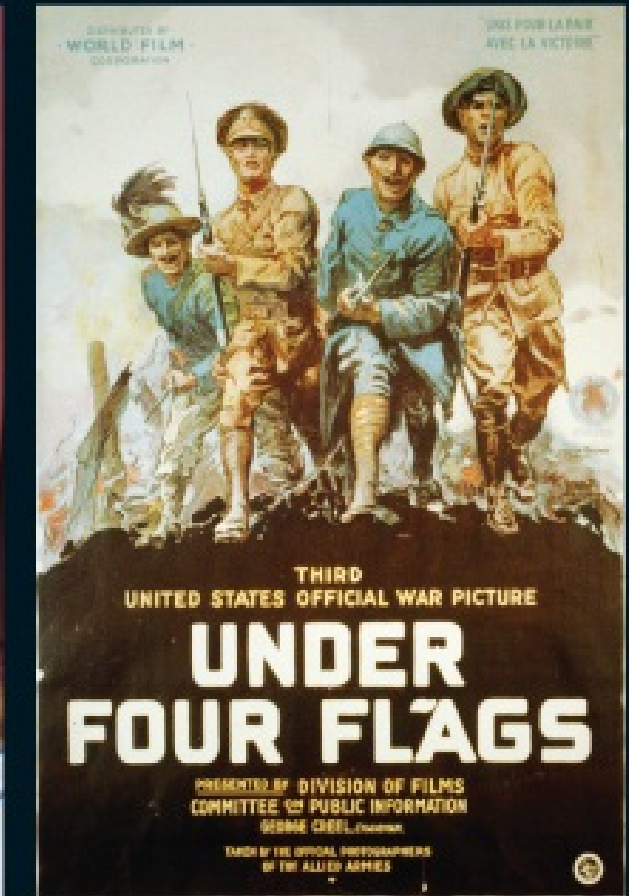




GLEN M. BROOM



BEY-LING SHA

Cutlip & Center's EFFECTIVE PUBLIC RELATIONS

ELEVENTH EDITION





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Cutlip and Center's Effective Public Relations

Eleventh Edition

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Glen M. Broom, Ph.D.

Professor Emeritus

Bey-Ling Sha, Ph.D., APR

Associate Professor

School of Journalism and Media Studies

San Diego State University

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To our students in our classrooms and former students in the practice and academe, whose feedback and contributions have helped shape the eleventh edition.

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Preface

Beginning with the first edition in 1952, *Effective Public Relations* (EPR) has introduced the theory and principles of public relations, schooled its practitioners, and served as a reference for those in the calling worldwide. This eleventh edition begins its seventh decade of advancing public relations toward professional status.

What's New In the Eleventh Edition of *Effective Public Relations*

- A new co-author brings new perspective, insight and content to the eleventh edition.
- Each chapter begins with “Learning Outcomes” and ends with related questions in a “Study Guide.”
- Considerations of social media and other new media technologies are incorporated throughout the text.
- New case examples and illustrations throughout give chapter content “real-world” context and global perspective.
- New sections outline challenges faced by public relations practitioners, including those related to diversity and professionalism.
- Expanded sections on measurement, evaluation and metrics.
- Legal aspects of public relations practice are more clearly articulated and presented in the context of specific public relations concerns.
- New sections on message crafting, message framing, and message encoding and decoding offer concrete, yet theory-grounded tips for

message development.

- Five leading practitioners helped revise chapters on contemporary practice in [Part 4](#) of the text—The Practice.
- Seven new chapters on specific contexts of public relations practice accommodate the increasing specialization of the profession—Business and Industry, Government and Politics, Military Public Affairs, Nonprofits and Nongovernmental Organizations, Health Care, Education, and Associations and Unions.

EPR Through The Years

For many years, students and practitioners alike referred to the book simply as “Cutlip and Center,” using the original authors’ names instead of the actual title. Scott M. Cutlip and Allen H. Center created the book that made public relations education an academic area of study on university and college campuses. Many of their ideas and ambitions in the early editions still serve as beacons guiding public relations education and practice.

EPR is known to many as “the bible of public relations.” “After all,” as one longtime counselor and consultant said, “It was Cutlip and Center, as much as anyone, who gave those of us who strayed or wandered into the profession from journalism and other professional pursuits, a sense of substance and legitimacy about practicing our adopted craft.”¹

¹ Stephen H. Baer, Fellow, PRSA, writing in a book review published in *Public Relations Review* 18, no. 4 (Winter 1992): 392.

In the early years, EPR served as the comprehensive encyclopedia of public relations, but no longer is that its role. The body of knowledge that today underpins both public relations education and professional practice extends well beyond the limits of a single book or an introductory course. Yet EPR remains the basic reference for the field worldwide. It is the public relations book most frequently used by those preparing for accreditation examinations, most frequently cited in public relations literature, most widely used in

English worldwide, and most-often translated into other languages. EPR has been translated into the languages of Bulgaria, China, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Russia, and Spain. As one reviewer said, “ ‘Cutlip, Center, and Broom’ . . . [is] the standard against which all basic public relations textbooks are measured.”²

² Donald K. Wright, “Review of Public Relations Literature: Basic Textbooks,” *Public Relations Review* 22, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 380.

Surely, Cutlip and Center created the franchise that remains *Effective Public Relations*, but neither had been active after the sixth edition (1985). Cutlip died in 2000 and Center in 2005, but their influence and ambitions for the field continue to be reflected in *Cutlip and Center’s Effective Public Relations*, eleventh edition; thus, their names are again above the title. (Read more about Cutlip and Center in [Chapter 4](#), pages [97](#) and [98](#)).

The many editions of EPR reflect an evolving practice based increasingly on professional standards, theory, and principles, as well as on a requirement of specialized educational preparation for entry and advancement. This is Glen M. Broom’s sixth edition and Bey-Ling Sha’s first. Keeping the book relevant is both our challenge and our commitment to maintaining its longtime legacy in public relations. Our mission in this edition is to advance professional standards in both public relations education and practice.

What you will learn in EPR

First, when you study this edition of EPR, you will learn basic concepts about what public relations is and is not and how it evolved to today’s practice. Second, you will learn the values, theories, principles, and management process that guide the practice. (Other public relations books and courses cover writing techniques and detailed management case studies. EPR does not.) Third, you will gain knowledge of updated information and examples to help you understand contemporary public relations practice in a variety of settings. Each chapter begins with a list of learning outcomes to help you focus your study and to master the material and ends with a list of study questions to help you determine if you achieved the intended outcomes.

EPR comprises four parts: [Part I \(Chapters 1–4\)](#)—Concept, Practitioners, Context, and Historical Origins; [Part II \(Chapters 5–10\)](#)—Foundations; [Part III \(Chapters 11–14\)](#)—Management Process; and [Part IV \(Chapters 15–21\)](#)—The Practice.

In short, the book covers a broad range of public relations theory and practice. However, EPR does not trivialize public relations by presenting brief, oversimplified case studies. Rather, EPR gives you a foundation for subsequent courses and books devoted to developing and implementing program tactics, and to analyzing in-depth cases. This also is not a chest-thumping “how-I-saved-the-day” book that claims to show how to succeed in public relations without having a foundation based on the body of knowledge.

Following is an annotated description of each chapter:

- [Chapter 1](#), “Introduction to Contemporary Public Relations,” introduces the concept of contemporary public relations and defines terms often confused with the practice. Most importantly, it introduces a set of “core axioms” that spells out the principles and values central to contemporary practice ([Exhibit 1.4](#), page [23](#)).
- [Chapter 2](#), “Practitioners of Public Relations,” presents recent data on employment, salary, diversity, population demographic changes, and the feminization of the field. “Day in the Life of . . .” exhibits introduce you to practitioners’ work in internal departments and outside public relations firms, as well as the roles they play in organizations.
- [Chapter 3](#), “Organizational Settings,” gives public relations work context by explaining how organizational settings and other factors influence the practice and outlines how public relations often begins and develops in organizations. The chapter also outlines the pluses and minuses of establishing an internal department versus retaining outside counsel and presents data on major national and international firms.
- [Chapter 4](#), “Historical Origins and Evolution,” describes how the practice has evolved, identifies historical leaders who led the evolution, and traces the origins of current practice. In addition to discussing the

contributions of founders such as Ivy Lee, Edward Bernays, and Doris Fleischman, the chapter features the contributions of twentieth-century leaders, including Harold Burson, Allen Center, Scott Cutlip, Daniel Edelman, Tim Traverse-Healy, Inez Kaiser, and Betsy Plank.

- [Chapter 5](#), “Professionalism and Ethics,” introduces the professional and ethical principles that underpin the practice. Supplemental exhibits document the development of public relations outside the United States, particularly in Australia, Sweden, and China, as well as with The Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management. The chapter also outlines the professionalization of the field through specialized education, accreditation, and licensing.
- [Chapter 6](#), “Legal Considerations,” summarizes the legal considerations vital to public relations practice in the United States and gives examples of how the law in other countries impacts the practice. Sections regarding the First Amendment, public access to government information, corporate expression, lobbying, employee and labor relations, investor relations, copyright law, defamation, and privacy all explicitly connect legal issues to specific areas and elements of public relations practice.
- [Chapter 7](#), “Theoretical Underpinnings: Adjustment and Adaptation,” outlines a theoretical foundation for the practice—systems theory. It distinguishes between an “open system” approach and the reactive “closed system,” approach that all too often characterizes the practice. Based on the systems perspective of how organizations adjust and adapt to environmental change pressures, the discussion concludes with a presentation of an open systems model for public relations.
- [Chapter 8](#), “Communication Theories and Contexts,” presents communication and public opinion theories and models essential to understanding the function of public relations in organizations and society. Within a systems theory framework, the chapter outlines the major effects of public relations communication and the contexts and dimensions of public opinion. It concludes with a discussion of individual orientation, social consensus, and organization–public relationships.

- [Chapter 9](#), “Internal Relations and Employee Communication,” defines the intra-organizational part of public relations practice and its role in organizations. It discusses organizational culture and the application of systems theory to employee communication programs. It also covers the major goals of employee communication, the regulatory aspects of internal relations, and traditional and new media for communicating with internal publics.
- [Chapter 10](#), “ External Media and Media Relations,” provides detailed discussion of the traditional and new media for communicating program messages to external publics. It also covers new uses of old media and how new media—blogs, e-mail, social media, and so on—have changed organization–public interactions in the digital communication world. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how to work with the media in order to build and maintain good media relations.
- [Chapter 11](#), “ Step One: Defining Public Relations Problems,” applies theory to practice by outlining the “four-step public relations process.” The model demonstrates the logic of using research to “benchmark” the beginning of the program by defining problems and setting program goals. (The model is repeated in [Chapter 14](#) to illustrate the three phases of evaluation and to close the loop on benchmarking.) [Chapter 11](#) discusses the differences between informal and formal research methods and describes technology used to gather data for detecting, exploring, and describing public relations situations.
- [Chapter 12](#), “Step Two: Planning and Programming,” builds a rationale for strategic planning, using many examples to illustrate key concepts. It expands the traditional four-step public relations process presented in [Chapter 11](#) into a detailed 10-step strategic planning outline, clarifying the difference between strategy and tactics. The steps include how to identify publics, how to write objectives for each target public, and how to apply working theory to developing program strategy.
- [Chapter 13](#), “Step Three: Taking Action and Communicating,” illustrates major tactics for implementing program strategy, grounding them in theoretical principles. It emphasizes that taking action is necessary—particularly corrective action—in addition to

communication. Examples from practice illustrate crafting, framing, and disseminating effective messages. The discussion also covers the diffusion process and the role of opinion leaders in public relations communication.

- [Chapter 14](#), “Step Four: Evaluating the Program,” outlines how to track program progress and how to assess impact. The discussion of the three phases of program evaluation—preparation, implementation, and impact—includes numerous models and examples to illustrate and clarify the steps of program evaluation. The chapter also covers practical research methods used in program evaluation, including a discussion of how to use content analysis for tracking program implementation and survey research to measure program impact.
- [Chapter 15](#), “Business and Industry,” outlines how the practice in corporate settings is different from that in other settings. In addition, the chapter describes the role of public relations in corporate social responsibility, corporate philanthropy, and corporate finance. It reflects the growing interest in protecting corporate reputations and building public trust following two decades of corporate scandals and financial malfeasance exposés. The discussion also addresses social media and globalization, as well as their impact on corporate practice.
- [Chapter 16](#), “Government and Politics,” covers the goals of government public relations, or as it is called in government—“public affairs.” Goals include informing constituents, promoting citizen participation, advocating public views to government decision makers, managing internal communication, facilitating media relations, and supporting social and development programs. Additionally, the chapter describes barriers to effective government practice, explains how technology is changing government public affairs, and discusses public affairs’ role in international relations.
- [Chapter 17](#), “Military Public Affairs,” discusses the roles and goals of public relations in the military branches. It also outlines how military public affairs differs from the practice in other government agencies and other organizational settings. It points out the unique challenges and barriers military public affairs officers face in the era of public-

demanded transparency, operational engagement, and media scrutiny. The chapter ends with a discussion of efforts to professionalize the military public affairs officers and staff.

- [Chapter 18](#), “Nonprofits and Nongovernmental Organizations,” covers public relations practice in the broad range of not-for-profit organizations known as “The Third Sector.” It discusses how reduced government budgets have forced private groups to take on many former tasks of government, thus creating greater need for volunteers and philanthropic support, and an expanded role for public relations in securing both. It concludes with a discussion of the role of public relations in faith-based and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).
- [Chapter 19](#), “Health Care,” outlines the challenges and opportunities of public relations practice in the era of health care reform. It discusses how the practice in health care settings has to protect patient privacy, communicate about complex issues, and deal with the impact of social media. It also covers the connection between internal (employee) communication and external public relations programming, as well as the increasingly important role that public relations plays as the health care industry adjusts to economic, social, and technological changes.
- [Chapter 20](#), “Education,” sets the stage by outlining the role of education in the global economy. It discusses issues and trends impacting educational institutions at all levels—preschool to university, public and private. Access to education is a global concern, with concern about funding, accountability for educational outcomes, and school choice driving much of the practice in education public relations. The chapter concludes with an outline of public relations goals and challenges unique to higher education.
- [Chapter 21](#), “Associations and Unions,” begins with a discussion of the different types of associations and the roles they play in society. It outlines the challenges public relations practitioners face in working on behalf of associations, as well as the nature of association public relations programs. “The Problem of Strikes” suggests the special public relations challenges facing practitioners representing labor unions as they attempt to mobilize members and tell their story to gain public

support for labor.

Contributors

Former students formed a pipeline of new information and examples for this edition, for which we are grateful and in their debt. Five students took on the task of helping update previous chapters or writing new chapters. Stephanie Casenza, APR, Executive Director, Peralta Colleges Foundation, Oakland, Calif., helped create the new [Chapter 21](#) on public relations in education settings. Scott Farrell, President, Global Corporate Communications, GolinHarris, Chicago, Ill., updated [Chapter 15](#) about public relations in business and industry. Diane Gage-Lofgren, APR, Fellow PRSA, Senior Vice President of Brand Strategy, Communication, and Public Relations, Kaiser Permanente, Oakland, Calif., (along with colleague Jon Stewart, Senior Project Director) added the new chapter on public relations in health care. Jim McBride, president of McBride Communications, Poway, Calif., and lecturer, School of Journalism and Media Studies, San Diego State University, revised his chapter on public relations in the “The Third Sector”—[Chapter 18](#) on public relations in nonprofits and nongovernmental organizations. And T. McCreary, Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy (retired), Lorton, Va., now President, [Military.com](#), contributed the new [Chapter 17](#) on military public affairs.

Other former students contributing include Mark S. Cox, APR, Director of Public Communications, City of Chesapeake, Va.; Vanessa Curtis, Senior Account Executive, Lizzie Grubman Public Relations, New York, NY; Greg Davy, Communications Specialist, Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools, Williamsburg, Virginia; Rachel Kay, Principal, Rachel Kay Public Relations, Solana Beach, Calif.; Suman Lee, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Greenlee School of Journalism and Communication, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa; and Commander Wendy L. Snyder, APR, U.S. Navy, Pentagon, Washington D.C.

Colleagues in the practice contributed much to this edition. George D. Lennon, Director for Public Affairs, National Science Foundation, Arlington, Va., updated his [Chapter 16](#) on government and politics. Other contributors

listed in the text chapters include Walter Barlow, President, Research Strategies Corporation, Princeton, New Jersey; Janet M. Bedrosian, APR, Deputy State Director (retired), Bureau of Land Management, Sacramento, Calif.; Ed Davis, Director of Media and Public Relations, United Way of Greater Houston, Texas; Lawrence G. Foster, Corporate Vice President–Public Relations (retired), Johnson & Johnson, New Brunswick, New Jersey; Elizabeth Dougall, Ph.D., Executive General Manager, Rowland, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia; Bill Furlow, Partner, Furlow Communications, Natchez, Miss.; Julia McHugh, APR, Director of Public Relations, Santa Barbara Zoo, Santa Barbara, Calif.; David B. McKinney, APR, ABC, Senior Communications Manager (retired), Shell Oil Company, Houston, Texas; Debra Lynn Ross, Director, Corporate Communications, Consorta, Inc., Schaumburg, Ill.; and Wendy Harman, Director, Social Strategy, American Red Cross, Washington, D.C.

Colleagues in the academy made significant contributions to the eleventh edition and are credited in the text. Those include James Everett, Ph.D., Professor and Chair, Department of Communication, Coastal Carolina University, Conway, S.C.; Rochelle L. Ford, Ph.D., APR, Associate Dean, Research and Academic Affairs, John H. Johnson School of Communications, Howard University, Washington, D.C.; Larsåke Larsson, Ph.D., Professor, Örebro University, Sweden; Ming Anxiang, Professor, Institute of Journalism & Communication, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing; Juan-Carlos Molleda, Ph.D., Associate Professor, College of Journalism and Communications, University of Florida, Gainesville; Kaye Sweetser, Ph.D., APR+M, Associate Professor, Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Georgia, Athens; and Robina Xavier, FPRIA, Associate Professor and Head of the School of Advertising, Marketing and Public Relations, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia, and President, Public Relations Institute of Australia.

Alas, we cannot list all the former students and colleagues in education and in the practice who contributed to this edition. They will recognize how their feedback changed and improved the book. Many responded to our requests for help, while others cited in the book contributed through their own writings. We could not have revised the book for the eleventh edition without the support, suggestions, and critical analysis of such friends and colleagues.

We thank them all and hope that you also will be as generous with your feedback and suggestions as you study this eleventh edition.

Pearson Prentice Hall editors provided able assistance and firm direction in getting this edition produced: Erin Gardner, Marketing Editor, joined the team at mid-point, and Kierra Bloom, Senior Editorial Product Manager, Business Publishing, and Clara Bartunek, Project Manager, guided the process from manuscript to an actual book. George Jacob, Integra, made sure that the words you are reading made sense and were spelled correctly. We appreciated their help in producing the eleventh edition and relieve them of any responsibility for problems created by the authors.

We hope this book helps you prepare for the challenging and rewarding calling of building organization–public relationships. Best wishes for success in that mission.

Glen M. Broom, Ph.D., and Bey-Ling Sha, Ph.D., APR

About The Authors

Glen M. Broom

is professor emeritus, School of Journalism and Media Studies, San Diego State University, where he served on the faculty from 1979 to 2007. He began his academic career as head of the public relations sequence at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. He served as Times-Mirror Centennial Visiting Professor at the University of Texas-Austin; as adjunct professor at Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia; and as visiting professor at universities in Sydney and Melbourne, Australia.



Broom earned bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Illinois and a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin–Madison. His professional career began as assistant editor in the U. of I. Cooperative Extension Service. He later became part owner and vice president–director of public relations, Applied Behavioral Science, Inc., then a Chicago-based management training and consulting firm.

Broom authored or coauthored the sixth through eleventh editions of Cutlip

and Center's Effective Public Relations and coauthored *Using Research in Public Relations* (Prentice-Hall, 1990). His awards and recognitions include the Public Relations Society of America's (PRSA) 1991 Outstanding Educator Award, the PRSA Foundation's 1993 Jackson, Jackson & Wagner Behavioral Science Award, and the International Communication Association's 1998 PRide Award for Research Article.

Bey-Ling Sha

is associate professor in the School of Journalism and Media Studies, San Diego State University. Her research has been published in various scholarly journals and book chapters, and she has won top-paper honors from all five major communication and public relations associations in the United States. For her teaching, Sha won the 2007 Outstanding Faculty Award from San Diego State University and the 2004 Outstanding Faculty Award from the University of Maryland, College Park.



Before becoming a full-time educator, Sha worked as a public affairs officer for the U.S. Census Bureau, where she helped oversee the execution and evaluation of the Census 2000 promotional campaign, which won a 2001 Silver Anvil Award of Excellence from the Public Relations Society of America. The PRSA San Diego chapter named Sha its 2007 Professional of the Year. Her pro bono professional work won the 2010 Outstanding Advocacy Award from the National PTA® and the 2005 President's Award from the International Listening Association.

Sha holds a B.A. in communication and in French from Purdue University and an M.A. in journalism and a Ph.D. in mass communication from the University of Maryland. She is accredited in public relations by the Universal Accreditation Board.

1. Photo of President Obama and Press Secretary Jay Carney:

What role does public relations staff play in setting policy and making management decisions, much as Press Secretary Jay Carney does for President Barack Obama? See pages [49–51](#). (Official Whitehouse photo by Pete Souza)

2. Photo of World War I poster, “Under Four Flags”:

Learn how President Woodrow Wilson's World War I “Committee on Public Information” introduced social science to what is now called “public relations.” See page [90](#).

3. Photo of California condors:

How did research change the Santa Barbara Zoo's public relations strategy for opening the new \$7.5 million “California Trails” exhibit featuring the endangered California condors? See page [249](#). (Photo by Sheri Horiszny, Santa Barbara Zoo)

Part I Concept, Practitioners, Context, and Origins

1. [Chapter 1 Introduction to Contemporary Public Relations](#)
2. [Chapter 2 Practitioners of Public Relations](#)
3. [Chapter 3 Organizational Settings](#)
4. [Chapter 4 Historical Origins and Evolution](#)

Chapter 1 Introduction to Contemporary Public Relations

Learning Outcomes

After studying [Chapter 1](#) this chapter you should be able to:

1. Define public relations as the management function that builds and maintains relationships between organizations and their publics.
2. Distinguish between public relations and marketing, identifying the exchange between provider and customer as the distinguishing characteristic of marketing relationships.
3. Describe and differentiate among related concepts—publicity, advertising, press agency, employee relations, community relations, public affairs, issues management, crisis communication, lobbying, investor relations, and development.
4. Outline how public relations helps improve organizations and society.

Public relations is the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the public on whom its success or failure depends.

Individuals and groups have always entered into relationships in order to satisfy mutual wants and needs. In the interconnected global community, however, increasing interdependence requires even more complex social, political, and economic interaction. As a result, establishing and maintaining relationships at all levels of social systems have become important areas of scholarly study and professional practice.

For example, human relations, marital relations, and interpersonal relations

describe the study and management of relationships between individuals. At the other extreme, international relations deals with relationships among nations in the largest social system. Courses and books are devoted to the study of all these relationships, as well as relationships in families, work teams, groups, organizations, communities, and other social entities.

This book is about relationships between organizations and their stakeholder publics—people who are somehow mutually involved or interdependent with organizations. The term “public relations” refers to the management of organization–public relationships and is one of the fastest-growing fields of professional employment worldwide.

In everyday conversation and in the media, however, people use “public relations” to refer to many things, and often not in a positive way. For example, some say “it’s just public relations” to describe what they consider to be an insincere public gesture. Others say it is “good public relations” or “great PR” if something appears



CLS

Old school PR
has been shuffled off to the
retirement home.

Times are changing. And it's natural to want to play it safe—to stick with the big, the old, the familiar. When your gut is telling you old school thinking isn't enough, it's time to seek out a fresh new way of doing things. We can help. With a reputation for creative excellence, and a mountain of industry awards to back it up, CLS has successfully reinvented PR for scores of national brands. Yours can be one of them. Call Doug Spong at 612.375.8555, or visit us at carmichaellynchspong.com.

CARMICHAEL LYNCH SPONG

MINNEAPOLIS DENVER NEW YORK CHICAGO

Figure 1.1 “Old School ‘PR’”

Courtesy Carmichael Lynch Spong, Minneapolis.

in the media, equating public relations with anything that attracts media coverage. As one publicist said, “We encourage that feeling because that’s what we do.”¹ (See [Figure 1.1](#).)

Critics see public relations as an attempt to hide the truth or to put a positive “spin” on bad news—“an industry designed to alter perceptions, reshape reality and manufacture consent.”² For example, during unrest in the Middle East, critics claimed that public relations firms were engaged in “reputation laundering”: “What people assume with PR agencies is their real business is burying the truth.”³ Another critic suggested “the terms PR and public relations have become widely accepted shorthand for subterfuge and deception.”⁴ Even more extreme is a long-held view that public relations people “pull the wires which [sic] control the public mind, who harness old forces and contrive new ways to bind and guide the world.”⁵

This book text is not about the kinds of public relations represented in these views. Rather, it describes public relations as the art and science of building and maintaining relationships between organizations and their stakeholder publics. This chapter defines public relations as an organizational management function, discusses its parts and specializations, and distinguishes it from other management functions and activities.

Attempts to Define Public Relations

Hundreds have written definitions attempting to define public relations by listing the major operations that make up the practice—what public relations does. A longtime public relations scholar and professional leader, the late Rex F. Harlow, collected almost 500 definitions. He identified common elements and incorporated them in the following definition:

Public relations is the distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organization and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilize change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and sound and ethical communication as its principal tools.⁶

The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) adopted an even longer definition—“Official Statement on Public Relations”—in 1982. A blue-ribbon panel of PRSA leaders attempted to provide society members a definition of the field that stressed public relations’ contributions to society. In addition to this conceptual aspect of the definition, the panel included activities, results, and knowledge requirements of public relations practice. (See [Exhibit 1.1](#).) PRSA’s current website presents a new and much shorter definition similar to what was first presented in this textbook in its 1985 edition: Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics.

Public relations helps our complex, pluralistic society to reach decisions and function more effectively by contributing to mutual understanding among groups and institutions. It serves to bring private and public policies into harmony.

Public relations serves a wide variety of institutions in society such as businesses, trade unions, government agencies, voluntary associations, foundations, hospitals, schools, colleges, and religious institutions. To achieve their goals, these institutions must develop effective relationships with many different audiences or publics such as employees, members, customers, local communities, shareholders, and other institutions, and with society at large.

The management of institutions needs to understand the attitudes and values of their publics in order to achieve institutional goals. The goals themselves are shaped by the external environment. The

public relations practitioner acts as a counselor to management and as a mediator, helping to translate private aims into reasonable, publicly acceptable policy and action.

As a management function, public relations encompasses the following:

- Anticipating, analyzing, and interpreting public opinion, attitudes, and issues that might impact, for good or ill, the operations and plans of the organization.
- Counseling management at all levels in the organization with regard to policy decisions, courses of action, and communication, taking into account their public ramifications and the organization's social or citizenship responsibilities.
- Researching, conducting, and evaluating, on a continuing basis, programs of action and communication to achieve the informed public understanding necessary to the success of an organization's aims. These may include marketing, financial, fund raising, employee, community or government relations, and other programs.
- Planning and implementing the organization's efforts to influence or change public policy.
- Setting objectives, planning, budgeting, recruiting and training staff, developing facilities—in short, managing the resources needed to perform all of the above.
- Examples of the knowledge that may be required in the professional practice of public relations include communication arts, psychology, social psychology, sociology, political science, economics, and the principles of management and ethics. Technical knowledge and skills are required for opinion research, public-issues analysis, media relations, direct mail, institutional advertising, publications, film/video productions, special events, speeches, and

presentations.

In helping to define and implement policy, the public relations practitioner uses a variety of professional communication skills and plays an integrative role both within the organization and between the organization and the external environment.

Exhibit 1.1

Public Relations Society of America's "Official Statement of Public Relations"

Courtesy of Public Relations Society of America.

In summary, the many definitions suggest that public relations:

1. Conducts a planned and sustained program by an organization's management.
2. Deals with the relationships between an organization and its stakeholder publics.
3. Monitors awareness, opinions, attitudes, and behaviors inside and outside the organization.
4. Analyzes the impact of policies, procedures, and actions on stakeholder publics to identify those that conflict with the public interest and organizational survival.
5. Counsels management to establish new policies, procedures, and actions that benefit both the organization and its publics.
6. Establishes and maintains two-way communication between the organization and its publics.
7. Produces measurable changes in awareness, opinion, attitude, and behavior inside and outside the organization.

8. Results in new and/or maintained relationships between an organization and its publics.

Defining Contemporary Public Relations

Definitions serve at least two purposes: to help us understand the world around us and to argue for a particular worldview of how one concept relates to other concepts.⁷ Consequently, the definition of [public relations](#) describes what public relations is and does, as well as how it relates to other organizational activities:

Public relations is the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends.

This definition positions public relations as a management function, because all organizations must attend to relationships with their publics. It also identifies building and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and publics as the moral and ethical basis of the profession. At the same time, it suggests criteria for determining what public relations is and what is not public relations. And finally, it defines the concept of public relations that is the subject of this book.

Confusion with Marketing

Many confuse public relations with another management function—[marketing](#). Job openings for “public relations representatives” turn out to be positions as shopping mall sales representatives or telephone solicitors. In small organizations, the same person may do both public relations and marketing, often without distinguishing between the two. So it is not surprising that some mistakenly conclude that there is no difference. But there is a difference that makes the difference.

Marketing is the management function that identifies human needs and wants, offers products and services to satisfy those demands, and causes transactions that deliver products and services to users in exchange for something of value to the provider.

If not always clearly defined in practice, public relations and marketing can be distinguished conceptually and their relationship clarified. First, people's wants and needs are fundamental to the concept of marketing. What people want or need gets translated into consumer demand. Marketers offer products and services to satisfy the demand. Consumers select the products and services that provide the most utility, value, and satisfaction. Finally, the marketer delivers the product or service to the consumer in exchange for something of value. According to marketing scholars Philip Kotler and Kevin Lane Keller, "Marketing is a societal process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating, offering, and freely exchanging products and services of value with others."⁸ This special relationship distinguishes the marketing function—two parties exchanging something of value to each other.

The goal of marketing is to attract and satisfy customers on a sustained basis in order to secure "market share" and to achieve an organization's economic objectives. To accomplish that goal, marketing creates quid pro quo relationships in which ownership—title—changes hands. On the other hand, in public relations there is no exchange of title in relationships with employees, community members, environmentalists, and other constituent publics. Simply put, organizations cannot "own" support, trust, commitment, or loyalty from those upon whom the organization's very survival depends. (See [Chapter 3](#), pages [58–59](#), for an extended discussion of the public relations–marketing relationship in organizations.)

Parts of the Function

Some confuse public relations with its activities and parts. For example, many think that "publicity" is simply another way of saying "public relations." Publicity is often the most visible part, but seldom the only program tactic. Similarly, "lobbying" may be the most noticeable activity in

Washington, D.C., and in state capitals, but it usually is only one part of an overall public relations strategy. Another part, employee communication, may dominate in some organizations, but it represents the internal public relations effort that is necessary before dealing with relationships outside the organization.

The contemporary concept and practice of public relations includes all the following activities and specialties.

Employee Communication

Critical to the success of any organization, of course, are its employees. Before any relationships can be maintained with customers, consumers, neighbors, investors, and others outside the organization, management must attend to those who do the work—the employees. Hence, CEOs in organizations talk about employees as their “number one public” or as “the organization’s most important asset,” and they try to create an “organizational culture” that attracts and retains productive workers. This part of public relations practice deals with [internal relations](#).

Internal relations is the specialized part of public relations that builds and maintains a mutually beneficial relationship between managers and the employees on whom an organization’s success depends.

Internal relations specialists work in departments called “employee communication,” “employee relations,” or “internal relations.” They plan and implement communication programs to keep employees informed and motivated and to promote the organization’s culture. According to Jon Iwata, senior vice president of marketing and communications at IBM, “When we talk about employee communications, we really think of it in terms of corporate culture—how work gets done in our company, how we view things here.” He points out that the CEO plays a critical role: “The CEO has to get his or her business to perform, and that is down to the workforce. The realization is that in order to drive any business results, the employees have to be with you”⁹

Internal relations staff work closely with the human resources department to communicate about benefits, training, safety, and other topics important to employees. They work with the legal department in communication related to labor relations during contract negotiations and work stoppages. And, recognizing that employees are an organization's best ambassadors, internal relations staff work with external relations staff. They coordinate messages so the entire organization speaks with "one voice," whether in face-to-face discussion with neighbors and friends or in social media postings. ([Chapter 9](#) discusses internal relations and employee communication in greater detail.)

Publicity

Much of the news and information in the media originates from public relations sources. Because the sources do not pay for the placement, however, they have little or no control over if the information is used, when it is used, and how it is used or misused by the media. Public relations sources provide what they judge to be newsworthy information—[publicity](#)—with the expectation that editors and reporters will use the information. Media decision makers may or may not use the information, based on their judgment of its news value and interest to their audiences. They may use the information as provided, change the original information, or change how it is presented, usually without identifying the original source. In the eyes of readers, listeners, or viewers, the medium carrying the information is the source.

Publicity is information provided by an outside source that is used by media because the information has news value. This is an uncontrolled method of placing messages in the media because the source does not pay media outlets for placement.

Examples of publicity include a story in a newspaper's financial section about a corporation's increased earnings, a columnist's item about a charity fund-raising campaign, a feature story in the city magazine describing a new cancer research center, an entertainment tabloid's announcement of your favorite band's local concert, and television news coverage of a new civic center dedication ceremony. Typically, such stories came from the

corporation's investor relations department, the charitable organization's director of donor relations and development, the university medical school's news bureau, the band's publicist, and the mayor's press secretary.

Print media usually receive a news release, feature story with photographs, or media kit including detailed background information. Broadcast media and blogs typically receive a broadcast-style news script, recorded interview or "sound bites," video news release (VNR), or media kit including material suitable for broadcast or Internet posting (see [Figure 1.2](#)). To generate publicity, public relations practitioners must know what information will attract media attention, identify a newsworthy angle and lead, and write and package the information appropriately for each medium. It also helps if journalists and targeted bloggers trust the news source.

Newsworthy events also generate publicity by attracting media coverage. Groundbreaking ceremonies, ribbon cuttings, open houses, reunions, dedications, telethons, marathons, ceremonial appointments, honorary degrees, contract and legislation signings, protest demonstrations, press conferences, and other "media events" are designed to be "news." An amusement park makes news, for example, when the 500-millionth "guest" enters the park. Network news crews cover the president signing health care reform legislation as leaders of health care groups pose alongside on the White House lawn. Those staging such events hope to attract media coverage and to gain some control over what is reported. Successful publicity events have real news value; appeal to media gatekeepers; offer photo, video, or sound opportunities; and communicate the source's intended message.

In its infancy, public relations practice consisted of former journalists producing publicity, so it is not surprising that some still confuse publicity with the broader concept of public relations. There is much more to public relations than publicity, however. As long-time counselor and educator Michael Herman observed:

We consistently see senior-level managers who still think that public relations is “free advertising” or the ability to “get our name in the media.” I usually tell clients that it’s no problem getting your name in the media—just do something stupid or wrong.¹⁰

Advertising

Unlike publicists, advertisers control content, placement, and timing by paying for media time and space. Although both publicity and [advertising](#) are mediated communication, advertising gives the source control over content and placement.

Advertising is information placed in the media by an identified sponsor that pays for the time or space. It is a controlled method of placing messages in the media.

Many associate advertising with marketing goods and services, but it is not limited to that purpose. Other parts of the organization also use this controlled means of placing messages in the mass media for nonmarketing purposes. For example, human resources departments place advertisements in newspaper classifieds and Sunday business sections to announce job openings. Legal departments place advertisements in “newspapers of record” to conform with public notification requirements when corporations announce their formation, change names, issue new bonds, or sell shares; when they recall a defective product; or when they comply with a court settlement.

Public relations uses advertising to reach audiences other than the customers targeted by marketing. For example, after the tragic Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf, BP spent more than \$93 million on advertisements, but not

to market its products:

“Our objective has been to create informational advertising to assure people that we will meet our commitments and tell them how they can get help—especially claims,” said BP spokesman Scott Dean. “It is an important tool to help us be transparent about what we are doing.”¹¹

When Andersen Consulting changed its name to Accenture, the company placed advertisements in business publications announcing the new name. Investor relations at another company placed advertisements to assure stockholders and financial analysts that the corporation had thwarted a hostile takeover attempt. Nordstrom advertisements in store communities announced four-year Nordstrom Scholarships to be awarded to high school juniors who plan to go to college. The Embassy of Kuwait purchased full-page advertisements in major U.S. newspapers announcing “America is our ally” and support for “the international effort to eradicate terrorism.” An aerospace company’s community relations department placed an advertisement announcing its gift to the local symphony, yet not a single member of the intended audience buys the wing assemblies and airframes manufactured by the company. A local charity’s public relations committee bought a full-page advertisement to thank contributors who funded a new center for the homeless. Merck & Company used advertising to announce its withdrawal of VIOXXTM from the market (see [Figure 1.3](#)).

Mobil Oil (now ExxonMobil) began the practice of using “advertorials” on op-ed pages and in magazines in 1970 “to speak out on a variety of issues designed to reach

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS TAKING VIOXX® (rofecoxib)



September 30, 2004

Merck Voluntarily Withdraws VIOXX

Dear VIOXX Patient:

Merck & Co., Inc. announced today a voluntary withdrawal of VIOXX®

This decision is based on new data from a three-year clinical study. In this study, there was an increased risk for cardiovascular (CV) events, such as heart attack and stroke, in patients taking VIOXX 25 mg compared to those taking placebo (sugar pill). While the incidence of CV events was low, there was an increased risk beginning after 18 months of treatment. The cause of the clinical study result is uncertain, but our commitment to our patients is clear.

Patients who are currently taking VIOXX should contact their health care providers to discuss discontinuing use of VIOXX and possible alternative treatments. In addition, patients and health care professionals may obtain information from merck.com and vioxx.com or may call 1-888-368-4699.

Merck will reimburse all patients for their unused VIOXX. All dosage strengths and formulations of VIOXX are affected by this voluntary withdrawal. Information can be found at vioxx.com or at 1-888-368-4699.

Merck is notifying physicians and pharmacists and has informed the Food and Drug Administration of this decision.

We are taking this action because we believe it best serves the interests of patients. That is why we undertook this clinical trial to better understand the safety profile of VIOXX. And it's why we instituted this voluntary withdrawal upon learning about these data.

Be assured that Merck will continue to do everything we can to maintain the safety of our medicines.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Raymond V. Gilmartin".

Raymond V. Gilmartin,
Chairman, President & CEO

Please read the Patient Prescribing Information for VIOXX.

Where patients come first  MERCK

Figure 1.3 Vioxx Recall Advertisement

Courtesy Merck & Company, Inc.

opinion makers.”¹² According to Mobil’s then-public relations vice president, Mobil’s chairman wanted to make the company’s positions on economic and political issues part of public debate. The advertisement did not sell Mobil products. The Minnesota Law Review described such corporate advertising as “a hybrid creature designed to use the means of paid advertising to accomplish the goals of PR.”

Similarly, some charities also use advertising for public education. For example, the American Cancer Society has long relied on advertising to achieve its public awareness goals:

The society was the first traditional health charity to engage in paid advertising and, to be sure, for years our ad budget, which is less than 2% of our revenues, was spent raising awareness of things such as colorectal cancer and breast cancer screenings and tobacco prevention.¹³

Organizations also use advertising for public relations purposes when they want to address criticism in the media—over which they have no control when they feel that their point of view is not being reported fairly, when they feel that their publics do not understand the issues or are apathetic, or when they are trying to add their voices to a cause. For example, Nike ran full-page newspaper advertisements denying that the company used unfair labor practices in its Asian factories. Advertising messages attempted to counter the critical news coverage of “Asian sweatshops” and to deflect attention from editorial criticism and ridicule by editorial cartoonists, including the Doonesbury comic strip. Subsequent advertisements reported the results of Ambassador Andrew Young’s six-month investigation of Nike labor practices overseas.

In the final analysis, given an adequate budget, organizations use advertising to place and control content, position, and timing of public relations messages in the media.

Press Agency

In *Walking the Tightrope*, the late Hollywood publicist Henry Rogers summarized the essence of [press agency](#), “When I first started, I was in the publicity business. I was a press agent. Very simply, my job was to get the client’s name in the paper.”¹⁴ He candidly said that he had lied to the West Coast editor of *Look* magazine about Rita Hayworth’s “fabulous” wardrobe. The magazine devoted its cover and ten pages of photographs to the then-relatively unknown actress and her hastily borrowed clothes. Following such attention in a major national magazine, she became the talk of Hollywood, and Columbia Pictures extended her contract. To the extent that mass media coverage confers status, Rita Hayworth’s early stardom can be attributed in part to her press agent’s lies about the size and worth of her wardrobe.

Press agency is creating newsworthy stories and events to attract media attention in order to gain public notice.

Press agents attract public notice more than build public understanding. Publicity is their major strategy. They base their approach on agenda-setting theory, which says that the amount of mass media coverage subsequently determines public perception of the relative importance of topics and people (see [Chapter 8](#) for more on agenda setting). In other words, the goal of press agency is to create the perception that the subject of the publicity is newsworthy and deserves public attention.

And the press coverage does not have to be positive, according to some (see [Figure 1.4](#)). For example, *The New York Times* quoted a spokesperson for Bruno Magli shoes—featured as evidence in the O. J. Simpson murder trial—putting a positive spin on what many considered to be negative publicity, “It’s certainly not the best way to get the name out there, but it’s effective. Now we have a bigger audience of people who know about our shoes.”¹⁵ Most would agree, however, that the impact of negative publicity seldom has

positive outcomes. Press coverage featuring the antics of Charlie Sheen, Lindsey Lohan, and Kate Gosselin may bring notoriety—even celebrity—but surely will not positively impact their respective careers in the long run.

Press agency plays a major role in the music recording industry, professional sports, tourist attractions, motion picture studios, television, concert and theater performances, and business enterprises headed by celebrities. For example, press agents gave us the legends of Davy Crockett and Marilyn Monroe; promoted NASCAR auto races and the Super Bowl into national events; turned Fort Lauderdale and Cabo San Lucas into internationally known spring break



Figure 1.4 Nest Heads “Publicity” Comic Strip

Courtesy Copley News Service.

destinations; positioned Disneyland Resort Paris and Hong Kong Disneyland as vacation destinations even before opening days; and made the Harry Potter movies and each new Disney–Pixar animated release must-see movies even before the final edit. Press agency also is an important factor in political campaigns and national political party conventions designed to build name recognition and attract voters through media exposure.

In the candid words of a veteran press agent, “We stoop to anything, but our stuff gets printed.” And it can pay off. A career-launching appearance on a

popular talk show may reflect the work of a press agent more than the talent of the guest. Likewise, a good press agent can make a new club or restaurant the “in place” even before a single customer experiences the ambiance, food, or entertainment of the place itself. A musical group’s earning power may be as much a tribute to the skill of its press agent to get publicity as to its musical abilities. For example, the young press agent who worked for a struggling band later admitted that he reported the band “sold 50,000 albums this week when I knew it was 5,000, but it made a better story.”¹⁶ The “struggling band” was the Beatles.

There are full-time press agents, or celebrity publicists, but many public relations practitioners use press agency tactics at some time or another to attract media attention to their clients, causes, or organizations. Confusion results when press agents describe what they do as “public relations” or use that term to give their agencies more prestigious, but less accurate, titles. Hence, many journalists mistakenly refer to all public relations practitioners as “flacks,” even though the Associated Press Stylebook defines “flack” as “slang for press agent.” In fact, consumer press writers often use “flak” or “flack” when referring to public relations people (30 percent of 1,350 articles in one study). Only “spin doctor” was used more often—in 56 percent of the stories.¹⁷

Public Affairs

The armed services, many governmental agencies, and some corporations use the title “public affairs” as a substitute for public relations. The actual meaning varies across different types of organizations, but in general the concept of [public affairs](#) is as follows:

Public affairs is the specialized part of public relations that builds and maintains organizational relationships with governmental agencies and community stakeholder groups to influence public policy.

In the military and government agencies, this title is part of a name game dating back to the 1913 Gillett Amendment to an appropriation bill in the U.S. House of Representatives. The amendment stipulated that federal

agencies cannot spend money for publicity unless specifically authorized by Congress. This legislative hostility was reaffirmed in Public Law 93–50, Section 305, enacted July 1, 1973. This law expressly prohibited government spending on “publicity or propaganda purposes designed to support or defeat legislation pending before the Congress.” Historian J. A. R. Pimlott concluded that limitations imposed on government public relations “springs from the fear lest programs undertaken in the name of administrative efficiency should result in an excessive concentration of power in the Executive.”¹⁸

Neither the 1913 amendment nor the 1973 law actually referred to public relations. Nevertheless, many federal, state, and local governmental officials apparently confuse publicity with the larger concept of public relations. As a result, governmental agencies typically use other terms to describe building and maintaining relationships with their constituents. It is nothing more than a label switch, however, as thousands of public relations specialists work in local, state, and federal government under titles such as “public affairs,” “public information,” “communications,” “constituent relations” or “community relations,” and “liaison.”

Recognizing the obvious need for building and maintaining relations with citizens, in 1966 the federal government created what are now called Federal Citizen Information Centers (www.pueblo.gsa.gov/). These centers give citizens a single place to get information about federal programs and services. As summarized by Mordecai Lee:

First, they perform a marketing function, helping increase the utilization of public-sector services and products. Second, as a medium for answering questions about the federal government that aren't related to obtaining a service, FICs accomplish democratic accountability to the public. They contribute to an informed citizenry, the sine qua non of democracy.¹⁹

In corporations, “public affairs” typically refers to public relations efforts related to public policy and “corporate citizenship” and “corporate social responsibility.” They may use the title “community relations” to describe their position. Corporate public affairs specialists serve as liaisons with governmental units; implement community improvement programs;

encourage political activism, campaign contributions, and voting; and volunteer their services to charitable and community development organizations (see [Figure 1.5](#)). Hewlett-Packard's public affairs department's mission is to "shape public policy to foster an environment that allows HP to achieve its business objectives."²⁰

Likewise, public relations counseling firms (see [Chapter 3](#)) use the public affairs label for their lobbying and governmental relations services designed to help clients understand and address regulatory and legislative processes. As Ruder Finn-D.C. managing director, Neil Dhillon, says,

PUBLIC AFFAIRS MANAGER

We seek a public-policy oriented individual holding a B.A. degree combining public relations and political science, and at least five years full-time experience in corporate-government relations. Graduate work or a law degree would be a definite plus.

Basic requirements include strong oral and written communication skills, as well as knowledge of local government and/or public sector regulatory processes. Some media experience also desired.

The successful candidate, reporting to the vice president of Corporate Relations, will work with district managers to develop and implement broad-based public affairs programs related to cable television policy. Other responsibilities include monitoring franchise compliance, leading media relations and producing press materials, and conducting district community relations programs.

If you are a talented writer, assertive and skilled professional, and experienced in working with top management to achieve corporate goals, we want you to apply for this high-profile, well-compensated position in our rapidly growing cable distribution and production company.



Figure 1.5 Public Affairs Job Description

“The real value in what we do is knowing how to navigate the process and understanding how to work with the appropriate people.” Steve Behm, senior vice president, Crisis & Issues Management, Edelman Worldwide in Atlanta, adds, “Particularly in public affairs, what has become so important is that those relationships are done through honest and transparent communications.”²¹

A public affairs specialist described the relationship between public relations and public affairs as follows: “Public affairs is the public relations practice that addresses public policy and the publics who influence such policy.”²² An association executive based in Washington, D.C., defined public affairs as “PR tactics applied to GR (government relations) strategies to produce ‘excellent public policy.’”²³ A survey of public affairs officers identified major public affairs responsibilities as including (in descending order) federal government affairs, state government affairs, local government affairs, community relations, political action committees, contributions, grassroots support, and issues management. Forty-three percent of their departments use the title “public affairs.” Other public affairs specialists operate in departments called “corporate affairs,” “corporate relations,” “government relations,” and “external affairs.”²⁴

When the San Diego Chargers National Football League team embarked on its campaign to build a new football stadium, team owners hired former Clinton administration special counsel Mark Fabiani to work with local governments and citizen groups to build “grassroots” support for a new stadium. The primary stumbling block for replacing the current stadium—public financing for part or all of the new stadium—calls for public affairs expertise not usually found in sports public relations departments. The issues go well beyond scores and players, and media attention is intense.

For example, rumors that San Diego Mayor Jerry Sanders and Chargers president Dean Spanos were going to meet piqued media interest. The mayor’s “tight-lipped” press secretary confirmed the meeting but provided little insight except for the key role of public affairs counselor Fabiani: “Yes, a meeting is being scheduled. Other than the mayor and Mr. Spanos, the meeting will include members of the mayor’s staff and Mr. Fabiani. . . . Of course, a potential stadium downtown will be on the agenda.”²⁵

Lobbying

An even more specialized and criticized part of public affairs—[lobbying](#)—attempts to influence legislative and regulatory decisions in government. The United States Senate defines lobbying as “the practice of trying to persuade legislators to propose, pass, or defeat legislation or to change existing laws.”²⁶

Lobbying is the specialized part of public relations that builds and maintains relations with government, primarily to influence legislation and regulation.

Even though the U.S. Constitution protects people’s right to petition the government, some view lobbying as an attempt to manipulate government for selfish ends. Movies and television programs depicting smoke-filled rooms and payoffs by lobbyists working for powerful corporate and special interests perpetuate this cynical view of lobbying. News stories sometimes report illegal or questionable cash contributions to legislators, lavish fund-raising parties, and hosted weekends at exotic golf resorts. However, lobbying more often takes the form of open advocacy and discussion on matters of public

policy.

Registration laws and their enforcement vary from state to state, but all who engage in lobbying the U.S. Congress must register with the Clerk of the House and Secretary of the Senate. Failure to register carries a fine of up to \$50,000 under the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 (see [Chapter 6](#)). Twice a year, lobbyists are also required to report their clients, expenditures, and issue-related activities.

Despite occasional abuse and public rebuke, lobbying remains a legal and accepted way for citizen groups, associations, labor unions, corporations, and other special-interest groups to influence government decision making. Although clearly labeled and monitored at national and state levels, similar lobbying efforts on county and municipal issues often are part of and undifferentiated from public affairs, community relations, or other public relations efforts. Many large cities, however, have or are developing regulations to make lobbying more transparent in making local public policy.

Lobbyists at all levels of government must understand the legislative process, know how government functions, and be acquainted with individual lawmakers and officials. Because this knowledge may not be part of many public relations practitioners' educational preparation and professional experience, lobbyists often have backgrounds as well-connected lawyers, governmental administrators, elected officials' important staff members, or other insiders with good relationships with governmental decision makers. In fact, critics of "the public-private revolving door" say that lobbyists working for special interests "cash in" on the access and credibility they earned while working in government.

In practice, lobbying must be closely coordinated with other public relations efforts directed toward nongovernmental publics. Sophisticated lobbyists mobilize like-minded constituents to get their voices heard by lawmakers and officials in government. Targeted mailing lists, high-speed printers, and software for individualizing letters can produce a flood of mail, phone calls, faxes, and personal visits from constituents. Customized email address lists and "blast" broadcast emails, as well as online news groups, social media, podcasts, and blogs provide even faster ways to mobilize constituents.

Getting the folks “back home” to take up the cause is referred to as “grassroots lobbying” and is part of many coordinated public relations efforts to influence public policy. In some cases, however, responses actually come from “front” groups created to deceive or mislead policy makers about public sentiment. Some refer to these pseudo-grassroots movements as “Astroturf lobbying.” Examples of such front groups include “Citizens for Riverboat Gambling,” funded by a gambling organization trying to pass a local referendum, and numerous pro-gun ownership “grassroots networks” formed by National Rifle Association of America (NRA) members at the encouragement of the NRA’s lobbying arm, the Institute for Legislative Action. Such front organizations are designed to give the appearance of widespread citizen support, when in reality they often are created by sponsors to promote narrow interests.

In its primary roles as credible advocate and reliable source of information, however, lobbying takes the form of information designed to educate and persuade (see [Exhibit 1.2](#)). Lobbyists succeed or fail in part based on their traditional public relations skills—researching legislators’ positions on issues and information needs, and communicating persuasive information to government officials, to grassroots constituencies, and to their clients. In addition to those abilities, lobbyists need sophisticated knowledge of government, legislative process, public policy, and public opinion. Stereotypical images of the cigar-chomping insider dispensing stacks of cash no longer apply to most lobbyists and their work.

Email and the Internet have changed lobbying. Researcher Kurt Wise called the explosion of email the “ ‘Blackberrization’ of Capitol Hill.” As one lobbyist told him, “Now, I can get so much more done sitting right here [at his desk] than I can walking the hall [on Capitol Hill] and invading their space. I can get quicker information without taking them away from what they

“Lobbying involves much more than persuading legislators. Its principal elements include researching and analyzing legislation or regulatory proposals; monitoring and reporting on developments; attending congressional or regulatory hearings; working with coalitions interested in the same issues; and then educating not only

government officials but also employees and corporate officers as to the implications of various changes. What most laypeople regard as lobbying—the actual communication with government officials—represents the smallest portion of a lobbyist’s time; a far greater proportion is devoted to the other aspects of preparation, information and communication.”

Courtesy American League of Lobbyists, Alexandria, VA
(www.alldc.org/resources.htm).

Exhibit 1.2

Lobbying

are doing.” However, lobbyists still see face-to-face communication as necessary for maintaining relationships with their contacts: “On the Hill, it is better to be seen and known than to just be an anonymous voice on the phone or e-mail.”²⁷

Likewise, the many sources of information on the Internet can complicate the lobbyist’s task. Increasingly, their job is to help legislative staff sort through the many blogs and other sources advocating conflicting positions on pending legislation. Staff often turn to trusted—key word—lobbyists for help in making sense of the flood of information.

Lobbying is an outgrowth of our democratic system in a pluralistic society, keeping government open to those affected by proposed legislation and government regulation. In Washington, D.C., and state capitals, lobbying and other public affairs efforts play increasingly important roles in formulating and implementing public policy. More effective regulation of campaign finance and lobbying remains a challenge, however. In the end, the role of lobbyists is to ethically advocate the interests of their clients in the public policy debate.

Issues Management

Two points capture the essence of [issues management](#): (1) early identification of issues with potential impact on an organization and (2) a strategic response designed to mitigate or capitalize on their consequences. For example, in the context of public opinion, issues management “attempts to discern trends in public opinion so that an organization can respond to them before they amplify into serious conflict.”²⁸

Issues management is the process of anticipating, identifying, evaluating, and responding to issues and trends that potentially affect an organization’s relationships with its publics.

As originally conceived by the late public relations consultant W. Howard Chase in 1976, issues management includes identifying issues, analyzing issues, setting priorities, selecting program strategies, implementing programs of action and communication, and evaluating effectiveness. He said the process “aligns corporate principles, policies and practices to the realities of a politicized economy.”²⁹ Chase later defined issues management as the process of closing the “gap between corporate action and stakeholder expectation.”³⁰ A panel of experts expanded the definition to include the following:

. . . anticipating, researching and prioritizing issues; assessing the impact of issues on the organization; recommending policies and strategies to minimize risk and seize opportunities; participating and implementing strategy; evaluating program impact.”³¹

Even though issues management was originally touted as a new approach that would give practitioners elevated status, many do not see it as anything different from what they already do. Others express concern that the term “issues management” suggests something unlikely and unacceptable because it sets up visions of manipulation—that an organization can “manage” major public issues. Many major corporations, however, have created issues management departments or “task forces,” either by establishing specialized sections or by renaming existing units that research and track issues. They focus on how to respond to public concerns such as terrorism, global warming, deregulation, offshore “outsourcing,” globalization, food safety, biotechnology (genetic engineering), toxic waste disposal, managed care, an aging population, and corporate influence in politics.

Conceptually, if not always administratively, issues management is part of the public relations function. When viewed merely as persuasive communication, however, it becomes a tactic to influence public policy, not part of an organization's strategic planning. When concerned with adjusting the organization and building relationships with stakeholders to achieve mutual goals, "public relations and issues management are quite similar and result in similar outcomes."³²

Crisis Management

Stuff happens. And sometimes issues management does not prevent all "issues." Thus, the growing specialties of [crisis management](#) and "crisis communication" are often key components of the strategic response.

Crisis management is the public relations specialty that helps organizations strategically respond to negative situations and to dialog with stakeholders affected by perceived and actual consequences of crises.

Many public relations consultancies (both firms and solo practitioners) claim expertise in helping organizations respond to unexpected, negative events that threaten their relationships with stakeholders. For example, crisis communication counselor Jim Lukaszewski has been referred to as one of the experts "to call when all hell breaks loose." In addition to helping clients deal with crises, he writes books, conducts workshops, and blogs on the subject (<http://crisisgurublog.e911.com/>).

Crisis management has become an increasingly important part of public relations practice, according to scholar Tim Coombs. He attributes this to the high value attached to organizational reputation, increased stakeholder/consumer activism, new Internet-based communication media and technology—especially social media, and the legal liability of negligent failure to plan for crises. In addition, he points out that the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, made clear that crises do not have to be local to have an impact.³³ The disastrous 2011 earthquake and tsunami in northern Japan, for example, interrupted the supply line of auto parts, temporarily shutting down auto manufacturing plants worldwide.

Coombs divides crisis management into “three macrostages: precrisis, crisis, and postcrisis.”³⁴ His precrisis stage deals with taking steps to detect, prevent, and/or prepare for potential crises. The crisis stage comprises dealing with the “trigger event,” containing the damage, and recovering from what happened. The postcrisis stage covers activities and plans after the crisis is considered “history.” Kathleen Fearn-Banks describes five stages of crises: (1) detection, (2) prevention/preparation, (3) containment, (4) recovery, and (5) learning. “The learning phase brings about change that helps prevent future crises.”³⁵

This is not to suggest, however, that crisis management neatly follows such sequenced stages or that experts can prescribe a strategy that works in every situation. As researchers in one study concluded, “The best crisis strategy is to maintain good relationships.”³⁶

Investor Relations

Also referred to as “IR” and “financial relations,” [investor relations](#) is another specialized part of public relations in publicly held corporations. Investor relations specialists work to enhance the value of a company’s stock. This reduces the cost of capital by increasing shareholder confidence and by making the stock attractive to individual investors, financial analysts, and institutional investors.

Investor relations is the specialized part of corporate public relations that builds and maintains mutually beneficial relationships with shareholders and others in the financial community to maximize market value.

Investor relations specialists keep shareholders informed and loyal to a company in order to maintain a fair valuation of a company’s stock. Their work involves tracking market trends, monitoring financial blogs and social networks, providing information to financial publics, counseling management, and responding to requests for financial information. Annual and quarterly reports, required Securities and Exchange Commission 10-K forms, emailed earnings reports, press releases distributed by newswire services, and home page links to “material” financial information are

methods used to disseminate timely information

Finance

INVESTOR RELATIONS

The Titan Corporation, a high-tech San Diego-based NYSE company, is currently seeking a seasoned professional to manage the company's investor relations programs. Reporting to the CEO, the successful candidate must be able to effectively communicate company information to all audiences, including shareholders, brokers, analysts, media and employees. Responsibilities include: liaison to the financial community; preparation of financial press releases; assisting CEO with shareholder and road show meetings; development and distribution of investor materials and company story; review of SEC filings; and maintenance of current shareholder, mailing and fax lists.

The ideal candidate will possess 10 years' direct experience in investor relations and corporate communications, excellent verbal/written communication skills, ability to deal with Board of Directors and Executive Staff, computer skills, and the highest standards of ethics and integrity. MBA preferred.

In return for your expertise, we offer an excellent salary and benefits package, including bonus and stock option programs. To take advantage of this excellent opportunity, please submit resume, including salary history in confidence to: The Titan Corporation, 3033 Science Park Rd., San Diego, CA 92121. Fax (619) 552-9745, Via E-mail to: resumes@titan.com
We are an equal opportunity employer.

<http://www.titan.com>



Technology for Changing Times

Figure 1.6 Investor Relations Job Description

Courtesy Titan Corporation (now L-3 Communications Titan Group), San Diego.

to analysts, investors, and the financial press. An example illustrates how it works to benefit both a company and its investors:

A new biotechnology company has 10 million shares outstanding, with each

share selling for \$20. This means the company has a “market capitalization” of \$200 million. Assume that the stock becomes more attractive to institutional investors, financial analysts, and individual investors as they learn more about the company’s products, management, “financials,” and plans. If the share price increases to \$25, the market value of the company increases to \$250 million!

Now assume that the company needs \$10 million to continue research on promising new products. At \$25 a share, it needs to sell only 400,000 company-held shares, versus 500,000 shares at \$20, to raise the \$10 million to finance the research. Not only are investors’ holdings worth more, but the company must sell fewer shares to raise additional capital.

On the other hand, consider what happens to the value of stockholder investments and the cost of new capital when a corporation loses shareholder confidence, fails to respond to a respected financial blogger’s concern about the latest quarterly earnings report, or receives negative coverage in the financial press. For example, when Compaq Computer merged with Hewlett-Packard, HP stock lost almost one fifth of its premerger value and Compaq stock fell about 10 percent. Some specialists criticized how the investor relations staffs of both companies had failed to address investors’ concerns that had been extensively reported in the financial press before the rumored merger.

Investor relations specialists must know corporate finance, accounting, Wall Street, international equities trading, international business trends, business journalism, and much more. Most of all, however, they must know Securities and Exchange Commission and stock exchange financial reporting requirements. “Public relations practitioners who do not have solid training and experience in business, management, and law will apparently be unable to fill even entry level positions in investor relations,” according to researchers who studied CEO perceptions of investor relations.[37](#)

As a result, those aspiring to careers in investor relations should combine studies in public relations with coursework in finance and business law. An MBA degree is often necessary preparation (see [Figure 1.6](#)). It also helps to know more than one language, to study economics, to be widely traveled, and to follow the rapidly changing international political scene. Corporations and

investor relations specialists increasingly deal in a global economy. Because few practitioners have the required combination of corporate finance and public relations, and the competition for those who do is great, investor relations practitioners are among the highest paid in public relations.

Development

Just as investor relations helps finance publicly held corporations, fundraising and membership drives provide the financial support needed to operate charitable and nonprofit organizations. These organizations typically use the title “[development](#)” or “advancement” for this aspect of public relations. Nonprofit hospitals, social welfare groups, disease research foundations, service charities, and universities have directors of development. Organizations that rely on membership fees for some or all of their revenues often have a “director of member services and development.”

Development is the specialized part of public relations in nonprofit organizations that builds and maintains relationships with donors, volunteers, and members to secure financial and volunteer support.

Development specialists work for charities, public broadcasting stations, disease research foundations, hospitals, community arts groups, museums, zoos, youth clubs, universities, and religious organizations. Because these organizations depend on donations, membership fees, volunteers, or all three, they rely heavily on annual campaigns and special events to call attention to their needs and to solicit public support and contributions.

An annual telethon, 10K run, open house, homecoming, and celebrity auction, however, represent only a few of the activities in a yearlong program to establish and maintain relationships with volunteers, alumni, members, and donors, as well as prospective members, volunteers, and donors. Fund-raising activities and membership services make up a major part of the overall program. Because development deals with the lifeblood of nonprofit organizations, it often plays a major role in the larger public relations function in such organizations.

Confusion of Terms

The preceding sections discuss terms that are all parts of the broader organizational management function known as public relations. They all deal with organizations' relationships with specific groups or publics. Some organizations divide the function into internal and external departments. Internal relations deals with publics involved in the internal workings of organizations, such as employees, families of employees, and volunteers. Relations with publics outside organizations—neighbors, consumers, environmentalists, investors, and so forth—are the responsibility of external relations.

Title confusion is further complicated when the total function is given one of many other labels such as corporate relations, corporate communication, university advancement, hospital relations, public affairs, and public information. Whatever name is used, the basic concept and motivation of public relations are similar from one organization to the next—large or small, local or global. All effective organizations strive to establish and maintain relationships with those identified as important to organizational survival and growth.

In practice, however, too often employers and clients define public relations narrowly or incorrectly based on the various goals and tasks they assign to it. In one organization, public relations takes the form of candid, open communication with many publics. In another, public relations attempts to maintain a silent, low profile. For an organization engaged in the gun-control debate, the purpose of public relations can be to provoke controversy and maintain adversarial relationships that motivate and activate its members. In an organization attempting to resolve differences with a labor union in order to avoid a work stoppage, public relations tries to facilitate reconciliation and compromise.

Likewise, practitioners define public relations every day by what they do and by what they call “public relations.” For example, many do product publicity because that is what they are paid to do under the rubric of public relations. Others see it as “getting ink” or “hits” (exposure in the mass media or on the

website), because that is their experience as former journalists now working in public relations.

Concerned citizens see frequent references to “PR,” “public relations,” and “flacks” in press coverage of scandals, oil spills, industrial pollution, political campaign shenanigans, city hall corruption, and other breaches of the public trust. Movies and television programs featuring public relations practitioners often do not present accurate portrayals. Media coverage seldom associates public relations with positive stories of organizations and their accomplishments. Books such as *PR! A Social History of Spin and Toxic Sludge Is Good for You* sensationalize accounts of press agentry and advocacy on behalf of clients and causes later proven to be of dubious merit.

There is little news value or market for reports about the good work done by public relations on behalf of clients and causes judged worthy of public support. Who outside the inner circle of a children’s hospital pays attention to a successful development campaign that funded a new pediatric wing? Other than investors and employees, what other groups care if the investor relations staff successfully debunked press reports of impending bankruptcy? In other words, it depends on who values what and who has a stake in the organization’s success or failure.

In short, most people know public relations by what they see organizations and practitioners do under the banner of “public relations” and by what media report as “public relations.” Few study the concept itself or the roles public relations plays in organizations and society. The challenge for practitioners is to define and perform public relations in ways consistent with the contemporary meaning of this necessary organizational and social function.

Toward Recognition and Maturity

Some scholars credit public relations for the heightened attention to public accountability and social responsibility among government administrators and business executives (see [Exhibit 1.3](#) on page 20). Others emphasize the function’s role in making organizations more responsive to public interests and more accepting of their corporate social responsibility (CSR):

The new era of transparency is part of an offshoot movement in CSR that's been dubbed "sustainability." Sustainability proponents argue that companies that are consistently indifferent to their impact on the environment and its various stakeholders—such as employees and customers—are threatening their own long-term sustainability.³⁸

As the authors of *The Naked Corporation: How the Age of Transparency Will Revolutionize Business* said, "If you are going to be naked, you had better be buff!"³⁹ One business leader long ago said:

We know perfectly well that business does not function by divine right, but, like any other part of society, exists with the sanction of the community as a whole Today's public opinion, though it may appear as light as air, may become tomorrow's legislation for better or worse.⁴⁰

Exhibit 1.3

Public Relations in the Tylenol Crises



Lawrence G. Foster, Corporate Vice President—Public Relations (retired), Johnson & Johnson

A different form of terrorism was unleashed on America in 1982

with the grim news of cyanide-laced Tylenol poisonings in the Chicago area. Seven people died. Because the extent of the contamination was not immediately known, there was grave concern for the safety of the estimated 100 million Americans who were using Tylenol.

The first critical public relations decision, taken immediately and with total support from company management, was to cooperate fully with the news media. The press was key to warning the public of the danger. The poisonings also called for immediate action to protect the consumer, so the decision was made to recall two batches of the product and later to withdraw it from store shelves nationally.

During the crisis phase of the Tylenol tragedy, virtually every public relations decision was based on sound, socially responsible business principles, which is when public relations is most effective.

Johnson & Johnson's corporate Credo strongly influenced many of the key decisions. Robert Wood Johnson, son of the company founder and, at the time, chairman of the company, wrote the one-page Credo in 1943. The Credo lists four responsibilities. The customer is placed first and foremost, followed by responsibility to employees, to the communities where they work and live, and finally, responsibility to the stockholders. (See the complete Credo in [Chapter 12](#).)

At Johnson & Johnson, Lawrence G. Foster, corporate vice president of public relations, reported directly to chairman and CEO James E. Burke, who promptly formed a seven-member strategy committee to deal with the crisis. Foster and five other senior executives on the committee met with Burke twice daily for the next six weeks to make key decisions, ranging from advertising strategy and network television interviews to planning Tylenol's comeback in tamper-resistant packaging.

In the weeks following the murders, Foster and his three senior

staff members, all former journalists, responded to more than 2,500 calls from the press. They were helped by the smaller public relations staff at McNeil Consumer Products (manufacturers of Tylenol). While the corporate staff was dealing with the press, Burson-Marsteller, which had the product publicity account for Tylenol, began planning a unique 30-city video press conference via satellite to reintroduce the product. Polls showed that 90 percent of Americans did not fault the company, and 79 percent said they would again purchase Tylenol. The satellite relaunch took place in just six weeks. Later, sales of Tylenol began soaring to new highs.

The Washington Post wrote: “Johnson & Johnson has effectively demonstrated how a major business ought to handle a disaster.”

The unthinkable happened four years later. A woman in Westchester County, New York, died after ingesting a Tylenol capsule that contained cyanide. A second contaminated bottle was found in a nearby store a few days later. Chairman Burke reconvened the strategy committee, and the Credo was at the center of the discussions. The next day, Johnson & Johnson announced that, henceforth, no J&J company worldwide would market any over-the-counter capsule product because the safety of customers could no longer be assured, even when the capsules were in the new safety packaging. The public made Tylenol caplets a best seller soon after, and to this day Johnson & Johnson has kept its pledge not to market an over-the-counter capsule product anywhere in the world.

Once again, Robert Wood Johnson’s Credo had shown the way. The Tylenol tragedies demonstrated that public relations is a business of basics and that the best public relations decisions are closely linked to sound business practices and a socially responsible corporate philosophy.*

*For more detailed discussion of the Tylenol crises, see Lawrence G. Foster, “Tylenol: 20 Years Later,” *The Public Relations Strategist* 8, no. 4 (Fall 2002): 16–20; and Foster’s *Robert Wood Johnson: The Gentleman Rebel* (Ashland, OH: Lillian Press, 1999).

Courtesy Lawrence G. Foster, Corporate Vice President—Public Relations (retired), Johnson & Johnson. Used with permission.

Public relations also helps organizations anticipate and respond to public perceptions and opinions, to new values and lifestyles, to power shifts among the electorate and within legislative bodies, and to other changes in the social and political environment. Thus, it contributes to making the democratic process more effective in meeting social needs. Without effective public relations, organizations tend to become insensitive to changes occurring around them and to become dysfunctional as they grow increasingly out of step with their environments.

Public relations also makes information available through the public information system that is essential to both democratic society and organizational survival. Practitioners increase public knowledge and understanding by promoting expression and debate in the competitive marketplace of ideas regarding, for example, the need for health care and immigration reform, the causes and cures of global warming, the value of a new public transportation system, the impact of international trade barriers, or the need for blood and organ donations.

Public relations serves the public interest by providing organizations and interest groups voices in the public forum for alternative points of view, including the views of those—such as the homeless and powerless—who would not otherwise be heard because of limited media attention.

The practice serves society by mediating conflict and by building the consensus needed to maintain social order. Its social function—its mission—is accomplished when it replaces ignorance, coercion, and intransigence with knowledge, compromise, and adjustment. In other words, public relations facilitates adjustment and maintenance in the social systems that provide us with our physical and social needs.

In the final analysis, an organization's relationships are the responsibility of top management. As counselor and author Henry DeVries rephrased our definition of public relations, "Public relations is the boss's job to build and keep strong bonds with key groups that the organization needs to grow and thrive." Once this concept of public relations is embraced at the top, it

spreads and becomes part of an organization's culture. The axioms outlined in [Exhibit 1.4](#) outline the principles and values central to this concept of contemporary practice.

Public relations professionals who help organizations establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships perform an essential management function that has an impact on the larger society. They encourage social responsibility in organizations and promote public relations' essential role in maintaining social order. Inherent in this concept of public relations is a moral commitment to mutual adjustment among interdependent elements of society. That calling motivates the chapters that follow.

1. Public relations takes a broad view of an organization's environment by attending to a wide range of issues and relationships with stakeholders.
2. Public relations is part of strategic management, seeking to avoid or solve problems through a goal-directed process.
3. Public relations outcomes must be quantified and measured. This requires a detailed understanding and assessment of what's happening now and of desired future states.
4. Strategic planning begins by identifying the current conditions motivating the process, the contributing forces and actors in the situation, the objectives to be achieved with each target public, and the overall program goal.
5. Public relations programs outline how the organization will get from where it is to where it wants to be.
6. Public relations initiatives must have senior management's support and cooperation, and cannot be isolated from other operations.
7. Success or failure depends more on what the organization does than on what it says, unless the communication itself becomes a problem. Success, however, requires a coordinated program

of deeds and words.

8. Success also requires that all actions, communication, and outcomes are ethical, legal, and consistent with the organization's social responsibility.
9. Ultimately, however, success is based on the organization's impact on society and culture—as is the character and professional careers of the public relations practitioners who helped plan and implement its programs.

Exhibit 1.4

Core Axioms of Public Relations

Notes

1. [1.](#) Thomas J. Madden, *Spin Man: The Topsy-Turvy World of Public Relations . . . a Tell-All Tale* (Boca Raton, FL: TransMedia Publishing, Inc., 1997), 1.
2. [2.](#) John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton, *Toxic Sludge Is Good for You! Lies, Damn Lies and the Public Relations Industry* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1995), 2.
3. [3.](#) Arun Sudhaman, "Middle East Crisis Puts PR Firms in the Spotlight," *The Holmes Report* (February 25, 2011). http://www.holmesreport.com/story.cfm?edit_id=12389&typeid=1&goto=story (accessed March 28, 2011).
4. [4.](#) Stuart Ewen, *PR! A Social History of Spin* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), viii.
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Study Guide

1. Without looking back to the chapter, write a definition of public relations. What are the essential components of your definition?
2. What is the social system level addressed by public relations practice?
3. What is the major distinction between the relationships in public relations and marketing relationships?
4. Some think of publicity as simply another way of saying “public relations” and equate advertising as being the same as “marketing.” How do their views differ from those of the textbook authors?
5. How do various organizations differ in their use of the “public affairs” title?
6. Why are investor relations specialists the highest-paid public relations practitioners?
7. Discuss two positive outcomes of public relations practice on society and describe at least one major negative social impact of the practice.

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Chapter 2 Practitioners of Public Relations

Learning Outcomes

After studying [Chapter 2](#) this chapter you should be able to:

1. Describe practitioners' characteristics and work assignments.
2. Define the four major roles played by practitioners, discuss the major differences among the roles, and distinguish among them in practice.
3. Understand personal and professional challenges facing practitioners.
4. Outline the major requirements for success in public relations, identifying writing as the primary requirement for entry to the field and success in the practice.

The way to gain a good reputation is to endeavor to be what you desire to appear.

—Socrates

To be credible and effective as a communicator both inside and outside, truth, trust and transparency must be your modus operandi.

—Rear Admiral (ret.) T. L. McCreary¹

This chapter discusses public relations practitioners—who they are, what they do, the roles they play, and their professional aspirations. Compared to accounting, law, and medicine, the relatively young practice of public relations is an emerging profession. Unlike the more established professions, public relations does not require a prescribed educational preparation,

government-sanctioned qualifying exams, and peer review to ensure competent and ethical practice. Nor do its practitioners operate in clearly defined roles recognized as essential for the common good. And because there are no complete official lists, estimates of how many practice public relations are based on membership data from the major professional societies worldwide and statistics from various government agencies.

Numbers And Distribution

Little agreement on the underlying concept and inconsistent use of titles complicate attempts to count the number of public relations practitioners, even in the United States, let alone worldwide. The U.S. Department of Labor reports public relations employment statistics in its monthly Employment and Earnings for “public relations specialists” under the occupational heading “professional and related occupations.” For 2010, the Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) survey of the Bureau of Labor Statistics counted 275,200 people employed as public relations specialists and 56,700 people as public relations managers, for 331,900 practitioners overall. While these numbers are useful, they do not include people who are self-employed because the OES looks only at the records of employers. Because many people in public relations work as solo practitioners, the OES does not give an accurate picture of everyone in the field.²

The U.S. Census Bureau conducts the Current Population Survey (CPS), which gets information from workers, as opposed to from employers. For 2010, the CPS showed 148,000 people working as public relations specialists and 85,000 as public relations managers, or in total 233,000 practitioners. Since this figure includes solo practitioners, one would expect the number of public relations practitioners to be higher than that reported in the OES. But, the lower number may indicate that some people who actually do public relations work simply do not use the term “public relations” to describe what they do for a living.³

As noted in [Chapter 1](#), what one organization or person calls “marketing communication” may actually describe a public relations position. What another calls a “public relations representative” would be

more accurately titled “sales” or “customer service representative.” And the official government categories of “public relations specialist” and “public relations manager” do not include all who work in the field. Artists, graphic designers, photographers, videographers, lobbyists, receptionists, researchers, and other specialists who work in public relations departments and firms may be counted in other categories. As a result, government figures probably include fewer than half of all those working in public relations.

Even though the practitioner data are incomplete, The U.S. News & World Report rated public relations among the “best jobs of 2012”.⁴ Furthermore, the latest Occupational Outlook Handbook published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicated that public relations “employment is projected to grow much faster than average, [with] keen competition . . . for entry-level jobs.” The U.S. government expects more than 341,000 practitioners in public relations by 2018.⁵

Geography

Employment opportunities for public relations specialists exist in almost every community but are concentrated in major population centers. For example, in the United States, the greatest numbers of Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) members are in California, New York, and Texas.⁶ Washington, D.C., however, has the largest PRSA chapter, with more than 1,425 members in the National Capital Chapter as of April 2011. Based in Atlanta, the Georgia chapter is second largest, with 889 members, followed by the New York chapter, based in New York City, with 856 members. The Los Angeles chapter has 559 members, and the Chicago chapter, 553.⁷

Employers

The most common employers of practitioners are business and commercial corporations, followed by nonprofits and associations, then by public relations firms and agencies. Many also work as individual consultants (“solo

practitioners”), often after being released from positions in downsizing internal departments. See [Table 2.1](#) for one estimate of where practitioners work and how much they earn.

Table 2.1

Public Relations Employers

Employer Type	Estimated Percentage of Practitioners	Number of Responses	Mean Salaries (\$)	Number of Responses
Corporation	27.80	158	88,822.80	125
Nonprofit/Association	21.60	123	62,274.81	97
PR Firm/Agency	17.00	97	84,062.50	80
Government/Military	13.40	76	75,140.73	66
Educational Institution	8.40	48	71,453.33	45
Independent/Solo Practitioner	6.90	39	89,111.11	27
Professional Services	3.30	19	69,785.71	14
Other	1.60	9	75,966.67	6
Total	100.00	569	78,004.34	460

Notes: Estimates based on PRSA membership survey conducted by its National Committee on Work, Life & Gender, December 2010 to January 2011. Total number of survey respondents was 876 of 4,714 members solicited, for a response rate of 18.6 percent. Table reports only active practitioners who answered questions regarding employer type and salary. Data provided by Bey-Ling Sha, 2010–2011 Chair, PRSA National Committee on Work, Life & Gender.

The largest single employer for public relations is the federal government.

According to the latest available data from the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, about 4,400 “public affairs” specialists work under various titles. The total jumps to more than 18,000 in the “Information and Arts” category, which includes photographers, writers and editors, visual information specialists, and others working in internal and external communication for the government.⁸ However, because the function is often camouflaged to hide it from Congress and the press, reliable figures on the number of public relations specialists working in government are not available.

