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This is **PR**

The
Realities
of Public
Relations

Eleventh Edition



Doug Newsom Judy VanSlyke Turk
Dean Kruckeberg

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Doug Newsom, Judy VanSlyke Turk and Dean Kruckeberg

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PR Roles and Responsibilities

OBJECTIVES

- To understand the role and responsibilities of public relations—in public and private companies, nonprofit organizations, agencies and firms.
- To recognize the difference between strategic planning and execution that relies only on tactics and techniques.
- To appreciate the value of public relations in solving problems and making policy.
- To understand why individuals as well as institutional credibility are critical to public relations practice.
- To appreciate the international scope of public relations practice.

“All public relations should exist to preserve a consistent reputation and build relationships.”

—Robert I. Wakefield¹

Do you realize that public relations is an international occupation? It is, even if you never physically leave your country. Technology now enables public relations practitioners to have an instant interconnectedness that is an asset with increased responsibility. What you do is electronically borderless, and differences in practice worldwide are diminishing.

Relationships among public relations practitioners around the world have been building through the years by joint projects, shared research and educational opportunities.

Associations for groups, such as the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management and a number of associations for individual practitioners as well as research and educational efforts by many institutions have strengthened international ties.

At least a decade ago, seventy countries formed the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management to examine how public relations is practiced in different parts of the world and how practitioners can share information and learn from each other. The outcome of this worldwide collaboration is “The Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management Accords Analysis.” (See www.stockholmaccords.org for updates, and visit www.globalalliancepr.org.)

The Accords, “a product of collaboration between public relations and communication management industry leaders

on every continent,” was endorsed June 15, 2010, in Stockholm at the World Public Relations Forum of the Global Alliance.² It is “a global call to action on the role of public relations in the evolving digital society,” according to John Paluszek, APR, Fellow PRSA, chair of the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management, senior counsel at Ketchum (New York and Washington, D.C.) and representative to the United Nations (UN) for the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA).³

The six major points of the Accords are agreement on the role of public relations in organizational sustainability, governance at the highest level of organizational responsibility for two-way strategic communication, practice of public relations as a management function, oversight of organizational internal communications policies and action, oversight of organizational external policies and action and coordination of internal and external communication. (See the Accords document for details and explication.) Looking at the dimensions of the each of these six points in the following discussion will give you an idea of what public relations practice is today.

The eventual direction for the Accords is to develop an international core curriculum for public relations education, says Paluszek, a member of the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications as well as the Commission on Public Relations Education; the latter published guidelines specifically for the USA that have been adopted and used by other countries.

The idea of a global core curriculum is not new. In 2008, the Global Alliance started a collaborative study of PR education coordinated by the U.S.-based Commission on Public Relations Education and funded by the Public Relations Society of America Foundation. (Visit <http://www.prsaoundation.org/research.html>.) The effort is a topic supported by Bruce Berger, a member of the International Public Relations Association (IPRA). In an article for the organization’s online journal, Berger details a 2009

survey conducted by the European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EUPRERA) that looked at educational programs in mostly Western European countries and another in 2008 that examined Eastern European countries.⁴

Why all of this concern about what public relations students the world over are being taught? The situation is best explained by the international desire for consistency in practice and the question of professionalism. ■

International Consistency of PR Practice

Some consistency of the practice, despite differences in the social, economic and political climates in various parts of the world can be traced to the growing body of knowledge about and the general acceptance of what public relations is. The creator of public relations’ international code of ethics, Lucien Matrat, offers these thoughts:

Public relations, in the sense that we use the term, forms part of the strategy of management. Its function is twofold: to respond to the expectations of those whose behaviour, judgments and opinions can influence the operation and development of an enterprise, and in turn to motivate them....

Establishing public relations policies means, first and foremost, harmonizing the interests of an enterprise with the interests of those on whom its growth depends.

The next step is putting these policies into practice.⁵

This means developing a communications policy that can establish and maintain a relationship of mutual confidence with an organization’s multiple publics.

What Does Public Relations Practice Involve?

The **public relations (PR)** practitioner serves as an intermediary between the organization that he or she represents and all of that organization’s stakeholders/publics.

Consequently, the PR practitioner has responsibilities both to the institution and to its various publics. He or she helps set organizational policies that will affect its stakeholders and distributes information that enables the institution's publics to understand the policies, which may then be adjusted in response to feedback from those stakeholders.

Public relations involves research on all stakeholders: receiving information from them, advising management of their attitudes and responses, helping to set policies that demonstrate responsible attention to them and constantly evaluating the effectiveness of all PR programs. This inclusive role embraces all activities connected with ascertaining and influencing the opinions of individuals and groups of people. But that is just the communications aspect. As a management function, *public relations involves responsibility and responsiveness in policy and information to the best interests of the organization and its publics.*

The First World Assembly of Public Relations Associations, held in Mexico City in August 1978, defined the practice of public relations as “the art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counseling organizational leaders, and implementing planned programs of action which will serve both the organization and the public interest.”

The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) defines public relations as a management function that involves anticipating, analyzing and interpreting public opinion, attitudes and issues; counseling management at all levels with regard to policy decisions, courses of action and communication and taking into consideration public ramifications and the organization's social or citizenship responsibilities; researching, conducting and evaluating on a continuing basis and being involved in strategic planning for the organization. Yet another definition of public relations as “reputation management” has gained currency as expressed by the British Institute of Public Relations (IPR):

Public relations is about reputation—the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you. Public Relations Practice is the discipline which looks after reputation with the aim of earning understanding and support, and influencing opinion and behaviour.⁶

As a practical matter, good public relations involves confronting a problem openly and honestly

and then solving it. In the long run, the best PR is evidence of an active social conscience. The various practitioner organizations have codes of ethics, even though there isn't now a truly international code of ethics, as Matrat recommended.

The move toward a universal educational core would direct the practice of public relations more toward what is generally considered a profession.

Career, Job (Field) or Profession?

Some commentators argue that the very fact that anyone would question whether PR is a profession proves that public relations is *not* a profession. Another clue that PR may not be a profession is the lack of practitioners' commitment to continuing education.

One criterion of a profession is that its practitioners have command over a *body of knowledge*. Although the PRSA has developed a body of knowledge, it is for the USA only and has been criticized by the International Public Relations Association for its parochialism. The Institute for Public Relations' Commission on Global Public Relations is attempting to catalog and codify public relations literature globally. An additional criterion of a profession is general acceptance of a *standard educational curriculum*. Although this exists to some degree in the USA, what is being taught in the USA is not necessarily what is being taught elsewhere, where the availability of specialized education in public relations is growing at an explosive pace—thus, the emphasis in the Global Alliance to move in that direction.

Another criterion of a profession is *control over entry and exit* to the field, and public relations, at least in the USA, lacks any such control. One aspect of that control consists of PRSA's requirement of continuing education of all practitioners to maintain standards of practice by ensuring that practitioners learn new developments and update skills. But that is not a requirement for practicing public relations. In fact, there are no educational requirements that would preclude anyone from saying he or she is a public relations practitioner.

Although practitioners refer to professional standards and encourage educational experiences, perhaps it is a mark of honesty that PRSA's bylaws, with a slogan that reads: “Advancing the Profession and the Professional,” identify the organization thusly: “The Society is organized and shall be operated as a not-for-profit trade association ...” (See PRSA.org/AboutPRSA/Governance/.)