Public relations firms can range in size from an individual counselor or solo practitioner to large organizations that operate around the world. For example, four of the largest U.S.-based international firms—Weber Shandwick Worldwide, Fleishman-Hillard, Burson-Marsteller, and Hill & Knowlton—each employs between 2,500 and 3,000. The largest independently owned firm—Edelman Public Relations Worldwide (with headquarters in New York)—employs more than 3,600. Rounding out the top-three independent firms, Waggener Edstrom Worldwide has more than 800 employees and Ruder Finn more than 600.⁹

Gender

The numbers of women in public relations have increased steadily in the last several decades, changing the gender distribution in the field from a male majority in the late 1960s to a female majority by the late 1980s.¹⁰ Data from the U.S. Census Bureau for 2010 show that women comprise 59.2 percent of practitioners, although they comprise 70.7 percent of the members of the Public Relations Society of America.¹¹ In contrast, in 1968, only one in ten members of PRSA was female.¹²

Women are likely to continue increasing their presence in public relations as new practitioners come into the field. Data from colleges and universities indicate that, in 2009, women made up 64 percent of undergraduate students in advertising, journalism, public relations, and mass communication.¹³ Membership of the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) was 84 percent female in 2011.¹⁴

Race and Ethnicity

With regard to race and ethnicity, data from PRSSA indicated that, in 2011, about 20 percent of members were non-White.¹⁵ Enrollment data for undergraduate journalism and mass communication programs—where public relations is often one of the majors—indicated that 32 percent

Table 2.2

Minorities in the United States, in public relations, and in the Public Relations Society of America

	U.S.	PR	PRSA
Population Total	308,745,538	233,000	20,733
Percentage of Total Population			
Hispanic (of any race)	16.3	7.42	2.5
Black/African American	12.6–13.6	3.4	4.0
Asian	4.8–5.6	3.4	1.6

Note: Data for African Americans and Asians presented as range, with lower number indicating those selecting the race alone, and the higher number indicating those selecting the race either alone or in combination with another race.

Sources: U.S. population data from Karen R. Humes, Nicholas A. Jones, and Roberto R. Ramirez, “Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin: 2010,” 2010 Census Briefs (C2010BR-02). Issued March 2011, U.S. Census Bureau. Retrieved April 5, 2011, from www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-02.pdf. Public relations practitioner data and PRSA membership data as reported in Vince Hazleton and Bey-Ling Sha, 2011.

of students were non-White in 2009, compared to 17 percent in 1989. The

student enrollment in 2009 was 15.4 percent Black.¹⁶ This latest report on undergraduate enrollment did not break out other racial or ethnic groups, but the 2006 survey indicated students were 6.8 percent Hispanic, 3.4 percent Asian, and 0.6 percent Native American.¹⁷

In contrast, data from the 2010 census indicated that the nation's population was 12.6–13.6 percent Black or African American, 4.8–5.6 percent Asian, and 0.9–1.7 percent American Indian and Alaskan Native. For these figures, the lower number represents those who selected only that race, whereas the higher number represents those who selected that race alone or in combination with another racial group. Overall, multirace individuals comprised 2.9 percent of the population. Non-white Hispanics accounted for 16.3 percent.¹⁸ (See [Table 2.2.](#))

When comparing student enrollment data to U.S. population data, it's clear that African Americans are fairly represented, whereas other minority groups are underrepresented. The same pattern is found in the PRSA membership, when those numbers are compared to census figures of practitioners.

In 2010, African Americans comprised 4.0 percent of PRSA members, although they were only 3.4 percent of practitioners in the Current Population Survey. On the other hand, Asians made up 1.6 percent of PRSA members, but 3.4 percent of practitioners; and Hispanics comprised 2.5 percent of PRSA members, compared to 7.4 percent of practitioners.¹⁹

But, the main point remains that minorities are severely underrepresented in public relations practice, compared to their numbers in the U.S. population. As asserted by former U.S. chairman of Hill & Knowlton, MaryLee Sachs: “We’re not anywhere close to the tipping point.”²⁰

Education and Preparation

In 2010, U.S. government data indicated that about 66 percent of practitioners were college graduates, although nearly 69 percent of the PRSA membership held a bachelor's degree. Census data showed that 15 percent of practitioners held master's degrees, but this figure in the PRSA membership

was nearly 25 percent.²¹ As discussed in [Chapter 4](#), public relations practitioners historically entered the field from other academic and work backgrounds, particularly journalism. But in 2008, nearly 40 percent of the respondents to PRWeek's annual salary survey reported public relations as their college major, with fewer than 20 percent marking journalism as their major.²² (See [Chapter 5](#) for the recommended curriculum for public relations majors.)

Public relations employment no longer requires journalism experience. On the other hand, journalistic media experience gives practitioners an understanding of media gatekeepers' values and ways of working. So, when hiring public relations practitioners, employers still value media experience, even if only with the college newspaper or radio station. (See [Chapter 10](#) for information on media relations.)

Many employers also look for education or experience in a specialized field in addition to public relations. The most difficult positions to fill are those that require specialized preparation and backgrounds such as computer technology, corporate finance, health care, and agriculture. So, for example, students who combine public relations education with a minor in health promotion or hospital administration have a clear advantage when applying for hospital public relations openings. Likewise, graduates who minored in computer science while completing their public relations education have a competitive advantage in the world of high-tech public relations.

Salaries

Public relations is touted as one of the highest-paying jobs available to people with a bachelor's degree.²³ Unfortunately, these exciting-sounding articles often misrepresent the nature of the public relations function, confusing it with image building, marketing, and customer relations. Most recent data available from the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicate that the median annual salary in public relations in 2008 was \$51,280. The lowest-paid 10 percent of practitioners earned less than \$30,000, and the highest-paid 10 percent of practitioners earned more than \$97,000.²⁴ This wide range of salary levels can be explained by many factors, including years of experience, type of

employer, and geographic location, among other things.

PRWeek's 2012 salary survey of 1,567 self-selected online respondents found that the highest-paid practitioners worked for corporations, with a median annual salary of \$113,000, followed by agency practitioners (\$81,500), and those working in nonprofits (\$70,000). With regard to industry-specific salaries, practitioners working at financial services companies earned median base salaries of \$120,000, while those at technology companies earned \$115,000.²⁵ Professional accreditation is also related to salaries, with practitioners holding the Accredited in Public Relations (APR) credential earning more than those who do not.²⁶ (See [Chapter 5](#) for information about accreditation.) Another factor that affects salaries is practitioners' gender (see page [37](#)).

Executive-level public relations practitioners typically receive stock options, bonus or profit-sharing checks, and lucrative retirement programs, in addition to their six-figure salaries. Fringe benefits and perquisites add considerable value to their positions. Employers do not frivolously dispense high salaries or extra benefits, however. Just as when recruiting other top executives, employers must compete for top public relations professionals and managers. As a result, compensation packages for the top public relations post at major corporations often are in the \$1–\$2 million range.

For example, when Walmart lured Edelman Public Relations vice chairman Leslie A. Dach from Washington, D.C., to Bentonville, Arkansas, as executive vice president of corporate affairs and government relations, his compensation package became big news. The *New Yorker* magazine reported:

He was given three million dollars in stock and a hundred and sixty-eight thousand stock options, in addition to an undisclosed base salary. He and his wife, a nutritionist, recently bought a \$2.7-million house in the Cleveland Park neighborhood of Washington. He commutes to Bentonville during the week, to an apartment furnished out of a Wal-Mart store.²⁷

Competition for management-level talent is so intense that executive search firms (sometimes called “headhunters”) are retained to identify, screen, and

recruit finalists for top public relations positions. Even for non-executive-level positions, professional recruiters are being used to find the best job candidates. In 2009, 62 percent of practitioners claimed that they had been approached by a headhunter within the last 12 months.[28](#)

How does a practitioner ascend to the executive levels of public relations? Research shows that top-level public relations executives tend to bring to their positions a diversity of work experience. This means that they don't just stay with a single company or industry; rather, they move from organization to organization, climbing up the career ladder while getting experience in different work settings and industry contexts.[29](#)

Work Assignments

Some describe public relations work by listing the specialized parts of the function: media relations, investor relations, community relations, employee relations, government relations, and so forth. However, such labels do not describe the many activities and diverse assignments in the day-to-day practice. The following eleven categories summarize what public relations specialists do at work:

1. Writing and Editing:

Composing print and broadcast news releases, feature stories, newsletters to employees and external stakeholders, correspondence, website and other online media messages, shareholder and annual reports, speeches, brochures, video and slide-show scripts, trade publication articles, institutional advertisements, and product and technical collateral materials.

2. Media Relations and Social Media:

Contacting news media, magazines, Sunday supplements, freelance writers, and trade publications with the intent of getting them to publish or broadcast news and features about or originated by an organization. Responding to media requests for information, verification of stories,

and access to authoritative sources. Data from the 2010 Practice Analysis conducted by the Universal Accreditation Board indicated that social media activities fall into the same work area as traditional media relations.[30](#)

3. Research:

Gathering information about public opinion, trends, emerging issues, political climate and legislation, media coverage, special-interest groups, and other concerns related to an organization's stakeholders. Searching the Internet, online services, and electronic government databases. Designing program research, conducting surveys, and hiring research firms.

4. Management of Clients and Staff:

Establishing client relationships, managing client expectations, assessing resource allocation needs, and planning logistics. Administering personnel, budget, and program schedules.

5. Strategic Planning:

Programming and planning in collaboration with other managers; determining needs, establishing priorities, defining publics, setting goals and objectives, and developing messages, strategies, and tactics.

6. Counseling:

Advising top management on the social, political, and regulatory environments; consulting with the management team on how to avoid or respond to crises; and working with key decision makers to devise strategies for managing or responding to critical and sensitive issues.

7. Special Events:

Arranging and managing news conferences, 10K runs, conventions, open houses, ribbon cuttings and grand openings, anniversary celebrations, fund-raising events, visiting dignitaries, contests, award

programs, and other special observances.

8. Speaking:

Appearing before groups, coaching others for speaking assignments, and managing a speakers' bureau to provide platforms for the organization before important audiences.

9. Production:

Creating communication collateral products using multimedia knowledge and skills, including art, typography, photography, layout, and computer desktop publishing; audio and video recording and editing; and preparing audiovisual presentations.

10. Training:

Preparing executives and other designated spokespersons to deal with media and to make other public appearances. Instructing others in the organization to improve writing and communication skills. Helping introduce changes in organizational culture, policy, structure, and process.

11. Personal Contacts:

Serving as liaison with media, community, and other internal and external groups. Communicating, negotiating, and managing conflict with stakeholders. Meeting and hosting visitors. Building strategic alliances and interpersonal relationships.

Although last on this list, being “good with people” is often the first thing many attribute to public relations. True enough, public relations people often find themselves dealing with people problems and sensitive relationships, but it would be misleading to limit one's view of public relations work to this commonly held stereotype.

The mix of assignments and responsibilities varies greatly from organization to organization, but one task is the common denominator: writing. (Study the

job descriptions in [Figure 2.1](#).) Writing skills remain a requirement throughout one's career. Daily logs in [Exhibits 2.1 – 2.3](#) illustrate the central role of writing in public relations work. To manage their jobs, individual practitioners devise and apply similar strategies and approaches day in and day out. In other words, they develop and play roles.

Director—University Relations
 Director will report directly to university president and lead program of media relations, publications, electronic media and issues management. Responsible for researching, writing and editing news releases, feature stories, fact sheets and other materials about the university to national news media. Must be hands-on leader with knowledge of strategic management, publication production and new media design.

**VICE PRESIDENT
 INVESTOR RELATIONS**

International pharmaceutical company seeks experienced investor/financial relations executive. New VP reports directly to CEO/president and serves on the exec. committee. VP manages IR web site; maintains institutional, broker and retail investor contacts; coordinates financial reporting; and produces annual reports. Corp./IR communication exp.; and strong analytical, writing and management skills; and working knowledge of SEC disclosure requirements. MBA preferred and prior exp. in pharm./health care necessary.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

COORDINATOR—INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

Medical center Communications Division opportunity for leader with 8-10 years significant supervisory experience in organizational communication. Coordinator will supervise internal publications, staff communications and recruiting outreach support. Must have extensive writing, planning, consulting and project management experience. Experience and knowledge of new communication technology required. Master's degree preferred.

public relations account executive

Requires minimum five years experience in tourism / hospitality industry account service, travel writing background and strong media contacts. Fluency in Spanish helpful. Portfolio of results-oriented work and strong reference letters from previous clients required for interview.

COMMUNICATION DIRECTOR

Laser systems company seeks accomplished professional to direct government/community relations and public affairs. You also will direct institutional advertising, environmental communications, customer relations, employee issues and plant tours.

Director of Campaign Communications

Major charitable foundation seeks pro to direct media relations, special events, donor relations and campaign communications. Requires significant experience in fund raising; proven record of establishing program goals, identifying target publics, and setting specific communication objectives; significant experience managing multi-media communications program; and strong presentation skills. Successful candidate will plan, manage and direct implementation of a \$5-million capital campaign. Position reports directly to Executive Director.

Public Relations Director

Health care provider seeks senior manager to plan strategic public relations activities and collaborate with other departments heads to maintain relationships with payors, physicians, area consumers, and employees. Must have top-level media and community contacts.

Figure 2.1 Public Relations Job

Descriptions

Exhibit 2.1

Day in the Life: Senior Account Executive



Vanessa Curtis, Lizzie Grubman Public Relations, New York, NY

9:00 a.m.

Arrive at office and check e-mails. Answer e-mails for editor appointments and editor reservations. Scan New York daily publications and check for news or trends clients should be aware of.

9:30 a.m.

Look through Google alerts for any placements where clients have come up. Meet with interns about tasks.

10:15 a.m.

Send the daily celebrity bulletin to a beauty client and a restaurant client to approve celebs they would like to invite in for dinner or spa services while celebrities are in New York City for events, premieres, and press tours. Get on a call with a restaurant client about a kick-off event next week. Send out celebrity invites.

11:15 a.m.

Receive e-mail from a beauty editor interested in including our client in her story and needing the most recent products and treatments they offer. Call manager of salon and decide which treatments are the best options to send beauty editor. Finalize shoot with make-up artist from salon with an online magazine for two and a half weeks from now. Meet with a colleague to brainstorm ideas about a consumer brand who is participating in a national campaign for the launch of a candy product before a call with the client.

12:00 p.m.

Send out finalized invite for kick-off event at restaurant to media and VIP guests. Assign RSVP e-mail to an intern to reply and track responses. Receive sponsorship opportunity for clients from another publicist and send to consumer brands in candy and beverages to see if they would like to donate product for the event in two weeks. Respond to e-mails and send out pitches to publications for upcoming stories for beauty client.

1:30 p.m.

Receive summer cocktail recipe from bartender and summer grilling tips from executive chef for dining pitches. Work with an intern in creating these pitches.

3:30 p.m.

Get on a call with consumer brand about candy launch happening in the summer to discuss logistics of how we will promote the weeklong promotion.

4:15 p.m.

Edit intern-written pitches for specified clients. Meet with interns to give feedback. Complete press recap for meeting with beauty client tomorrow to discuss past press hits, upcoming press opportunities, and media placement goals.

6:00 p.m.

Receive recaps of interns' completed work for the day.

7:15 p.m.

Receive an e-mail from an entertainment publicist asking to make a reservation for her client this evening.

8:00 p.m.

Attend a networking event with press and other publicists at a new restaurant opening.

Courtesy Vanessa Curtis (Senior Account Executive) and Lizzie Grubman Public.

Roles

Over time, practitioners adopt patterns of behavior to deal with recurring situations in their work and to accommodate others' expectations of what they should do in their jobs. Four major public relations roles describe much of the practice.[31](#)

Communication Technician

Most practitioners enter the field as communication technicians. These entry-level practitioners are hired to write and edit employee newsletters, to write news releases and feature stories, to develop website content, and to deal with media contacts. Practitioners in this role usually are not present when management defines problems and selects solutions. They are brought in later to produce the communication collaterals and implement the program, sometimes without full knowledge of either the original motivation or the intended results. Even though they were not present during the discussions about a new policy or management decision, they are the ones given the job

of explaining it to employees and the media.

Practitioners not only begin their careers in this role, but also spend much of their time in the technical aspects of communication, as illustrated by the list of work assignments presented

Exhibit 2.2

Day in the Life: Director of Media and Public Relations



Ed Davis, United Way of Greater Houston

2012 President, Public Relations Society of America, Houston chapter

5:52 a.m.

Get up. Let dog out. Scan national and local news stations. Scan news aggregator and news feeds. Check e-mail.

7:21 a.m.

Take call from a Houston Chronicle reporter asking if she can get a quote from my boss about the effect the economy is having on nonprofits.

8:14 a.m.

Start commute into the office. During the drive, make follow-up calls with PRSA members regarding annual awards gala.

9:01 a.m.

Arrive at work. Check in with team to see who is working on what and get updates. Current big projects include strategic planning for the upcoming year, revamping of our measurement and analytics, planning video and photo shoots for our annual fundraising campaign materials, and finalizing a donor newsletter and coordinate pitching around hurricane preparedness to generate awareness of our helpline and emergency transportation registry we manage for the state.

10:17 a.m.

Meet with reporter.

10:52 a.m.

Call a client referred by one of the agencies we work with to see if she is still closing on the home we helped her obtain through a government savings program. Need to meet her and her children at her home to get photos and shoot a few minutes of video to get their reaction so we can potentially include it on our video. No answer, so I leave a message.

11:22 a.m.

Arrive eight minutes early for lunch with colleague, and catch up on e-mail while waiting. Get call back from client during lunch.

Closing was moved to Friday, so I must find someone to cover the assignment because I'll be out of town. Finish lunch. Head back to the office.

12:39 p.m.

Learn that we need two more stories for our campaign video because two potential clients backed out. Send e-mails to agencies and hope someone responds quickly. Schedule a meeting with boss for later in the day to give her an update on video/photo shoots. Approve messaging for hurricane preparedness commercial to be run the next couple months on Houston CBS affiliate.

2:00 p.m.

Go to doctor's appointment.

2:40 p.m.

Take a call from local Telemundo affiliate asking if we can provide a Spanish-speaking spokesperson for a piece on hurricane preparedness. We can, and I ask her to speak to our communications coordinator who will schedule and staff the interview and prepare the spokesperson. Head to meeting with my boss. Provide update on video/photo shoot locations and logistics for next week. Also discuss how hurricane preparedness pitching is going so far.

3:08 p.m.

Hear back from one agency about providing a client for our video. They ask if someone can meet with the client this evening. The client's home is on my way home, so I take the assignment. Go to meeting with several members of communications team to discuss video/photo shoot logistics and any remaining issues. Identify the last potential client participant. Meet with human resources vice president to discuss one of my employee's reviews. She would like to see some additional detail in one particular area. I update and

send back to her 15 minutes later.

4:15 p.m.

Catch up on e-mail and return a few phone calls.

4:57 p.m.

Leave office.

5:25 p.m.

Arrive at clients' house to interview them for our campaign video. Spend about 45 minutes talking to the client and their daughter about the impact a United Way program had on their lives. They will be in our video. On the way home call my boss to let her know that we are all set with clients for the campaign video shoot.

6:33 p.m.

Arrive home. Feed the dog and make dinner. Wife calls to say she will be home by 7 p.m.

8:22 p.m.

Check e-mail for the last time—but the blackberry and phone are never turned off—respond to a couple of questions from staff about communications plan.

Courtesy Ed Davis and United Way of Greater Houston

in the preceding section and by the job descriptions in [Figure 2.1](#). When limited to this role, however, practitioners typically do not participate significantly in management decision making and strategic planning. They complain that they are not part of the management team and that they are “the last to know.”

Expert Prescriber

When practitioners take on the expert role, others see them as the authority on public relations problems and solutions. Top management leaves public relations in the hands of the expert and assumes a relatively passive role. Practitioners operating as expert practitioners define the problem, develop the program, and take full responsibility for its implementation. The expert prescriber role seduces practitioners because it is personally gratifying to be viewed as the authority on what needs to be done and how it should be done. It seduces employers and clients because they want to feel sure that public relations is being handled by an expert. They also erroneously assume that they will no longer have to be involved once the expert is on the job. Limited participation by key top managers, however, means that their relevant knowledge does not get factored into the problem-solving process. Public relations becomes compartmentalized and isolated from the mainstream of the enterprise.

By not participating themselves, managers become dependent on the practitioner any time public relations issues arise. Managers also develop little or no commitment to public relations efforts and do not take responsibility for the success or failure of programs. In effect, other managers in the organization assume an “it’s-not-my-job” stance on public relations matters. They see public relations as a sometimes-necessary job handled by support staff not directly involved in the organization’s main line of business.

Whereas the expert prescriber role is called for in crisis situations and periodically throughout any program, in the long run it hinders the diffusion of public relations thinking throughout the organization. It also leads to the greatest dissatisfaction with practitioners, because they are held solely accountable for program results even though they had little or no control over critical parts of the situation and the factors that led to public relations problems in the first place. Top management often responds by simply replacing one expert with another, endlessly searching for someone who can make public relations problems go away without having to make needed changes in organizational policy, products, or procedures.

Communication Facilitator

The communication facilitator role casts practitioners as sensitive listeners and information brokers. Communication facilitators serve as liaisons, interpreters, and mediators between an organization and its publics. They maintain two-way communication and facilitate exchange by removing barriers in relationships and by keeping channels of communication open. The goal is to provide both management and publics the information they need for making decisions of mutual interest.

Practitioners in the communication facilitator role find themselves acting as information sources and the official contacts between organizations and their publics. They referee interactions, establish discussion agendas, summarize and restate views, call for reactions, and help participants diagnose and correct conditions interfering with communication relationships. Communication facilitators occupy boundary-spanning roles and serve as links between organizations and publics. They operate under the assumption that effective two-way communication improves the quality of decisions that organizations and publics make about policies, procedures, and actions of mutual interest.

Problem-Solving Process Facilitator

When practitioners assume the role of problem-solving process facilitator, they collaborate with other managers to define and solve problems. They become part of the strategic planning team. Collaboration and consultation begin with the first question and continue until the final program evaluation. Problem-solving process practitioners help other managers and the organization apply to public relations the same management step-by-step process used for solving other organizational problems.

Line managers play an essential part in analyzing problem situations, as they are the ones most knowledgeable of and most intimately involved with the organization's policies, products, procedures, and actions. They are also the ones with the power to make needed changes. As a result, they must

participate in the evolutionary thinking and strategic planning behind public relations programs. When line managers participate in the public relations strategic planning process, they understand program motivations and objectives, support strategic and tactical decisions, and are committed to making the changes and providing the resources needed to achieve program goals.

Problem-solving process facilitators get invited to the management team because they have demonstrated their skill and value in helping other managers avoid and solve problems. As a result, public relations thinking is factored into management decision making.

What Roles Research Tells US

Researchers have studied what leads practitioners to play different roles, including education, professional experience, personality, supervision, and organizational culture and environment. Research also has considered what happens when practitioners enact different roles in their organizations. These findings have isolated factors that influence role selection and enactment, salary and career advancement, and participation in organizational decision making. Other scholars have used the concept of public relations role to describe similarities and differences in the practice internationally.³²

Technicians Versus Managers

Research findings show that practitioners play several roles, but that over time a dominant role emerges as they go about their day-to-day work and dealings with others. Enacting the communication technician role is usually not related to enacting the other three roles; however, for the other three roles, enactment of one tends to go with enactment of the other two. In other words, practitioners who play the dominant role of expert prescriber, communication facilitator, or problem-solving process facilitator also tend to play the other two roles. High correlations among these three roles suggest that they go together to form a single, complex role that is distinct from the

communication technician role. As a result, two major predominant roles occur in practice: public relations technician and public relations manager.³³

Public relations technicians are primarily concerned with writing, producing, and disseminating communications, such as press releases, speeches, websites, feature stories, and annual reports. They tend to be creative, artistic, and technically proficient; see themselves as their organization's "wordsmith"; and exhibit little inclination or aptitude for strategic planning and research. For the most part they focus on communications and other activities in the process. Those in this role typically make less and are not part of the management inner circle, but enjoy high levels of job satisfaction if they remain in the technician role by choice. This role constitutes the traditional core of public relations work—writing mediated communications and doing media relations.

The public relations manager role casts practitioners as part of organizational management. This role calls for research skills, an aptitude for strategic thinking, and a tendency to think in terms of the outcomes or impact of public relations activities. Practitioners in the public relations manager role do not limit their tactics to communications. They use environmental scanning and organizational intelligence, negotiation and coalition building, issues management, program evaluation, and management counseling as public relations tools. Accountability and participation in organizational management earn these practitioners high salaries, as well as high stress and responsibility. Researchers who studied 321 organizations in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, however, found that the major predictor of public relations excellence was the extent to which the organization's top public relations executive was able to enact the manager role versus the technician role.³⁴

Exhibit 2.3

Day in the Life: Executive General Manager



Elizabeth Dougall, Ph.D., Rowland

Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

6:30 a.m.

Check e-mail and messages. Reply to anything urgent that has come in overnight. Check schedule for the day and reprioritize appointments and workflow if needed.

7:00 a.m.

Channel-surf cable and network news to find out what is happening around the world and locally while getting some early-morning exercise.

8:30 a.m.

Head to the office. Dock laptop and scan the major daily newspapers at the news tables. Scan the major news websites and review online our client media monitoring accounts. Review the daily coverage reports collated by the consultant teams. Walk the floor to do a climate check on the day ahead. Talk to the team leaders and their teams as needed to see what is going on and double-check on priorities for the day ahead.

9:00 a.m.

Meet briefly with the Leadership team for their reports on Business Development and work in progress. Discuss workflow and ensure that the teams are on target in terms of client outcomes and billable hours for the week ahead. Make decisions about who is leading projects and proposals. Make calls to satellite offices and team members for brief updates.

9:30 a.m.

Meet with head of human resources and an associate in the research services practice to map out an audit of company's research services capabilities and to plan research training for consultants.

10:15 a.m.

Meet with a client on the comprehensive operational and market review of the association's newspaper with a view to improving market share. Provide advice on the process and resourcing.

11:15 a.m.

Meet with the San Francisco-based head of a major global philanthropic organization to report on the excellent outcomes of a very challenging announcement. Discuss plans for the next phase of issues management work.

12:00 p.m.

Attend presentation of research commissioned for a client facing a very contentious issue with high business risk. Provide feedback on report and further direction on data analysis to the research director. Discuss strategic direction the client campaign must now take and how to most effectively communicate our recommendations to the client.

1:00 p.m.

Host key client lunch with Managing Director at a local Japanese restaurant. Celebrate client's promotion to a more senior role and discuss an array of issues and opportunities for which we are providing support.

2:30 p.m.

Check e-mail and calls on walk back to the office. Take urgent call from a client and arrange to meet in 20 minutes. Quickly reply to e-mails and most urgent phone calls. Meet with client looking for additional support to manage a significant community engagement challenge involving intense media scrutiny and sophisticated activism.

4:00 p.m.

Take taxi to next meeting, with the head of our digital media offer, where we hear from an existing client in transportation on the review of a new social media policy manual.

4:30 p.m.

Talk through client's requirements, scope, and budget on the walk back to the office. Discuss next steps in plans to expand our digital media offer and to take some further initiatives with our work in branding.

4:45 p.m.

Running 15 minutes late for an internal meeting to review the work in progress on a client project. The topic is contentious and complex and the presentation must be a game changer. Provide feedback and further direction to the team.

6:00 p.m.

Return to desk to review e-mail and clear the most urgent requirements. Listen to national news broadcast on car radio on

way home. Take call from a team member working on a client site and dealing with media calls.

6:45 p.m.

Say hi to my family! While tuning in to the evening news, turn on my lap-top, open e-mail and look for the proposal finalized by my team. Double-check the proposal and forward it to the client after making a couple of amendments.

8:30 p.m.

After a family dinner, log in to our system and complete timesheets for the day. Respond to all the texts, messaging and e-mails that I had neglected all day. Check the workflow forecasts for the week ahead and update my checklist to share with the leadership team.

9:30 p.m.

Log off and check out!

Courtesy Elizabeth Dougall and Rowland

Table 2.3

Organizational Environments and Roles

	Low Threat	High Threat
Little Change	Communication technician	Problem-solving process facilitator
Much Change	Communication facilitator	Expert prescriber

Environmental Influences

Important distinctions are lost when the three managerial roles are combined. For example, as [Table 2.3](#) illustrates, a practitioner's dominant role is a function of an organization's environment. Communication technicians tend to work in organizations with relatively stable, low-threat environments, such as many nonprofit organizations and charities. Communication facilitators predominate in organizations with relatively turbulent settings that pose little threat, such as school districts and some governmental agencies. Problem-solving process facilitators and expert prescribers work in organizations with threatening environments. In relatively stable settings, including some utilities and associations, the problem-solving process facilitator role dominates. Expert prescribers dominate in rapidly changing environments, particularly in public relations firms that specialize in crisis communication and in consumer products companies subject to high levels of competition and government regulation.[35](#)

In short, the expert prescriber role appears when immediate action is imperative, whereas the problem-solving process facilitator role is preferred when there is time to go through a process of collaboration and joint problem solving. Highly paid problem-solving process facilitators and expert prescribers tend to work for organizations most threatened by competition, government regulation, labor conflicts, and public scrutiny, such as financial and insurance companies, utilities, and the public relations firms that work for these companies. By contrast, lower-paid communication technicians and communication facilitators typically work as promotional publicists for media and advertising agencies or for educational and religious organizations and charities.

Research and Information Gathering

The various studies of public relations roles have consistently demonstrated the impact of using research to manage the function. Practitioners who use all types of research and information gathering are the ones most likely to operate in management roles. Operating in the manager role correlates with the use of scientific, informal, and mixed approaches to research, whereas

operating in the technician role does not.³⁶ The obvious conclusion is that practitioners must be actively gathering information useful in decision making before they are invited to the management table.

Furthermore, becoming part of the management team does not happen simply because of years on the job. Rather, the amount of research practitioners do determines the likelihood of their having a seat at the management decision-making table.³⁷ Moving into the management role, however, “does not immediately ensure that practitioners have the knowledge or expertise to enact the manager role,” according to Lauzen and Dozier.³⁸ Simply put, practitioners long accustomed to operating in the technician role may find moving into the strategic manager role a difficult adjustment. But, practitioners who understand the causes and consequences of playing different roles can develop strategies for dealing with a variety of situations and with others’ views of practitioner roles.

Challenges

No career field is easy; all professions and the practitioners in them face various challenges, some more easily surmounted than others. In public relations, practitioners face general misunderstanding about the organizational and social functions of the practice, although some recent research indicates that public perceptions of public relations may not be as negative as previously thought.³⁹ Listed below are some other challenges that practitioners face:

The Glass Ceiling, Broken?

Historically, women in public relations have found themselves relegated to the technician role, with difficulty advancing to managerial positions. This “glass ceiling effect” has been documented by decades of scholarly research in public relations, beginning in the 1980s.⁴⁰ But, the latest data from 2010 suggested that women have caught up to men in enacting the manager role in public relations.⁴¹

Were the 2010 data an anomaly, or were they indicative of a broken glass ceiling in public relations? Only time and future research will tell. Meanwhile, much of the credit for progress goes to women in public relations who struggled to break through the managerial glass ceiling and to feminist scholars who documented the process and effects of gender discrimination. Although the glass ceiling and gender discrimination may not have been eliminated, as one group of researchers put it, “Watch for falling glass.”[42](#)

Gendered Pay Gap

In 2011, a female executive with a major public relations firm filed a \$100 million class-action lawsuit against the company, alleging gender discrimination in both promotion and salary.[43](#) Unfortunately, her claim of a gendered salary gap is supported by nearly half a century of research in public relations, as well as by general income data from the U.S. Dept. of Labor.[44](#) Surveys consistently find that salaries paid to women are below those paid to men. As one researcher put it, there is a “million-dollar penalty for being a woman” in public relations, noting the effects of male–female salary differences and limited advancement opportunities over the course of a career.[45](#)

This gendered pay gap is illustrated in [Figure 2.2](#), with women’s income shown as cents on the dollar earned by men. The bottom line (with diamonds) shows that, although the pay gap has decreased since 1979, women in 2010 still earned less than men. If women’s incomes were equitable to those of men—in other words, if the pay gap did not exist—the salaries would be represented by the top line (with triangles).[46](#)

Of course, differences in salary are not only about gender. Education levels, years of professional experience, and career interruptions also affect how much people are paid, in any field. But, one study conducted in the 1980s showed that women earned less than men even when they had equal education, professional experience, and tenure in their jobs.[47](#) The middle line in [Figure 2.2](#) (with

Women's Earnings on the Dollar Earned by Men

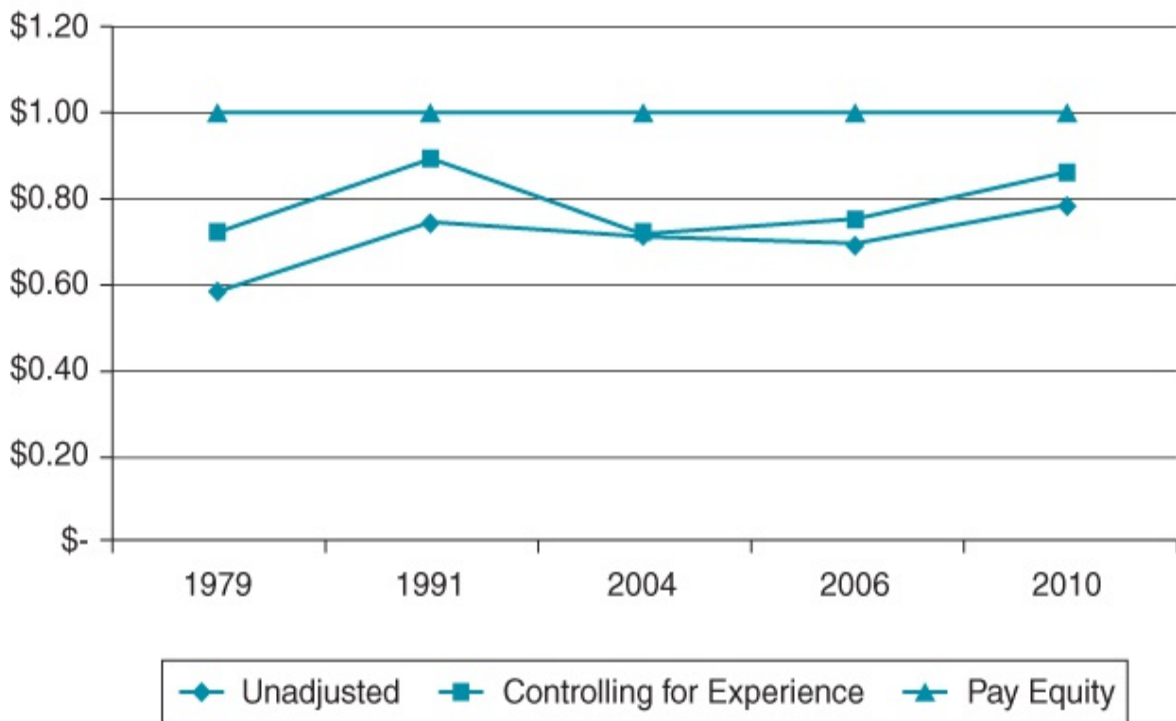


Figure 2.2 Gendered Pay Gap in Public Relations, 1979–2010

Sources: Chart presented by Bey-Ling Sha, “Gendered Pay Inequities in Public Relations,” *New Voices for Pay Equity: New Data on Pay Gap in the Professions*. Congressional panel hosted by the American Association of University Women (April 11, 2011): Washington, D.C. Data from David M. Dozier and Bey-Ling Sha, 2011.

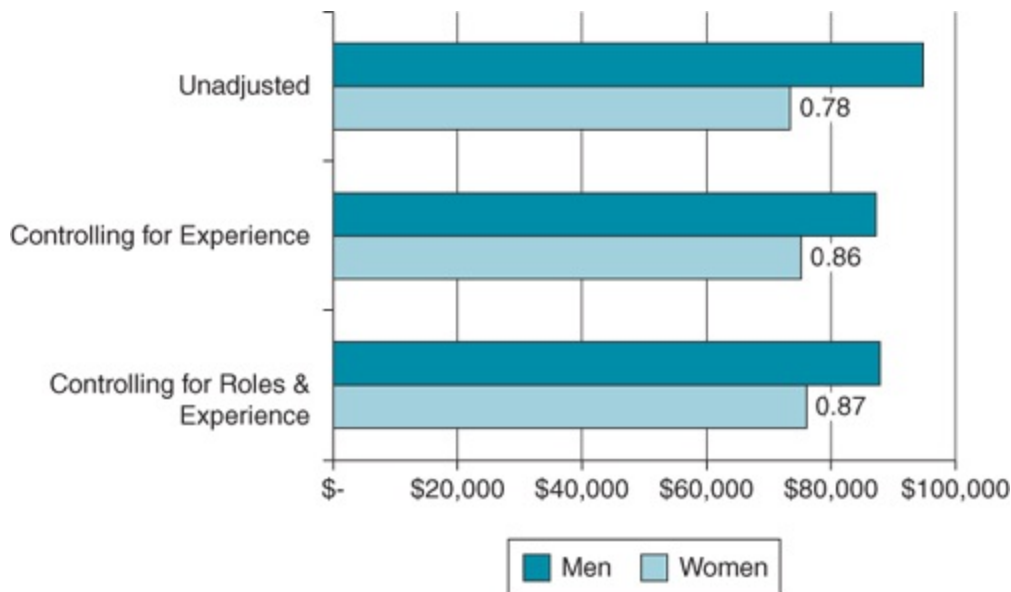


Figure 2.3 Gendered Pay Gap, 2010

Sources: Chart presented by Bey-Ling Sha, “Gendered Pay Inequities in Public Relations,” *New Voices for Pay Equity: New Data on Pay Gap in the Professions*. Congressional panel hosted by the American Association of University Women (April 11, 2011): Washington, D.C. Data from David M. Dozier and Bey-Ling Sha, 2011.

squares) shows the salary gap between women and men when professional experience is accounted for. With the exception of 2004, the pay gap remained in all the other years studied, including 2010.

Likewise, [Figure 2.3](#) shows that, in 2010, women earned 78 cents on the dollar earned by men. When years of professional experience were accounted for, women’s salaries rose to 86 cents on the dollar earned by men. When both professional experience and managerial and technician role enactment were accounted for, women’s salaries rose only to 87 cents on the dollar earned by men.⁴⁸ In other words, even when accounting for experience and roles, women earned on average only \$76,083, while men earned \$87,743.

These differences were statistically significant.⁴⁹

These figures show us that women continue to earn less than men, even when common explanations such as experience and practitioner role are taken into account. Even the “mommy track” cannot explain why women earn less than men; the annual salary difference between a woman who took a career break to have a baby and a woman who did not was a mere \$148!⁵⁰ Clearly, the gendered pay gap remains a challenge practitioners face in public relations, as well as in other fields.

Diversity and Cultural Competence

Recognition of the importance of building and maintaining relationships with all racial and ethnic segments of the community has increased opportunities for individual practitioners as well as for minority-owned firms.

Globalization has also increased demand for skilled practitioners able to bridge cultural and communication gaps.⁵¹ Minority practitioners with public relations training and skills will continue to be in demand because all organizations need to communicate with the many publics in an increasingly pluralistic society (see [Exhibit 2.4](#)). Ketchum’s Raymond Kotcher succinctly summarized the challenge: “The public relations profession should aspire to be representative of the communities served by our companies, clients and organizations across the nation.”⁵²

On one hand, the increasing diversity of society underscores the severe underrepresentation of minorities in public relations, as discussed earlier in this chapter. On the other hand, the belief that only minority practitioners are qualified to communicate with minority publics underscores challenges faced by these practitioners. One such challenge is called [pigeon-holing](#), meaning that minority practitioners are restricted to working with minority clients or dealing with minority publics, even when they might wish to work on “mainstream” public relations programs or accounts.⁵³ A related challenge is “cultural interpretation,” whereby minority practitioners are expected to know everything about the cultural group to which they appear to belong, and they are expected to explain that culture to others. A third challenge is outright discrimination. One study found that

Exhibit 2.4

Diversity Dimensions



Rochelle L. Ford, Ph.D., APR

Associate Dean, Research and Academic Affairs

School of Communications, Howard University

Diversity, multiculturalism, and inclusiveness are becoming common concerns in public relations, yet at times their meanings and application within the practice of public relations can be challenging. Diversity is so essential to public relations practice that the Commission on Public Relations Education infused the concept throughout its 2006 report and addressed it as a foundational concept.

Common definitions of diversity typically address all the differences that exist between and among people. Primary diversity characteristics are innate and cannot be changed, such as gender, age, nationality, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and race. Secondary diversity characteristics—religion, geographics, and marital and military service status—can change over time.

Likewise, culture is often defined as the sum of ways of living,

including behavioral norms, linguistic expression, styles of communication, patterns of thinking, and beliefs and values of a group large enough to be self-sustaining, and transmitted over the course of generations. Groups defined on the basis of an element of diversity may have a unique culture or co-culture, but it may not persist.

When communicating across cultures, it is important to ensure that publics feel respected and valued even if differences exist. Such respect and value are achieved through the spirit of inclusion or inclusiveness—recognizing different groups, listening to them, taking into account what they have to say, and communicating with them. Therefore, a public relations practitioner must conduct research in order to understand both the culture(s) of the organization and the public(s) of the organization. Likewise, modern public relations professionals must understand who they are, what cultures they represent, and the power or privilege held or perceived because of roles or diversity characteristics.

Communicating with different groups requires an understanding of the situational nature of identity. In other words, although a practitioner may be a Black Latina mother from South Texas, it doesn't mean that she is thinking about those diversity characteristics in every communication situation. Only through research will a practitioner know which aspect of her identity is likely to be important in a particular situation. The key is approaching public relations with sensitivity, informed by research.

Diversity, multiculturalism, and inclusion are also important to the staffing of the public relations function. The Excellence Theory in public relations explains that support for women and minorities are important, but the term “minorities” is becoming outdated as Hispanics and Blacks outnumber Caucasian and non-Hispanics in many communities. When an organization has a diverse team, it will be able to monitor and address issues more effectively because of the diversity of ideas and perspectives that the team members bring to the issue.

Here are five trends to consider regarding diversity in public relations:

1. Growth of Hispanic population in the United States
2. Growing recognition of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities and culture
3. Mobile technologies, the Internet, and other digital communication expand the reach and connections among people, particularly along diversity dimensions
4. Immigration changes the culture and workforce of all nations
5. The baby boom generation aging, lower birth rates, and longer life expectancy lead to older median ages in most nations

Note: More information on diversity is available online at www.commpred.org, and in my past “Diversity Dimensions” PRTactics columns posted on PRSA’s website, www.prsa.org.

Courtesy Dr. Rochelle L. Ford and Howard University

53 percent of Black and Hispanic practitioners surveyed had encountered subtle discrimination because of their race or ethnicity, and 40 percent of them had experienced overt discrimination.⁵⁴

Pigeon-holing:

The restricting of minority practitioners to working with minority clients or dealing with minority publics, even when they might wish to work on “mainstream” public relations programs or accounts.

Rather than expecting minorities to be the only practitioners capable of dealing with “diversity” of publics and clients, all public relations practitioners should strive to develop what scholars call “cultural competence.” This kind of competence goes beyond language ability and cultural know-how to include genuine respect for cultural differences, sensitivity to how culture affects perceptions, and appreciation of “diversity”

to include differences grounded in race, gender, sexual orientation, age, education, socioeconomic level, marital and family status, and physical abilities and qualities.[55](#)

Professionalism

When practitioners assemble at professional meetings, discussions typically turn to the extent to which public relations qualifies as a profession. Criteria used to assess the professional status of a field date back to preindustrial England. Sons of wealthy landowners went to either Cambridge or Oxford to receive a liberal arts education before taking exams to enter the practices of law and medicine. Wealth was a prerequisite because professional practice provided little, if any, remuneration.

By the late 1800s, the “status professionalism” of England began to give way to “occupational professionalism.” Specialized skills and knowledge became the basis for entry, opening the way for the growing middle class. Although being challenged in some fields, many of the values associated with the origins of professions persist today: “personal service, a dislike of competition, advertising and profit, a belief in the principle of payment in order to work rather than working for pay and the superiority of the motive of service.”[56](#) (See [Chapter 5](#) for contemporary definitions of professions.)

For now, suffice to say that many public relations practitioners qualify as “professionals” on the basis of their commitment to meeting professional and ethical standards. Professionalism is an important concern and goal for those entering the emerging profession of public relations.

Ethical Conduct

Closely related to the challenge of professionalism is the need for ethical conduct among practitioners. Not only do codes of ethics serve as indicators of professional status, but so does the behavior of individual practitioners affect how others see the public relations field. As one practitioner put it:

“ . . . [W]e must work harder to shift the perception and reality of the [public relations] craft from that of a marginal or dubious trade to a mature profession. We must earn and nurture the respect of all with whom we deal—our clients, the media and the general public. Reestablishing and upholding the highest ethical standards is at the core of that task.”[57](#)

So, perhaps the most important challenge faced by public relations practitioners today is one of personal choice: To choose to behave ethically or to choose to behave unethically. How a person chooses to behave reflects, of course, on that individual. But, in the case of public relations practitioners, such choices also reflect on their employers and clients, as well as on the public relations profession as a whole. As the headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry tells Harry Potter, “It is our choices . . . that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities.”[58](#)

Requirements For Success

Surveys of top public relations executives show that they think communication skills, knowledge of media and management, problem-solving abilities, motivation, and intellectual curiosity are needed for success. The late public relations executive and professor Richard Long listed five qualities of those on the career “fast track”:

1. Results.

The single most important key to success is a reputation for getting results, being goal oriented. Employers and clients pay for results, not hard work and effort.

2. Conceptualizing.

Those on the fast track have an ability to focus on the employer’s or client’s needs. The strong conceptualizer is a “quick study” who is a good listener and thorough note taker.

3. Human Relations.

Persons on the fast track are team players who balance personal goals with those of the organization. These persons also know how to deal with management, including when they do not agree with the boss.

4. Style.

The most important style-related trait is a “can-do” attitude. Another is constructive competitiveness. Those on the fast track translate confidence into persuasive advocacy and substantive public relations contributions.

Guts

Also called the GI or digestive tract, the guts are the group of organs that take in food, digest it to extract energy and expel waste. More importantly, the guts function as the seat of grit, moxie, gumption and overall determinacy. Do you have guts? Find out below.

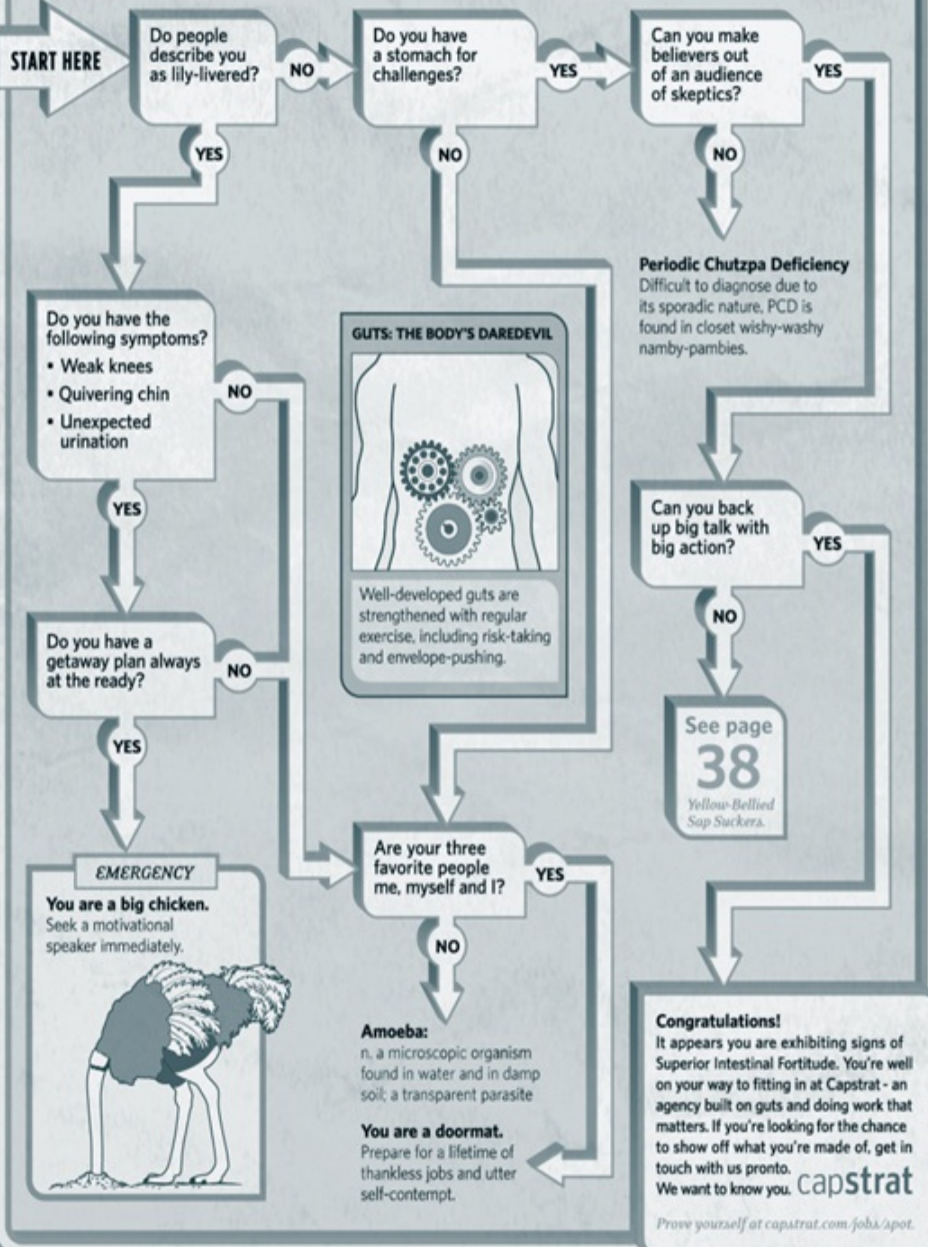


Figure 2.4 Capstrat “Guts” Advertisement

Courtesy Capstrat, Raleigh, NC.

5. Intangibles.

This quality almost defies description, but charisma, presence, and moxie affect the way other managers evaluate people in public relations. Go to school on the boss. The bottom line with bosses, however, is to find ways to make their jobs easier. Know what your boss expects of you.⁵⁹

Among other traits sought by employers are an understanding of how the business works (whatever a particular organization’s business is), possessing skills with computer software and new media technology, being well read and informed on current events, having an ability to deal with frustration and stress, and being able to improvise.⁶⁰ One trait tops every list, however. Ability to write is number one by a wide margin. As one executive put it:

Too often, clear writing is not stressed sufficiently and the public relations professional goes through his or her career with one hand tied behind. Learn how to write before you start to climb the public relations ladder.⁶¹

Another said, “If our experience is typical, writing is one of the very weakest areas of most new graduates. That’s probably being kind . . . ‘appalling’ is what’s really crossing my mind.”⁶²

In short, both entry-level employment and long-term career success require the ability to write grammatically correct, easy-to-read, forceful, informative, and persuasive copy for publication and speech in both traditional and digital formats. (See [Figure 2.4](#).)

Notes

1. [1.](#) Address to military public affairs officers in graduate program at the School of Journalism and Media Studies, San Diego State University, April 4, 2011.
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Study Guide

1. How would you describe the “typical” public relations practitioner?
2. What are some typical work assignments for public relations practitioners?

3. What are the four major roles played by practitioners, and how do they differ from each other?
4. What are challenges faced by practitioners, and how do these differ among practitioners from different backgrounds?
5. What are some major requirements for success in public relations? What is the most important skill sought by employers for entry-level public relations jobs?

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Chapter 3 Organizational Settings

Learning Outcomes

After studying [Chapter 3](#) this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Discuss how top management decides the status and role of public relations.
2. Distinguish between line and staff functions, and explain why public relations is a staff function in most organizations.
3. Compare the major advantages and disadvantages of internal departments versus outside counseling firms.
4. Describe working relationships between public relations and other departments in organizations.
5. Outline the four primary approaches public relations firms most frequently use to bill clients.

Public relations people, if they are to be truly respected by management colleagues, must merit “a seat at the management table.

—The Public Relations Strategist¹

Years of acquisitions, divestitures, downsizing, globalization, reengineering, and mergers have produced great changes in the structure of organizations. Budget cuts and deficits, taxpayer revolts, and deregulation have led to reorganization, decentralization, and staff cuts in all levels of government. Nationally publicized scandals, embarrassing revelations about executive salaries and benefits, increasing demand for social services, and vigorous competition for funds during the “great recession” have forced changes in the missions and fund-raising methods in many nonprofit organizations.

Employees at all levels have learned to live and work with sometimes contradictory rhetoric saying that their organization was trying to become “lean and mean,” that reorganization and retraining meant “empowerment,” that layoffs and plant closings were aimed at “right-sizing,” and that high overhead and budget cuts had forced “outsourcing.” Technology revolutionized how organizations manage and communicate. In short, change pressures have transformed most organizations.

Many, if not most, organizations reorganized the public relations function, reduced department staff size, and tried to do more with fewer people. Many shifted part or all of the workload to outside counseling firms and solo practitioners. Small public relations firms merged, acquired others, or affiliated to form regional, national, and international networks. Large national public relations firms became international by opening or acquiring branches outside their headquarters country or by merging with firms in other countries.

In other words, practitioners work in turbulent organizational settings, dealing with both internal and external change. Many work at the highest levels of management, helping chief executive officers (CEOs) and others manage change. This chapter discusses the origins and place of public relations in organizations, its responsibilities, and its working relationships with other departments.

Origins Within Organizations

Public relations in organizations often can be traced back to unintended and humble beginnings. It can begin with someone simply answering letters and phone calls from customers or members; with someone writing the organization’s newsletter and annual report; with someone creating the organization’s website and responding to e-mail inquiries; with someone meeting with visitors, conducting group tours, or arranging the annual meeting; or with someone serving as the organization’s ombudsman for employees or neighbors. In other organizations, public relations starts as product publicity for a national advertising campaign or as communication support for a fund-raising or membership drive.

Public relations, however, does not always spring from a welcome opportunity. For example, an emergency product recall, a factory fire or explosion that threatens neighbors, or a manufacturing plant closing or massive layoff will attract public and media attention. If no one on the staff is qualified to deal with the media and to communicate with affected publics during such crises, then the organization must retain outside public relations counsel. After the emergency or crisis subsides, those brought in on a short-term basis may be hired or retained on a continuing basis. Over time, public relations will be defined and redefined to fit changing missions, new problems and opportunities, and the values and views of a succession of chief executive officers (CEOs).

Because so many factors influence public relations' beginning in organizations, even some large organizations have small public relations departments. Conversely, some relatively small enterprises employ many practitioners, in some cases supplemented by outside counsel. Many top public relations executives report directly to the CEO, whereas others report to the top marketing, human resources, or legal officer. Some organizations retain outside counselors, even though setting up their own internal staff would be the more appropriate choice. In others, internal staffers are assigned tasks that could be better handled by outside counsel.

Such mismatches often represent nothing more than delays in adapting to change. But even practitioners disagree about what is the best structure and place for the function in various types of organizations. As a consequence, each internal public relations department is tailor-made to suit a particular organization and its unique circumstances, particularly the expectations of the CEO.

Establishing a Public Relations Department

The position of public relations on the organization chart and its relationship to top management often can be explained by how the function came into being. For example, top managers in a rapidly growing corporation discover

that they have lost touch with employees because face-to-face communication with all their employees is no longer possible. The CEO then directs the human resources department to hire a writer-editor to write news updates on the company's intranet and to publish a quarterly newsletter for employees' families on the company's website. On the basis of the success of these employee communication efforts, top managers soon ask the energetic and ambitious communication specialist to write occasional news releases about employee achievements and corporate successes. Shortly after, the job expands to include duties such as speechwriter for the CEO and as media contact. The communication specialist hires an assistant to handle a growing number of internal and external communication needs.

Because the function expanded beyond its original employee communication origins, top management moves it out of the human resources department and gives it a title—"Public Relations Department." The new department manager reports directly to the CEO. Its missions are to improve communication and to build better relationships with all the corporation's major internal and external stakeholders.

As the corporation grows, the public relations department takes on responsibilities for maintaining relationships with investors and financial analysts, government agencies at all levels, community groups, environmental and other special-interest groups, and an increasingly diverse workforce. The public relations manager gets promoted to vice president and appoints managers for each of the specialized areas. In some instances, the new vice president is elected to the executive committee and participates in corporate decision making at the highest level.

From its origin as a low-level communication support function in the human resources department, the role evolved to become an integral part of the management team. To remain on the management team, however, it must contribute to achieving organizational goals and demonstrate accountability through measurable results.

Retaining Outside Counsel

Client relationships with outside counseling firms also can begin in simple and unexpected ways. For example, an organization retains an outside firm (sometimes called an “agency”) to survey community public opinion regarding a proposed trash-to-energy recycling plant. After receiving the survey results, client management asks the firm to help interpret the findings “from an outsider’s perspective” and to help address a public opinion problem identified by the survey. Success in the follow-up project leads to a continuing and expanding relationship as the client draws on the full range of the firm’s public relations capabilities.

The client pays the firm a monthly retainer fee, ensuring access to outside counsel and covering a set number of hours of service each month. Above and beyond regular counsel and services, the firm takes on special projects such as producing the annual report, designing and creating the organization’s website, and special-event planning for the grand opening of a new facility. If the work exceeds the hours covered by the retainer fee, the firm bills the client an agreed-upon hourly fee or a fixed fee to cover costs associated with the additional projects.

The firm’s account executive and the internal department staff work as a team to plan and carry out the public relations program. The firm’s account executive meets periodically with the client’s senior management and public relations staff to discuss plans and to assess progress. The client–firm relationship becomes so close that the firm’s account executive sits in on many of the client’s internal planning meetings.

Friction sometimes develops, however, when the account executive is not available because of travel and work demands from other clients or, more commonly, when the firm bills for more hours than the client’s management anticipated. A hastily called meeting to discuss the invoice reminds both the account executive and internal public relations management that outside counsel is a variable cost and that the outside firm has its own economic goals. The relationship continues but with heightened awareness that internal staff and outside counselors work from different perspectives. The outsider’s perspective and specialized skills were, after all, why the client retained the counseling firm in the first place.

Public Relations Starts with Top Management

One of the few safe generalizations in public relations is that an organization's public reputation derives in substantial part from the behavior of its senior officials. As those in top management act and speak, so go the interpretations and echoes created by the public relations function. Thus, public relations is inescapably tied, by nature and by necessity, to top management, with public relations staff providing counsel and communication support.

For example, when traces of benzene were found in its bottled water, Source Perrier's top management first suggested that it resulted from a single, isolated cleaning accident and that contaminated bottles were limited to only the few being recalled in North America. The next installment of top management's story came when scientists found benzene-tainted products in Europe. This time, management attributed the benzene to a simple problem with the filter system. Finally, red-faced Perrier management announced a worldwide recall. Tests showed that consumers around the world had been drinking contaminated products for months. The media blasted Perrier, questioning management's integrity and raising concern for public safety. Perrier lost and has not regained its former share of the bottled water market.

The BP's (formerly British Petroleum) Gulf of Mexico Deepwater Horizon oil rig explosion on April 20, 2010, killed eleven crew members and created the greatest environmental disaster in U.S. history. In the days that followed, BP's CEO, Tony Hayward, minimized the damage and said he would "like his life back" as he headed to a yacht race off Europe. Public relations could not undo the damage caused by the company's most visible executive. Three months later, Mr. Hayward agreed to step down as CEO and was transferred to a BP facility in Russia with a large severance payment and retirement package.

Likewise, public relations could not rescue Tepco President Masataka Shimizu after Japan's largest earthquake and tsunami damaged the

Fukushima-Daiichi nuclear plant. Intense criticism of Tepco management's slow response to the crisis, and its misleading and confusing statements about radiation levels leaking from the plant, prompted Mr. Shimizu to drop from public view and to issue a statement that he had been hospitalized. Weeks later, the federal government in Tokyo took over Tepco's public relations and Mr. Shimizu announced that he would step down from its presidency.

In sharp contrast, years later, Johnson & Johnson's Tylenol crisis remains a classic case study in crisis management (review [Exhibit 1.3](#) on page 20). Johnson & Johnson's top management put customer safety first, immediately pulling the product off retail shelves and recalling Tylenol capsules in the United States and abroad. Management took these dramatic steps even though the only known product tampering cases and deaths were limited to the Chicago area. Media coverage praised the company's socially responsible actions, reported the company's cooperation with federal agencies, and gave full coverage to later announcements of new tamper-resistant packaging.

In all four cases, the CEOs set the course and became the public face in responding to the crises. Each crisis also illustrates top management's key role in an organization's public relations. To this day, Source Perrier, BP, and Tepco continue to struggle to regain public confidence and respect. On the other hand, Johnson & Johnson management's response positioned it as a leader in safe packaging, forcing competing brands to follow suit; led to its annual ranking among the most respected corporations; and helped the company retain market share for Tylenol.

These cases illustrate that public relations credibility starts with management's integrity and socially responsible actions. In addition, long-term success in public relations calls for the following from top management:

1. Commitment to and participation in public relations
2. Retention of competent public relations counsel
3. Incorporation of public relations perspectives in policy making
4. Two-way communication with both internal and external publics

5. Coordination of what is done with what is said
6. Clearly defined goals and objectives

The first and continuing task for public relations is to earn and hold support from top management. Johnson & Johnson's former public relations head—Lawrence Foster—reports that such support is not easily earned and requires mutual respect:

Perhaps in more than any other relationship among senior executives in a company, the chemistry that exists between the CEO and the senior public relations executive is most critical. If things are working as they should, the public relations person is given the unique opportunity to become the CEO's "loyal opposition," the one who, behind closed doors, can say, "If you do this, you are making a huge mistake."²

Role in Decision Making

Public relations is one of several staff functions, meaning that it advises and supports line managers who have responsibility and authority to run the organization. Practitioners therefore need to understand the staff role.

Line Versus Staff Management

The line–staff management distinction originated in the military—those who fight the battle versus those who support the fighters—but now is used in most large organizations. For example, line functions in industry include the product- and profit-producing functions: engineering, production, and marketing. Staff functions include those that advise and assist line executives: finance, legal, human resources, and public relations. For example, a company may make the staff role explicit in the position title—"Staff Vice President/Director of Public Relations." (Notice how the legal and public relations vice presidents' reporting lines differ from those of the other vice presidents in [Figure 3.1](#).)

Staff support becomes increasingly necessary as an organization increases in size and complexity. Line executives have the authority and responsibility to set policy and to oversee the operations. To do their jobs, however, they need assistance in the form of research, advice, and support services from staff. Many years ago, a management expert made the distinction between line and staff managers rather bluntly: “Specialists are necessary, but ‘they should be on tap—not on top.’”³

Public relations practitioners typically applaud when public relations executives move into line management but view the reverse with alarm. In a bit of semantic tyranny, they label

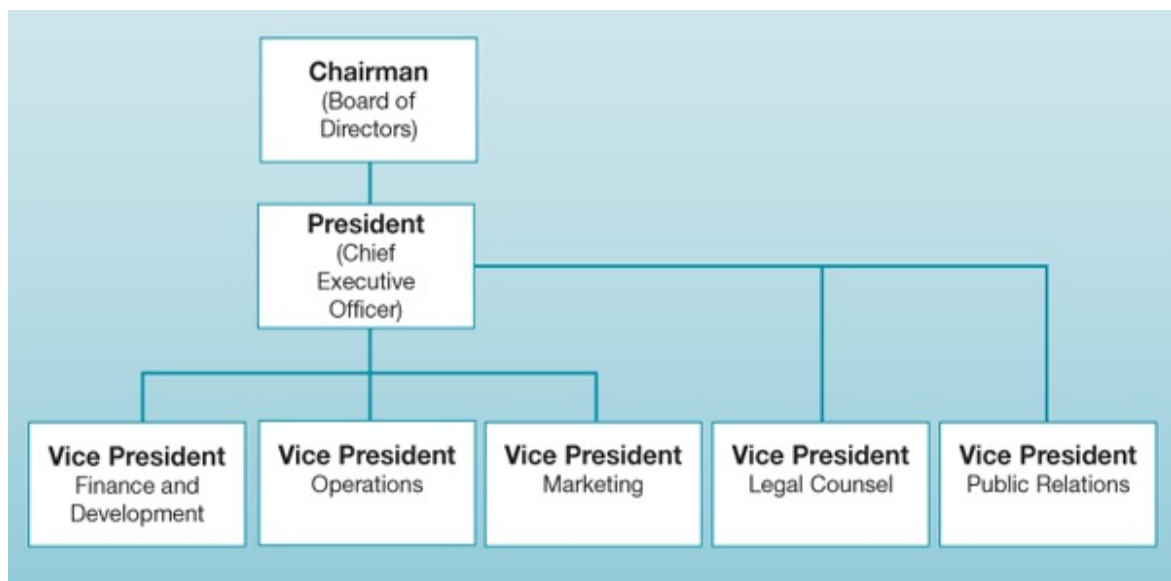


Figure 3.1 Line and Staff Organization Chart

the movement of “nonpublic relations professionals” from other staff or line units into public relations management as “encroachment,” identifying it as a threat. They argue that when the senior public relations manager enacts the manager role, “Public relations will be seen as a powerful organizational function, making the assignment of nonpublic relations professionals to manage the public relations function unnecessary and undesirable.”⁴

On the other hand, some argue that when executives gain public relations experience, they move on to other assignments with a greater understanding of the function. In many organizations, line managers rotate through a variety of assignments before reaching the top. Public relations experience would add to the credibility of public relations as a management function, demystify the function for other managers, and expand career opportunities for those now viewed as communication technicians with no role in management.⁵

Participation in Management

Traditional and somewhat rigid distinctions between line and staff managers—giving orders versus giving advice—do not always represent their respective roles in decision making. Increasingly, practitioners are assuming positions in the policy-setting and decision-making processes, but those positions are earned, not automatically awarded.

Proximity and access are important factors influencing public relations participation in management. For example, when faced with bankruptcy, Federated Department Stores expanded its dominant coalition to include the vice president of corporate communication:

They moved the corporate communications function to the 20th floor; the 20th floor is where the senior management offices are located. So we were literally right in the midst of things. . . . It's a very informal communications process. There was an amazing amount of contact that occurred in the hallway. The president would just walk down the hall and come in my office. It is casual in that respect, but really is an important component of the access to the thought process, access to the person, access to judgment calls when they need to be made.⁶

The term “dominant coalition”—generally five to eight senior executives—describes those who hold power in organizations.⁷ Power comes to the public relations function in an organization when the members of the dominant coalition value it as a vital management function, rather than as simply a technical role implementing the communication strategy decided by others.⁸ If public relations has a “seat at the table” of the dominant coalition, then

public relations plays a greater role in determining and achieving organizational outcomes.⁹

Fulfilling this strategic role, however, requires that public relations professionals have strategic management skills not typically associated with many practitioners, according to the Excellence Project researchers: “These strategic functions are evaluation research, environmental scanning, and research to segment publics.”¹⁰

Organizational changes can also enhance or diminish the role of public relations in management. For example, when Boeing Company acquired McDonnell Douglas Aircraft Company, it restructured its management team, forming an executive council that reports to the chairman’s office. The vice president of communications and investor relations and the vice president of ethics report to the council, placing these staff management executives in positions to influence.¹¹

On the other hand, when Germany-based Daimler AG (makers of Mercedes-Benz cars) sold the Chrysler division to Cerberus Capital Management LP, new CEO Robert Nardelli restructured the company, making corporate communications report to the senior vice president of human resources. Jason Vines, who as vice president of corporate communications had been reporting directly to the CEO, resigned.¹²

Characteristics of the practitioners themselves—particularly personal credibility—also contribute to their inclusion or exclusion from the dominant coalition. Researchers have identified practitioners’ lack of broad business experience, passivity, naïveté about organization politics, technical education, gender, and tenure in their organizations as factors contributing to the relatively limited power of public relations in organizations.¹³

The extent to which the function conducts various kinds of research is a major determinant of public relations participation in management, according to our colleague David Dozier. He and other researchers have called such research “organizational intelligence,” “environmental scanning,” “scanning for planning,” and simply “metrics.” Regardless of labels, survey results consistently show that when the function does research, there is a greater likelihood that public relations staff will participate in decision making and

other management planning activities.[14](#)

The degree to which line managers and practitioners themselves view the function as part of the management team, however, remains the major determinant of public relations' role in organizational decision making. When top management views the function as marginal and outside the main line of business, it remains outside the dominant decision-making coalition. The Excellence Study researchers discovered that CEOs in the top 10 percent of organizations were almost three times more supportive of the public relations function than were CEOs in other organizations. Likewise, top public relations executives in the top 10 percent of organizations in the study rated the dominant coalition as more than three times more supportive than did public relations executives in other organizations.[15](#)

When public relations operates in the realm of programmed decisions, it is seen as part of organizational routine and overhead. When it participates in nonprogrammed decision making, on the other hand, it is seen as playing an important strategic role in achieving organizational goals and contributing to the bottom line. When public relations employs management by objectives (MBO), sometimes referred to as “management by results,” to guide program planning and management, then the focus shifts from producing communications (process) to results and consequences (impact). It also makes public relations part of the management team held accountable for achieving organizational goals.

According to Robert Dilenschneider, former president and CEO of Hill & Knowlton and now chairman of the Dilenschneider Group of New York and Chicago, “seven deadly sins in this business” threaten progress in integrating the function:

1. Overpromising—making commitments for things they know they cannot deliver.
2. Overmarketing—overselling the client on the capabilities or expertise of public relations.
3. Underservicing (sometimes referred to as “bait-and-switch”)—listing senior people as part of the account team but using junior staff to do the

work.

4. Putting the public relations firm's profits ahead of the client's performance and results.
5. Using public relations quick fixes—shortsighted responses to complex problems that require long-lasting solutions. (An example would be yielding to client or management expectations that public relations has the power to fix problems without having to make changes in the organization.)
6. Treating public relations as simply a support function charged with implementing strategies formulated by lawyers, financial officers, and top-line managers.
7. Violating ethical standards, thereby damaging public relations' reputation for ethical conduct and concern for social responsibility.[16](#)

As a management function, public relations is part of an organization's structure and process for adapting to change. Its responsibilities include helping organizations identify, assess, and adjust to their turbulent economic, political, social, and technological environments. In the final analysis, however, as Pacific Gas and Electric's former CEO Richard A. Clarke said, "The only way CEOs can get what they need from their public relations advisers is to have them at the table when the policies, strategies, and programs are being hammered out."[17](#)

The Internal Department

The internal department is the most common organizational structure for public relations. A department may consist of only one person, as in a small community hospital, or have a staff of hundreds, as in a major corporation. A public relations department may be concentrated in the organization's headquarters or scattered among many locations. For example, of the approximately 300 communication and public relations professionals who support the Johnson & Johnson global business, only about 30 are in the

public affairs and corporate communication department at its world headquarters in New Brunswick, New Jersey. The rest are spread across the more than 250 operating companies in 57 companies across three major business segments: consumer health care, pharmaceuticals, and medical devices and diagnostics.¹⁸

Whereas the public relations department's size, role, and place on the organization chart vary from one organization to the next, there generally is one public relations leader on an organization's leadership or management team. (See [Figure 3.2](#) for a typical department organization chart.)

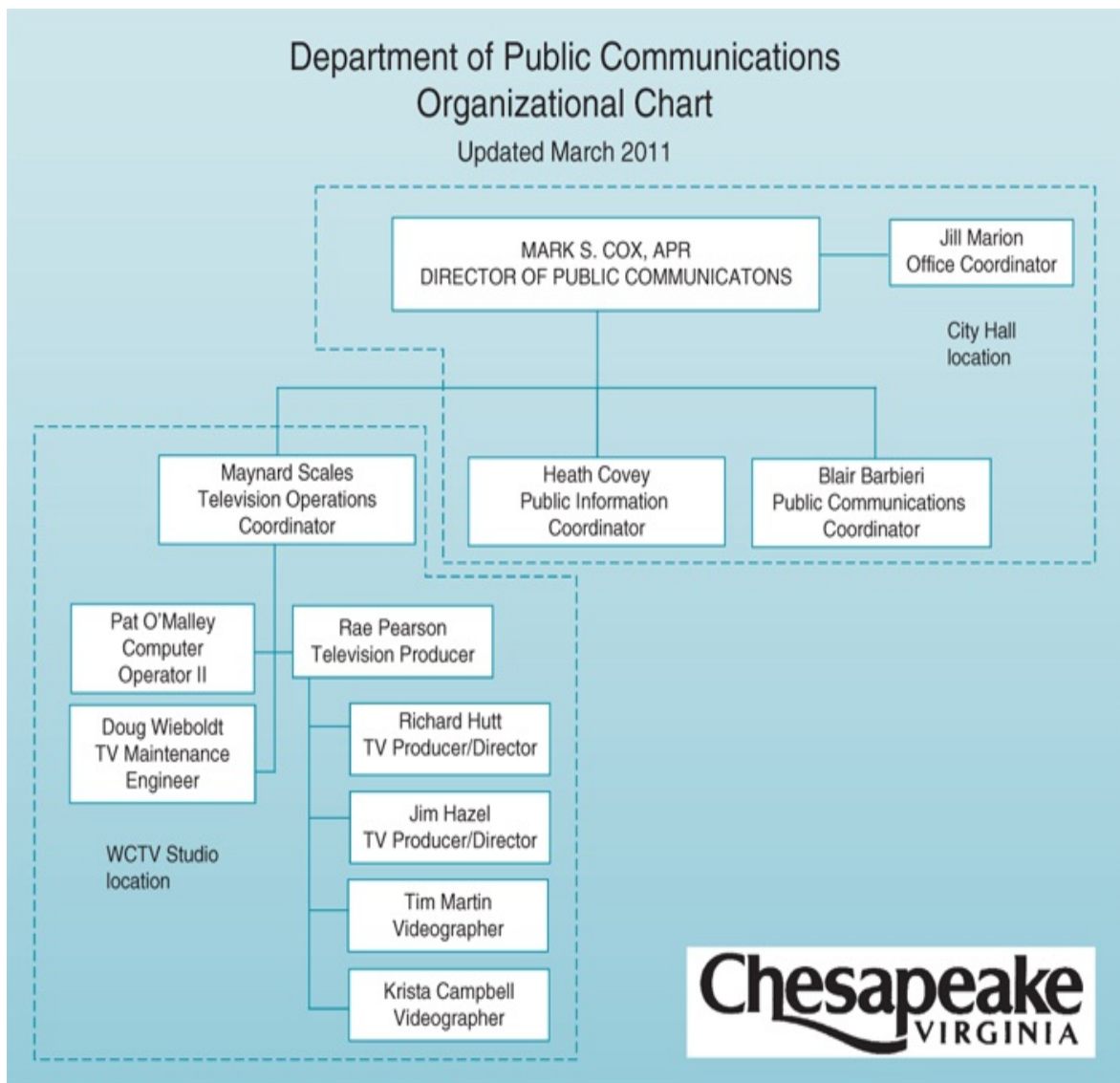


Figure 3.2 Department of Public Communications Department Organization Chart

Courtesy City of Chesapeake, Virginia.

The Department's Advantages

An internal department has at least four factors working in its favor:

1. Team membership
2. Knowledge of the organization
3. Economy to the organization for ongoing programs
4. Availability to associates

Team membership is the department's greatest advantage over outside counsel. In some organizations the top public relations executive's office is next door to the chief executive's office. As an example of the close working relationship, for years the top public relations executive at Eastman Kodak began most workdays by meeting with the CEO. Federated Department Stores moved the public relations function to the 20th floor where other senior management offices are located because "it's a more complicated, complex, interrelated . . . involvement than ever before."¹⁹

Frequent contact between the public relations department and top-line management is the rule rather than the exception. Surveys typically show that at least 60 percent of public relations executives meet with their CEOs at least once each week. Many meet or talk at the beginning of every day. Such

a close working relationship between the public relations department and the CEO builds confidence, trust, and support. It can also position public relations as a key player on the management team. (See [Figure 3.3](#) for an example of a department's mission.)

Knowledge of the organization means an intimate, current knowledge that comes from being an insider. Staff members know the relationships among individuals and departments, and are aware of the undercurrents of influence and internal politics. They can call on key people to make decisions and lend support. They are aware of who can serve as able and articulate spokespersons as opposed to those who do not perform well as representatives to engage stakeholders.

Occasionally a trusted outside counselor is able to acquire such knowledge, but insiders are in a better position to do so and to apply their knowledge on a continuous basis. Because they are part of the organization, internal staff typically can advise, conciliate, and provide services while taking into account intimate details of organizational history, culture, and people.

Economy may occur from typically lower overhead costs and efficient integration in an organization. When the need for public relations is continuous—and in most organizations it is—then a full-time, permanent staff typically is more cost-effective than outside counsel. For example, the marginal costs of an internal department are usually a small portion of overhead costs in a large organization. The outside firm's overhead might be higher than that of an internal department simply because outside firms are typically smaller than the client organizations they serve. As a result, economies of scale are reduced on overhead—such as the costs of facilities, utilities, employee benefits programs, and supplies.

Start-up costs for projects can be less, because internal staff members already have the necessary background and access to managers and files. Routine work, such as daily and weekly news outlets, monthly publications, quarterly and annual reports, and so forth, is efficiently handled by those closest to the sources and other departments in the organization. Efficiency contributes to cost-effectiveness.

Availability of staff practitioners has several advantages. When things go

wrong, practitioners are only a minute away from a face-to-face meeting with the organization's officers. And as deputies, they can be entrusted with delicate matters. For example, if the CEO dies or a senior executive defects to a competitor, top management wants a public relations specialist on the spot who knows the background, understands the dangers of mishandling the news, and has credibility with the news media and other key players.

Availability also means being on call for all other departments, divisions, and operating units. Staff members can be called into meetings on short notice. In organizations where public relations is largely decentralized, the on-site internal staff members are relatively handy for

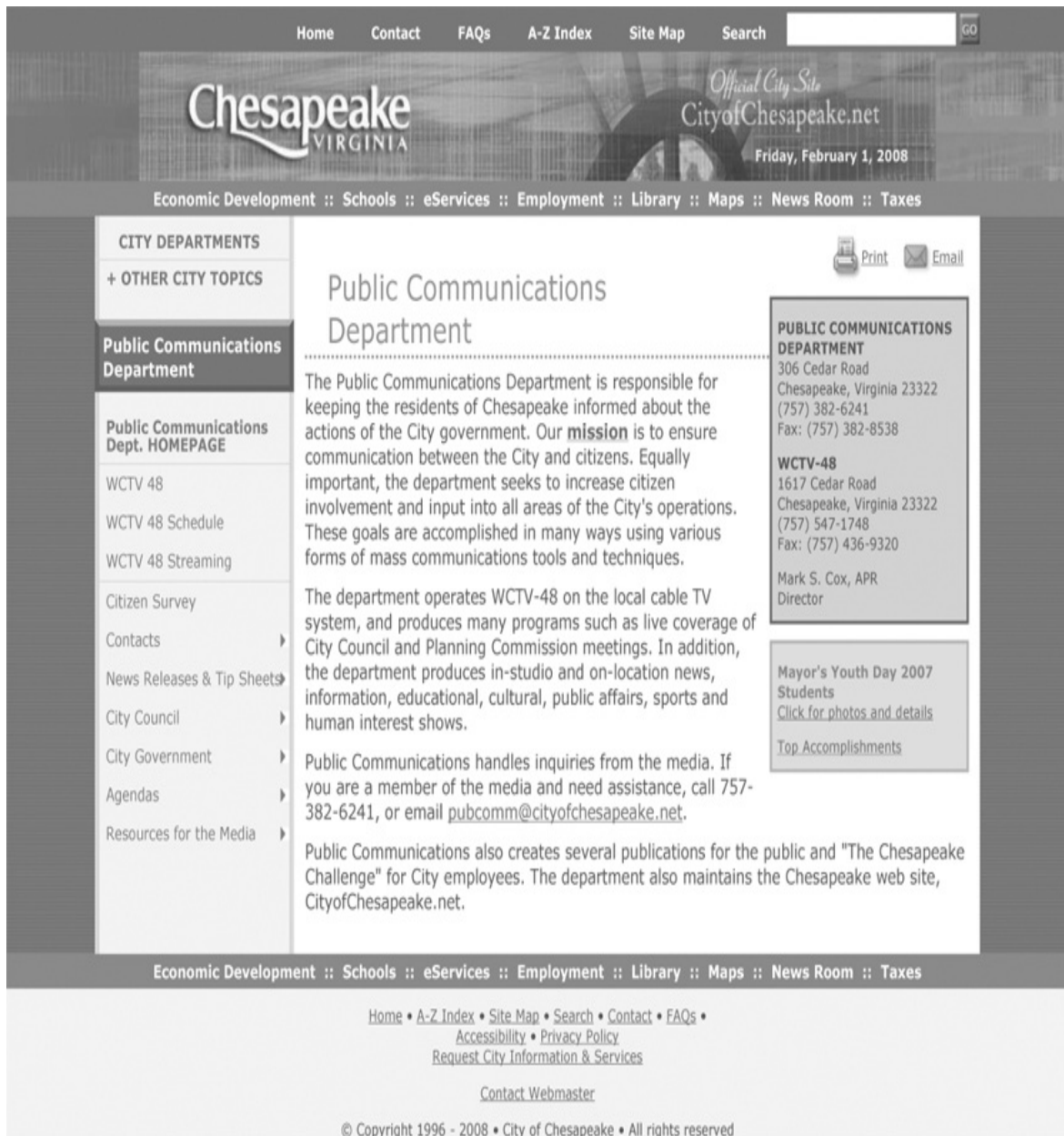


Figure 3.3 Chesapeake, VA, Public Communications Department

Courtesy City of Chesapeake, Virginia.

consultation in each operating unit. In others, a centralized function operates from headquarters much in the fashion of an outside firm, treating operating units and other departments as “clients.” Even in these organizations, however, internal counselors have greater knowledge and stronger relationships with their client colleagues than is typically the case with outside counsel.

The Department’s Disadvantages

Team membership also can become a liability when an internal staff member sacrifices objectivity and perspective in order to be a team player. If people are too loyal, they may be exploited when friendships and collegiality lead to subservience. Availability can cast the function as a catchall if it does not have a clearly defined mission and specified roles.

Loss of objectivity can happen ever so slowly and unwittingly as practitioners are subjected to day-to-day pressure and workplace politics. In supporting and being supported, they can be unduly influenced and compromised by group views, in order to not “rock the boat.” Their ability to offer disinterested and outsider points of view gives way to the subjectivity that does not serve those they were hired to counsel. They lose their ability to do the boundary spanning needed to avoid or solve problems in the organization’s relationships with others. In effect, practitioners run the risk of becoming part of the problem. After all, they work hard to become and stay a member of the management team.

Domination and subservience result when the function becomes co-opted, resulting in a group of yes-men and -women. Being team players and helping others is one thing; being diverted from goals, planning, and strategy to run errands for others is another. Practitioners walk a narrow line between providing professional services that are valuable, helpful, and appreciated and rendering low-level technical support that is easily replaced. Also, practitioners must guard against inaction based on fear of making what they perceive to be a career-threatening move or decision, as that undermines their role as trusted counselor to top management.

Confused mission and roles can result from being readily available. Practitioners find themselves serving as stand-ins for top executives who make commitments but do not or cannot follow through themselves. For example, a CEO accepts an invitation to serve on a community charitable organization board but finds it difficult to attend the meetings. The practitioner gets a call to attend in the CEO's place. One could argue this indicates that the CEO trusts the public relations officer to effectively represent the organization. External constituencies are seldom pleased, however, to have a public relations representative instead of the CEO. They accept the switch in order to maintain the organization's support and permission to use the CEO's name on the letterhead.

The dilemma of a state bar association's public relations director illustrates confusion about mission and roles. Among many "miscellaneous duties," he was put in charge of the housekeeping staff and was directed to deal with the homeless population who entered the main reception area to use restroom facilities and to seek refuge from the cold and rain. How did the practitioner get such duties? Being the only nonlawyer at the director level probably did not help, but a vague and open-ended job description made the function vulnerable. The public relations director also was the most available, because other directors were often out of the office conducting programs and providing direct services to members. It became a vicious cycle: The more miscellaneous assignments the director accumulated, the less time he had for the association's public relations efforts and publications. Not surprisingly, the executive director eventually questioned the public relations director's effectiveness and criticized him for missing deadlines.

Department Titles

Titles and positions of departments vary greatly, but across all organizations, "public relations" remains the most commonly used title. "Public information" remains a frequently used title in nonprofit organizations and government agencies. Military branches use "public affairs" almost exclusively. Many corporations use "corporate relations," "corporate communications," or "communications," with about one in ten using "public affairs." Among Fortune 500 companies, however, only about one in five use

“public relations” titles (alone or in combination with other names).

There is no compelling reason to conclude that some other title will replace “public relations.” To the contrary, “public relations” has survived almost a century despite the many attempts by practitioners themselves to find an alternative, despite the occasional taint of malpractice by individual practitioners, and despite public relations bashing by the media. Media and publics worldwide use the term to describe this function in organizations. Switching labels does not change more than 100 years of history.

Reporting Relationships

Reporting relationships, along with titles, are indicated in organization charts and job descriptions. These lay the groundwork for division and specialization of work, communication up and down the chain of command, and acceptance of various functions throughout the organization.

More significant than the department’s title, however, is the top public relations executive’s place on the organizational chart and reporting relationship to the CEO. Too often, public relations is not included in the CEO’s decision-making circle, the executive committee—sometimes referred to as “the C-suite.” In a corporation, for example, that group typically brings together the CEO, the president (if someone other than the CEO), and the heads of manufacturing, finance, marketing, engineering, research and development (R&D), and legal. If public relations is not included, then the potential impact of decisions on important stakeholders and required communication strategy may not be part of the discussion when decisions are made.²⁰ Even if not included in the decision circle meetings, however, the top public relations executive typically reports directly to the CEO (see [Figure 3.4](#)).

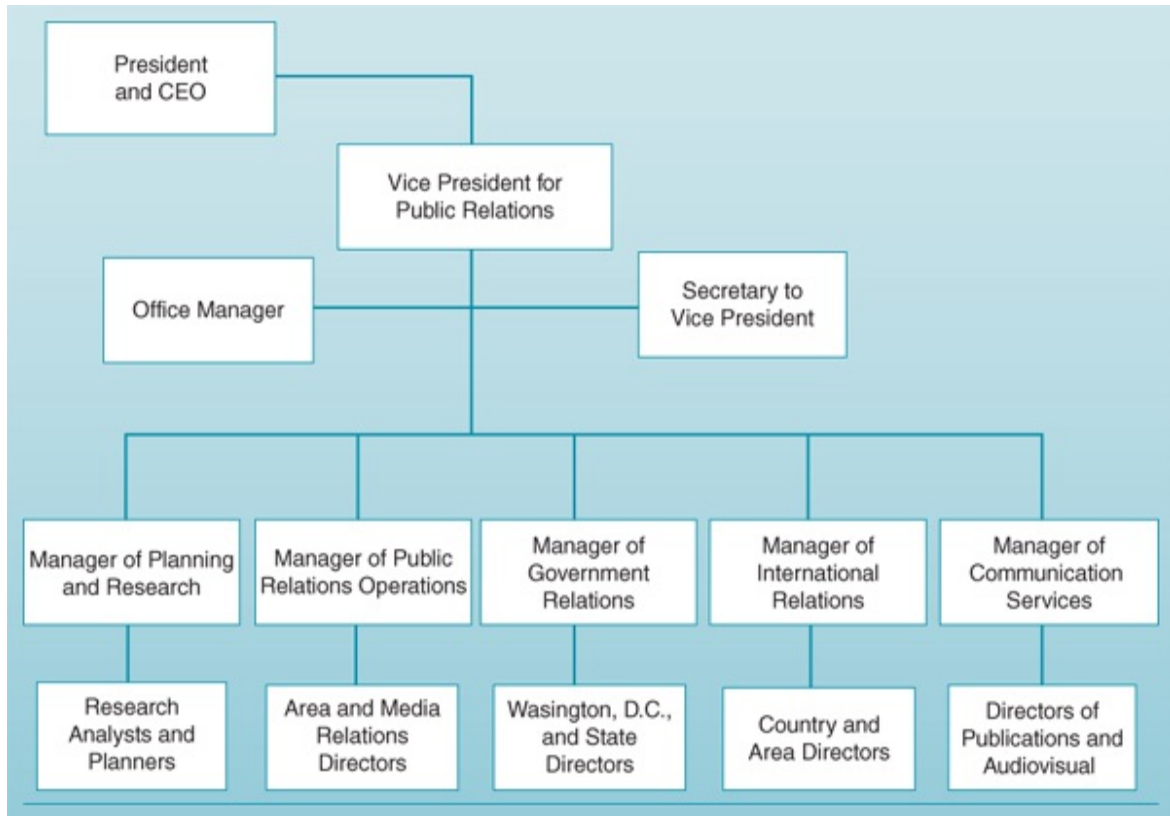


Figure 3.4 Corporate Public Relations Department

Working with other Departments

Public relations staff typically work most closely with the marketing and finance units. They also collaborate with the human resources, industrial or employee relations, and legal departments. These functions overlap with public relations in varying degrees, occasionally leading to unavoidable confusion or even outright conflict over their respective roles. To achieve organizational goals, however, each function needs the support and cooperation of the others.

Marketing

As discussed in [Chapter 1](#), public relations is most often confused with marketing. These two major communication and outreach functions must work in harmony in dealing with an organization's many publics—sometimes referred to as “integrated communication.” Conflict can arise over which function should be responsible for institutional advertising and product publicity. Confusion results if marketing specialists define “public relations” as simply publicity or media relations, or even more mistakenly, as “journalism.” Some think that any goal-driven strategic plan is “marketing” and define public relations as simply media relations.

Some hold the mistaken notion that advertising is the sole province of marketing. Advertising designed to establish, change, or maintain relationships with key publics other than customers (usually by influencing public opinion) should, by its objectives and strategic nature, be implemented as part of public relations strategy. Advertisements addressing public policy issues, corporate reputation, financial news, or special events may require the advertising department's expertise to produce and place. The outcomes sought by such advertising, however, have more to do with public relations than with selling goods or services—marketing.

Conversely, publicity about products and services designed to increase sales is clearly directed to achieving marketing outcomes. Because public relations staff members are typically more skilled at writing and placing publicity, they often are enlisted to help publicize new products, product changes, price changes, product recalls, and special promotional activities as part of the marketing effort. For example, Microsoft uses national publicity efforts, along with advertising, to help introduce each edition of Windows. Even though it may have had an impact on publics other than customers—such as investors, competitors, and government regulators—the publicity was designed primarily to support the marketing effort.

Advertising and publicity produced by either public relations or marketing should be coordinated with the other's communications. For example, public relations should not be communicating about the company's commitment to

protecting the environment and reducing the company's carbon footprint when marketing is advertising a nationwide sale of "non-green" products sold in nonbiodegradable packaging. The growth of articulate protest and consumer groups, global access to the Internet, investigative and consumer reporting, and government scrutiny all make cooperation between public relations and marketing essential.

Competition, even conflict, between these two functions is understandable. The two functions compete for recognition, access to top management, and budgets. For example, a public relations author published an article subtitled "How to Steal Budget from Those Folks in Advertising," suggesting several levels of confusion. Historically, the two have been separate departments, with public relations in a traditional staff relationship to the chief executive officer and marketing in the line management chain of command. That is changing, however.

Software company Vocus surveyed 966 public relations and marketing practitioners in 2010 to learn about the relationship between the two functions. Their findings show that almost 80 percent of the heads of public relations and marketing now report to the same executive, who is charged with coordinating their efforts. Vocus researchers concluded that formal coordination does not necessarily mean actual integration or the absence of "functional silos," however:

Despite a significant step forward in aligning organizational structures—turf battles still exist. In fact, the battle over turf was by far cited as the largest barrier to integrated communications, cited by 34%. Budget shortcomings were next, with 20%, and organizational culture and time both followed next with 13% respectively.[21](#)

Former Hill & Knowlton USA chairman MaryLee Sachs says that new organizational structures integrating public relations and marketing under one head are working in some organizations. She describes a new "modus operandi" for coordinating the public relations function with other communication functions, including marketing, under a "chief marketing officer" (CMO):

Clearly the time has come for PR to shine with a key role in marketing

and brand building. Never before has the convergence between marketing and PR been more acute, driven mainly by the immediacy of the Information Age, the proliferation of social platforms, and the resulting consumer democracy which, in turn lends added weight to the importance of brand reputation.[22](#)

Eight of the ten CMOs featured in her book, however, came from public relations and communication backgrounds, not marketing—the CMOs at International Business Machines (IBM), General Electric Company (GE), Intuit, VisitBritain, Eastman Kodak Company, PAC-12, Adobe Systems, and Nissan Motor Company. As IBM’s former vice president of corporate communications and now CMO Jon Iwata explained:

The corporate communications job is about having an understanding that we have to think about all of the audiences and constituents that matter to us or that we matter to them. So you don’t do anything without thinking about how it will be understood or received by the different audiences—including media, management, staff, retirees, unions, communities, suppliers, customers, and so on. This is second nature, but not to marketers.[23](#)

The Vocus researchers concluded, “at least from a leadership standpoint, the lines between marketing and PR are blurring—that it’s harder to discern where one discipline begins and ends. In fact, we’d go so far as to say the days of ‘silos’ are waning.”[24](#) Maybe the real conclusion from their findings is that the new title of the integrated function should be “Chief Relationships Office” (CRO), not “Chief Marketing Officer” (CMO).

Legal Counsel

The conflict between public relations and legal staffs is an old one. In the days of the muckrakers, corporate executives turned first to their lawyers to fix things. Some still do. One of the founders of public relations, Ivy Lee, felt strongly about this in 1925:

I have seen more situations which the public ought to understand and

which the public would sympathize with, spoiled by the intervention of the lawyer than in any other way. Whenever a lawyer starts to talk to the public, he shuts out the light.[25](#)

Traditionally, legal and public relations counselors approach situations from different perspectives. Lawyers tend to favor “no comment,” pointing out that what you say may come back to haunt you (be used as evidence in court) and reminding that you are not legally obliged to say anything. Lawyers are called on when conflict and discord dominate an organization’s relationships and stakeholders turn to the courts for redress. Lawyers are accustomed to getting extensions, to protracting the process in private, and to delaying responses as long as possible.

Public relations practitioners, on the other hand, espouse the virtues of transparency and openness, of sharing information as soon as possible, of cooperating with the media, and of responding to people’s claims to a right to know. Public relations practitioners work to build and maintain mutuality and harmony in relationships. Public relations specialists routinely meet deadlines, recognize media time constraints as real, and respond immediately to media requests.

Former Chase Manhattan Bank public relations executive and now-textbook author Fraser Seitel contrasts the approaches of public relations and legal counselors:

A PR professional must never lie on behalf of a client. Nor should a PR person represent a client that he or she believes to be unethical, immoral or worse.

An attorney, by contrast, has no such restrictions. A lawyer’s job is to represent his client’s position under the rules of the adversary system and do all he can to achieve a result advantageous for the client. A lawyer, therefore, is principally concerned that his client received the best possible representation, regardless of whether he is right or wrong, honest or dishonest, guilty or not.[26](#)

Cooperation between these two functions can protect the organization legally while at the same time serving the public interest, as when Sentry Insurance

led the way in the insurance industry by rewriting policies and literature in plain English. The new policy descriptions meet the test of legal counsel and greatly increase information value to policyholders and prospective customers.

Cooperation also is critical during labor contract negotiations, product recalls, layoffs or other sensitive personnel matters, consumer protests or boycotts, and other situations that could lead to litigation. In such cases, “litigation public relations” involves “managing the communications process during the course of any legal dispute or adjudicatory proceeding so as to affect the outcome or its impact on the client’s overall reputation.”²⁷ Additionally, legal and public relations counsel must be coordinated on such matters as communications explaining benefits to employees, the legality of advertising or publicity claims, plant security, and disclosure of financial information.²⁸

Examples from various settings illustrate the need: Universities defend themselves both in the courts of justice and public opinion when fraternity hazing deaths, campus shootings, date rapes, or discrimination charges in tenure decisions become news. The presidents of Stanford, MIT, and other major universities called in both lawyers and public relations specialists when excessive overhead charges on federally funded research projects made headline news.

Increasingly, legal and public relations specialists collaborate when counseling CEOs and to coordinate their responses in the courts of law and public opinion. Additionally, about 10 percent of CEOs have law degrees.²⁹ But, as one lawyer advised fellow legal counselors, “Make sure you are the lawyer and that public relations is handled by a public relations professional.”

Human Resources

Potential overlap between public relations and human resources occurs, and questions arise about their respective roles (1) when developing employee relations plans during downsizing (read “layoffs”), crises, reorganization, mergers, and acquisitions; (2) when planning and implementing community relations efforts involve employee participation; and (3) when programs

directed to employees require public relations thinking and skills more than those from the human resources perspective and skill set. Compromise comes when practitioners and human resource specialists realize that internal relationships inevitably reverberate externally.

Employee communications (not the whole of employee relations) is the most frequent source of conflict and requires the greatest cooperation between these two functions. For example, how they address concerns about employee loyalty and mobility, quality-of-life and work-life balance, health care and security, and employee education and training impact the bottom line. Recognizing that the workforce has changed and continues to change, many organizations have increased efforts to develop their major resource, people.

Change is now probably the only corporate constant. And if employees are expected to go along with the new programs, who better to collaborate and strategize about workforce changes than human resources and public relations?[30](#)

Strategic management of human resources, organizational culture, and organizational change requires close cooperation and collaboration between public relations and human resources specialists. Recognizing this need, chocolate maker Hershey Company named Charlene Binder senior vice president and “chief people officer” to oversee both public relations and human resources. Absent such coordination, some organizations created new units to conceive and implement internal and external communication strategy to support organizational restructuring and cultural change.

Information Technology

Advances in communication technology drive public relations practitioners to consult with their colleagues in information technology—the “IT” department. All too often, however, top managers call on the IT department to set up and manage the organization’s email, messaging, Internet conferencing, websites, and social media systems separate from public relations. Under this arrangement, new technology platforms may not be part of the larger public relations strategy. This complicates efforts to take the

“one voice” approach in public statements, branding, and other public relations program components. To confuse the issue further, some IT department heads have job titles such as “chief information officer.”

Managing social media efforts are particularly troublesome. Researchers in one study concluded that “technology personnel will fail to develop adequate social media initiatives due to an inability to shift from ‘providing a platform to delivering a solution.’”³¹ As one author concluded: “Remember this: Tech people are tech people for a reason.”³² That statement may be a bit harsh, but it makes the point that the tech staff typically pay more attention to the hardware and software than to the message strategy and intended outcomes. Public relations staff, on the other hand, must have an intimate understanding of stakeholder publics’ needs, concerns, and interests that goes well beyond the technology.

In addition, public relations practitioners must be able to respond immediately and nimbly in day-to-day media relations and crisis communication. Time is not something enjoyed by public relations when the media call or crises threaten the organization’s very survival. IT staff, by training and primary responsibility, work in a more isolated environment and at a slower pace. They have the luxury of time for researching, testing, and troubleshooting before recommending major investments in costly technology upgrades.

At the same time, few public relations staff have the technical background and skill necessary to understand and develop rapidly evolving communication technologies. However, public relations people, not IT staff, were among the first to see value in social media, because they thought it might be a useful way to communicate with journalists.³³

Finally, public relations collaborates and cooperates with other departments to help avoid or solve problems. So does IT. For example, their computer systems help departments of finance, manufacturing, marketing, human relations, distribution, and so on do their jobs. IT departments work with other departments—including public relations—in a collaborative way, adapting their technology to meet the specific needs of each. Seldom, if ever, can either the public relations department or the IT department solve problems on its own. After all, both are staff functions, not line management.

Business Intelligence

Another important intraorganizational relationship emerged during the last ten years—business intelligence. Many businesses now do “data mining” and other forms of sophisticated environmental and competitive scanning and analysis. A “chief performance officer” (CPO) typically heads the unit and sits at the table with the CEO; CFO; COO; CMO; and chief IT, legal, human resources, and public relations officers. The primary duty of the CPO is to monitor, analyze, and make recommendations to improve organizational performance.

Key performance indicators (KPIs) serve to benchmark and track progress on a variety of process and outcome indicators. For example, reducing employee turnover across an organization can reduce costs significantly . . . and requires that all units and managers improve performance that leads to the desired outcomes. Clearly, human resources and the employee communication component of public relations will play important roles in the effort. Thus, all departments must be on board with the KPIs used to guide the effort and to document progress and to make strategic course corrections when needed.

Integrating the performance monitoring unit is still a work in progress. Surely, however, public relations will work closely with the CPO to identify stakeholders, determine relationship indicators, and communicate the KPIs continuously so all know when their efforts are working or failing. As the CEO of the Partnership for Public Service observed after President Barack Obama appointed the first federal CPO: “Old information reveals how well an agency did. Managers need up-to-the-minute data to help improve how they are going to do.”³⁴

The Outside Counseling Firm

Beginning in the 1980s, many “public relations agencies” changed their titles to “public relations firms.” The change reflects an increased emphasis on counseling and strategic planning services, viewed as more professional than the communication tactics produced by press agents and publicists. Another

reason for the switch is to position the firm as something different from advertising agencies that work on commissions and other low-cost vendors of communication services. Rather, most in the field prefer to be seen as comparable to law firms, management consulting firms, certified public accounting firms, architectural firms, and consulting engineering firms. However, some still refer to their “agency” in unguarded moments and proudly announce that a client has chosen their firm as “agency of record” (AOR).

Public Relations Firms

Public relations counseling firms range widely in size and scope. O’Dwyer’s Directory of Public Relations Firms lists more than 1,700 firms by location and specialty in the United States and abroad, cross-indexed with more than 7,000 clients. New York and London lead all cities in the number of firms, followed closely by Chicago and Washington, D.C.

The world’s largest firm, New York-based Weber Shandwick, has 81 wholly owned offices (19 in the United States) and another 40 affiliate firms in 74 countries and (<http://www.webershandwick.com/>). St. Louis-based Fleischman Hillard has 84 offices, about equally divided between the United States and abroad (<http://fleishmanhillard.com/>). Hill+Knowlton Strategies, headquartered in New York, has 82 offices (17 U.S.) in 44 countries (<http://www.hkstrategies.com/>). Burson-Marsteller’s (New York) 68 wholly owned offices (13 U.S.), when combined with 71 affiliate firms, give the firm a presence in 96 cities across six continents (http://www.burson-marsteller.com/About_Us/). Independently owned Edelman Public Relations has 63 offices (15 U.S.) and more than 4,000 employees in offices worldwide, with coheadquarters in Chicago and New York (http://www.edelman.com/about_us/welcome/). New York-based Ketchum (including Ketchum Pleon Europe) has 58 offices (25 U.S.) and 56 affiliates operating in 69 countries (<http://www.ketchum.com/>).³⁵

In contrast, worldwide there are uncounted thousands working as independent self-employed counselors or consultants. Many work as “_____ and Associates,” meaning, “If I can’t handle the project myself, I know other

practitioners I can bring in to assist.” As the global economic crisis forced both corporations and government agencies to downsize, many internal staff became “solo” or “sole” practitioners. Many became outside vendors to the very organizations that laid them off.

With the growing recognition of the global economy and expansion of the European Union, the public relations capital has shifted from New York to London. For example, Hill+Knowlton’s London office is bigger than its New York headquarters in both size and billings. Business in Europe increased dramatically with the introduction of a common currency (the euro) and removal of many international barriers to commerce. In the meantime, the business boom in China and much of Asia, Brazil, and India is drawing global firms and inspiring local start-ups. For example, Hill+Knowlton now employs more than 120 in its four China offices.

Phone directories in every major city list firms under “Public Relations” and “Publicity.” For example, the London yellow pages directory contains listings under “Public Relations Consultancies” (outside the United States, “consultancy” is typically used instead of “firm” or “agency”) and “Publicity Consultants.”

Networks of independent firms offer yet another approach when clients need global reach but do not want to be confined to a single brand firm. For example, as software firm Mindset’s contract with a large global public relations firm was about to end, management explored options. Instead of retaining the firm, management chose Palo Alto, California-based GlobalFluency (GF), a network of 70 offices operating in 40 countries. Mindset cut its public relations costs by 40 percent without cutting back on programming. When working on GF contracts, member firms operate under the GF name, not their own names. Other large networks include Worldcom, the largest with 105 member firms in 85 cities worldwide; Pinnacle Worldwide, with 50 firms covering 44 countries; and IPREX, with 67 “partner” firms with 98 offices worldwide.³⁶ Whatever the approach, public relations firms now serve clients with new approaches to communication and counsel in the global village.

Standards of practice for public relations firms are more closely monitored and enforced in Europe than in the United States and Asia. For example,

more than 160 consultancies belong to the United Kingdom's Public Relations Consultants Association (PRCA), founded in 1969 (www.prca.org.uk). In 2009, membership expanded to include more than 30 in-house departments representing major corporate and public sector organizations. All PRCA member organizations—not individual practitioners—must attain and maintain Consultancy Management Standard (CMS) accreditation, for which each member undergoes formal review on eight criteria every two years.

The trade association requires member consultancies to follow specific guidelines for dealing with the media, clients, and competitors; and to enforce the Professional Charter and Codes of Conduct. Strict enforcement forced then-Ogilvy Adams & Rinehart to withdraw from PRCA when the firm refused to list all of its clients in the association's confidential "Annual Register" as required in the PRCA Professional Charter.

PRCA belongs to the International Communications Consultancy Organisation (ICCO), which represents public relations consultancies around the globe. ICCO members are the 28 national associations that represent more than 1,400 individual firms or consultancies in Africa, the Americas, Asia, Australia, and Europe. The goals are to raise standards, address ethical issues, standardize practice, and share knowledge. ICCO promotes standards of professional practice in consultancies—The Stockholm Charter—and guidelines for media relations—Charter on Media Transparency. ICCO also promotes the quality accreditation developed by PRCA—the Consultancy Management Standard—which has been adopted by more than 235 consultancies worldwide. (Go to <http://iccopr.com/about-us/Aboutus.aspx> for more about ICCO and links to documents listed in this paragraph.)

The first such association of firms in the United States was formed in 1998 after 38 founding firms, representing most of the major national and international firms, contributed \$200,000 to establish the American Association of Public Relations Firms (AAPRF). Renamed the Council of Public Relations Firms (CPRF), it now serves more than 100 members with education, standards of practice, and a code of ethics. Its mission is "To advance the business of public relations firms by building the market and firms' value as strategic business partners." CPRF is a member of the ICCO

and subscribes to its charters and standards (www.prfirms.org).

Specialization

Most firms claim to be “full-service” firms, but some carve out specialized client–service market niches. Although there are many specialties, the most dramatic growth has occurred in Washington, D.C., firms that specialize in government relations—lobbying, public affairs, and legislative affairs. Clients retain these firms primarily to participate in the public policy process and to have influence on those who formulate and implement public policy.

Client lists at many such firms also include foreign governments and foreign corporations who follow developments in the U.S. capital and want their points of view to be considered in the White House, Congress, or federal agencies. The service can be nothing more than putting out news releases about a visiting dignitary or providing updates on legislation of interest to a foreign client. Regardless of the assignment, individuals who represent foreign interests must register with the U.S. Department of Justice, as required under the Foreign Agents Registration Act of 1938 (see [Chapter 6](#)). Globalization and increased international commerce of all kinds suggest that this will continue as a growth area for public relations firms specializing in government relations.

Unfortunately, the “Beltway Set” and “K Street” (Washington, D.C.) also include influence peddling operations that rise and fall with administrations and as the government–private revolving door produces more and more insiders with connections with their former government employers. Commenting on the antics of those who turned government service into profitable public relations and lobbying practices, one editorial writer asked, “Has the murky ‘profession’ of public relations turned to sleaze?” These exceptions aside, there remains a large and growing need for legitimate public relations counsel on legislative affairs and lobbying in the nation’s capital, as well as in every state capital and major city.

Other specialties include agriculture, financial public relations and investor relations, health care, high tech, sports, and travel and tourism, to name only

a few. For example, Morgan & Myers, with offices in Waukesha, Wisconsin, and Waterloo, Iowa, serves clients in agriculture and food production. Their clients have included the Illinois Soybean Association, Monsanto, National Milk Producers Federation, and Pfizer Animal Health. Sloane & Company (New York), specializing in investor relations, serves clients such as AT&T, Bass Pro Shops, Gaylord Entertainment, and TiVo, Inc. The client list at health care specialist Cooney/Waters (New York) includes vaccine producer sanofi-pasteur, National Foundation for Infectious Diseases and global biopharmaceutical company UCB (see [Figure 3.5](#)). In the entertainment capital, Los Angeles, California, Bender/Helper Impact serves clients such as 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, DreamWorks Home Entertainment, Netflix, and Showtime Entertainment.

In addition to industry specialization, a few firms provide specialized services to help clients target particular communities. For example, when retailer Eddie Bauer was threatened with a national boycott after a security guard's questionable accusation that a black customer had shoplifted was nationally publicized, the company retained the black- and woman-owned firm Robinson Associates, LLC (Washington, D.C.) for counsel on crisis media relations and community relations (<http://www.robinsonassociatesllc.com/>).

Reasons for Retaining Outside Counsel

The late Chester Burger, longtime consultant to the public relations industry, suggested six reasons why organizations retain firms.

1. Management has not previously conducted a formal public relations program and lacks experience in organizing one.
2. Headquarters may be located far from communications and financial centers.
3. The firm has a wide range of up-to-date contacts.

4. An outside firm can provide the services of experienced executives and creative specialists who would be unwilling to move to other cities or whose salaries a single organization could not afford.
5. An organization with its own public relations department may need highly specialized services that it cannot afford or does not need on a full-time, continuous basis.
6. Crucial policy matters require the independent judgment of an outsider.

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Figure 3.5 Cooney/Waters “Take a Fresh Look” Advertisement (Used with permission).

Courtesy Cooney/Waters Group, New York, NY.

Such reasoning prompted Sprint Nextel Corporation to retain the Weber Merritt firm (Alexandria, Virginia) to mobilize “grassroots and grasstops” resistance to AT&T’s \$39 billion takeover of T-Mobile USA. (Sprint already retained APCO Worldwide and Abernathy MacGregor Group for other public relations work.) Weber Merritt claims to have the “largest and most prolific national network of state and local public affairs specialists and political operatives.” The firm’s website boasts about one grassroots campaign to oppose legislation:

Utilizing our extensive national network of political field operatives, we developed and implemented an opinion leader letter-writing campaign utilizing constituents in the home districts of relevant Congressional Members to influence their legislator. Over a three-month period, Weber

Merritt activated a constituency network and generated over 300 letters from prominent local opinion makers to targeted Congressional Members.³⁷

Clearly, even a large organization would not invest what it takes to build and maintain such a national network for an occasional need. A firm, on the other hand, can spread the cost and effort over many clients by offering specialized services not readily available in internal departments.

Client–Firm Relationships

Sometimes counseling firms contact clients they think need the firm's help. More commonly, clients call counseling firms (see [Figure 3.6](#) for how they select a firm). For instance, an oil company faces increased government regulation of offshore drilling, a long-planned

 <p>Competence and reputation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Years in business • Size—people and billings • Full service—specialties • Reach—local, regional, national, international • Growth pattern/financial stability • Types of accounts • Experience with accounts similar to yours—any conflicts • Samples of work • Sample list of suppliers used 	 <p>Staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List and qualifications of staff—full time, project clients, freelance/consultants • Names of several former employees • Staff to be assigned to your account—qualifications and longevity with firm • Percent of their time to be devoted to your account—other accounts they will handle • Staff or personnel backup available • Staff turnover in the past two years
 <p>Clients</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing client list • Past clients • Average number of clients during past three years—retainer clients, project clients • Oldest clients and length of service • Average length of client–firm relationships • Clients lost in last year 	 <p>Results and measurement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does firm understand your objectives/needs? • How will progress be reported? • How will results be measured? • What will it cost—billing process, hourly rate, expenses billed, approval process?

Figure 3.6 Checklist for Selecting a Firm

Courtesy the late Harland W. Warner and Public Relations Journal.

enterprise in which the company has invested millions of dollars. However, plans are on hold because of opposition to exploration by environmental groups, investor concern that stock value will drop because of unfavorable reports in the business press, and public skepticism that the oil company will

protect fragile ocean ecosystems. All this is framed by memories of the BP Deepwater Horizon spill of almost 5 million barrels of oil into the Gulf of Mexico. The internal department convinces the chairman and CEO that it is time to seek the best outside help available to help design and manage a strategic plan to address these public relations problems. Unfortunately, too often it takes an oil spill, stock sell-off, or some other crisis to get top management's attention.

Client–firm relationships often begin with an emergency, as was the case when Arizona Economic Council officials called on then-Hill & Knowlton. After Arizona voters defeated a ballot initiative establishing a state holiday honoring Martin Luther King Jr., the National Football League announced that it would move the Super Bowl game from Tempe, Arizona. In such emergencies, counsel provides advice and helps the client manage the crisis. Depending on the outcome, the firm may be retained on a long-term basis to prevent such crises in the future. In the Arizona situation, however, the Super Bowl game was moved to the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, and Hill & Knowlton lost the Arizona Economic Council as a client. (Arizona did host the 2008 Super Bowl and will host the 2015 Super Bowl.)

Under more typical circumstances, a counseling firm begins its service after being invited to present a proposal. It begins by researching the client's problem situation and its relationships with the publics affected by or involved in the situation. Called a "public relations audit," this initial exploration can take several days or even weeks. The counsel then arranges to make a presentation—"new business pitch"—outlining the following:

1. Research findings and situation analysis of the problem or opportunity
2. Threats and gains to the organization, given various courses of action or nonaction
3. Immediate action and communication responses, if needed to meet a crisis
4. Overall strategy and program goals, as well as objectives for various publics

5. Highlights of the communication and action program for achieving the goals and objectives
6. Evaluation research plan for monitoring the program and assessing impact
7. Staffing, budget, and timetable

Typically, competing firms make presentations (see [Figure 3.7](#)), and one is selected on the basis of its demonstrated capabilities and the presentation. Once retained, the counselor usually functions in one of three ways:

1. Provides advice and strategic plan, leaving execution to the client's internal staff
2. Provides advice and works with the client's staff to execute the program
3. Provides advice and undertakes full execution of the program

Occasionally, client–firm relationships take a turn the client does not anticipate. To get the business (win the account), usually a team of experienced professionals makes the new business pitch. Client staff is impressed by the talent and depth of experience that they assume will be devoted to their problem. In some instances, however, that is the last time they see some members of the team that made the pitch. Instead, the account is assigned to account coordinators and assistant account executives who do not have the same range of experience as the new business development team. Critics justifiably refer to this practice as “bait-and-switch.” The firm's senior executives show up just often enough to reassure the client, but in fact junior staff do the work. Firms employing such a tactic risk losing clients.

Clients occasionally call for a review of the firm's work or even reopen the selection process by requesting proposals from competing firms. A review may simply be a cover for having already decided to change firms. To soften the blow, the client announces that the incumbent firm made the “short list” of finalists before another firm gets the account. In

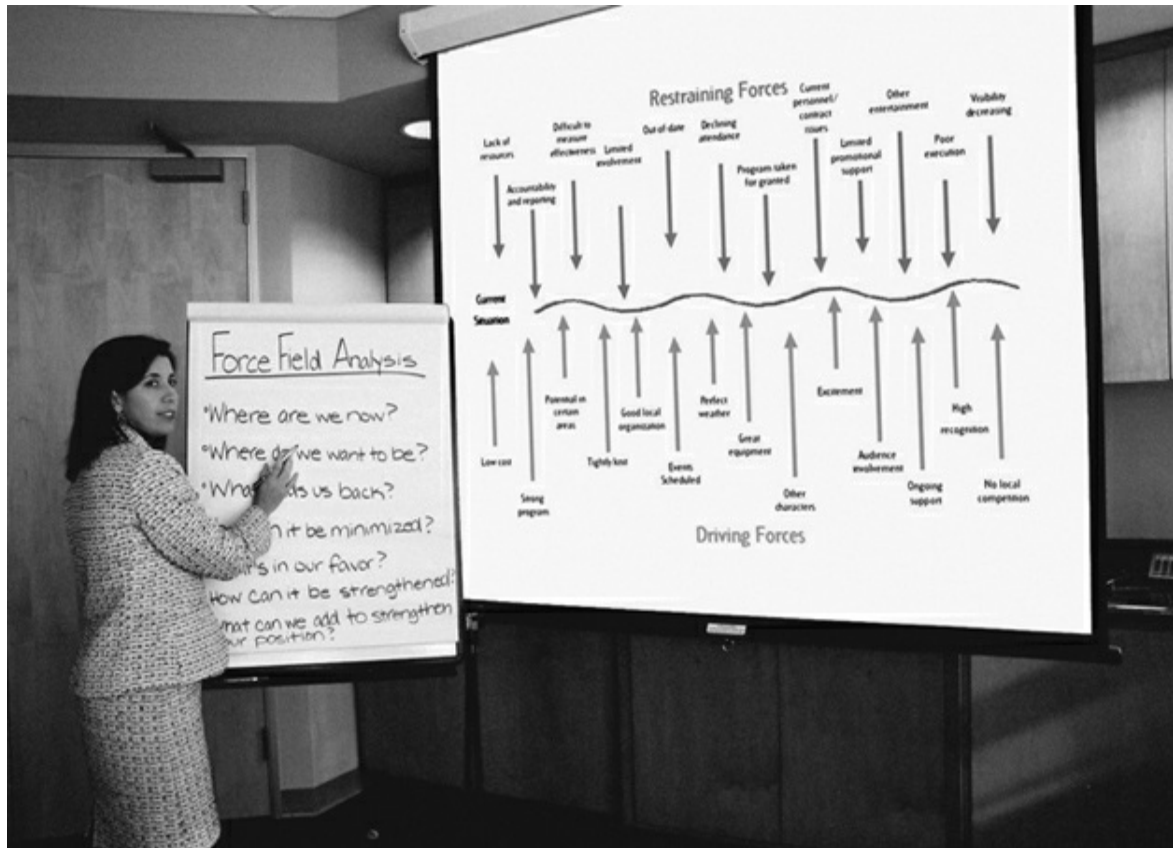


Figure 3.7 Counselor's Presentation

Courtesy Mary Correia-Moreno, Vice President and COO, Nuffer,Smith, Tucker, Inc., San Diego.

some cases, clients call for reviews and entertain proposals from competing firms simply to remind the incumbent firm that the client's business should not be taken for granted or given anything less than prime attention.

Some counselors suggest yet another reason why some clients conduct reviews and call for proposals: to get new ideas—free. The suspicion is that there is no real intention to replace the incumbent firm or to award the business to a firm. The published request for proposals (RFP) or the invitation to selected firms represents an unethical search for new ideas

without having to pay for the counsel. Consequently, some firms will not do speculative pitches unless the client signs an agreement stating that the “prospective client will not use or disclose the creative work or ideas presented unless and until a mutually agreeable form of compensation is worked out.”³⁸ Some firms require prospective clients to pay a fee to cover the cost of preparing the presentation. Critics of the RFP selection process say that quality is often sacrificed when price considerations lead to choosing the low bidder.

For the most part, however, trust and respect characterize many client–firm relationships that are built on a foundation of cooperation, collaboration, and collegiality developed while working together through both the worst and best of times.

Counselors’ Advantages

Most large corporations retain external counsel—called the “Agency of Record”—at corporate headquarters. They also hire national, regional, and local counseling firms to supplement corporatewide efforts and to handle problems and issues specific to various locales. In the last decade, a wide range of organizations, including government agencies and nonprofits, have cut in-house staff and increased use of outside firms. There are several advantages to having outside counsel.

Flexibility of talents and skills, according to outside counselors, is their greatest advantage over internal staffing. Counseling firms with large staffs emphasize the variety of their personnel and operations available to reinforce and upgrade a client’s internal staff. In their offices, or in their on-call network, are skilled researchers, artists, models, media specialists, editors, feature writers, media coaches, talk show experts, photographers, videographers, and legislative experts. A client can request a highly technical and specialized service, and an account executive can attend to the need immediately.

Objectivity, relatively untrammelled by the politics within an organization, ranks second. In some situations, objective and disinterested counsel is the

primary reason for retaining outside counsel. Internal staff often seek an outsiders' perspective and feedback, free of internal relationships, history, and power bases.

Range of prior experience is third. In the course of a year, counselors work on many different problems for several different clients. In effect, a public relations firm is a repository of living case histories. Each project adds to its fund of knowledge. The counselor approaches each situation bolstered by experience with similar situations and knowledge of the success or failure from previous encounters in various organizations and problem situations.

Geographical scope of operations is another component of flexibility. A firm based in New York, Washington, or Chicago can serve clients from Alabama to West Virginia through its branches or affiliates. A global firm is as likely to have a network of branch offices or affiliated firms in Beijing, London, and Sydney as in Boston, Los Angeles, and Seattle.

The counselor's reputation also can be a major advantage. Externally, a counselor's reputation among the press and government officials can work to the advantage of clients. Internally, outside experts can often introduce ideas that internal staffers have struggled unsuccessfully to place on the agenda. Apparently, paying a hefty fee increases top management's attention to public relations counsel. And from the client's point of view, knowing that the counselor's reputation and subsequent referrals are on the line also helps ensure performance.

Counselors' Disadvantages

In spite of all those advantages, hiring an external public relations firm has some disadvantages. Bringing in outside counselors of any type constitutes an intervention, which introduces a range of "push-backs" and obstacles.

Internal opposition can range from nonacceptance to outright rejection. This is, at least in theory, the counselor's most serious handicap. Antagonism toward and resistance to outsiders and their recommendations are natural human traits. The old guard with their set ways resists change—the new idea,

new approach, new look—and sees it as a threat to security and established ways of doing business. Their realm is being invaded; and by implication, their judgment is being questioned. The offended ask, “What does this outsider know about our organization, our way of doing things?” Then, under the guise of scrutiny and concern, they raise questions about cost, return on investment, or qualifications. Dealing with the internal staff and others in the client organization calls for special consulting skills.

Questions of cost and hours billed are the most common threats to client–firm relationships. As a result, most firms use sophisticated accounting methods to record and track staff hours and project expenses. Yet, cost is overwhelmingly the most frequent problem with clients, according to counselors. Clients see monthly invoices with hourly rates as excessive, forgetting that fees must also cover overhead and expenses other than staff time. (See following section about how fees are calculated.)

Conflicts of personality or conviction should not come as a surprise, as they occur in all complex relationships. In fact, many clients suggest that “good chemistry” is the one of the most important criteria when selecting a new firm.³⁹ Of course, not all client–firm “marriages” work out.

Difficulties caused by distance and availability can contribute to friction and questioning. Public relations firms typically serve many clients, with staff dividing their time and attention across several clients. Clients expect, however, full attention and prompt response to their needs. Questions about meeting deadlines, keeping promises, and attention to detail become important criteria for evaluating the outside firm.⁴⁰

Clients’ lack of understanding of public relations and unavailability of client management when counselors need approvals, clearance, or other decisions before the work can proceed are also problems cited by counselors. But, of course, if clients fully understood best practices in public relations, they might not need outside counsel. Client management not paying attention or being fully engaged with the public relations effort—whether by internal staff or external counsel—may be a symptom of why the organization needs outside counsel.

Counseling Firm Costs

Clients retain counseling firms for specific projects or for indefinite periods of continuing service, reviewable and renewable at agreed upon intervals. Fees for services typically are established in one of four ways:

1. A monthly retainer covering a fixed or flexible number of hours and services
2. A minimum monthly retainer plus billing for actual staff time at hourly rates or on a per diem basis above what is covered by the retainer
3. Straight hourly charges for staff time, using fees based on the range of staff experience and expertise
4. Fixed project fee, typically resulting from competitive bidding in response to a request for proposal (RFP)

A few outside counselors use a fifth approach to billing clients—“payment-by-results.” Whereas the title appeals to some clients, closer inspection reveals that the promise is misleading. “Results” turn out to be media coverage, website hits, contacts with bloggers, or similar indicators of effort. As one counselor’s home page made clear, the “results” are not solutions or impact: “Instead of charging fixed fees, we only charge our customers for the coverage we generate.” One critic of such an approach summarized the problem with so-called “payment-by-results”:

Results such as media coverage or briefings are not the ultimate measures of success, but rather they represent progress towards desired outcomes: behaviour change, response to a call to action (to buy, to switch etc), accrual of value in the intangible asset that is reputation.[41](#)

The trend toward fixed project fees has changed the nature of business. Instead of having a stable client list and steady cash flow from retainers and hourly fees, firms have to compete for contracts to do specific and limited projects. As one firm’s principal put it, instead of having 30 clients, the firm has to have 300 clients because so much of the work is piecemeal. One of the

costs to clients of such an approach can be loss of continuity and an uncoordinated series of tactics that are not part of an overall strategy.

Out-of-pocket expenses are generally billed at cost and are exclusive of the retainer fee. In some cases, the client deposits an advance with the firm to cover such expenses. Some firms, however, mark up actual costs of certain expenses by 15–20 percent to cover overhead costs. One firm, for example, marks up advertising placements, photography, and printing by 20 percent, but bills actual cost for entertainment, clipping services, and postage.

Fees vary widely. Counseling firms have minimum retainer fees, usually in the range of \$1,000–\$10,000, but up to \$100,000 and more per month for major accounts. For example, a large wood products company might retain a large national firm for \$125,000 per month, plus expenses, to lead the company's national media relations and lobbying in Washington, D.C. At the other end of the scale, a small client might pay as little as a \$500 monthly retainer to write an occasional news release or as little as \$100 for a single news release.

Hourly fees range from a low of about \$60 for account coordinators or other junior staff to several hundred dollars for every hour worked by senior counselors and firm principals. Large firms retained by large clients typically charge \$100–\$500 hourly for professional project staff. These rates typically reflect salary markups in the range of three to six times actual hourly staff costs. Figures differ from city to city, but five elements are reflected in counseling fees and charges:

1. Actual cost of staff time devoted to the project
2. Executive time and supervision
3. Administrative and other nonproject time, such as clerical and accounting
4. Overhead costs, such as space, benefits, and utilities
5. Reasonable profit for doing the work, based on what the market will bear

Results of benchmarking surveys of public relations firms indicate a 25 percent pretax profit is the target. Revenue (client fees paid) per professional typically ranges from \$80,000 to \$150,000 in smaller firms and from \$150,000 to \$225,000 in larger firms. Regardless of the size and management of the firm, three external factors influence a firm's profitability—market size and share, competition, and overall market trends.⁴² In practice, however, many firms operate at levels below the target benchmarks and would celebrate mightily if they achieved 25 percent pretax profit.

“Billable hours” often becomes a criterion for assessing employee productiveness. Some firms, formally or informally, expect each practitioner to “bill out” a minimum of 30 hours each week, just as in most accounting and law firms. In other words, the employee's time log—recorded in tenth- or quarter-hour units—documents 30 or more hours of work charged each week to specific client projects. Each client's monthly bill, then, reflects the total hours recorded on all staff time logs designated to that account or project. The account executive monitors these time records and detailed expenses to keep costs in line with the client–firm agreement. (Figure 3.8 shows an example of a software time sheet for recording hours and expenses linked to software that generates invoices for billing clients.)

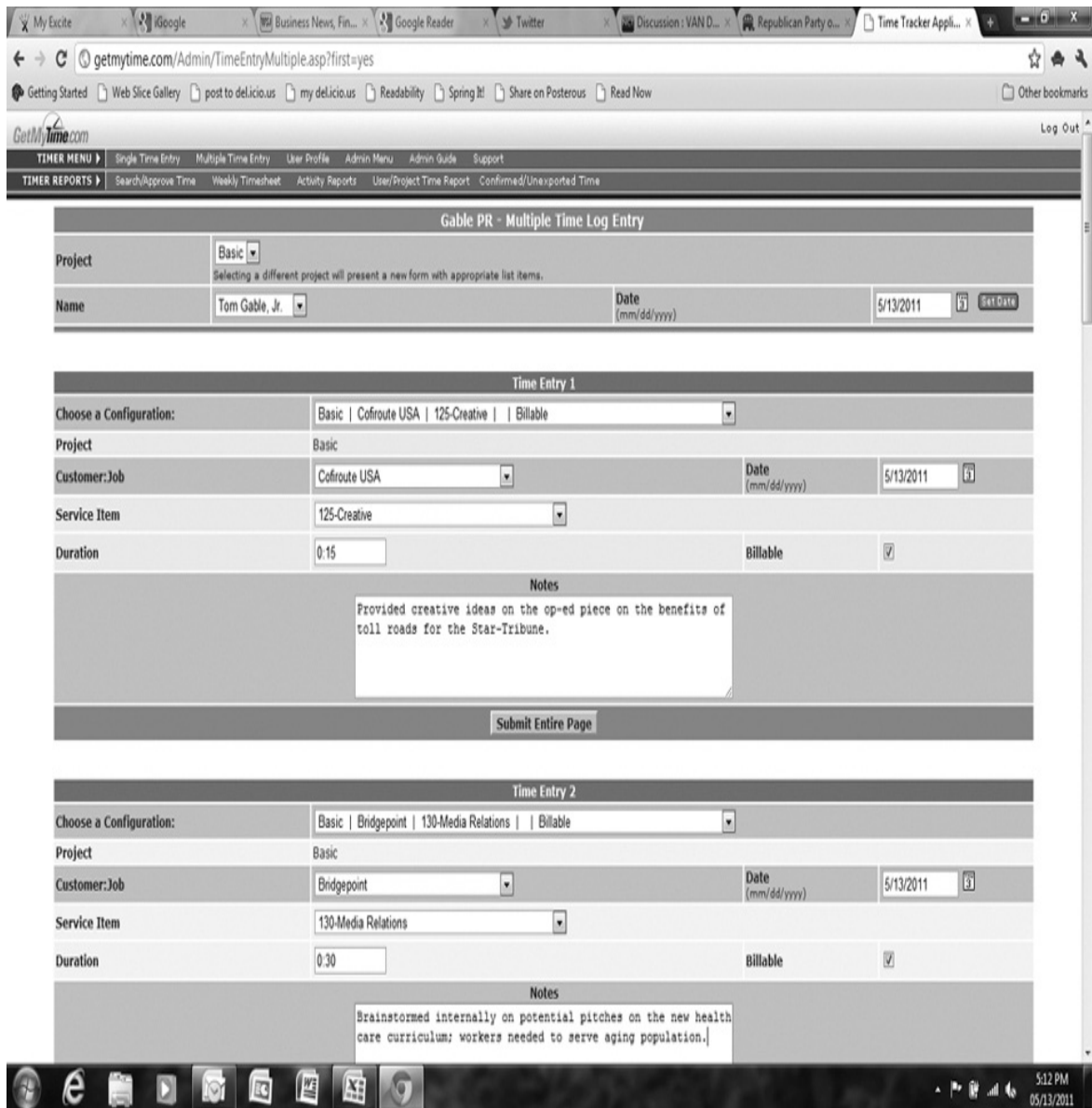


Figure 3.8 Time Sheet

Reprinted with permission from The PR Client Service Manual, 5th ed. (San Diego, CA: PRSA Counselors Academy and GablePR, in press), [Chapter 12](#)

New Approaches

Increasingly, organizations are using a combination of internal departments and outside counsel to fulfill the public relations function. Moreover, top management increasingly recognizes how essential public relations is to organizational success. High-level practitioners who have the knowledge needed for the manager role have joined the executive decision-making group or at least are consulted on major decisions. (Review [Chapter 2](#) section on roles.) Practitioners in public relations firms increasingly serve as counselors and strategic planners, rather than mere press agents and communication technicians. In short, public relations has become an integral part of most organizations' management structure—the dominant coalition.[43](#)

The president of one public relations firm predicts these changes will affect both internal departments and the firms serving them:

Traditional, large, central PR departments will almost certainly become relics. Very tight, small and expert departments are likely to become the norm and outsourcing may be the word most commonly used. In many cases, the PR chief will use a broad array of consulting firms, rather than just one. He or she may conclude that it is far more effective to use a small, expert local company in a Third World country, rather than the local office of a U.S. multinational agency. The agencies, for their part, will need to find ways to demonstrate that they have significant comparative advantage relative to these small, local rivals.[44](#)

Former AT&T public relations executive Edward M. Block, who oversaw what was at the time the largest corporate public relations department (before the 1984 breakup of AT&T), agrees that the smaller departments will increasingly work with outside firms:

Given the choice, I would never have built anything so large.... Rather than build huge staffs it (the firm) can be a cost-effective way to out-source noncritical functions. But the high priority, core responsibilities must remain in-house. A firm may even be a counselor, but not a substitute or surrogate for handling the vital PR roles.[45](#)

Global markets, strategic planning, and the convergence of communication and technology have attracted other types of consulting firms to public relations. Management consulting firms have added “communications

specialists” to their staffs. Job descriptions read much like position descriptions in traditional public relations firms. Some large law firms also have started offering “public relations counsel” (read “media relations advice”) to complement legal counsel and services in high-profile cases that attract media coverage.

Regardless of the source of counsel and services, public relations has an impact in an organization when people begin to tell each other that candor in communication is the best policy and that socially responsible actions are in the best interest of the organization. This means that public relations consciousness is gaining ground and there is growing confidence in the internal staff and outside counselors.

Exposing a clean organization to public gaze and operating in the mutual interests of itself and its publics does not mean that everything about the organization should be made public. In business, there are competitors to consider. In the military, there are security considerations. In health institutions, there are ethical limitations on disclosure of patient information. In government agencies, there are political and regulatory factors. Everywhere there are legal pros and cons. Common sense helps, but organizations must have specialized staff or counsel to perform the public relations function in an ethical and professional manner. That is a lesson from public relations’ history, the topic of the next chapter.

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Study Guide

1. Who in an organization determines where to place public relations in the organization chart?
2. How is public relations different from operations management, but similar to human resources and legal departments in most organizations?
3. List two major advantages and disadvantages of having an internal department conduct an organization’s public relations function.
4. List two major advantages and disadvantages of retaining an outside counseling firm to handle public relations.
5. Describe the confusion that can occur in the relationship between the human resources department and public relations department. How does the legal department’s approach to handling crises sometimes differ from how the public relations department wants to respond?
6. Discuss two methods used by public relations firms to calculate how much to bill clients. What method has led to reduced and uncertain revenue for many firms during the past decade?

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Chapter 4 Historical Origins and Evolution

Learning Objectives

After studying [Chapter 4](#), this chapter you should be able to:

1. Use examples to illustrate how public relations developed to mobilize public opinion in struggles for power and to promote change.
2. Name major historical leaders in public relations and describe their respective contributions to the development of public relations.
3. Trace the evolution of public relations from its American beginnings to modern practice.
4. Describe the origins of principles and techniques in contemporary public relations.

Those who cannot remember the past are doomed to repeat it.

—George Santayana, American Philosopher, Poet, and Cultural Critic

Studying how public relations evolved provides insight into its functions, its strengths, and its weaknesses. Unfortunately, many practitioners do not have a sense of their calling's history and thus do not fully understand its place and purpose in society. Nor do they realize how history and the development of public relations are intertwined. Published histories often oversimplify what is a complex and dramatic story by emphasizing novelty and a few colorful personalities. But understanding public relations' historic role underpins today's practice.

Efforts to communicate with others and to deal with the force of public

opinion go back to antiquity; only the tools, degree of specialization, breadth of knowledge, and intensity of effort are relatively new. This chapter traces the evolution of public relations.[1](#)

Ancient Genesis

Communicating to influence viewpoints and actions can be traced from the earliest civilizations. Archaeologists found an 1800 B.C. farm bulletin in Iraq that told farmers how to sow their crops, how to irrigate, how to deal with field mice, and how to harvest their crops. Chinese politicians as early as 770 B.C. skillfully used persuasion and mediation to lobby their case.

Rudimentary elements of public relations also appear in descriptions of the king's spies in ancient India. Besides espionage, the spies' duties included keeping the king in touch with public opinion, championing the king in public, and spreading rumors favorable to the government.[2](#)

Greek theorists wrote about the importance of the public will, even though they did not specifically use the term "public opinion." Certain phrases and ideas in the political vocabulary of the Romans and in writings of the medieval period relate to modern concepts of public opinion. The Romans coined the expression *vox populi, vox Dei*—"the voice of the people is the voice of God." Machiavelli wrote in his *Discorsi*, "Not without reason is the voice of the people compared to the voice of God," and he held that the people must be either "caressed or annihilated."

Public relations was used many centuries ago in England, where kings maintained Lords Chancellor as "Keepers of the King's Conscience." Even kings acknowledged the need for a third party to facilitate communication and adjustment between the government and the people. So did the church, traders, and artisans. The word propaganda appeared in the seventeenth century, when the Catholic Church set up its *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*—"Congregation for Propagating the Faith."

American Beginnings: Born in

Adversity and Change

The American beginnings of public relations appear in the American Revolution's struggle for power between the patriots' grassroots movement and the commercial, propertied Tories. Later efforts to gain public support included the conflict between the trade and property interests led by Alexander Hamilton and the planter-and-farmer bloc led by Thomas Jefferson, the struggle between Andrew Jackson's agrarian pioneers and the financial forces of Nicholas Biddle, and the bloody Civil War.

Before the Revolution

Using publicity to raise funds, promote causes, boost commercial ventures, sell land, and build box office personalities in the United States, however, is older than the nation itself. The American talent for promotion can be traced back to the first settlements on the East Coast in the seventeenth century. Probably the first systematic effort on this continent to raise funds was sponsored by Harvard College in 1641, when that infant institution sent a trio of preachers to England on a "begging mission." Once in England, they notified Harvard that they needed a fund-raising brochure, now a standard item in a fund drive. In response to this request came New England's First Fruits, written largely in Massachusetts but printed in London in 1643, the first of countless public relations pamphlets and brochures.³

Pushing for Independence

The tools and techniques of public relations have long been an important part of political weaponry. Sustained campaigns to shape and move public opinion go back to the Revolutionary War and the work of Samuel Adams and his cohorts. These revolutionaries understood the importance of public support and knew intuitively how to arouse and channel it. They used pen, platform, pulpit, staged events, symbols, news tips, and political organization in an imaginative, unrelenting way. Adams worked tirelessly to arouse and

then organize public opinion, proceeding always on the assumption that “the bulk of mankind are [sic] more led by their senses than by their reason.” Early on, he discerned that public opinion results from the march of events and the way these events are seen by those active in public affairs. Adams would create events to meet a need if none were at hand to serve his purpose.⁴

Far more than most realize, today’s patterns of public relations practice were shaped by innovations in mobilizing public opinion developed by Adams and his fellow revolutionaries. In fomenting revolt against England, these propagandists, operating largely from the shadows, developed and demonstrated the power of the following techniques:

1. The necessity of an organization to implement actions made possible by a public relations campaign: the Sons of Liberty, organized in Boston in January 1766, and the Committees of Correspondence, also born in Boston in 1775
2. The use of symbols that are easily identifiable and arouse emotion: the Liberty Tree
3. The use of slogans that compress complex issues into easy-to-quote, easy-to-remember stereotypes: “Taxation without representation is tyranny”
4. Staged events

that catch public attention, provoke discussion, and thus crystallize unstructured public opinion: the Boston Tea Party⁵ (see [Figure 4.1](#))

5. The importance of getting your side of a story to the public first, so that your interpretation of events becomes the accepted one: the Boston Massacre
6. The necessity for a sustained saturation campaign using these techniques through all available channels of communication to penetrate the public mind with a new idea or a new conviction

The revolutionaries recognized the enormous difficulty of mobilizing public opinion to fight a war and to form a government:

They knew that there was a wide gap between their public professions and American reality. They knew that there was bitter opposition to Independence and that the mass of the people were [sic] mostly indifferent. They knew, too, that there were deep rivalries and serious differences among the colonies.⁶

But neither the revolutionaries nor the anti-independents

... could have anticipated ... the stunning effect of Common Sense. The little pamphlet had become a clarion call, rousing spirits within Congress and without as nothing else had. The first edition, attributed to an unnamed "Englishman" [Thomas Paine] ... appeared

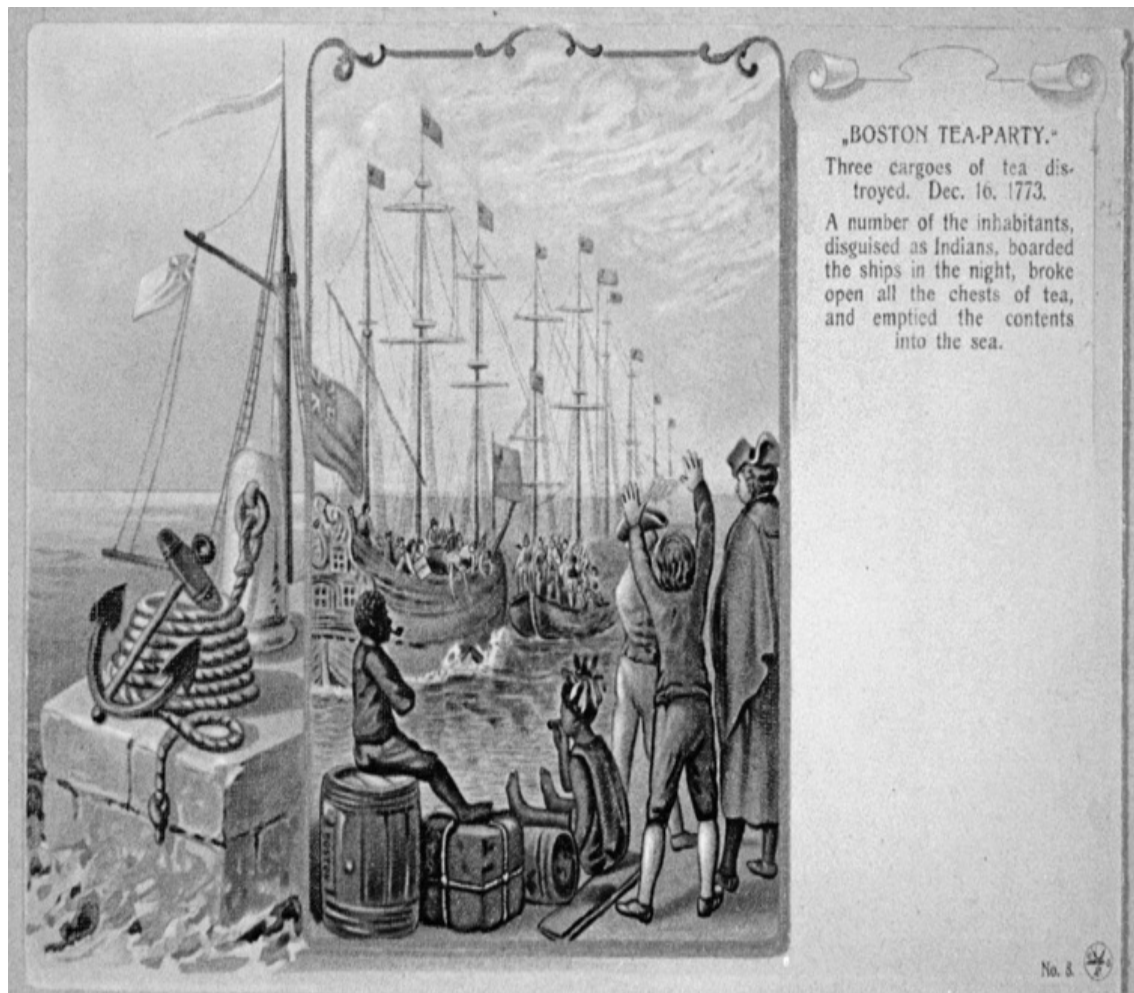


Figure 4.1 Boston Tea Party Special Event

January 9, 1776. By the time Adams had resumed his place in Congress a month later, *Common Sense* had gone into a third edition and was sweeping the colonies. In little time more than 100,000 copies were in circulation.⁷

One history buff called Paine's *Common Sense* "the greatest PR act of the Revolution" and traced three additional principles of modern practice to tactics used by revolutionaries:

- Swaying Early Adopters:

Samuel Adams and "The Committees of Correspondence"

- The White Paper:

Thomas Paine and "*Common Sense*"

- Product Launch Press Release:

Thomas Jefferson and the "*Declaration of Independence*"⁸

In weak contrast to the revolutionists' effective communication, the Tories, supporters of King George and the British Empire, relied not so much on propaganda as on legal and military pressures, to no avail. It is little wonder that an exuberant Sam Adams would exult when he heard the firing at Lexington, "Oh, what a glorious morning is this!" He and his fellow propagandists had done their work well.⁹ The emotion-laden revolutionary campaign set patterns for the nation's political battles that were to follow.¹⁰

The next public relations landmark in the new nation came with publication of *The Federalist Papers*, 85 letters written to newspapers in 1787 and 1788 by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay. The letters urged ratification of the Constitution, in what one historian called the new nation's

“first national political campaign”:

The political ordeal that produced the Constitution in 1787 and brought about its ratification in 1788 was unique in human history. Never before had the representatives of a whole nation discussed, planned, and implemented a new form of government in such a manner and in such a short time.[11](#)

Another historian, Broadus Mitchell, wrote:

In parrying blows against and enlisting support for the Constitution, the authors of the Federalist did the best job of public relations known to history. Objectors were not so much repulsed as refuted. Honest fears were removed. Ignorance was supplied with information and illustration. The manner was earnest rather than passionate, was persuasive by a candor that avoided the cocksure. He [Hamilton] addressed his readers’ judgment in a spirit of moderation.[12](#)

Historian Allan Nevins credited Alexander Hamilton with “history’s finest public relations job”:

Obtaining national acceptance of the Constitution was essentially a public relations exercise, and Hamilton, with his keen instinct for public relations, took thought not only to the product but to the ready acquiescence of thoughtful people; and he imparted his views to others Once the Constitution came before the country, the rapidity with which Hamilton moved was a striking exemplification of good public relations. He knew that if a vacuum develops in popular opinion, ignorant and foolish views will fill it. No time must be lost in providing accurate facts and sound ideas.[13](#)

Promoting Growth and Change

Early developments in public relations are directly tied to the power struggles evoked by political reform movements. These movements, reflecting strong tides of protest against entrenched power groups, were the catalytic agents for

much of the growth of public relations practice, because the jockeying of political and economic groups for dominance created the need to muster public support.

The first clear beginnings of presidential campaigns and of the presidential press secretary's function came in the era of President Andrew Jackson. In the late 1820s and early 1830s, the common man won the ballot and the free public school was started. Literacy increased greatly, and a burgeoning, strident party press stimulated political interest. As the people gained political power, it became necessary to campaign for their support. No longer was government the exclusive concern of the patrician few. With the rise of democracy in America came increasing rights for, and power of, the individual.¹⁴ The ensuing power struggle produced an unsung pioneer in public relations—Amos Kendall.

As a key member of President Jackson's "Kitchen Cabinet," Kendall served as pollster, counselor, ghostwriter, and publicist. The Kitchen Cabinet was unexcelled at creating events to mold opinion. On all vital issues that arose, Jackson consulted these key advisers, most of whom, like Kendall, were former newspapermen.

Jackson, unlettered in political or social philosophy, had difficulty getting his ideas across. He needed a specialist to convey his ideas to Congress and the country. Jackson's political campaigns and his government policies clearly reveal the influence of Kendall's strategy, sense of public opinion, and skill as a communicator.¹⁵

Likewise, Bank of the United States president Nicholas Biddle and his associates were fully alert to the methods of influencing public opinion in their political battles with Jackson and Kendall. In fact, banks were the first businesses to use the press for this purpose; by loans to editors and placement of advertisements, they influenced many newspapers and silenced others. In March 1831, the bank's board authorized Biddle's publicist, Mathew St. Clair Clarke, to saturate the nation's press with press releases, reports, and pamphlets pushing the bank's case. But the pamphlets, the many articles planted in the press, and the lobbying efforts by Biddle and his associates did not prevail over the forces of Jackson and Kendall.¹⁶

The evolution of public relations also is tied to attempts to gain public acceptance and utilization of innovation . Early efforts promoted adoption of electricity, telegraph, telephone, and automobile—“the horseless carriage.” Public information and persuasion campaigns to promote change have long been mainstays in the public relations arsenal. For example, when the Bell Telephone System switched to all-number telephone dialing, it ran into a storm of public opposition on the West Coast from the Anti-Digit Dialing League, organized by Carl May against what he called the “cult of technology.”¹⁷ Similarly, the U.S. Postal Service had to implement a public education campaign to overcome resistance when it introduced ZIP codes.

The evolution of public relations makes sense only when viewed in the historical context of crises of power conflicts and change. It is not mere coincidence that in the past, business interests took public relations most seriously when their positions of power were challenged or threatened. Nor is it a coincidence that labor’s programs intensified when waning public support led to regulatory legislation, or when trade agreements led to well-paid union jobs being lost to countries with cheap labor. Similarly, the most intense developments in public relations within government came in periods of crisis: World War I, the Great Depression and New Deal, World War II, the Vietnam War, and the continuing global effort against terrorism. Threats to public health spawned development of sophisticated campaign strategy and tactics designed to gain public adoption of safe food canning and storage methods, smoking cessation, not drinking and driving, vaccinations to prevent disease, and not texting and using cell phones when driving, to name but a few public safety and health promotion topics.

Press Agency Origins

To say that public relations evolved from press agency, although a gross oversimplification, contains a kernel of truth. Systematic efforts to attract or divert public attention are as old as efforts to inform and persuade. Much of what we define as public relations was labeled “press agency” when it was being used to promote land settlement in the unsettled U.S. West or to build up political heroes.

Biddle and the Bank of United States effectively demonstrated the power of press agency when Jackson's opponents created the myth of Davy Crockett. Biddle's press agent, Mathew St. Clair Clarke, decided to build up "a brash, loud-talking Tennessee Congressman, the colorful Colonel David (which he preferred over "Davy") Crockett and to build him up as a frontier hero to counter Old Hickory's [President Andrew Jackson] appeal to the frontiersmen."¹⁸ As Scott Cutlip reported, "The transmogrification of Davy Crockett from a boorish, backwoods boob into a colorful frontier statesman was the work of several ghostwriters and press agents," when in fact Crockett "spent four years loafing and boasting at the Congressional bar."¹⁹

Crockett's ghostwritten campaign included books, widely distributed printed speeches (which were not the words he actually spoke when he stood up!), theatrical plays, and letters to editors. Reality has a way of catching up, however, so the Crockett strategy failed to keep Jackson from winning a second term as president or to prevent the election of Jackson's choice as his successor, Martin Van Buren, in 1836. Crockett failed in his own reelection bid and headed to Texas, where he was killed by Santa Ana's troops in the Siege of the Alamo. It was Walt Disney, however, who revived the legend of Davy Crockett, further embellished the myth, and cashed in on the creative work done by press agents more than 100 years earlier.²⁰ One writer compared the Davy Crockett myth with modern counterparts, "Crockett matched the modern definition of celebrity—famous for being famous. The difference is, his fame persisted."²¹

But the master of embellishment was P. T. Barnum, and he knew it. Barnum lived from 1810 until 1891, a period of great importance in the evolution of public relations. His influence continues.

Today's patterns of promotion and press agency in the world of show business were drawn, cut, and stitched by the greatest showman and press agent of all time—that "Prince of Humbug," that mightiest of mountebanks, Phineas Taylor Barnum.²²

Barnum's circus, now known as the Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey Circus®, put on display such oddities as the alleged 160-year-old nurse of George Washington, fake mermaids, the midget Tom Thumb (see [Figure 4.2](#)), and so many large oddities that he introduced the word "jumbo" to our

language. Promoter Barnum even employed his own press agent, Richard F. “Tody” Hamilton, whom he credited with much of the success of the circus.[23](#)



Figure 4.2 P. T. Barnum and Tom Thumb

Courtesy © Bettmann/CORBIS

Railroad publicists played an important role in settling our nation and in creating the romantic aura that still surrounds the West. Beginning in the 1850s, railroads and land developers used publicity and advertising to lure people westward. Charles Russell Lowell, who directed the Burlington Railroad's publicity campaign that was launched in 1858, wrote, "We are beginning to find that he who buildeth a railroad west must also find a population and build up business." He had good advice for today's practitioner: "We must blow as loud a trumpet as the merits of our position warrants."²⁴

Success begot imitators. Barnum led the way, and others followed in ever-increasing numbers. For example, Colonel William F. Cody ("Buffalo Bill") used similar techniques to promote his "Wild West Show" (see [Figure 4.3](#)). During the two decades before 1900, press agency spread from show business to closely related enterprises. But as press agents grew in number and their exploits became more outrageous—although successful, more often than not—it was natural that they would arouse the hostility and suspicion of editors, and inevitable that the practice and its practitioners would become tainted.

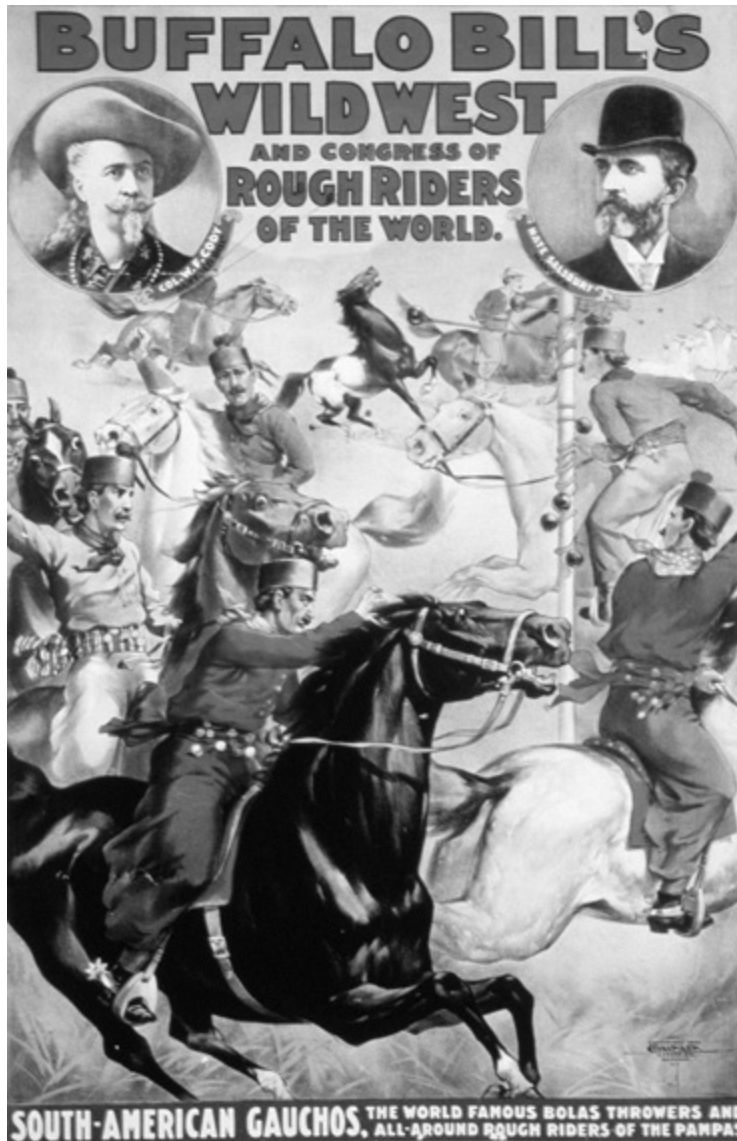


Figure 4.3

Buffalo Bill Poster

Dorling Kindersley. Courtesy © CORBIS

Business Practices

The last two decades of the nineteenth century brought other discernible

beginnings of today's practice. Frenzied and bold development of industry, railroads, and utilities set the stage for public relations in the twentieth century.

Between 1875 and 1900, America doubled its population and jammed its people into cities, went into mass production and enthroned the machine, spanned the nation with rail and wire communications, developed the mass media of press and magazines, and replaced the plantation owner with the head of industry and the versatile pioneer with the specialized factory hand. These 25 years laid the foundation for a mighty industrial machine.

The rise of powerful monopolies, the concentration of wealth and power, and the roughshod tactics of the robber barons brought a wave of protest and reform in the early 1900s. Contemporary public relations emerged from the melee of the opposing forces in this period of the nation's rapid growth. In this "the public be damned" era, exploitation of people and of natural resources was bound to bring protest and reform once people became aroused.

The then-prevailing hard-bitten attitude of businesspeople toward the public—be they employees, customers, or voters—was epitomized in the brutal methods used by Henry Clay Frick to crush a labor union in the Carnegie-Frick Steel Company's Homestead, Pennsylvania, plant in 1892. The Pennsylvania state militia helped break the employees' strike, and the union was destroyed. Cold-blooded power won this battle, but the employees eventually won the war.²⁵ Historian Merle Curti observed, "Corporations gradually began to realize the importance of combating hostility and courting public favor. The expert in public relations was an inevitable phenomenon in view of the need for the services he could provide."²⁶

Beginning in 1897, the term "public relations" appeared with increasing frequency in railroad literature and in speeches of railroad tycoons. In the American Association of Railroads' 1897 Year Book of Railway Literature, the stated objective was "to put annually in permanent form all papers or addresses on the public relations of railways, appearing or being delivered during the year, which seem to have enduring value."²⁷ The Railway Age Gazette pleaded for "better public relations" in a 1909 editorial entitled, "Wanted: A Diplomatic Corps."

First Corporate Department

The first corporate public relations department was established in 1889 by George Westinghouse for his new electric corporation. Westinghouse had organized his company in 1886 to promote his revolutionary alternating-current system of electricity. Thomas A. Edison had earlier established Edison General Electric Company, which used direct current. The infamous “battle of the currents” ensued.

Edison, aided by the astute Samuel Insull, launched a scare campaign against the Westinghouse alternating-current system. As Forrest McDonald recorded,

Edison General Electric attempted to prevent the development of alternating current by unscrupulous political action and by even less savory promotional tactics The promotional activity was a series of spectacular stunts aimed at dramatizing the deadliness of high voltage alternating current, the most sensational being the development and promotion of the electric chair as a means of executing criminals.[28](#)

When the state of New York adopted electrocution in 1888, Westinghouse hired Pittsburgh journalist Ernest H. Heinrichs to get his story to the public. When Westinghouse’s AC system won public acceptance despite the Edison–Insull propaganda scare campaign, it demonstrated “that performance and merit are the foundation stones of effective public relations.”[29](#)

Evolution to maturity

The evolution of public relations reflects the changing roles of organizations in society, the increasing interest in applying the findings of the social sciences, and the never-ending march of social and cultural change, to name but a few of the forces. Highlights of the evolution illustrate how the function became a part of organizational management and portray an emerging profession seeking its own identity and recognition.

Powerful business interests in the early 1900s employed public relations to

defend themselves and their monopolies against muckraking journalists and a growing interest in government regulation. The strategy was to tell their side of the story and to counterattack to influence public opinion. The goal was to prevent increased governmental regulation of business.

As the United States prepared for World War I, President Woodrow Wilson created the “Committee on Public Information.” George Creel headed a staff of young propagandists, some of who would later establish public relations firms. The committee’s goal was to unite public opinion behind the war through a nationwide campaign. During those early years, public relations took the form of one-way persuasive communication designed to influence others—often referred to simply as “propaganda.”