Role and Function for Organizations: 10 Basic Principles

As the definitions for public relations suggest, the result of public relations efforts must be the real behavior of the organization and perceptions of that behavior by its publics/stakeholders. Therefore, among the various titles now being used for the role of the public relations function are communications management (or sometimes strategic communications management or just strategic communications), reputation management and relationship management. In delineating these, Fraser Likely, of the Canadian Public Relations Society, Inc., observes that all are managerial roles.⁷

We can describe the function and role of public relations practice by stating 10 basic principles:

1. Public relations deals with reality, not false fronts. Conscientiously planned programs that put the public interest in the forefront are the basis of sound public relations policy. (*Translation*: PR deals with facts, not fiction.)
2. Public relations is a service-oriented occupation in which public interest, not personal reward, should be the primary consideration. (PR is a public, not personal, service.)
3. Because the public relations practitioner must go to the public to seek support for programs and policies, public interest is the central criterion by which he or she should select these programs and policies. (PR practitioners must have the guts to say “no” to a client or to refuse a deceptive program.)
4. Because the public relations practitioner reaches many publics through mass media, which are the public channels of communication, the integrity of these channels must be preserved. (PR practitioners should never lie to the news media, either outright or by implication.)
5. Because PR practitioners are in the middle between an organization and its publics, they must be effective communicators—conveying information back and forth until understanding and (ideally) consensus are reached. (The PR practitioner probably was the original ombudsman or ombudswoman.)
6. To expedite two-way communication and to be responsible communicators, public relations practitioners must use scientific public opinion research extensively. (PR cannot afford to be a guessing game.)
7. To understand what their publics are saying and to reach them effectively, public relations



Theory and Research Perspective

In attempting to agree on what public relations is, many researchers have wrestled with a definition that seems suitable and internationally acceptable. When some in the UK began to call public relations “reputation management,” that caught on in the USA. The U.S. notion of “branding” that came from integrated marketing communications likewise caught on in Europe. In working on the European body of knowledge, researchers struggled for a paradigm that would cover private relationships, not just those in the public sphere, and broader social issues that public relations should address. This is not new to the social responsibility concept of public relations: being responsible first to a broader public welfare and then to the organization it represents.

Although that is understood, European researchers urge a reflective approach that looks at society’s changing standards and values and then adjusts the organization’s standards accordingly.

In terms of how public relations practitioners themselves define the discipline globally, a model emerges that involves education, government, business and cultural norms and values—religion-based or not.

Read “On the Definition of Public Relations: A European View,” by Dejan Vercic, Betteke van Ruler, Gerhard Butschi and Bertil Flodin in *Public Relations Review*, 27 (2002), pp. 373–87. Look at the Practice Matrix for the Cultural-Economic Model of International Public Relations Practice (Table 10-1) in Patricia A. Curtin and T. Kenn Gaither’s *International Public Relations* (2007) and *Bridging Gaps in Global Communication* (2007) by Doug Newsom.

practitioners must employ the social sciences—psychology, sociology, social psychology—and the literature of public opinion, communication and semantics. (Intuition is not enough.)

8. Because a lot of people do PR research, the PR person must adapt the work of other, related disciplines, including learning theory and other psychology theories, sociology, political science, economics and history. (The PR field requires multidisciplinary applications.)
9. Public relations practitioners are obligated to explain problems to the public before these problems become crises. (PR practitioners should alert and advise, so people won't be taken by surprise.)
10. A public relations practitioner should be measured by only one standard: ethical performance.

Instead of “public relations,” particularly in some educational institutions in the USA, the term used is “strategic communications.” The reason for that becomes clearer when you consider the levels within the six areas under “The Value of Public Relations and Communication Management” in Sections Two and Three of the Stockholm Accords (abridged here).

1. *Sustainability*: The organization's sustainability depends on balancing today's demands with the ability to meet future needs, so the role for PR and communication managers is to involve and engage stakeholders in sustainability policies and programs; to interpret societal expectations for sound economic, social and environmental commitments that yield a return to the organization and society; to ensure stakeholder participation to identify information that should be regularly, transparently and authentically reported; and to promote and support efforts to reach an ongoing integrated reporting of financial, social, economic and environmental information.
2. *Governance*: The stakeholder governance model empowers leaders—board members and elected officials—to be directly responsible for deciding and implementing stakeholder relationship policies, so the role of the PR and communication managers is to participate in defining organizational values, principles, strategies, policies and processes; to apply social networking, research skills and tools to interpret stakeholders' and

society's expectations as a basis for decisions; and to deliver timely analysis and recommendations for an effective governance of stakeholder relationships by enhancing transparency, trustworthy behavior and authentic and verifiable representation, thus sustaining the organization's “license to operate.”

3. *Management*: The quality and effectiveness of an organization's decisions are increasingly determined by their time of implementation. This requires a high priority for listening before strategic and operational decisions, so the role of the PR and communication managers is to inform and shape the organization's overall two-way communication abilities; to communicate the value of the organization's products/services and relationships with stakeholders thereby creating, consolidating and developing its financial, legal, relational and operational, capital; and to participate in the solution of organizational issues as well as lead those specifically focused on stakeholder relationships.
4. *Internal Communication*: Organizational internal communication enhances recruitment, retention, development of common interests and commitment to organizational goals by an increasingly diverse, extended and segmented set of “internal” publics that include everyone who works there at any time, retirees, consultants, suppliers, agents, distributors and volunteers. The role of the public relations and communication managers is to seek constant feedback for a mutual understanding of how frontline people comprehend, accept and achieve the organization's strategy; how and how well organizational leaders collaborate and communicate with stakeholders; how knowledge and policy are being shared; how processes and structures are identified, developed and enhanced; and, most importantly, how the organization's reputation depends largely on the actions taken by internal stakeholders.
5. *External Communication*: As the network society expands and accelerates, organizations must review and adjust their policies, actions and communications behavior to improve relationships with increasingly influential stakeholders as well as with society at large, so public relations and communication managers have to bring the organization's “voice” and interests

into stakeholder deliberations and decisions; to assist all organizational functions in crafting and delivering effective communication; and to contribute to the development and promotion of products, services or processes that strengthen brand loyalty and equity.

6. *Coordination of Internal and External Communications:* Organizational communication is often a multifaceted, multistakeholder, interrelational enterprise, engaging several value networks concurrently and often involving diverse legal frameworks. That means public relations and communication managers have to oversee the development and implementation of internal and external communications to assure consistency of content and accurate presentation of the organization's identity; to research, develop, monitor and adjust the organization's communicative behavior; to create and nurture a knowledge base that includes social and behavioral sciences; and to manage and apply research to implement evaluation and measurement programs for continued improvement.

Why the Need to Know This About PR?

If you are reading this book to find out what public relations is and what its practitioners do, you need to understand the role and function of public relations in society because it affects you all day, every day. It is persuasive communication, and, at its best, is responsible communication—listening before responding and changing behavior that is harmful.

If you are reading this book because you plan to enter or are entering public relations as a career, you might be wondering where you would fit, where your talents would be appreciated and what you need to know. Unless you understand the significance to an organization of the public relations and communication management function, you can't fit your talent successfully into the overall picture. You have to understand the strategic goal of the communication effort for your organization before you can develop the tactics to accomplish the task designed to meet a goal and then create the techniques that will be most effective.

The Job of the PR Practitioner

The instant and interactive global communication climate have changed the demands on the practitioner and the way the practitioner carries out his or her duties, and technology will continue to change these responsibilities and skills. There is more call for depth and breadth in knowledge needed to function at a global level. There is more accountability for public relations actions and greater damage if risk management and crisis communication are mishandled. There's less tolerance for "hype" and more pressure for transparency. The interconnectedness of the world and the diversity within many nations, including in the USA, now demands greater sensitivity to multiculturalism.

But some things have not changed. Former PRSA president Frank Wylie, now a consultant in Santa Cruz, Calif., notes that "every beginner is a 'gopher,' and it's important that you not only go for something, but that you bring back something usable."⁸ The retrieval emphasis implies reportorial skills, including knowledge of research techniques.