Many still define public relations as merely persuasion. This definition reflects the writings of Edward L. Bernays—one of the founders of public relations and a member of Creel’s staff—in his influential book, *The Engineering of Consent* (1955). Even today, many practitioners work with managers and clients who think public relations is simply persuasive communication with the power to induce public support or acceptance. During the decades following World War II, however, knowledge of media effects became more sophisticated. Consequently, definitions evolved to include notions of two-way communication and relationships. Definitions of public relations included words such as reciprocal, mutual, and between. This interactive concept appeared in Webster’s Third New International Dictionary’s definition: “The art or science of developing reciprocal understanding and goodwill.” Likewise, the British Institute of Public Relations defined the practice as an effort to build “mutual understanding between an organization and its publics.”

Yale professor and Public Opinion Quarterly founder Harwood L. Childs had introduced an even more advanced concept in the late 1930s. Going against conventional wisdom, Childs concluded that the essence of public relations “is not the presentation of a point of view, not the art of tempering mental attitudes, nor the development of cordial and profitable relations.” Instead, he said, the basic function “is to reconcile or adjust in the public interest those aspects of our personal and corporate behavior which have a social significance.”³⁰

Childs saw the function of public relations as helping organizations adjust to their social environments, a concept that reemerged many decades later in contemporary public relations. The adjustment concept of public relations suggests a management-level, policy-influencing role that calls for corrective action in addition to communication. The International Public Relations Association (IPRA) adopted such a concept by including “counseling organization leaders” and implementing “planned programs of action” in its definition of public relations.

In summary, the one-way concept of public relations relies almost entirely on propaganda and persuasive communication, typically in the form of publicity. The two-way concept emphasizes communication exchange, reciprocity, and mutual understanding. Additionally, the two-way concept includes counseling management on changes needed within the organization. Although the one-way concept still dominates in many settings, contemporary practice increasingly includes management status and participation in corrective action, as well as two-way communication.

Stages of Development

Edward Bernays proposed three stages of American history that influenced public relations development. He called the first stage the public-be-damned period, beginning after the Civil War and lasting until about 1900. During public relations’ early twentieth-century seedbed era, Bernays suggested that the country had entered the public-be-informed period. He labeled the third period following World War I as the time of mutual understanding, when the lessons of the behavioral sciences were being applied to public relations practice. The context changed, however, beginning in the late 1960s.

Antiwar protests, the consumer movement, environmental activism, civil rights, and other demonstrations of the increasing power of citizens—including aroused and empowered minorities—challenged the status quo. Mutual understanding no longer satisfied those demanding change. Corrective action became the requirement, leading to the era of mutual adjustment. This paradigm shift in society dramatically changed how public relations would be practiced in the latter part of the twentieth century and in

the twenty-first century (see [Figure 4.4](#)).

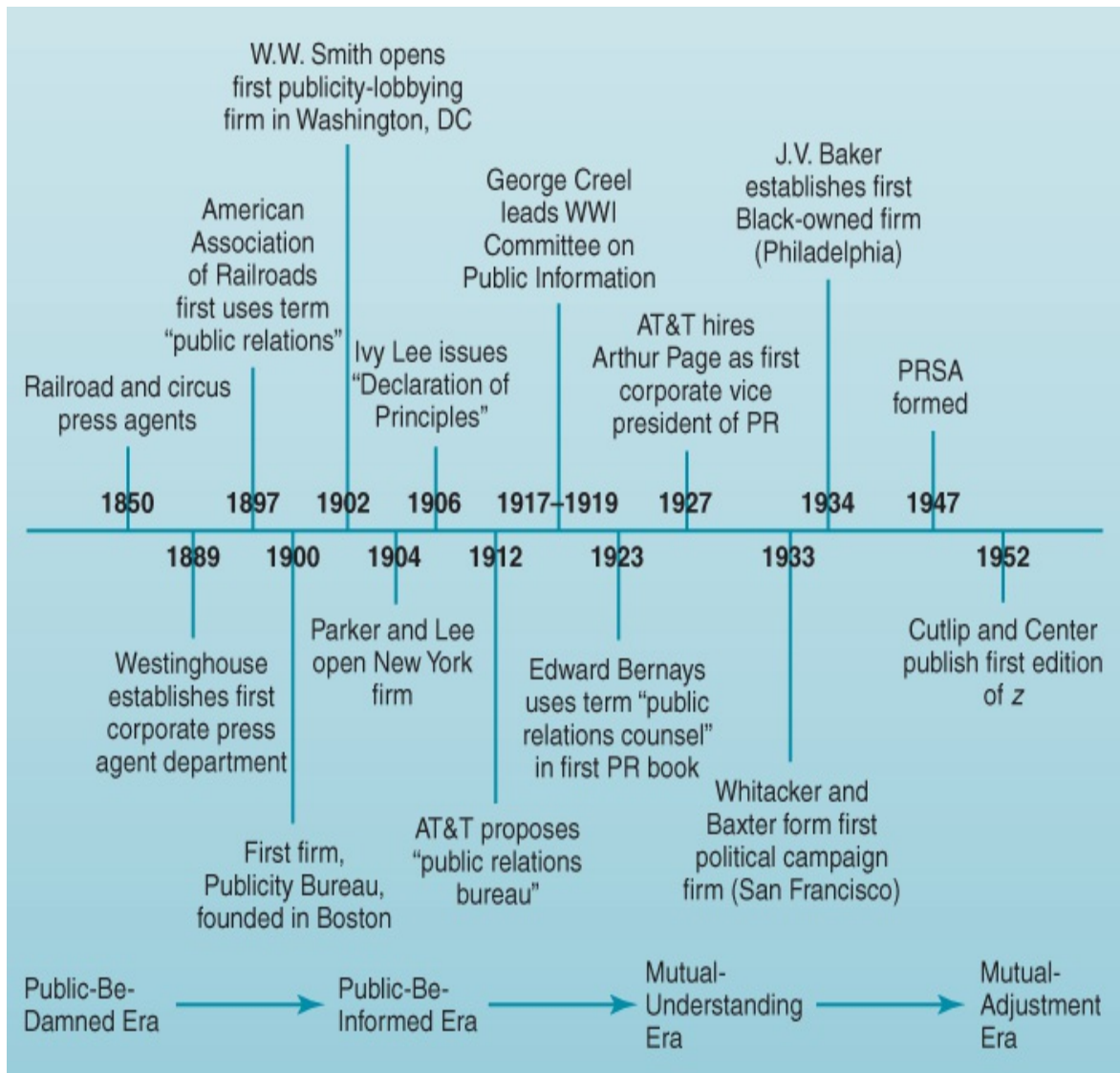


Figure 4.4 Time Line of Defining Events and People in Public Relations

Although the roots of public relations lie far in the past, today's practice dates from the early 1900s, when the world entered the twentieth century, which

spanned from the horse and buggy to the international space station. The dividing lines blur a bit, but the evolution can be traced through seven main periods of development:

1. Seedbed Era

(1900–1916) of muckraking journalism countered by defensive publicity and of far-reaching political reforms promoted by Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson through the use of public relations.

2. World War I Period

(1917–1918) of dramatic demonstrations of the power of organized promotion to kindle a fervent patriotism: to sell war bonds, enlist soldiers, and raise millions of dollars for welfare.

3. Booming Twenties Era

(1919–1929), when the principles and practices of publicity learned in the war were put to use promoting products, earning acceptance for changes wrought by the war-accelerated technology, winning political battles, and raising millions of dollars for charitable causes.

4. Roosevelt Era and World War II

(1930–1945), an era dominated by Franklin D. Roosevelt and his counselor, Louis McHenry Howe; the Great Depression; and World War II—events profound and far reaching in their impact on the practice of public relations.

5. Postwar Era

(1946–1964) of adjustment as the nation moved from a war-oriented economy to a postindustrial, service-oriented economy, shouldered leadership of the “Free World,” brought widespread acceptance of public relations—strong professional associations, the beginnings of public relations education, and the emergence of television as a powerful communications medium.

6. Period of Protest and Empowerment

(1965–1985) of student and activist protests against environmental pollution, racial and gender discrimination, concentration of special interest wealth and power, the Vietnam War, governmental abuse of the public trust, and consequently, an increasing recognition of social responsibility and more responsive organizations.

7. Age of Digital Communication and Globalization

(1986–present), with new technology impacting most aspects of life; multiplying communication channels—including social media; and a world economy that features global competition, interdependence, instantaneous interaction, and terrorism.

The following sections outline the key actors and events in the evolution.

Seedbed Era: 1900–1916

Muckraking journalists—Lincoln Steffens, Thomas W. Lawson, David Graham Phillips, Charles Edward Russell, Upton Sinclair, Ida Tarbell, and others—effectively exploited the newly developed national forums made possible by popular magazines, national wire services, and feature syndicates. Regier says, “Muckraking ... was the inevitable result of decades of indifference to the illegalities and immoralities attendant upon the industrial development of America.”[31](#)

The exposé and reform period extended roughly from 1900 to 1912. The muckrakers took their case to the people and got action. The agitation before 1900 had been primarily among farmers and laborers; now the urban middle class took up the cry against government corruption and the abuses of big business. President Theodore Roosevelt joined the movement as the “trustbuster” president.

The muckrakers thundered out their denunciations in boldface in the popular magazines and metropolitan newspapers, which now had huge circulations.

By 1900, there were at least 50 well-known national magazines, several with circulations of 100,000 or more. The Ladies Home Journal, founded only 17 years before, was approaching a circulation of 1 million. The impact of the mass media was growing.³²

The muckraker movement began when McClure's Magazine published Lincoln Steffens' articles on corruption in city and state politics in 1903. Thomas W. Lawson's series of articles, "Frenzied Finance," in Everybody's magazine in 1904–1905 exposed stock market abuses and insurance fraud. Two books that produced violent public reactions followed. Ida Tarbell's History of the Standard Oil Company (1904), described at the time as "a fearless unmasking of moral criminality masquerading under the robes of respectability and Christianity," and Upton Sinclair's book, The Jungle (1906), exposed the foul conditions in the meatpacking industry. Public protest and reform brought regulatory legislation and a wave of trust busting. David Graham Phillips' wrote how big business corrupted members of the U.S. Senate—"a scurvy lot they are"—which led to the Seventeenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution that changed how we elect senators. Businesses were forced to go on the defense.

Long accustomed to a veil of secrecy, business leaders felt the urge to speak out in self-defense but did not know how. Their first instinct was to turn to their advertising planners and lawyers. In the first stages of the muckraking era, many great corporations sought to silence the attacks from the press by the calculated placement and withdrawal of advertising. The strategy produced limited success.

Early Firms

The Publicity Bureau

The nation's first publicity agency and forerunner of today's public relations firm was founded in Boston in mid-1900. George V. S. Michaelis, Herbert Small, and Thomas O. Marvin organized the Publicity Bureau "to do a general press agent business for as many clients as possible for as good pay

as the traffic would bear.” Michaelis, a Boston journalist once described by an associate as “a young man of many expedients,” took the lead in organizing this new enterprise and was with it until 1909. One of the first people hired was James Drummond Ellsworth, who would later work with Theodore N. Vail in building the public relations program of American Telephone and Telegraph Company.³³

Harvard University was the Publicity Bureau’s first client. Michaelis, the firm’s president, wrote to the president of Harvard boasting about the success of an early publicity effort: “We have met with very satisfactory success in publication of the articles, and I shall be glad to show you the clippings upon your return.” And in a subsequent letter, he outlined what was surely the first fixed-fee plus expenses arrangement:

In the matter of payment, we understand that you are to pay the Bureau \$200 a month for our professional services, and those of an artist where drawings seem to be required. That this sum is to include everything except the payment of mechanical work, such as printings and the making of cuts, and the postage necessary to send out the articles themselves to the various papers, which items are to be charged to the University.³⁴

The reorganized Publicity Bureau came into national prominence in 1906, when it was employed by the nation’s railroads to head off adverse regulatory legislation then being pushed in Congress by President Roosevelt. Journalist Ray Stannard Baker reported:

The fountainhead of public information is the newspaper. The first concern, then, of the railroad organization was to reach the newspaper. For this purpose a firm of publicity agents, with headquarters in Boston, was chosen Immediately the firm expanded. It increased its Boston staff; it opened offices in New York, Chicago, Washington, St. Louis, Topeka, Kansas, . . . and it employed agents in South Dakota, California, and elsewhere.³⁵

According to Baker, the Publicity Bureau operated secretly, “careful not to advertise the fact that they are in any way connected with the railroads.” This firm effectively used the tools of fact-finding, publicity, and personal contact

to saturate the nation's press, particularly weeklies, with the railroads' propaganda. The campaign was to little avail, however, because the Hepburn Act, a moderately tough regulatory measure, passed in 1906 after President Roosevelt used the

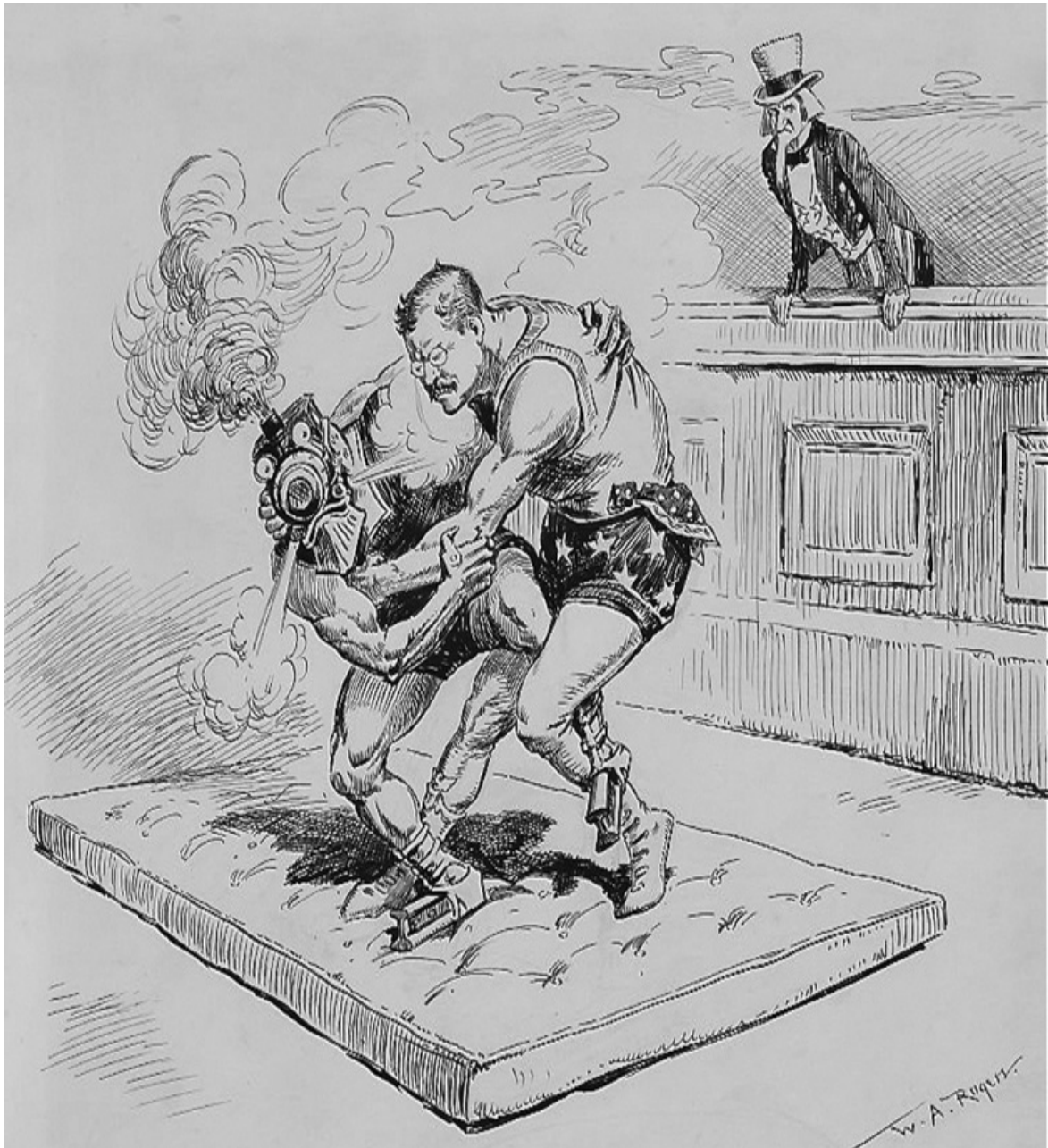


Figure 4.5 “Who Is Master?”

President Theodore Roosevelt Takes on the Railroads

Courtesy of Library of Congress

nation's press and the platform to publicize a more persuasive case (see [Figure 4.5](#)). Failure of their nationwide publicity effort caused railroad executives to reassess their public relations methods. Within a few years, many set up their own public relations departments. The Publicity Bureau faded into oblivion in 1911.³⁶

Smith & Walmer

The second firm also was the first to be based in Washington, D.C. William Wolff Smith quit his job as correspondent for the New York Sun and the Cincinnati Enquirer in 1902 to open a “publicity business” with a partner named Walmer in the capital. (Walmer's role and tenure with the firm are not known.) A New York Times reporter later recalled that the Smith & Walmer firm solicited “press-agent employment from anybody who had business before Congress.”³⁷

Smith closed the firm in 1916 and returned to law school, which he had quit in 1893 to take his first newspaper job. His “law practice,” primarily devoted to lobbying the new regulatory agencies that resulted from the muckraking exposés, was the forerunner of the many law firms and public relations firms in Washington, D.C., and state capitals engaged in lobbying.

Parker & Lee

Also during the seedbed era, former Buffalo reporter and veteran political publicist George F. Parker and young publicist Ivy Ledbetter Lee established the third firm in 1904. They formed their partnership, Parker & Lee, in New

York after working together in the Democratic Party headquarters handling publicity for Judge Alton Parker's unsuccessful presidential race against Theodore Roosevelt. The agency dissolved in 1908 when Lee went to work full time for one of the firm's clients, the Pennsylvania Railroad. He became director of the railroad's publicity bureau, which he had organized while the company was a client of Parker and Lee.³⁸ Lee became one of the most influential pioneers in the emerging craft of public relations (see pages [87–88](#) section on Lee).

Hamilton Wright Organization, Inc.

The fourth firm—The Hamilton Wright Organization—was founded in 1908 when Hamilton Mercer Wright, a freelance journalist and publicist, opened a “publicity office” in San Francisco. Wright's first publicity work was for the California Promotion Committee, but he was also known for his promotion of Miami using publicity photographs. His agency's first account, however, was to promote the Philippine Islands on behalf of U.S. business interests, making his the first international firm.

He moved to New York City in 1917, after World War I cut short his work promoting tourism in Central America for the United Fruit Company. His son and grandson, both carrying the same name, followed in the founder's footsteps by specializing in promotion of foreign countries in the United States. The Wrights closed the firm in 1969.

Pendleton Dudley and Associates

The fifth agency, started during the first decade of the century, lasted until 1988. Pendleton Dudley, who was to become an influential figure in public relations for half a century, took his friend Ivy Lee's advice and opened a publicity office in New York's Wall Street district in 1909. His first business client, AT&T, retained Dudley until his death at the age of 90 in 1966. He was among the few then in practice who saw the value of research and the need to measure program effectiveness. For all those 57 years, Dudley

remained the active head of his firm, which in 1946 had become Dudley-Anderson-Yutzy Public Relations when Thomas D. Yutzy and George Anderson joined the firm. In 1970, sisters Barbara Hunter and Jean Schoonover acquired the firm and changed the name to D-A-Y. The firm became a subsidiary of Ogilvy & Mather in 1983, which dropped the separate D-A-Y identity and operation in 1988.[39](#)

Thomas R. Shipp and Co.

In 1914, Thomas R. Shipp organized the nation's sixth firm and the second located in Washington, D.C. Shipp, like William Wolff Smith, was a native of Indiana and a former reporter. He spent six years learning publicity and politics from two experts, Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot. In 1909, they gave Shipp administrative and publicity responsibilities for the newly formed National Conservation Association (NCA)—“the center of a great propaganda for conservation” (see [Figure 4.6](#)). Historians credit the NCA with making “conservation” and “natural resources” powerful terms in the public vocabulary.



Figure 4.6 Theodore Roosevelt and naturalist John Muir at Yosemite 1903

Courtesy of Library of Congress

When the United States entered World War I, Shipp headed the first American Red Cross fund drive, raising an unprecedented \$100 million. After the war, such corporations as General Motors, Standard Oil Company of New York, Swift & Company, and International Harvester retained Shipp as Washington public relations counsel.[40](#)

Early Pioneers

The period of 1900–1916 saw an intensive development of public relations skills by the railroads and the public utilities. These businesses, particularly the local transit companies, were the first to feel the heat of public anger and be brought under public regulation. The Interstate Commerce Act set the pattern. In a five-year period, 1908–1913, more than 2,000 laws affecting railroads were enacted by state legislatures and Congress.

For the most part, big businesses hired former reporters to counter the muckrakers with whitewashing press agency, demonstrating little grasp of the fundamental problems in the conflict. But there were exceptions. One was Georgia native Ivy Lee, credited by many as the “father of public relations.”

Ivy Ledbetter Lee

Lee, a Princeton graduate and New York newspaper reporter covering business, saw the possibility of earning more money in the service of private organizations that were seeking a voice. After five years as a reporter, in 1903 Lee quit his low-paying job on the World to work in Seth Low’s campaign for mayor of New York. This led to working with George F. Parker during the 1904 presidential campaign and then formation of Parker & Lee when President Grover Cleveland did not appoint Parker the nation’s first White House press secretary.[41](#)

When the anthracite coal mine operators hired Parker & Lee to tell management’s side in the 1906 strike, Lee issued a “Declaration of Principles.” Lee’s statement of philosophy profoundly influenced the evolution of press agency and publicity into public relations. Going against the prevailing feeling on Wall Street that “the public be damned,” Lee’s declaration made it clear that the public was no longer to be ignored, in the traditional manner of business, nor fooled, in the continuing manner of the press agent. It was to be informed. Lee mailed his newsworthy declaration to all city editors:



Ivy Ledbetter Lee

This is not a secret press bureau. All our work is done in the open. We aim to supply news. This is not an advertising agency; if you think any of our matter ought properly to go to your business office, do not use it. Our matter is accurate. Further details on any subject treated will be supplied promptly, and any editor will be assisted most cheerfully in verifying directly any statement of fact In brief, our plan is, frankly and openly, on behalf of business concerns and public institutions, to supply to the press and public of the United States prompt and accurate information concerning subjects which it is of value and interest to the public to know about.[42](#)

Lee's new approach greatly simplified the work of reporters assigned to cover the strike. Although reporters were not permitted to attend strike conferences, Lee provided reports after each meeting in the form of a "handout" (now called "press release" or "news release"). His success in generating favorable press coverage for the coal operators prompted the Pennsylvania Railroad to retain Parker and Lee in the summer of 1906. Lee handled the account.[43](#)

During this period, Lee used the term "publicity" to describe what is now called public relations. The practice and Lee's success grew steadily. In December 1914, Lee was appointed as a personal adviser to John D. Rockefeller Jr. The Rockefellers were being savagely attacked for the strikebreaking activities of their Colorado Fuel and Iron Company. Newspapers and other critics referred to the tragic event as "Bloody Ludlow" and "the Ludlow Massacre." Cartoonists and editorial writers called

Rockefeller “the biggest criminal of the time.” Lee served the Rockefellers until he died in 1934. When Rockefeller died in 1937, six weeks before he would have been 98 years old, the press eulogized him as the “great benefactor of society.” Obviously, Lee had done his job.



John D. Rockefeller

Above marginal photos are Courtesy of Library of Congress

Ivy Lee did much to lay the groundwork for contemporary practice. Even though he did not use the term “public relations” until at least 1919, Lee contributed many of the techniques and principles that practitioners follow today. He was among the first to realize the fallacy of publicity not supported by good works and to reason that performance determines the publicity a client gets.

In his 31 years in public relations, Lee changed the scope of what he did from publicity to counseling clients. For example, he said, “If you issue an untruth in a public statement, it is going to be challenged just as soon as it sees the light.”⁴⁴ His counsel extended beyond publicity, telling his audience at the 1916 Annual Convention of the American Electric Railway Association that “the actual relationship of a company to the people ... involves far more than saying—it involves doing.”⁴⁵

Lee’s record, although substantial, is not free from criticism. When he died, he was under fire for his representation of the German Dye Trust, controlled by I. G. Farben. Lee advised the cartel after Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany and the Nazis had taken control. Headlines at the time

sensationalized his work—“LEE GIVES ADVICE TO THE NAZIS” and “LEE EXPOSED AS HITLER PRESS AGENT.” Although he never received pay directly from the Nazi government, Lee was paid an annual fee of \$25,000 and expenses (a large sum at the time) by the Farben firm from the time he was retained in 1933 until his firm resigned the account shortly after his death in 1934.[46](#)

One of the craft’s most forceful representatives, his practice, writings, and preachments helped make public relations an occupation. Ironically, however, as Lee biographer Ray Hiebert concluded, he was not able to do for himself what he had done so effectively for others:

He was rarely able to explain his work adequately or to gain understanding for the underlying principles by which he operated. He often admitted that he did not know what to call himself, and that what he did was an art that he could not explain.

When reporters reached him in Baden [Germany] after the news of his I. G. Farben work had been made public, he pulled within his shell and refused to make a statement.[47](#)

Theodore N. Vail

The former American Telephone and Telegraph Company pioneered in public relations as well as in telephonic communications. Although public relations got short shrift when Theodore N. Vail was forced out in 1887 until he returned to power in 1902, the company did organize a “literary bureau” in Boston around 1890 and was one of the first clients of the Publicity Bureau. After Vail returned as a director, the policies that became identified with AT&T began to take shape, and they were brought to the fore when Vail became president in 1907. Vail hired James Drummond Ellsworth to begin a publicity and advertising program.



Theodore N. Vail

Courtesy of Library of Congress.

The company tried to eliminate public criticism through efficient operation and consideration for the needs of subscribers. A systematic method of answering complaints was put into effect. Unlike other utilities, Bell did not fight public regulation but accepted it as a price of monopoly. Vail and Ellsworth, in collaboration with the N. W. Ayer advertising agency, began an institutional advertising campaign that continued for decades⁴⁸ (see [Exhibit 4.1](#)).

Theodore Roosevelt

Although he did not practice public relations as an occupation, Theodore Roosevelt deserves credit for spurring the evolution of public relations. The colorful president was a master in the art and power of publicity, and he used his knowledge and skill to achieve his political goals.

Exhibit 4.1

Proposal for a Public Relations Bureau at AT&T in 1912

The establishment of a Public Relations Bureau in the American Telephone and Telegraph Company, in which all information concerning the relations of the telephone companies to the public should be concentrated and made available for use, would serve to coordinate much of the work now done independently by various departments of that company and the operating companies.

The bureau could bring together a large sum of material at present scattered, and a proper arrangement and collation of this would make it readily available and eliminate a considerable amount of duplication.

It would also be able to give its attention to the trend of public opinion and the drift of legislation, and by a study of these, bring to the attention of executive officers in a condensed form the broader lines of public sentiment in time to enable the telephone company to meet new phases of legislation and in many cases to forestall legislation by remedying conditions which have been the cause of trouble.

By employing a central organization to collect, analyze, and distribute material relating to these questions, there will be a distinct saving in times of those actually engaged in work in the field and a broader and more efficient treatment of the problems.

All the available material can be brought together and everyone dealing with these questions be kept in touch with the trend of public opinion and action throughout the country . . .

Observers claimed that Roosevelt ruled the country from the newspapers' front pages. One of his first acts upon assuming the presidency was to seek an understanding with the press. New York Sun correspondent Richard V. Oulahan wrote in 1907 that Roosevelt "was one of the pioneers in the modern method of doing things through the power of publicity."⁴⁹

A typical Roosevelt policy initiative...began with a barrage of newspaper headlines intended to stir up public sentiment and to discredit his adversaries, then continued through a series of news releases and

public actions that were intended to maintain the flow of news coverage. The process went on until the President either won or started another crusade.⁵⁰

Roosevelt's successful and well-publicized antitrust suit against the Northern Securities Company turned the tide against the concentration of economic power. His conservation policies, effectively promoted by Gifford Pinchot in the government's first large-scale publicity program, saved much of America's natural resources from gross exploitation.

As one historian observed, "Roosevelt's colorful, outgoing personality and shrewd sense of publicity had his name constantly in the papers, and in ways to make him a national hero."⁵¹ He saw the White House as a "bully pulpit."

With the growth of mass-circulation newspapers, Roosevelt's ability to dominate the front pages demonstrated a newly found power for those with causes to promote. He had a keen sense of news and knew how to stage a story so that it would get maximum attention. His skill forced those he fought to develop similar means. Roosevelt fully exploited the news media as a new and powerful tool of presidential leadership and remade public policy and the presidency in the process.

Rex F. Harlow

Others recognized the need for publicity services in other parts of the country. Rex F. Harlow began a lifetime career in 1912 in Oklahoma City when he was hired by an older brother to promote Harlow's Weekly. Harlow's career spanned the evolution of this young, uncertain calling to its maturity in the 1980s and helped shape today's practice. Dr. Harlow became the first full-time public relations instructor in 1939 when he joined the faculty at Stanford University. He founded the American Council on Public Relations (ACPR). In 1945, he started the monthly Public Relations Journal, published until 1995 by the Public Relations Society of America and reactivated in 2007 as an online journal (www.prsa.org/prjournal/). Harlow died April 16, 1993, at 100 years of age.



Rex F. Harlow

World War I Period: 1917–1918

The contemporary practice of public relations first emerged as a defensive measure, but World War I gave it great offensive impetus. President Woodrow Wilson, who was keenly aware of the importance of public opinion, established the Committee on Public Information (CPI)—often referred to as the “Creel Committee.” The CPI was charged with mobilizing public opinion in support of the war effort and Wilson’s peace aims in a country in which opinion was divided when war was declared. Wilson appointed George Creel chairman.

George Creel

George Creel and his CPI demonstrated as never before the power of publicity to mobilize opinion. Without a campaign manual to guide him, Creel improvised as he went along. For example, he had no national radio or television to reach the nation quickly, so he created the Four Minutemen, a network of 75,000 civic leaders covering the nation’s some 3,000 counties. These volunteers, alerted by telegrams from Washington, would fan out to speak to schools, churches, service clubs, and other gatherings. By the war’s end, nearly 800,000 of these four-minute messages had been delivered.



George Creel

Above marginal photos are Courtesy of Library of Congress



Figure 4.7 “Under Four Flags”

Poster

Courtesy of Library of Congress

Creel assembled as brilliant and talented a group of journalists, scholars, press agents, editors, artists, and other manipulators of the symbols of public opinion as America had ever seen united for a single purpose. The breathtaking scope of the huge agency and its activities were not to be equaled until the rise of the totalitarian dictatorships after the war. Creel, Carl Byoir, and their associates were public relations counselors to the U.S. government, carrying first to the citizens and then to those in distant lands the idea that gave motive power to the wartime undertaking of 1917–1918 (see [Figure 4.7](#)).⁵²

Analyzing the influence of the Creel Committee, *The New York Times* commented in 1920:

Not only did he have a staff of press agents working immediately under him in a central office, but Creel decentralized the system so that every type of industry in the country had its special group of publicity workers. In this manner, more than in any other, were the heads and directors of movements of every type introduced to and made cognizant of the value of concentrating on publicity in so-called “drives.”⁵³

To illustrate the *Times*’s point, when America entered the war, the American Red Cross had a membership of fewer than 500,000 in 372 chapters scattered across the nation and \$200,000 in working funds. In September 1918, as the war neared its end, the Red Cross had 20 million members in 3,864 chapters and had raised more than \$400 million in gifts and membership dues (see [Figure 4.8](#)). Another example: On May 1, 1917, there were only some 350,000 holders of U.S. bonds; six months later, after two organized publicity and sales drives for “Liberty Bonds,” there were 10 million bondholders.

After the war, many held an overly optimistic belief in the power of mass communication. A noted political scientist, Harold D. Lasswell, observed, “When all allowances have been made, and all extravagant estimates pared to

the bone, the fact remains that propaganda is one of the most powerful instrumentalities in the modern world.”[54](#)



Figure 4.8

“You Can Help—AmericanRed Cross”

Carl Byoir

The Creel Committee trained a host of practitioners who took their wartime experiences and fashioned a profitable calling. Among these was Carl Byoir, who at age 28 had been associate chairman of the CPI. After a decade’s tour

into other endeavors, Byoir founded a publicity firm in 1930 to promote tourism in Cuba. The firm would become one of the country's largest public relations firms, Carl Byoir & Associates (CB&A). Some of the nation's largest corporations retained CB&A. Long-term clients included Hughes Aircraft, a client for 40 years; Hallmark, 37 years; RCA, 34 years; and Borg Warner, 20 years.

Byoir and his CB&A associates are credited with introducing grassroots advocacy groups and the third-party endorsement, popularizing the Jeep, helping make the tubeless tire acceptable to consumers, and using the full-page editorial advertisement.⁵⁵ Byoir also devoted his own time and CB&A resources to social causes, such as raising money for the March of Dimes to fund research that ultimately eliminated the feared infantile paralysis—polio. Byoir died in 1957 at 68.⁵⁶



Carl Byoir

Booming Twenties Era: 1919–1929

Vigorously nourished by wartime developments, the public relations specialty quickly spread. It showed up in government, business, education, churches, and social work—now burgeoning in the war's aftermath, the labor movement, and social movements. The victory of the Anti-Saloon League in achieving national prohibition and the triumph of the women's suffrage movement, both in 1920, provided fresh evidence of the newly found power of public relations.

Edward L. Bernays and Doris E.

Fleischman

Among those vying with Ivy Lee for prominence and for business in the 1920s was Edward L. Bernays. Prior to World War I, Bernays had worked as a press agent. While he worked for the Creel Committee during the war, his busy mind envisioned the possibility of making a life's work of what he called "engineering public consent." Many have credited Bernays with introducing the term "public relations counsel" in *Crystallizing Public Opinion* (1923), the first book on public relations. In fact, Bernays said that he and his wife and business partner, Doris E. Fleischman, came up with the term after opening his first office in 1919.[57](#)



Edward L. Bernays

Bernays married Fleischman in 1922. Together they ran their firm—Edward L. Bernays, Counsel on Public Relations—until formally retiring from active practice in 1962. She died in 1980 at age 88. They counseled major corporations, government agencies, and U.S. presidents from Calvin Coolidge through Dwight Eisenhower, with Bernays taking the spotlight for most assignments. Although credited with being an equal partner with Bernays in the firm, creating the first public relations newsletter, and coining the term "public relations counsel" with Bernays, Fleischman struggled for professional equality because of her gender.[58](#) For example, in one of her two books she wrote:



Doris E. Fleischman

Above marginal photos are Courtesy of Library of Congress

Many men resented having women tell them what to do in their business. They resented having men tell them, too, but advice from a woman was somewhat demeaning. I learned to withdraw from situations where the gender of public relations counsel was a factor or where suggestions had to be disassociated from gender. If ideas were considered first in terms of my sex, they might never get around to being judged on their own merits.[59](#)

Fleischman was an early feminist, who, after marrying Bernays, retained her birth name long before it was socially acceptable:

During the next three decades, Fleischman continued to sign into hotels—and twice into maternity hospitals—as “Miss Doris E. Fleischman,” and in 1925 she received the first U.S. passport granted to a married woman under her birth name. That was her name on the 1928 book she edited on careers for women and on the seven magazine articles and book chapters she published between 1930 and 1946.[60](#)

Bernays’s first book on public relations followed Walter Lippmann’s 1922 *Public Opinion*, a book that reflected the growing interest in power and nature of public opinion. In all the years prior to 1917, only 18 books on public opinion and publicity were printed. At least 28 titles appeared between 1917 and 1925.

Scholarly interest also dates from this period. Social scientists began to explore the nature of public opinion and the role of mass communication in its formation. Although sophisticated opinion measurement methods did not appear until the 1930s, the postwar work of social scientists contributed much to the development of market research, public opinion polls, and communication science. Bernays broke more new ground in 1923 when he taught the first public relations course at New York University.

Bernays continued in his roles as author, lecturer, advocate, and critic into the 1990s. Many refer to Bernays as the other father of public relations. Life magazine included Bernays in its 1990 special issue, "The 100 Most Important Americans of the Twentieth Century." He died March 9, 1995, at age 103.

John W. Hill

Despite a booming economy and rapidly growing media, there were only six public relations firms listed in the Manhattan telephone directory in 1926. In 1927, John W. Hill, a Cleveland journalist, started a firm in that city. In 1933, he formed a partnership with Don Knowlton and shortly thereafter moved to New York to found Hill & Knowlton, Inc. (H&K). Knowlton remained to run the Cleveland office. The two firms, connected only by overlapping ownership, operated independently until 1964, when Knowlton retired and the Cleveland office was sold to a successor firm. Hill died in 1977. In 1980, JWT Group, the holding company that owned the J. Walter Thompson Company advertising agency, acquired H&K for \$28 million. The British conglomerate WPP Group acquired the JWT Group of companies in 1989, including the recently renamed Hill+Knowlton Strategies (see <http://www.wpp.com/wpp/companies/>).



John W. Hill

Courtesy of Library of Congress

Long viewed as an ethical and respected leader of public relations counseling, Hill's role in helping the major tobacco companies form the Tobacco Industry Research Committee (TIRC) threatens his legacy. On his recommendation, the presidents of the major tobacco companies agreed to fund the TIRC, which allegedly funded research projects that challenged others' findings that smoking posed health threats. Hill fought the tobacco wars on behalf of the cigarette industry until he retired from H&K in 1962.[61](#) Throughout his professional life, however, Hill saw himself as a man of integrity and principle, committing his views to paper:

Should an existing client company adopt policies which the counsel believes are not in the public interest, he would advise against such policies—and, if he has integrity, be prepared to resign the account in case the client persisted.[62](#)

When asked directly about his role in the formation of the TIRC and in tobacco public relations, in 1966 Hill responded, “I decline to comment on this matter on the basis that this is an active, highly sensitive account,” and he did not cover H&K's tobacco account in his 1963 memoir, *The Making of a Public Relations Man*. [63](#) Long after Hill's death in 1977, however, there is little doubt about his role in creating a public relations front for the tobacco industry:

Though John Hill had long since passed from such earthly battles, the fact remains that he was the guiding force in the formation of the Tobacco Industry Research Committee and later the Tobacco Institute. Thus, Hill must bear responsibility for that “brilliantly conceived and executed plan” that served the selfish interests of the tobacco industry at the expense of millions of Americans' good health.[64](#)

Arthur W. Page

Among the pioneers shaping today's practice, Arthur W. Page stands at the summit. Page built three successful business careers, yet found time to contribute his talent to many public service endeavors. He was a writer and editor of World's Work magazine and other periodicals of Doubleday, Page and Company from 1905 until 1927. Then he accepted Walter Gifford's offer to succeed James D. Ellsworth as vice president of American Telephone and Telegraph Co.



Arthur W. Page

Courtesy of Library of Congress

At the outset Page made it clear that he would accept only on the conditions that he was not to serve as a publicity man, that he would have a voice in policy, and that the company's performance would determine its public reputation. Page's philosophy is summed up in this statement:

All business in a democratic country begins with public permission and exists by public approval. If that be true, it follows that business should be cheerfully willing to tell the public what its policies are, what it is doing, and what it hopes to do. This seems practically a duty.[65](#)

Although he continued nominally as vice president of AT&T during World War II, he devoted most of his time to the war effort. According to Page biographer Noel Griese, Page wrote for President Harry S. Truman what was surely the most widely distributed news release, which was issued in Washington, D.C., at 11:00 a.m., Monday, August 6, 1945:

Sixteen hours ago an American airplane dropped one bomb on Hiroshima, an important Japanese Army base. That bomb had more power than 20,000 tons of TNT. It had more than two thousand times

the blast power of the British “Grand Slam” which is the largest bomb ever yet used in the history of warfare.

The Japanese began the war from the air at Pearl Harbor. They have been repaid manifold It is an atomic bomb. It is a harnessing of the basic power of the universe. The force from which the sun draws its powers has been loosed against those who brought war to the Far East.⁶⁶

After the war, Page stayed on at AT&T to mentor his replacement. Page retired January 1, 1947, after integrating public relations concepts and practices into the Bell System. From then until his death in 1960 at age 77, he served as a consultant to many large corporations and gave much of his time to the service of government, higher education, and other causes. However, it was Page’s work for AT&T that left his lasting imprint on public relations. He was among the first to use the new science of public opinion polling as the basis for planning and evaluating public relations programs. His precepts and principles not only endure in the companies that used to be part of AT&T (broken up in 1984 by court order to foster competition), but also are renewed and promoted by the Arthur W. Page Society (see Page’s principles in [Chapter 5](#)).

Roosevelt Era and World War II: 1930–1945

Propelled by wartime lessons and a changing America, the practice of public relations moved full speed ahead until the stock market crash in 1929. Events flowing from the Depression and the President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal brought home to every group the need to build informed public support. New Dealers soon found that this was essential to pave the way for their radical reforms, and government public relations had its greatest expansion under President Roosevelt (FDR).

The Depression brought a tremendous expansion in social welfare needs and agencies, whose administrators also came to realize the need for better public

understanding. Military leaders, looking apprehensively at the buildup of the Nazi and Fascist war machines, began to promote support for more adequate armed forces. Colleges and universities, caught in the web of financial woes, turned more and more to public relations to raise funds.

Business leaders increasingly used public relations specialists to counter Roosevelt's biting criticisms and his legislative reforms. There was a marked trend away from occasional and defensive efforts and toward more positive and continuous programs administered by newly established departments. A growing labor movement, too, found that it had problems and needed guidance. School administrators, recognizing the need for bigger and better schools, also were made to realize the dangers of an uninformed public. This period also brought the tool that promised more precise, more scientific measurement and assessment of public opinion. The Roper and Gallup polls, begun in the mid-1930s, won wide respect in the presidential election of 1936. Perceptive practitioners began using this new tool to advise management and to formulate programs.

Louis McHenry Howe

FDR combined strong leadership with consummate skill to harness the forces of protest into an effective political coalition. He won his battles on front pages and over the radio, a new medium he used with matchless skill. Roosevelt's adroit moves in the public arena can be credited in large part to his public relations mentor, Louis McHenry Howe. The astute, tough-minded Howe served FDR and Eleanor Roosevelt faithfully and effectively from 1912 until Howe's death in 1936.[67](#)

Joseph Varney Baker

In 1934, the first minority-owned firm opened in Philadelphia. Joseph Varney Baker left his position as city editor of the Philadelphia Tribune to provide counsel to the Pennsylvania Railroad Company. Baker was the first African American to serve as president of a PRSA chapter and the first to be

accredited by PRSA. His firm's list of clients included Chrysler, Gillette, Procter & Gamble, NBC, RCA, and Scott Paper Company. One authority on minorities in public relations concluded that during the 40 years that Baker's firm existed, it "was hired to communicate only with the black consumer market, and the practice has continued to this day."[68](#)

Leone Baxter and Clem Whitaker

This era also produced the forerunner of a major segment of today's practice: the political campaign specialist. In 1933, husband and wife Clem Whitaker and Leone Baxter formed the first agency specializing in political campaigns, headquartered in San Francisco, California, with its heavy reliance on the initiative and referendum, and its then-weak political party organizations, provided fertile ground for the growth of political firms. From 1935 through 1958, the firm managed 80 major campaigns and won all but six. This agency brought a new approach to politics, including the "media blitz" in the final days of the campaign. Today it has countless imitators.



Leone Baxter

Courtesy of Library of Congress

Whitaker and Baxter met in 1933 at a Sacramento, California, gathering of supporters who had proposed that the Central Valley Project generate electrical power to sell to public agencies. Not surprisingly, private utilities—led by Pacific Gas & Electric—got a proposition put on the ballot to defeat the proposal. Even with a small budget, the Whitaker–Baxter campaign defeated the referendum funded by powerful corporate interests. Time magazine called them “the acknowledged originals in the field of political

public relations.”[69](#)

World War II produced more violent changes in the environment, accelerating the development of public relations. Once more the government led the way, demonstrating the power of an organized informational campaign. This time the instrument was the Office of War Information (OWI).

Military public relations now makes up a major segment of modern practice. Prior to the outbreak of World War II, however, it had been given scant support by military leaders. In 1935, General Douglas MacArthur, then Army chief of staff, appointed a young major, Alexander Surles, to head a public relations branch with the “dual job of getting before the public the War Department’s anxiety over things to come in Europe and to help newsmen pry stories out of the War Department.”[70](#)

With the advent of war, the “bureau of public relations” staff quickly grew from 3 to 3,000 officers and civilians. Concurrently, the Navy Department moved to expand and strengthen its public relations. The Army Air Corps, under the imaginative leadership of General H. H. “Hap” Arnold, a former information officer, quickly recruited a host of skilled public relations and advertising specialists. Their task was to sell air power in an age of trench-minded generals. In the process they trained countless practitioners for public relations work after the war and built a solid foundation for practice in the postwar boom.



General H. H. Hap Arnold

World War II brought paid advertising to the fore as a major tool of public relations, now in its many forms: public relations advertising, public service

advertising, issue or advocacy advertising, and institutional advertising. Beginning in 1942, the War Advertising Council worked with industry and the government to make advertising a major tool in getting citizens to produce for the war, recycle, ration scarce resources, buy war bonds, and serve in the armed forces.

Postwar Boom: 1946–1964

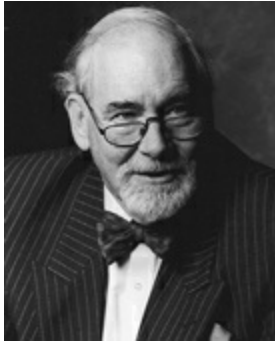
World War II brought new opportunities; new demonstrations of public relations' effectiveness in motivating war production, military morale, and civilian support; and new techniques and channels of communication. The war also schooled about 75,000 persons in the practice. The uneasy years of conversion from wartime to a peacetime economy and from an industrial to a postindustrial, service-oriented society accentuated and extended these developments. For example, in the late 1940s, industry was wracked by a series of bitter, prolonged strikes as organized labor fought to redress grievances built up in the no-strike war period and to keep wartime gains in pay. These struggles and increased public criticism of big business placed heavy demands on public relations in business and industry.[71](#)

Similarly, the postwar baby boom and the enrollment bulge of soldiers returning from World War II brought new and heavy demands on the nation's schools and colleges. Administrators recognized the need for public relations counsel. School districts had to promote one bond issue after another to build additional schools, and the nation's institutions of higher education had to scramble for funds for more teachers and buildings to meet the exploding demand for higher education and research.

Tim Traverse-Healy

In Europe, a leader emerged whom some called the “Edward Bernays of Europe”—a World War II British officer who formed a public relations firm, Traverse-Healy Limited, in 1947. As a Royal Marine Commando attached to Special Forces, Tim Traverse-Healy had parachuted into rural France during

the German occupation to work with the French resistance. He and the locals reactivated an abandoned bakery to bake bread, in which they could encase messages to be distributed to resistance forces. After the war, young Traverse-Healy and his bride converted the bakery into a vacation residence.



Tim Traverse-Healy

Above marginal photos are Courtesy of Library of Congress

During his illustrious career, he counseled major international corporations, lectured around the world, and cofounded both the British Institute of Public Relations and the International Public Relations Association. He was awarded two of England's highest honors—Fellowship of the Royal Society of Arts and Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE). The latter is second only to knighthood and was awarded by the Queen of England for “services to the profession of public relations.” He was the first public relations practitioner from outside the United States to address the Public Relations Society of America conference (1957 in Philadelphia) and is the only “foreigner” [his word] inducted into the Arthur W. Page Society “Hall of Fame” (1990).⁷² His long career as a practitioner included serving clients such as Airbus Industrie, General Motors, Lockheed, Hilton Hotels, National Westminster Bank (1952–1993), AT&T, and Johnson & Johnson. He sold his firm in 1993 and turned his attention to lecturing and writing standards for public relations practice for the European Union.

Daniel J. Edelman

Many of the major public relations firms that dominate the practice today

were established in the postwar years. In Chicago, following World War II service in the U.S. Army Psychological Warfare and Information Control divisions and four years as public relations director of Toni Company (Gillette), former CBS reporter Daniel J. Edelman started his firm in 1952. Within eight years, expansion began with a branch office in New York, followed by openings in Los Angeles, London, Washington, D.C., and Frankfurt, Germany. Edelman Public Relations Worldwide is now the world's largest independent firm (not owned by a communication conglomerate), with more than 4,000 employees in 63 offices worldwide. Edelman's son, Richard, is now CEO, operating out of coheadquarters in New York and Chicago (see www.edelman.com).



Daniel J. Edelman

Harold Burson

Harold Burson had operated his own firm for six years before teaming up with advertising executive Bill Marsteller in 1953 to form Burson-Marsteller. Burson worked as a newspaper journalist before serving with combat engineers in Europe during the last two years of World War II. After the war, he covered the Nuremberg Trials for the American Forces Network. Burson served as chairman and CEO of the firm until 1987. By 1983, Burson-Marsteller was the world's largest public relations firm, then with more than 2,400 employees in 58 offices in 27 countries. Unlike firms that grow by acquiring other smaller firms, Burson-Marsteller expanded by opening its own offices. Today, the firm's 68 wholly owned offices and 71 affiliated firms on six continents make it a truly global firm. Communication conglomerate Young & Rubicam purchased the firm in 1979 and was in turn

purchased in 2000 by the even larger British conglomerate, WPP Group. In conjunction with its 50th anniversary in 2003, the firm and a number of Burson's clients funded the Harold Burson Chair in Public Relations at Boston University (see <http://www.bu.edu/bridge/archive/2003/10-10/burson.html>).



Harold Burson

Inez Y. Kaiser

In Kansas City, Missouri, Inez Yeargan Kaiser established in 1961 the first public relations firm owned by an African-American female to serve national accounts. Inez Y. Kaiser & Associates, Inc., worked for 7-Up, Sears, Sterling Drug, Sperry Hutchinson, Continental Baking Company, and Pillsbury, among others. During her 33-year business career, Kaiser was the first black woman to join the Public Relations Society of America and founded the National Association of Minority Women in Business. Public relations educators in the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication created the Inez Kaiser Award in 1993, providing one-year memberships to minority graduate students pursuing advanced degrees in public relations.



Inez Y. Kaiser

Betsy Ann Plank

After working for a Pittsburgh radio station, Betsy Ann Plank began her career in public relations in 1947. She was executive vice president and treasurer for Daniel Edelman's Chicago firm before joining AT&T in New York as director of public relations planning. She transferred to Illinois Bell Telephone Company in 1974, where she was the first woman to head a department. She directed external affairs until she retired in 1990.



Betsy Ann Plank

Above marginal photos are Courtesy of Library of Congress

In 1973, Plank became the first woman to serve as president of the Public Relations Society of America. Since then, PRSA has awarded her the Gold Anvil, recognizing her as the nation's outstanding professional in 1977; the Lund Award for civic and community service (1989); and the first Jackson Award for distinguished service to PRSA (2001). The Arthur W. Page

Society awarded her its first Distinguished Service Award (2000). When she accepted the Institute for Public Relations' Alexander Hamilton Award, also in 2000, Plank summarized her concept of public relations:

Public relations is fundamental to a democratic society where people make decisions in the workplace, the marketplace, the community and in the voting booth. Its primary mission is to forge responsible relationships of understanding, trust and respect among groups and individuals—even though they often disagree.[73](#)

Plank was cofounder of the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) in 1967. An alumna of the University of Alabama, Plank endowed the “Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations” in the university’s College of Communications and Information Sciences. The university inducted her into its Communication Hall of Fame in 2001. “The First Lady of Public Relations” died May 23, 2010, at the age of 86.

The 1946–1964 boom period also produced a tremendous spurt in the number of books, articles, and journals devoted to the practice and its principles, problems, and techniques. As the body of knowledge grew, so did the number of college courses and programs specifically designed to prepare practitioners. Academic preparation in public relations led to greater acceptance of young graduates in the job market. Much of the impetus in education can be attributed to the original coauthors of this book—Effective Public Relations—first published in 1952, and referred to for many years as simply “Cutlip and Center.”

Scott M. Cutlip

West Virginian Cutlip began his career as a journalist in Morgantown, West Virginia. He earned a bachelor’s degree in journalism and political science at Syracuse University in 1939 and a master’s degree from the University of Wisconsin in 1941. After a short stay as public relations director for the West Virginia State Road Commission, he enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Force in 1942. He advanced from private to major in three years, beginning with the Fifth Air Force from Australia and ending with the occupation of Japan.



Scott M. Cutlip

Courtesy of Library of Congress

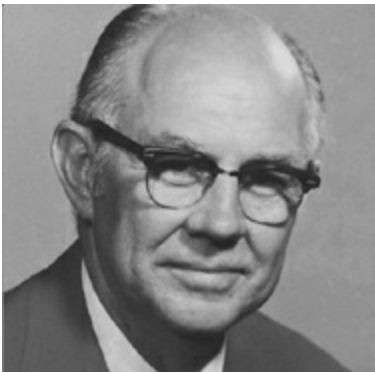
After World War II, Cutlip returned to the University of Wisconsin in 1946 as the president's assistant for public relations and as an instructor of public relations courses in the then-School of Journalism. He is widely credited with establishing public relations as a legitimate field of academic study. He also served as professor and mentor to many military public relations officers who came to Wisconsin to earn master's degrees as part of the Department of Defense effort to professionalize the function. He left Wisconsin in 1975 to become dean at what is now the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Georgia. He retired in 1985 and returned to his beloved Madison, Wisconsin, and the Wisconsin Historical Society.

His long and illustrious career earned him major lifetime achievement awards from communication associations and societies, including PRSA's first national Outstanding Educator Award in 1970 and the Gold Anvil in 1995. He was the third person inducted into the Arthur W. Page Society Hall of Fame (1987). In addition, he was awarded an honorary doctorate from West Virginia Wesleyan College, which he had attended as a youth. He died August 18, 2000, at the age of 85.

His legacy is tied to his books about public relations history cited in this chapter, including *Fund Raising in the United States: Its Role in America's Philanthropy*, *Public Relations History from the 17th to the 20th Century*, and *The Unseen Power: Public Relations—A History*. But it was the book that he wrote with Allen H. Center that defined both of their places in history.

Allen H. Center

Center's public relations career began during World War II in the Southwest Pacific. For three years in Guadalcanal, New Guinea, and the Philippines, Corporal Center edited a daily newspaper for the 13th Army Air Force Fighter Command Headquarters. As Tom Brokaw said in his book, *The Greatest Generation*, Center's generation learned lessons in the war that served them throughout their lives. In his unpublished family history, *The Center Line*, Center wrote:



Allen H. Center

Courtesy of Library of Congress

Looking back, the main lesson or benefit from my three years of military service was the conviction never to relinquish or delegate control of my own destiny . . . no matter what the gain in money, brownie points, or recognition. I, alone, must be in charge of my life. My time would be for sale, but not my character, standards, or convictions.

After the war, Center returned to his prewar employment with the American Chicle Company in New York, while he searched for a job in his newfound calling—public relations. His search led to the position as publications editor, then public relations director, at Parker Pen Company in Janesville, Wisconsin. In Wisconsin, he met Professor Scott Cutlip, who shared his interest in writing an authoritative text for the growing field of public relations. Referred to for years as “the bible of public relations,” their book

has introduced students and practitioners worldwide to the theory and practice of public relations for more than six decades.

He left Parker Pen after seven years to join Motorola as public relations director to help the Consumer Products Division introduce color television. Then the large Chicago advertising agency—Leo Burnett—lured him from Motorola, making him vice president of public relations. While holding this position for two years, he also served as the president of the Chicago chapter of PRSA.

He returned to Motorola in 1961, serving as corporate vice president for public relations until he took early retirement in 1973 to write the first edition of the advanced public relations case studies textbook, *Public Relations Practices*, now in its seventh edition with coauthors.⁷⁴ When he retired to the San Diego area in 1976, San Diego State University invited Center to teach part-time as the first and only person to hold the title “Distinguished Resident Lecturer.” He taught there until 1987.

In 1981, he received the PRSA’s highest national honor—the Gold Anvil—for his contributions to advancing the field. In 1986, he was the second person to be inducted into the Arthur W. Page Society’s Hall of Fame (Page’s son John was the first).

In a lifetime of achievement, Center was a true pathfinder who set the standards and aspirations for the emerging profession. He also served as a role model for generations of students and practitioners who share his vision of the social value and nobility of purpose in building harmonious relationships. Center died November 13, 2005, at the age of 93.

Additional impetus for the growth of professionalism came with the establishment of one strong general organization and the emergence of a number serving specialized fields of practice. Public Relations Society of America was formed August 4, 1947, when representatives of the West Coast American Council on Public Relations and the East Coast National Association of Public Relations Counsel met in Chicago. Dr. Rex F. Harlow was the moving force in bringing about this merger.

Period of Protest and Empowerment: 1965–1985

This era put “consumerism,” “environmentalism,” “racism,” and “sexism” at the top of the public agenda. Add to those “isms,” “peace.” A new breed of investigative muckrakers and powerful new advocacy groups pushed for social change, new social safety nets, and increased government oversight of business and industry. Through public demonstrations and “Great Society” legislative initiatives, as well as good-faith negotiation, power was redistributed, and organizations became more responsive to public concerns and values. Protecting the environment and securing civil rights became the flagship causes of this era.

Activist Leaders

Rachel Carson

Reminiscent of the early part of the twentieth century, “big business” again became the target of protest movements and media criticism. Also repeating that earlier era, books led the charge. For example, many credit Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962) with beginning the environmental movement.⁷⁵ President John F. Kennedy directed his science advisory committee to study the book’s documented charges that DDT indiscriminately killed all manner of insects and animals when applied to crops as a pesticide and that DDT had contaminated the entire food chain. The big pesticide manufacturers responded by threatening that without DDT the Dark Ages would return and that insects and disease would go unchecked. (Surely, this was not corporate public relations’ finest hour.) Public apathy changed to public demands to regulate the pesticide industry and to protect the environment.



Rachel Carson

Courtesy© Bettmann/CORBIS

Legislators' responses were immediate and long lasting. Congress passed the Clean Air Act of 1963, the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (making the protection of the environment national policy), and the Water Quality Improvement Act of 1970. The first "Earth Day" was celebrated in April 1970, and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was created in October 1970. Carson had taken on corporate America ... and won, setting the stage for an era of protest and change.

Ralph Nader

General Motors was another target of protest and public scrutiny, opening the door to greater corporate accountability. Ralph Nader gave birth to the consumer movement when he wrote *Unsafe at Any Speed: The Designed-In Dangers of the American Automobile* (1965).⁷⁶ Nader charged that the Chevrolet Corvair's suspension system made the car subject to rolling over.

GM's legal department responded by investigating Nader's private life. Subsequently, the company's president had to appear before a Senate subcommittee and apologize to Nader for resorting to intimidation. In addition, the company settled lawsuits out of court for invading Nader's privacy and agreed to change the Corvair suspension system. Congress

passed the 1966 National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act, spelling out safety standards on all vehicles.



Ralph Nader

Courtesy of Library of Congress

Nader used the cash settlement and his book royalties to establish the Project on Corporate Responsibility, staffed by young lawyers and investigators. Nader became the “consumer crusader” media darling for the fledgling consumer movement. Corporate secrecy and arrogance suffered many setbacks as “Nader’s Raiders” continued to press for corporate accountability over the next four decades. One tactic was to ask shareholders to give their vote proxies to Nader so he could challenge corporate policy and board elections.

Saul Alinsky

A self-described “radical,” Saul Alinsky, used similar tactics to take power from corporate America and others in the “establishment.” He made his intentions clear in the first paragraphs of his book:

The Prince was written by Machiavelli for the Haves on how to hold power. Rules for Radicals is written for the Have-Nots on how to take it away.

In this book we are concerned with how to create mass organizations to seize power and give it to the people[77](#)

Even his book title—Rules for Radicals—captures the tenor of that era. And he succeeded in creating widespread participation in his movement, as volunteers offered their proxy votes and active participation:

“Enclosed find my proxies. I wonder whether you have heard from anyone else in my suburb? If you have, I would appreciate receiving their names and addresses so that I can call a housemeeting and organize a San Fernando Valley Chapter of Proxies for People.” The second letter said, “. . . we don’t know why you should go to the board meetings with our proxies—why can’t we go with our proxies, of course all organized and knowing what we want, but we would like to go ourselves.”

[Emphasis added by Alinsky.][78](#)

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Without a doubt, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is the icon of this era of social change and empowerment. His rise to national leadership began in 1955 when he stood up for Rosa Parks, who was arrested for refusing to give up her bus seat to a white passenger in Montgomery, Alabama. He gave his famous “I Have a Dream” speech August 28, 1963, to an estimated 250,000 at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. Dr. King gave his prophetic last speech, “I’ve Been to the Mountain Top,” in Memphis, Tennessee, the day before he was assassinated on April 4, 1968. He became the martyr and symbol of the civil rights movement that produced, among many other changes, the 1965 Voting Rights Act and the Open Housing Law (1968). In short, Martin Luther King Jr. and the civil rights movement helped define this era of change and empowerment, affecting both internal and external relationships for all organizations.



Martin Luther King JR.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

Public relations scholar Linda Childers Hon studied the public relations strategy of King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), concluding: "Effective public relations clearly was a large element—if not the ultimate component—of SCLC's overall strategy."⁷⁹ She quoted King making the same point:

Public relations is a very necessary part of any protest of civil disobedience.... The public at large must be aware of the inequities involved in such a system [of segregation]. In effect, in the absence of justice in the established courts of the region, nonviolent protesters are asking for a hearing in the court of world opinion.⁸⁰

King's successes in the civil rights movement energized the equal rights movement spearheaded by Gloria Steinem, Bella Abzug, Shirley Chisholm, and Betty Friedan. They formed the National Women's Political Caucus in 1971 to help women run for political office. In addition, the organization endorses candidates supportive of women's issues. The organization continues to call for passage of an amendment to the Constitution mandating equal rights for women, first passed by the Congress in 1972 but never ratified by the states. Regardless, women have entered all phases of work—becoming the majority in public relations, for example—because of the doors opened during this era.

Surely the Vietnam War protests were the most divisive of this era, contributing to the “generation gap,” “hippies,” the “sexual revolution,” and—ultimately—Watergate and the impeachment of President Richard Nixon. Students staged antiwar protests on campuses nationwide, but none with more disastrous results than the 1970 demonstrations against the U.S. incursion into Cambodia. National Guard troops shot to death four students on the Kent State University (Ohio) campus, and Mississippi State Police killed two students on the campus of Jackson State College.

Seven months later, Congress repealed the 1964 Tonkin Gulf Resolution, which had authorized U.S. action in Vietnam. On January 27, 1973, the United States, North Vietnam, South Vietnam, and the Viet Cong Provisional Revolutionary Government signed the agreement “Restoring Peace in Vietnam.” The genie was out of the bottle, however, as citizen action had changed public policy and removed a president. A popular saying, “Power to the People,” also captured the essence of this era.

Corporate Campaigns

Power to the people took yet another turn during this era in the form of organized attacks on corporations’ profits and reputations. Referred to as “corporate campaigns,” strategy and tactics originally developed by radicals to oppose the Vietnam War were soon adopted by churches, labor unions, and other organized protest groups to force change on corporations. For example, men’s clothing maker Farah Manufacturing opened a new, nonunion plant in El Paso, Texas, in 1970. By 1972, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union (ACWU) had organized consumer boycotts and pressured Farah to recognize the ACWU as the bargaining agent for all 9,000 employees.[81](#)

As media and political science scholar Jarol Manheim points out, the corporate campaign is designed to systematically exploit key stakeholders’ relationships with the corporate target:

If a union or some other advocacy group pursuing a grievance against a company can turn the company’s customers, suppliers, shareholders, or

some other group on whose goodwill it depends against it, that stakeholder group becomes a de facto supporter of the campaign. If enough such supporters can be mobilized in this manner, the pressure on the company may well be irresistible. Management may be willing to do almost anything to make the pain disappear. That is, at least, the theory of the corporate campaign.[82](#)

In other words, this era's early activists pioneered a powerful combination of communication and action now systematically employed to empower those trying to force change on the part of corporations, government, churches, universities, charities, and all other types of organizations.

Public relations textbooks written near the end of this era also reflected a major change in public relations practice: No longer was the journalist-in-residence model of "telling our story" going to define public relations in organizations responding to the new balance of power in society. For example, the sixth edition of this book introduced "adjustment and adaptation" as the basis of contemporary practice (see [Chapter 7](#)). Research courses were added to the public relations curriculum on many campuses, and practitioners who engaged in information gathering were invited to join the management decision-making team in many organizations.

Emerging from the era of protest and empowerment, public relations could no longer focus simply on domestic relations. Technology, global commerce, and terrorism required new approaches to communication and international relations.

Digital Age and Globalization: 1986–Present

In the digital age, computers became affordable for home use. Information became "0s" and "1s" distributed over—in sequence—copper, fiber-optic, and wireless networks; and stored on ever-smaller devices—first on "floppies," then hard drives, CDs and DVDs, "thumb drives," and "the cloud." DVDs replaced videotapes. Blu-ray Discs replaced HD-DVD. The

“on demand” online downloads threaten to make discs of any kind obsolete.

The Internet changed everything—introducing email, online searches, and nearly unrestricted access to a powerful and instantaneous information and misinformation distribution system. Access made “self-publishing” a reality, leading to less control over the public information system by traditional media, to greater diversity in points of view, to increased interest in organizational transparency, and to precisely targeted communication with stakeholders. Social media further shift power from media and organizations to individuals formerly treated as mere “targets” in strategic communication programs. Much of the rest of this book describes the global practice in the digital age.

This chapter began with a quotation from George Santayana stating that people who do not remember the past are doomed to repeat it. The “inconvenient truth” is that unpopular wars and concern about global environmental damage are again near the top of the public agenda . . . worldwide.

Of course, we are living in this era as it redefines the concept and practice of public relations. Readers of this book text will be the actors writing this part of public relations history.

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Study Guide

1. What modern practice did Ivy Lee in his “Declaration of Principles” introduce in 1906?
2. This chapter outlines four periods of development, beginning with the “Public Be Damned Era.” What three periods follow that era?
3. What was the major contribution of the World War I “Creel Commission”?

4. Who were some of the major figures and how did they influence the development of public relations during the “Postwar Boom: 1946–1964”?

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Part II Foundations

1. [Chapter 5. Professionalism and Ethics](#)
2. [Chapter 6. Legal Considerations](#)
3. [Chapter 7. Theoretical Underpinnings: Adjustment and Adaptation](#)
4. [Chapter 8. Communication Theories and Contexts](#)
5. [Chapter 9. Internal Relations and Employee Communication](#)
6. [Chapter 10. External Media and Media Relations](#)

Chapter 5 Professionalism and Ethics

Learning Outcomes

After studying [Chapter 5](#) this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Identify the six characteristics of professions.
2. Describe the major professional associations serving the field.
3. Describe the undergraduate program of study in public relations recommended by the Commission on Public Relations Education.
4. Identify the major motivations behind concern for professional ethics in public relations practice.
5. List and briefly discuss the positives of socially responsible public relations, as well as the major negatives attributed to public relations when it is not practiced in the public interest.
6. Outline and apply some of the major articles from the Public Relations Society of America Code of Ethics.
7. Outline the major arguments for and against licensing and accreditation of practitioners.

If I have done my job well for the right purpose, my life has substance and meaning. If I have done my job poorly or for the wrong purpose, I have squandered my life, however much I have prospered.

—John Kultgen¹

As discussed in [Chapter 1](#), many Many people confuse public relations with

other departments, such as marketing, or with its parts, such as publicity. Furthermore, many people hold mistaken assumptions about public relations, believing it serves only organizational interests without regard for the public interest. For these reasons, improving the professionalism of public relations practice remains a key concern among most practitioners. They cannot do their jobs without the trust of the public and their organization's dominant coalition; they cannot earn that trust until they live up to professional standards.

Criteria of a Profession

As in other “professional” occupations, many in public relations work to earn status as members of a true profession. Attempts to achieve professional status might be considered selfish by some, but the results of increased professionalism benefit society as a whole. Professionalization institutionalizes the best practices and establishes standards of quality that serve the public interest. Professionalization has, by and large, brought us better health care; safer highways and bridges; better houses; faster cars and airplanes; safer air travel; and higher standards in business, banking, and accounting. Add to this list more competent public relations counsel.

Assessing the progress of contemporary practice toward achieving professional status requires criteria. Indicators of professional status include² the following:

1. Professional associations;
2. Specialized educational preparation to acquire unique knowledge and skills;
3. A body of theory-based knowledge, developed through research, that provides us with principles of appropriate and effective public relations practice;
4. Codes of ethics and standards of performance established and enforced by a self-governing association of colleagues;

5. Autonomy in practice and acceptance of personal responsibility by practitioners; and
6. Recognition by the community of providing a unique and essential service.

Professional Associations

The growth of professional associations reflects the serious efforts being made by many practitioners to surround the function with status and to advance its competence. Although these associations represent only a small portion of all those working in the public relations field, they exert considerable influence through their publications, conferences, seminars, awards programs, and advocacy for the practice. These organizations are international, national, regional, and specialized by area of practice—such as practitioners in health care, agriculture, or financial relations.

International Professional Organizations

The growth of public relations on a global scale makes it possible to have international professional societies devoted to public relations education, research, and professional standards. Groups of scholars such as the International Communication Association (www.icahdq.org) also have divisions devoted to public relations research and teaching among their ranks. Practitioners have organized several international societies, including the following:

International Association of Business Communicators (IABC)

Progress toward increased professionalism and higher standards in public relations advanced with the emergence of the IABC as a strong organization. Founded in 1970 when the Association of Industrial Editors and the International Council of Industrial Editors merged, IABC grew from 3,500 members to more than 15,000 members today in over 80 countries (www.iabc.com). The IABC world headquarters is in San Francisco. To advance the competence and ethics of this field, IABC created a professional development guide for practitioners to help them identify the skills and knowledge necessary for attaining career goals and an ethics review committee to enforce a code of ethics. The code of ethics (www.iabc.com/about/code.htm) emphasizes that the principles of professional communication—legal, ethical, and in good taste—apply worldwide.

IABC

International Public Relations Association (IPRA)

When IPRA was formed in London in 1955, it had only 15 members in five countries. Membership in 2007 totaled nearly 1,100 individuals in 100 countries (www.ipra.org). With administrative offices in the United Kingdom, IPRA is formally recognized by the United Nations, as well as by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and UNESCO. In 1965, it adopted an International Code of Ethics, called the “Code of Athens,” which is based on the UN Declaration of Human Rights. To commemorate IPRA’s 25th anniversary in 1980, the French Post Office Authority issued the first and only stamp dedicated to public relations. IPRA promotes professional recognition, high standards, and ethics among practitioners working in international aspects of public relations.



In addition, it supports professional development and recognition in parts of the world where public relations is just developing and helps establish new national associations. The organization's website includes a mirror site in Arabic (www.ipra-ar.org).

One of the newer international organizations in the field is the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management (www.globalalliancepr.org). See [Exhibit 5.1](#) for details on its founding.

National Professional Organizations

Public Relations Society of America (PRSA)

The largest public relations professional organization in the world is headquartered in New York City. With the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) as its affiliated student organization, the PRSA has nearly 32,000 professional and student members. PRSA is organized into 110 chapters nationwide and 16 professional interest sections, and the organization traces its origins to three older associations established to bring together practitioners of this growing vocation (see [Chapter 4](#)). Formed in 1947, PRSA fosters the exchange of ideas through its publications and

meetings, promotes a sense of professionalism, provides opportunities for continuing education, and encourages ethical behavior and high standards of practice (www.prsa.org).



Courtesy Public Relations

Exhibit 5.1

The Global Alliance Supports “One Profession, One Voice”



Juan-Carlos Molleda, Ph.D., Associate Professor, University of Florida

The Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management (GA) provides leadership in unifying the worldwide trade community under a common vision: one profession, one voice. After three years of planning, the formal commitment to establish the GA was reached by 23 professional organizations at a meeting that followed the 2000 World Public Relations Congress in Chicago, co-sponsored by the Public Relations Society of America and the International Public Relations Association.

The GA is a clearinghouse of national and international professional organizations that encourages debate regarding common issues facing the industry. Likewise, the GA works to set standards for the practice and provide venues and channels for increasing interactions among global practitioners. Because no individual membership is allowed, the national association is the GA's primary focus. The core offering of the GA allows member associations to share resources and achieve greater unity through building constructive relationships.

In 2002, the GA became a registered nonprofit in London, initiated a formal election process for its leadership (a chairperson holds the position for two consecutive years), and structured seven committees: setting standards (i.e., ethics, accreditation, curriculum, industry tools, and corporate social responsibility), sharing information and resources, advocacy, outreach, finance, marketing, and technology. Relevant outcomes of these efforts include a Global Protocol of Ethics introduced in Rome in 2003; a study on regulations in Italy, South Africa, and the United Kingdom; a Position Statement on corporate social responsibility in 2004; and a series of PR Landscapes profiling the industry, business, and political environments in countries around the world since 2004.

Starting in 2006, the "Global Alliance Scholarship," in association with the University of Lugano (Switzerland), offered education opportunities to non-Swiss students and an Executive Master of Science in Communications Management to member-organization applicants, seminars and workshops on best practices in association management, and a report on core competencies in public relations and communication. In 2008, the Global Alliance Center was established at the Università della Svizzera Italiana in Lugano.

The GA convenes twice annually, once with the Executive Board and the other as a General Council meeting in which all association representatives are encouraged to participate. Meetings are held as a component of conferences and the World Public Relations Forum

(WPRF) organized by national association members (i.e., Rome 2003, Trieste 2005, Brasilia 2006, Cape Town 2007, London 2008, Stockholm 2010, and Melbourne 2012). “The Stockholm Accords” advocacy program, a significant outcome of the 2010 Stockholm WPRF, was the first unified global declaration of the important role of public relations in organizational success in the organizational success in the twenty-first century “digital society.” In 2011, the GA completed and published the first global research study of public relations curriculum.

Courtesy Juan Carlos Molleda, Ph.D.

Canadian Public Relations Society (CPRS)

Founded in 1948, CPRS has 2,000 national members in 16 local societies (www.cprs.ca). One-third of the members are accredited. CPRS publishes a bimonthly newsletter, Communiqué, and holds an annual conference. Headquartered in Toronto, Ontario, CPRS closely parallels PRSA in philosophy and programming. The local Societies also recruit and mentor junior and student members.

Chartered Institute of Public Relations (United Kingdom) (CIPR)

Also founded in 1948, London-based CIPR has regional and specialist groups (by type of practice) with 9,000 members (www.cipr.co.uk). It is the largest public relations professional association in Europe. Fifty-five percent of the membership work in-house, while the other 45 percent work in public relations consultancies. Long a leader in establishing and enforcing codes of professional and ethical conduct, and in encouraging academic preparation and professional development within the profession, CIPR publishes Profile

six times a year. It is a member of the Confédération Européenne des Relations Publiques and charter member of the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communications Management.

Outside the United States, there are more than 100 national and regional associations of public relations practitioners in more than 70 countries. One of the oldest of these national associations, the Public Relations Institute of Australia, was also formed in 1947 (see [Exhibit 5.2](#)). As public relations gains recognition around the world, the number of professional associations in this field will continue to grow (see [Exhibit 5.3](#)).

Specialized, Regional, and Local Associations

The growing memberships of several specialized national organizations attest to the field's growing sense of common interests, developing esprit de corps, and professionalism. Almost every type of industry has an organization for its communicators, and many are

Exhibit 5.2

Public Relations Institute of Australia



Robina Xavier, FPRIA

President, Public Relations Institute of Australia

The Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA) is the peak body for public relations and communication professionals in Australia. PRIA represents and provides professional support and recognition to more than 3,000 individual practitioners and more than 175 consultancies, across all states and territories.

Since 1949, our role has been to promote and enhance the profession and its status to the broader community throughout Australia. The PRIA enforces a high standard of ethical practice among members and represents public relations practitioners in the best interests of the profession.

Our members are drawn from in-house and agency practice across all sectors of the industry, from corporate to government to community. Individuals are required to meet strict criteria for full professional membership. These include a PRIA-accredited tertiary qualification and a minimum of three years of full-time practice, or a minimum of five years of full-time experience. All members are required to make a personal, written commitment to a stringent Code of Ethics.

Public relations agencies can also apply to hold Registered Consultancy status. To achieve this, the agency principal must be a full professional member of the PRIA. Consultancy members are bound by the Code of Ethics and an additional Code of Practice covering client relations, fees and income, and general practice.

PRIA provides members with professional accreditation, as well as recognition through our annual awards program. PRIA also provides members with privileged access to a range of resources, tools, and professional support to help them develop their current role or the next.

The PRIA runs hundreds of networking, information and training events and programs each year, to help improve members' professional skills, networks and opportunities. Many members

take up the opportunity for professional development by volunteering with the Institute to help it achieve its mission.

Courtesy Public Relations Institute of Australia.

Exhibit 5.3

Public Relations in Sweden



Larsåke Larsson, Professor, Örebro University, Sweden

Public relations in Sweden started much later than in the United States, England, and Germany. Swedish public relations began during World War II, when the country was isolated because it was neutral, like Switzerland. After the war, some government agencies and corporations, such as Swedish Rail, Swedish Post, and the National Board of Health, engaged public relations specialists.

Public relations competence spread in the business sector in the 1950s under the title “press officer.” The first counseling firms also came into being during this decade, but the public relations industry grew slowly in the following years. Beginning in the late 1970s, however, the function in all types of organizations began to grow, with particularly rapid growth in the 1990s. Counseling firms experienced a surge in growth as the twentieth century ended. More than a decade into the new century, most companies more or less use such external communication experts.

Today, the Swedish public relations industry embraces about

10,000 professionals in a country with 9 million inhabitants. Almost 5,000 practitioners belong to the Swedish Public Relations Association (Sveriges Informationsförening), which was established in 1956. Most professionals work in-house for companies, organizations, and state and local governmental authorities. The others are engaged as consultants at public relations firms. At least 1,000 consultants work in approximately 100 public relations firms (most of them in small firms), while about one-fourth of the consultants work for the three largest public relations firms. Several large firms are affiliates of international firms based in other countries.

Public relations in Sweden differs from the practice in many other countries in that approximately 40 percent of practitioners work within the public/official sector. Secondly, most public relations professionals work in-house. A third feature specific to Nordic/Scandinavian public relations strategy is that programs often address the “general public” due to cultural tradition and laws that require the dissemination of public information.

Twelve state universities offer public relations education under a three-year general media and communication program. Students study public relations (often called “planned and strategic communication”) for one to four semesters. A few private schools also offer public relations and advertising education.

Scholarly research in public relations is a specialty under the larger field of media and communication research, most using qualitative methodology and often employing a societal perspective. These researchers are mostly active in the European Public Relations Education and Research Association (<http://www.euprera.org>).

Courtesy Larsake Larsson

organized by geographic location or demographic commonalities. For some examples, see [Exhibit 5.4](#).

In addition, a number of “exclusive” professional groups have developed

over the years, with varying degrees of impact in shaping the practice. These include the Wise Men, begun in 1938 by John W. Hill, Pendleton Dudley, and T. J. Ross; Public Relations Seminar, started in 1951 as an outgrowth of the National Conference of Business Public Relations Executives; and Pride and Alarm, founded in 1957 in New York. Exclusivity for the in-group is their hallmark, and these groups generally hold their meetings in private and off the record. Some are small, informal, and area-specific, like the Corporate Relations Roundtable, a Houston group. Others are large, formalized, and national or international.

The newest by-invitation-only group is the Arthur W. Page Society, formed in 1983 when deregulation splintered AT&T's public relations unit. The group's literature offers the vision statement (www.awpagesociety.com):

The Arthur W. Page Society is committed to the belief that public relations as a function of executive management is central to the success of the corporation. The membership of the Society will embrace those individuals who epitomize the highest standards of public relations practice, as exemplified by the Page Principles. [See [Exhibit 5.5](#)]

Elite groups such as the Page Society attempt to provide leadership, continuity, and continued growth for the public relations function. They often encourage the role of the public

Exhibit 5.4

Public Relations Professional Associations

International

Confédération Européenne des Relations Publiques, established in 1959 (www.cerp.org)

African Public Relations Association, established in 1975 as
Federation of African Public Relations Associations

(www.afapr.org)

Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management, 2000 (www.globalalliancepr.org)

International Communications Consultancy Organisation, 1988 (www.iccopr.com)

Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa, 1957 (www.prisa.co.za)

Study and Research Centre on Public Relations in the Mediterranean Area, 2008 (www.cerrpmed.it)

Universal Accreditation Board, 1998 (www.praccreditation.org)

Nation-Based

Armenian Public Relations Association, established in 2002 (www.apra.am)

Canadian Public Relations Society, 1948 (www.cprs.ca)

Chartered Institute of Public Relations (United Kingdom), 1948 (www.cipr.co.uk)

China International Public Relations Association, 1991 (www.cipra.org.cn)

Deutsche Public Relations Gesellschaft (Germany), 1958 (www.dprg.de)

Federal Council of Professionals of Public Relations (Brazil), 1969 (www.conferp.org.br)

Information Presse & Communication (France), 1956 (www.infopressecom.org)

Institute of Public Relations Malaysia, 1962 (www.iprm.org.my)

Public Relations Society of India, 1958 (www.prsi.co.in)

Public Relations Society of Turkey, 1972 (www.tuhid.org)

Public Relations Association of Indonesia, 1972
(www.perhumas.or.id)

Public Relations Institute of Australia, 1947 (www.pria.com.au)

U.S.-Based, Specialization- Based

Agricultural Relations Council, established in 1953
(www.agrelationscouncil.org)

Association of Fundraising Professionals, 1960 (www.afpnet.org)

Council for Advancement and Support of Education, 1975
(www.case.org)

Hispanic Public Relations Association, 1984 (www.hpra-usa.org)

Issue Management Council, 1988 (www.issuemanagement.org)

National Association of Government Communicators, 1976
(www.nagc.com)

National Black Public Relations Society, 1987 (www.nbprs.org)

National Investor Relations Institute, 1969 (www.niri.org)

National School Public Relations Association, 1935
(www.nspr.org)

Religion Communicators Council, 1929
(www.religioncommunicators.org)

relations practitioner as the ethical conscience of an organization, help mentor young public relations managers, and advance the role of public relations in management.

Student Organizations

Development of the Public Relations Student Society of America under the auspices of PRSA has strengthened education and recruitment into the field in the United States. PRSSA's first chapter was chartered in 1968; today, PRSSA has more than 300 chapters at colleges and universities throughout the United States and one chapter in Argentina. The organization works to "advance the public relations profession by nurturing generations of future professionals" (www.prssa.org). Since the mid-1970s, the organization has been completely governed by student leaders elected to the PRSSA National Committee by PRSSA delegates to the organization's annual leadership assembly. Thus, PRSSA presents opportunities for training not only in public relations, but also in leadership. In recognition of the increasing globalization of public relations practice, PRSSA in 2007 started the Public Relations Student International Coalition, which provides information on public relations practice and education in numerous countries(www.prssa.org/prsic).

IABC also sponsors student chapters (www.students.iabc.com); although IABC's student organization is smaller than that of PRSSA, it has the benefit of being international. Students worldwide are forming similar affiliates of their country's professional societies. In Russia, for example, more than 400 public relations majors at 67 universities met in Moscow in December 2003 to form the Russian Public Relations Student Association (RASSO), the student division of the Russian Public Relations Association (RASO).³ In the United States, the Southern Public Relations Federation (www.sprf.org) also sponsors student chapters on college campuses.

Specialized Educational

Preparation

The establishment of pre-professional organizations for students is only one aspect of an aspiring professional's education in public relations. As a leading public relations practitioner told students at Ball State University, "Public relations will never reach the status of a profession as long as people can get into the field and prosper without having completed a fairly rigorous course of study in the field."⁴ Established professions require extended periods of training to learn the knowledge and skills needed to practice, plus the completion of qualifying or board exams; generally, the more rigorous the training and the more complex the knowledge, the higher the professional status.

Because preparation is standardized and demanding, those entering professions go through similar initiations to the values and expectations of practice. Their common socialization experience not only standardizes the practice, but also encourages commitment to lifelong careers and strong bonds with colleagues. Because of the commitment, time, and effort invested in acquiring the knowledge and skills base, professionals value achievement in the intellectual aspects of their fields.⁵

Degree Programs

Degree programs in public relations have seen tremendous growth over the last half century, and the numbers of students majoring in public relations continues to grow each year.⁶ The first university-level public relations course was offered in 1923 and taught by Edward L. Bernays, who had just written *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, a foundational book for the field. Bernays taught the one-semester-credit course for two years in the journalism department of New York University's School of Commerce, Accounts, and Finance.

In the United States, instruction in public relations quickly grew. By 1946, 30 colleges offered 47 courses.⁷ In 1956, the PRSA made the first comprehensive survey of public relations education and found that the

number of colleges offering courses had tripled in a decade.⁸ Another survey financed by PRSA in 1970 identified 303 institutions offering one or more courses and increasing scholarly research activity.⁹ The 1981 Commission on Public Relations Education estimated that 10,000 students were taking public relations courses at some 300 institutions.¹⁰ Now, there are respected public relations programs at most major universities in countries around the globe.

The most recent Commission on Public Relations Education recommended that undergraduate public relations programs contain the following core content areas of study:

1. Theory, Origin, Principles, and Professional Practice of Public Relations

—

nature and role of public relations, history and development of the field, theories and principles underlying the practice, and societal forces affecting the profession and its practice.

2. Public Relations Ethics and Law—

codes of ethics and standards of practice in public relations and in other professions; ethical issues and trends toward greater organizational transparency; and legal and regulatory compliance issues such as privacy, defamation, copyright, workplace diversity, product liability, and financial disclosure.

3. Public Relations Research, Measurement, and Performance Evaluation

—

quantitative and qualitative research designs, processes, tools, and techniques such as public opinion polls, surveys, experiments; fact-finding and applied research; observation and performance measurement; social, communication, and employee audits; issue tracking; focus groups and interviews; use of external research services and consultants; media clipping and analysis; and historical research.

4. Public Relations Planning and Management—

techniques and models related to setting long- and short-term goals and objectives; designing strategies and tactics; segmenting publics and designing effective messages; analyzing problems and opportunities; communicating with top management; developing budgets; contingency planning for crises and disasters; managing issues, developing timetables and calendars; and assigning authority and responsibility.

5. Public Relations Writing and Production—

communication theory; concepts and models for mass, interpersonal, employee, and internal communication; new and emerging communication technologies; organizational communication and dynamics; communication with diverse audiences and across cultures; persuasion and propaganda; controlled versus uncontrolled communication; and feedback systems.[11](#)

The Commission on Public Relations Education advised that these key courses be supported by a public relations internship and coursework focusing on tactical implementation, such as a writing or campaigns class. Finally, they also recommended directed electives in an area of “supporting coursework” in another discipline. The Commission also recommended business management and marketing, sociology, public administration, political science, and international business courses.[12](#)

As discussed in [Chapter 2](#), increasing numbers of practitioners possess a graduate degree, either in public relations or a related field. Graduate-degree programs in public relations today include not only standard master’s-level curriculum, but also executive-level programs for public relations managers.

Continuing Education

Professions require continuing education to keep practitioners current in theory and skills. Graduate school is only one of many options for continuing education. The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) and the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) now require or

encourage members to earn continuing education units (CEUs) through professional development seminars and workshops.

Requiring practitioners to maintain current expertise and skills, and to perform public service, moves the field even closer to the more established professions. Continuing education also demonstrates commitment to the lifetime of learning needed to provide clients with current and competent service, part of any profession's implicit contract with society.

Educational Resources

Professional associations in public relations also offer various educational resources, such as webinars or case studies of public relations campaigns. The website of the Universal Accreditation Board includes a list of textbooks recommended for candidates who are preparing for the accreditation examination in public relations (see www.praccreditation.org). One of those textbooks is this one, *Effective Public Relations* .

The textbook that you are now reading was first published in 1952. Written by Scott M. Cutlip and Allen H. Center (see [Chapter 4](#) for details), the first edition of *Effective Public Relations* was one of the world's first textbooks in public relations. In the last 60 years, this text has undergone many thorough revisions and additions. Now in its eleventh edition, *Effective Public Relations* remains one of the most widely used public relations textbooks worldwide. Previous editions have been translated into several languages, including Bulgarian, Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Latvian, Russian, and Spanish.

Research and the Body of Knowledge

Professional higher education introduces aspiring practitioners to the body of theory, research, and skills on which the profession is based. Continuing

education then keeps practitioners up to date on research developments that expand the body of knowledge. Not everyone, however, accepts the concept of a body of knowledge and the value of basic research. Few practitioners subscribe to or read the field's research journals, as many believe that experience is enough to guide their activity.

A sure sign of advancement toward professional status, however, is the increasing demand for research and critical examination of the conventional wisdom guiding the practice. Public relations problems in business and industry, for example, are every bit as tough and complicated as the problems faced by engineering, finance, production, or distribution. Practitioners must approach them as methodically and as thoroughly prepared as engineers, economists, and other managers approach their own. Such a scientific approach requires understanding based on a body of knowledge developed through extensive research. Hence, the oft said, "Nothing is more practical than a good theory."

Support for Research

Because professions draw on a specialized body of knowledge developed through research, practitioners are obligated to support the advancement of professional knowledge. Several organizations support research in public relations, including the Institute for Public Relations (IPR), the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), The Arthur W. Page Center for Integrity in Public Communication, and the Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations.

In 1956, the PRSA chartered the Foundation for Public Relations Research and Education to advance professionalism in the field by funding research, disseminating scholarly writings, and promoting professional education. In 1989, this foundation separated from PRSA and changed its name to the Institute for Public Relations (IPR). Today an independent nonprofit based at the University of Florida, the IPR's mission is to support "the science beneath the art of public relations" (www.instituteforpr.org). To that end, the IPR funds public relations research projects and publishes their results online,

makes academic research accessible to practitioners, recognizes outstanding scholarship, and awards undergraduate and graduate scholarships. The IPR also supports the Commission on Public Relations Measurement and Evaluation, founded in 1998, and the International Public Relations Commission, founded in 2005. In another key effort to support public relations research, the IPR sponsors, with the University of Miami and other organizations, the annual International Public Relations Research Conference, which draws top scholars from around the world to present cutting-edge research that pushes the boundaries of our body of knowledge.

In 1984, the Research Foundation of the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) awarded the largest-to-date single grant for public relations research. Estimated to total more than \$400,000, its “Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management” project explored the function’s contributions to the bottom line and identified factors contributing to organizational success. Professor James Grunig, now retired from the University of Maryland, led a team of researchers from the United States and the United Kingdom that produced comprehensive reviews of theory and research and also collected data from more than 200 organizations in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. This decade-long research project produced several principles of excellence in public relations, which many scholars and practitioners consider to benchmark the body of knowledge in our field.¹³ Another important research project funded by the IABC Research Foundation in the 1980s was the “Velvet Ghetto” study, which benchmarked how women in public relations at that time often failed to advance to managerial roles (see [Chapter 2](#)).¹⁴

In 1990, the Public Relations Society of America reorganized its efforts to support research, creating the PRSA Foundation as a philanthropic arm “committed to the development of programs to advance public relations research, education and scholarships, while encouraging

Exhibit 5.5

Arthur W. Page Principles

Arthur W. Page practiced seven principles of public relations management as a means of implementing his philosophy.

Tell the truth. Let the public know what's happening and provide an accurate picture of the company's character, ideals and practices.

Prove it with action. Public perception of an organization is determined 90 percent by what it does and 10 percent by what it says.

Listen to the customer. To serve the company well, understand what the public wants and needs. Keep top decision makers and other employees informed about public reaction to company products, policies and practices.

Manage for tomorrow. Anticipate public reaction and eliminate practices that create difficulties. Generate goodwill.

Conduct public relations as if the whole company depends on it. Corporate relations is a management function. No corporate strategy should be implemented without considering its impact on the public. The public relations professional is a policymaker capable of handling a wide range of corporate communications activities.

Realize a company's true character is expressed by its people. The strongest opinions—good or bad—about a company are shaped by the words and deeds of its employees. As a result, every employee—active or retired—is involved with public relations. It is the responsibility of corporate communications to support each employee's capability and desire to be an honest, knowledgeable ambassador to customers, friends, shareowners and public officials.

Remain calm, patient and good-humored. Lay the groundwork for public relations miracles with consistent and reasoned attention to information and contacts. This may be difficult with today's contentious 24-hour news cycles and endless number of watchdog

organizations. But when a crisis arises, remember, cool heads communicate best.

Courtesy Arthur W. Page Society. From www.awpagesociety.com/about/the-page-principles (April 2012).

contributions from those who stand to benefit from its advancement.” Each year, the PRSA Foundation offers the Jackson Jackson and Wagner Behavioral Science Prize, which recognizes a researcher “whose scholarly work enhances the understanding of the concepts and theories that contribute to the effectiveness of public relations practice” (www.prsafoundation.org). In addition, the foundation offers grants to support research from public relations academics, graduate students, and practitioners.

Founded in 2004, The Arthur W. Page Center for Integrity in Public Communication is located at Pennsylvania State University. Although The Page Center is primarily a research center, offering financial support to public relations scholars, it also presents educational programs, houses a collection of oral histories with important public relations practitioners, and archives documents related to Arthur Page and to ethics in public communication (thepagecenter.comm.psu.edu).

The Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations was established in 2005 at the University of Alabama. With generous funding from public relations pioneer Betsy Plank, often called the “First Lady of Public Relations” in the United States (see [Chapter 4](#)), the Center supports various awards and scholarships, educational programs, and grants in leadership studies related to public relations (www.plankcenter.ua.edu).

The Body of Knowledge

The body of knowledge serving the field, as documented in scholarly and trade publications, often reflects a gap between the immediate information needs of practitioners and the theory-building research conducted by scholars. For example, the content of PRSA’s Public Relations Tactics and IABC’s Communication World primarily reflect practitioners’ interest in day-

to-day problems and techniques related to designing and implementing programs and what one practitioner called “news you can use.” The independent Public Relations Quarterly features commentaries and scholarly analyses, book reviews, and regular columnists of interest to practitioners. PRSA’s Public Relations Strategist quarterly addresses issues and trends of interest to public relations professionals and—according to the magazine’s promotional literature—their peers, meaning “the chief executive officer, marketing managers, and financial and human resources executives.” PRWeek updates practitioners with industry news and features, primarily focusing on marketing support efforts of public relations firms and corporate departments.

On the other hand, the scholarly journals—Public Relations Review and Journal of Public Relations Research—report research on the social context of public relations, factors of effectiveness, and theory development related to the practice. The scholarly literature also mirrors classic concerns of other emerging professions: preoccupation and introspection during the search for collective identity, justification, and recognition.¹⁵

In 2007, in an effort to bridge the gap between public relations practitioners and scholars, PRSA relaunched Public Relations Journal as an online publication in which researchers must spell out the implications of their work for public relations practice (www.prsa.org/Intelligence/PRJournal). Potential articles are reviewed by scholars for their research rigor, as well as by practitioners for their practical relevance in the day-to-day work of public relations professionals. But despite all these trade and scholarly publication outlets, a majority of public relations analyses and research reports do not get published and widely disseminated. Most of the research conducted by and for public relations departments and firms is considered proprietary and is therefore not shared beyond the sponsoring organization.

Ethical Foundations of Professionalism

One key characteristic of professional education in any field is an emphasis

on professional ethics. Yet, even as the majority of professionals in a field do their work ethically, there are always those few who harm the profession's reputation through their lack of ethics. News reports tell of insurance fraud, unnecessary medical tests, or risky but unnecessary surgery. Lawyers are known for filing absurd claims to harass, intimidate, or frustrate the judicial process. Dentists, pharmacists, accountants, and other professional occupations also have their share of scandal. In public relations, practitioners have been convicted of defrauding their clients, among other crimes.¹⁶

Ideally, professional societies or associations engage in self-policing to deter malfeasance, to enforce the collective morality, and to ensure that professionals will engage in what one writer calls "right conduct."¹⁷ Surely, the primary goal is to protect the clients of professional services. At the same time, however, self-policing in the professions protects the professional franchise and maintains public trust and support for professional privilege.

Professional Ethics

Ethical conduct suggests that actions are consistent with moral norms in a society. In professions, the application of moral values in practice is referred to as "applied ethics."¹⁸ Established professions translate widely shared ideas of right conduct into codes of ethics. These statements of applied ethics guide professional practice and provide the basis for enforcement and sanctions. For instance, an attorney convicted of perjury or witness tampering can be disbarred and no longer be allowed to practice law.

Why this concern for professional ethics and enforcement of codes of conduct? The answers are both simple and complex. The simple answer is to protect those who entrust their well-being to the professional. The more complex answer also includes concerns about protecting the profession itself: professional privilege, status, and collegiality.

The Imperative of Trust

Clients' relationships with professionals differ from their relationships with other providers of skills and services. For example, if you go to a hospital emergency room, you will most likely have some degree of confidence that the physicians and nurses are qualified and capable and, furthermore, that it is their ethical duty to perform with your best interests in mind. It is unlikely that you will delay their performance while you check their transcripts to make sure they took the appropriate courses and passed all their exams. Contrast your relationship with these doctors and nurses with the one you establish with a mechanic when your car needs repair service.

The difference centers on the nature of fiduciary relationships. When you seek the services of a professional, you put yourself—not just your things—at risk. Your well-being is subject to the judgment and actions of the professional. Professional privilege maintains confidentiality when you must reveal aspects of your person and behavior that normally remain private. In other words, you trust the professional with information and access that often are withheld from even your closest friends and family. Often, you actually entrust yourself and your possessions to the professional. That is, you enter a fiduciary relationship, meaning the professional holds you, and possibly your possessions, in trust and is obliged to act in your best interest. This obligation differentiates the professional from other occupations.[19](#)

The importance of fiduciary relationships was well-illustrated by a public relations executive for Toyota, who urged his colleagues to “come clean” about problems with some vehicles' accelerators: “We are not protecting our customers by keeping this quiet,” he wrote in an email.[20](#)

Professional Privilege

Professionals traditionally hold privileged positions in society because of the value and trust inherent in fiduciary relationships. Additionally, professionals do work that is seen as especially valuable, in part because of the preparation and practice needed to develop the required knowledge and skills. Not only must professionals invest a great deal of time and effort to acquire their knowledge and skills, but they must also commit themselves to uphold the profession by honoring its obligations and values. For example, the

Hippocratic Oath, written in 400 bce, obligates physicians to work for the benefit, not harm, of patients.

When professionals violate fiduciary relationships or otherwise exploit clients, or when they perform substandard practice, they threaten not only their client's welfare, but also that of their entire profession. Professional privilege rests on the foundation of public trust and confidence in both the professional's expertise and right conduct.

To protect both clients and their own privileged positions in society, professions establish codes of ethics and standards of practice. These codes often have the weight of law and the power of state sanctions. The argument for codes and rigorous enforcement rests on the belief that professional work involves special and valuable knowledge and skill essential to the public good and is so complex that only those deemed qualified may engage in practice.[21](#)

Social Responsibility

Professions must also fulfill expectations and moral obligations at the level of society. Commitment to serve society applies to both individual practitioners and the profession collectively. It means that right conduct takes into account the welfare of the larger society as the professional helps clients solve problems. It also means that associations of professionals exercise collective power as moral agents for the betterment of society. One example of a "guerrilla marketing stunt" that failed to consider its potential impact on society occurred in January 2007, when a promotional campaign for a television show planted "briefcases with blinking lights in locations around 10 cities nationwide." In Boston, panicked citizens reported the devices to authorities, who shut down highways and bridges thinking terrorists were involved.[22](#)

Ultimately, public relations is judged by its impact on society. Public relations' value to society is enhanced when (1) it promotes the free, ethical competition of ideas, information, and education in the marketplace of public opinion; (2) it reveals the sources and goals of participants in the debate; and

(3) it enforces high standards of conduct. Value to society is diminished when (1) it suppresses or otherwise limits competition of ideas; (2) it hides or ascribes to others the true sources of public relations efforts; and (3) it leaves unchallenged incompetent or unethical practice.

Positives

The major positives of socially responsible public relations include the following:

1. Public relations improves professional practice by codifying and enforcing ethical conduct and standards of performance.
2. Public relations improves the conduct of organizations by emphasizing the need for public approval.
3. Public relations serves the public interest by making all points of view articulate in the public forum.
4. Public relations serves our segmented, scattered society by using communication and mediation to replace misinformation with information, discord with rapport.
5. Public relations fulfills its social responsibility to promote human welfare by helping social systems adapt to changing needs and environments.

Much good can be credited to ethical public relations practice, and opportunities for serving the public interest abound. Public relations' benefits are apparent in the billions of dollars raised to construct buildings, endow professorships, and provide scholarships in universities; in campaigns to eradicate disease and substance abuse, reduce poverty, improve nutrition, and house the homeless; in the lessening of ethnic, racial, and religious discrimination and conflict; in responsive economic enterprises providing profit for investors, jobs for employees, and goods and services for consumers; and in greater understanding of global problems and relations.

The potential good inherent in ethical, effective public relations is limitless. So is the potential for dysfunction.

Negatives

Three major negatives can be attributed to the practice:

1. Public relations gains advantages for and promotes special interests, sometimes at the cost of the public well-being.
2. Publicity clutters already-choked channels of communication with the debris of pseudo-events and phony phrases that confuse or influence rather than clarify.
3. Public relations sometimes corrodes our channels of communication with cynicism and credibility gaps.

Too often the thrust of public relations is to obfuscate and obscure rather than to clarify complex public issues. Robert Heilbroner recognized public relations as a social force and charged it with a major part “in the general debasement of communications from which we suffer.” He said:

No one can quarrel with the essential function that public relations fills as a purveyor of genuine ideas and information. No one denies that many public relations men [sic], working for corporations as well as for colleges or causes, honestly communicate things which are worth communication. Nor can anyone absolve public relations for loading the communications channels with noise. We read the news and suspect that behind it lies the “news release.” We encounter the reputation and ascribe it to publicity. Worst of all, we no longer credit good behavior with good motives, but cheapen it to the level of “good public relations.”²³

This social aspect of right conduct reminds us that both individual practitioners and the profession as a whole are entrusted with the welfare of the larger society as a condition of how they serve clients. This aspect of

ethics is referred to as the profession's "social responsibility." When choosing such work and life, one also takes on the social responsibility of the profession, as well as its knowledge, skills, trust, and privileges.

In summary, to qualify as a profession, practitioners—both individually and collectively—must operate as moral agents in society. Ethical professional practice requires placing public service and social responsibility over personal gains, as well as the ability to engage in a rational analysis of ethical dilemmas. To facilitate and encourage ethical conduct, professional associations establish codes of ethics and standards of practice to which they hold their members accountable. Thus, before we can discuss accountability in public relations, we must first understand codes of ethics.

Codes of Ethics

A basic requirement for professions is adherence to a set of professional norms, usually referred to as codes of ethics. Many practitioners are making an earnest effort to act morally and to advise their organization or clients as an ethical conscience of the company. Unfortunately, others see codes of ethics as obstacles to be avoided, window dressing, or nice-sounding puffery.²⁴ Even more unfortunately, sometimes codes of ethics are indeed just that. For example, one practitioner pointed out that "Enron's code of conduct was as well-written as any I've seen in the industry.... And yet, as we all know, it was window dressing."²⁵

Codes of ethics may be established by specific employers or by professional associations. Thus, attempts to advance the ethics in public relations are reflected in the number of codes of professional standards for the practice. In the United States, the principal code is that of the Public Relations Society of America. PRSA's first Code of Professional Standards was adopted in 1954, and the newest iteration of the code appeared in 2000 (www.prsa.org/AboutPRSA/Ethics). The evolution of PRSA's Code of Ethics has been well documented,²⁶ and its focus over the years has shifted from enforcement to education.²⁷

PRSA members agree to conduct their professional lives in accordance with

the code of ethics. Compliance is enforced in confidential proceedings, following complaints of code violations by a PRSA member, by a nonmember, or through media exposure. An eleven-member national Board of Ethics and Professional Standards investigates complaints and makes recommendations on whether or not to bar individuals from membership or to expel members found in violation of the code.

Enforcement by PRSA's Board of Ethics and Professional Standards has been uneven over the years. Few cases get referred to the ethics panel. Most cases that are referred are dismissed due to lack of evidence, settled to the satisfaction of all parties, or dropped because the charged member died or simply resigned. One of the quirks in the code is that it applies only to members.

Adoption of a code of ethics does not automatically bring morality to a calling. Generally, having a code reflects a sincere desire to raise standards of ethical practice and to provide criteria to guide and judge individual behavior. But a code without commitment, training, and enforcement means little in practice. Thus, many public relations firms hold regular training sessions on ethical issues, such as conflicts of interest among commitments to various clients, transparency about whom firms are representing, buying advertising in a news medium that runs a positive article about a client, and disclosure that one is speaking on behalf of a paying client when one uses blogs or creates anonymous Internet postings to promote a product or idea.

Some firms—like CarryOn Communication based in Los Angeles—make a particular point of ensuring that employees understand the firm will support them in making ethical choices. As the company's managing director explained, “[Employees] know that they're not going to lose their jobs because the client asked them to do [something unethical that] they didn't want to... . [They] don't have to be bullied by the client.”²⁸

Further demonstrating their commitment to ethical practice, some public relations firms—Epley Associates, Inc.; Ketchum Public Relations; and Manning, Selvage & Lee—require new employees to sign an agreement that obligates them to practice according to the PRSA Code, even if they are not themselves members of PRSA. Such agreements are similar to the PRSA Member Code of Ethics Pledge, which all members must sign:

I pledge:

To conduct myself professionally, with truth, accuracy, fairness and responsibility to the public; To improve my individual competence and advance the knowledge and proficiency of the profession through continuing research and education; And to adhere to the articles of the Member Code of Ethics for the practice of public relations as adopted by the governing Assembly of the Public Relations Society of America.

I understand and accept that there is a consequence for misconduct, up to and including membership revocation.²⁹

A Canadian counselor pointed out that “Unfortunately, these codes have little real value unless they are accepted in turn by the employers of practitioners and applied to the conduct of the business itself.”³⁰ Longtime leader and crusader for higher ethics in public relations Frank Wylie admonished, “We shouldn’t allow ourselves to accept the lowest common denominator of behavior—the negative and retrogressive ‘it won’t really hurt anyone’ philosophy. We must aspire to a better level of ethics, and we must persevere to achieve that goal.”³¹

Another common pitfall is the idea, “If it isn’t illegal, then it must be all right.” This mistaken logic abrogates the moral duty of public relations practitioners to attorneys.³² Public relations practice is fraught with ethical dilemmas, and practitioners must be prepared to evaluate them using the professional codes of ethics. (See [Exhibit 5.6](#) for examples.)

In public relations scholarship, the debate about codes of ethics is ongoing. Some scholars see codes as unenforceable and voluntary, whereas others see them as necessary baselines for the practice. Public relations ethicists argue that the PRSA Code is unenforceable, full of contradictions, and neither professional nor useful to practitioners.³³ Even though codes of ethics are held up as evidence of professional status, enforcement poses little threat or is easily subverted when the subject of enforcement simply drops his or her membership.

Some argue that codes of ethics only “preach to the choir” and do not help where they are actually needed: with ethics training and moral reasoning or

moral development.³⁴ Others argue that codes institutionalize consistent guidelines for public relations practice around the world.³⁵ Whether a code is used or not often matters less than who is responsible for making ethical decisions. One ethicist concluded: “The bottom-line of ethical decision making in our field will continue to rest in the laps of individual practitioners.”³⁶ Even though the culture of the organization in which a practitioner works often exerts subtle, but powerful, influence over

Exhibit 5.6

Public Relations Ethics: Situations for Discussion

Refer to the IABC Code of Ethics (www.iabc.com/about/code.htm) and the PRSA Code of Ethics (www.prsa.org/AboutPRSA/Ethics) to resolve the following situations:

Situation 1: Your firm is one of several under consideration by a prospective client planning to introduce a new service. The company anticipates severe opposition from certain groups and politicians. You are given confidential information as to the service and the company’s plans for you to use while developing your firm’s proposal. The company awards the contract to a competing firm. Can you disclose the information to the company’s opposition?

Situation 2: Your firm publishes a newsletter directed to brokerage houses. A corporate executive—one of your clients—asks you to help make the company better known among stockbrokers. You publish a highly optimistic forecast of the company’s business prospects, leaving out some information about problems. You also fail to indicate your firm’s relationship with the company. Were you under any obligation to disclose this relationship? Should you print a correction that includes all the information you have about the company?

Situation 3: Your employer directs you to set up a supposedly

independent citizens' organization to demonstrate support for a new real estate development that requires planning commission approval. The new organization will be financed secretly by your company and a group of contractors who will participate in building the homes. Is there anything wrong with establishing this organization?

Situation 4: Your employer asks you to give a series of talks in communities served by your company. You are to discuss the new plant being built and its operations. You visit the plant before giving the speech prepared by your immediate supervisor. During the tour you learn that several claims in the speech are not true. Can you give the speech as originally written?

Based on an article written by the late Donald B. McCammond, APR, while he served as chairman of PRSA's Board of Ethics and Professional Standards. "Ethics: The Right Choice," Public Relations Journal 43, no. 2 (February 1987): 8–10. Used with permission of Public Relations Journal.

individual behavior (see [Chapter 9](#)), professionals are "held responsible for improving the institutions administering those services."³⁷

In other words, public relations professionals must behave ethically as individuals, as well as encourage their organizations to support ethical behavior. It is imperative that ethical behavior be authentic, institutionalized, and reinforced through codes of ethics, training, and sanctions within organizations. Lockheed Martin's director of communications, Gail Rymer, explained that "PR needs to be leaders in [ethics] because we are the people out front dealing with the media, with consumers, with the public. If we do business ethically, everything else will follow."³⁸

Accountability: Licensing and Accreditation

Accountability in a profession means that practitioners must face up to the consequences of their actions. As noted earlier, codes of ethics put forth by public relations associations are not always useful for holding unethical practitioners accountable, because these codes only apply to association members, rather than to all practitioners, and because associations often do not have power to enforce their own codes or penalize transgressions against those codes.

Another possible means of holding practitioners accountable for their actions is occupational licensure—the permission granted by the state or government to engage in a specific occupation. Practitioners who behave unethically or otherwise inappropriately in the execution of their professional duties can be removed from the profession by having their license revoked, much like doctors or lawyers guilty of malpractice can have their licenses taken away. Today, the licensing of public relations practitioners exists in Brazil, Nigeria, Panama, and Peru. Recently, Puerto Rico also enacted legislation to license public relations practitioners.³⁹ And in mid-2011, the Public Relations Society of Kenya announced that all practitioners in that country would, in the next three years, be required to register and to become accredited.⁴⁰

Pioneer counselor Edward L. Bernays was among the first to advocate licensing of public relations practitioners. In 1953, he argued, “In the entire history of professions, licensing standards and criteria and finally codes of ethics in public conduct have been necessary . . . to exclude those who are not properly qualified.”⁴¹ The indefatigable Bernays was still thumping the same drum more than 30 years later:

We must get the two words, public relations, defined by law with licensing and registration of practitioners, as is the case with lawyers, medical doctors and other professionals. Today the term “public relations” is in the public domain and anyone—many without training, education, or ethical behavior—is welcome to use it to describe what he or she professes to do.⁴²

Yet practitioners in the United States remain divided on the feasibility and desirability of licensing.

Legal Considerations

The issue of licensing, whereby the government regulates who can practice public relations and who cannot, generates many questions and concerns for practitioners around the world. In the United States, licensing raises three basic constitutional issues: (1) the right of freedom of expression, (2) the right of the states to regulate occupations, and (3) the right of individuals to pursue occupations without unjustified government interference. Licensure must be justified on the grounds that it is crucial to the well-being and preservation of society.

In the United States, legal objections are raised in the debate over licensing. One is the problem of demonstrating a compelling state interest; another is safeguarding the practitioner's freedom of expression as guaranteed by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The right of the states to regulate occupations is based on the Tenth Amendment, which reserves for states the powers not specifically delegated to the federal government. Therefore, the two broad reasons generally given for public relations licensure—protection of society and professionalization of practitioners—must be considered carefully in the light of “compelling state interest.”

The argument for a compelling need to regulate public relations is weak in the eyes of the courts. Although public relations—like any occupation—has the potential for abuse, its actions may be no more dangerous to society as a whole than would be those exercised directly by the organization for whom the practitioner might act. And although public relations practice may be controversial in some instances, the courts have argued in cases such as *Adams v. Tanner*, 244 U.S. 590 (1917), and *Baker v. Daly*, 15 F. Supp.2d 881, that controversy is not sufficient cause to regulate. In fact, U.S. courts tend to rule in favor of public relations and media efforts to foster “vigorous public debate” and to protect the “watchdog of government.” The argument that licensing would protect society is directly refuted in law. The U.S. courts have consistently found that even abusive communication merits protection under the First Amendment. Other nations, such as Australia, Germany, the Netherlands, and England, also tend to encourage free and open debate in the media as a means of societal expression.

The second argument for licensure—that it would professionalize the practice—also gets short shrift in the law. It may be a powerful professional argument, but it has no legal basis. In no case have the courts suggested that because licensing would be beneficial, it would be justifiable. Licensing cannot be imposed simply for the benefit of those in an occupational group, either to raise standards or to fence out competition.

Advocates counter that licensing would be voluntary, thereby avoiding conflicts with the constitutionally protected rights. Likewise, organizations cannot be forced to hire only licensed practitioners. Instead, state licensing would limit only the use of the label “licensed public relations practitioner,” not restrict the right of free expression. Advocates also point out that employers and clients would soon learn the value of hiring licensed professionals. On the whole, it appears that licensure will not soon provide a means of elevating and standardizing the preparation, ethics, and competence of practitioners.

Accreditation

In the absence of state licensing, accreditation is one means of encouraging professionalism and accountability in public relations. Although accreditation programs from various professional organizations have existed for decades, only in 1998 did several groups join together to form the Universal Accreditation Board (www.praccreditation.org). The accreditation examination in public relations involves a portfolio presentation and panel interview with three accredited practitioners, as well as a rigorous, four-hour, computer-based test. Successful candidates earn the right to put the professional designation of “APR” or “Accredited in Public Relations” after their name on all professional documents. To retain their accredited status, professionals also must earn 10 points every three years through education, professional development, and public service activities.

A 2005 salary survey indicated that “accredited public relations professionals earn 20 percent more than those who are not [accredited]—that is, on average, \$102,031 versus \$85,272.”⁴³ Financial considerations aside, accreditation may offer other benefits, such as setting a standard for ethical

practice and helping practitioners connect public relations efforts with organizational goals. Accreditation is also a way to reconnect with fundamental public relations skills and principles, to indicate that one is serious about the profession, and to advance in the field.

A 2010 study found that accredited public relations practitioners and unaccredited practitioners differed significantly on a variety of measures. Compared to non-APRs, accredited practitioners tend to be older, have more years of professional experience, earn higher annual salaries, have higher education levels, report to higher levels of organizational management, and engage more frequently in the four-step public relations strategic planning process, as well as in ethics and legal issues.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the fact remains that many employers do not care whether the practitioners they hire are accredited, just as many do not care whether potential employees have any public relations education.

Advocates of accreditation have proposed consolidation of the many accreditation programs under a single certification program. The Universal Accreditation Board was a large step toward that goal. A single, well-publicized, and strongly enforced accreditation program backed by strong ethics codes is a significant advance toward professional status. Current practice, however, continues to be guided by weak voluntary codes and splintered efforts by different associations and societies. For example, the IABC continues its own accreditation program that leads to the “ABC” or “Accredited Business Communicator” designation. Absence of a single, credible accreditation or certification agency weakens claims of professionalism and high ethical standards, which in turn affects the ability of public relations to gain community recognition of its role in organizations and in society.

Winning Acceptance and Stature

Today, public relations still falls short of public acceptance as a true profession. The field has a recommended, standardized educational curriculum, but even those who do not study public relations can enter the profession. Journals and books report a research-based body of knowledge,

but many practitioners remain ignorant of basic principles grounded in theory. There are professional associations with codes of ethics, but the latter apply only to association members. There is no uniform process for holding practitioners accountable for their work, although accreditation is an important step in that direction. And although public relations provides an important and necessary service, giving voice to a variety of organizations in the marketplace of ideas, many people still view public relations as “spin-doctoring” or “media manipulation”—in short, as a practice dedicated to special interests at the expense of the public interest.

Thus, the field continues to attract some practitioners who are more interested in manipulating opinions than in building true relationships with stakeholders. There is ample evidence that the function is not fully and widely understood, and confusion exists even among its practitioners and students.⁴⁵ In sum, the field still attracts many who cannot qualify morally, through a commitment to ethical practice, or functionally, through knowledge and expertise gained in specialized education. Fortunately, the ranks of those who do meet these requirements are growing rapidly.

Professionalism and ethics go hand in hand. One without the other falls short of the ideal: Ethics without competence is meaningless; competence without ethics is directionless—and even dangerous. European scholar Hans-Martin Sass makes the point clearly:

Ethics and expertise belong together; only together do they constitute true professionalism and provide a morally acceptable foundation for professional fiduciary services. The client . . . expects experienced expertise in making good technical and good moral judgments.⁴⁶

Whether public relations qualifies as a profession ultimately will depend on the extent to which its practitioners use their unique positions as rigorously professional and ethical counselors to create genuine dialogue between organizations’ managers and their publics.

Toward a Promising Future

More than a century ago, a handful of pioneers staked claim to what is now called public relations. Moves to professionalize the practice and to accept the nobility of serving the public interest continue to strengthen educational programs, build the body of knowledge, and raise the standards of ethics and acceptable behavior. Consequently, public relations continues to progress professionally and to provide opportunities to achieve professional status to those with the necessary ethics, commitment, knowledge, and skills, all over the world (see [Exhibit 5.7](#)). Practitioners committed to high standards of ethics and professionalism will distinguish public relations practice from other skilled occupations and make it a calling serving the public interest.

Exhibit 5.7

Public Relations in China



Ming Anxiang, Professor

Institute of Journalism & Communication, Chinese Academy of
Social Sciences;

Senior Adviser and former Executive Vice-Chairman, China Public Relations Association

With China's 2001 entrance into the World Trade Organization (WTO), Beijing's hosting of the 2008 Summer Olympics, and Shanghai's hosting of Expo 2010, organizations ranging from major corporations to different government agencies recognize more and more the importance of professional public relations practice.

From Intrinsic Ancient Practice to Imported Modern Concept

Many Chinese scholars consider public relations to be a common phenomenon of human behavior that has been practiced in China since ancient times. For example, during China's Spring and Autumn Period (770–476 b.c.), as well as the Warring States Period (475–221 b.c.), Chinese politicians used sophisticated skills and techniques of persuasion and mediation to lobby among the states. On the other hand, Chinese scholars of public relations agree that, as a modern concept and practice in China, public relations was imported in the early 1980s, mainly from the United States in the form of public relations departments within international hotels, such as the Hilton and the Sheraton in Guangzhou and Beijing.

In 1984, I led a group to study concepts of western public relations and investigate the practice in foreign and local corporations on China's mainland; the results of this study were published on December 26, 1984, in one of the most important Chinese national newspapers, Economic Daily. In 1986, other researchers and I published the first Chinese text on public relations, using the U.S. "bible of public relations"—Effective Public Relations—as our number-one reference book. Since then, hundreds of books about

public relations have been published in China, including printings of two editions of *Effective Public Relations* in Chinese.

Established in 1987 as the Public Relations Society of China (PRSC), the China Public Relations Association (CPRA) today has about 1,000 members. Founded 1991, the China International Public Relations Association (CIPRA) now has more than 1,000 members. There are also hundreds of professional public relations associations across all levels of government, more than 10,000 public relations firms, and more than 100,000 public relations practitioners. Around 10,000 Chinese universities or colleges offer public relations courses.

From Confused Concept to Professional Practice

Until the mid-1990s, many corporate managers, public relations practitioners, and even some teachers—not to mention ordinary people—confused public relations with advertising and marketing, or defined it using the negative aspects of traditional Chinese “*guanxi*”—the use of personal connections to achieve an end. Today, however, there is greater recognition that media coverage, effective events execution, strategic planning, corporate positioning, issues management, and crisis communication are important elements of professional public relations practice.

Beijing’s bid to host the 2008 Olympic Games was the first time that Chinese central and municipal governments—in collaboration with Chinese and international public relations organizations and consultants—consciously and successfully employed modern public relations. Other successes followed, such as Shanghai’s hosting of Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in 2002 and its successful 2003 bid to host Expo 2010.

After more than three decades of rapid economic growth, China

today has enormous media resources in place for modern public relations practice. These include more than 2,000 newspapers (almost half of them dailies), 400 million TV sets, 500 million radio receivers, and 1.2 billion TV viewers and radio listeners. There are 457 million Internet users (34.3 percent of the national population), 294 million fixed telephones, and 859 million mobile phone users.

Today, China's public relations practitioners face diverse professional challenges, such as how to cultivate and build China's own worldwide brands of corporations, how to plan for and tackle various public crises and disasters, and how to communicate effectively with other countries and people in the world.

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Study Guide

1. What are the six characteristics of professions?
2. What are three major professional associations serving the public relations field?
3. What five subjects are recommended by the Commission on Public Relations Education for an appropriate undergraduate curriculum?
4. Why should public relations practitioners be concerned about professional ethics?
5. What are the positives of socially responsible public relations?
6. What are the negatives of public relations when it is not practiced in the public interest?

7. What are the professional values articulated in the Public Relations Society of America's Code of Ethics? How are these similar to, or different from, the values articulated by the codes of ethics of other professional associations in public relations?
8. What is the difference between licensing and accreditation? Give some reasons as to why public relations practitioners should be licensed. Give some reasons as to why public relations practitioners should not be licensed.

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Chapter 6 Legal Considerations

Learning Outcomes

After studying [Chapter 6](#) this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Summarize the basic structure of law in the United States.
2. Outline the major principles of the First Amendment pertaining to freedom of speech and press and explain their relevance to the practice of public relations.
3. Distinguish between commercial and political speech.
4. Describe permissible federal regulation of First Amendment–protected expression in election communication, lobbying, communication between labor and management, and financial public relations/investor relations.
5. Outline constitutional protection and permissible federal regulation of copyright and trademark law.
6. Define and explain the major provisions of libel law and privacy law relevant to public relations work.

It is the purpose of the First Amendment to preserve an uninhibited marketplace of ideas in which truth will ultimately prevail.

—Supreme Court Justice Byron White

Public relations practitioners do not operate in a societal vacuum. Accordingly, they need to know how to evaluate situations involving legal issues if they want to succeed in their jobs. This may come as a surprise to those who subscribe to the common misconceptions that law is incomprehensible to those who are not lawyers and that law is only narrowly

applicable or relevant to public relations.

Clearly, this chapter alone cannot provide everything a practitioner needs to know. Instead, it presents a summary of major legal issues affecting public relations work. Public relations practitioners do not practice law, but knowledge of the law will help them avoid legal pitfalls and work with their organizations' legal staff in situations that require collaboration.

What Is Law?

Fundamentally, law is that system of rules that governs society. Different societies have different laws, which is one reason why public relations cannot be practiced in exactly the same way around the world. [Exhibits 6.1](#) and [6.5](#) show how legal considerations affect public relations practice outside the United States.

Exhibit 6.1

The Law and Public Relations in Brazil



Maria de Fatima Oliveira, Ph.D.,

Public Relations Research Manager, Prime Research LP, New York City

In 1914, the first public relations department was created in Brazil. It was housed by a Canadian company—Light Co.—that was responsible for public transportation and utilities in the state of São Paulo. Many years passed, however, until the implementation of college education in the field. Only in 1966 did the University of São Paulo (USP) create the first college degree in public relations.

In 1967, the public relations profession in Brazil became legally regulated (Law No. 5377). Brazil is one of the few countries in the world where, to exercise the profession, practitioners are required to hold a college degree in public relations and be registered in a public relations regional council.

There are six of these councils in the country. All of them are affiliated with the Brazilian Federal Council of Public Relations (CONFERP), which was created by the government in 1967 with the goal of monitoring and regulating the profession. In 1972, the CONFERP developed and implemented a code of ethics, emphasizing respect for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, commitment to truth, and the obligation to promote free speech.

The principles stated in the CONFERP code of ethics regulate the public relations profession in Brazil, defining public relations practitioners' and agencies' legal obligations and rights. Lack of compliance can result in fines, lawsuits, and even cancellation of the practitioner's registration at the regional councils, which in turn bans the practitioner from practicing public relations. The CONFERP code of ethics has been amended throughout the years, with the most recent update in 2003.

The code of ethics states that public relations professionals have several key duties. They must strive for maximum efficiency in their services, seek always to improve and update their knowledge, and collaborate with the training of future professionals, providing advice and guidance. The code also makes it illegal (not just unethical) for practitioners to disseminate false or misleading information, to use methods or techniques that may corrupt or

impair the integrity of communication channels, and to work with people who are illegally practicing public relations. For more information on the legalities of practicing public relations in Brazil, see www.conferp.org.br.

Courtesy Maria de Fatima Oliveira, Ph.D.

In the U.S. government structure, both the executive and legislative branches make law, whereas the judicial branch interprets law to ensure that it complies with existing statutes and ultimately the U.S. Constitution. The U.S. legal structure includes (1) federal laws—made by the president and the Congress, along with regulations produced by federal government agencies—as well as (2) state laws enacted by governors, legislatures, and administrative agencies in each of the 50 states. The U.S. Constitution, the fundamental source of all law in the United States, provides a minimum set of rights to which any state constitution may add for its residents.

To illustrate the relationship between federal and state law, [Exhibit 6.2](#) presents the sources of law in the United States organized in the hierarchy of their authority over one another. Knowing where a particular law originates as well as what other type of law can supersede it will help practitioners better evaluate the impact of any single part of the law on public relations work.

Federal and state courts are separated into criminal courts—to review laws against actions that harm “the state” (society in general), such as murder and theft—and civil courts, to resolve disputes between private individuals, such as defamation and privacy invasion. Most legal decisions affecting public relations work occur in civil court.

The First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech; or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

The legal foundation for U.S. public relations practice lies in the First Amendment protection of freedom of speech. After all, part of public relations practice involves, in essence, speaking out on

Exhibit 6.2

Law Sources Hierarchy

Constitutional law represents the basic legal charters of the federal and state governments, spelling out basic legal principles, rights, and authorities. The federal Constitution is the final arbiter of constitutional law, because no law in conflict with the U.S. Constitution can be enforced by the government.

Statutory law is that body of statutes and ordinances written and passed by legislative bodies at the federal, state, and local levels.

Administrative law includes rules and decisions of the numerous governmental agencies established by statute to write and enforce administrative rules in regulated areas and activities, such as communication (Federal Communications Commission), advertising and trade (Federal Trade Commission), public trading of stocks (Securities and Exchange Commission), and communication between labor and management (National Labor Relations Board).

Executive actions are made by the top elected government official at the federal level (president), state level (governor), city level (mayor), and so forth.

Common law in the United States derives from the accumulation of court rulings over time and is based on English common law. There is no federal common law, however, because each state has its own judicial traditions that are subject to changing conditions and values.

Law of equity is a part of common law, but there are no jury decisions, only rulings by judges.

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behalf of organizations and clients. The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was adopted in 1791, but only in the early twentieth century did U.S. Supreme Court decisions begin to reveal the power of this amendment.[1](#)

There is no such category as “public relations speech” in the lexicon of the courts or First Amendment scholars. But that does not mean that the U.S. Supreme Court has no knowledge of the field. In fact, Petersen and Lang’s content analysis of U.S. Supreme Court decisions from 1766 through 1999 concluded that “over the years, the justices have had a much better understanding of the public relations practice than has the typical citizen”; that there is a strong association of public relations with the highly protected speech used in lobbying the government for redress of grievances; and that the justices know the similarities as well as differences between public relations and marketing.[2](#) “Even when the justices pointed out publicity practices they deemed unethical, they still emphasized the fact that constitutionally, such practices are protected alongside other contentious exchanges in the marketplace of ideas.”[3](#)

Public relations practitioners who know when to invoke their clients’ rights under the First Amendment, and when to caution clients that certain speech activities can be limited by the government, will not only better serve their clients, but also provide higher-quality public relations counsel.

Free Press and Media Relations

In addition to protecting freedom of speech, the First Amendment protects freedom of the press. Consequently, the First Amendment also has important implications for public relations practitioners in the area of media relations. ([Chapter 10](#) discusses in greater detail the media relations aspects of public relations practice; this This section focuses on legal considerations in media

relations.) To achieve “free publicity” for their work, practitioners need access to the news media to disseminate the ideas, information, or causes of the organizations and clients they represent.

Journalists rely on information from practitioners to write articles about newsworthy events in their communities.⁴ However, First Amendment protection of press rights means that journalists can choose whether or not they will use a particular news release, or interview a particular person, or print letters to the editor. Even commercial speech (see below) gets this type of First Amendment protection, meaning mass media companies have the choice to publish or not publish a particular category of advertisements.

Print Media

Public relations practitioners need to know that First Amendment protection of press freedom means that no citizen has a guaranteed right to require the print media to publish specific information. In 1974, the U.S. Supreme Court declared unconstitutional a Florida statute requiring a newspaper to give a candidate for public office free space to reply to criticism. The Court said the state government should not be allowed to compel a newspaper to print something that its editors would not have chosen, because this would interfere with the editorial control that First Amendment press freedom protects.⁵

Broadcast Media

In an apparent contradiction of First Amendment principles, U.S. broadcast media have been subject to government regulation since their inception, providing several opportunities for public relations practitioners to gain access to this medium.

“Broadcasting” means only over-the-air signals that are capable of being received by a television or radio with the use of a simple antenna and are thus accessible to people who do not have cable or satellite service. Federal

government regulation of the technological aspects of broadcasting began early in the twentieth century under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of Commerce and Labor,⁶ with the original justification for government oversight borrowed from the Interstate Commerce Commission—public interest, convenience, and necessity.⁷ That standard continues today under the control of the Federal Communications Commission (www.fcc.gov).

The FCC was created by the Communications Act of 1934, which gave the agency the power to make and enforce programming policies for broadcasting and to issue, renew, or deny licenses to individual station operators. An early challenge to the FCC’s power to regulate program content, on the grounds that this violated the First Amendment, was rejected by the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled, “. . . the right of free speech does not include . . . the right to use the facilities of radio without a license.”⁸

The basic justification for regulating broadcast content that the Supreme Court has accepted over the years is based on the 1934 Congressional assertion that the U.S. airwaves are owned by the public and are a scarce resource that needs to be protected. Accordingly, those who receive licenses to use this limited resource must be trustees for all those who do not get to operate a broadcast station.

Cable Systems

Cable technology was developed in the late 1940s and applied to broadcasting by Community Antenna Television (CATV) systems, whose primary purpose was to improve a community’s reception of available but hard to receive over-the-air broadcast signals. The CATVs were not licensed by the FCC, but instead were awarded state and local government franchises to serve a particular geographic location. There was no specific cable legislation at that time, and the FCC had statutory authority only to regulate broadcasting. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that cable regulation was necessary to ensure “fair, efficient, and equitable” broadcasting service, and that the FCC had the authority to do so because the Communications Act of 1934 required the commission to take action “reasonably ancillary” (connected) to its responsibility to regulate broadcasting.⁹ Ultimately, the

courts made it clear that cable operators have more First Amendment rights than do broadcasters, though cable still falls far short of the constitutional freedom of expression rights granted the print media.[10](#)

In 1984, Congress enacted the Cable Communication Policy Act, giving the FCC jurisdictional authority over cable, deregulating rates and program choices, and providing benefits for cities and counties regarding franchise fees. This act also required cable applicants to set aside channels on its systems for public, educational, and governmental access. These public access channels also provide valuable tools for public relations practitioners who need to reach particular publics directly through a mass medium, such as giving citizens opportunities to observe city council meetings and other local government activities.

The Internet

The 1997 Supreme Court decision *Reno v. American Civil Liberties Union* made clear that speech on the Internet was fully protected by the First Amendment.[11](#) The decision overturned the Communications Decency Act (CDA) of 1996, in which Congress tried to regulate indecency on the Internet by forbidding the operation of certain websites. The Court found that the law to contain unconstitutional content regulation was both vague and overbroad. The justices ultimately decided that the Internet was more like the traditional public forum, concluding, “As the most participatory form of mass speech yet developed, the Internet deserves the highest protection from government intrusion.”[12](#) This gives public relations practitioners “free rein” to use the Internet to send unmediated communication to various publics.

The Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA) of 2000 requires public schools and libraries that receive some federal money for Internet use to install “technology prevention measures,” meaning filters, on computers used by those aged 17 or younger to block material that is considered to be obscene, child pornography, or “harmful to minors.” The Supreme Court upheld this legislation regulating Internet speech as constitutional. Libraries that do not comply risk losing their share of federal funding for computers in libraries.

Government Access and Public Affairs

The U.S. concept of a free press originated in the belief that media should serve as public watchdogs of the government and help make available to citizens information about government activities and programs. Access to government-controlled information is important to every citizen because the legal presumption in a democracy is that such accounts belong to the people, not the government. Thus, to encourage open government and an informed electorate, the federal government and all 50 states have statutes governing open records and meetings, although the extent of access varies considerably from state to state. Accordingly, this section will discuss only the U.S. federal laws, and public relations practitioners must study on their own the access laws of the particular state or nation in which they do business. A compilation of access laws for all 50 states is available online through the Marion Brechner Citizen Access Project (www.citizenaccess.org).

It might surprise some that the heaviest users of open access laws are not journalists. Various estimates over the years of who requests government records the most agree that it is business, with approximately one-half of all requests each year. Journalist requests make up only about one-quarter of the requests, with the remaining one-quarter made by the general citizenry. Indeed, the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled in several decisions that the media's right of access to government sources of information is only as extensive as that of the public.¹³ Most important is the fact that the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled there is no First Amendment or other federal constitutional right of media access to government-controlled information.¹⁴

The federal Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) of 1966 was a bipartisan effort in the U.S. Congress to promote full disclosure from the executive branch of government. It applies to “any executive department, military department, government corporation, government-controlled corporation or other establishment in the executive branch of the federal government . . . , or any independent regulatory agency.” The act applies only to records, meaning tangible items of information such as documents, but not to

intangible information, meaning agency employees are not required to answer any questions. The 1996 Electronic Freedom of Information Act added access to digital information (e.g., computer databases) held by those federal government agencies subject to the FOIA. The federal FOIA specifies nine categories of exemptions from disclosure, giving government employees discretion to decide if they should provide access to items in these categories.[15](#)

Public relations practitioners in government organizations must be fully informed about both federal and state open access legislation because they are responsible for responding appropriately to requests for access to information and meetings relevant to their particular agencies. Practitioners must also make sure that the officials with whom they work are aware of their obligations under both federal and state laws.

Corporate Expression

First Amendment protection is considered to be an individual right in our democracy. However, a more complex question of great importance to public relations practitioners is whether the organizations they represent also have constitutional rights for “speech.” Historically, U.S. Supreme Court decisions have afforded corporations some of the same legal rights as individuals, but courts have also upheld many restrictions on corporate legal rights. The same is true in First Amendment jurisprudence. In the legal sense, “corporate expression” deals with communication by any organization, not just corporations.

Commercial Speech

Commercial speech deals with commerce, or the buying and selling of things. The First Amendment right to commercial speech was extended in limited form to organizations by the U.S. Supreme Court case *Virginia State Board of Pharmacy v. Virginia Citizens Consumer Council*. This court case formed the basis of the modern practice of advertising.

As fans of the television show *Mad Men* can attest, advertising in the 1960s was very different from advertising today. This is in part because the 1976 case *Virginia State Board of Pharmacy v. Virginia Citizens Consumer Council* laid out two conditions for commercial speech: First, the commercial speech must be about a legal activity (which is one reason why cocaine dealers don't advertise in local newspapers). Second, the commercial speech cannot be misleading.¹⁶ This second condition is particularly important for public relations practitioners to remember. As discussed in [Chapter 1](#), advertising is often used in public relations, so practitioners have a legal duty to verify the accuracy of the commercial messages they place on behalf of employers and clients.

The Federal Trade Commission (www.ftc.gov) has primary authority to regulate advertising, making sure that it is truthful. In April 2011, the FTC filed complaints against 10 companies for allegedly making false claims about the health benefits of acai berries. The companies were operating websites designed to mimic the sites of real news organizations, making it appear that losing weight using acai berries was “news.” According to the government statement, “The FTC seeks to permanently stop this misleading practice and has asked courts to freeze the operations’ assets pending trial.”¹⁷

Political Speech

Political speech deals with politics and government, including legislation and elections. In the precedent-setting decision defining corporate political speech rights, *First National Bank of Boston v. Bellotti*, the Supreme Court ruled that the First Amendment protects “political speech” regardless of who (individual or corporation) is speaking.¹⁸ In this case, First National Bank and four other companies wanted to buy advertising to oppose a referendum on establishing a state personal income tax. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the inherent worth of speech that informs the public or helps it make democratic decisions “does not depend upon the identity of its source, whether corporation, association, union, or individual.”¹⁹

Two other important Supreme Court decisions regarding corporate speech rights dealt with energy utility companies that were subject to state

regulations. Both cases involved sending messages to customers using monthly bill mailings. In one case, the Court ruled that Consolidated Edison Company in New York could publish its perspective advocating nuclear power as the best alternative for large-scale energy generation, arguing that customers should have access to a variety of viewpoints on this controversial topic.²⁰ In another case, the Court ruled that Pacific Gas & Electric Company in California did not need to disseminate materials with which it did not agree. In other words, as it does for individuals, the First Amendment also protects the right of corporations to not speak.²¹

Even though the Supreme Court has recognized some speech rights for corporations, many instances remain in which such rights are restricted by government regulations that have been justified by the long-standing fear of the potential corrupting influence of business. Such regulations mean the government has demonstrated a compelling interest to regulate corporate political speech. Four major areas of federal legislation limiting corporate speech that are relevant to public relations include political elections, lobbying, labor organization communication with management, and securities trading.

The Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002 (BCRA)—commonly referred to as “McCain-Feingold”—regulates political election contributions. As [Exhibit 6.3](#) shows, the three

Exhibit 6.3

Campaign Finance Reform

Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (BCRA) of 2002 [in effect since November 6, 2002]

- Soft Money Prohibition [“soft money” donated to political parties for “party building” purposes]

Corporations and labor unions may not contribute or make expenditures on behalf of the national political party

committees or Leadership PACs (set up by federal candidates and officeholders as nonprofit organizations raising funds for the campaigns of those particular federal candidates or officeholders).

Only individuals and federal PACs, subject to federal limits, may contribute to the national parties and Leadership PACs, though state parties may continue to give \$25,000 under federal hard dollar limits to the national parties.

Corporations and labor unions may still contribute to state and local organizations as permitted under state law, although these organizations are limited in how they can use money raised outside the federal limits.

Members of Congress may no longer solicit funds for soft money accounts, including for their own Leadership PACs and for state and local parties.

Members of Congress may raise no more than \$20,000 per individual donor for voter registration and get-out-the-vote (GOTV) efforts by 501(c) (general nonprofit) and Section 527 (nonprofit political) organizations, but they may continue to solicit funds for a nonprofit organization's non-political activities.

- **Post-BCRA Contribution Limits**

An individual may contribute no more than \$2,000 per election (the primary and general count separately) to any one federal candidate (twice the previous limit).

The contribution limit to a federal candidate may be increased to \$3,000 per election if the candidate's opponent spends a specified amount of his or her personal funds on the race.

An individual may contribute no more than \$5,000 per calendar year to any one federal PAC (no change).

An individual may contribute no more than \$25,000 per calendar year to a national political party committee.

An individual may contribute no more than \$10,000/calendar year to the federal account of a state political party.

During the two-year election cycle, an individual may contribute no more than \$95,000, of which

No more than \$37,500 may be contributed to federal candidates, and

No more than \$57,500 may be contributed to national political parties and federal PACs, of which no more than \$37,500 may be contributed to federal PACs, state/local party committees.

Contribution limits to candidates and national party committees are indexed for inflation while contribution limits to PACs are not.

- Limits on “Electioneering Communications” (“issue ads”) [commercials that support or oppose a candidate without explicitly urging that candidate’s election or defeat]

Radio or television advertising that refers to a federal candidate and is made within 60 days of a general election and within 30 days of a primary is an “electioneering communication.”

Corporations, trade associations, and labor unions may only run “electioneering communications” through their PACs, using hard money contributions.

Any entity making “electioneering communications” must file a disclosure report with the FEC listing those who gave more than \$1,000 for the communication and those who received more than \$200 relative to the advertisement.

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main provisions of the BCRA are “soft money” prohibitions (money donated to political parties for “party building” purposes), increases in contribution limits, and limits on “electioneering communications” (commercials that support or oppose a candidate without explicitly urging that candidate’s election or defeat).

Lobbying

Because of the fear that lobbyists for groups could corrupt the lawmaking process, Congress passed several laws regulating lobbyists’ attempts to influence legislation and regulations directly. Lobbying has been one of the fastest growing specialties in public relations practice, so knowing these regulations is important to practitioners. Lobbyists for organizations were first required to disclose their activities under the Federal Regulation of Lobbying Act of 1946.²² Later, to more effectively regulate lobbying and protect public confidence in government, Congress enacted the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995, with updated definitions, disclosure requirements, and restrictions.²³

- A lobbyist is someone employed or retained by a client who makes more than one contact on behalf of that client and spends at least 20 percent of her/his time during a six-month period providing that service to the client.
- A lobbying firm is an entity that has at least one person who was hired to represent someone other than her/his employer. The term also applies to self-employed individuals who represent other people or entities.
- A lobbying contact is defined as a communication, either oral or written, on behalf of a client to a covered executive or legislative branch official regarding legislation, rules, regulations, grants, loans, permits, programs, or the nomination of anyone subject to Senate confirmation.²⁴

Lobbying includes direct pressure on members of Congress through an “artificially stimulated letter writing campaign.”²⁵ But lobbying does not include general public relations campaigns designed to sway public opinion and to activate constituents, thereby increasing pressure on legislators and government agencies. So-called “grassroots lobbying” is part of an organization’s First Amendment right to express itself on public issues.²⁶ It is distinguished from the type of lobbying that requires registration by the fact that it is not “direct” contact with government officials. Nor does lobbying include testimony before a committee of Congress (because such testimony is invited by the legislators) or magazines and newspapers that in the ordinary course of business publish news items and editorials urging the passage or defeat of legislation.²⁷

Lobbyists and lobbying firms must register with the Secretary of the Senate and the Clerk of the House and must report names, addresses, places of business, and phone numbers of their own business, their clients, and anyone else who contributes more than \$10,000 in a six-month period to lobbying activities conducted by the registrant. In addition, all registrants must file reports twice a year, providing “good faith estimates” of the amounts paid by clients or spent on lobbying.²⁸ Lobbying laws also apply to nonprofit charitable, educational, and other tax-exempt organizations. Nonprofit organizations that engage in lobbying are prohibited from receiving federal grants, awards, contracts, and loans.²⁹

The number of lobbyists has increased dramatically. Based on data from the Senate Office of Public Records, the Center for Responsive Politics counted 12,986 active lobbyists (individuals) or lobbying firms registered with the federal government in January 2010. The Center estimated the total spent on lobbying in 2010 to be almost \$3.5 billion.³⁰ That means lobbying costs averaged almost \$6.4 million per legislator. Lobbyists spent more than \$1.3 billion to lobby state governments, with an average of five lobbyists for every legislator spending more than \$200,000 for each state legislator.³¹ According to the nonprofit Campaign Legal Center, “lobby[ing] disclosure enforcement is notoriously lax.” The Senate received more than 130,000 “Lobbying Disclosure Act” forms in 2009, but only four staff members deal with lobbying disclosure. And, no civil actions or settlements have been pursued by the U.S. Attorney’s Office since 2005. In the words of the Center’s

spokesperson, “Nobody’s looking.”³²

All public relations practitioners working for “foreign principals” must register under the Foreign Agents Registration Act of 1938 (FARA), whether or not they lobby U.S. government officials.³³ The law requires all persons who work as agents of foreign governments, companies, or political parties to register within 10 days with the U.S. Attorney General. The Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 also applies to the Foreign Agents Registration Act. The law defines a “foreign agent” as anyone in the United States who works as a “public relations counsel, publicity agent, information service employee, or political consultant,” acting “at the order, request, or under the direction or control” of a “foreign principal,” which could be a government, political party, business, or other organization.³⁴

Information materials produced by foreign agents are defined as any communication designed to influence the American public about political interests or policies of a foreign government; to influence U.S. foreign policy; to promote racial, religious, or social tensions; or to advocate the forceful overthrow of other Western Hemisphere countries.³⁵ Foreign agents must label lobbying materials as “political propaganda” being distributed by a registered foreign agent. They also must provide copies to the U.S. Attorney General.

Employee and Labor Relations

Labor relations is a specific type of employee relations involving communication between unions and management. Practitioners in this area must comply with the provisions of the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (Wagner Act) and the Labor Management Relations Act of 1947 (Taft-Hartley Act). The 1935 statute created the independent, federal National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to administer laws governing relations between unions and employers in the private sector. These prohibit both unions and management from engaging in unfair labor practices, primarily by forbidding coercive expression during political elections and also by forbidding management from interfering with labor’s right to organize and to bargain collectively once a union is established.

Representative Elections

In 1941, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that an employer could not be barred “from expressing its view on labor policies.” The employer, the Court said, is free “to take any side it may choose” on a controversial labor issue as long as the employer does not restrain or coerce his employees.³⁶ This ruling has major implications for public relations work in employee communication.

Management does not engage in an unfair labor practice if it communicates to employees through speeches, talks, and letters to tell workers about the strike history of the union, the likely dues and assessments, and the merits of working for a company without a union. But management cannot threaten to fire or punish employees because of union activities, make promises of special benefits to influence votes, spy on union meetings, or call employees separately to discuss the union. Management also cannot urge employees individually to vote against the union.

Collective Bargaining

The Labor Management Relations Act of 1947 also requires companies and unions to enter negotiations with open minds and with a willingness to reach an agreement. Practitioners sometimes deal with management that is unwilling to meet or is unreasonably firm in its offers, or with unions that engage in unfair labor practices or make equally unreasonable demands. The NLRB regularly publishes fact sheets, press releases, and case summaries of the Board’s actions on its website (www.nlr.gov).

Contract Law

Although employers must be careful in dealing with labor unions and union members, they also must take care in handling non-union employees, such as public relations professionals. For their part, practitioners should pay attention to their employment paperwork, which in most cases is governed by

contract law. In many states, a common part of employment contracts is the noncompete clause, which basically states that employees cannot use their employer's time and facilities to develop their own separate business. For example, Manning, Selvage & Lee sued three former executives in the Atlanta office—Glen Jackson, Boling Spalding, and Joseph Ledlie—who quit to start their own firm, Jackson Spalding Ledlie. The two firms settled out of court.[37](#)

In the majority of cases, however, the courts have not upheld noncompete clauses in employment contracts, favoring employees over their former employers seeking damages. Most contractual noncompete agreements apparently fail to meet one or more of three tests. First, they must be reasonable, being no broader than necessary to protect the legitimate business interests of the employer without placing undue restriction on an employee's ability to earn a living. Second, they must be supported by some monetary consideration, such as the offer of employment, raise, promotion, or continuing employment. Third, they must protect only the employer's legitimate business interests, such as unique products and services, trade secrets, and goodwill. Attempts to eliminate competition or other purposes not related to the three tests usually mean that courts will not uphold noncompete clauses.[38](#)

Internships

Interns by legal definition are not “employees.” Most public relations students know that internships are an important entrée into the profession, giving new practitioners the skills and experience they need to get hired into “real” jobs. But, many students are unaware that internships in the United States are regulated by the Department of Labor, and they fall prey to unscrupulous employers who exploit them for free labor. See [Exhibit 6.4](#) for the six criteria of legal internships.

Many states also have additional requirements. For example, some states require that unpaid interns earn college credit during the experience. Other states require that employers pay workers' compensation insurance for interns.[39](#) Furthermore, unpaid internships are increasingly being scrutinized

by various states for possible violations of minimum-wage laws.⁴⁰ As one Labor Department representative stated, “If you’re a for-profit employer or you want to pursue an internship with a for-profit employer, there aren’t going to be many circumstances where you can have an internship and not be paid and still be in compliance with the law.”⁴¹ In February 2011, the Public Relations Society of America issued a Professional Standards Advisory regarding the ethical use of interns.⁴² The bottom line for students is this: Do not be so desperate for work experience that you let an employer exploit you for free labor while calling you an “intern.”

Exhibit 6.4

Six Criteria for Legal Internships

1. The internship, even though it includes actual operation of the facilities of the employer, is similar to training which would be given in an educational environment;
2. The internship experience is for the benefit of the intern;
3. The intern does not displace regular employees, but works under close supervision of existing staff;
4. The employer that provides the training derives no immediate advantage from the activities of the intern; and on occasion its operations may actually be impeded;
5. The intern is not necessarily entitled to a job at the conclusion of the internship; and
6. The employer and the intern understand that the intern is not entitled to wages for the time spent in the internship.

The internship must meet all six of these requirements. If it does not, then the position should be treated as a regular employee, who would be entitled to minimum wage.

Source: Fact Sheet #71: Internship Programs Under The Fair Labor Standards Act, U.S. Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division (April 2010). Available at <http://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs71.pdf>.

Public Companies and Investor Relations

When companies have shares that are publicly traded on the stock market, they are considered to be publicly owned companies. People who own shares of the company are called investors. Public relations specialists whose work involves communication by publicly owned companies must comply with the Securities Act of 1933 and the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, which were enacted in response to the great stock market crash of 1929.

The 1933 act restricts corporate communication before and during the period that new securities offerings are being registered.⁴³ The Securities and Exchange Commission Act of 1934, which regulates trading of securities after their initial distribution, requires periodic reporting about a company.⁴⁴ The 1934 statute also created the independent, federal Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to enforce the newly passed securities laws, to promote stability in the markets, and most important of all, to protect investors. The Investment Company Act of 1940 and the Investment Advisers Act of 1940 regulate investment companies and advisers.⁴⁵ In addition, practitioners in this field are subject to the disclosure rules of the stock exchange that lists their company's stock.

Investor relations, sometimes called “financial public relations,” requires practitioners to also have in-depth knowledge of corporate finance, accounting, and law.⁴⁶ Under the SEC's “integrated disclosure system,” corporations in which members of the public own shares must continuously provide information that affects the understanding of stockholders and investors about the financial position and prospectus of a company. Accordingly, practitioners must issue press releases, draft speeches, and write quarterly and annual reports to achieve the “adequate and accurate

information” required under federal law. Public relations practitioners keep current with changes in securities regulations by regularly visiting the SEC’s website (www.sec.gov).

Disclosure requirements take two forms—those mandated by statute and those required to avoid fraud. Both the Securities Act of 1933 and the Securities and Exchange Act of 1934 mandate disclosure by “senior officials” of a corporation, defined as “any director, executive officer, investor relations or public relations officer, or other person with similar functions.”⁴⁷

The 1933 Securities Act requires filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission when securities are offered to the public. The law requires that companies provide “material information” about new security offerings so that investors can make purchasing decisions based on facts. Information is considered “material” if the information is likely to have a significant effect on securities prices or if it is likely to be considered important by a reasonable investor when making decisions to buy, hold, or sell shares. The Securities Act also requires a company to register its stock with the Securities and Exchange Commission and to provide detailed information about its financial history and prospects. Furthermore, it prohibits a company from offering to sell or to buy a security before the security is registered with the SEC.

The Private Securities Litigation Reform Act of 1995 made several reforms to the Securities Act of 1933 and the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, primarily in restricting such abusive litigation practices as routine filing of class action lawsuits against public companies following sharp drops in stock prices and abuse of the discovery process by plaintiffs’ attorneys to extort settlements from publicly traded companies that might be willing to settle simply to avoid costly litigation.⁴⁸ Additionally, the act created a new “Safe Harbor for Forward-Looking Statements” to encourage dissemination of information without fear of litigation. Companies may be protected from liability for predictions about earnings and performance as long as such forecasts are tempered by “meaningful” cautionary statements telling investors why the projections might fail to come true.⁴⁹

Simply issuing a news release may not be sufficient to fulfill the disclosure requirements. The American Stock Exchange disclosure policies, for

example, require a company, “at a minimum,” to release announcements of material information simultaneously to the national business and financial news wire services, the national news wire services, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, Moody’s Investors Service, and Standard & Poor’s Corporation. Appropriate disclosure procedure depends on the size of a company and the dispersion of its stockholders, but the basic principle remains the same—public statements must be truthful.

Securities regulations also prohibit fraud in securities trading.⁵⁰ In order for there to be fraud in the buying and selling of securities, it is usually necessary to show that insiders are using nonpublic information to help them trade securities profitably or that insiders are “tipping” friends and clients with information that gives them an unfair advantage over the average investor. “Insiders” barred from tipping or trading on information not available to the public include corporate executives, public relations personnel, outside accountants, lawyers, outside public relations counsel, and other professionals with access to corporate plans.

A combination of new federal legislation (Sarbanes–Oxley Act of 2002) and Securities and Exchange Commission and New York Stock Exchange rules implemented since November 2003 update SEC regulations and further ensure compliance. The new rules increase transparency and timeliness, hold top management accountable for financial reports, and make sure insiders cannot exercise unfair advantage in either their compensation or stock trading. [Chapter 15](#) has more information on legal requirements for publicly traded companies. For a look at how laws affect investor relations in another country, see [Exhibit 6.5](#).

Exhibit 6.5

Legal Contexts for Investor Relations: Comparing the United States and Russia



Alexander V. Laskin, Ph.D.,

Assistant Professor of Public Relations, Quinnipiac University

The United States has the largest securities market in the world—billions of investors have billions of dollars at their disposal that they want to invest. However, this market is also one of the most regulated. Any company that wants to attract shareholders' capital has to follow very strict regulations in its public relations efforts targeted at investors, shareholders, and financial analysts—a practice called investor relations (see [Chapter 1](#) for definition).

The Securities Act of 1933 regulates the initial offer of securities, the Initial Public Offering (IPO). According to the act, a company must disclose in detail its business model, its prospects for growth, as well as risks and threats it faces or is likely to face in the future. Second, the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 regulates the trading of securities on the stock market and specifies periodic reporting requirements for the company—every quarter the company must update information about itself in a public manner. More recently, Sarbanes–Oxley Act of 2002 introduced personal responsibility of the company's officers for the accuracy of the information provided; the act also created a variety of internal and external control mechanisms. Finally, the Dodd-Frank Act of 2008 was a response to the U.S. financial crisis and, as a result, focused on protecting investors from fraud, increasing government regulators' authority, and making financial institutions more transparent.

Such extensive protections are not uniform globally. For example,

the Russian Federation has significant deficiencies in its investment regulations. The legal framework in Russia is based on the 1996 Federal Law on the Securities Market and its subsequent update, Securities Law of 2010. Despite the legal similarities between these laws and their international counterparts, from the investor relations standpoint some key omissions in the Russian laws can be discovered.

First, the Russian laws do not require transparency in the ownership structure. So, investors can be left without information as to who actually collects most of the company's profits. Second, the laws do not require incorporating and disclosing corporate governance policies. In addition, companies are not required to disclose information on future risks. The most troublesome issue, however, concerns unequal treatment of investors—large shareholders enjoy preferential treatment by companies while small minority shareholders lack access to information, cannot fully exercise their voting rights, and are thus unable to protect their interests. As a result, Moody's Investors Service in 2010 concluded that Russian securities markets are weak and highly risky.

On the other hand, U.S. companies complain that the extensive regulations they have to meet come at a heavy price. For example, the Financial Executives Institute estimates that complying with the provisions of just the Sarbanes–Oxley Act costs large companies about \$8 million, while small companies spend about \$550,000 dollars on compliance. This financial burden can make U.S.-listed companies less competitive against their international counterparts.

In short, investor relations is an important practice in market economies, but one that is complicated by differing legal environments for the practice.

Courtesy Alexander V. Laskin, Ph.D.

Protecting Public Relations

Materials

Public relations practitioners create materials for use in print, broadcast, digital and other formats. Legal protection for “intellectual property,” so called because it refers to rights in products of the mind or intellect, is found in the U.S. Constitution.⁵¹ The two parts of this body of law most relevant for public relations work are copyright law and trademark law, both of which apply to creative works regardless of the medium in which they are expressed.

Copyright

Copyright protection has the multiple goals of providing economic incentive for creative people to produce original work and for publishers to distribute those works, and also to preserve the public interest by guaranteeing that the right to use the works without restrictions will eventually be passed to all people.

The statutory definition of copyright is that it subsists in “original works of authorship fixed in any tangible medium of expression . . . from which they can be perceived, reproduced, or otherwise communicated.”⁵² Public ownership of creative material exists—that is, it is in the “public domain”—when a copyright has expired, when an author has never claimed copyright, and when the materials involved were produced by government employees on government-paid time.⁵³

The eight categories of works that can be copyrighted are literary works (includes databases, computer programs, and textbooks such as this one); musical works; dramatic works, pantomimes and choreographic works; pictorial, graphic, and sculptural works; motion pictures and other audiovisual works; sound recordings; and architectural works created after 1990.

Copyright law requires public relations practitioners to check the copyright date of each work to determine which copyright act applies and then to

calculate from that date when the work will pass into the “public domain,” or when it can be used without restriction. Terms of copyright are complicated and vary depending on when the work was created, what type of work it is, and who created it.

A copyright exists automatically the moment a work is created and copyright notice is placed on the work. The copyright notice must have three elements: (1) the word “Copyright,” or the abbreviation “Copr.,” or the copyright symbol ©; (2) the year of first publication; and (3) the name of the copyright owner. An example of a correct copyright notice is “© 2011 by Jane Q. Citizen.” Formal registration is necessary for a copyright owner to bring suit for infringement, but that formal registration can be made after the infringement has occurred.[54](#)

Generally, copyright belongs to the “author” of the work. However, when an author publishes a book, at least some of the rights of ownership transfer to the publisher, who purchases the rights to reproduce and distribute the book. Depending on the terms of a publisher’s contract, an author might be able to negotiate to retain some copyright rights, for example, adaptation rights.

Who owns the copyright when an individual completes a “work for hire” is a complex issue. The Copyright Act includes two different definitions of this term.[55](#) In the first, the phrase refers to works made by an employee as part of his/her employment, in which case copyright ownership belongs to the employer. The second definition refers to “a work specially ordered or commissioned,” such as that produced by freelance writers, and who owns the copyright depends on whether the person creating the work is considered an “employee” of the organization that commissioned the work or an “independent contractor.”

In a 1989 decision, the U.S. Supreme Court set the guidelines for something to be considered a freelancer’s work product, rather than the intellectual property of the employer.[56](#) Essentially, if an independent contractor wants to keep control of the copyright for something produced as a “work for hire,” the person must have a written agreement signed by all parties specifying this ownership.

Table 6.1

Copyright Permission Guidelines

Source: Adapted from “Copyright Compliance: What Every Media Relations Professional Needs to Know.” Livingston, NJ: BurrellesLuce (February 14, 2008). Downloaded February 26, 2008, from www.burrellesluce.com/copyright1.

Seek Copyright Permission If You:	Generally You Do Not Have to If You:
Reproduce an article from a magazine or newspaper and distribute it at a trade show or use as a promotional handout.	Reproduce excerpt from that article and send it to a few coworkers or friends, or an outside vendor.
E-mail the article to a large number of clients, potential clients, colleagues, etc.	E-mail excerpt from the article to a few clients, potential clients, colleagues, etc.
Put the entire article up on your Web site or Intranet.	Post excerpt from the article and link to the original source of the article.
Publish the entire article in an internal newsletter or blog.	Publish excerpt from the article in an internal newsletter or blog.