Other skills Wylie stresses include thinking (first and foremost), writing of all types, speaking, being persuasive, understanding and appreciating media, knowing graphics and photography, respecting deadlines and developing an ability to deal with and solve multiple PR problems at one time.⁹

Three Basic Roles

The way a PR person applies his or her special skills depends on the role he or she plays in an organization. The three main roles are those of organizational *staff member*, *agency employee* and *independent PR practitioner*, who might from time to time function as a *PR counselor*. We will consider each of these roles separately.

Staff Member Staff public relations practitioners are employees of commercial or nonprofit organizations or of divisions of government such as local, state and federal agencies. They perform highly specialized tasks in their organizations, but they get a paycheck just as other employees do, and they share the same corporate or institutional identity. Specific needs of the organization usually determine a staff member's job description.

Staff positions within small organizations often include responsibility for all public relations functions.

In the case of a small nonprofit organization, the PR person typically works either with volunteers who provide professional expertise of various kinds or with outside suppliers whose services may be bought on a limited basis or donated.

Staff positions with larger organizations depend upon the level of management for an employee. Senior positions involve all of the responsibilities detailed previously in the Accords for communications functions, including participating at the highest level in the management team. Large organizations may buy services for some areas of expertise such as in-depth research—communication audits or media monitoring, or media distribution or for technical production of audiovisuals—everything from employee training videos to video news releases and commercials. Long reports such as an environmental report or an annual report may be contracted to outside suppliers. In a major crisis, an outside firm may be called in to advise and assist the internal crisis management team. Outsourcing of special public relations services is increasing as companies cut back on their total number of in-house employees. However, budget cutbacks have also pushed internal public relations staff to learn more skills and carry a heavier workload.

Commercial and Large Nonprofit Organizations

Public relations people in institutions—whether commercial or nonprofit—may have skills jobs in a PR or communication department, may be middle managers of specialized PR activity such as community relations or employee relations or may function as general professional staff. Increased use of computer technology has decreased the number of practitioners working at the lower-level jobs, but has demanded a higher level of technical expertise. The number working at middle managerial levels has increased slightly. The small number of positions at the most senior level of policy making remains rather consistent, but held only by practitioners with a high-level skills set, including technology.

Government Job descriptions for PR positions in government vary dramatically. Some people who are called “public information officers” are really publicists handling information but probably making no policy decisions. Others, often called “public affairs officers,” may have all the responsibilities of a corporate vice president for PR or communication management.

Firm/Agency Employees Each agency or firm has its own internal structure, but generally, the president

or CEO of the firm shares in handling accounts, as do the account executives (AEs), who are also expected to bring in new business. A firm may employ a bookkeeper who handles billings, a secretary/receptionist, publicity writer(s), a design (advertising or graphics) specialist, an artist and technology expert(s), also likely to be responsible for general interactive media. Postings, including blogs, and responses for clients are usually handled by the AE. In some instances, the writer may prepare both publicity and advertising copy, and the artist may be responsible for illustrations and layout. The online expert suggests software to buy, handles technical problems and may monitor online media also.

Large firms have copywriters and copy editors, media specialists, website designers, several artists and a production facility. Most firms, even the largest ones, arrange contracts for high-level production needs. Digital publishing makes the jobs of writers and artists more efficient and easier to coordinate. Computer software makes graphics and almost instantaneous page makeup possible in-house. These systems usually make the writer the production person as well, because the writer actually develops the final format, often including generic artwork that is available digitally. However, an artist usually provides original designs and artwork.

Independent Practitioners/Counselor The *independent* public relations practitioner is usually hired to accomplish a specific task—one that is ordinarily (but not always) predetermined. Payment may take the form of a flat fee, a fee plus expenses or a base fee plus hourly charges and expenses. The less experienced the independent practitioner is, the more often he or she will have to work for a flat fee.

Although some experienced independents prefer to bill for actual costs, they price a job based on the hours required to complete it multiplied by an hourly rate. They then increase these costs by a certain percentage to cover overhead and profit. Independent public relations practitioners sometimes function as PR counselors. Indeed, some independent practitioners work almost exclusively as counselors.

A PR counselor is called in at an advisory level and works for a consultant's fee, which he or she sets, with hours and expenses added. The counselor studies and researches a situation, interviews the people involved, outlines recommendations and makes a formal presentation of these recommendations.



PR in Practice

Although the U.S. government is the world's largest employer of public relations practitioners, the government uses the term *public affairs*, not *public relations*. The reason for that is an Oct. 22, 1913, act of Congress that is often interpreted as precluding governmental use of public relations practitioners. The last paragraph of the Interstate Commerce Commission statute reads: "Appropriated funds may not be used to pay a publicity expert unless specifically appropriated for that purpose." Because this was an amendment to a bill introduced by Representative Frederick H. Gillett (R.-Mass.), it is often called the Gillett Amendment in PR literature.

The intent was to be sure publicity was not used to propagandize U.S. citizens. PR people have tried a number of times to repeal this amendment, but not recently. Additionally, the 1948 Smith-Mundt Act's ban on domestic exposure to public diplomacy related to geographic boundaries.

As a result, the term *public affairs* is widely used in government to mean public relations. To make matters more confusing, the same title is used in commercial and nonprofit organizations for the person working on the organization's relationships with government at all levels.

Federal wire services carrying public relations news releases and announcements are not new. The services date to 1954, but what is new is the cultural and international expansion of the services so that news is released to ethnic wire services and may be distributed in different languages too. The U.S. Department of State has a Bureau of International Information (IIP) that operates the America.gov websites, successor to the USINFO website, although some languages are available only from USINFO.

What is obvious from this is that the Internet has changed the whole role of government in the USA. As indicated above, information prepared for international audiences, which has been going on for decades, is accessible now to domestic audiences. The IIP, which goes to 140 countries, is "the principal international strategic communication community. IIP designs, develops, and implements Internet and print publications, traveling and electronically transmitted speaker programs, and information are created strictly for key international audiences...."

Another change inside the USA and internationally is a demand for transparency in government. Attempting to restrict what the government is communicating to other countries seems to hamper such an effort. (For a thorough discussion of this aspect, see the Lawrence Erlbaum publication, *Communication Law and Policy*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2006, Winter) for the article by Allen W. Palmer and Edward L. Carter, "The Smith-Mundt Act's Ban on Domestic Propaganda: An Analysis of the Cold War Statute Limiting Access to Public Diplomacy," pp. 1–34. For some historical background on the U.S. government's role in communication, see Elsevier's *Public Relations Review*, Vol. 32 (2009) for Mordecai Lee's "The Rise and Fall of the Institute for Government Public Relations Research," pp. 118–124.)

The program is then implemented by other PR workers at the organization or at an agency. (See Chapter 8 for details of billings.) Counselors may work independently, or they may be associated with a firm as senior members. Some independent PR practitioners do various PR jobs, but some are strictly counselors.

Some counselors are sensitive about their roles because people tend to view them as behind-the-scenes influence peddlers. Another misconception

is that counselors are simply unemployed would-be senior staffers. Public confusion is understandable, however, because counselors are *advisers* who possess special areas of expertise, most of it gained in agency or corporate work. Their value resides in their experience, in the people they know and are able to call upon and in their skill as researchers, analysts, communicators and persuaders.

Some counselors develop reputations for helping institutions prepare for and handle crisis communication. Others are known for their ability to help institutions establish and maintain good government relations (at all levels, but primarily at the federal level). Still, others are called on for their ability to help with internal problems, typically ones involving employee relations. Counselors, as senior practitioners, often develop staffs that include younger people who have particular strengths or specializations.

Specific Areas of PR Specialization

The breadth of PR services gives individuals a variety of career choices. Many practitioners are experienced in more than one area.

Nonprofit Organizations Nonprofit organizations offer a practitioner several advantages and opportunities, although the compensation is often less than in other areas. The structure of these organizations (a small production staff answerable to a volunteer board of directors) means that the nonprofit PR person generally has a great deal of freedom in designing a program. An attractive program that does not require a large bankroll probably will be accepted.

This kind of PR work usually entails a considerable amount of promotional activity and sometimes also **fundraising** and seeking grants from foundations.

A particular plus, however, is the reception given to publicity materials by news media representatives, who are more likely to use information from nonprofit institutions than from for-profit organizations as long as the preparation is professional. Even nonprofit advertising gets a break, with nonprofit special rates. The only drawback other than a smaller budget is frequent dependence on volunteer support in many areas. Responsibility for training volunteers usually falls on the PR people, and they must recognize that volunteers' interest in and enthusiasm for the organization can be stimulated and sustained only by a viable program.

Outside the USA, nonprofit organizations may be called nongovernmental organizations (**NGOs**), although the World Bank notes that "there has been a deliberate shift away in the last few years from use of the term *NGO*, which refers more narrowly to professional, intermediary and non-profit organizations which advocate and/or provide services

in the areas of economic and social development, human rights, welfare and emergency relief," and now "uses the term *civil society organizations* or **CSOs** to refer to the wide array of *nongovernmental and not-for-profit* organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations."¹⁰ Nevertheless, the term *NGO* in more casual usage still is applied to any nonprofit organization that is independent of government. These are typically values-based organizations that depend, at least in part, on charitable donations and voluntary service. Organizations that get some government funding are called **GONGOs**. Nonprofits all over the world include museums, hospitals, social service and health care groups, professional associations of all kinds as well as activists groups, often known as private voluntary organizations or **PVOs**, such as Greenpeace and Oxfam.

Educational Institutions Educational institutions are usually nonprofit organizations as well, but they may be either public or private. The private institutions generally conform to the nonprofit organizational pattern. Although they have significant dealings with government, their work is quite unlike that of public institutions, which, being a part of government, are more open to the scrutiny of taxpayers and the whims of politicians. The type of PR practiced in state educational institutions is often suited to a person who enjoys dealing with the government.

PR people in all educational institutions are likely to be involved in development, which includes fundraising. The functions of PR and of development are separate, but the two groups must work closely together. In fact, the two functions are often lumped together under the umbrella term *institutional advancement* (a term used by CASE, the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education).

The title "vice president for development" or "director of university relations" is commonly assigned to the individual who supervises both the PR and the fundraising functions. Sports information may be included under public relations or kept separate from it in an athletic department; in the latter case, the person responsible for it reports to the athletic director, who in turn reports to the president. However, this arrangement can cause problems because university sports can be involved in controversies that affect university relations.

Fundraising or Donor Relations Although many public relations people will tell you that they “don’t do fundraising”—just as many others say that they “don’t do advertising”—those who do it well are in great demand.

Fundraising is sometimes called donor relations. First and foremost, the fundraiser must identify sources of potential support through research. Then he or she must inform those sources of the value of the organization so that they will consider making a gift to it. In the case of individual donors, this usually means cultivating a relationship between that person and the organization over a period of time. If the source is a foundation, the informational task means writing a grant proposal that explains the value of the organization seeking the funds and identifies it closely with the mission of the foundation.

The third aspect of donor relations—the actual solicitation—takes many forms. It may involve an elaborate presentation book prepared just for that individual, or it may employ a PowerPoint™ presentation or a DVD that can be used repeatedly in combination with personally directed appeals. It generally involves a series of letters requesting funds, and in broader appeals it may include **brochures** and occasionally, phone solicitations, such as the texting to mobile phones that raised funds for Haiti after the 2010 earthquake. Face-to-face meetings also are used for the personal appeal, and these can be one-on-one or one to a group of potential donors. In the case of large gifts, a strong tie is usually built between the institution (some element or some person in it) and the donor.

Once a gift is announced, appropriate recognition of the donor is expected that reflects the size of the gift and the nature of the appeal. (Nothing is more upsetting to a donor than getting an expensive “reward,” because this signals that a good portion of the money raised is being spent on thank-yous instead of on the primary mission of the organization.)

Finally, the donor’s relationship to the organization must be sustained in a way that is mutually satisfying. The fundraiser wants the donor to give again, especially if the organization has annual fundraising events (as public television stations do, for example). Even if the gift was substantial and there is no reason to expect another, the fundraiser still wants the donor to have an ongoing relationship with the organization and to feel good about having given. Donors often attract other donors, but only when they feel good about their experience.

Research: Trend Analysis, Issues Management and Public Opinion Evaluation Some PR practitioners specialize in research that focuses on capturing information to help organizations plan better by anticipating currents of change. Some engage in analyzing trends to enable their organization to detect, adapt to and even take advantage of emerging changes. Issues management is centrally concerned with watching the horizons for change through many types of research. By determining in advance what developments are likely to become important to one or more of its publics, an organization can plan to meet the challenge, rather than be taken by surprise. Much of the research underlying trend analysis and issue anticipation consists of monitoring public opinion and evaluating the consequences of attitude changes to the organization and its publics. Interactive media monitoring of blogs and social networks is increasingly being used for analysis.

Detection of emerging issues and surveillance of social and economic trends continue to be important PR functions. These skills cast PR people in the role of social scientist. Information and intelligent analysis of issues and trends can help restore public confidence. The challenge facing PR practitioners is to provide leadership in developing creative, pragmatic communication programs that provide their publics with complete, candid, factual and understandable information. Furthermore, PR workers must pioneer new skills to use in maintaining good relations with their publics.

International PR for Organizations and Firms The globalization of news media, global economic dependence among countries and the emergence of multinational companies have helped expand this area of public relations. *International PR* is not limited to businesses, however, because many nonprofit organizations and associations are international in scope. PR firms often have offices abroad to represent both domestic and foreign clients. Corporate PR people abroad function just as their counterparts do at home, working with community leaders, government officials and media. They provide a crucial link between the branch organization and the home office.

International PR requires extra sensitivity to **public opinion** because practitioners deal with people whose languages, experiences and worldviews differ from their own. Areas of special concern are language (and knowledge of its nuances); customs

affecting attitudes toward media, products/services and symbols that stem from customs; and laws. The last area is particularly significant, because incompatibilities between one country's laws and another's may make harmonious relationships difficult.

Financial PR or Investor Relations This area includes such activities as preparing material for securities analysts to study, developing an **annual report** that is acceptable to auditors and intelligible to stockholders and knowing when and to whom to issue a **news release** that could affect corporate stock values. What this means in the USA is complying with the regulations for corporate disclosure of the Securities and Exchange Commission. Filing of the appropriate forms is usually a function for the chief financial officer (CFO) and the in-house attorney, but writing the accompanying news release and distributing it is the role of investor relations (IR). IR is a rather hazardous occupation because a wrong move can have such grave repercussions. In turn, it is exciting, remunerative and challenging. A related function is writing, editing and sometimes also producing environmental reports, prepared by practitioners who must be given sensitive internal documents on compliance and ratings, as well as on customer experiences. These reports are very time-consuming and often need to be prepared in several languages, preferably all commanded by the writer because automatic translations are seldom sensitive to nuances.

Industry Public relations for industry also requires a good feel for political PR—public affairs because so much of industry is regulated by government. A person working for a company that handles government contracts must develop a high tolerance for bureaucratic delay. One PR staffer for a defense contractor has said that the average time required to get an “original” release—one with all new material—cleared for dissemination to the news media is 23 days. Because much of the emphasis in **industry relations** is on internal PR, and in particular on labor relations, a strong background in the social sciences and business helps.