The “Fair Use” Doctrine allows limited portions of an original work to be used or copied before falling into the public domain. (See [Table 6.1](#) for guidelines.) The following factors determine whether someone may freely use the copyrighted material:

The purpose and character of the use, including whether such use is of a commercial nature or is for nonprofit educational purposes; the nature of the copyrighted work; the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole; and the effect of the use

upon the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work.[57](#)

Infringement of copyright involves a violation of one or more of the copyright “rights” of an owner. Legally, the copyright owner must show proof of three elements—originality of the work, probable access by the infringer, and substantial similarity of the unauthorized work to the original.[58](#) In a case involving file-sharing, the U.S. Supreme Court held that developers of this type of software may be liable for copyright infringement for the actions of their end users.[59](#)

Trademarks

The Lanham Act of 1946 and its amendments protect trademarks—words, names, and symbols used by companies to identify and distinguish their goods or services from those of another. A trademark can be a product brand name such as Kleenex. A trade name, on the other hand, identifies the commercial name of the producer. Thus, Kimberly-Clark Corporation, a trade name, manufactures KleenexTM tissues, a trademark. A service mark differs from a trademark only in that it identifies a source of services, rather than a source of goods. For example, ServiceMaster is a registered name for a company that provides cleaning services.

Trademark rights are created through adoption and use of the mark on goods in trade. Trademark rights are protected under common law, but registration of a trademark with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office creates presumptions of ownership that are important should infringement be claimed. Application for trademark registration can be filed before or after the mark is used in commerce, but usually after a commercial research firm has confirmed that no other party has registered the name, phrase, or logo intended as a trademark.

The formal trademark application process includes filing a written application form with a drawing of the trademark, paying the filing fee, and providing three examples of how the trademark is being used. The ® symbol or the phrase “Registered in U.S. Patent and Trademark Office” indicates a completed trademark registration. Often, the “TM” superscript is used when

the registration is pending for a mark identifying a product, whereas “SM” is used to identify a service mark. The completed trademark registration lasts for 10 years, with 10-year renewals granted for as long as the mark is used in commerce.

Trademark enforcement is limited to situations that have a likelihood of confusion or deception or a probability that the public will be misled because of the use of confusingly similar marks. Also subject to enforcement are situations where the use of a trademark would tarnish or dilute its value. For example, the Coca-Cola Company formally objected to associations of its soft drinks with the abbreviation “coke” meaning cocaine.[60](#)

Owners of trademarks frequently run advertisements in such specialty publications as Editor and Publisher reminding journalists and public relations practitioners to use trademarks as adjectives, not as nouns or verbs, and to use capital letters when referring to their products. For example, people may use a Xerox photocopier, but they cannot “Xerox” a document. Penalties for infringement are specified in the federal trademark law. In a successful infringement suit, the trademark owner is allowed to recover treble damages. This means the persons who infringed the trademark must pay the owner three times the infringer’s profits from using the mark or three times any damages sustained by the legal owner, whichever is greater, plus reasonable attorney’s fees to cover the costs of the trademark action. Furthermore, whatever materials have been created using the infringed trademark “shall be delivered up and destroyed.”[61](#)

Reputation, Defamation and Privacy

Business investor Warren Buffet once said, “It takes 20 years to build a reputation and 5 minutes to ruin it.”[62](#) Defamation is the legal term for wrongfully harming an individual’s reputation. Public relations practitioners responsible for writing news releases, speeches, corporate reports, newsletters, brochures, and other communication materials need to be constantly aware that pictures and statements could defame someone or

invade someone's privacy. Privacy is an individual's right "to be let alone."⁶³

Defamation and privacy violations in civil law are "torts," meaning anything considered legally wrong that one party does to harm another. Because tort law varies among the states, practitioners must know and understand the applicability of state law regarding libel or privacy lawsuits in their states. To begin that process, practitioners can make use of free, online legal information services, such as www.findlaw.com.

Libel

Technically, libel is written defamation, whereas slander is spoken defamation, but that distinction became blurred after the advent of broadcasting. Accordingly, this section uses the term libel generically to discuss both types of legal actions.

Any individual or organization has the right to sue for libel, except for government institutions, which cannot bring suit for criticism of their official conduct. This is because the First Amendment gives citizens the right to criticize government actions. But, public officials may sue as individuals when they think their reputations have been subjected to defamatory statements that cause injury or actual damage. Because defamation is a matter of personal reputation, individuals cannot sue on behalf of relatives or friends (living or dead), and large groups of people cannot sue for damage to the group as a whole.⁶⁴

Suing may not be the wisest course, however. Corporations and executives considering suits against critics who they believe have defamed them must consider the ramifications of their suits in the court of public opinion, as well as their chances of winning in a court of law. Moreover, public relations practitioners must remind thin-skinned executives that the First Amendment protects caustic and even false comments that can arise from public discussion of controversial issues.

In all libel lawsuits, the plaintiff (i.e., the person or institution whose

reputation allegedly has been wrongfully harmed) has the burden of proof, meaning that it's the plaintiff's responsibility to show that libel exists. Specifically, plaintiffs must demonstrate in court proceedings that they have evidence for all the elements of the libel suit according to a particular state's laws, or the courts will not allow the lawsuit to go forward.

Though specific requirements for bringing a libel suit may differ among the states, there are key elements that are the same nationwide, largely as a result of a 1964 landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision, *New York Times v. Sullivan*.⁶⁵ There are five or six standards of proof for a libel case, depending on who the plaintiffs are:

- Defamation.

This is defined as a communication ... that injures another's reputation or good name.⁶⁶

- Identification.

Plaintiffs must prove that the defamatory language is "of or concerning" them. Many libel cases involve naming the wrong person because of careless reporting or writing by the defendant (i.e., the person who allegedly committed libel who is getting sued). People can also be identified without actually being named (e.g., providing a job description).

- Publication.

The defamatory language was witnessed by a third party besides the plaintiff and the defendant. For a non-media defendant (i.e., a public relations practitioner), only one witness is necessary. For mass media defendants (i.e., newspaper, TV station), the publication burden is presumed to be met. Publication can occur in public relations brochures, newsletters, fiction, yard signs, interoffice memos, conversations, interviews, business letters, e-mail, and websites. Any individual who repeats the libelous statement can also be sued.

- Fault.

In the simplest terms, “fault” means that a mistake was made. The degree of fault (how serious was the mistake) that must be proved depends on who is suing whom, as well as the content of the alleged defamation.

- Actual Malice.

This means the defamatory statement was made with knowledge that it was false or with “reckless disregard” to its truthfulness. This higher burden of proof is generally for public officials and public figures.

- Negligence.

This means the defamatory statement was made because the defendant failed to act as a “reasonable person” would have in similar circumstances. Examples include the failure to verify statements or to check court records. This lower burden of proof is generally for private figures.

- Falsity.

The defamatory language is untrue. This standard generally only applies to public officials and public figures.

- Damages.

The defamatory language hurt the plaintiff. Compensatory damages are actual financial harms suffered by the plaintiff. Punitive damages are monetary awards to the plaintiff for non-financial harms, such as emotional distress. Plaintiffs that seek punitive damages must prove actual malice, regardless of whether they are private or public individuals.

As these standards of proof demonstrate, the distinction among types of “legal persons” is important. One main outcome of *New York Times v. Sullivan* was holding public officials to the higher standard of actual malice. The court did this to protect citizens’ First Amendment right to free speech,

so that criticism of official government action would not be stifled.⁶⁷ A subsequent Supreme Court case, *Gertz v. Welch*, distinguished between public figures and private figures.⁶⁸

- Public Officials.

These are government employees who have, or appear to the public to have, substantial responsibility for or decision-making control in governmental affairs.⁶⁹ They can be elected or appointed. Not all government employees are public officials, but only those who hold positions that invite greater public scrutiny (e.g., city tax assessor, county medical examiner, public university president).

- Public Figures.

These are people who invite attention and comment and thus voluntarily expose themselves to an increased risk of public scrutiny and possibly, to defamatory falsehoods. Typical public figures include movie stars and sports figures.

- Private Figures.

The courts believe that private persons are more vulnerable to injury and can thus suffer more irreparable damage to their reputations. This is why the standard of fault for private figures is lower than for public officials and public figures.

When a defendant is accused of libel, he or she has legal remedies both outside and inside the courtroom. Before a case goes to court, a judge can issue a summary judgment in favor of the defendant. This basically means that the case is dismissed because the plaintiff failed to meet the libel action's burden of proof. Or, a libel lawsuit can fail outside the courtroom for exceeding the statute of limitations. This means that the limited time during which a plaintiff can bring a lawsuit for libel has expired. Statutes of limitations vary from state to state, generally ranging from one to three years.

Inside the courtroom, if a case makes it to trial, the defendant in a libel lawsuit usually has several legal defenses. One defense is truth, although it is

actually quite difficult to have sufficient evidence for a defendant to prove in court that statements published about the plaintiff are literally true. Perhaps the defendant's witnesses refuse to testify, or perhaps either the witnesses or the defendant does not seem credible to the jury. A second defense is fair comment. This means that the comment in question was simply an opinion, and opinions are protected as free speech under the First Amendment. This applies mostly to public officials and public figures. A third defense is privilege. In many libel cases involving news media as defendants, privilege is invoked when the allegedly defamatory language was a fair and accurate report of something that occurred in a government proceeding or document.

Privacy

Legal scholars divide the law of privacy into four different torts, each of which is “an interference with the right of the plaintiff . . . ‘to be let alone.’”⁷⁰

1. Intrusion

upon the plaintiff's seclusion or solitude, or into her/his private affairs. This tort deals with how information was gathered, and most of these cases deal with the media's intrusion into people's lives.

2. Public disclosure

of embarrassing private facts about the plaintiff. This tort deals with the sharing of information, regardless of how it was obtained.

3. Publicity that places the plaintiff in a false light in the public eye. This might be done by distorting information or making up information to suggest that someone is other than what he or she really is, usually in an offensive way. This area of privacy law is closely related to libel law.

4. Appropriation

—meaning usage without permission—of the plaintiff's name or likeness for the advantage of the defendant.

In privacy legal actions, the defendant has a number of legal defenses available to counter an invasion of privacy lawsuit. These legal tactics are primarily used by media defendants, though they are also relevant for situations in which public relations practitioners are the defendants.

The U.S. Supreme Court has acknowledged that the publication of some private information is protected by the First Amendment. The Court has allowed publication of most truthful information that was lawfully obtained from official government records or court proceedings.⁷¹ Common law provides broad protection for publication of newsworthy information, and that newsworthiness outweighs privacy interests in stories of public interest involving public officials or public figures participating in public proceedings. The newsworthiness defense also overrides the privacy interests of private individuals—the key is not the status of a person as a public or private figure, but rather, the status of an event as being newsworthy.

Another defense in privacy violation lawsuits is consent, meaning that the defendant had permission to obtain and share the information. Public relations practitioners that produce materials with information or photos of people often will request that “model releases” be signed as a form of consent. The necessary components of such formal consent are that it be written, that it state the names of all parties to the agreement, that it state the scope and duration of the terms of the agreement, and that it provide for consideration or payment.⁷² Practitioners must make sure the appropriate person signs the consent form, keeping in mind that minors and mentally disabled persons cannot give legal consent. In some cases, such as the filming of a YouTube video in a public park, the consent of bystanders is implied—if they do not consent to be in the video, they should move away from the filming area.

Reputation in the Digital Age

With Facebook, Twitter, personal blogs, and many other digital venues for self-expression, the lines between personal and professional interests often become blurred. Practitioners—and students hoping to one day become practitioners—should remember that any information or photos posted online

by them or about them can be quickly found by a prospective employer, supervisor, or client. Photos that may seem innocuous or funny during one's first year in college—"Look! My new tongue piercing! I was soooooo drunk!"—may present one in an unattractive light after graduation.

News reports in recent years have highlighted the professional repercussions suffered by people who thought their online postings were personal and private, as well as those who simply did not think about the impact of their posts. As one Hollywood celebrity publicist said, "This new dynamic gives our clients many new opportunities to screw up."⁷³ Even for non-celebrities, there are fan pages titled "I lost my job because of facebook" and "Fired by Facebook."⁷⁴ In April 2011, a British palace guard was dismissed from working the wedding of Prince William and Catherine Middleton after he posted rude comments on Facebook about the future princess.⁷⁵ Besides potential job loss, being sued for defamation is another possible outcome of thoughtless online posts.⁷⁶

Here are some tips for maintaining a clean online reputation:

- Post with Caution.

Assume that anything you post is public, even if you have put your security settings on "private."

- Think Long-Term.

Ask yourself, "How will this make me look next year, in 10 years, in 30 years?"

- See it Their Way.

Look at the information or photo from the perspectives of your parents, significant others, children, clients, employers, and teachers. How would this look to a news reporter or activist who is already predisposed to disliking you?

- Patrol the Web.

See what others are posting about you. Monitor your Facebook wall regularly. Set up Google Alerts that will let you know when your name has been put online.

- Defend Yourself.

If you find that someone has posted something about you that you find inappropriate, ask them to take it down. If they refuse, contact the service platform hosting the post. An increasing number of professional services claim to help people manage their online reputations, but caution is recommended before hiring such a service.[77](#)

Litigation Public Relations

The increased recognition of the impact of public opinion on organizations involved in legal controversies spawned the development of a specialty practice area called “litigation public relations.” Those practicing litigation public relations help organizations address important interests that extend beyond legal concerns. For example, a company might be concerned about the effect of litigation on its shareholders and the price of its stock, on its employees and the company’s effort to recruit, on its customers and the sale of its products, or on its relationships with industry partners such as distributors, suppliers and others. In short, because the damage caused outside the courtroom can be greater than that incurred in resolving the legal issues, it is in a company’s best interest to seek both legal and public relations counsel.

Closing Thoughts

Although public relations practitioners do not practice law, legal considerations often define, limit, and regulate modern public relations practice. Thus, sound knowledge of the law will help practitioners work in partnership with legal personnel so that lawyers do not try to do public relations work without the practitioner’s involvement.

Also, public relations practitioners themselves are not immune from lawsuits, and so the increasing need for malpractice insurance is understandable. Many consider it a cost of doing business in today's litigious society, similar to the malpractice insurance carried by lawyers, doctors, accountants and other professionals. Finally, given today's media environment, practitioners must remember that even their actions in their private lives may affect their professional reputations, especially online.

Notes

1. [1](#). See, for example the opposing positions taken by Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes regarding the kind of speech that would constitute a “clear and present danger” to the nation and therefore would not be protected by the First Amendment, as presented in two U.S. Supreme Court decisions regarding alleged violations by dissidents of the Espionage Act of 1917 and its 1918 Amendment. *Schenck v. U.S.*, 249 U.S. 47 (1919), and *Abrams v. U.S.*, 250 U.S. 616 (1919).
2. [2](#). Barbara K. Petersen and Allison R. Lang, “A 200-Year Analysis of U.S. Supreme Court Interpretations of Public Relations,” A paper presented to the Law Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (AEJMC) Southeast Colloquium, Chapel Hill, NC, March 16–18, 2000: 49, 50, 60.
3. [3](#). *Ibid.*, 49.
4. [4](#). In a study of how journalists view their relationships with public relations practitioners, respondents estimated that 44 percent of the content of the U.S. news media is subsidized by practitioners. Lynne M. Sallot and Elizabeth A. Johnson, “Investigating Relationships Between Journalists and Public Relations Practitioners: Working Together to Set, Frame and Build the Public Agenda 1991–2004,” *Public Relations Review* 32, no. 2 (June 2006): 151–159.
5. [5](#). *Miami Herald Publishing Co. v. Tornillo*, 418 U.S. 241 (1974): 256.

6. [6](#). Wireless Ship Act of 1910, Radio Act of 1912, and Federal Radio Act of 1927.
7. [7](#). Black's Law, s.v. "public interest" and s.v. "public convenience and necessity." Public interest is "something in which the public, the community at large, has some pecuniary interests, or some interest by their legal rights or liabilities are affected." Public convenience and necessity is the common criterion used in public utility matters when a board or agency is faced with a petition for action at the request of the utility.
8. [8](#). NBC v. FCC, 319 U.S. 190 (1943).
9. [9](#). U.S. v. Southwestern Cable Co., 392 U.S. 157 (1968).
10. [10](#). See, e.g., Wilkinson v. Jones, 800 F.2d 989, aff'd without opinion, 480 U.S. 926 (1987), in which the federal courts declared the Utah Cable TV Programming Decency Act an overbroad restriction of cable system operators' First Amendment rights to choose programming. Likewise, provisions in the Cable TV Consumer Protection & Competition Act of 1992 to ban "indecent" on cable were found to violate the First Amendment (Denver Area Educational Telecommunications Consortium, Inc. v. FCC, 518 U.S. 727 [1996]). Indecency is not the same as obscenity, which was declared outside the protection of the First Amendment in Miller v. California, 413 U.S. 15 (1973). Instead, the FCC defined indecency as something that depicts or describes sexual or excretory activities or organs in a patently offensive manner and that is offensive to the contemporary community standards for the broadcasting medium. The U.S. Supreme Court supported the FCC's ban on indecency on broadcasting in FCC v. Pacifica Foundation, 438 U.S. 726 (1978) because the agency believed broadcasting is a uniquely pervasive presence in the lives of all Americans, even in the privacy of the home, and because "broadcasting is uniquely accessible to children, even those too young to read." In Wilkinson, the Court ruled the opposite was true for cable.
11. [11](#). 521 U.S. 844 (1997).

12. [12](#). Ibid., 863.
13. [13](#). Saxbe v. Washington Post Co., 417 U.S. 843 (1974); Houchins v. KQED, 438 U.S. 1 (1978); Pell v. Procunier, 417 U.S. 817 (1984).
14. [14](#). Branzburg v. Hayes, 408 U.S. 665 (1972).
15. [15](#). The nine categories of exemptions are national security, agency rules and procedures, statutory exemptions, confidential business information, agency memoranda, personnel or medical, law enforcement investigations, banking reports, and information about oil and gas wells. The U.S. Supreme Court reviewed FOIA's exemptions and found them constitutional since federal agencies are not required to withhold documents, though they may do so under their own discretion. Chrysler Corp. v. Brown, 441 U.S. 281 (1979).
16. [16](#). Virginia State Board of Pharmacy v. Virginia Citizens Consumer Council, Inc., 425 U.S. 748 (1976).
17. [17](#). For details of the federal complaint, see "FTC Seeks to Halt 10 Operators of Fake News Sites from Making Deceptive Claims About Acai Berry Weight Loss Products," <http://www.ftc.gov/opa/2011/04/fakenews.shtm> (accessed April 20, 2011).
18. [18](#). First National Bank of Boston v. Bellotti, 435 U.S. 765 (1978).
19. [19](#). Ibid., 777.
20. [20](#). Consolidated Edison Co. of New York v. Public Service Commission of New York, 447 U.S. 530, 535 (1980).
21. [21](#). Pacific Gas & Electric Co. v. Public Utilities Commission of California, 475 U.S. 1 (1986).
22. [22](#). 2 U.S.C. sec. 261 et seq. (1988).
23. [23](#). The Senate passed S1060, 98-0, July 25, 1995. The House passed HR2564, 421-0, then cleared S1060, Nov. 29, 1995. President Clinton signed S1060 into law (PL 104-65), Dec. 19, 1995.

24. [24.](#) “Lawmakers Enact Lobbying Reforms,” Congressional Quarterly 1995 Almanac: 104th Congress (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1996), sec. 1, 40.
25. [25.](#) U.S. v. Harris, 347 U.S. 612, 620 (1954).
26. [26.](#) U.S. v. Rumely, 345 U.S. 41, 47 (1953). However, if a powerful corporation uses a public relations campaign to do damage to another, it may run afoul of antitrust laws. In Eastern Railroad Presidents Conference v. Noerr, 365 U.S. 127 (1961), the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that antitrust laws, which prohibit anticompetitive restraints of trade, do not bar corporations from joining with public relations counsel in a “no-holds-barred” public relations campaign to affect legislation. The Court said railroads could try through public opinion to kill legislation favored by truckers. However, the Court said there may be situations where a publicity campaign, “ostensibly directed toward influencing governmental action, is a mere sham to cover . . . an attempt to interfere directly with the business relationships of a competitor” (365 U.S. 127, 144 [1961]).
27. [27.](#) 2 U.S.C. sec. 267 (1988).
28. [28.](#) “Lawmakers Enact Lobbying Reforms,” Congressional Quarterly 1995 Almanac: 104 Congress (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1996), sec. 1, 40.
29. [29.](#) For example, the law precludes the most powerful lobbying organization in Washington, D.C.—the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)—from receiving such government largess because it lobbies the federal government on Social Security, Medicare, taxes, and other issues important to its members. The law allows nonprofit charitable, educational, and other tax-exempt organizations to simply file a copy of their IRS Form 990, which reports lobbying expenditures, rather than requiring them to file a separate report.
30. [30.](#) “Washington Bubble: Tight Budgets Favor Lobbyists,” Time (April 25, 2011), 19, and Center for Responsive Politics, “Lobbying Database,”

www.opensecrets.org/lobby/index.php (accessed April 16, 2011).

31. [31](#). “Influence: A Booming Business,” The Center for Public Integrity, Washington, DC, <http://www.publicintegrity.org/hiredguns/report.aspx?aid=957> (accessed January 28, 2008).
32. [32](#). Josh Israel and Aaron Mehta, “Second Labor Union Failed to Disclose Lobbying Activities,” Center for Public Integrity (July 6, 2010), www.publicintegrity.org/articles/entry/2210/ (accessed April 16, 2010).
33. [33](#). 22 U.S.C. sec 611 et seq. (1988). See original Act at 52 U.S. Statutes at Large, pp. 631–33, or PL 583, 8 June 1938.
34. [34](#). 22 U.S.C. sec. 611 (c)(1)(iii) (1988).
35. [35](#). 22 U.S.C. secs. 611, 614 (1988).
36. [36](#). National Labor Relations Board v. Virginia Electric & Power Co., 314 U.S. 469, 477 (1941).
37. [37](#). “MS&L, JSL of Atlanta Settle Lawsuit,” Jack O’Dwyer’s Newsletter 30, no. 13 (March 26, 1997): 7.
38. [38](#). “Are Non-Compete Clauses Enforceable?” Public Relations Tactics 4, no. 12 (December 1997): 10.
39. [39](#). For another good explanation of the legalities of internships, see Shel Perkins, “Be Smart About Student Internships,” AIGA Center for Practice Management (May 20, 2009), <http://cpm.aiga.org/content.cfm/be-smart-about-student-internships> (accessed April 23, 2011).
40. [40](#). For a good discussion of whether unpaid internships are legal, see Steven Greenhouse, “The Unpaid Intern, Legal or Not,” The New York Times (April 2, 2010), <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/03/business/03intern.html> (accessed April 23, 2011).
41. [41](#). Ibid., n.p.

42. [42.](#) Professional Standards Advisory PS-17: Ethical Use of Interns. Public Relations Society of America (February 2011)., <http://www.prsa.org/AboutPRSA/Ethics/ProfessionalStandardsAdvisories/PSA17EthicalUseofInterns.pdf> (accessed April 23, 2011).
43. [43.](#) 15 U.S.C. sec. 77a et seq. (1988).
44. [44.](#) 15 U.S.C. sec. 78a et seq. (1988).
45. [45.](#) 15 U.S.C. sec. 80a-1 et seq. (1988) and 15 U.S.C. sec. 80b-1 et seq. (1988).
46. [46.](#) See Barbara K. Petersen and Hugh J. Martin, “CEO Perceptions of Investor Relations as a Public Relations Function: An Exploratory Study,” *Journal of Public Relations Research* 8, no. 3 (1996): 173–209. CEO respondents in the study reported here did not perceive public relations knowledge as relevant for conducting effective investor relations programs, but instead, preferred to have them supervised and conducted by financial affairs executives and departments.
47. [47.](#) 17 CFR 243.101(f).
48. [48.](#) Private Securities Litigation Reform Act of 1995, Pub. L. No. 104-67, 109 Stat. 737 (1995).
49. [49.](#) See Mary S. Diemer, “Reforms Change Landscape of Securities Litigation,” *Litigation News* 21, no. 3 (March 1996): 1, 4.
50. [50.](#) Black’s, s.v. “fraud.” Anything calculated to deceive, whether by a single act or combination, or by suppression of truth, or suggestion of what is false, whether it be by direct falsehood or innuendo, by speech or silence, word of mouth, or look or gesture... .” Bad faith” and “fraud” are synonymous, and also synonyms of dishonesty, infidelity, faithlessness, perfidy, unfairness, and so on.
51. [51.](#) U.S. Constitution, Article I, Section 8.
52. [52.](#) 17 U.S.C., Sec. 102.

53. [53.](#) 17 U.S.C., Sec. 101, 105.
54. [54.](#) Salinger v. Random House, Inc., 811 F.2d 90 (2d Cir. 1987), cert. denied, 484 U.S. 890 (1987). The author J. D. Salinger did not register his copyright of unpublished letters until after he became aware that they were scheduled to be published in a forthcoming book.
55. [55.](#) Supra note 123.
56. [56.](#) Community for Creative Non-Violence v. Reid, 476 U.S. 693 (1989).
57. [57.](#) Copyright Act of 1976, 17 U.S.C., Sec. 107.
58. [58.](#) 17 U.S.C., Sec. 506(a). Plagiarism and photocopying are two ways to show substantial similarity.
59. [59.](#) MGM Studios, Inc. v. Grokster, Ltd., 545 U.S. 913 (2005).
60. [60.](#) In Coca-Cola Co. v. Gemini Rising, Inc., 346 F. Supp. 1183 (E.D.N.Y. 1972), a federal court stopped a company from selling posters that were printed in the colors and type of script used by Coca Cola to identify its drinks, but that instead urged people to “enjoy cocaine.”
61. [61.](#) 15 U.S.C.S. Sec. 1117 (2004).
62. [62.](#) <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/w/warrenbuff108887.html> (accessed April 22, 2011).
63. [63.](#) William L. Prosser, 48 Calif. L. Rev. 383 (1960).
64. [64.](#) According to the Restatement (Second) of Torts, 560, “liability exists when the group is so small that the matter can reasonably be understood to refer to an individual or the circumstances reasonably lead to the conclusion that there is a particular reference to one person.”
65. [65.](#) New York Times Co. v. Sullivan, 376 U.S. 254 (1964).

66. [66.](#) Black's, s.v. "defamation."
67. [67.](#) In *New York Times* (*Ibid.* at 270), the Court said that the United States has "a profound national commitment to the principle that debate on public issues should be uninhibited, robust, and wide-open, and that it may well include vehement, caustic, and sometimes unpleasantly sharp attacks on government and public officials."
68. [68.](#) *Gertz v. Robert Welch, Inc.*, 418 U.S. 323 (1974).
69. [69.](#) 383 U.S. 75 (1966).
70. [70.](#) William L. Prosser, 48 *Calif. L. Rev.* 383 (1960)
71. [71.](#) *Cox Broadcasting Corp. v. Cohn*, 420 U.S. 469 (1975).
72. [72.](#) Traditionally, participants in public relations photographs or films are given a token "consideration" such as a \$1 bill.
73. [73.](#) Laura M. Holson, "When Publicists Say 'Shh!,'" *The New York Times* (April 15, 2011), <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/17/fashion/17PUBLICISTS.html?scp=1&sq=publicists%20social%20media&st=Search> (accessed April 23, 2011).
74. [74.](#) See <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=6474455501> and <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=63470796208> (accessed April 23, 2011).
75. [75.](#) Kwala Mandel, "Royal Guard Cut from Wedding after Kate Complaints," *Shine from Yahoo* (April 25, 2011), <http://royalwedding.yahoo.com/blogs/guard-cut-from-wedding-after-kate-complaints-6189?nc> (accessed April 25, 2011).
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77. [77.](#) See John Tozzi, "Do Reputation Management Services Work?" *Bloomberg BusinessWeek* (April 30, 2008), <http://>

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Study Guide

1. What is the basic structure of law in the United States?
2. How do the First Amendment protections of free speech and free press relate to specific aspects of public relations practice?
3. What is the difference between commercial and political speech? In what areas is corporate expression regulated?
4. In what ways can public relations materials be protected?
5. What are the conditions for libel? What are the legal types of persons and how do these affect the application of libel standards? What are defenses against allegations of libel?
6. What are the four torts of privacy law? What are defenses against allegations of privacy violations?

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(This chapter includes work done for the tenth edition by Martin Kruming, J.D., editor of *San Diego Lawyer* and lecturer in the School of Journalism & Media Studies, San Diego State University, as well as work done for the ninth edition by Barbara K. Petersen, Ph.D., University of South Florida, Tampa.)

Chapter 7 Theoretical Underpinnings: Adjustment and Adaptation

Learning Outcomes

After studying [Chapter 7](#) this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Define a system and explain how systems theory is useful for explaining how concepts of adjustment and adaptation apply to public relations.
2. Explain the differences between open and closed systems, using notions of reactive and proactive public relations.
3. Define systems theory concepts—homeostasis, static and dynamic states, morphogenesis, negative and positive feedback, and cybernetics.
4. Diagram, label, and explain the open systems model of public relations.

Our organizations are living systems, existing in a turbulent environment that constantly tests their abilities to survive . . . the forces of fierce global competition, dizzying technological advances, vacillating economies, and highly sophisticated and demanding customers.

—Carol Kinsey Goman¹

The key ideas of system theory are amazingly coherent and consistent, and they have had a major impact on many fields, including communication.

—Stephen Littlejohn and Karen A. Foss²

This chapter presents a theoretical model for public relations. Theory provides a framework for understanding, organizing, and integrating the many activities and purposes of public relations. In addition, the practice requires a body of knowledge grounded in theory.

As defined in [Chapter 1](#), public relations deals with the relationships that organizations build and maintain with publics. These relationships are subjected to political, social, economic, and technological change pressures in an ever-changing environment. Careful assessment and tracking of these forces helps organizations steer a safe, steady course through uncharted territory in the increasingly global community. Why are Costco and Nordstrom strong retail organizations, whereas Montgomery Ward department stores and Blockbuster video rental stores are gone from the scene? To paraphrase Darwin, it is not the powerful organizations that will survive, it is those able to adjust and adapt to a changing world.

The Ecological Approach

This was the first public relations book text to suggest using a social systems perspective when in 1952 it introduced the concept of ecology to public relations. Borrowed from the life sciences, the term introduced students and practitioners to public relations as dealing with the interdependence of organizations and others in their environments. Viewed in this perspective, public relations' essential role is to help organizations adjust and adapt to changes in their environments.

Organizations depend on their environments for many things: charters to operate, personnel, funds to operate and grow, freedom to pursue missions, and too many others to list. To prosper and endure, all organizations must (1) accept the public responsibility imposed by an increasingly interdependent society; (2) communicate, despite multiplying barriers, with publics that are often distant and diverse; and (3) achieve integration into the communities that they were created to serve. The first point represents the source of public relations thinking in management. The second point explains the growth of public relations as a specialized staff function. The third point states the goal of both management and the specialized practice.

In short, the job of public relations is to help organizations adjust and adapt to their environments . Public relations counselors monitor public opinion, social change, political movements, cultural shifts, technological developments, and even the natural environment. They then interpret these environmental factors and work with management to develop strategic plans of organizational change and responsiveness.

Years ago, author and futurist Alvin Toffler foresaw a more dynamic environment emerging from what he called the “technology-driven Information Age.” He said the changes would include “new family styles; changed ways of working, loving, and living; a new economy; new political conflicts; and beyond all this an altered consciousness as well.”³ The revolution in information and communication is not so much about technology as it is the social consequences of the new communication systems, according to communication scholar Frederick Williams: “Never before in history have so many people had so much information at their fingertips.”⁴

Public relations specialists must anticipate and monitor such changes in an organization’s environment and help interpret them to management. The successful public relations counselor constantly surveys the environment, always trying to extend vision further beyond the horizon and trying to increase both the size and the resolution of the picture of present and future realities. In essence, such attempts to see clearly and to anticipate are designed to give the organization time to plan, an opportunity to be proactive rather than simply reactive to environmental changes.

Specific changes and forces at play must be identified, studied, and understood for particular situations and organizational settings. At the same time, some overriding changes produce consequences for all organizations, such as the tragic events of September 11, 2001, and the continuing efforts to rid the world of terrorism.

Tracking the Trends

This discussion of major trends and changes is far from complete, but it

indicates how major forces affect organizations and their relationships with stakeholder publics. It simply is not possible to build an omnibus list that would cover all situations. Instead, the role of public relations is to track and analyze the specific trends and forces at play in particular situations that affect organization–public relationships.

The growing animal rights movement, however, provides an example of how change pressure affects many organizations’ ability to accomplish their missions. The Los Angeles Times Magazine reported that the Norfolk, Virginia–based animal rights group People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) “has grown from humble origins to an 800-pound gorilla . . . the largest organization of its kind. . . .”⁵ PETA’s website boasts more than 2 million “members and supporters” worldwide. Cosmetics manufacturers, medical research laboratories, universities, meat packers, farmers, and even federal government agencies have had to factor the views of this new activist force into their decision making.

For example, Avon, Estée Lauder, Benetton, and Tonka Toy Company, among others, stopped testing products on rabbits, guinea pigs, and other animals. The National Institutes of Health closed a research clinic that used animals in research, and the Pentagon halted battle-wound tests on animals. State agriculture departments shut down slaughterhouses in Texas and California after PETA pressure. PETA is also winning the battle for public opinion, as an overwhelming majority support animal rights and think it should be illegal to kill animals for fur or to use animals in cosmetics research.

Whole Foods Market apparently recognized the growing concern about how farm animals are raised and the potential impact on its relationships with customers, employees, vendors, and other stakeholders. The company partnered with nonprofit animal-welfare advocate Global Animal Partnership (GAP) to craft a preemptive response. The result is color-coded labeling that gives consumers information about how the source animal was raised. The highest score—5-plus and color green—means that a chicken, for example, had been farm-hatched and raised on lush pasture. The lowest score—1 and color yellow—assures only that the chicken had not been caged in crowded conditions and that the grower had followed rules regarding feed, antibiotics,

and treatment. The GAP executive director predicted such responses will have an impact well beyond Whole Foods, causing “massive improvements in the way animals are raised in this country.”⁶

Education reform provides another example of change pressure: As more and more Americans enter the job market with deficient basic writing, math, and problem-solving skills, American industry slips further behind in the competitive global marketplace. In response, many companies have “adopted” schools to help promote improvement in the educational system. Others have started their own basic education programs in an attempt to equip employees with basic job skills. For example, Shell Oil Company established Shell Youth Training Academies to help prepare inner-city youth for college and jobs. The National Basketball Association began “Read to Achieve” programs in every NBA city. The Chicago Bulls expand that effort each year to include building a Reading and Learning Center at an inner-city school; sending players to schools and libraries to promote literacy; and contributing 5,000 books to libraries, schools, youth centers, and youth clubs.

Concern about global warming and sustainability has reenergized the environmental movement globally. One international survey found that “protecting the environment” ranks as the top consumer concern and that 72 percent of consumers globally “expect corporations to take actions to preserve and sustain the environment.”⁷ The “Tappening” campaign is an example of consumers trying to pressure corporations to change an environment-damaging product—bottled water. Organizers encourage like-minded people to “start a lie” campaign at www.startalie.com. Examples include “Bottled Water Causes Blindness in Puppies” and “Bottled Water Makes You Radioactive.” Organizations and products that damage the environment face increased criticism, scrutiny, and threat of regulation.

Few organizations escape the change pressures brought on by the education and health-care crises, the changing family, new technology, the “eco-movement,” globalization, or other major issues and trends. (See [Exhibit 7.1](#).)

Exhibit 7.1

Tracking Trends and Issues



Kerry Tucker, Chairman, Nuffer, Smith, Tucker, Inc., San Diego, California

Picture yourself as the captain of the starship Enterprise.

You want to be sure that you have a radar system that can accurately anticipate fast-moving meteors and the location of nearby planets to avoid impending disasters.

While moving through space at warp speeds, you don't want to wait until these obstacles are in sight to adjust your course and keep the ship out of danger.

The same is true about an organization—your organization—facing a meteor shower of issues in today's rapidly changing environment.

As issues affecting your organization arise, it is best to have a radar system in place that will help management anticipate trends and issues likely to affect your organization and its publics, rather than waiting until it's too late to do anything except react defensively.

If you are in public relations, you must start being more systematic in the tracking and management of issues. If you don't, someone else in your organization will. It's a prerequisite for organizational survival.

Even the starship Enterprise would find it difficult to navigate through the turbulent issues environment most organizations face today.

Courtesy Nuffer, Smith, Tucker, Inc.

A Systems Perspective

This discussion of changes and their impact on organizations suggests a systems perspective for understanding what drives public relations. The systems perspective applies because public relations deals with the mutually dependent relationships established and maintained between organizations and their publics.

The concepts of adjustment and adaptation, as well as our definition of public relations, employ concepts and propositions from systems theory. For example, a university is part of a system composed of students, faculty, alumni, donors, neighbors, employers, high school counselors and teachers, and other universities in the area, to name but a few of the many publics. Even the simplest definition of a system—a set of interdependent parts—illustrates this perspective. However, an extended definition serves as the basis for applying systems theory to public relations: A system is a set of interacting units that endures through time within an established boundary by responding and adjusting to change pressures from the environment to achieve and maintain goal states.

In the case of public relations, the set of interacting units includes the organization and the stakeholders with which it has or will have relations. They are somehow mutually affected or involved. Unlike physical and biological systems, however, social systems are not especially dependent on the physical closeness of component parts. Rather, organization–public interactions define systems. In other words, an organization–publics system consists of an organization and the people involved with and affected by the organization, and vice versa. Whereas the organizational component in the system is relatively easy to define, publics are abstractions defined by the public relations manager applying the systems approach. In fact, different

publics, and therefore a different system boundary, must be defined for each situation or problem.

This principle is illustrated by comparing a university's publics when the goal is recruiting high-GPA students, with its publics when the goal is raising money for a new digital media center. The student recruitment campaign might include community college students, college-bound high school juniors and seniors, their parents, and high school counselors. Because the university tends to attract students from a particular region, program planners would have to identify the geographic area to be covered in the recruitment effort. In effect, each of these decisions defines the system components and boundary for the student recruitment program.

The capital campaign for the new digital media center at the same university, on the other hand, calls for a different definition of the organization–publics system. Program planners would determine what groups or entities are most interested in such a facility or most likely to benefit from its presence on campus. Surely the local media community would include potential donors. In cities far from the campus, corporate foundations that have historically funded innovative communication education programs would be included as prospective contributors. More specifically, digital media hardware and software companies that produce related products would be identified as a third public for this campaign. Not all alumni are likely contributors, but those who have succeeded in professions calling for digital media skills could be selected from the alumni list to make up a fourth public. For all these publics, interest and involvement in digital media, not geography, help define the system components.

In both situations, definitions of the publics include those with whom the organization must establish and maintain enduring and mutually beneficial relationships. Most relationships, however, extend well beyond the period of such specific campaigns. Therefore, even though relationships must be defined specifically for each situation and program goal, they also must be viewed in the larger context of the university's overall public relations program. To paraphrase a relevant saying, "We must do friend-raising before we do fund-raising."

Public relations efforts, then, are part of an organization's purposive and,

therefore, managed behavior to achieve goals. For example, a fire that destroys a museum certainly has an impact on the museum's relationships with donors and others. Such an unplanned event, however, clearly is not part of the public relations program. On the other hand, the fund-raising campaign, groundbreaking ceremony, and grand opening gala are public relations responses to the situation created by the fire. These events are intended to establish or maintain relationships necessary for rebuilding the museum.

In some cases, goals can be achieved by simply maintaining existing relationships in the face of changing conditions. More likely, however, organizations must continually adjust their goals and relationships to accommodate change pressures from their complex and dynamic settings. A classic case of adjustment and adaptation is the redirection of March of Dimes fund-raising and research to birth defects after polio vaccine eliminated the disease for which the organization–publics system was originally created.

Environmental Change Pressures

Systems theorists typically define the environment as anything that generates change pressures—information, energy, and matter inputs—on a system. As the examples in the first part of this chapter illustrate, environmental inputs to organization–publics systems take many forms.

For example, soon after the U.S. Gulf coast Hurricane Katrina disaster, news coverage of the American Red Cross relief efforts headlined alleged abuses and missteps—missing rented cars, generators, computers, and donated supplies; and convicted felons serving as volunteers in the disaster area. Headlines in the nation's news media: “Counterparts Excoriate Red Cross Katrina Effort” (The Washington Post), “Red Cross Shifting Internal Charges over Katrina Aid” (The New York Times), and “American Red Cross Troubles” (PBS News Hour). The charges certainly threatened the charity's relationships with donors and the local Red Cross chapters that had raised more than \$2 billion to fund relief activities.

The perception of abuses by the charity continued well after Katrina when the ousted CEO, Marsha Evans, was awarded a severance package worth \$780,000 by the organization's governing board. According to records released by the Senate Finance Committee, the Red Cross also had paid out about \$2.8 million in severance, bonuses, and delayed compensation to five other Red Cross executives in the prior seven years.⁸ Soon after, Iowa Senator Charles E. Grassley, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, threatened to rewrite or revoke the organization's charter if it did not thoroughly change its operations.⁹

In fact, American Red Cross governance was changed. On May 11, 2007, President George W. Bush signed into law H.R. 1681, the American National Red Cross Governance Modernization Act. This set of reforms resulted from a comprehensive assessment of Red Cross governance launched on February 24, 2006, by its board of governors. The Red Cross dealt with the threat to its survival as all functional systems do—by changing its structure and processes. In April 2008, the governing board appointed former AT&T executive Gail J. McGovern president and CEO of the storied but troubled charity.

Change pressure was not limited to the American Red Cross. All charities and nonprofits braced for donor backlash, greater public scrutiny, and even government investigations of high executive salaries and generous benefits packages.

Even “an insignificant leak” of radioactive water in a power utility's nuclear-generating reactor puts stress on a utility's relationships with regulators, antinuclear citizen groups, and the financial community. The March 14, 2011, earthquake and tsunami that destroyed Japan's Fukushima nuclear power plants also created a “tsunami” of change pressure worldwide. For example, less than three months afterward, both Germany and Switzerland announced plans to phase out all nuclear power plants, scrapping plans to upgrade the plants and extend service. The shockwaves rippled throughout the global energy system, as companies, cities, and nations implemented safety inspections, called for design improvements, and explored alternative energy sources. The system remains under the stress of extreme change pressure.

These examples illustrate that change pressures on organization–publics systems come from many types of environmental sources. In turn, organization–publics relationships change in response to these environmental pressures. If they do not change, old relationships become dysfunctional because the organization acts and reacts in ways inappropriate to the new circumstances. If responses to environmental changes are unmanaged and nonpurposeful, systems tend to degenerate to maximum disorder, what systems theorists call “entropy.” In social systems, this means that coordinated behavior to attain mutually beneficial goals is no longer possible. Simply put, systems break up. Public relations is charged with keeping organizational relationships in tune with the mutual interests and goals of organizations and their publics.

Subsystems and Suprasystems

To this point, the focal system has been defined as the organization and its publics. Similarly, the organization is itself composed of a set of interacting units. From this perspective, the organization can also be viewed as a system. Because organizations exist in dynamic social settings, they must modify internal processes and restructure themselves in response to changing environments. In the absence of such adjustment and adaptation, organizations—just like any other social systems—become out of step with the world around them. As counselors to line management, the public relations staff is charged with keeping the organization sensitive to environmental changes, anticipating as well as reacting to change pressures.

Likewise, the organization–publics system can be part of a larger set of interacting units, thus viewed as a component of a higher-order social system. For example, the system composed of the local American Red Cross and its publics is but one component of a community’s charitable social services system. It is also only one subsystem in the national system of affiliates, which in turn is but one component of the nation’s charitable social services system. Eventually, of course, one could project this series of ever-larger systems to the highest level on earth, the world. Many public relations specialists work at the level of the private enterprise system, health-care system, educational system, or international development system, to name

but a few examples of regional, national, and international systems.

The systems perspective, then, suggests that the level and definition of the system must be appropriate to the concern or the problem situation. A component—a subsystem—in one system may be itself analyzed as a system in another context. Likewise, a system defined as such for one purpose may be but a component or subsystem in a higher-order suprasystem when the reason for the analysis changes.

For example, when reorganizing the local Red Cross' internal structure and process, people and programs within the organization make up the system, and the external publics are viewed as parts of the environment. When the American Red Cross crisis made headlines, however, each of the 700 local Red Cross chapters and their publics became local systems subject to forces at play in the larger environmental context. Likewise, the national American Red Cross, made up of national headquarters in Washington, D.C., and all 700 local chapters, can be viewed as but one component in the national or international charity system. And the charities as a group are but one component in the larger set of tax-exempt, nonprofit organizations some have referred to as the “third sector” of the economy.

Systems theorist James G. Miller uses the concept of higher-order systems to define a system's environment:

The immediate environment is the suprasystem minus the system itself. The entire environment includes this plus the suprasystem and systems at all higher levels which contain it. In order to survive, the system must interact with and adjust to its environment, the other parts of the suprasystem. These processes alter both the system and its environment. It is not surprising that characteristically living systems adapt to their environment and, in return, mold it. The result is that, after some period of interaction, each in some sense becomes a mirror of the other.[10](#)

Organizations as Systems

Miller says “living systems” engage in exchanges with their environments,

producing changes in both the systems and their environments. Such imagery of exchange processes, structural change, and adaptation captures the essence of the public relations function in organizations. Specifically, public relations is part of what organization theorists call the adaptive subsystem, as distinct from the production, supportive-disposal, maintenance, and managerial subsystems.¹¹ The latter—the managerial subsystem—is defined as “direction, adjudication, and control” of the other subsystems.

Adaptive subsystems—including public relations—vary in their sensitivity to their environments. Some organizations actively monitor their social environments and make adjustments based on what is learned. An example is a church that begins offering single-parent counseling and social events in response to the growing number of households headed by divorced and single parents. On the other hand, given public concerns about excessive corporate profits and health-care costs, how sensitive was the pharmaceutical company that charged 100 times more for a drug when it was used to treat human cancer than when the same drug was sold as an antiparasitic agent for farm animals?

Several factors determine the amount of resources, time, and effort an organization devotes to monitoring its environment:

1. The degree of conflict or competition with the external environment, typically related to the extent of involvement with and dependence on government.
2. The degree of dependence on internal support and unity.
3. The degree to which internal operations and the external environment are believed to be rationalized, that is, characterized by predictable uniformities and therefore subject to planned influence, and affecting all of these.
4. The size and structure of the organization, its heterogeneity of membership and diversity of goals, and its centralization of authority.¹²

Organizational adjustment and adaptation to new conditions depend in part on how sensitive organizations are to their environments. Differences in how

sensitive organizations are provide a useful basis for further systems analysis of the public relations function.

Open and Closed Systems

All systems—mechanical, organic, and social—can be classified in terms of the amount and quality of interchange with their environments. The continuum ranges from closed systems on one extreme to open systems on the other. Closed systems have impermeable boundaries, so they cannot exchange matter, energy, or information with their environments. Rather, interaction only occurs within the system. Open systems, on the other hand, exchange inputs and outputs with their environments through boundaries that are permeable. Of course, social systems cannot be completely closed or totally open, so they are either relatively open or relatively closed. The distinction is important.

The extent to which systems are closed or open indicates how sensitive they are to their environments. Closed systems do not take in new matter, energy, or information. In short, closed systems do not adapt to external change and eventually disintegrate. On the other hand, open systems recognize and respond to environmental changes. Survival and growth of open systems depend on interchange with their environment. The most successful organizations are “especially adroit at continually responding to change of any sort in their environments.”¹³

Open systems adjust and adapt to counteract or accommodate environmental variations. Inputs from the environment can be reactions to a system’s own outputs or the result of changes independent of system outputs. In either case, inputs can cause deviations from established system goal states. When that happens, feedback within a system causes adjustments in both structure (what the system is) and processes (what the system does).

Adjustments are intended to reduce, maintain, or increase the deviations from goal states. The output of adjustments can be directed internally, externally, or both. Internal outputs can change or maintain goal states. External outputs can change or maintain environmental conditions. Which type of output

should public relations emphasize? That depends, because “there is no property of an organization that is good in any absolute sense; all are relative to some given environment, or to some given set of threats and disturbances, or to some given set of problems.”¹⁴

Will an open system adjust effectively? Not necessarily, for “there is maladjustment as well as adjustment; the function concept only poses the question of adequacy but does not settle it beforehand.”¹⁵ Figure 7.1 depicts the cyclical nature of an open system’s interchange with its

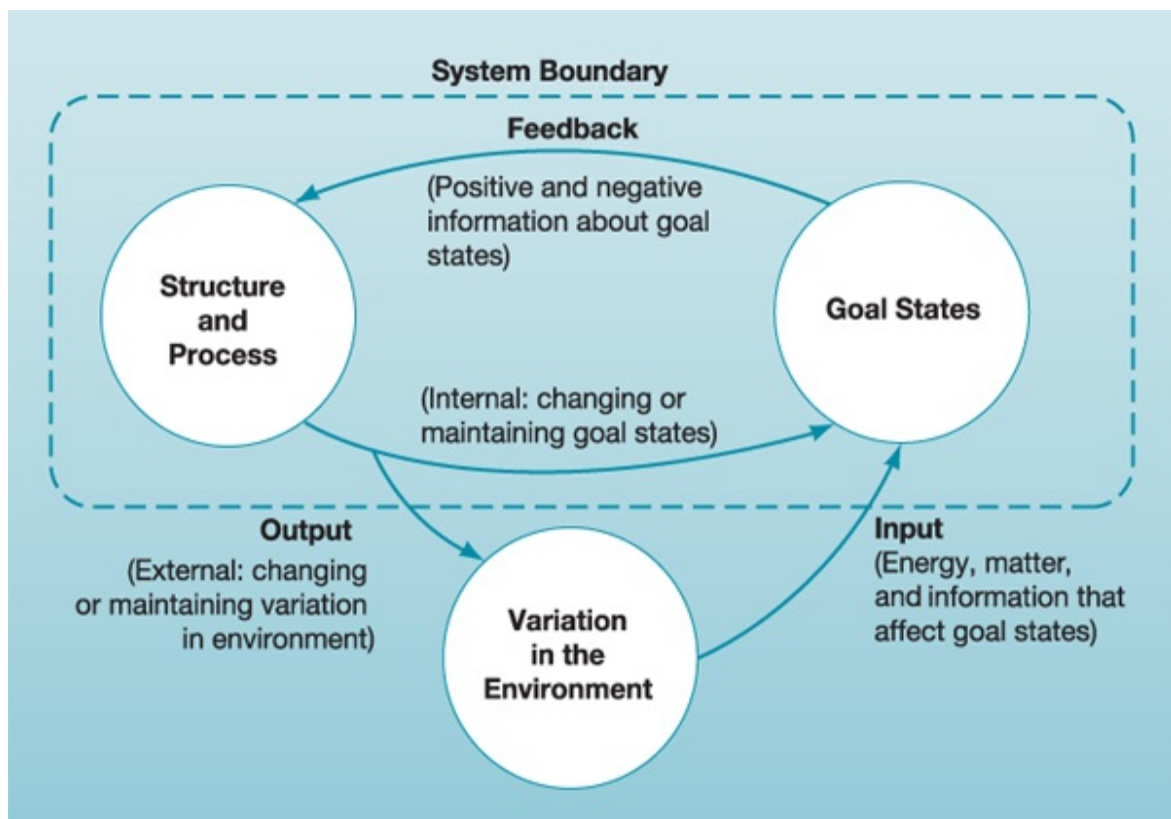


Figure 7.1 Open Systems Model

environment, assessment and reassessment, and adjustment and adaptation essential to the system maintenance and change.

Goal states, Structure, and Process

The ultimate goal of systems, of course, is survival. But because they exist in changing environments, open systems must continually adjust to maintain states of equilibrium or balance. The conditions necessary for survival are represented as the “goal states” in the model. Paradoxically, open systems must continually change to remain the same—an enduring set of interacting units.

To acknowledge both the dynamic goal states of relatively open systems and the static goal states of relatively closed systems, systems theorists refer to the goal states as “homeostasis.” This term is used “to avoid the static connotations of equilibrium and to bring out the dynamic, processual, potential-maintaining properties of basically unstable . . . systems.”¹⁶ The person credited with coining the term said it “does not imply something set and immobile, as stagnation,” but rather “a condition which may vary.”¹⁷

Homeostasis, then, refers to goal states in [Figure 7.1](#) that, although relatively stable or instable, are subject to change as a result of system inputs. For example, your academic department attempts to maintain a certain student population, but that goal may change if the state reduces the university’s budget. The student census goal could be increased if new resources are added, such as a newly endowed lectureship made possible by wealthy alumni. Yet another term is needed, however, to describe other changes characteristic of open systems that adjust and adapt to environmental inputs.

Whereas homeostasis recognizes the relative stability of system goal states, morpho-genesis refers to changes in the structure and process element in the open systems model in [Figure 7.1](#). For example, media and public criticism of how the state fair is being managed prompts the board of directors to appoint a new administrator and to reorganize the business office. In addition, the board revises procedures for awarding contracts. Notice that the structure and processes may change even if the goal states do not, and vice versa. What changes and to what extent depends on the nature of the feedback in the system. According to Littlejohn and Foss,

In a complex system, a series of feedback loops connects the parts. . . . In a positive relationship, variables increase or decrease together. In a negative relationship, they vary inversely, so that as one increases, the other decreases.¹⁸

In an earlier edition of his book, Littlejohn explained feedback more fully as follows:

Feedback can be classified as positive or negative, depending on the way the system responds to it. Negative feedback is an error message indicating deviation, and the system adjusts by reducing or counteracting the deviation. Negative feedback is important for balance because it maintains a steady state.

A system can also respond by amplifying or maintaining deviation, in which case the feedback is positive. This kind of interaction is important to morphogenesis, or system growth such as learning . . . [T]he response to negative feedback is “cut back, slow down, discontinue.” Response to positive feedback is “increase, maintain, keep going.”¹⁹

Systems, then, adjust and adapt their goals, structures, or processes, depending on the kind and amount of feedback. Open systems not only generate different types of feedback as a result of system inputs, but they also exhibit more flexibility in adjusting to inputs. Choices among alternative adaptive strategies are made on the basis of which ones are most effective in helping the system maintain or achieve system goals in the context of environmental change pressures. As one systems theorist put it, “All systems are adaptive, and the real question is what they are adaptive to and to what extent.”²⁰

Cybernetics in open Systems

Study of this input–output self-regulation process in systems is referred to as cybernetics. Buckley’s general cybernetic model ([Figure 7.2](#)) portrays what tends to occur or would occur (“were it not for complicating factors”) in goal-seeking systems. The model contains five elements: (1) goals established in a control center; (2) outputs related to the goals, which have an impact on the state of the system and its environment; (3) feedback to the control center on the effects of the output; (4) a comparison of the new system state with the goal state; and (5) control center determination of the need for corrective output.²¹

Cybernetic control systems used for “auto pilot” navigation on space shuttles, airplanes, and ships are good examples. Early in the twentieth century, sailors called the first such navigational system “iron mike.” This relatively simple electrically driven gyroscope cybernetic system contained a course-setting device, a course indicator to signal discrepancies from the set course, and a mechanism for activating the rudder to make course corrections. Compare that with the sophisticated cybernetic control system on one of the most advanced and largest sailing ship, the 617-foot Wind Surf:

A hard gust of wind generates pressure on the sails. The extent of that increase in pressure is measured, and the computer instructs the sheets, which are attached to the clews of the sails, to slacken off—spilling the incremental wind and thereby easing the tension. Simultaneously, the computer instructs the windward seawater ballast to ingest more water, while the leeward ballast chamber rushes to empty its supply of water. It is most terribly important to do all of this before the ship lists over more than two degrees. . . . So that everything described above happens within approximately three seconds.²²

Even a thermostat–furnace system can be described as a cybernetic system. Just as does Wind Surf, this system responds (corrective actions) to deviations from the goal state (the temperature set in the thermostat). Its responses, however, include either production or cessation of heat or cold: turning the furnace on or off, or turning the air conditioner on or off. Similarly, relatively simple organisms have relatively limited options for dealing with variations in their

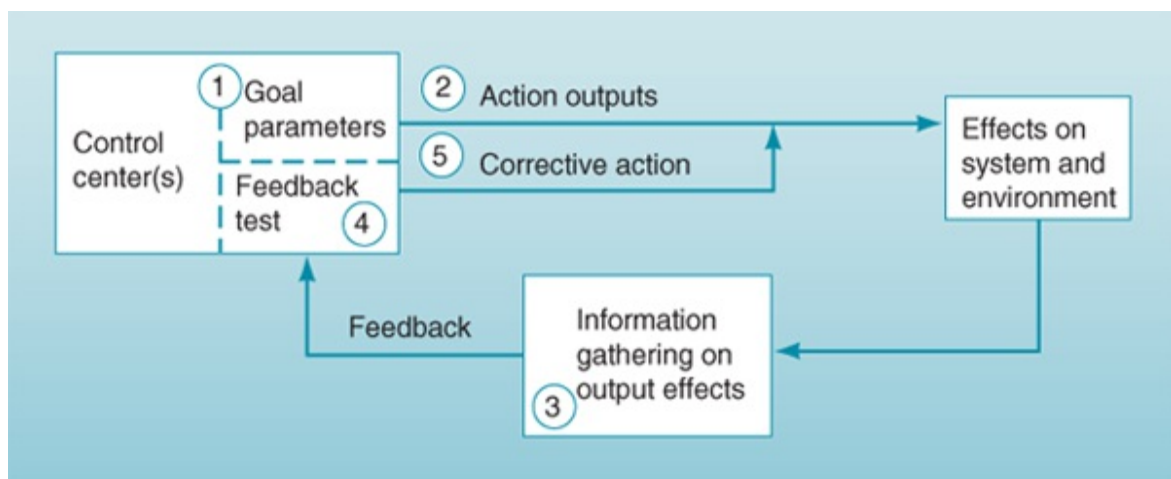


Figure 7.2 Cybernetics in Open Systems



Figure 7.3 Cuttlefish

Courtesy Alexandru Axon / [Shutterstock.com](https://www.shutterstock.com)

environments. For example, the cuttlefish ([Figure 7.3](#))—a squid-like marine mollusk—first takes on the appearance of whatever surface it rests—cosmetic change. If the threat—whatever it is—persists, the cuttlefish indiscriminately squirts an inky fluid, apparently to conceal itself or to confuse whatever it senses is a threat in its surroundings. Change the threat—real or perceived—and the response is always the same.

Applying Cybernetics to Social Systems

Organizations, much like the Wind Surf, have so many more sophisticated options available for dealing with environmental change that they make turning on the heat and squirting ink seem primitive. Or do they? Some public relations programs are routine to the point that, regardless of the problem and without regard to environmental conditions, the response is a news release, email blast, and blog posting “telling our story.” In other words, the response is both predetermined and applied indiscriminately from situation to situation, and it involves no real consideration of what the threat is—real or not. Maybe the cuttlefish’s strategy for squirting ink at threats to confuse them and conceal itself is not unique to that species.

Simple mechanical cybernetic systems and living organisms typically do not change structurally except when pushed to the limit of system tolerance. For example, even though the cuttlefish makes cosmetic changes to blend in with its environment, structural change is not an option when it confronts threats in its surroundings. Social systems and complex cybernetic systems such as those used in “smart buildings,” on the other hand, have the capacity to use cybernetic self-regulation to make relatively major structural and procedural changes. Such changes help the system to adapt to new environmental conditions or to modify outputs to change or neutralize the sources of change pressure. This interchange between systems and their environments is characteristic of open systems and makes morphogenesis—purposive changes in structure and process—possible. In short, open systems have the capacity to adjust and adapt to constantly changing environments.

Another quality of open systems becomes apparent when social systems are compared with mechanical systems and many living organisms. Simple, relatively closed systems react to outside events only if the input—change pressure—is sufficient to penetrate the system boundary. Complex, relatively open systems monitor, and in some cases actively probe, their environments to detect and predict changing conditions. In other words, sophisticated open systems anticipate changes in their environments and initiate corrective

actions designed to counteract or neutralize the changes before they become major problems.

Reactive Versus Proactive

Public relations uses a similar range of closed versus open approaches. When public relations practitioners get together, they often use the terms reactive and proactive to describe programs. Reactive programs employ relatively closed systems approaches to program planning and management. Like the cuttlefish squirting ink, a reactive public relations program activates only when disturbed (see [Figure 7.4](#)). For example, Forbes magazine suggested that Weyerhaeuser's management philosophy "minimizes outside pressures for performance on management." The magazine went on to say, "The company is structured in ways that once made sense but no longer do." According to Forbes, the longtime chairman's (the founder's great-grandson) "reaction to criticism was to shrug it off," hiring from the outside "was nearly taboo," and "change moves at a glacial pace in this company." Completing the picture of a relatively closed systems approach, the magazine reported that company representatives "declined to talk with Forbes for this story, citing among other things a negative story that ran 13 years ago. Like an elephant, Weyerhaeuser never forgets. Like an elephant, it is also hard to turn around."²³

Exhibiting the telltale signs of a closed system, the beef industry responded with denial and "ink squirting" when confronted with the clear evidence that mad cow disease had been found in a cow slaughtered in the United States. Industry groups resisted calls for increased inspection and screening of cattle being slaughtered for human consumption and for an end to adding parts of slaughtered animals to cattle feed. The beef industry and its friends in government agencies have continued to resist increased inspections and tighter controls over the beef that enters the food system, even as other cases of mad cow disease were discovered. The routine, defensive tactics and resistance to structural change represent a system slow to adjust to environmental change. In other words, collectively, the beef industry appears to operate as a relatively closed system.



Figure 7.4 Reactive Public Relations

Courtesy Doug Marlette

Proactive programs, in contrast, use their early-warning “radar” to gather information, to make adjustments, and to generate internal and external output to prevent or avoid problems. In contrast to the beef industry, pistachio growers in California responded as an open, self-correcting system when increased levels of mold were found in their product. The California Pistachio Commission—representing growers—asked the Agriculture Department to lower allowable levels of mold and to increase inspections, demonstrating an ability to take in new information and a willingness to change structure and process.

Sadly, even what appears to be a relatively open system in one aspect of its life may be vulnerable to environmental change in other areas. For example, the California Pistachio Commission was eliminated in 2007 by a vote led by the state's largest grower because the commission's \$6 million advertising budget—to which all growers were obliged to contribute—promoted pistachios as a commodity. The large growers wanted instead to promote their own branded pistachios.

Even organizations long thought to be the corporate equivalent of dinosaurs can behave as proactive open systems. For example, while other utilities were fighting acid rain regulations and legislation, Minneapolis-based Northern States Power Company had already factored pollution control and reduction into operations. “Their policy is to exceed every environmental requirement that's placed on them,” according to a Minnesota pollution-control agency program chief. Northern States, for example, to comply with new emission regulations, started buying low-sulfur Western coal years before it needed to. By doing so it locked in prices and transportation costs well into the twenty-first century.

Meanwhile, other Midwest utilities continued to burn the cheaper, high-sulfur Midwestern and Eastern coals. As a result, these coal-burning utilities paid premium prices for the cleaner-burning Western coal. Northern States also installed scrubbers to clean sulfur from smoke and gases emerging from its furnaces and continued to improve their efficiency. Utilities that waited paid more than five times as much for scrubbers. The company's president and chief executive took the long view: “You have to be environmentally responsible to have a hope for success or longevity.”²⁴ He could have added “environmentally responsive.”

Open Systems Model of Public Relations

Output of a steady stream of news releases, email blasts, and other reactive public relations responses clearly is suggestive of defensive, closed-systems thinking. This all-too-common approach to public relations is apparently

based on several assumptions: (1) that the purpose of public relations is to bring about changes in the environment, (2) that persuasive communication can make those changes happen, (3) that message placements in the media are all powerful, and more mistakenly, (4) that organizations do not need to change themselves in order to solve public relations problems. Such thinking reminds one of the cuttlefish and furnace–thermostat systems. On the other hand, an open systems approach casts public relations in the role of bringing about mutual changes in both the environment and organization as a result of environmental inputs.

Bell and Bell referred to the reactive approach to public relations as functionary and the open systems approach as functional. In their view, the functionary role is similar to a closed systems approach:

Public relations functionaries attempt to preserve and promote a favorable image of the organization in the community on the hypothesis that if the organization is “liked” the public will continue to absorb the organization’s outputs. Such functionaries are only concerned with supplying information about the organization to the environment and not with supplying information to the organization about the environment. Because functionaries do not supply feedback information, they do not function in decision-making or even in advisory roles in relation to environmental concerns. Therefore, they have little to say about what is said; they are mainly concerned with how things are said.²⁵

In this approach to public relations, the emphasis is on maintaining the status quo within the organization while trying to change the organization’s publics. The goal of building and maintaining relations between the organization and its publics is to bring the publics into line with the organization’s plans.

In contrast, a functional view of public relations calls for an open systems approach, changing both the organization and the environment. An organization’s particular environment includes those “constituencies that can positively or negatively influence the organization’s effectiveness. It is unique to each organization and it changes with conditions.”²⁶ Relations between the organization and its publics are maintained or changed on the basis of reciprocal output–feedback adjustment (see [Exhibit 7.2](#)). In the functional approach:

Exhibit 7.2

Adjustment and Adaptation—“Ma Bell” Style

Before government and media turned their attention toward Microsoft’s alleged domination of the software industry, maybe no organizational change received as much attention as did the court-ordered divestiture of the Bell System. On January 1, 1984, the then-107-year-old American Telephone and Telegraph split into eight separate companies: AT&T and seven regional companies. The old AT&T had been the world’s largest company, secure in its position as a virtual monopoly and employer of almost a million “telephone people.” It began with the famous words of Alexander Graham Bell, “Mr. Watson, come here. I want to see you.” Its continuing transformation stands as an extreme example of system adjustment and adaptation to a changing environment.

Even during the long court fight against divestiture, AT&T was planning a new structure to respond to the new legal, social, economic, and technological environments. AT&T’s chairman had decided that the fight would have gone on for years with little hope of avoiding the inevitable breakup. When it happened, advertisements announced, “We’ve been working to make the biggest change in our lives a small change in yours.”

The response should have been anticipated: Theodore N. Vail, twice chairman of AT&T—1878–1887 and 1907–1920—pioneered in making the corporation responsive to its social setting. He did not fight public regulation and hired James D. Ellsworth to begin a public relations program that responded to public interests. Arthur W. Page succeeded Ellsworth. Page’s philosophy of public relations and corporate social responsibility endures (see [Exhibit 5.5](#)).

By the early 1990s, AT&T and the seven regional companies had broadened their missions and product lines well beyond what was

once thought of as “the telephone company.” They manufactured computers and other communication equipment, expanded their publishing businesses, diversified their communication services, and became leaders in the generation and transmission of information. Cable television companies, other manufacturers, publishers, and other telephone companies faced not one but eight competitors.

By the late 1990s, mergers had reduced the number of regional “integrated telcos” to five, and AT&T had once again divested, spinning off its Bell Laboratories to form a new company—Lucent Technologies—and spinning off former cash register manufacturer NCR as a computer company. AT&T also began building high-speed fiber-optic voice and data transmission networks and even reentered the local telephone service business in 1999 by linking its operations with Time Warner’s millions of cable television lines. In 2005, SBC purchased AT&T for \$16 billion and took on AT&T’s more widely recognized name. The merged company added SBC’s Internet services to AT&T’s business and long-distance services. As one observer said, “SBC is now a part of AT&T.” Who bought whom?

The “new” AT&T became the focus of government and competitor scrutiny in 2011, when it announced that it would buy T-Mobile USA from Deutsche Telekom AG for \$39 billion. If the deal had received regulatory approval (which it did not), the merged company would have a nationwide 3G and 4G network connected to 95 percent of the U.S. population. Critics echo the charges made in 1984—the expanded AT&T would become the biggest cell phone company in country, thus reducing competition and phone options, ultimately increasing consumer costs. Did the company “morph” into what they were before the court-ordered split?

In short, AT&T transformed itself into a powerful player in a new digital, wireless, and multimedia environment. It is no longer “The Telephone Company” or “Ma Bell.” The old AT&T adjusted and adapted to business changes regulatory changes, and technology

changes.

It was not an easy transition, however. Longtime AT&T consultant, the late Chester Burger, recalls that in the early 1980s there were 1,700 full-time public relations specialists on AT&T's payroll with a total budget of about \$170 million. Much of the public relations effort was to defend the company's historic monopoly in providing telephone service and the equipment that could be connected to the system. Burger concludes, however, that (1) public relations strategy can't overcome broad social factors, (2) it is easy to convince yourself that corporate self-interest coincides with the public interest, and (3) technology is changing the world.

Simply put, AT&T either had to change or it would have followed other corporate dinosaurs into extinction.

Source: Adapted in part from Chester Burger, APR, Fellow PRSA, "Last Word: When Public Relations Fails," *The Public Relations Strategist* 3, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 56.

[Public relations] has the potential to act in an advisory capacity and to have impact on decision-making. This potential in turn leads to some control over its own domain in times of crisis and, as a sensing device, public relations can be effective in preventing many potential crisis situations. Management properly remains the "large wheel" but the small wheel that is public relations may occasionally be capable of influencing the larger one. If observations of external and internal environments indicate that a policy or practice is detrimental to the best interests of the organization (and, increasingly, society) management can be encouraged to adjust.²⁷

The functionary approach casts public relations practitioners in the technician role discussed in [Chapter 2](#) . In this limited role, they monitor the environment (if at all) to make communication output more effective, not to make changes within the organization. On the other hand, in organizations in which public relations operates in the functional mode, practitioners become part of top management, "the dominant coalition."

Practitioners with the knowledge, training, and experience to practice a two-way model of public relations are more likely to be included in the organization's dominant coalition. They also are more likely to have power in that coalition rather than to serve it in an advisory role. When public relations managers have power in the dominant coalition, they can influence organizational ideology and the choice of publics in the environment for which strategic public relations programs are planned. At that point, public relations practitioners can fulfill a communication counseling and management role—and truly practice the profession defined for them in public relations textbooks but seldom fulfilled in the real world.[28](#)

The open systems functional approach radically changes public relations practice. Whereas the more common functionary version attempts to maintain the status quo and to exercise control over environmental forces, the open systems model views adjustment and adaptation as the more realistic and appropriate responses.

The open systems model uses “two-way symmetric” approaches, meaning that communication is two way and that information exchange causes changes on both sides of organization–public relationships. The difference between one-way and two-way communication led to yet another way to describe closed and open systems public relations: craft public relations versus professional public relations.

Practitioners of craft public relations seem to believe that their job consists solely of the application of communication techniques and as an end in itself. To them, the purpose of public relations simply is to get publicity or information into the media or other channels of communication. Practitioners of professional public relations, in contrast, rely on a body of knowledge as well as technique and see public relations as having a strategic purpose for an organization: to manage conflict and build relationships with strategic publics that limit the autonomy of the organization.[29](#)

Both approaches emphasize the primary role of communication in social systems. As Buckley put it, “the interrelations characterizing higher levels (of systems) come to depend more and more on the transmission of information

—a principle fundamental to modern complex system analysis.”³⁰

Applying the open systems approach to public relations first and foremost calls for purposeful sensing of the environment to anticipate and detect changes that affect organizational relationships with publics. Following an open systems approach, public relations must be selectively sensitive to specifically defined publics that are mutually affected or involved by organizational policies, procedures, and actions. The open systems model of public relations calls

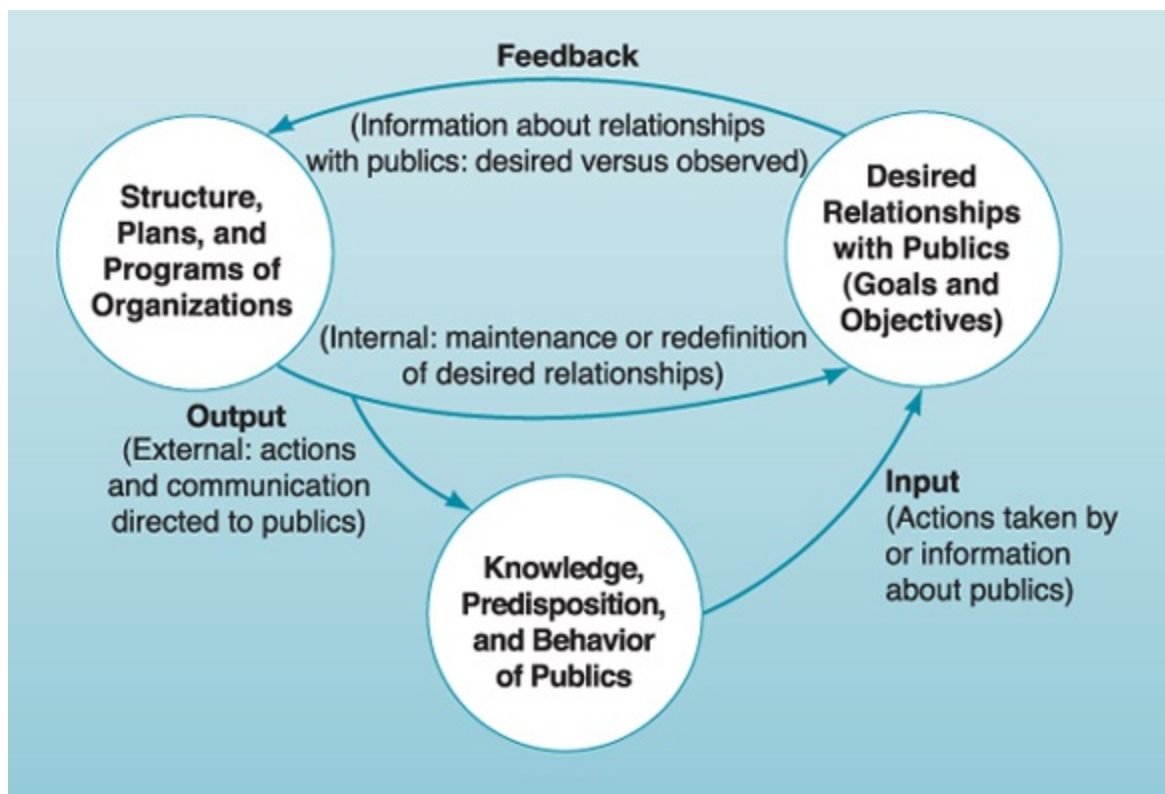


Figure 7.5 Open Systems Model of Public Relations

for research skills to monitor publics and other environmental forces, as well as forces within organizations.

Open systems public relations also has the capacity to initiate corrective

actions within organizations and direct programs to affect knowledge, predisposition, and behavior of both internal and external publics. The outcomes sought are maintenance or achievement of goals that reflect the mutual interests of organizations and their publics. Those found in conflict with mutual interests are changed or eliminated, before they become issues or problems. Proactive corrective action may be the major and most useful aspect of the open systems model of public relations. Steps taken in advance reduce both the amount of effort required and the trauma associated with crisis-oriented reactive public relations.

Thus, organizations employing open systems public relations maintain their relationships by adjusting and adapting themselves and their publics to ever-changing social, political, and economic environments. [Figure 7.5](#) shows the open systems model applied to public relations.

As early as 1923, in the earliest public relations book, *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, Edward L. Bernays wrote about the role of the “public relations counsel” in a democratic society. Expressing a model of public relations similar to our open systems approach, he said that the public relations counselor recognizes changes in the organization’s social setting and advises clients or employers how the organization should change itself and respond so as to establish a “common meeting ground.” Not many years later, Harwood Childs said that the function of public relations is to “reconcile or adjust in the public interest” those aspects of organizations that have social significance. This concept of public relations, based on the open systems model, serves as the basis for the many activities under the banner of public relations and spells out its essential role in organizations and society (see [Exhibit 7.3](#)).

In the final analysis, public relations practitioners are applied social and behavioral scientists working as part of a strategic plan. According to employee communication expert Paul Sanchez, a public relations plan “also tilts the balance toward proactive communication, thus avoiding wasted time on purely reactive communication that does not support strategic goals.”³¹

Working on behalf of their organizations and in the public interest, public relations professionals are agents and managers of change, both inside and outside their organizations. They plan and facilitate organizational and social

adjustment and adaptation using primarily communication, the topic of the next chapter.

Exhibit 7.3

Good Theory Drives Best Practice



James Everett, Ph.D., Professor and Chair, Department of Communication, Coastal Carolina University, Conway, South Carolina

The importance of a good theory is that it guides our thinking, informs our practice, and sets imperatives for refining our understanding. The adjustment and adaptation model of public relations is in many ways a centrifugal force in public relations because it fulfills these obligations to thinking and practice but equally points toward how to do both better.

While some see theory as a barrier to effective action, in fact it is a necessary, if usually tacit, precursor to such action. In this context, the adjustment and adaptation model refines our understanding of the significance and functional role of public relations in organizations by moving the boundaries of practice beyond prescriptive, journalistic output toward a new horizon of responsibilities linked to management decision making. In this role, the boundary-spanning nature of public relations creates a core operational activity that serves as a “mind in the middle” to provide

critical monitoring and knowledge management functions through which the organization interprets its environment and creates sustainable relationships with stakeholders.

The adjustment and adaptation model, first built in this text two decades ago, anticipated the contemporary turn in sociology and the management disciplines to organizational ecology for describing the relationship of organizations to their social environments. Today, the insight offered by those early statements of public relations as an applied discipline set within organizational ecology remains one of the essential challenges for building our discipline in the twenty-first century.

In applied social sciences like public relations, good theory also helps provide an understanding of the teaching and learning requirements that eventually become what philosopher T. S. Kuhn called the discipline's "textbook tradition." Here the adjustment and adaptation model clearly differentiates the education and training of students and practitioners from the discipline's journalistic past. The model establishes the tenet that the quality of communication between an organization and stakeholder publics is a necessary but insufficient requirement of good practice.

Perhaps more fundamentally, the model stipulates that good practice must include the capacity to monitor and interpret the organization's social environment. Under these terms, contemporary public relations education should emphasize construction of a professional "portfolio" that, in addition to writing skills, includes skills related to measurement, analysis, and predicative modeling. The implications of the adjustment and adaptation model are that such skills are critical to practitioners who are called on to describe, explain, and influence the nature of such realities as public opinion in the organization's social environment and cultural elements within the organization that are inertial barriers to adaptation.

Additionally, practitioners who must defend program strategy and related budgets do so by the capacity to measure the effects of

public relations programs on target publics. Such skill sets require commitments to lifelong learning by practitioners whose work is inextricably linked to the challenging problems of social influence, organizational legitimacy, and collective behavior. Those problems ensure not only the viability of our discipline in the twenty-first century, but also the value of its central theoretical model.

Courtesy James Everett, Ph.D.

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Study Guide

1. What is the definition of a system?
2. How do systems theory concepts of adjustment and adaptation apply to public relations?
3. What are the differences between open and closed systems?
4. How does proactive public relations respond differently from reactive public relations?
5. Write a definition for each of the following systems theory concepts—homeostasis, static and dynamic states, morphogenesis, negative and positive feedback, and cybernetics.
6. Diagram and label the major elements of the open systems model of public relations.

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Chapter 8 Communication Theories and Contexts

Learning Outcomes

After studying [Chapter 8](#) this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Differentiate between “communication” and “public relations.”
2. Identify the first task of public relations communication in the crowded message environment.
3. Define communication as a two-way process of exchanging signals to inform, persuade, and instruct within intrapersonal, interpersonal, and social contexts.
4. Diagram the communication model, and label and briefly discuss its elements.
5. List and briefly discuss the four major categories of public relations communication effects.
6. Identify and discuss the five dimensions of public opinion.
7. Define attitude and opinion, and distinguish between them.
8. Diagram and explain the model of individual orientation and the model of coorientation.
9. Define the four states of coorientational consensus.