Despite the trend toward deregulation in the utilities industry, PR practitioners still must work with both the government and consumers. They must also know financial PR and investor relations, because most utilities are publicly held. Finally, industry's PR practitioners may be involved in product promotion, which requires an understanding and appreciation of marketing and advertising activities.

General Business or Retail PR This area is somewhat broader than the term *retail* implies. It involves working with government regulatory bodies, employees, the community, competitors and, generally, the full complement of publics both inside and outside the company. Consumers represent an increasingly significant external public because they talk to politicians, blog, post opinions on interactive sites of all kinds and can arouse public opinion against a business. Product promotion—of a service or of goods—is another common aspect of general business. For that reason, the business setting is a likely place to find the *marketing/public relations*, integrated marketing communications (IMC) or just integrated communication (IC) designation.

Government The four areas in this category all have the same focus, but their internal workings vary.

Federal, State or Local Government Employment Although the federal government is prohibited from labeling PR activities as such, it (like state and local governments) uses PR talent under a variety of titles: public information officer, public affairs officer or departmental assistant or aide and, in some other countries, information minister for a government unit.

Nongovernmental Organizations' Government Relations The term *public affairs* is also used by institutions to designate the working area of staff members who deal with governments. Most institutions, whether commercial or nonprofit, have specialists who handle their relations with relevant departments of government on federal, state and local levels. In this context, public affairs work consists of dealing with problems that come under the jurisdiction of elected or appointed public officials.

Political Public Relations Political PR involves working with candidates for office—and often continuing to work with them after their election to handle problems, strategies and activities such as speech writing or publicity. Many PR practitioners will not support a cause or person they cannot conscientiously endorse. Others see PR advice as being like legal counsel and offer their services to anyone who is willing to pay for them.

For government, public affairs and politics, a strong background in government and history is useful. Political PR, like other areas of public relations, can be high pressure, especially since the 1967 **Freedom of Information Act** has made government secrets more generally discoverable. In addition,

restrictions on campaign financing mean that PR people must be even more judicious in collecting, reporting and spending money. State and federal laws must be obeyed to the letter. Furthermore, when information is stored electronically in any format, it can be leaked and easily made available globally.

Lobbying Many lobbyists are not public relations specialists at all (many are former government officials). But many public relations practitioners get involved in lobbying activities through their jobs with corporations or utilities. Some PR practitioners become professional lobbyists, at which point they generally represent a particular industry (such as oil and gas) or special interest (such as senior citizens or health care organizations). Lobbyists work closely

with the staffs of federal and/or state representatives and senators, who depend on them to explain the intricacies and implications of proposed legislation. Lobbyists draw on information furnished by their sponsors to try to persuade lawmakers to adopt a particular point of view.

Health Care Health maintenance organizations (HMOs), hospitals, other health care agencies (such as nursing home corporations), pharmaceutical companies, medical clinics, health-science centers and nonprofit health agencies (for example, those combating heart disease, cancer and birth defects) all employ public relations personnel. The demand in this field is for PR practitioners who either know or have the educational background to learn about medical science to translate that information



PR in Practice

Some people resist considering lobbying a part of public relations, but it is. Sometimes, it is difficult to decide what is lobbying and what is just public affairs practice. Public affairs is a public relations function that involves working with legislative and regulatory units of government or working for government in conducting campaigns. When a public affairs person is working outside of government, that person is employed either for a company or nonprofit or for a firm that represents an organization as a client.

A good example of a public affairs campaign is the work that was done to get legislation that would permit airline pilots to carry guns in the cockpit, a post-9/11 issue. The PR firm that represents the Allied Pilots Association, Shirley and Banister Public Affairs, launched a campaign that involved talking to people in government who favored the idea to get them to introduce the legislation, a lobbying function. This is usually the way such campaigns begin, and the practice of pairing public affairs and lobbying is increasing. The reason is to find in government “ball carriers” who can move the idea forward, and then give them information that will support the proposed legislation. The idea has to be advanced to the public, too, through traditional and nontraditional media. Because the news media cover government, it is easier to get one of the supporters to lead off with the idea and get it covered by television and print news media.

The work only starts there. The staffs of government legislators and affected government regulatory groups have to be educated too. The public affairs people work with the actual contact persons, lobbyists, to be sure the knowledge is there to support the idea and to counter arguments. In working for their clients, public affairs firms write op-ed pieces for newspapers, and these often stimulate letters to the editor, so the idea gets into public discourse.

Often, media outside of Washington, D.C., have to be approached with a local angle to get coverage; sometimes, the legislator’s home state is an opening, or the community where the client is based.

Efforts such as this involve research, especially polling. Such campaigns involve lining up specialists to add credibility to arguments. They may involve advertising. All messages from whatever source must support the goal. This is strategic public relations at the most fundamental level, and the measurable outcome is getting policy adopted and implemented.

accurately for the organization's publics. A heavy marketing component also exists in this area, which means that the PR person needs to have good advertising and public relations skills.

Sports Before sports became big business, the term *public relations* was sometimes used to describe a job that actually combined press agency (planning activities or staging events that attract attention) and publicity.

Today, however, business enterprises in professional sports are of such size and scope that the PR title is legitimate. Professional teams have intricate relations with investors, their own players, competing teams and players, stadium owners, transportation and housing facilities (at home and on the road), community supporters, media (with regard both to publicity and to contractual obligations, as in live coverage) and other important publics. Most professional sports organizations employ full-time staff PR people, and they contract for special PR activities as well. Sports are also increasingly important to colleges and universities. Sports information officers in these institutions handle relations with media and fans.

Leisure Time The leisure-time market includes all recreation-related industries. It covers real estate promotion for resort locations; public park development; resorts and hotels; travel agencies; airlines and other mass transportation systems; sports, hobbies and crafts; and some educational, entertainment and cultural activities. The focus of PR activity in this market is promotion, and the only real hazard is the somewhat erratic international economy. Creative and inventive public relations generalists can function here quite comfortably.

The Function of Public Relations in Business and Society

Traditionally, three functions have been ascribed to public relations. According to one point of view, public relations serves *to control publics*, by directing what people think or do to satisfy the needs or desires of an institution. According to a second point of view, PR's function is *to respond to publics*—reacting to developments, problems or the initiatives of others. According to a third point of view, the

function of public relations is *to achieve mutually beneficial relationships among all the publics that an institution has*, by fostering harmonious interchanges among an institution's various publics (including such groups as employees, consumers, suppliers and producers).

Stephen A. Greyser, a Harvard University business professor and consumer researcher, calls this third view of the function of PR, in which the consumer is seen as a partner of business, the *transactional model*. Greyser has developed two other models: the *manipulative model*, which looks upon the consumer as victim; and the *service model*, which sees the consumer as king. According to Greyser, the consumer still sees some distance between the current marketplace and the ideal service model.¹¹

The three traditional views of PR are each discernible in the history of public relations (see Chapter 2). Greyser's manipulative model describes public relations during the era of communicating and initiating. His service model describes practices that predominated during the era of reacting and responding. His transactional model describes public relations during the era of planning and presenting.

The current era of professionalism has seen practitioners beginning to control PR's development, use and practice. This concept of the uniqueness of public relations is not new and was well expressed in the following words of the late Philip Lesly:

Public relations people have the role of being always in the middle—pivoted between their clients/employers and their publics.... This role "in the middle" does not apply to any other group that deals with the climate of attitudes. Experts in other fields—journalists, sociologists, psychologists, politicians, etc.—are oriented in the direction of their specialties.¹²

James E. Grunig, who edited *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*, has defined public relations as "the management of communication between an organization and its publics."¹³

Another way of talking about the different approaches to PR is from the standpoint of practitioner self-description. PR educator Lalit Acharya suggests that environment might explain the self-perception of a practitioner.¹⁴ Self-described roles, largely the conceptual work of Glen M. Broom and George D. Smith,¹⁵ include *expert prescriber*, an authoritarian and prescriptive model; *communication technician*, a supportive, skills-oriented model;

communication facilitator, a liaison model; *problem-solving process facilitator*, a confrontational model; and *acceptant legitimizer*, a yes-person model. Acharya examined these descriptions in terms of “perceived environmental uncertainty” for the practitioner and concluded that a public relations practitioner (as an individual) may play a number of these roles, depending on the environment in which he or she functions in any given case.