No human capability has been more fundamental to the development of civilization than the ability to collect, share, and apply knowledge. Civilization has been possible only through the process of human

communication.

—Frederick Williams¹

Publicity is a great purifier because it sets in action the forces of public opinion, and in this country public opinion controls the courses of the nation.

—Charles Evans Hughes, 11th Chief Justice, U.S. Supreme Court (1930–1941)²

Many people confuse “communication” and “public relations,” believing the terms to be synonymous. In fact, they are not. As explained in [Chapter 1](#), public relations is about building and maintaining relationships between organizations and their stakeholder publics. [Chapters 11](#) through [14](#) explain the four-step process of strategic public relations. The strategic public relations process has four steps: research, planning, implementation, and evaluation. In contrast to this four-step process, “communication” is done by organizations in the third step of strategic public relations, when the plan is being implemented.

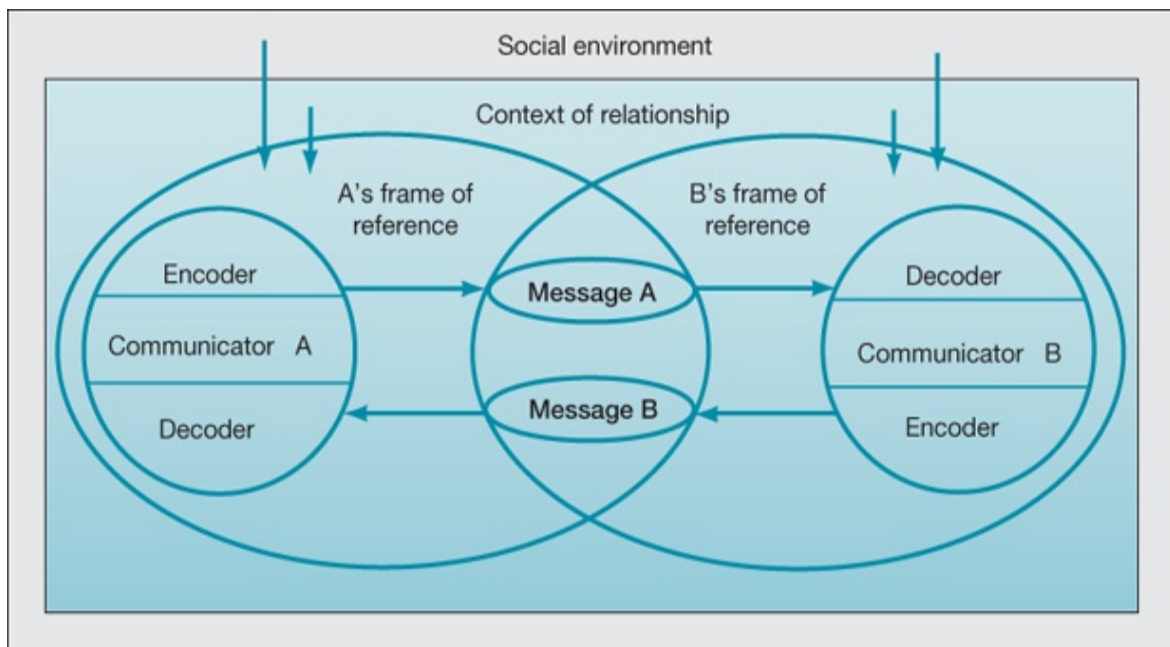


Figure 8.1 Communication Process Model

As [Figure 8.1](#) illustrates, communication is a reciprocal process of exchanging signals to inform, persuade, or instruct, based on shared meanings and conditioned by the communicators' relationship and the social context. This chapter explains some of the theoretical and practical contexts in which communication takes place, while [Chapter 13](#) offers more specific information on how to design and implement communication messages.

Understanding the various contexts for communication is important because each of us, every day, is exposed to thousands of messages. Even as you read this chapter of Effective Public Relations, you may be exposed to many other messages from other sources. These could include postings on your Facebook wall, numerous Tweets from people you follow, Lady Gaga's latest hit on your iPod, the sound of your neighbors' argument coming from the unit next door, your roommate asking if you want to order pizza, and a text from your mom asking how last week's test went. During the rest of the day, you are exposed to many more messages, most of which you probably do not seek out. You may screen out many because you have little or no interest in the content. You skip some because you do not have time to pay attention. You miss others simply because you are preoccupied with something else and "tune out." In short, getting your attention is the goal of a fierce competition. The contenders include not only individual people, but also advertisers, news media, entertainment media, political parties, and all manner of other special interest groups.

To defend against the onslaught of attention seekers, people become choosy, even resistant. As a result of this onslaught of messages and information overload, few messages get their attention. Even fewer have an impact. No wonder some communication scholars refer to "the obstinate audience."³

Public relations communications compete in this crowded message environment. The first task is to get the attention of target publics. The second is to stimulate interest in message content. The third is to build a

desire and intention to act on the message. And the fourth is to direct the action of those who behave consistent with the message. Unfortunately, the communication process is not as simple as many apparently believe.

Dissemination Versus Communication

The myth of communication suggests that sending a message is the same as communicating a message. In essence, dissemination is confused with communication. This confusion is apparent in public relations when practitioners offer media placements (clippings, “mentions,” cable placements, broadcast logs, etc.) as evidence that communication has occurred. These practitioners probably subscribe to the communication model introduced by informationscientists Shannon and Weaver, based on their work for Bell Telephone Laboratories in the late 1940s.⁴

Shannon and Weaver’s model consists of an information source, message or signal, channel, and receiver or destination. Not surprisingly, because of their telephone perspective, the communication process produces relatively few and simple problems. Technical problems arise when the signal or channel limits or distorts the message being transmitted from the source to the sender. Semantic or fidelity problems occur when the receiver’s perception of the message and meaning are not the same as those intended by the sender. Influence problems indicate that the sender’s message did not produce the desired result on the part of the receiver. As Weaver wrote,

The questions to be studied in a communication system have to do with the amount of information, the capacity of the communication channel, the coding process that may be used to change a message into a signal and the effects of noise.⁵

But as public relations practitioners know, however, communication with target publics is much more complicated than this set of questions suggests. As the late Wilbur Schramm pointed out, communication is complicated by people:

Communication (human communication, at least) is something people do. It has no life of its own. There is no magic about it except what people in the communication relationship put into it. There is no meaning in a message except what the people put into it. When one studies communication, therefore, one studies people—relating to each other and to their groups, organizations, and societies, influencing each other, being influenced, informing and being informed, teaching and being taught, entertaining and being entertained—by means of certain signs which exist separately from either of them. To understand the human communication process one must understand how people relate to each other.⁶

This is no simple task. In fact, Schramm's concept of communication requires a two-way-process model in which sender and receiver operate within the contexts of their respective frames of reference, their relationship, and the social situation.

The process of informing involves four steps: (1) attracting attention to the communication, (2) achieving acceptance of the message, (3) having it interpreted as intended, and (4) getting the message stored for later use. The process of persuasion goes beyond active learning to a fifth step—accepting change: yielding to the wishes or point of view of the sender. The more demanding process of instruction adds a sixth step: stimulating active learning and practice. Clearly, barriers to achieving the outcomes of informing, persuasion, and instruction increase with the addition of the fifth and sixth steps in the processes.⁷

Elements of the Mass Communication Model

Early communication researchers studied the individual elements in the communication process model to determine the effect of each on the process. Most studies dealt with persuasion as the desired outcome, but more recent research has expanded the range of effects studied.

Senders

Characteristics of message sources affect receivers' initial acceptance of the message but have little effect on long-term message impact. Hovland and his colleagues called this long-term source impact the "sleeper effect."⁸ For example, according to the theory of source credibility and attractiveness, safe-sex messages promoting prevention of HIV infection among college students are more readily accepted as believable when presented by highly credible sources, such as a recognized medical authority, than when presented by peers.

More recent research suggests both short-term and long-term source impacts. Source credibility amplifies the value of information, according to one scholar. The theory suggests that the perceived status, reliability, and expertness of the source add weight to messages. Multiplying the three source characteristics by each other yields the weight factor of the source in the communication process.⁹

Researchers have concluded that although source characteristics affect the communication process, their impact varies from situation to situation, from topic to topic, and from time to time. At a minimum, however, source characteristics affect receivers' initial receptivity to messages.

Message

Message characteristics surely have an impact in the communication process, but many communication scholars say, "Meaning is in people, not words." This observation leads naturally to the conclusion that different people receiving the same message may interpret it differently, attribute different meanings to it, and react to it in different ways. All the same, message characteristics can have powerful effects, even if they do not conform to simple and direct cause-and-effect explanations. As suggested by the notion of the obstinate audience, message effects are mediated by receivers, thereby frustrating the search for rules that apply in all communication situations.

In the final analysis, however, many characteristics of the source, receiver, and communication situation mediate the impact of messages on receivers. One writer concluded,

When main-effect findings demonstrated relationships between the selected variable and some measure of attitude/behavior change, additional variables such as source characteristics, power, and receiver variables were investigated.[10](#)

Medium or Channel

New technologies for delivering messages challenge conventional wisdom. For example, in many organizations, e-mail has changed communication within organizations and even across national boundaries. Meetings take place in a variety of virtual or digital formats, changing the nature of the interaction but providing benefits in cost and convenience.

Communication scholars and practitioners historically have considered face-to-face interpersonal communication the most direct, powerful, and preferred method for exchanging information. In contrast with mass communication, interpersonal communication involves as few as two communicators (typically in close proximity), uses many senses, and provides immediate feedback. This description of the interpersonal communication situation, however, does not take into account the possibility that mass media messages may be directed to only a few in a very specific public. Likewise, physical proximity can be less important than the nature of the relationship between communicators, what one scholar calls the “intimacy-transcends-distance phenomenon.” What began as impersonal communication when people initially exchanged messages can become interpersonal communication as the communicators develop a relationship.[11](#)

Extending time and distance, however, often requires using message delivery systems other than in-person presentations. In much of contemporary society, face-to-face contacts give way to mediated transmissions. Spoken words give way to written communication. Individually addressed letters give way to targeted publications. Printed publications give way to broadcast words and

pictures. Broadcast messages give way to networks of computers carrying digital signals translated into all manner of information. Emails give way to text messages, available anytime and anyplace simply by accessing a mobile device. Choosing the right medium (singular) or media (plural) requires an understanding of media and media effects.

Receivers

Communication models—and public relations programs—often mistakenly consider the audience to be passive recipients at the end of a message transmission process. This tradition continues even though research evidence and constant references to “two-way” suggest a different model and role for the audience.

In early mass communication studies, however, mass society audiences were viewed as vulnerable to messages and media manipulated by those in control. Critics saw people as alienated and isolated from the kind of strong social and psychological forces found in traditional societies, as a consequence of industrialization, urbanization, and modernization. However, the evidence gathered on audience effects suggests a more active receiver. The Yale persuasion experiments demonstrated that receivers are not uniformly influenced by messages designed to change attitudes. For example, receivers who value group membership are relatively unaffected by messages espousing positions counter to those of the group. Those who are persistently aggressive toward others tend to be resistant to persuasive messages. On the other hand, receivers with low self-esteem and feelings of social inadequacy are influenced more by persuasive messages than are people with high self-esteem and feelings of indifference toward others.¹² These differences in impact place a great responsibility on the communicator to target messages to specific and well-defined publics.

In short, the notion of a monolithic and passive mass audience does not describe reality. A more accurate description suggests selected active receivers processing messages designed for the few, not the masses:

Since audiences are known to be evasive at best and recalcitrant at

worst, efforts are directed at targeting messages for different audience segments and promoting audience involvement wherever possible.¹³

Relationship Contexts

Communication occurs within the context of the communicators' relationships. The range of such relationships includes close and intimate relationships, as well as formal, competitive, and conflictual interpersonal relationships in a variety of settings. The point, of course, is that the relationships themselves affect much about the communication process.

All relational communication reflects four basic dimensions: (1) emotional arousal, composure, and formality; (2) intimacy and similarity; (3) immediacy or liking; and (4) dominance–submission.¹⁴ For example, a supervisor announces changes in work schedules for student assistants without consulting with the students (the first dimension just listed) by posting the new schedule on the office bulletin board (the second dimension). The notice also expresses the supervisor's hope that the new schedule does not inconvenience any of the assistants (the third dimension) but indicates that the supervisor has the power to establish work schedules (the fourth dimension).

Not surprisingly, nonverbal behaviors play important roles in relational communication. Proximity communicates intimacy, attraction, trust, caring, dominance, persuasiveness, and aggressiveness. Smiling communicates emotional arousal, composure, formality, intimacy, and liking. Touching suggests intimacy. Eye contact intensifies the other nonverbal behaviors.¹⁵ Obviously, these interpretations of nonverbal behaviors do not take into account cultural differences. For example, in Navajo and some Asian cultures, eye contact can be interpreted as a sign of disrespect or challenge. In some cultures, touching in public is taboo.

Whether verbal or nonverbal, communication in relationships helps the parties make predictions about others in the relationship. Communication reduces uncertainty about the probable outcomes of future exchanges and provides a basis for the continuing relationship. Understanding the

communication process, however, requires an understanding of not only the relationship between the communicators, but also the larger social context within which communication occurs.

Social Environment

Communication affects and is affected by the social setting. Thus, communication occurs as a structured process within evolving systems of related components and activities. Social systems include families, groups, organizations, and all kinds of collectivities that are at the same time both producers and products of communication.

For example, when people think they can achieve something through joint action that they cannot accomplish individually, they form groups. Communication in groups depends on the nature of the group (primary vs. secondary, formal vs. informal, task-oriented vs. experiential), characteristics of group members, group size, group structure, group cohesiveness, and group purpose.[16](#)

Successful group decision making requires accomplishing four tasks: (1) developing an adequate and accurate assessment of the problem, (2) developing a shared and complete understanding of the goal and the criteria for success, (3) agreeing on the positive outcomes of decisions, and (4) agreeing on the negative outcomes of decisions. Decision-making effectiveness, therefore, depends on the extent to which members' communication helps achieve these group functions.[17](#)

Organizations impose additional layers of complexity and constraints on communication. Forces at play in the larger society affect how all communicators—individuals, groups, and organizations—approach their publics, shape the content of their messages, define communication goals, and condition audience responses. Recall our ongoing connection to systems theory: All elements of a system are interdependent and mutually influenced by forces in their environment. In short, communication—when it occurs—results from a complex reciprocal process in which communicators try to inform, persuade, or negotiate within the contexts of their relationships and

the larger social setting.

Mass Communication Effects

Communication effects have long been the object of concern and study. The range of effects runs the gamut from early concerns about “all-powerful” media to “no effects.” Hypothesized unlimited effects of movies on helpless children motivated the Payne Fund studies of the 1920s. Maybe critics simply feared too much. After ambitious public persuasion and political campaigns in the 1940s and 1950s produced disappointing results, many concluded that mass communication had almost no impact. Maybe the campaign planners simply asked too much of mass communication. More recent evidence supports theories in which mass communication effects occur under specified conditions. Apparently, the answer depends on what question you ask.

Creating Perceptions of the World Around Us

Early theorists cast mass communication’s role as telling about events, things, people, and places that could not be directly experienced by most. Walter Lippmann said it best when he wrote about “the world outside and the pictures in our heads.” He described a “triangular relationship” between the scene of action (interpreted to include people, places, actions, and the entire range of possible phenomena), perceptions of that scene, and responses based on the perceptions. The last side of the triangle is complete when the responses have an impact on the original scene of action. Mass media fit in the model between the scene of action and audience perceptions (see [Figure 8.2](#)).¹⁸

Lippmann pointed out that most of us cannot or do not have direct access to much of the world; it is “out of reach, out of sight, out of mind.” The mass media help us create a “trustworthy picture” of the world that is beyond our reach and direct experience. His notions of media impact on public

perceptions not only set the stage for studying mass communication effects but also arguably established the conceptual basis for much of what later became public relations.

Communication scholar George Gerbner followed up on Lippman's work. His studies of television viewing led to what he called "cultivation theory"—the homogenizing effect of creating a shared culture.¹⁹ For example, those who watch a great deal of television have a different picture of the world—social reality—than do those who do not watch much television. Heavy

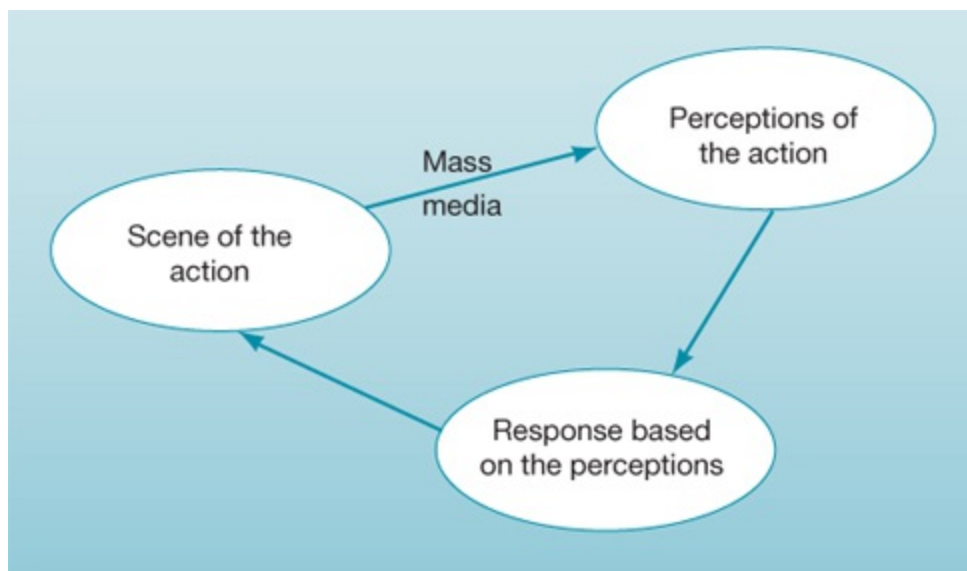


Figure 8.2 Mass Media in Public Opinion Formation

viewers see the world as portrayed on television, not as it really is. The most dramatic example of the effect is referred to as the “mean world syndrome,” meaning that heavy television viewers see the world as more dangerous and less trustworthy—and view it more pessimistically—than do light viewers. Maybe the most dramatic of the cultivation theory studies was the finding that senior citizens who watch a great deal of television see the world outside their homes as too dangerous to venture into, even though reality has little relationship to the levels of muggings, purse snatchings, robberies, murders, and so on portrayed on television. In sum, the findings show that the effect of

television viewing is less one of individual impact than it is of a collective impact on culture and people's views of the world around them.[20](#)

Setting and Building the Agenda

The “agenda-setting” theory of mass communication effects also builds on Lippmann’s notion of media impact by distinguishing between what we think about and what we think . The difference is that the former includes what we know about (cognition), whereas the latter refers to our opinions and feelings (predisposition). Early agenda-setting theory suggested that mass media can have a substantial and important impact on the cognitive level without affecting predisposition, although more recent research shows that media affect predispositions as well.[21](#)

For example, early explorations of agenda setting by the press during presidential elections found that relative media emphasis on issues has a cumulative effect on the electorate. The same issues, with the same relative emphasis as that given by the media, make up the voters’ agenda. In other words, the issues considered least to most important by voters reflect patterns of media coverage rather than a particular political agenda. Furthermore, the relative number of people concerned about issues parallels the relative media emphasis of those issues. Media and public agendas were most similar during the early stages of the campaign and for those issues least likely to be within people’s direct experience.[22](#) McCombs elaborated on how the process works:

The agenda-setting influence of the press results in large measure from the repetition of the major issues in the news day after day. The public learns about the issues on the press agenda with little effort on their part, and considering the incidental nature of this learning, issues move rather quickly from the press agenda to the public agenda.[23](#)

Imagine the potential consequences of media agenda setting. First of all, media coverage can elevate the public standing of issues, people, organizations, institutions, and so forth. Second, changes in the amount of media attention can lead to changes in public priorities. Third, the more

concerned people are about something, the more they tend to learn about it, the stronger their opinions are of it, and the more they tend to take action on it. (Notice, however, that the agenda-setting theory does not predict what information they will seek, which way their opinions will change, or what types of actions they will take.) Fourth, media coverage can affect the agenda priorities of some specific and important publics, such as legislators, regulators, and other policy makers.

In summary, mass communication can affect public opinion by raising the salience of issues and positions taken by people and groups in the news.²⁴ Furthermore, like Lippmann's theory of media effects, the agenda-setting theory contributes to the conceptual foundation for public relations mass communication.

For public relations practitioners, getting an issue onto the media agenda can be a good thing (i.e., when you want to raise awareness of an issue) or a bad thing (e.g., when something embarrassing, dangerous, or illegal happens at your organization). Being aware of the power of media agenda setting is a key to the strategic management of public relations communication. Public relations can contribute tremendously to the effectiveness of the organization when it carefully and strategically considers its own issues in regard to the media agenda. Often, public relations saves an organization money and resources by resolving a problem before it gets onto the media agenda. In other instances, getting an issue onto the media agenda is a crucial part of press agency and a valuable method of creating symmetrical dialogue on an issue.

Two concepts in agenda-setting theory and research are especially useful in public relations:

1. Issue salience

determines the prominence and penetration the issue has with the audience, or how well it resonates with each public. People care the most about issues that are close to their own interests. Researchers found that frequency of discussion was the single largest predictor of issue salience. Interpersonal communication enhanced the agenda-setting effect of the media or interfered with the agenda-setting effect when the

interpersonal discussion conflicted with media content.[25](#)

2. Cognitive priming

describes the personal experience or connection someone has with an issue. Researchers thought that a person with little or no personal experience on an issue must rely on the media for information. Scholars initially expected to find that the media had weak or no agenda-setting effects on issues with which people had personal experience. To the contrary, they found support for the cognitive priming hypothesis, which states that previous or personal exposure to an issue stimulates interest in that issue's media coverage, thus enhancing the agenda-setting effects.[26](#)

In recent years, researchers McCombs and Shaw have reformulated and expanded agenda-setting theory: "Media not only tell us what to think about, but how to think about it, and, consequently, what to think."[27](#) In other words, media affect both cognitions and predispositions, a phenomenon researchers call "second-level agenda-setting."[28](#) This enhanced theory of mediated, powerful effects provides a promising theoretical framework for application in the practice of public relations.

In particular, one aspect of second-level agenda-setting theory that has generated much scholarly research in public relations is the idea of agenda building. Agenda-building theory tries to answer the question of who is building the agenda of the media. This is an important question. If the media set the public agenda, then the public should know who is building the media agenda. So far, research has shown that typical builders of the media's agenda include politicians and elected officials, as well as—yes—the public relations practitioners who work for them.[29](#)

Diffusing Information and Innovation

Beyond setting the issues agenda, mass communication also facilitates social

interaction and change. Sources may come from different social, economic, and educational backgrounds but are accessible through the media. The media, then, provide information from sources that would otherwise not be available through interpersonal networks in which “like talks to like.” Once people get information from the media, however, they enter conversations armed with useful new information. What we learn from the mass media often determines what we talk about with others, providing the common ground needed to begin conversation: “Did you see in this morning’s paper that . . . ?” or “Can you believe Jay Leno has already announced his retirement?” In effect, mass media provide information to those who seek it and supply information needed for subsequent interpersonal communication, thereby diffusing information to others.[30](#)

Diffusion of information and innovation theory explains this process. Characteristics of innovation—or new ideas—as well as characteristics of the adopters influence the adoption process. Ideas or innovations are more readily adopted if they are (1) more advantageous than the current situation, (2) compatible with previous experience and other aspects of the situation, (3) simple, (4) easily tried, and (5) observable with readily apparent outcomes. As shown in [Figure 8.3](#), “innovators” are the first to adopt new ideas, followed by “early adopters,” “early majority,” “late majority,” and “laggards.” Characteristics of the individuals in each of the categories vary with the nature of change being adopted and the context.[31](#)

Early diffusion of innovation studies identified opinion leaders as key components of gaining acceptance of new ideas and practices. In effect, these people tend to get their information from media sources and then become themselves the source to others in their network.[32](#) Researchers identified leaders who had influence on a specific issue, while others wielded influence over a range of issues. The two-step flow model has given way to the multistep flow model, in which there may be many different steps and actors in decisions to adopt an innovation or idea.[33](#) Whatever the number of steps or links in the network, it is safe to conclude that people are important in the process of diffusion of innovation:

Interpersonal influence is very important in this process. People raise awareness of the innovation as they talk with one another about it. They

share opinions, discuss their experience with the innovation, sometimes advocate its use, and sometimes resist it.³⁴

Diffusion and adoption processes illustrate the impact that mass communication has on interpersonal communication and networks. More important, they show how mass and interpersonal communication interact in social systems and in social change.

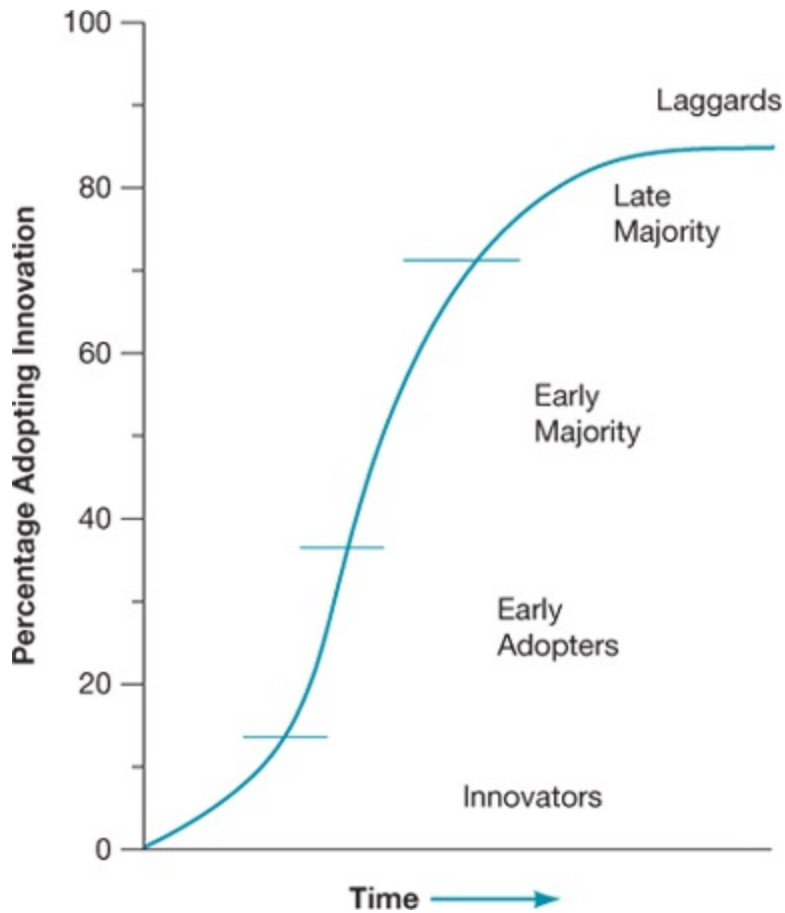


Figure 8.3 Diffusion of Innovation Curve

Source: Adapted from Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 5th ed. (New York: Free Press, 2003), 11.

Defining Social Support

“Spiral of silence” theory suggests a phenomenon commonly referred to as “the silent majority.” Individuals who think their opinion conflicts with the opinions of most other people tend to remain silent on an issue. Carried to an extreme, even if a majority actually agree but do not individually recognize social support, their silence and inactivity can lead to the erroneous conclusion that not many people support a particular view. On the other hand, individuals who think that many others share their view or that the number of people who agree is growing rapidly are more likely to express their views. Under these conditions, a vocal minority that sees itself on the winning side can appear to represent a widely shared perspective. In either case, as Lippmann pointed out more than 50 years before the spiral of silence theory, people “respond as powerfully to fictions as they do to realities, and . . . in many cases they help to create the very fictions to which they respond.”³⁵

In essence, public opinion arises as individuals collectively discern support for their views through personal interaction and by attending to the mass media. Individuals observe and assess their social environments, estimating the distributions of opinions, evaluating the strength and chances of success for each, and determining the social sanctions and costs associated with each. The spiral begins when individuals choose to remain silent or decide to express their views. It continues as others observe the presence or absence of support for their own views. It gains apparent legitimacy when increasing numbers of individuals translate their observations into either public silence or expression. It is reinforced when the media cover the views being displayed most forcefully and most frequently and do not make an effort to determine the actual distribution of views.

Media coverage can reflect, enforce, or challenge the spiral of silence effect on public opinion. But understanding the dynamics of individuals’ collective observations of their social environments and public opinion translates rather directly into public relations practice. Examples include public information campaigns designed to break the spirals of silence associated with domestic violence, sexual harassment, and stalking, to list only a few. In each instance, and for many other public issues, mass communication plays a key role in

redefining socially accepted expression and behavior.

As illustrated in [Figure 8.4](#), mass media messages can provide individuals pictures of their social environment, of whether there is social approval or disapproval of their views or actions. This “sociocultural model” of communication effects suggests that “messages presented via the mass media may provide the appearance of consensus regarding orientation and action with respect to a given object or goal of persuasion.”³⁶

To sum up, the late communication scholar Everett Rogers concluded: “. . . [T]he media can have strong effects, especially when the media messages stimulate interpersonal communication about a topic through intermedia processes.”³⁷

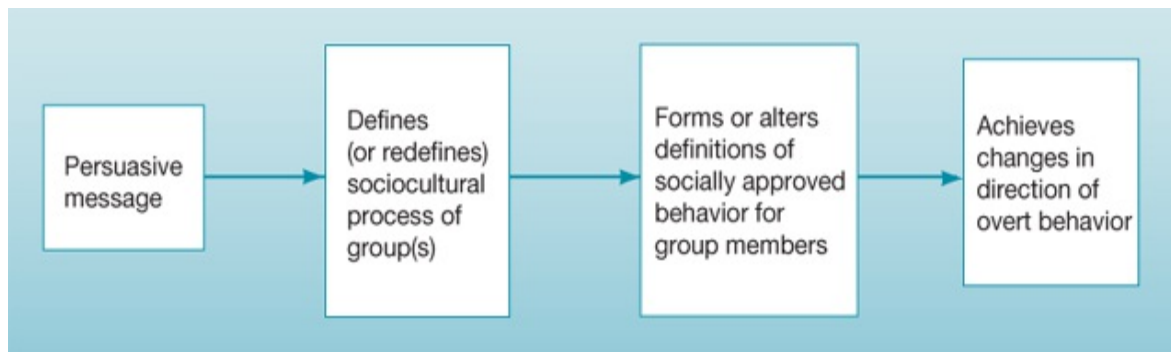


Figure 8.4 Sociocultural Model of Persuasion

Source: Melvin L. DeFleur and Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach, *Theories of Mass Communication*, 4th ed. (New York: Longman, 1982), 225.

Public Opinion Contexts

The force of public opinion has steadily gained strength around the world, especially with the advent of new media technologies. Governments and

institutions formerly somewhat isolated from the glare of media attention and public scrutiny now see their actions or inaction reported via international news media. For example, international pressure against various dictators in the Middle East increased during the “Arab Spring” of 2011, when citizens used social media to document government repression of protestors seeking democratic reforms.

Nineteenth-century writer and first editor of *The Atlantic Monthly* James Russell Lowell said, “The pressure of public opinion is like the atmosphere; you can’t see it—but all the same it is sixteen pounds to the square inch.” Lowell’s words have even more relevance now. Public opinion has never been more powerful, more fragmented, more volatile, and more exploited and manipulated. For example, researchers studying U.S. presidential campaign coverage found ample evidence of “a powerful relationship between news media coverage and public opinion in presidential elections.”³⁸

Public opinion polls have long guided politics, government programs, entertainment programming, and even corporate decision making. In short, much as Lowell suggested, public opinion is an always present, dynamic force. It is part of public relations’ mission to help organizations recognize, understand, and deal with this powerful influence in their environments. This is not an easy task, however. As the former vice president of AT&T said:

Public opinion is not necessarily logical; it is amorphous, ambivalent, contradictory, volatile. Consequently, those of us who would hope to influence public opinion can only expect that our efforts, over time, may nudge the consensus toward some reasonable perception of the issues.³⁹

Organizations of all types must deal with real and perceived public opinion as they establish and maintain relationships with their many internal and external publics. But organizations are the actors; public opinion is simply the “energizer” of their actions.

(Public opinion) is . . . an expression of social energy that integrates individual actors into social groupings in ways that affect the polity. This understanding takes the concept of public opinion out of metaphysics and . . . avoids reducing it to a set of discrete individualized observations that cannot account for its composite sociopolitical

significance.[40](#)

Definition of Public Opinion

The common notion of public opinion holds that it is simply the aggregation of individual views on some issue. This “individual agreement” approach to defining public opinion, however, misses the point that it is public. Individual cognition may or may not represent the consensus, or “thinking together,” that more fully represents the kinds of opinions that form and are formed by public discussion among those sharing a “sense of commonness.”

Thus, public opinion represents more than the collected views held by a particular category of individuals at one point in time. Public opinion is not adequately defined as simply a state of individual cognition. Instead, it reflects a dynamic process in which ideas are “expressed, adjusted, and compromised en route to collective determination of a course of action.”[41](#) Public opinion is found among publics, or groups of communicating people who have some common interest. People collectively hold a view of an issue, why it is a cause for concern, and what can or should be done in the situation. In short, public opinion is the social process of forming, expressing, and adjusting ideas that affect collective behavior in situations. The process is, unquestionably, ongoing.

Dimensions of Public Opinion

In practice, however, both researchers and public relations practitioners take “snapshots” of public opinion, essentially freezing the process at one point in time so as to describe it and compare it with opinion at other times. Their surveys too often measure only direction and intensity, ignoring three other important dimensions:

1. Direction

of opinion indicates the evaluative quality of a predisposition, telling us the “positive-negative-neutral,” “for-against-undecided,” or “pro-con-it-

depends” evaluation of publics. In its simplest form, direction is a yes–no answer to a survey question. Media frequently report public opinion survey results as simply the percentages for or against some issue, proposition, or candidate. For example, stories reporting poll results, popularity, margin, and other indicators of the direction of public opinion about the candidates tend to dominate coverage in U.S. presidential campaigns, comprising 38 percent of all stories.⁴² (Character stories are second at 18 percent.) Direction clearly represents the most basic and most frequently used measure of public opinion.

2. Intensity

measures show how strongly people feel about their opinions, whatever the direction. For example, pollsters ask registered voters to indicate “on a scale of 1 to 10” how strongly they felt about a wide range of issues related to the election. Likewise, surveys often ask respondents to indicate whether they “strongly disagree/disagree/neutral/agree/strongly agree” with a statement. This question format is a common means of measuring both direction and intensity of feelings. Intensity measures provide an initial estimate of the relative strength of predisposition. Intensity and direction are often reported to indicate not only how people feel about issues, but also how deeply they hold the feelings. For instance, the issue of abortion commonly polarizes publics based on the intensity of their beliefs.

3. Stability

refers to how long respondents have held or will hold the same direction and intensity of feelings. Measures of stability require observations taken at two or more points in time. Think of this dimension as something like the charts that track stock prices or temperature patterns over time. In effect, the stability measure provides evidence of how reactive public opinion is to events or other information.

4. Informational support

refers to how much knowledge people hold about the object of their opinion. For example, voters who have little information about

candidates tend to focus on who they see as being involved or associated with a candidate and how they think the candidate would affect them personally. Better-informed voters, in contrast, “are more likely to ignore consideration of the specific groups involved in favor of a more general interpretation of the issue.”[43](#)

Other researchers studying a mayoral election found that those more informed about issues hold stronger opinions about the issues, but the direction of the opinions is not easily predicted. Furthermore, those with more knowledge and strong opinions are more likely to vote and to contact local officials.[44](#)

Absence of “information mass” behind an opinion on relatively nonpartisan issues may indicate that the direction and intensity are susceptible to change. For example, if Monsanto finds that public opinion against field testing of genetically engineered plants is not well informed, the company could mount a public information campaign designed to educate community members about the risks and benefits involved, taking care to frame the messages in the context of who is affected and involved (including the consensus views of community leaders), as well as how the field tests will affect those in the community—potential risks (if any) and benefits.

5. Social support

measures provide evidence of the extent to which people think their opinions are shared by others in their social milieu. The persuasion model in [Figure 8.4](#) indicates the power of perceptions of social approval or disapproval. Pollsters probing this dimension of public opinion ask respondents to report their impressions of what significant others think about an issue or to estimate the distribution of public opinion on the issue under study. In effect, measures of social support show how people define the nature of the consensus on issues.

The social context of opinion may be simply the tendency to think that other people are more influenced by media or events than ourselves. Researchers have found “third-person effects” whereby people tend to underestimate media impact on themselves and overestimate impact on

others. Such effects could have consequences in how public policy is determined (protecting those perceived to be vulnerable others), or how political campaigns are conducted (influencing easily persuaded voters). Researcher Richard Perloff discussed the implications of the third-person effect:

Social life is strengthened when individuals recognize that their perceptions of other people are not always accurate and that their fellow citizens are more capable of separating out the political wheat from the chaff than they typically assume. In a fragmented era, it is particularly important to reduce people's inclination to psychologically separate themselves from others and to encourage individuals to view others and the self through the same sets of lenses.[45](#)

Think of both informational and social support as giving predisposition weight and inertia. If, for example, people with a strong opinion on an issue hold a lot of information—pro and con—about that issue and see their particular position as being widely shared, then the direction and expression of the opinion are not likely to change. Just as the direction of a bowling ball is little affected by the air movement created by an air conditioner, opinions with much informational and social support have great mass and are not susceptible to easy or quick change. On the other hand, even strongly held opinions can change if they are not backed by information and perceived social support. They can change direction as frequently and rapidly as a ping-pong ball in a hurricane.

Describing and understanding public opinion requires greater measurement sensitivity and depth than the simple yes–no questions often used in telephone polling. [Chapter 11](#) offers more information on how to conduct public opinion polling and other research. [Chapter 12](#) explains how public opinion contexts are important for identifying, segmenting, and targeting specific organizational publics. For now, remember that public opinion reflects a dynamic process of interpersonal and media communication on issues among groups of people who have the capacity to act in similar ways. “Thinking together” often leads to “acting together,” the real reason for understanding public opinion.

Orientation and Coorientation

Public opinion, by definition, is about opinions that are shared—or perceived to be shared—among individuals, each of whom may have an individual opinion regarding a specific issue. The realization, rightly or wrongly, that an individual's views of a situation are similar to those held by others evokes a sense of identification among individuals and the perception of a common interest. In other words, individual orientation includes perceptions of issues or objects in one's environment, as well as perceptions of significant others' views of those same issues or objects. When two or more individuals' orientations include the same issues or objects and each other, they are in a state of coorientation.

Orientation

Individuals hold opinions of varying degrees of relevance and intensity. Individuals assign value to objects in their environments on the basis of both their previous history with the objects and their assessment of the objects in the current context (see [Figure 8.5](#)). The former value is salience, or the feelings about an object derived from an individual's experiences and reinforcements from previous situations. Salience refers to what the individual brings to a situation as a result of history.

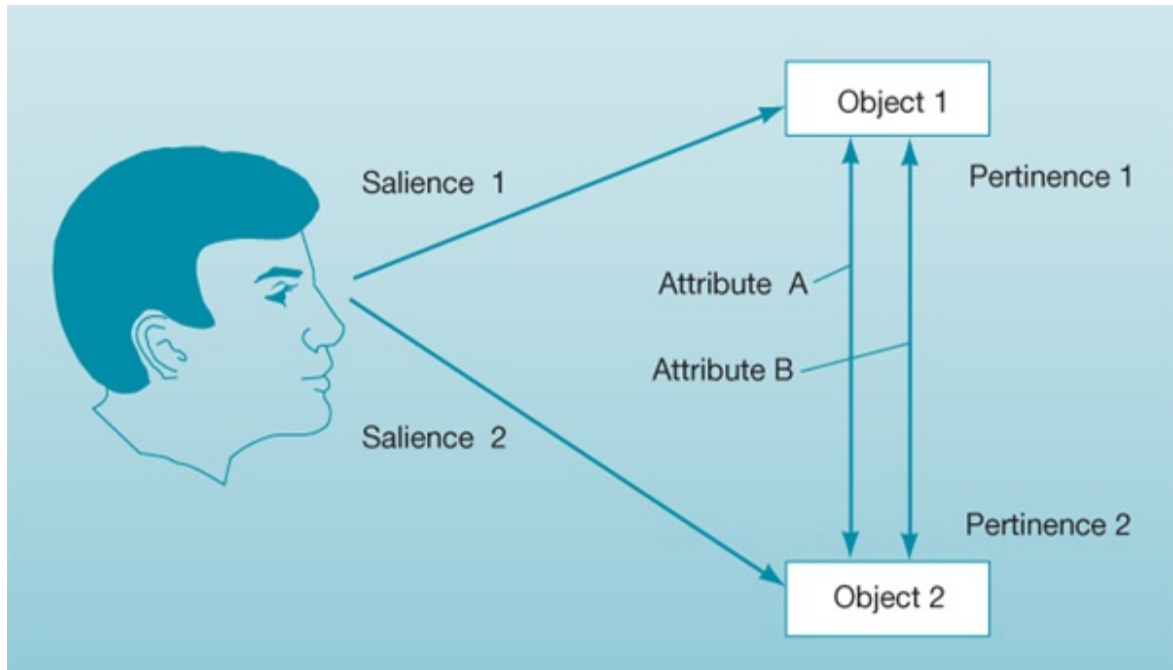


Figure 8.5 Model of Individual Orientation

The second source of value is pertinence , which refers to the relative value of an object found by making object-by-object comparisons on the basis of some attribute or attributes. Pertinence value can vary depending on which attribute is used to make the comparison or what other objects are used in the comparison.⁴⁶

In other words, salience indicates how individuals feel about an object, independent of the situation, whereas pertinence depends on how the individual defines the situation. To describe and understand an individual's opinion about some object, then, you have to measure both salience and pertinence. The distinction helps clarify the relationship between attitudes and opinions.

An attitude is the cross-situational predisposition or preference with respect to an object or issue. Attitudes predispose individuals to respond in certain ways from one situation to another, based on a lifetime of accumulating and

evaluating information and experiences. Crespi substitutes “attitudinal system” when referring to what others call “attitude.” He defines attitude systems as comprising four components:

1. Evaluative frames of reference (values and interests)
2. Cognition (knowledge and beliefs)
3. Affection (feelings) (Because many use the term “attitude” as referring only or primarily to the affective mode, whereas others use “attitude” more generally, an added benefit of adopting this nomenclature is that it avoids confusing the affective response mode with the entire system.)
4. Conation (behavioral intentions)[47](#)

On the other hand, an opinion is the judgment expressed about an object in a particular situation or given a specific set of circumstances. Opinions tend to reflect an individual’s related attitudes but also take into account aspects of the current situation.

Scholars have generally distinguished between attitudes and opinions in two ways:

First, opinions are generally considered to be verbal, or otherwise overt responses to a specific stimulus (an issue), while attitudes are more basic global tendencies to respond favorably or unfavorably to a general class of stimuli. While opinions are largely situational, attitudes are more enduring with a person across situations. Second, opinions are considered to be more cognitive and somewhat less affective in their makeup. . . . An attitude is an immediate, intuitive orientation while an opinion is a thought-out, reasoned choice between alternatives for action in a social matrix.[48](#)

The notion that opinions are expressed makes them important to the formation and study of public opinion. On the other hand, unexpressed intrapersonal predisposition does not affect public opinion formation. Not until attitudes are expressed through opinions in discussion or other public communication do they have an impact on the processes of forming and

changing public opinion. That opinions are public expressions establishes public opinion as a social phenomenon.

Coorientation

The social or interpersonal concept of public opinion requires two or more individuals oriented to and communicating about an object of mutual interest. In other words, they are “cooriented” to something in common and to each other.

The coorientational model in [Figure 8.6](#) illustrates the intrapersonal and interpersonal elements of communication relationships.⁴⁹ First, the intrapersonal construct of congruency describes the extent to which your own views match your estimate of another’s views on the same issue. Some refer to this variable as “perceived agreement.” On the basis of this estimate, you formulate strategies for dealing with the other person or for spontaneously responding in interactions.

The extent to which you accurately estimate another’s views determines the appropriateness of your actions. Each of us recalls instances in which we misjudged another person’s position on some issue of mutual interest and responded to them inappropriately until we learned what the person really thought about the issue. Accuracy, then, represents the extent to which your estimate matches the other person’s actual views. Because it requires a comparison of observations taken from two different people, accuracy represents an interpersonal construct.

The other interpersonal constructs include agreement and understanding. Agreement represents the extent to which two or more persons share similar evaluations of an issue of mutual interest. Understanding measures the similarities in the definitions held by two or more

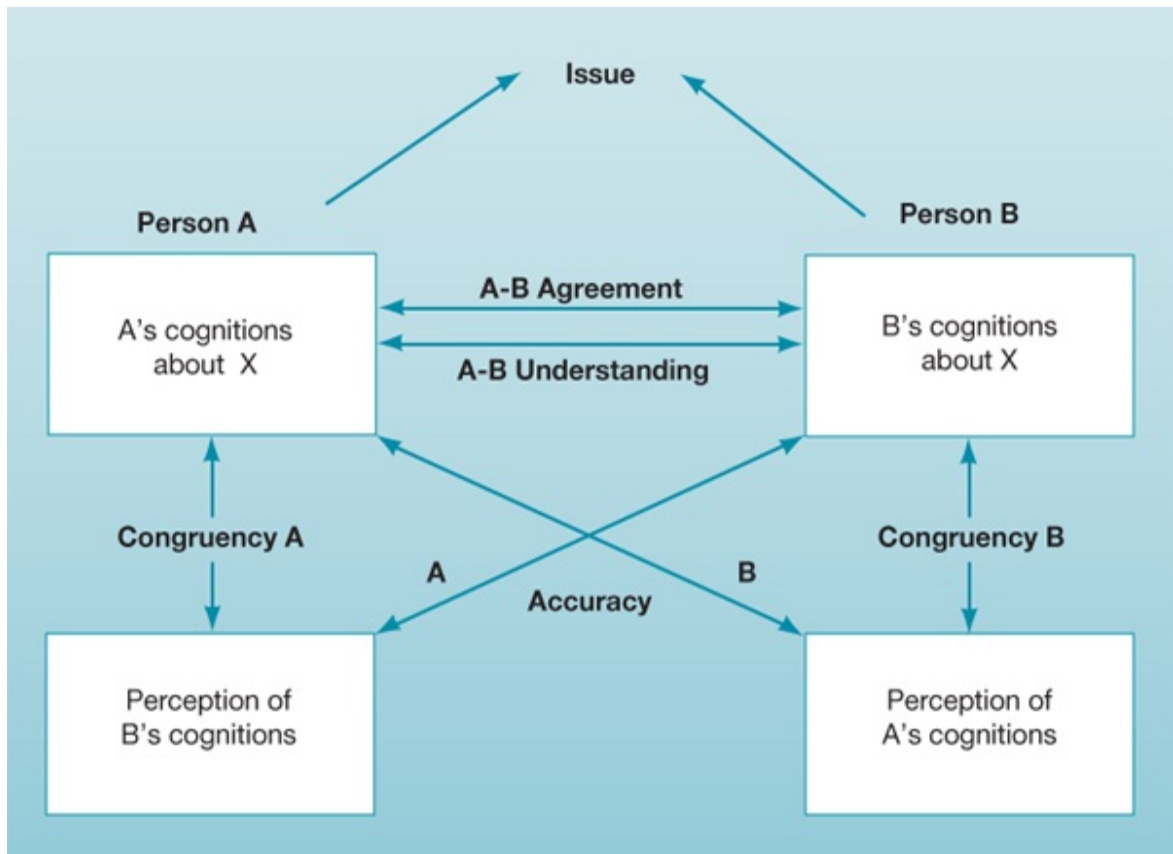


Figure 8.6 Model of Coorientation

Source: Adapted from Jack M. McLeod and Steven H. Chaffee, "Interpersonal Approaches to Communication Research," in *Interpersonal Perception and Communication*, ed. Steven H. Chaffee and Jack M. McLeod, special edition of *American Behavioral Scientist*, 16, no. 4 (March–April 1973), 483–488.

persons. In terms used in the individual orientation paradigm, agreement compares saliences, whereas understanding compares pertinences.

Coorientational Consensus

By including many individuals simultaneously oriented to issues of mutual concern and interest, the interpersonal coorientational model is extended to large social groupings. A coorientational concept of public opinion in communities and society provides an alternative to the usual psychological approaches to describing states of consensus.

First, the coorientational approach does not use the traditional “individual agreement” approach to describing public opinion, that is, an aggregation of individual orientations to some issue or topic. Instead, the coorientational approach casts public opinion as the product of both individual perceptions on an issue and their perceptions of what significant others think about the same issue.

Social scientists long ago recognized the need to take into account perceptions of agreement in addition to actual agreement. Scheff, for one, argued that perceptions of agreement can be independent of actual agreement and that perceptions of agreement more likely affect public behavior than does actual agreement. In fact, it is often the case that those involved in issues of public debate do not know the state of actual agreement, operating instead on their perceptions of agreement.[50](#)

Conceiving public opinion—or consensus—in this way makes it a complex social phenomenon that can be described using coorientational concepts. For example, the state of monolithic consensus represents high levels of actual agreement accurately recognized as such by those involved. Dissensus exists when high levels of actual disagreement are accurately perceived as such (see [Table 8.1](#)).

Public opinion based on inaccurate perceptions of agreement is more troublesome in relationships. Unlike actual agreement or disagreement, however, inaccurate perceptions are at least subject to change as a result of effective communication. For example, after extended interaction, two or more persons may simply agree to disagree. At least they each know where the other stands on the issue. The same cannot be said about situations based on inaccurate perceptions of each other’s views.

False consensus exists when there is actual disagreement but the majority of those involved think they agree. Pluralistic ignorance represents the state of

public opinion in which a majority perceive little agreement, but in fact there is widespread agreement. When those involved do not accurately recognize the state of actual agreement, they act on the basis of their inaccurate perceptions. In the cases of false consensus and pluralistic ignorance, their responses and public expressions (i.e., public opinion) are not consistent with the actual distribution of individual orientations on issues of common interest. Accurate perceptions of others' views, however, are surely the most likely outcome of public communication and the greatest motivation for maintaining communication in society and in relationships.

Table 8.1

Types of Coorientational Consensus

Source: Adapted from Thomas J. Scheff, "Toward a Sociological Model of Consensus," *American Sociological Review* 32, no. 1 (February 1967), 39.

	Perceives that Majority Also Agrees on Issue	Perceives that Majority Does Not Agree on Issue
Majority actually agrees on issue	Monolithic Consensus	Pluralistic Ignorance
Majority does not agree on issue	False Consensus	Dissensus

What may appear as logical in the context of this discussion, however, apparently is not widely recognized by those who commission or practice public relations. Instead of trying to increase the accuracy of cross-perceptions in social relationships, most communication efforts attempt to influence levels of agreement or to "engineer consent." But actual agreement can exist independent of perceptions of agreement, leading to Scheff's more useful definition of coorientational public opinion:

Complete consensus on an issue exists in a group [read: “public”] when there is an infinite series of reciprocating understandings between the members of the group [read: “public”] concerning the issue. I know that you know that I know, and so on.[51](#) (Words in brackets added.)

In the context of public relations, the coorientational approach to consensus and relationships is also useful for describing the nature of organization–public relationships.

Coorientational Relationships

The coorientational approach helps identify three public relations problems that call for rather straightforward communication strategies:

1. An organization and a public hold different definitions of an issue. They simply are not talking about the same thing when they engage in communication about “the issue.” They are talking about different issues.
2. The organization’s perceptions of a public’s views of an issue (evaluations and/or definitions) do not match the public’s actual views. Organizational management makes decisions about a public based on inaccurate estimates of the public’s views. Not surprisingly, the relationship suffers when members of that public are subjected to the organization’s actions and communications.
3. Members of a public hold inaccurate perceptions of an organization’s positions on an issue of mutual concern. Public responses to the organization’s management, its products, its actions and procedures, and so forth are based on inaccurate estimates of management policy and values.

Note that in all cases, the nature of the organization–public relationship is threatened by differing definitions and inaccurate perceptions, not by disagreement over the issue itself. None of the situations calls for communication designed to change the level of agreement–disagreement on

the issue. Communication that helps create shared definitions and increase accuracy improves the relationship and makes each side's dealings with the other more appropriate (see [Figure 8.7](#)).

For example, even though the Army Corps of Engineers communicated the advantages of a proposed flood-control project to the various publics who would be affected, they apparently did not do the same for the project's disadvantages. Convinced that the various publics supported the project, the Corps scheduled what was to be the final public hearing for project approval. Project planners were surprised by the suspicions, concerns, objections, and uncertainties expressed at the hearing. The project was delayed for the additional meetings and negotiations needed to improve accuracy in both the Corps's and publics' perceptions of the project and one another's views.⁵² Had the Corps initially used the coorientational approach to assess public opinion of the project, they might have identified their relationship problems and taken steps to avoid the costly delays.

As this example illustrates, the coorientational approach serves three major purposes in public relations planning. First, coorientational measures provide the information needed to identify and describe problems in organization–public relationships. Rather than defining problems in ways that limit strategies to those designed to increase agreement by changing

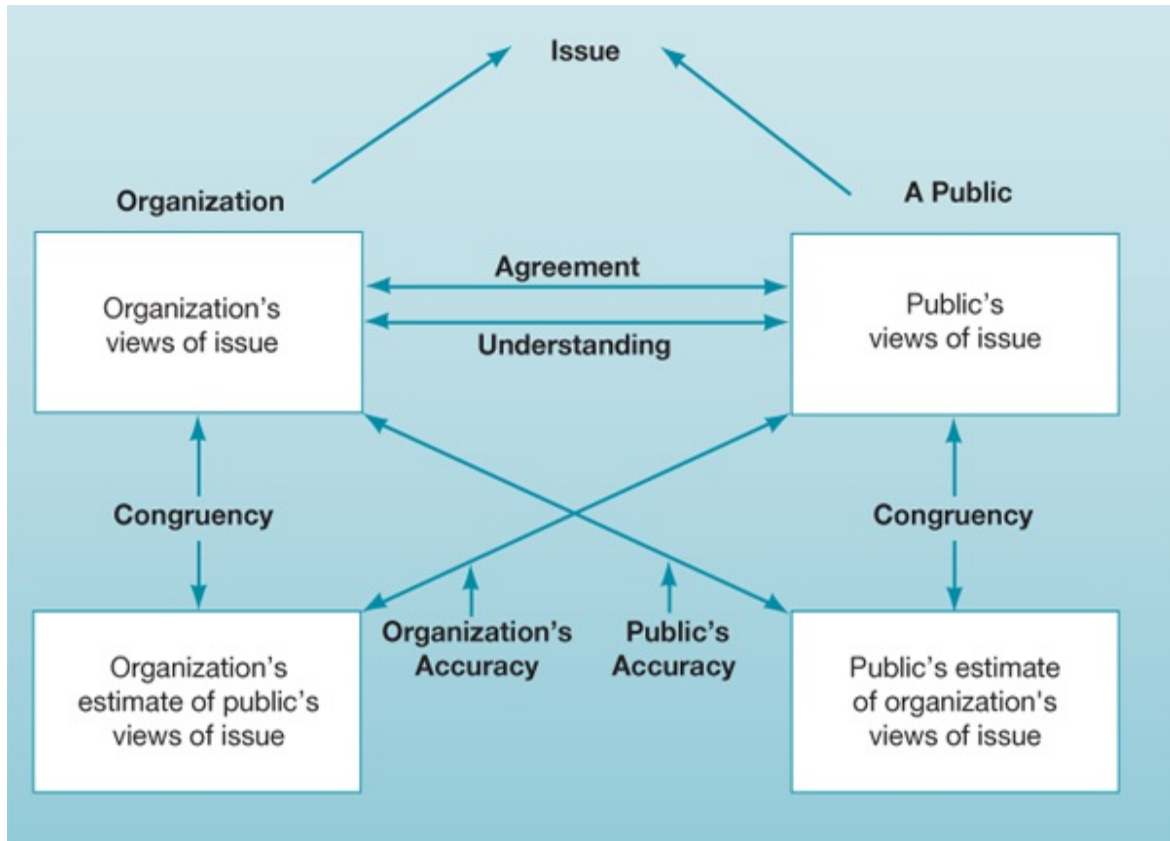


Figure 8.7 Coorientational Model of Organization–Public Relationships

public perceptions, this approach calls for an assessment of all parties' views in order to understand relationships.

Second, coorientational measures provide useful guidance for planning appropriate messages and responses to correct organization–public relationship problems. Coorientational assessments of relationships can lead to atypical, yet efficient, solutions. For example, imagine that the analysis shows that management has an inaccurate perception of a public's views on an issue and as a result is proposing what will be an inappropriate action or response. Simply reporting the public's actual views on the issue to

management may be the only corrective action needed.

Third, repeated use of coorientational measures indicates how the relationship changes as a result of the communication and other corrective actions. In other words, agreement, understanding, congruency, and accuracy serve as outcome criteria for assessing the impact of public relations efforts on organization–public relationships.⁵³

In conclusion, public relations establishes and maintains relationships between organizations and their publics by—among other means—facilitating two-way communication. The communication, however, may have less impact on the extent to which parties agree or disagree than on the accuracy of their cross-perceptions of each other’s views. In the final analysis, Lippmann’s “pictures in our heads” of the “world outside” include our estimates of what others think. These perceptions of social reality lead to the formation of active publics and condition actions toward others, both other individuals and other organizations. Researchers studying how people interact with their computer, television, and new media arrived at the same conclusion: “What seems to be true is often more influential than what really is true. . . . Perceptions are far more influential than reality defined more objectively.”⁵⁴ As Lippmann said, “That is why until we know what others think they know, we cannot truly understand their acts.”⁵⁵

Communication, then, not only moves information from one party in a relationship to another, but also defines the relationships and social environment within which all people function: as students, citizens, employees, managers, and policy makers. Not surprisingly, the media of communication—the topic of the next two chapters—play essential roles in shaping both issues and their social contexts. Mass media make possible the thinking together that shapes and represents the states of consensus in complex organizations, in communities, and in the larger global society.

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Study Guide

1. What is the difference between “communication” and “public relations”? Define each term and explain how they are related.
2. In the crowded message environment, what is the first task of public relations communication?
3. What are elements of the communication model, and how do they fit together in the communication process? Illustrate your response by drawing the model.
4. What are four major categories of public relations communication effects and some examples of each?
5. What are the five dimensions of public opinion? Select a current events issue and apply each dimension of public opinion to the issue.
6. How are attitudes and opinions different?
7. Diagram and explain the model of individual orientation and the model of coorientation.
8. What are the four states of coorientational consensus and what does each mean?

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Chapter 9 Internal Relations and Employee Communication

Learning Outcomes

After studying [Chapter 9](#) this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Define internal relations and employee communication as a part of the public relations function, using the basic elements of the definition of public relations.
2. Argue convincingly for the importance of the internal relations function.
3. Discuss the impact of organizational culture on internal communication.
4. Apply systems theory to internal relations.
5. Discuss some of the regulatory and business contexts for internal relations.
6. Explain the major purposes of employee communication.
7. Describe nonmediated and mediated means of communicating with internal publics.

As leaders, we must accept the challenge to create a work environment that sets the world-class standard where individual differences not only are recognized and valued, but indeed embraced because of the richness they bring to thinking, creating, problem solving, and understanding our customers and communities.

—Marilyn Laurie,¹ Executive Vice President, Public Relations (Retired), AT&T

Public relations deals with the relationships among organizations and all types of publics on whom organizational success or failure depends. You may think of public relations as communicating with external publics. However, the internal publics—employees—are any organization's most important publics. One writer went further, asserting that companies today “realize employees aren't ‘just another audience’—they are the company.”²

This chapter discusses how public relations contributes to effective communication within an organization, also referred to as “internal relations.” Communication inside an organization is arguably even more important than external communication, because the organization has to function effectively in attaining its goals in order to survive. In short, “timely, complete, and accurate corporate communication and face-to-face managerial communication can help to secure employee action in favor of company goals.”³

Internal relations means building and maintaining relationships with all the publics inside an organization, including production line workers, managers and supervisors, administrative staff, and facilities and maintenance support, to name but a few. For example, a former CEO of General Motors (GM) identified internal communication as a “top three priority” because it is so vital to organizational success.⁴ As one practitioner put it, “an organization's most important audience is, has been and always will be its employees.”⁵ Another explained: “When your employees aren't advocating for you, you're in trouble. There's no amount of advertising to overcome someone saying, ‘I work at that hospital and it's got problems.’”⁶

For example, an employee from Domino's Pizza prepared sandwiches using cheese that he had put up his nose, while his colleague filmed the prank in a video that they later posted to YouTube. This incident not only violated health-code standards and disgusted customers—it also demonstrated how two employees at a single location could bring major damage to a national corporation's reputation.⁷

The first part of this chapter discusses how organizational culture and worldviews are important concepts for internal relations and the cultural contexts in which employee communication takes place. The second section addresses some of the problems and challenges faced in internal relations,

including the regulatory and business contexts in which employee communication takes place. The chapter concludes with a review of some commonly employed means by which public relations practitioners conduct internal relations—in particular, the nonmediated and mediated contexts for employee communication.

Importance of Internal Relations

An organization's most important relationships are those with employees at all levels. The terms internal publics and employee publics refer to both managers and the people being supervised. These publics represent an organization's greatest resource—its people. According to Alvie Smith, former director of corporate communications at General Motors, two factors are changing internal communication with employees and enhancing management's respect for this part of the public relations function:

1. The value of understanding, teamwork, and commitment by employees in achieving bottom-line results.

These positive aspects of worker behavior are strongly influenced by effective, way-of-life interactive communications throughout the organization.

2. The need to build a strong manager communication network, one that makes every supervisor at every level accountable for communicating effectively with his or her employees.

This needs to be more than just job-related information and should include key business and public issues affecting the total organization.⁸ [Emphasis added.]

Organizations miss out on a sizable share of their human resource potential because they do not put a high priority on effective, two-way communication—the foundation for management–employee relations and overall job performance. Smith calls the consequence “slothing on the job”:

The ugly truth is that employee disloyalty and lack of commitment to organizational goals may be costing American businesses more than \$50 billion a year . . . the cost of absenteeism, labor grievances, production interruptions, poor quality, repair and warranty expenses. Perhaps most costly of all is inaction by employees who withhold their best efforts and ideas; who cruise along with just passable performance.⁹

The coordination and mediation necessary for dealing with employees today put the public relations staff, with its communication knowledge and skills, square in the middle of managing internal relationships. For example, former Delta Air Lines chairman and CEO Ronald W. Allen, who rose through the ranks by running departments such as human resources and training, saw his primary job as cultivating a motivated and loyal workforce.¹⁰

Day-to-day working relationships involve a great deal of contact, but effective employee communication develops in a climate of trust and honesty.¹¹ Ideally, working relationships are characterized by at least seven conditions:

1. Confidence and trust between employer and employees
2. Honest, candid information flowing freely up, down, and sideways in the organization
3. Satisfying status and participation for each person
4. Continuity of work without strife
5. Healthy or safe surroundings
6. Success for the enterprise
7. Optimism about the future

The chief executive must establish this culture and endorse it as formal policy. Even with such support from the top, however, many barriers stand in the way of free-flowing, two-way communication in organizations.

Opinion Research Corporation has tracked employee opinions of

organizational internal communication since 1950. Large majorities consistently give their organizations favorable scores on credibility, but fewer than half say their organizations do a good job of “letting them know what is going on,” or downward communication (management to employee). Less than half also give high marks to their organization’s willingness to “listen to their views,” or upward communication (employee to management). Face-to-face communication with an “open-door policy” is the primary medium for encouraging upward, two-way communication and for building good working relationships with employees.

Balancing the needs for employee satisfaction with the success of the enterprise is but one aspect of the continuous adjustment and reconciliation in employer–employee relationships—especially in multicultural settings. As a part of the larger public relations function, however, the goal of internal relations is to establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the employees on whom its success or failure depends.

Cultural Contexts

Understanding the internal communication of any organization requires analysis of the culture of that organization. Some who study organizational culture define it as the shared meanings and assumptions of group members.¹² Others focus on culture as a common values system or the behavioral norms in the organization.¹³ Organizational culture is an important consideration because it has a significant impact on the model of public relations an organization practices and on the internal communications that follow. Experts note that a poor cultural fit can make even highly qualified employees ineffective on the job.¹⁴

Organizational culture is the sum total of shared values, symbols, meanings, beliefs, assumptions, and expectations that organize and integrate a group of people who work together.¹⁵

The culture of an organization is often what defines it as different from other organizations, and—if managed properly—can be a valuable asset in building

cohesion and teamwork inside the organization, resulting in organizational effectiveness—reaching its goals. Organizational culture defines the values and norms used by decision makers in an organization. Worldviews and organizational culture define the range of responses preferred in any given situation. Although it is often unspoken, organizational culture is a powerful influence on individual behaviors within an organization.

Dimensions of Culture

Dimensions of culture are ways in which culture can be classified and explained. One of the most well-known studies of various cultural dimensions was conducted by Geert Hofstede.¹⁶ Although Hofstede's work focused on national cultures, the dimensions that he articulated can be applied to organizational cultures as well, because organizations often reflect the national cultures in which they operate.

The first dimension of culture articulated by Hofstede is the concept of power-distance, which is the extent to which people see inequities as natural and unchangeable. An organization with high power-distance is one in which managers and employees see themselves as inherently different from each other. Employees respect managers simply because of the position they hold within the organization, and promotion from the lower employee levels to the managerial levels would be unusual. In contrast, a low power-distance organization is one in which managers and employees see each other as equals, despite their different positions within the organization. In these organizations, there are no special bathrooms for high-level managers or different dining areas in the company cafeteria for workers of different positions.

For the public relations practitioner charged with communicating internally, the power-distance dimension suggests how organizational messages should be disseminated. In a high power-distance organization, communication might emphasize the power and authority of the top manager giving the information. For example, in South Korea, which has high power-distance in both its corporate and national cultures, there is high social distance between managers and employees, and managers can control the organization's

communication system without “interference” from employees.[17](#)

In contrast, in a low power-distance organization, information might be better received if the manager emphasized similarities between himself or herself and the employees in terms of goals, values, or concerns. For example, many corporations in the United States, a traditionally low power-distance country, have instituted company blogs in which employees interact directly with CEOs, speaking to them as social equals, asking them hard questions, and expecting timely answers.[18](#)

Hofstede’s second dimension of culture is individualism, or the extent to which people put their own individual needs ahead of the needs of the group. Organizations with strong individualistic cultures reward employees on the basis of their personal achievements, and there is competition among employees to gain that individual recognition. On the other hand, organizations weak in individualism are strong in collectivism, emphasizing the needs and accomplishments of teams of employees and focusing on the goals of the group instead of the goals of the individual.

For employee communication messages, the public relations practitioner in a highly individualistic culture might emphasize the actions that employees can take as individuals in order to accomplish something, say, a successful recycling program. In a more collectivist culture, public relations messages might instead focus on how recycling is a team responsibility that benefits everyone in the organization. As another example, in one study of an international public relations firm, employees from cultures high in individualism preferred less standardization of their work activities.[19](#) In other words, they wanted to do their jobs their own way.

Third, Hofstede identified uncertainty avoidance as a cultural dimension that explains the extent to which people prefer organizational communication and structures that reduce their social anxiety. In companies with high uncertainty avoidance, employees tend to prefer “clear requirements and instructions,” to follow organizational rules, to take fewer risks, and to demonstrate more loyalty to the employer.[20](#) In a low uncertainty avoidance culture, people feel more tolerant of ambiguous situations, have lower resistance to change, and show greater interest in taking risks. Organizations with low uncertainty avoidance are more likely to engage in two-way public relations activities; in

other words, they do not feel threatened by input from their environment.[21](#)

Finally, Hofstede's fourth dimension of culture, which he called masculinity, describes behaviors that are traditionally (or stereotypically) "masculine," such as aggressiveness and independence. An organization that is high in masculinity rewards competitiveness and initiative. On the other hand, an organization that is low in masculinity rewards nurturing and cooperation, that is, traditionally or stereotypically "feminine" characteristics. For the public relations practitioner, employee communication must reflect organizational values to be effective, and this dimension of culture offers one way to characterize those values. Thus, in an organization with high masculinity, an employee communication program to encourage production might offer a competition between individuals or departments. In an organization with low masculinity, the same employee communication program might point out how increasing the production rate enhances or nurtures employees' sense of self-esteem.

Applying Systems Theory to Internal Relations

[Chapter 7](#) outlined the ecological approach to public relations and how organizations can be relatively open or closed systems. This approach applies as well to internal communication as it does to external communication. To review, open systems are organizations that receive input from the environment and adjust themselves in response to that input. Closed systems are organizations that do not receive input from the environment; as a result, they are less likely to be able to adapt to environmental changes.

For internal communication, whether an organization is open or closed is related to its "worldview," or the basic value and belief system prevalent in an organization. Generally, the worldview of the organizational leadership, that is, the dominant coalition (see [Chapter 3](#)), shapes the worldview of the organization as a whole through internal communication. Public relations researchers have identified two primary types of worldviews: symmetrical and asymmetrical.[22](#)

An asymmetrical worldview is one in which an organization's goal is to get what it wants without having to change the way it does business internally. This worldview focuses almost exclusively on the goals of the organization, and the culture is to resist change, much like the culture of a closed system. In an asymmetrical worldview, power in decision making tends to remain on the side of the organization and is not shared with publics.

A symmetrical worldview incorporates the ideas of negotiation, conflict resolution, and compromise in an organization's operating procedures. The organization is not only self-oriented, but also oriented on satisfying the interests of strategic publics. Therefore, desires and goals are set in a shared fashion by incorporating some of what the publics want. Change occurs on both sides of the relationship—a give-and-take on behalf of both the organization and its publics. Change may not always be balanced in every instance, but both the organization and its publics are open to adopting or adapting to the views of the other through dialogue and negotiation. In other words, an organization with a symmetrical worldview tends to function as an open system.

Symmetrical and asymmetrical worldviews produce different organizational cultures—authoritarian and participative. These two organizational cultures have direct and indirect effects on the nature and flow of internal communication in the organization.

Authoritarian Organizational Culture

An authoritarian organizational culture arises from an asymmetrical worldview. In this type of culture, communication processes are structured and formalized within a decision-making hierarchy. Military organizations typically are examples of authoritarian organizational cultures.

In authoritarian organizational cultures, decisions are made at the top levels of the organization and implemented by those at lower levels. Decision making is centralized at the highest level of the organization, and input is

typically not sought from middle- and lower-level employees. An authoritarian organizational culture usually stresses individual accountability for an area of limited scope, and organizational departments are independent, rather than interdependent. Authoritarian cultures are often based on the idea of a “mechanistic” or “mechanical” organizational structure, in which tasks are routinized and there is a high division of labor. For example, at www.Amazon.com, one employee is responsible for sealing and labeling boxes as they roll off the stocking line, while another employee stacks the boxes in the warehouse where they wait to be shipped. There is little role for dialogue or feedback in an authoritarian organizational culture, because the input of employees is not seen as vital in management.²³

Communication in authoritarian cultures, therefore, takes on the form of disseminating the ideas and goals decided by upper management to various internal employee publics, such as midlevel and lower-level management, administrative and support staff, supervisors, skilled laborers, and unskilled laborers. This means that communication is generally one-sided—or asymmetrical—in that management directs employees, but little communication flows from employees back to management. Furthermore, what little communication does flow from employees to management is unlikely to result in the managers’ changing their minds to accommodate employee concerns. Efficiency is valued over innovation in many authoritarian cultures due to the emphasis on uniform output of a product or standardized provision of a service.

Authoritarian cultures, like other closed systems, tend to resist change. Input from publics is viewed as a threat to authority rather than as an opportunity for change. These organizations also resist sharing power with “outsiders.” Even internal publics face recalcitrant management in an authoritarian culture, leading to high employee turnover and lower levels of job satisfaction than reported in other types of organizational cultures.

Participative Organizational Culture

Participative organizational cultures are based on a symmetrical worldview that values dialogue and the exchange of input between the organization and its publics. Teamwork is valued, and emphasis is placed on the collective rather than the individual, meaning that the organization and employees share goals. A participative organizational culture values innovation and seeks input from employees and other stakeholder groups to ensure a thorough analysis of decisions and policy. Organizational departments are often integrated or multifunctional and emphasize open communication across different departments.²⁴

A participative organizational culture values information and seeks input from internal publics; in other words, it functions as an open system with respect to employees, their opinions, and their concerns. Feedback and upward communication allow employees and those at lower levels of an organization to have a voice in management decision making. Feedback is encouraged and sought; furthermore, feedback is taken seriously and can lead to organizational change. In the language of systems theory (see [Chapter 7](#)), the organization engages in morphogenesis to maintain homeostasis. This type of culture is organic, as opposed to mechanistic, as parts of the team work together in an environment that encourages and rewards innovation.

In participative organizational cultures, decisions are made in a decentralized manner—across varying levels of the organization—and implemented by those who hold responsibility over a specific area. Innovative ideas can come from any level of the organization, from the manufacturing line to top management, or from the person who fills potholes in city streets to the head of the city street department. Feedback at all levels of the organization is sought and valued. One effect of a participative organizational culture is increased teamwork and higher value placed on employees at all levels.

At one company, the CEO established an employee advisory board to advise management on ways to be more environmentally friendly. Employees were eager to join the board, and many of its recommendations to help the company “go green” were implemented. According to the CEO, “employees will always be happier in an environment where they feel that they are being listened to and that their opinions count.”²⁵

In short, whether described using Hofstede’s dimensions of culture or

organizational worldviews, organizational culture has significant impact on internal relations and employee communication. Efforts to communicate with employees can only be successful when they account for and work with an organization's culture and worldviews. (See [Exhibit 9.1](#) for one approach to accounting for cultural factors in multinational organizations.)



Exhibit 9.1

Co-acculturation in Multinational Organizations

Suman Lee, Ph.D., Associate Professor,

Greenlee School of Journalism and Communication, Iowa State University

In the global economy, multinational companies usually include two or more cultures under a single corporate umbrella. Each cultural group has its own cognitive, affective, and behavioral characteristics. As a result, multinational companies face unique challenges, and sometimes more serious manager–worker relationship problems, than do companies operating in their home settings. For example, misconceptions led by cultural differences can interfere with the integration of new workers and cause higher turnover. In this regard, effective communication and mutually beneficial relationships between culturally diverse managers and workers serve as significant indicators of successful operation of multinational companies.

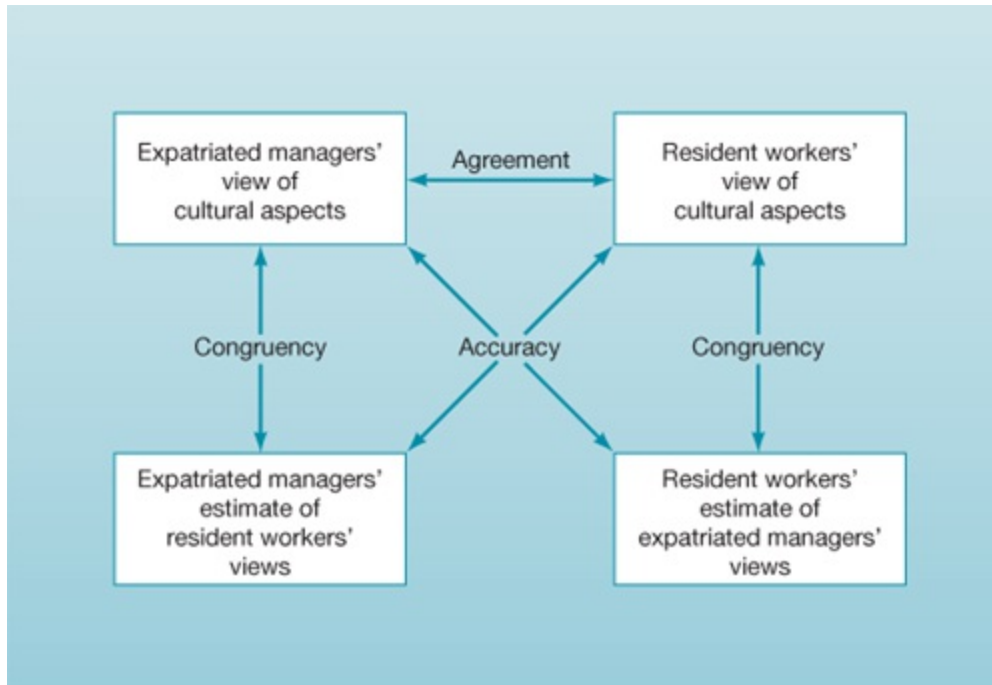
Co-acculturation is a theoretical model for examining relationships between managers and workers in a multinational organization. Co-acculturation is defined as simultaneous orientation toward each other and toward aspects of each other's culture. Co-acculturation expands upon concepts derived from acculturation theory and the coorientation model (see [Chapter 8](#)). Co-acculturation is not one individual's or one group's acculturation to a fixed and given host culture, such as when immigrants and international students "acculturate" to a host country's culture. Rather, it represents mutual and relational acculturation between two or more cultural groups.

For example, Samsung Tijuana Park is a manufacturing plant in Mexico comprising expatriated Korean managers and resident Mexican workers. In this organizational setting, both Koreans and Mexicans simultaneously acculturate to each other's cultures. Examining relationships in the co-acculturation paradigm requires three key measures: agreement, congruency, and accuracy.

Co-acculturation agreement is the comparison of one cultural group's view with the views held by the other group toward the same behavioral artifacts of culture. It represents the degree to which the cultural groups share the similar evaluations of the cultural artifacts. Co-acculturation congruency is the comparison of one's own view on cultural aspects with his or her estimates of the other cultural group's view on the same topic. Co-acculturation accuracy is the degree to which members of different cultural groups estimate the other group's perceptions correctly. Improving co-acculturation agreement, congruency, and accuracy can be a common goal for employee communication programs.

This co-acculturation framework can be applied to other cultural settings, such as an organization with multiple organizational cultures undergoing merger or acquisition, as well as an organization with diverse employee compositions beyond nationality.

Courtesy Suman Lee, Ph.D.



To some extent, public relations practitioners function as cultural messengers within and outside an organization. As globalization makes work settings much more culturally diverse (see [Chapter 2](#)), it will become the bigger challenge for public relations practitioners to facilitate communication within an organization. Co-acculturation provides a paradigm for understanding this challenge.

Regulatory and Business Contexts

Internal relations involves more than communicating with employee publics in isolation; there are legal and business realities in which and about which employee communication takes place.

Safety and Compliance

Every organization must comply with the governing standards of the country in which it operates, even if the organization operates locations in many nations. The different standards for each country must be followed, or the

organization can face severe penalties and fines from regulators. Internal relations specialists work hard at making sure the standards of each country are known and communicated internally in a global organization with locations around the world. Saying “that isn’t the way things are done in our home country” holds no weight with foreign governments, and their regulations can vary tremendously from an organization’s “standard operating procedure” at home. Every country has the equivalent of taxes, labor laws that govern workers, operational laws that govern workplace safety, and environmental laws concerning waste and transportation of materials. These laws are in addition to what the organization must handle externally, such as import and export regulations, competition, and other civil and criminal laws.