Actually, these self-described roles may be telescoped into only two: manager (who supervises technical staff and participates in planning and policy making as counsel to management) and technician (who performs the skills jobs that PR demands). A test of this conceptual research that involved mailing surveys to 136 PR practitioners in Washington state suggests that this is the case.¹⁶ If the roles really are more diverse, as the earlier descriptive work suggests, the particular roles chosen may depend on the degree of encouragement or discouragement for individual initiative present in the public relations practitioner’s own environment.

Acharya’s work describes practitioner behavior primarily in terms of the external environment of public opinion, but internal environments (such as open or closed communication systems) also can affect practitioner behavior. In fact, some research indicates that PR practitioners who work in participative environments (where employees make job-related suggestions and generally take a more active role in determining their work environment) see themselves as less constrained than those who work in authoritarian environments (where employee input is strongly discouraged).¹⁷ It may be that the self-described “technician” doesn’t have the option of being a manager because of authoritarian top management and a closed communication environment. Michael Ryan, who has investigated participative versus authoritative environments, observes:

*Practitioners who work in authoritative environments might attempt to change those environments by educating management about the advantages—indeed, the necessity—of involving public relations persons in decision-making at the highest levels and of removing constraints on their freedom to act professionally.*¹⁸

Although Ryan recognizes that the task of transforming an organization from authoritative to participative might not be included in a PR person’s job description, he notes that accomplishing such a

change might be among the most significant contributions a practitioner could make. In any case, Ryan suggests that “public relations persons would do well to seek out participative environments and to avoid authoritative environments.”¹⁹

Although most public relations practitioners accept the *idea* of there being distinct technician and manager roles due to the variety of activities that public relations incorporates, in reality public relations practitioners juggle the two roles most of the time. The delineation might best be used to describe which role occupies *most* of the practitioner’s time.

Typologies Aside

These typologies are very useful; however, they often do not grasp the full range of factors affecting public relations practice. It makes a great deal of difference, for example, who is actually doing the PR. In many cases, public relations functions have been delegated to people from other fields: lawyers without any background in public relations or even communications, former media personnel who have been on the receiving end of public relations material but have no theoretical background and/or management-trained executives whose business school education did not include any courses in public relations or marketing experts who have no knowledge of the overall communications components. If management doesn’t know what the public relations function should be—and many do not—the function becomes what the person doing the job knows how to do best. In other words, the *corporate communications environment*, the *education of the individuals* doing the job, the *type of organization* and the *culture* in which they function all significantly affect what actually happens under the name of public relations.

Internationally, much of what is called public relations really isn’t. Often, it is publicity, promotion or press agency—all technical activities often included in public relations efforts. In some nations, you’ll find something called “developmental public relations,” and this is usually government-generated information or campaigns designed to get citizen compliance with or without prior consultation about the goals or objectives. The Stockholm Accords, mentioned earlier, are an effort to neutralize this tendency to give real public relations and communication management more traction. A common tool found in the USA as well as abroad is what

James E. Grunig has called “asymmetrical public relations practice,” which means that feedback is used only to find out the best ways to persuade people and get compliance. Business firms in highly competitive markets use this. Internationally, companies may change products to meet consumer tastes and desires, evidence of the two-way symmetrical model of PR.

Grunig holds up a two-way symmetrical model as the ideal because it involves negotiation with an organization’s various publics to arrive at some mutually acceptable and beneficial policies and ways of doing business. One fortunate outcome of the instant international communication on the Internet is the shift in a balance of power to those outside the organization. All organizations have had to deal with information on the Internet that has created difficulty, even a crisis. In some countries, the reaction is not to improve communication, but to attempt to block various sites on the Internet.

Countries attempting to use the two-way symmetric model for best practices often find culture gets in the way of equalizing relationships. The two-way concept involves developing mutual understandings so that even when a public may not agree with management, at least there is an understanding of why management is saying or doing what it is. This can occur only if the public affected appreciates management’s position, and if the culture is not too hierarchical to permit such practice.

Realities of Working in PR

You will be called on to master new technology immediately and craft creative uses for it.

You will be expected to have a comprehensive knowledge of stakeholders, their expectations and their values, and how best to reach them with effective communication. You will have to know who the “influentials” are in every area—social, political and economic. You will be facing an ever-shifting level of “trust” among publics and exposure to more confrontational and highly propagandized criticism. You will have to offer proof that your efforts achieved designated goals, and be prepared to defend areas in which you have failed. This is not to advise against risk-taking. There is something to be said in favor of “No risk, no gain,” but be prepared to defend your decisions.

You will have to deal with attempting to find balance in your workload itself to do some of the “downtime” required to gather more information,

add new contacts and develop new skills. You will also be trying to find balance to protect your health and your personal relationships. Both men and women face these issues, but for women, expectations of their role in their families often causes additional stress. Some women have gone into business for themselves in an effort to have more control over their time. Others have used an integrative approach to incorporate the various components into their lifestyle.

The rewards, though, are that you will always be learning, are not likely to be bored, and will be constantly challenged to higher levels of professionalism and expertise. Another reward is the contribution of public relations to commerce, public policy and discourse.

The Value of Public Relations

The lack of consistency in PR practice is due to its rapid growth and its need to develop within the cultural, religious, socioeconomic and political context in which it is being practiced. The reason for its growth globally, though, is because it does have value to governments, commercial entities and non-profit organizations.

- Public relations can represent the needs, interests and desires of the organization’s various publics/stakeholders to management and then back from management to them, explaining management’s perspectives. It opens a dialogue between an organization and the publics it affects.

The dialogue can encourage mutual adjustments between an organization and the society it serves.

- Public relations focuses on society in the broadest sense and should work in the greater interest of society, rather than the narrow interests of the organizations it serves.
- In working toward the best interest of society, public relations has the opportunity to improve cooperation of an organization with its publics and perhaps avoid any arbitrary or coercive action on the part of government.
- PR provides useful information to people about various aspects of their lives.
- Although PR people cannot be a conscience to an organization whose leadership has none, their role is to raise issues and concerns and remind management of ethical responsibilities.



Ethical Perspective

U.S. ethics are anything but globally universal, so it is easy to run into trouble practicing public relations abroad where ethical standards and practices are different. The opening of China to international public relations firms, U.S. professors teaching public relations in Chinese universities and increased flow of public relations material into China due to improvement in trade relations have exposed Western PR practitioners to something called **guanxi**.

Like many words from other languages, this word has no English equivalent, although *networking* is frequently used. It isn't networking as the term is used in the USA. It isn't even social networking, as most Westerners would understand it. Nor is it just a special interpersonal connection that Americans would equate with being "well connected" or having "strong connections" within an organization. The Chinese who attempt to explain it to Westerners say it means a personal relationship with someone in power who can not only pave the way for what a PR person (or any other) wants to happen but who can actually get it accomplished by that person's power, status and access. Reciprocity is involved. But this is different from a Western understanding of "doing a favor" and "expecting a favor," often expressed by "Okay, you owe me one" when someone accomplishes something for another. It's also more than *pulling strings*, a term used to mean that you got something to happen because of a person in power, but that is close. Although reciprocity is usually expected in any of these Western contexts, in *guanxi*, it means the return has to be greater than the deed.

Guanxi is common not just in China, but in many places where a majority or a significant financial component of the population is Chinese. The practice comes from Confucian principles, so it is culture-bound. The Chinese are likely to believe that their Confucian values are superior to Western values. In turn, many Westerners exposed to *guanxi* often worry about what seems to them to be ethical issues, because this is not what they would consider to be a "straightforward" transaction. To them, it appears almost like unethical influence peddling.

- PR helps management formulate, advocate and teach objectives that are more sound.
- The principles of public relations reflect the basic cooperative natures of people, and thus, PR people earn their reputation as problem solvers.
- Being socially responsible means upholding these obligations.

PR as Counsel for Social Responsibility

Management must be responsible and responsive to its publics; otherwise, it will have to combat a hostile environment. Unfortunately, the pattern of action has often been just the opposite, according to social scientist Hazel Henderson, who identified the following "normal" pattern of business response to social issues: (1) Ignore the problem. (2) If publicity calls widespread attention to the problem, admit its existence but present business as a victim of circumstances it cannot alter. (3) When the public takes the problem to lawmakers,

lobby, testify in legislative hearings and advertise to get opinion leaders to believe that the proposed solutions constitute government interference in the private economy. (4) After new regulations are final, announce that business can live with the new law.²⁰

Not only does such behavior justify public pressure for government intervention as the only way to achieve needed changes—just what business does not want—but it also undermines a company's credibility. First, the behavior is reactive, as the late William A. Durbin, former chairman of Hill & Knowlton, pointed out. Second, it is defensive, suggesting that there is a fundamental conflict between public welfare and industry. Third, the posture business takes in explaining how it is a victim of circumstances evidences a preference for quantification (as in talking about "nonproductive dollars") when the public is focused on something qualitative like "clean air." Fourth, the pattern of response concentrates on the means and ignores the end—an end that business might actually support, like clean air.²¹

All large institutions, not only businesses, are challenged these days: governments, schools and colleges, professional sports, religious institutions, health care organizations, fundraising groups and mediated news media. One major source of challenges is information on the Internet. A study by the public relations firm Burson-Marsteller of 158 corporate messages by 16 *Financial Times* Global Companies showed a 48 percent gap between what messages corporations present with what bloggers convey. Furthermore, news releases are being reprinted extensively and everywhere, so any effort to control the audience for them is lost.²²

With the prevalence of such crises in public confidence, the role of the PR practitioner becomes critical. Probably the biggest obstacles to “ideal” public relations, as media scholars David Clark and William Blankenburg observe, are economics and human nature:

*The plain fact is that managers are hired to make money for owners, and that a conscience can cost money. In the long run, it is money well spent, but many stockholders and managers fix their vision on the short run. Then, too, an abrupt change in corporate policy amounts to a public confession of past misbehavior—or so it seems to many executives. The natural temptation is to play up the good, and to let it go at that.*²³

Unfortunately, this continues, but the concept of social responsibility and transparency are building. A start in this direction began in the 1970s when a whole “new math” entered the corporate structure. Executives committed to being responsive and responsible attempted to explain social costs to chief financial officers, securities analysts and stockholders. *The Wall Street Journal* called it “the Arithmetic of Quality”:

*The social critics of business are making headway. Increasingly, corporations are being held to account not just for their profitability but also for what they do about an endless agenda of social problems. For business executives, it’s a whole new ball game. Now they’re struggling to come up with a new way to keep score.*²⁴

The first round of downsizing and restructuring began in the 1980s, continued into the 21st Century and was stepped up by the major recession in 2008 that began in the USA and spread globally. The job of practicing social responsibility became increasingly more difficult.

Many examples of the problems of accountability can be found. How can a profit-and-loss statement be made to reveal on the credit ledger the good a company does when its personnel advise minority businesspeople struggling to succeed in a ghetto? How can the installation of pollution control devices at a factory be calculated as a positive accomplishment, rather than as a drag on productivity? How can the expense of hiring high school dropouts and putting them through company-financed training programs be manifested as a credit rather than as a debit? Conversely, how can the “bad” a company does (by polluting, using discriminatory hiring practices and the like) be measured and reflected as a negative factor in the company’s performance? The “going green” movement to protect the global environment that started in the 1990s became a popular mantra in the 2009–2010 era, until economic issues produced a sizeable share of critics about increased costs and loss of productivity.

Despite these problems, **social responsibility** is widely recognized today as an essential part of doing business in the USA and globally. Note the responsibility emphasis in the Accords. The international agreement also includes an emphasis that public relations has had to expand its role as (1) *a problem finder and problem solver or preventer* and (2) *an interpreter—a communication link*. Let’s consider these two requirements individually.

PR as Problem Finder, Solver and Preventer PR people have to be problem finders and solvers and preferably, problem preventers. Such work involves identifying issues and understanding what images are projected and how these are interpreted by global publics.

Now, in this 21st Century, words from as long ago as 1965 by the late PR practitioner Philip Lesly remain valid. Lesly outlined the six major problems he saw for business in the second half of the 20th Century.²⁵ These most “intangible, immeasurable, and unpredictable of all elements affecting business problems” that Lesly noted (that may also apply to large nonprofit institutions) were:

1. The main problem in production is no longer how to increase the efficiency of factories and plants, but how to deal with the attitudes of people whose jobs will be changed or eliminated by the introduction of more efficient methods.
2. The principal problem of growth through innovation is not how to organize and administer development programs, but how to deal

with the reactions to the product of intended customers and dealers.

3. The personnel problem is not how to project a firm's staff needs and standards, but how to persuade the best people to work for the company—and then to stay and do their best work.
4. The financing problem is not how to plan for the company's funding, but how to deal with the attitudes of investors.
5. The problem in advertising is not how to analyze in minute detail the media, timing and costs, but how to reach the minds and hearts of the audience.
6. The problem of business acceptance is no longer how to demonstrate that an institution is operating in the public interest, but how to get people to understand that its array of activities works better when it has a minimum of restraints.

Each problem Lesly isolated suggests a need for awareness of and sensitivity to what is going on in the minds of publics that now are global. No longer primarily a communicator, today's PR practitioner tries to prevent crises and, once they occur, tries to keep them from getting out of hand. The measure of performance is not only how effectively the client's message gets across but also whether a flare-up that might injure a client's business can be avoided. Often, these flare-ups are electronic, instant and global. One major obligation is to help clients conduct their businesses in a way that responds to the new demands made by concerned scientists, environmentalists, consumerists, minority leaders, employees and underprivileged segments of the community.

The most valuable type of public relations activity involves anticipating problems, planning to prevent problems or at least trying to solve them while they are still small.

PR as Interpreter and Communication Link Philip Lesly observed that institutions must function in a human climate and thoughtful managers recognize that they don't have the expertise to deal with this element unaided. As human patterns become more complicated, they demand greater expertise and experience. Consequently, Lesly said, "Communications sense and skills, which have been vital and have always been scarce, are becoming more vital and scarcer still."

This is where the PR practitioner comes in, of course. He or she must act as an interpreter or

communication link between an organization and its publics. Lesly added,

Public relations is a bridge to change. It is a means to adjust to new attitudes that have been caused by change. It is a means of stimulating attitudes in order to create change. It helps an organization see the whole of our society together, rather than from one intensified viewpoint. It provides judgment, creativity and skills in accommodating groups to each other, based on wide and diverse experience.²⁶

In 1972, David Finn, cofounder of the PR firm of Ruder & Finn, wrote:

Twenty years ago public relations had its eye on the social sciences, with the full expectation that new discoveries would soon be made which would elevate the art of mass communications into a responsible profession. Ten years ago some of us thought computer technology was going to do the trick and the phrase "opinion management" emerged as a possible successor to the long-abandoned "engineering of consent." As things turned out, it is not the technique of public relations which has changed so much as the subject matter with which we are concerned.²⁷

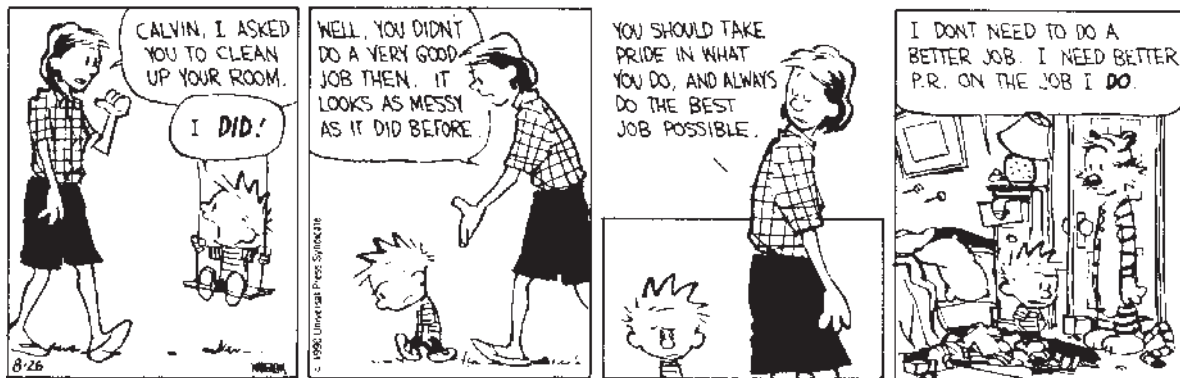
Emphasizing PR's role as a communication link, Finn focused on four developments that he held to be true of the job: (1) resolving conflicts may require modifying many opinions, including those held by the public relations consultant and the client; (2) patterns of communication in the future may revolve increasingly around smaller groups; (3) the random benefits of public relations activities not directly tied to corporate interests will increase; and (4) new methods of research now being developed will be especially relevant to situations where opinions change rapidly.²⁸

His words were prophetic of the instant global communication system in which PR practitioners and communication managers now work.

Public relations, one writer notes, does not "create the corporate image or reputation"; rather, "it interprets and advocates the policies, statements, and activities which qualify the corporation for its reputation."²⁹ In other words, PR cannot fabricate a corporate image; it must start with reality and seek to match the image to the truth. Many people wrongly assume that public relations is preoccupied with image-making in the sense of creating a false

Calvin and Hobbes

by Bill Watterson



Although humorous, the cartoon makes the point that many people think of PR as *spin*. Public relations professional Thomas J. Madden called his 1997 book *Spin Man*, and Larry Tye named his 1998 biography of Edward L. Bernays *The Father of Spin*. In today's world of pervasive media, spinning is likely to bring counter information and undesired publicity. CALVIN AND HOBBS © Watterson. Reprinted with permission of Universal Press Syndicate. All rights reserved.

front or cover-up. Unfortunately, this misperception of public relations is reinforced by periodic reports of just such behavior on the part of individuals identified as public relations specialists. For example, the term *spin doctor*, which suggests media manipulation through “doctored” (that is, deceptive) accounts or interpretations of events, was introduced in the late 1980s and gained currency in the 1990s.³⁰ In fact, a *New York Times* story about a media relations course being taught in business schools was headlined “Media Manipulation 101.”³¹

What public relations and communicator managers today know is that what is really going on within an organization is likely to go global in seconds. If an organization is doing its best to be responsible to all of its stakeholders, the message you need to be prepared for is one that not only goes global, but becomes viral, is a misunderstanding or misrepresentation, intentional or not, about an organization’s irresponsibility from a real or disguised source that may not be discovered quickly. Your best allies are electronic friends who will help you regain credibility.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is public relations a management function? What makes it strategic?
2. How will the Stockholm Accords help strengthen and standardize PR practice around the world?

3. What tactics, techniques and roles are suggested by PR’s various specialties?
4. What field of public relations interests you most? Why?

Points to Remember

- The practice of PR is now global, but some basic principles apply to it regardless of the culture and the geopolitical area where it is practiced.
- At least a decade ago, 70 countries formed a Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management to examine how public relations is practiced in different parts of the world and how practitioners can share information and learn from each other. The outcome is something called “The Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management Stockholm Accords Analysis.”
- The six major points of the Stockholm Accords are agreement on the role of public relations in organizational sustainability, governance at the highest level of organizational responsibility for two-way strategic communication, practice of public relations as a management function, oversight of organizational internal communications policies and action, oversight of organizational external policies and action and coordination of internal and external communication.

- The outcome of implementing the Stockholm Accords—which has already been signed by professional associations on each continent is to standardize the practice of public relations, to a large extent, and to lead to a standardization of educational curricula around the world.
- The result of implementing the Accords would improve the movement of public relations beyond professionalism to meeting the criteria for a profession.
- Because a PR person has only credibility to offer, he or she is only as good as his or her deserved reputation. The organization's credibility is always at stake, too, hence the term *reputation management*.
- PR involves responsibility and responsiveness in policy and information to the best interests of the organization and its publics.
- Demonstrating an active social conscience is the best PR.
- Whatever the title for the public relations or communications management role, whether it be reputation management or relationship management, it is a *strategic* management function.
- The public relations function has an impact on the organization's policy.
- The term *public affairs* is used by government generally to represent the public relations function, but other organizations use this term for communication managers who work with government at all levels.
- PR practitioner roles include being a staff member in a variety of institutional settings, being an agency or firm employee or being an independent PR practitioner.
- Public relations lacks the three major ingredients that qualify a field of activity as a profession: body of knowledge, standard educational curriculum and control over entry and exit.
- Specific areas of PR specialization include non-profit organizations, educational institutions, fundraising or donor relations, research, international, investor relations, industry, general business, government, health care, sports and leisure time.
- The three traditional interpretations of the function of public relations—controlling publics, responding to publics and achieving mutually beneficial relationships among all publics—correspond to the manipulative, service and transactional models of PR.
- The Internet has shifted the balance of power between organizations and their publics/stakeholders to almost assure symmetric two-way communication.
- Various typologies attempt to describe what public relations people do. However, who is doing the job, in what kind of communications environment, in what type of organization and in what culture all determine what is being done in the name of public relations.
- PR offers at least eight measurable values to society and the institutions it serves, most of them centering on PR's role in working out institutional and social relationships.
- Social responsibility is considered an essential “cost” of doing business, and all organizations are being pushed by the demand for transparency.
- PR people have to be interpreters, functioning as a communication link between an institution and all of its publics.
- Many people wrongly assume that public relations means image-making in the sense of creating a false front, cover-up or “spinning” facts.

Related Websites to Review

Professional associations:

Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management

<http://www.globalalliancepr.org>

Public Relations Society of America

<http://www.prsa.org>

International Public Relations Association

<http://www.ipra.org>

International Association of Business Communicators

<http://www.iabc.com>

National Investor Relations Institute

<http://www.niri.org>

Sources for information about PR:

Institute for Public Relations

<http://www.instituteforpr.com>

PR Newswire

<http://www.prnewswire.com>

PR Museum

<http://www.prmuseum.com>

About Public Relations

[http://advertising.about.com/od/
publicrelationsresources/](http://advertising.about.com/od/publicrelationsresources/)

Digital Media sites:

EC=MC (Every Company Is a Media Company)

<http://everycompanyisamediacompany.com>

Mashable

<http://mashable.com>

PaidContent

<http://paidcontent.org>

ReadWriteWeb

<http://readwriteweb.com>

Social Media Today

<http://socialmediatoday.com>

CENGAGE **brain**.com

Chapter 1

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- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 855.
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- ²¹ Durbin, "Managing Issues," pp. 1, 2.
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