Internal relations staff also educates employees about compliance with government regulations. Employees need to understand the rules under which they are required to operate in order to maximize their own safety. In the United States, one primary responsibility of the internal relations function is to communicate Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) worker safety standards required by the government. The U.S. Department of Labor requires organizations to hang posters in the workplace that list federal, state, and OSHA standards. These posters, which are usually displayed on bulletin boards or near time clocks or lockers, include topics such as minimum wage, safety standards, hand washing, and wearing protective equipment. OSHA governs everything from requiring hard hats in construction areas to the quality of air in office buildings. For example, OSHA regulates work conditions and safety of those handling the printing chemicals used to produce this book.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is another U.S. government agency that regulates disposal and transportation of goods, especially those deemed hazardous in nature, such as petroleum products, industrial chemicals such as DMSO or benzene, or pesticides. Many hazardous chemicals are used in manufacturing, so they must be produced at a chemical plant, are transported to the manufacturing site, and are eventually discarded after use. For example, textile dyeing and manufacturing plants often have large, concrete “settling ponds” in which used dyestuff is treated to decompose over time into biodegradable sediment. Or, Dow Chemical uses benzene, a highly

poisonous solvent if airborne, and must maintain sensitive benzene monitors and alarms throughout its facility in case of accidental leaks. The EPA regulates sites such as these, and many others, for environmental safety compliance.

So, in many organizations, another important task of internal relations provides communication support to ensure that environmental regulations and worker safety standards are maintained. Responsible internal communication about these issues can be a matter of life and death and can help prevent the accidents and violations that damage organizational reputations.

Labor Relations

Another significant task of internal relations is interacting with hourly employees, some of whom belong to labor unions. The relationship with labor is a vital relationship on which the success or failure of the organization literally depends. This relationship cannot—and should not—be taken for granted. Maintenance of the relationship with labor constitutes a large part of an internal relations specialist's work, especially in organizations with a “unionized shop.”

There is an inherent and undeniable tension between the roles of management and labor. This tension is the basis for many schools of thought in sociology and economics, in which labor and management are seen as adversaries locked in an eternal battle between the “haves” and the “have nots.” Out of this socioeconomic theory arises the tension that exists in everyday relations with labor. There is a core value that labor enacts work and management controls work. Controlling resource allocations—money and number of jobs—is a main function of management, but workers would also like a voice in this process, and that is where internal relations comes into play.

Relationships with unionized workers and their unions must be attended to continually, and internal relations specialists facilitate and help maintain those relationships. Some assume that human resources (HR) is in charge of this organizational function, but the role of HR typically is limited to hiring,

firing, training, and benefits. If a union is thinking of striking, it is the public relations function in management (usually the internal relations specialist) who first learns of the discontent. It is also the responsibility of internal relations to communicate about matters of dissension and try to find ways to resolve labor–management relationship problems. Although unions often draw much attention, the savvy internal relations manager accords just as much time and attention to communicating with nonunionized labor. (See [Chapter 6](#) for legal considerations in labor–management communication.)

Organizational Change: Mergers, Acquisitions, and Layoffs

Internal communication specialists have important strategic responsibilities during organizational change. Communication during periods of change and uncertainty is more than just “hand-holding,” as it plays an important role in helping employees cope with uncertainty and adjust to change (see [Exhibit 9.2](#)).

In situations such as a merger or acquisition, internal publics of all levels immediately have a need for communication about the future of their position in the organization. These situations tend to produce anxiety, especially for those not involved in the discussions and decisions that led to organizational change. The role of internal relations should be to guide the merger or acquisition communication with internal publics in a forthright and expedient manner, dealing



Exhibit 9.2

Communicating Organizational Change

David B. McKinney, APR, ABC, Senior Communications Manager (retired),

Shell Oil Company, Houston, Texas

Employees who learn from the local TV news that their company has just been acquired or the plant where they make widgets is shutting down have a right to be upset. After all, who has a greater personal and emotional stake in an organization than those who actually work there?

Whether described as rightsizing, downsizing, maximizing synergies or good old-fashioned cost cutting, today's business environment is characterized by frequent and unexpected change, with few certainties as to the future of the organization or individual jobs.

Organizational change—the journey of employees from a current state to a desired state—is when effective internal communication is the most critical, such as during layoffs, mergers, and corporate restructuring. Ironically, internal information breakdowns often occur at times of workplace change or uncertainty because of increasing and high-profile communication with media, government agencies, community, and other external stakeholders.

Addressing employee concerns, distractions and resistance requires attention to content (what is being communicated), and understanding the role of available tools or media (how, where, and when information is delivered). Additional challenges include how quickly management should respond; how much information should be given; and how employee support is gained and maintained. Objectives should be to keep up staff morale, boost staff's enthusiasm and interest in their jobs, and increase

knowledge of what is being done to help those who lose their jobs.

Consider a three-phase approach to communicating change: Phase 1 acknowledges the passing of the old and celebration of the new. Phase 2 looks at change or cognitive restructuring, which is timing critical (denial/resistance/exploration). Phase 3 is commitment—reward, training, and validation. Understanding these phases can remove fear and uncertainty, limit rumors, and restore a sense of control.

Every step of the way, internal communication must support business objectives, generate internal community spirit to raise and maintain morale, and be honest and open. Employees should be given the information they want and need, as well as being told what management wants to say. During workplace change or uncertainty, employees want to know what it means for them: do they have a job, where will they work, why are the changes happening, how will it improve the business, and what is the timing? The focus should be on face-to-face communication when feasible. Other methods, such as email, newsletters, and the intranet, can be used to raise awareness and share information, saving face-to-face discussion for debate, clarifying understanding, and private feedback—not for information dumping.

Organizational change or uncertainty requires communication that is sensitive to employees and acknowledges their potential impact as ambassadors for the organization as they interact with families, neighbors, and others in the community. Armed with factual information, informed employees are less likely to be discontent or to engage in rumors and speculation—usually negative—caused by lack of, bad, or no “official” information.

Enlightened organizational leadership ensures that when change occurs, effective dialogue with workers occurs early, often, and in a credible, transparent manner.

Courtesy David B. McKinney and Shell International Ltd.

with all questions and uncertainties honestly. Often, if employees know that a decision is still under consideration, their anxiety will be less than if they know nothing at all. Again, “We are still working that out” is a better answer than “No comment.”

Publics with a high level of involvement in the organization will have a greater need for information in times of uncertainty than in normal times, and internal relations should respond immediately and proactively. For example, a sharp drop in stock prices can cause both employees and investors to become concerned and to want accurate information rapidly. This information must be truthful.

In the Enron case, top executives were selling their own stock while assuring employees that the company was not losing value. This is an abhorrent example of allowing circumstances to dominate truth—rather than allowing truth to decide circumstances. It is the responsibility of the internal relations manager to be honest and forthcoming with information to internal publics, even when it means pushing recalcitrant top management to do the right thing.

During reorganizations and layoffs, the responsible organization responds by helping employees to the greatest extent that it can. For instance, when a manufacturing site is to move, the company could pay to relocate employees to the new location or provide them with job search assistance and retraining. This is how Johnson & Johnson responded when the company sold a surgical scrubs facility that had employed many mentally challenged persons in garment folding and packing. The company worked with the buyer to make sure that this community outreach initiative was continued and then helped place some of the displaced workers in other Johnson & Johnson facilities.

Communicating Internally

Employee communication serves several purposes. First, internal communication is meant to acculturate employees or to get them to understand and internalize the organization’s culture and values. Second, internal communication serves as a way to inform employees of

organizational developments, happenings, and news. Third, internal communication is a way for the organization to listen to its employees, to hear employees' concerns and questions. Finally, employee-to-employee communication is desired within organizations. All of these purposes can be served in any of a variety of ways, and new technology increasingly affects the manner in which employee communication occurs.

Acculturating Employees

Efforts to acculturate employees start from the moment a new person is hired. Usually, no distinction is made between information about organizational culture that is provided to internal and external publics. This congruence of internal and external messaging has two benefits. First, it ensures that employees get the same information about organizational culture as everyone else. Second, it helps to attract new employees who already believe in the organization's culture and values. Organizational culture is often articulated in vision statements, mission statements, policy documents, ethics statements, and training manuals.

Vision Statements

Vision statements provide an overview of organizational goals in the broadest sense. Although mission statements are better known, vision statements are the starting point for developing a more specific organizational mission. The terms mission statement and vision statement are closely related; however, there are basic differences between the two concepts.

The vision statement represents a future goal that outlines general priorities for where the organization is headed. An effective vision statement answers the basic questions: "Why does this organization exist?" and "What would we like to accomplish?" A shared vision is an integral part of the culture of an organization and is communicated through internal relations. If employees share a common vision and clearly defined goals, the organization can make more strategic and effective decisions than they can without a clear vision. A

vision statement spells out the future goal of an organization.

Vision statements are important tools of internal relations, particularly for helping manage reactions to changes in the environment. A well-planned vision statement gives employees an idea of what the organization will strive for in the future, the values it holds, and the areas of the business that will be of most strategic importance—ranging from strategies as diverse as research and development of new products to maintaining market share or developing relationships with new distributors.

A vision statement is usually created at the highest level of the organization by the CEO or other members of the dominant coalition. One danger here is that creating a vision statement in the top level of the organization alone misses the opportunity to engage internal publics in the discussion of organizational mission. Employees often report that feelings of pride, ownership, and responsibility are fostered when many participants work together at creating a vision statement.²⁶ Participating in the process can create a “shared vision” of the organization’s future throughout the organization (see [Figure 9.1](#)).

Mission Statements

The mission statement answers the question: “How are we different from our competitors?” For this reason, they are sometimes called “competitive advantage statements.” They convey goals, organizational structure and strategy, legitimacy, values, participation and ownership among employees, leadership, responsibility to the community, ethical priorities, and commitment to publics and stakeholders. Although mission statements and vision statements are similar, mission statements are more specific and operational than are vision statements. The mission statement helps employees set priorities and goals, so that all members of the organization are committed to achieving the mission specified in the statement.

Mission statements encourage members in an organization to focus on its strengths by emphasizing areas and attributes in which it has success. The focus fostered by a compelling mission statement can provide a competitive

advantage. It does so by allowing members of the organization to remain “on strategy,” both in conducting their responsibilities and in allocating resources. Without a clearly defined mission statement, an organization might make decisions that are well intentioned, but that do not emphasize the unique competitive strengths of the organization. By building on what



Figure 9.1 Row Boats Cartoon

Courtesy Harold Smith, Asheville, NC.

Exhibit 9.3

Comparing Mission Statements

Starbucks: “To inspire and nurture the human spirit—one person,

one cup and one neighborhood at a time.”¹

Peet’s: “To enable and inspire customers to enjoy the daily pleasure of Peet’s coffees and teas by providing distinctive, superior products, superior coffee and tea knowledge, and superior service to every customer, every day.”²

Caribou Coffee: “An experience that makes the day better.”³

1. <http://www.starbucks.com/about-us/company-information/mission-statement> (accessed May 4, 2011).

2. http://www.peets.com/who_we_are/history_mission.asp?rdir=1& (accessed May 4, 2011).

3. <http://www.cariboucoffee.com/page/1/cc-first-us-retailer-ra.jsp> (accessed May 4, 2011).

it does well, an organization reinvests resources in the areas where it is strongest and thus become less dependent on the areas in which it is weaker, giving it an overall competitive advantage.

An organization whose mission focuses on providing the highest-quality product would have a different strategic mission than an organization focused on creating the most innovative products, or another that offers the most inexpensive merchandise. Compare the examples in [Exhibit 9.3](#). Each mission statement spells out to employees what the organization values and rewards. Imagine that you worked for each of these coffee companies as a barista; how would each mission statement guide your interaction with customers?

There is little standardization of content and style among mission statements, but top-performing organizations almost always subscribe to exemplary statements of vision and mission.²⁷ In short, a clear vision for the future and a thoroughly articulated mission are vital to organizational success.

Policy Documents

Organizational policy and procedures are communicated through various channels to employees. Most organizations have an employee handbook explaining how to implement policies and procedures in common situations. For example, many organizations have a policy regarding employee nondisclosure of confidential or privileged information. Manuals often specify the internal policies and the governmental laws that regulate the organization, such as antitrust laws and rules to prevent insider trading of stocks. Increasingly, employee handbooks include computer usage and social media policies, including organizations' "right to monitor personal e-mail . . . [and] limit . . . employees' ability to make Internet posts about their employers (or their employers' clients)... "28

Policy manuals are generally exhaustive documents in book or electronic form that specify rights, responsibilities, and bureaucratic channels for procedures. A policy manual might include the procedure for reporting a sexual harassment situation or other problematic issue for employees, as well as routine procedures for requesting a promotion or personal use of office computers. A major drawback of this medium is that most policy manuals are little used because of their sheer length and complex content. Because of the presentation's detail and complexity, many employees refer to the policy manual only as a last resort. However, policy manuals can be effective tools of internal communication if they are well written, concise, interesting, and organized.

Ethics Statements

Another common policy document is a code of ethics. By definition, an ethics document provides a guide to organizational management's values, priorities, standards, and policy. The ethics statement spells out in clear terms the ethical parameters used by the organization in evaluating decision options. A well-written code of ethics provides more concrete guidance and priorities than does a vision or mission statement, but it is much briefer than a policy manual. Codes of ethics, also known as ethics statements, credos, principles, beliefs, values, or standards, are officially adopted and formalized statements that the organization adopts as its guide for ethical decision making. Johnson & Johnson's credo is an outstanding example of an ethics

statement (<http://www.jnj.com/connect/about-jnj/jnj-credo/>).

Training Materials

Materials used in the orientation and training process help socialize new employees into the culture of the organization. The socialization process is a means of learning the values, standards, and norms of the organization, as well as what is expected in relation to job responsibilities. An employee is acculturated when he or she internalizes the values of the organization and begins to identify himself or herself as part of the organization. Socializing and acculturating new employees are important aspects of internal relations .

New employee orientation at every level of the organization, from labor to executive management, can cover topics in the policy manual, benefits, and related procedures. Training provides internal relations staff an opportunity to help the human resources department to socialize and to acculturate employees at all levels of the organization. Employees need to be taught what is expected of them and the standards and methods to be used in that evaluation. Doing so builds more consistent organizational decision making, which can make maintaining relationships with publics easier. Providing rigorous training and setting clear expectations for employees also allows them to proceed in their responsibilities with the confidence that the organization will stand behind them when they act in accordance with its values.

Informing Employees Using Nonmediated Communication

The heart of communication inside an organization is in-person verbal communication. Employees prefer direct communication from their superiors over email, peers, news media, or any other form.²⁹ Studies also show that the most memorable, effective, and preferred type of message delivery for employees is traditional face-to-face communication. Verbal communication

has a significant impact on organizational culture and deserves attention, even though it is often an informal medium.[30](#)

The “Grapevine”

The grapevine is neither a formal nor a controlled medium, but word of mouth is often the quickest means for communicating information. Word of mouth today occurs both face to face and online.[31](#) The grapevine is not only a potent line of communication, but also dangerous because the information it carries is often unreliable or “enhanced.”

Sometimes the grapevine is actually harmful, or threatens to be. Rumors of downsizing and layoffs, of a hostile takeover by a competitor, of friction among officials, of sexual harassment charges, or of bad blood between factions can cause dissension within the organization with the speed of a wildfire. Social media sites enable information to spread virally within seconds, and rumors can travel far beyond the organization, becoming more and more distorted as they spread.

The public relations staff usually stays tuned in to the grapevine. When trouble brews, they squelch the gossip by releasing the full facts. Too often, however, the grapevine is the source of misinformation. The lesson for the public relations practitioner is that the grapevine will fill the information gaps left by an inadequate internal communication program . The informal, uncontrolled channels take over when the formal, controlled channels do not meet the need and demand for information.

Meetings, Teleconferences, and Videoconferences

Meetings bring people together, providing opportunities to both speak and listen, a method of two-way communication. Work group meetings, quality control circles, and participative management sessions are examples of small,

task-oriented meetings. Face-to-face meetings are expensive in time away from routine tasks and sometimes include travel expenses. However, meetings are economical in the long run because of both the ideas they produce and their team-building effects. Employees prefer face-to-face communication on many topics—from organizational goals to financial and competitor information.[32](#)

Just as with other communication strategies, a meeting requires specific objectives, careful planning and staging, and skillful direction. Exchange of viewpoints can be open but controlled so that the meeting does not drag or get diverted from its purpose. Effectiveness depends on the conveyor's ability to lead and articulate. For some meetings, specially trained group-process facilitators serve this vital role, while participants delve into important content issues. One school of thought is that important meetings involving people of different levels trying to resolve conflicts, to address crises, or to make critical decisions should be guided by a process facilitator so that power, content, and process are not vested in one person—the boss.

For large gatherings, particularly those bringing together the entire employee force or important external publics, the public relations staff is called on to help plan the meeting. At Google, global communications director David Krane explained that public relations activities fall into five “buckets”; these include media relations, traditional corporate communications, issues management and public affairs, internal communication, and international communication. For internal communication, Google has held “Thank God It’s Friday” (TGIF) meetings each week since its founding.[33](#) When the organization had fewer than 100 employees, these meetings “always took place in an open space within the office and always near food.” Today, with thousands of employees all over the world, Google holds TGIF meetings using videocasting. Furthermore, to accommodate those employees whose weekends have already started by the meeting time, the videocast is recorded, so that those not able to attend can replay the meeting later.[34](#)

As the Google example shows, many organizations use the latest technologies to bring ideas and people together. Some major global corporations have created state-of-the-art electronic meeting systems capable of connecting people around the world instantaneously to work together on a

single problem. Another reason for using these meeting technologies is to reach people at many locations all at the same time with the same message. For example, key speakers unable to take time to travel to participate in person can address meetings via teleconferencing, videoconferencing, or podcasting. The savings in travel time and costs, meeting facilities, and boarding of participants can more than offset the costs of technology. However, traditional, face-to-face meetings are still highly valued and a preferred means of communication by employees, especially when their input on an issue is sought.

Informing Employees Using Mediated Communication

Mediated communication with today's employees ranges from the traditional newsletter to such newer forms as intranet and email.

Employee Publications

Despite new communication technology, printed publications remain the primary media for internal communication in most organizations. Imagine the competition for attention these publications must overcome, given the amount of information that people are exposed to on a daily basis. The usual goals of such publications include the following:

1. Keeping employees informed of the organization's strategy and goals.
2. Providing employees the information they need to perform their assignments well.
3. Encouraging employees to maintain and enhance the organization's standards for and commitment to quality improvement, increased efficiency, improved service, and greater social responsibility.
4. Recognizing employees' achievements and successes.

5. Creating an opportunity for two-way communication to generate employee feedback, questions, and concerns.

Each publication, each issue, each printed word is part of a coordinated employee communication program designed to achieve these and other goals set in response to particular organizational settings and situations. Because of their impact, permanence, and reference value, printed words remain the workhorses of employee communication.

An organizational publication can take the form of a simple newsletter, a website, an intranet, a regularly distributed email, a newspaper, a magazine, or a “magapaper” that combines



Figure 9.2 DyStar Employee Publications

Courtesy DyStar, Frankfurt, Germany.

the format of a newspaper with the style of a magazine. Many are high-

quality, four-color publications (see [Figure 9.2](#)). Some companies now publish corporate history books, using them to tell stories about the company, its founders, and its employees.³⁵

All organizational publications have these characteristics in common: They satisfy the organizational need to go on record with its positions and to communicate information essential for achieving organizational objectives; they permit the organization to deliver messages to specific target publics; and they let the organization communicate in its own words, in its own way, without interruption or alteration. In short, they give the organization a means of controlled communication.

The organizational publication is versatile. It can be edited to serve the narrow interests of its sponsor. It can be edited to shed light on issues important to employees and other publics. Most often it combines editorial content that both espouses the sponsor's point of view and addresses concerns of targeted publics. (Without the latter, of course, it would die for lack of readers outside the inner circle of top management.)

Organizational publications are directed to many publics, but the most common use is in employee communication. Practitioners responding to surveys usually rate employees as a primary audience for organizational publications. The major advantage of publications is their ability to deliver specific and detailed information to narrowly defined target publics who have an interest in the issues being discussed. As a result, many organizations have several employee publications, each designed to meet the information needs of different employee publics. For example, because about half of Callaway Vineyards' employees speak Spanish, it prints its employee publication in both English and Spanish. Ciba Geigy Canada Ltd. publishes its employee publications in both English and French. The front cover and pages to the center staple are in one language; flip the publication, and the back cover becomes the front cover for the half published in the other language.

Many organizations construct their publications as two-way communication—invoiting questions, seeking input and comments, and conducting surveys, then reporting the results. This requires the full cooperation of top management because of the time required to respond to questions and the expense of conducting surveys. Two-way communication also demands a

climate of trust. Employees are often reluctant to submit questions or write for publication, so sometimes comments are solicited anonymously. Nonetheless, internal publications provide an excellent mechanism for feedback and responsive communication. Comment cards provide a greater sense of anonymity to employees than do websites or intranet systems with feedback forms, because those people who want to comment anonymously sometimes fear that electronic communication will be traced back to them.

Printed newsletters remain the “workhorse” of employee communication, even in the computer and intranet age. They are the most common form of periodical publication. Because of readily available and inexpensive desktop publishing technology, newsletters are relatively easy, fast, and inexpensive to produce. As a result, most organizations rely on newsletters to communicate news in a timely and targeted fashion.

Printed publications are also important because not all employees have computer access. For example, at Walgreens—a drugstore company—only 10 percent of employees have daily access to a computer. The company’s corporate magazine, Walgreen World, targets the organization’s front-line employees who have daily contact with Walgreens shoppers. Numbering about 150,000, these employees represent a diverse group, from teenagers working the cash registers to near-retirees filling prescriptions in the pharmacy. Reader surveys from the company indicate that 64 percent of the magazine’s target audience reads the employee publication during lunch or breaks—quite an achievement considering that these employees have access to all the popular magazines being sold in the store![36](#)

Inserts and Enclosures

Anyone who has received bills from utilities or oil companies knows about inserts and enclosures. A common form of insert is the “payroll stuffer” that goes into paycheck envelopes or gets direct deposit receipts. The insert is a valuable medium for appealing to natural constituencies for support and for important notices and news. Examples include calls for employees or stockholders to write to legislators in support of an organization’s stand on a public policy issue, recruit contributions to charitable organizations, or notify

of changes in benefits or procedures.

One obvious advantage of the insert is that the message goes to a strategically targeted public that is predisposed to be interested in the message. Readership and receptivity can be high. Another advantage is economy. A small, lightweight printed insert need not add to postage.

Published Speeches, Position Papers, and Backgrounders

Expressing an organization's position by electronically posting CEO speeches and position statements on an organizational website is a common method of communicating with both external and internal publics. Making such documents available on the website or intranet gives employees easy access to quotes and position statements, helps them follow developments, and enables them to more effectively represent the organization's positions in their communities. Reprinting CEO speeches or news articles in their entirety provides access to employees to the ideas of the CEO that they will probably not have on a personal basis.

Position papers and backgrounders also help employees understand new assignments quickly and might prevent them from exploring previously tried approaches to problems on the issue if they are familiar with the history of the situation. The downside of this information is that generally only publics with a need for information will seek it out. Information seekers benefit from such information, but internal relations must also encourage other employees to visit the publications archive.

Another method of extending the reach of limited-circulation materials is reprinting publications. With permission from the original publications, favorable publicity, analyses of important issues, and other relevant media coverage of interest to an organization's stakeholder publics can be reprinted and distributed. This adds control to what would otherwise be uncontrolled media coverage. Reprints can be added to the organizational archive for employees to continue referring to as necessary.

Bulletin Boards

The use of bulletin boards is widespread and here to stay. If there were no other reason, laws requiring the posting of an ever-increasing number of notices (OSHA and Homeland Security notices, for example) would preserve this medium. Bulletin boards represent both physical spaces that display traditional notices as well as electronic notices. The Safeway supermarket chain takes electronic notices a step further and airs about 1,000 live television broadcasts as a way of reaching managers and department heads at thousands of locations nationwide.³⁷ Bulletin boards offer a good public place to corroborate information with brief messages. They provide quick access for making announcements and countering rumors from both internal and external sources.

In order to be effective, bulletin boards need to have regular attention and to be updated often. Seeing the same notice again and again becomes an annoyance and soon leads to inattention. The same category applies to notices, posters, and placards on walls or columns in work areas. The themes of such postings are usually safety, health, housekeeping, productivity, and security. Keep in mind that many of these items are required by regulations, and the specific mandated wording leaves little room for creativity. Employees get used to these items as part of the environment and often pay little attention to them. Therefore, other forms of internal communication are often needed to supplement bulletin boards and notices in a creative manner to remind employees of the message or to heighten awareness.

Intranets

Intranet postings are for internal use, because only employees can access the Internet-like system. The intranet can contain an email system, electronic employee publications, policy manuals, electronic bulletin boards, and many sources of shared information such as project data. Having information available as an electronic document, such as a procedures manual, allows employees to search the document using key terms.

Using an intranet makes employees more productive because information can be located quickly and shared easily. Approximately three-fourths of American businesses use an intranet system because of the following:

1. It disseminates information widely and rapidly.
2. An intranet empowers employees by providing them with ready access to the information they need.
3. It overcomes geography, so that people in distant locations can work together on projects. Communication is likely to be more frequent and more two-way in a work group that uses an intranet.[38](#)

Senior vice president of IBM Jon Iwata said that during a restructuring, “We figured out that what employees want is one intranet where everything is logically integrated. They don’t want to hop around 8,000 sites; they want to stay in one place and have everything come to them. That requires all kinds of collaboration inside the company.” He estimated that its intranet gave the organization a \$2 billion cost of operation savings in a few years of use.[39](#) Similarly, in 2007, Motorola finished a two-year process of consolidating more than 25 separate company intranets and 5,000 employee blogs into a single site. The result? The intranet site failure rate dropped from 53 percent to only 3 percent, productivity increased, and employee collaboration flourished.[40](#)

Despite their advantages, intranets can create concern in internal relations. The advent of “spyware,” or software that monitors everything a PC does, raises the issue of privacy. Many versions of snooping software can be installed on a machine without the knowledge of the user, and some can even be placed and activated on the computer surreptitiously via email.[41](#) Employees might feel less empowered, and mistrusted, if their every move on the computer is monitored, although this approach can prevent policy infractions such as employee use of scandalous websites. However the ethical and legal issues of computer surveillance are handled, internal publics should be involved in and aware of the decision.

A second problem for an intranet system is that hackers could sabotage, disrupt, or steal information by electronically breaking into the site. Websites

can be hijacked internally by employee hackers or accessed externally to redirect those trying to enter a legitimate site.

For these reasons, security of intranet and Internet sites are major concerns. Potential threats should be communicated about immediately.

Hotlines

Hotlines or toll-free phone numbers are also used in internal relations for disseminating basic information. For example, Johnson & Johnson employees use a toll-free hotline to dial for emergency or weather information, such as closing due to ice or heavy snow. This information is also sent to radio stations, but the hotline provides employees a convenient and expedient source of organizational information.

Email

Perhaps the most ubiquitous form of employee communication today is the email. Emails and e-newsletters “push” information to the attention of employees, thus making them preferable for internal communication compared to electronic channels like intranets and websites, where employees must take the initiative to “pull” the information they seek.[42](#)

New MEDIA

As new technology changes communication, public relations practitioners have adjusted their strategies for reaching internal publics. For example, Southwest Airlines uses CEO podcasts to connect the chief executive with rank-and-file employees.[43](#) UPS celebrated its 100th birthday not only by inviting 100 employees from all over the country to the company’s Seattle headquarters, but also by giving the invitees the chance to share their experience with colleagues, friends, and family using blogs and video from the party.[44](#) Some public relations firms even use Facebook to strengthen

employee relationships, with colleagues also becoming one another's "friends."⁴⁵ On the other hand, many organizations prohibit employees from using social media while at work, due to concerns about what employees might say about the company.⁴⁶

Listening to Employees

When organizational culture is participative, employees are given opportunities to communicate their questions and concerns to the management. As noted earlier, this feedback can be sought in meetings or by using employee publications and emails. However, one challenge to getting feedback from employees is that people often do not want to ask questions for fear of being labeled a "troublemaker." To overcome this challenge, some organizations provide hotlines and toll-free phone numbers, as noted earlier, which allow employees to call with concerns or even as an anonymous whistle-blower source to report fraud. Anonymous email systems are also used as "tip-off" hotlines in which employees can report wrongdoing for further investigation without the stigma of being named the "whistle-blower."

In the United States, section 301(4)(B) of the Sarbanes Oxley Act requires publicly held (i.e., stock issuing) organizations to have an anonymous system that allows for reporting "questionable" accounting and management practices. As a result, companies that act as third-party call centers have become popular because they guarantee source anonymity and have a consistent method of interviewing callers and documenting claims for further investigation. For a good example, visit www.tnwinc.com, a company that says it provides whistle-blower service to nearly 50 percent of the largest American businesses.

Hotlines should not be limited to whistle-blower alerts, however. They can also be helpful for identifying trends within the organization that are problematic and need resolution before they rise to the level of an issue or crisis. The concerns reported on a hotline can range from work schedule conflicts with picking up children before the daycare center closes, to exposing someone padding an expense account report, to accusations of sexual harassment.

Another way for organizations to listen to their employees is to provide the services of an ombudsman or ombuds officer. This person is charged with giving employees the opportunity to share their concerns and resolve them through informal mediation. For example, an ombuds officer can help prevent an employee sexual harassment lawsuit by helping to negotiate a satisfactory resolution for both the accuser and the alleged harasser. Information provided to the ombuds officer usually is considered confidential, as well as a good way to monitor emerging trends and potential problems the organization may be facing.

More information on ways in which organizations can listen to their employees, as well as to other organizational stakeholders, is provided in [Chapter 11](#), which explains Organizations can listen to their employees via various informal and formal methods of collecting data, or conducting research. An understanding of research is important for public relations practitioners, including those responsible for internal communication.[47](#) Increasing numbers of organizations are conducting surveys to measure a variety of concerns, from employees' levels of engagement with the organization to whether a supervisor covered job basics during orientation.[48](#)

Connecting Employees

Internal relations must go beyond employer-to-employee communication, and even beyond employee-to-employer communication. Internal relations is also about connecting employees to each other. Traditionally, such activities as company picnics or family days brought employees together to connect socially, away from work duties. In a more modern twist, IBM nurtured its corporate culture using an internal social networking site that functioned like Facebook but was only accessible to employees. Called BluePages, this tool was accessed 6 million times each day by IBM employees around the world, facilitating employee connections and collaborations.[49](#) With increasing numbers of Millennials entering the workforce, these online tools for connecting employees is one way for employers to attract and keep young talent.[50](#)

This chapter did not cover all the internal media available to practitioners.

The intent here was to introduce the major media and employee communication channels used in internal relations. Controlled media are the primary means for communicating with internal publics. The composition and concentration of internal publics makes them relatively easy to reach with controlled media such as employee publications and the intranet, as well as with nonmediated efforts. Because external publics are often large and dispersed, sometimes making controlled media impractical, uncontrolled media and other communication targeted at external publics are discussed in the next chapter .

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Study Guide

1. How would you define internal relations and employee communication?
2. Why is the internal relations function an important one for organizations?
3. What are some ways in which organizational culture affects internal communication?
4. Contrast an organization with an open system of internal relations against one with a closed system.
5. What are some of the regulatory and business contexts for internal relations?
6. What are some major purposes of employee communication?
7. What are some nonmediated and mediated means of communicating with internal publics?

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Chapter 10 External Media and Media Relations

Learning Outcomes

After studying [Chapter 10](#) this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Discuss the major controlled and uncontrolled media used for communicating with external publics.
2. Outline how new media and social media affect external communication practices.
3. Define the relationship between practitioners and journalists as being mutually dependent and mutually beneficial, but as sometimes adversarial.
4. Outline basic guidelines for building good media relations and working with the media.

Every newspaper when it reaches the reader is the result of a whole series of selections as to what items shall be printed, in what position they shall be printed, how much space each shall occupy, what emphasis each shall have. There are no objective standards here. There are conventions.

—Walter Lippmann, 1922 [1](#)

The Internet gives you the power to end-run reporters, editors, and even complete news organizations when you really need to communicate directly with important audiences.

—Shirley Fulton and Al Guyant, 2002 [2](#)

Practitioners of public relations use printed words, spoken words, images, and combinations of all these communication forms. They use both controlled media and uncontrolled media to communicate with their organizations' many publics. Controlled media include those in which practitioners have the say over what is said, how it is said, when it is said, and—to some extent—to whom it is said. Many of these were discussed in [Chapter 9](#). Uncontrolled media—sometimes called “earned media”—are those over which practitioners have no direct role in decisions about media content. Instead, media gatekeepers decide if something is reported, what is reported, how it is reported, when it is reported, and to whom it is reported.

Technology has changed our notions about media, especially the concept of mass media. Three key changes with implications for public relations are as follows: (1) audiences have become fragmented, choosing ever smaller niche media for their own unique needs, as opposed to being part of an undifferentiated mass; (2) audiences are more active, choosing two-way media that permit interactivity, as opposed to one-way media that permitted only passive reception of information; and (3) a “citizen journalist” today is anybody with a camera cell phone and Internet access, as opposed to a trained professional who reports the news.

What follows is a snapshot of the major media used in public relations. The first part of this chapter examines the traditional media used primarily to reach large and dispersed publics. The second part of the chapter summarizes some of the new media and social media that have changed public relations practice. The chapter concludes with a discussion of media relations, historically one of public relations' primary assignments.

Traditional Media, New Uses

Traditional mass media have long provided economical, effective methods of communicating with large and widely dispersed publics. Consequently, work in public relations requires understanding of and skills in using newspapers, magazines, trade publications, radio, television, cable, direct mail, books, and so on. To handle this part of the job, practitioners must understand the role of information, the various media and their production requirements, and the

values of the gatekeepers who control access.

Practitioners also need to understand that media are constrained by their mechanical requirements, their values, their rules, and—for many—the necessity of “delivering” an audience to advertisers. Today’s communicators are confronted with a paradox: Multiplying channels of communication permit a sharper focus of messages but greatly escalate competition for audience attention. Furthermore, audiences today are more fragmented than in generations past, and they are also more active in the selection of which media messages get their attention.

Mass media reach nearly every home and workplace, showering citizens with far more messages than they can absorb. General and specialized media appear to represent an easy way to disseminate ideas and information to publics, but appearances can be deceptive. Just because these media distribute messages and have audiences does not mean that the messages are received, attended to, or acted upon.

Additionally, the traditional mass media have a relatively fixed capacity; newspapers and magazines have a limited number of columns for editorial matter, and there are only 24 hours in a broadcast day. Hence, no one of these media can possibly convey all the news and information available. Receivers also have limited time and attention to give to the millions of messages. Even in the 24-hour-every-day media world crammed with messages, only a tiny portion get past the door and into the home by way of traditional media. Few of those get attention. Fewer yet have impact.

Nonetheless, mass media constitute the key components in a nation’s public-information system, a system in which public relations practitioners play an increasingly important role as sources for an expanding proportion of the content. Many sources compete for access to media, however, so practitioners must continually adjust their communication strategy to rapidly changing media and audiences.

Despite the advent of new media technologies, the idea that “traditional media are dead” is a myth. In fact, findings of a media usage survey by Ketchum and the University of Southern California Annenberg Strategic Public Relations Center show that 62 percent of consumers tune in to their

local television news, 63 percent read local newspapers, 65 percent watch major network news, and 49 percent watch cable network news.³ Thus, this chapter begins with a discussion of traditional media, because they remain the core of public relations practice.

Newspapers

In spite of declining numbers and decreasing readership, newspapers remain the workhorse of the public information system. When people think of publicity, they almost instinctively think of the newspaper. And for good reason, because newspaper coverage remains the foundation of most political and public policy information programs . . . and frequently serves as the source of much that gets reported in other media.

Daily, weekend, Sunday, weekly, semiweekly, ethnic, labor, religious, scholastic, and foreign-language newspapers typically are read by the most literate people, whether online or in print. For the most influential citizens—the “opinion leaders” discussed in [Chapter 8](#)—reading the newspaper is as much a daily habit as eating and sleeping. In fact, one study found that “readers of newspaper Web sites are 52 percent more likely to share their opinions than those who do not visit newspaper sites.”⁴ As a result, the influence of the world’s great newspapers is also great. Journalism scholar John C. Merrill refers to these as the “internationally elite newspapers”:

Such papers—mainly dailies—are read by the world’s intellectuals, political and opinion leaders, and cosmopolitan, concerned citizens of various countries. They are directed at a fairly homogeneous audience globally and have a greater interest in international relations and the arts and humanities than the general run of mass-appeal papers. They are well-informed, articulate papers that thoughtful people the world over take seriously.⁵

U.S. papers on Merrill’s list of elite dailies include The New York Times, Los Angeles Times, The Washington Post, and The Christian Science Monitor—the latter now published online only. His European list includes Le Monde in France, Neue Zürcher Zeitung in Switzerland, El País in Spain, The

Daily Telegraph in England, and Svenska Dagbladet in Sweden. Asia's elite dailies include Japan's Asahi Shimbun and Mainichi Shimbun and India's The Times of India and The Statesman. In the 2011 European Opinion Leaders Survey (EOLS) of more than 1,600 business executives, politicians, scientists, media staff, and artists in 17 countries, the London-based Financial Times ranked as the most "influential" and "respected" international media title.⁶

According to Merrill, "The elite papers recognize that they will not reach many people, but they seek to have an impact that no other medium does on the serious, intellectual, opinion-leading segment of the world community."⁷ Although not on his list of elite papers, the The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) and USA Today both reach large U.S. and international audiences, with the WSJ surpassing USA Today as the largest U.S. daily with a worldwide circulation of more than 2.1 million and readership of 4.3 million adults in 80 markets. USA Today has a circulation of more than 1.8 million, with more than 3.2 million readers.⁸

Newspapers are a moving force in society. As the late Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter once said: "To an extent far beyond the public's own realization, public opinion is shaped by the kind, the volume, and the quality of the news columns." Nor should editorial endorsement be totally discounted. For example, when last-minute challenges threatened to bring to a halt the "Block E" downtown revitalization project in Minneapolis, public relations firm Carmichael Lynch Spong helped place an opinion piece written with the city mayor in the Star Tribune, the major daily in Minnesota. Within days, the paper's editorial staff wrote a similarly supportive editorial. The project proceeded without serious opposition and delay.

Newspaper scholars have suggested that the power of the press comes from its impact on public interest in important issues (see [Chapter 8](#) for discussion of the agenda-setting function). For example, newspaper readers' opinions about candidates for public office are affected by whether the local newspaper covered those candidates positively or negatively.⁹ Although no longer the primary news medium for the majority of Americans, newspapers remain a powerful force in shaping the public agenda and influencing the outcome of debate. In addition, newspapers remain the primary medium

when consumers look for advertising, with the Internet second.[10](#)

Since the early part of the twentieth century until World War II, when newspapers were the prime source of news and entertainment, the number of daily newspapers has declined. The number began to stabilize in the 1950s and remained about the same through the mid-1970s. For example, there were 1,772 daily papers in 1950, with only 16 fewer, 1,756, in 1975. Today, however, the number has dropped to fewer than 1,450 dailies because of mergers and discontinued editions.[11](#)

Newspaper circulation in the United States peaked in the early 1990s at almost 63 million, but now is less than 50 million. In 2011, for example, all but 7 of the 25 largest U.S. newspapers reported lower circulation. The New York Times remains the largest Sunday paper with more than 1.3 million subscribers. The Wall Street Journal increased its electronic circulation by 22 percent to more than 500,000.[12](#) The number of daily newspaper readers per copy remains relatively stable at 2.3, but has increased during the past decade to almost 2.6 for Sunday newspapers.[13](#)

Although newspaper circulation is decreasing in the United States, Australia, and much of Europe, it is increasing significantly in Africa, South American, and Asia. Total worldwide newspaper circulation totals more than 540 million daily sales, not counting the millions of free newspaper distributed each day, according to the World Association of Newspapers.[14](#) There are now more than 2,700 subscription daily newspapers in India, with an increase of more than 45 percent since 2005. India now has more paid-for newspapers than any other country, and The Times of India is the world's biggest English-language newspaper, with a circulation of 4 million. According to The Economist, even with 200 million Indians reading newspapers each day, experts predict more growth because broadband remains beyond the reach of most of the almost billion nonsubscribers.[15](#)

In a Newspaper Association of America survey, 45 percent of adults said they had read a daily print newspaper or its online edition "yesterday," 45 percent had read a newspaper last Sunday, and 65 percent had read a daily and/or Sunday print newspaper during the past week. However, only 25 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds read a newspaper daily, compared to more than 55 percent of those 55 and older. On the other hand, more than 58 percent of all

college graduates and more than 57 percent of heads of household with incomes greater than \$100,000 read newspapers in print or online.¹⁶ Newspapers tend to attract disproportionately white readers, however. Forty-nine percent of whites read a daily newspaper, but only 43 percent of African Americans, 38 percent of Asians, and only 27 percent of Hispanic adults.¹⁷

The number and circulation of weekly and other newspapers published less than four times each week has rebounded in recent years. There are 6,659 “weeklies” with a total circulation of almost 50 million.¹⁸ Most weeklies emphasize local news about government, nonprofit organizations, schools, sports, business developments, and personal news. Likewise, births, weddings, anniversaries, and obituaries are big news.

The Sunday paper generally gets a more intensive and leisurely reading. It tends to emphasize feature material—stories without a time element—with stories often more like those in a magazine than in a daily paper. In addition, practitioners should not overlook the national Sunday supplement magazines and local weekend magazines published by large-city newspapers. For example, 600 Sunday newspapers distribute Parade Magazine, with a circulation of 32 million and almost 70 million readers. The second-largest Sunday supplement is Gannett Co., Inc.’s USA Weekend, which is distributed by 700 newspapers each weekend with a circulation of almost 23 million and 48 million readers.¹⁹

Newspaper space allocated to news has decreased in recent years, at least relative to the increased glut of information pouring into newsrooms. Typically newspapers devote about 50 percent of their space to editorial matter, some as little as 25 percent. The rest is advertising (averaging 46 percent) and unpaid public service (4 percent). Local news makes up the largest proportion of editorial content—about 75 percent of all news published.

The strengths of newspapers are many. No other medium offers comparable audience size and breadth, day in and day out, or the range and depth of content. Most newspapers are produced in local communities and are indigenous to those communities. They have a firsthand intimacy with their local publics. The local YMCA can reach its community publics through its local newspaper. The state health department can reach its publics through

the state's daily and weekly newspapers. A commercial concern with regional distribution can reach its publics using a regional selection of newspapers. Similarly, a national organization can reach many national audiences with newspapers. In short, local connections give newspapers a perceived credibility that is hard to match.

Technology has changed not only the content of newspapers, but also their organizational structures, business models, and how they process news and information (see [Exhibit 10.1](#)). Increasingly, newspapers are charging online readers for access to what had been free on the Internet, with almost half of newspapers with circulations under 25,000 implementing “paywalls.”²⁰



Exhibit 10.1

Newspapers Try to Find Their Way in Changing Times

Bill Furlow, Partner*Furlow Communications

Natchez, Mississippi

This is a trying time for newspapers. It may, in fact, be the end of their era as the fundamental source of information, not only for their own readers but for other news media as well.

Competition from new media for readership and ad revenue has

caused profitability—already unacceptably low for many investors—to plummet. Companies that just a few years ago were consolidating their newspaper holdings are looking now for exit strategies. Papers in big cities like Philadelphia, Detroit, Denver, San Francisco, and Seattle are folding or hanging on by a thread. Newsroom staffs are shrinking dramatically, and the appetite for the most expensive types of reporting is waning.

Despite all that, newspapers remain a bread-and-butter information source for many people and are still the best way to communicate certain stories. Readers who get all their news from online sources like the Huffington Post, the Daily Beast, or the websites of Fox News or CNN are still reading stories directly or indirectly produced by newspaper reporters.

But the line between newspapers and other media has essentially dissolved. No longer does a newspaper reporter spend hours, perhaps days, gathering facts before sitting down to write and rewrite a story he or she hopes is comprehensive and easily understandable. As with wire services of old, today's newspaper journalist is under constant pressure to get the story on the Web. Rather than a sidebar, the reporter must blog, even tweet—not a moment to be wasted. Even in federal court, the most staid, decorous venue this side of the Vatican, reporters are sending nearly verbatim transcripts of proceedings almost in real time.

Naturally, the rush to publish leads to less research, shallower thinking, poorer editing and more mistakes.

So how do these changes affect the public relations professional?

For young persons entering the profession, probably not much other than having to listen to war stories about how there once was a simpler time—the 1990s—when newspapers were king and everyone knew the rules. Today's young adult is accustomed to living in a world in which information is amorphous, so the hard part might be learning to deal with newspapers at all.

But there are reasons to keep newspapers in the media mix when planning a public relations campaign, handling a crisis, or promoting an issue or cause.

Other than magazines, which publish less frequently and are harder to crack, papers still have the best resources for explaining a complex issue. And, notwithstanding the previous discussion of newsroom downsizing, they do have editors to at least attempt to function as a buffer, asking questions of the reporter and checking for accuracy.

The opinion pages of newspapers remain the daily forum for political discussion, usually with opposing sides of issues argued on op-ed pages.

And in smaller cities and towns, the newspaper may be the only source of original reporting.

The fact that many community newspapers are financially healthy is good for their owners, good for young journalists, and good for their readers. But dealing with a young, overworked staff has its own set of problems. For example, an entire paper may lack institutional knowledge that goes back more than just a few years. So proper context cannot be assumed; rather it must be provided by the PR person working with the journalist.

It is infuriating to see an inexperienced reporter become seduced by one side of a controversy before completing the basic reporting on a story. And it's mind-blowing for papers to publish accusations without seeking response.

These situations require the PR person to deluge the reporter with information, including fundamental background, to stress repeatedly that he or she is available to answer further questions and to insist that the client be treated fairly, including being given an opportunity to comment on any allegation that will be published.

One positive change is that reporters are easier to reach than they

were in the “good old days.” Their emails are nearly always given at the ends of their stories, and they read emails frequently. Cell phone numbers are often left on reporters’ voice mail greetings. The demand on them to produce copy in real time has the upside of making them more accessible.

Newspapers are struggling to find the formula that will allow them to be relevant and to make money. Most aren’t there yet. Nevertheless, they still serve millions of readers and remain important to many of our employers and clients. The day may come when we no longer need this kind of page in a textbook text like this. But it’s not here yet.

*Furlow is a former Los Angeles Times editor and is a partner in Furlow Communications, LLC (www.furlowcommunications.com), which specializes in crisis and strategic communications.

But convincing people to pay for online access remains largely an experiment for newspapers. As one skeptic said, “That’s only going to work where you have highly specialized information that’s not available anywhere else.”²¹

Economics have also changed newspaper relationships. Instead of being fierce competitors with radio and television stations in their markets, many now share the same ownership. As a result, they may share staff and content. Some newspapers form alliances with broadcast and cable media to share content and to attract larger audiences for their advertisers. Hence, the title in [Exhibit 10.1](#)—“Newspapers Try to Find Their Way in Changing Times.”

Wire Services and News Syndicates

News wire services economically and effectively distribute human interest stories and spot news to state, regional, national, or international media. For timely stories not limited to a locale, placing them on the wires increases the likelihood of immediate and widespread coverage. Being carried by a wire service also increases the acceptability of the practitioner’s copy. A well-written wire story can reach newspaper readers, radio listeners, and TV

viewers across the nation or around the world. Transmitting millions of words and pictures daily, wire services are influential beyond calculation. Access to these networks is through the nearest bureau or “stringer” correspondent.

Each of the two major wire services in the United States operates international, national, regional, state, and local bureaus. In addition to their newspaper subscribers, both serve online and broadcast customers with news copy and audio feeds. Both sell their news reporting services and products to media worldwide.

The Associated Press, founded in 1846 and headquartered in New York City, has 3,700 employees working in 300 locations worldwide. “AP”—as it is better known—sends news in six languages to almost 17,000 media subscribers in 121 countries. As the AP website boasts, “On any given day, more than half the world’s population sees news from AP.” It is a not-for-profit cooperative owned by 1,500 member newspaper and broadcast members. Subscribers in the United States include almost 1,700 newspapers, 5,000 radio and television stations, and the AP “Essential News Production System” (AP ENPS) operating in 800 newsrooms in more than 60 countries. In addition, AP markets its news services and content to nonmedia clients. Beginning in early 1993, AP began transmitting publicity photos for a fee, putting it in direct competition with the publicity wire services. (See www.ap.org.)

United Press International (UPI) is headquartered in Washington, D.C., and has been owned since 2000 by global multimedia company News World Communications. It was formed in 1958 by the merger of United Press (founded in 1907 by newspaper magnate E. W. Scripps) and William Randolph Hearst’s International News Service. UPI operates under the principles that it provides an independent coverage of world news and that any newspaper or news organization may purchase the news product. In addition to English, it provides Middle East news coverage in Arabic and Latin America coverage in Spanish. UPI maintains offices in Beirut, Hong Kong, London, Santiago, Seoul, and Tokyo. (See www.upi.com.)

The world’s largest international news agency is New York-based Reuters (formerly based in London), with more than 2,800 full-time editorial staff,

journalists, photographers, and videographers working in more than 200 bureaus in more than 100 countries. Even though best known for its news products, about 90 percent of Reuters' revenue comes from its financial services business, with more than 370,000 financial professionals as subscribers (see <http://www.about.reuters.com>). Founded in 1851 as an independent company, Reuters was acquired in April 2008 by Stamford, Connecticut-based Thomson Corporation, an international information services company with more than 55,000 employees.²²

Internationally, Agence France-Presse (France)—the world's first international news agency, Xinhua News Agency—"New China News Agency" (People's Republic of China), and Kyodo News (Japan) are among the other major news services providing news and features to newspapers, radio, television, magazines, and private subscribers. These are large organizations with reporters, editors, and other staff in most major capitals and market centers.

U.S. and international newspapers also subscribe to news services offered by The New York Times, The Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, MCT News Service (McClatchy-Tribune Information Services), and news syndicates such as King Features Syndicate (Hearst Entertainment and Syndication Group), and United Feature Syndicate and Newspaper Enterprises Association (both owned by E. W. Scripps Company).

Much like the news wire services, commercial public relations wires provide news from organizations and public relations firms. Practitioners use these distribution services to speed time-critical news releases simultaneously into newsrooms worldwide.

PR Newswire (PRN) introduced electronic distribution of news releases in New York City in 1954. PRN now has 26 offices in the United States and 14 other countries (see <http://www.prnewswire.com>). Other public relations wires copied the concept, starting competing national systems in the United States, Canada, and England, followed by worldwide news-release distribution systems. For example, Business Wire began operations in 1961 and grew rapidly, totaling more than 500 employees in 26 U.S. offices and offices in Brussels, London, Frankfurt, Paris, Tokyo, Toronto, and Sydney. In 2006, Business Wire became a wholly owned subsidiary of Warren Buffett's

Berkshire Hathaway (see <http://www.businesswire.com>) and celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2011.

Although they differ greatly in size, all these services operate in essentially the same way: charging clients to electronically transmit text, photographs, audio and video news releases, as well as regulatory postings (such as the required SEC financial disclosures discussed in [Chapter 6](#)), to the media and other organizations. Clients pay fees based on the extent and type of distribution ordered, but media receive these news services at no charge. In addition, public relations wire services also sell monitoring and measurement services, providing clients metrics indicating the extent of message dissemination, media placement, and potential audience size.



Courtesy PR Newswire

Because they offer fast, simultaneous transmission to the media, practitioners use these wires to send news ranging from major corporate developments, earnings reports, obituaries, and even invitations to news conferences. They are especially useful in times of emergency. For example, when a baby food manufacturer learned that glass shards had been found in a shipment, the commercial news services could quickly and simultaneously distribute a product recall to many media outlets.

Another large portion of print and electronic media content is supplied by the feature, photo, and specialized news syndicates. As in the case of the wire services, placement of a feature or a picture with a syndicate ensures wide, economical distribution and increases the acceptability of material. Most syndicates also distribute columns and comics. For example, United Feature Syndicate distributes columns and commentaries, editorial cartoons, and 150 comic strips. Offerings include Scott Adams's popular "Dilbert," the late Charles Schulz's "Peanuts Classics," and Stephan Pastis's "Pearls Before Swine." Syndicates charge fees based on each medium's circulation or audience size.

As in the case of paid publicity wires, there are also feature services that supply newspapers and periodicals with material without charge. Sponsoring clients pay the bill. Typical is North American Precis Syndicate, Inc. (NAPS), with offices in New York, Washington, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Detroit, and Palm Beach. In its “Feaurettes” service, NAPS distributes consumer news and information for 750 public relations firms, corporations, associations, and government public affairs offices to more than 10,000 dailies, weeklies, monthlies, shoppers, and online publications. NAPS’ monthly “Consumer Science News & Notes” goes to 1,000 television stations in the form of video news releases, B-roll, and animated still photos. “Radio Roundup” distributes two-monthly 60- and 3-second spots on CDs, paper scripts, MP3s, and scripts posted on the company’s website. (See <http://www.napsnet.com>.)

Magazines

More than 20,700 magazines and specialized publications published in the United States offer effective specialized channels of communication to narrowly defined audiences.²³ Variations in content and audience appeal are almost limitless and ever changing, attracting more than 325 million subscriptions and single copy sales.²⁴ In 2010 alone, hopeful publishers launched 180 new magazines, but based on historical trends, only one in three will survive more than five years, disappointing enthusiastic publishers who had visions of attracting both subscribers and advertisers.²⁵

Historians generally agree that Benjamin Franklin originated the concept of a magazine when he published General Magazine in January 1741.²⁶ Technically, Andrew Bradford’s American Magazine was the first American magazine, because it appeared in print three days before Franklin’s magazine. Historians also agree, however, that America’s first “national medium” was Franklin’s Saturday Evening Post, first published in 1821.



Magazines provide an array and variety of communication media to reach audiences who share common interests, including websites now produced by more than 7,000 consumer magazines.²⁷ Circulation giants such as AARP The Magazine, Reader's Digest, TV Guide, Better Homes and Gardens, National Geographic, Good Housekeeping, Family Circle, Ladies Home Journal, Woman's Day, Time, and People reach large national audiences. More narrowly targeted magazines include Cooking Light, More, Rolling Stone, Wired, Wine Spectator, Fine Homebuilder, and Architectural Digest. Trade and business magazine include Hoard's Dairyman, Women's Wear Daily, The Economist, BusinessWeek, Fortune, and Forbes. The sports-recreation-hobby magazines category includes Art of the West, Golf Digest, Field & Stream, Motor Trend, Popular Science, Snowboarder, and Outdoor Life. Clearly, magazines enable communicators to target specific messages to specific audiences.

The changing magazine market—from general to specialized publications—reflects the nation’s changing interests and lifestyles. There is a magazine or periodical catering to almost every interest, vocation, and hobby. Advances in offset printing and computerized production have stimulated circulation and advertising revenues by giving advertisers options for buying targeted portions of the total circulation. Farm Journal, published since 1877, customizes each issue according to subscribers’ crops, livestock, farm size, and location, once producing an issue with almost 9,000 different versions.²⁸ Regional advertising in such national magazines as Time and Newsweek, for example, allows advertisers to advertise to a market within a market, even local markets, based on subscribers’ ZIP codes.

Thousands of business and professional publications serve the specialized needs of professional groups, trade associations, and business and industry. These publications generally use prepared news releases if the content serves their readers’ economic or professional needs. Each of these publications caters to a carefully defined audience, usually representing the membership lists of the organization publishing the magazine. Examples include PRSA’s The Strategist, IABC’s Communication World, and the American Medical Association’s American Medical News. In addition to collecting subscription fees built into membership fees, many of these publications carry advertising for products and services specific to readers’ occupations or professional practices.

Magazines offer several advantages: Opinion leaders read magazines. For example, one study showed that fashion opinion leaders were more likely to read fashion magazines than were non-opinion leaders on fashion-related topics.²⁹ Also, young and diverse populations read magazines. For example, 83 percent of African American adults read magazines, as do 75 percent of Hispanics/Latinos. Sixty-six percent of teenagers read magazines.³⁰

Magazines provide more durable information than newspapers. Magazine readers have the opportunity to read, reread, discuss, and debate the information gleaned from this source. Readers with special interests turn to magazines for in-depth treatment of topics, such as when older citizens report that magazines are second only to health care specialists as a source for health information. Magazines shape opinions, create preferences for

fashions and products, influence house designs and decoration, help set standards for professions and businesses, and enlist political support. And even though most magazines are now available online, 87 percent of readers still want a printed copy.[31](#)

Practitioners study magazines' topics, styles, policies, trends, formats, and so forth, and then apply this knowledge by targeting news and features to specific magazines. They generally do not submit unsolicited material, however. Rather, they work on a tip or query basis when they have something that would have reader appeal. They submit story outlines or feature suggestions. If one is accepted, a practitioner works with the magazine's staff or freelance writers to develop the story. The practitioner's job is to sell ideas to editors and then to cooperate with writers and photographers, who build the ideas into articles.

Magazine publicity placement is almost essential for organizations seeking to influence national or specialized audiences. Yet many practitioners fail in their efforts to get such publicity because they do not understand the lead time of national magazines and the stiff competition for space. The competition comes from the magazine's own editors and staff writers, frequent contributors, and freelance writers who write regularly for national magazines.

Practitioners sometimes overlook working with freelancers. Freelance writers who regularly sell to national magazines are interested in a story about an institution, a person, or an event that possesses at least one of these three qualities: (1) national importance or significance; (2) elements of struggle, conflict, contest, or drama; and (3) anecdotal enrichment and entertainment value. In other words, give the story to a freelance writer. The experienced freelancer known to the magazine gets a check from the magazine, and the practitioner gets a publicity placement in a magazine.

Radio

Radio offers a wide range of publicity possibilities. It is a mobile medium suited to a mobile people. (Newspaper people like to point out that their

medium is also “mobile,” and batteries are not required. That appears to be changing, however, with the growing number of subscribers using e-readers, such as the iPad.) Radio reaches the shower and breakfast table in the morning; rides to and from work in the car; goes along to the beach, to the woods, and on fishing trips; and lulls us to sleep at night—a flexibility no other medium can match.

Radio listening in the United States remains relatively constant at two and a half hours a day, or about 16 hours each week. On a typical weekday, 73 percent of adults listen to radio in vehicles and 28 percent listen at home. Every day, more than 71 percent of those aged 12 years and older listen to radio—reaching a daily audience of more than 183 million listeners. Also, in the United States, about 57 million aged 12 and older listen to the radio via the Internet, up from 29 million online radio listeners the previous year. Of those online radio listeners, 63 percent had a profile on a social networking site such as MySpace, Facebook, or LinkedIn.³² This information illustrates how old media, with new uses and users, continue to be relevant to public relations practice.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) lists 14,420 licensed full-power radio stations in the United States, of which 3,151 are public “educational” FM stations. There are 4,790 AM stations and 6,479 FM stations.³³ The total number of stations is almost 25,000, when Internet streaming AM and FM stations, and high-definition digital AM and FM stations, are included.³⁴ The AM dial is so crowded that nearly half the AM stations (“daytimers”) have to shut down 15 minutes after sunset to avoid interfering with others’ signals. Subscription satellite radio is a fast-growing option, because it is usually free of advertisements and offers an array of format choices.

Public relations practitioners use radio news releases and audio feeds sent to stations through networks such as CNN (Atlanta, GA, <http://www.cnn.com>), North American Network (Bethesda, MD, <http://www.nanradio.com/services.htm>), and News Broadcast Network (New York City, <http://www.newsbroadcastnetwork.com>). Distribution is over the Internet or telephone lines to stations targeted by region and format. CNN Podcasts, for example, distributes audio feeds to affiliated stations worldwide, 24 hours a

day with four minutes of news on the hour, two-minute updates 30 minutes later, and one-minute news cutaways. To increase local station airings, some audio news services also provide interviews or sound bites that stations then localize.

Even though it is a “mass” medium, radio possesses the qualities of direct, personal touch, because it uses the spoken word, for the most part, to convey its message. Broadcast pioneer Arthur Godfrey understood this intimate quality when he decided that other radio speakers were reading to, not talking with, their audiences. He decided that he would always have a mental image of talking to only one person on the other side of the microphone.

Indeed, radio is a person-to-person medium that flourishes on conversation. Call-in talk shows now help set the public agenda and provide a forum for public debate on many local and national issues. The potential impact is great. For example, listeners of radio talk shows tend to reflect the even more partisan political orientations of show hosts, such as those of conservative commentator Rush Limbaugh.³⁵

Almost every major city has its own radio all-talk shows that capitalize on local conflict, sensational topics, and legitimate public debate of important issues. Increased emphasis on the discussion format opens up many possibilities for practitioners. Popular talk shows and telephone interviews focusing on controversial issues have an almost insatiable appetite for guests with a message—however controversial it may be.

Free public service time on radio seldom is prime listening time, but it is not without value. Since the Federal Communications Commission relaxed its public service requirements for broadcasters, many stations have reduced the number of public service and other nonrevenue programs they broadcast. Yet most stations provide some free time to nonprofit agencies as part of the station’s community relations program. In non-prime time, the competition for airtime is less intense than during the more desirable—and sellable—drive time and other high-listenership hours. That is not to say, however, that nonprofit organizations do not have access to prime time.

One approach is to provide radio (and television) public service announcements (PSAs)—10 seconds, 30 seconds, or 60 seconds in length. A

PSA is any announcement that promotes programs and services of government and voluntary agencies, for which no payment is made to the station. Stations set their own standards, but most use well-prepared PSAs. And they can be effective. For example, the Ad Council produces and distributes PSAs promoting use of seat belts, booster seats, and baby seats, no doubt saving many lives. Local, regional, and state groups promote recycling, storm water pollution prevention, and litter reduction. (For one example, see “Don’t Mess with Texas” at <http://dontmesswithtexas.org>.)

Television

The communication phenomenon of the twentieth century was television. No other medium matches television’s ability to provide a window on the world. What other medium could transmit live coverage from the international space station as an astronaut and cosmonaut make repairs outside the craft? How could any other medium convey the sights, sounds, and feelings of the unrest in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, Bahrain, Morocco, Libya, and Syria during the “Arab Spring” of 2011? And most vivid of all, what other medium could convey the horror of the earthquake and tsunami devastation of northeastern Japan?

Television combines the printed word, spoken word, video, color, music, animation, and sound effects into one message, making it a powerful medium. As discussed in [Chapter 8](#), television’s ability to shape our views of the world is explained by cultivation theory. Television offers a vast range of possibilities for telling a story—from a terse 30-second video on a TV newscast, to a half-hour or one-hour documentary, to 24-hour coverage of a crisis such as Hurricane Katrina and the riots in London, to a miniseries extended over several evenings or weeks. Satellites relay news to and from any place on the globe, making the powerful, pervasive impact of television a worldwide phenomenon. In 1963, television became the primary source of news in the United States, surpassing newspapers.

In the United States, 1,782 commercial and educational television stations broadcast almost around the clock to nearly every household.³⁶ More than 6,100 cable systems in the United States, carrying an average of more than

100 channels, give viewers more options than they can carefully consider.³⁷ The average time a television is on in a household surpasses the length of a typical workday—8 hours and 21 minutes—and reaches 90 percent of adults.³⁸ Children spend an average of three and a half hours each day watching television.³⁹ They grow up using the remote control to explore a seemingly endless array of program services such as Disney, Discovery, Black Entertainment Television (BET), ESPN, TNT, HBO, CNN, and C-SPAN, to name but a few.

This is our most intimate mass medium, yet it provides information about weather, traffic, and sports to more than half the population each day.⁴⁰ Television rears our young, serves as the prime source of news and entertainment for most Americans, and provides a powerful soapbox from which citizens' protests can be communicated to the nation and the world. This medium has greatly altered national election campaigns and diminished the role of the political parties.

Researchers in Germany, for example, found that the agenda reflected on TV newscasts changed not only awareness of problems but also voting intentions.⁴¹ National and international wire services and global TV news networks have created a truly global forum. Events made large by TV shape public opinion worldwide.

Television greatly heightens citizen awareness of the conduct of public institutions. It also creates a sense of frustration for citizens, who witness much that they cannot control—be it the war in Afghanistan, collapse of the World Trade Center towers, bodies of drug war victims in Mexico, bloated stomachs of starving Somali children and refugees in Kenya, those left homeless after a tornado destroyed much of Joplin, Missouri, and the long lines of the desperate unemployed waiting to interview for low-paying jobs. In fact, some research has documented “compassion fatigue,” meaning that people who are exposed constantly to bad news on television just get tired of hearing about it and become less prone to doing something about it.⁴²

Even with the popularity of the Internet, television remains an integral part of our lives; one study found that 46 percent of consumers who go online regularly visit the website of a television network.⁴³

Heavy reliance on television as a primary source of news disturbs thoughtful observers who know that the limits of time and dominance of dramatic pictures inevitably oversimplify and distort the news. For example, evening network shows, watched by millions of people each night, must tell the story of the world in 4,000 words or less, the equivalent of four columns in a standard-sized newspaper. A “major” story gets 58 seconds. Before retiring from the MacNeil-Lehrer News Hour on PBS (now the NewsHour), Robert MacNeil bluntly admitted,

In most of the stories television cares to cover there is always the “right bit,” the most violent, the most bloody, the most pathetic, the most tragic, the most wonderful, the most awful moment. Getting the effective “bit” is what television news is all about.[44](#)

The wide range of news stories and time pressures in television news, coupled with today’s news values and technology, produces a compound of fiction and fact in terse fragments to viewers around the world. One problem in journalism today is that news media often are citing other news media as sources of information, rather than verifying the news independently. Local television stations also contract with news services and independent journalists in other cities worldwide for news feeds reported under the banner of the local station. Not only is the source of the news ambiguous, or even misleading, but also so may be the journalistic integrity of the “news.” This is especially evident when the “news” is about the trials and tribulations of the remaining “survivors,” or about the stars du jour in the latest “reality” series.

Practitioners “pitch” story ideas to TV producers. Producers then decide if an author’s new book is reviewed, if the CEO is interviewed, or if a personality appears on network shows such as NBC’s Today and CBS’s Late Show with David Letterman, or on syndicated shows such as Anderson (Cooper) and Ellen DeGeneres (or similar local programs). Perhaps the most common technique for placing a message on television, however, is providing video for news or documentary programs in the form of a video news release (VNR).

Critics charge that it is unethical to use VNRs in newscasts without telling viewers that an outside source provided the video. The Radio Television Digital News Association (RTDNA) has long warned that using VNRs “is

just one way in which government, corporations and others try to influence the content of news.” [45](#) However, local television news directors are pressed to fill expanding “news holes” over multiple platforms with smaller staffs and reduced budgets. Consequently, local news operations are increasingly dependent on public relations sources, although they are loathe to admit that reality. In fact, most stations require disclosure or clear labeling when using VNR content.

Satellite transmission makes it possible to instantaneously distribute public relations messages. The satellite media tour (SMT) has replaced the time-consuming and expensive city hopping that was formerly part of political campaigns, crisis communication programs (see Tylenol [Exhibit 1.3](#)), movie openings, product launches, and breaking news.

Turn on any morning news show and you see anchors interviewing doctors, writers, entertainers, CEOs and other experts. Most of the time the interviews are via satellite from locations other than the anchors’ TV stations. . . . In the course of two or three hours, a typical SMT can cover 12 to 20 stations.[46](#)

SMTs work best when local stations cannot produce the same story themselves, when the story fits morning programming before being bumped by breaking news, and when the story calls for top management appearances on the global television medium.

Cable and Satellite Television

Television comes into our homes not only through the publicly accessible broadcast networks but also via cable and satellite, with increasing competition among these delivery systems. The growth of cable and satellite television with its 500-plus channels and high-definition capabilities has profoundly altered the nation’s communication and viewing patterns.

Cable was born in 1948, when the first community antenna television (CATV) system was built in a small Pennsylvania community that suffered from poor television reception. Advertising-supported cable channels

collectively now have more than a greater share of the television audience than do the broadcast networks—60 percent to 40 percent.⁴⁷ It was Cable News Network's (CNN) live coverage of the 1986 Challenger shuttle disaster; the round-the-clock coverage of the 1991 Gulf War and 2003 Iraq War; and 24-hour coverage of the September 11, 2001, World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks, however, that made cable news a major player in the global information system. CNN coverage was so complete that several network affiliates and many independent stations carried CNN reports and still contract for news packages.

As new technology expands the channel-carrying capacity and converts systems to on-demand programming, cable and satellite TV may become only part of the packages of services carried. Cable companies offer interactive services such as shopping, banking, information databases, local and long-distance telephone services, and emergency alert connections to police and fire departments. Digital and video recorders, currently in 40 percent of households, and other personal video recorders give viewers flexibility as to when they watch programs, called “time-shifted viewing.”⁴⁸

Fiber-optic and asymmetric digital subscriber line (DSL) networks link viewers 24 hours a day directly to central computers to retrieve and send information. Just as futurists had predicted, the line between television, telephone, other media, and home computers has blurred, as both information and entertainment services are delivered to homes over cable, wire, and satellite systems. The next section examines new media and their increasing roles in public relations practice.

New Media, New Challenges and Opportunities

The Internet was the “game-changer” in the communication revolution, because nearly all new media are Internet based and almost all “old” media have developed an online presence. For public relations practitioners, the new media environment offers at least four challenges:(1) staying abreast of changing technology, (2) responding to the demand for transparency,(3)

dealing with new media players who communicate directly with organizational stakeholders, and (4) representing organizations in the new social media environment.

Staying Abreast of Changing Technology

Digital and social media technologies have changed how public relations is practiced. The rapidity of change and the transformed global marketplace are forcing public relations practitioners to adjust. Ann Lewnes of Adobe Systems, Inc. (San Jose, California) summed up the change pressures:

I think that the world has become a very small place and we have to adapt ourselves accordingly. . . . Social [media] plays a big role in that. One bad review, one comment from an executive about your company changes everything, and you need to be responsive in a way that you never were before. You need 24-hour customer support; you need people who are talented at moving quickly analyzing results. It's just a totally different game.[49](#)

However, many public relations practitioners limit use of the expanding array of new digital and social media, instead relying on traditional media and message dissemination, albeit now by email or the organization's website. But that is changing, according to Lewnes, “. . . When hiring younger people, we look for social media expertise.”[50](#)

Another new focus for public relations practitioners is ensuring that the organizations they represent can be easily found by those seeking information. Thus, search engine optimization (SEO) has become another tool in the practitioner's toolkit. Basically, SEO means trying to get an organization's name to appear at the top or near the top of the list when someone does an online search on the organization's category or topic. One study showed that search engines drive Internet traffic for 84 percent of users.[51](#) Google—the most popular search engine in the United States—produces search results based on both their relevance and importance to a

search request. But one thing that search engines do not do is ensure the veracity of the information contained in the sites they sort.

Of course, information—truthful or not—spreads rapidly online, and savvy practitioners know that they need to be vigilant in scanning the digital media environment, “where rogue opinions can flourish and multiply.”⁵² This means that public relations practitioners must constantly monitor organizational reputations online. As counselor Mike Greece wrote in *The Public Relations Strategist*, “It used to be enough to read the morning papers on the way to work. That’s no longer a sufficient defense for the constant flow of news, information and opinions on a global and democratized Web that never sleeps.”⁵³ Rather, new media allow for participation of the public in “unmediated conversations”:

The empowerment of the Internet has magnified the intensity of opinions and made everyone an expert capable of transmitting his or her feelings at will through such content-sharing channels as YouTube, Twitter, Jaiku and Facebook, among many others.⁵⁴

For public relations practitioners, this means building relationships with organizational publics not only in the real world, but also in the virtual world (see [Exhibit 10.2](#)).



Exhibit 10.2

Speed, Agility, and Humility in the Age of Social Media

Rachel Kay, Principal

Rachel Kay Public Relations* Solana Beach, California

Only five or so years ago, words like “viral,” “blog,” and “social network” took the communication field by storm. Public relations practitioners had to augment their communication arsenals to make room for a whole new set of tools and a whole new set of rules. Like the speed with which the public relations landscape has changed with social media, the vehicles in which to send communication also change and evolve overnight, and we’re tasked with keeping up and keeping clients and employers current. The days of haggling over a crisis response for 24 to 48 hours are no more—constituents on social networks demand attention, and brands and organizations may have just a couple of hours, or minutes, to respond.

In 2008, Motrin, a well-known painkiller, unveiled a campaign aimed toward “babywearing” moms, or those who carry their babies in slings. The online and print-based ad campaign insinuated, among other things, that moms who wear their babies do so to look like official moms and to be in fashion. It only took a couple of women who found the campaign offensive to rally thousands of women across the social Web via Twitter (complete with #motrinmoms hashtag), a Facebook group, blog posts, and a YouTube montage of moms cradling their babies to ignite a firestorm flamed by both traditional and social media alike. Many practitioners agree that sensitivity and response time were catalysts for the level of anger that resulted from the ad. Motrin was not watching the real-time reactions spreading like wildfire on Twitter, and it took more than 48 hours for the company’s team to pull the ad and apologize; what seemed like an eternity for consumers who expected an instant response. The debacle became a classic case study for how important it is for brands to monitor mentions of their companies online, to respond as quickly as possible, and to have a social media crisis communication plan in place.

It's critical for brands and companies to develop a protocol and process for social media—the rapid-fire nature of platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Quora, and blogs don't allow for a complex and arduous process of draft, edit, rewrite, and so on. As the online “face” of a company, brand representatives must be agile in issuing responses while ensuring the tone, accuracy, and quality of responses are in line with the principles of company they represent. Like anywhere else, consumers can be very forgiving when a crisis occurs as long as the company comes across as apologetic and humble and responds without delay.

It's imperative to remember that no communication is truly private in the age of social media. A small, regional food-themed magazine, Cooks Source, was accused by a freelance writer of taking content that she wrote from the Web, making a couple of changes, and adding it to the magazine's editorial without permission or payment. The writer sent an email to the magazine's editor requesting an apology and donation to the Columbia School of Journalism in lieu of payment. The editor's snide response suggested that anything available online was free for the taking and refused any restitution, even going so far as to say the writer should compensate her for time in editing the piece. The writer posted the correspondence online, which as with all things social media, was quickly shared far and wide across the Internet in fiery blog posts, scathing comments on Cook's Source's Facebook page, and over Twitter with its own dedicated hashtags. Online sleuths uncovered and posted additional examples of plagiarized work. Days passed and eventually statements by Cook Source were released, but the combative, unapologetic tone simply encouraged more mocking and negative feedback. The fiasco shut the magazine down completely.

The inherent unrestricted nature of social media means target publics have more power than ever before to take complaints public and gather support. It's essential for organizations and public relations practitioners to adjust their communication strategies to

adequately respond to public outcry in a timely and sensitive manner.

*Rachel Kay Public Relations (RKPR) is a public relations firm servicing national brands and companies.

Recognizing the Global Transparency Imperative

Rapidly changing technology makes transparency mandatory; it is simply foolish to think that bad news can be hidden, mistakes can remain secret, and misdeeds will not get reported. Controlling what is made public is no longer possible to the extent it was before the Internet took that power away from organizations of all types. As researcher Brad Rawlins observed:

The Internet raises transparency to a new level by providing the means for those with information to share their knowledge Virtually anyone can find any opinion on any subject with a few simple searches through the Internet. And once found, those opinions can be expanded, editorialized, and shared around the world within seconds.[55](#)

The world watched in amazement how social media forced transparency even in decades-old autocracies in the Middle East during the 2011 “Arab Spring” uprisings. Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube provided participants ways to communicate with each other even when traditional means were shut down or censored. These new communication media made it possible for protesting citizens to share within their own communities, as well as with the rest of the world, their demands for political, economic, and cultural change. Text and images gave the world descriptions of what appeared to be ordinary citizens engaged in peaceful demonstrations being met with violent reactions from armed soldiers and pro-government thugs.

As protests spread from Tunisia and Egypt to Bahrain, Yemen, Libya, and Syria, Qatar Media Corporation’s Al Jazeera news network launched a Twitter dashboard showing the average number of tweets per minute in five

of those countries. According to Ed Schipul and Daniel Keeney, who wrote the story in PRSA's Tactics, social media "can expose anyone interested to the energy, passion and outrage that people are experiencing on the ground. Then you have them hooked."[56](#)

All organizations are vulnerable to the scrutiny of those armed with both new media technologies and a story to tell—praising or criticizing, true or false, fair or biased, night or day, local or global. As GolinHarris public relations counselor Scott Farrell describes the situation: "Today, one activist armed with social media tools can effectively take on a small army of communicators or even an entire company."[57](#)

And an organization cannot hide or withhold information in the social media environment. One study found that failure to disclose in social media campaigns damages the organization–public relationship and erodes the credibility of the organization.[58](#)

Dealing with Media Convergence and New Media Players

As noted earlier in this chapter, most traditional media outlets have moved onto the Internet, creating their own online presence and editions. In the imagery of [Chapter 7](#)'s systems theory, traditional media outlets are simply responding to change pressures from a radically changed competitive environment.

The biggest changes may be the explosive increase in information sources and the loss of traditional media outlets' control over the flow of information. Rather than having to rely on traditional media and on gatekeepers' decisions regarding what information gets published or broadcast, public relations sources now are able to go directly to target audiences or indirectly through a wide range of new "media." David Meerman Scott described the new options:

Instead of spending tens of thousands of dollars per month on a media

relations program that tries to convince a handful of reporters at select magazines, newspapers, and TV stations to cover us, we should be targeting the plugged-in bloggers, online news sites, micro-publications, public speakers, analysts, and consultants that reach the targeted audiences that are looking for what we have to offer. . . . We have the power to create our own brand in the niche of our own choosing.[59](#)

Media convergence and the move to the Internet put pressure on organizations to coordinate and integrate communication functions that traditionally operated in their separate “silos.” Internal and external communication programs have to be using the same message strategy, because search engines will access all available sources for those seeking information. Thus, companies like IBM, Intuit, and GE have put all communication functions under a single C-suite executive.[60](#) The need for having only one voice is particularly important in times of crisis: “There’s a reason the President of the United States has a press secretary, and not 20 people in the White House speaking for him,” according to author Peter Shankman.[61](#)

The new media environment also means that practitioners must work with nontraditional media gatekeepers and influencers—such as bloggers—who have the ability to shape an organization’s digital environment. For example, when the Democrats met in Charlotte, NC, and the Republicans in Tampa, Florida, for their national conventions in 2012, bloggers worked as “credentialed media” alongside reporters from the traditional news organizations. But of course, bloggers did not have to attend the conventions to become publishers of news and opinions about the issues, speakers, and candidates. For those in virtual communities of like-thinking participants, blogs have become the sources of choice in the interconnected and digitalized cyberspace.

According to technorati.com, a website that reports Internet developments and news of interest to technophiles, half of the world’s bloggers are in the United States, 29 percent in Europe, and 12 percent in Asian and Pacific countries. One in four engage in “mobile blogging” from their smartphone or tablet, leading to shorter and more spontaneous blogs.[62](#)

Public relations practitioners are increasingly monitoring the “blogosphere,”

but their relationship with bloggers remains tenuous because “bloggers want 100 percent access, and PR people want control. The level of transparency that bloggers think they should [get] is higher [than the level media expect].”⁶³ Nevertheless, blogs remain a useful tool for practitioners trying to reach Web-savvy publics, both by attracting blog coverage and by creating their own blogs as part of a communication strategy.

Finally, public relations practitioners must acknowledge that new technology today means that anyone with a camera phone can “report” the news. Often called “citizen journalists,” these individuals are invited even by mainstream media outlets to share the news in their communities by sending in video clips to major news outlets for possible dissemination to a wide audience.

For example, when terrorists attacked the Taj Mahal Palace and Oberoi Trident luxury hotels in Mumbai, India, November 26, 2008, Twitter reports broke the news within minutes, well ahead of traditional media. “Tweets” posted at a rate of more than 70 every five seconds provided eyewitness accounts as the tragedy unfolded.⁶⁴ Likewise, when U.S. Airways flight 1549 made a watery but safe landing in the Hudson River that January 15, 2009, afternoon, the first Twitter report of the accident occurred one minute later. (See [Figure 10.1](#))

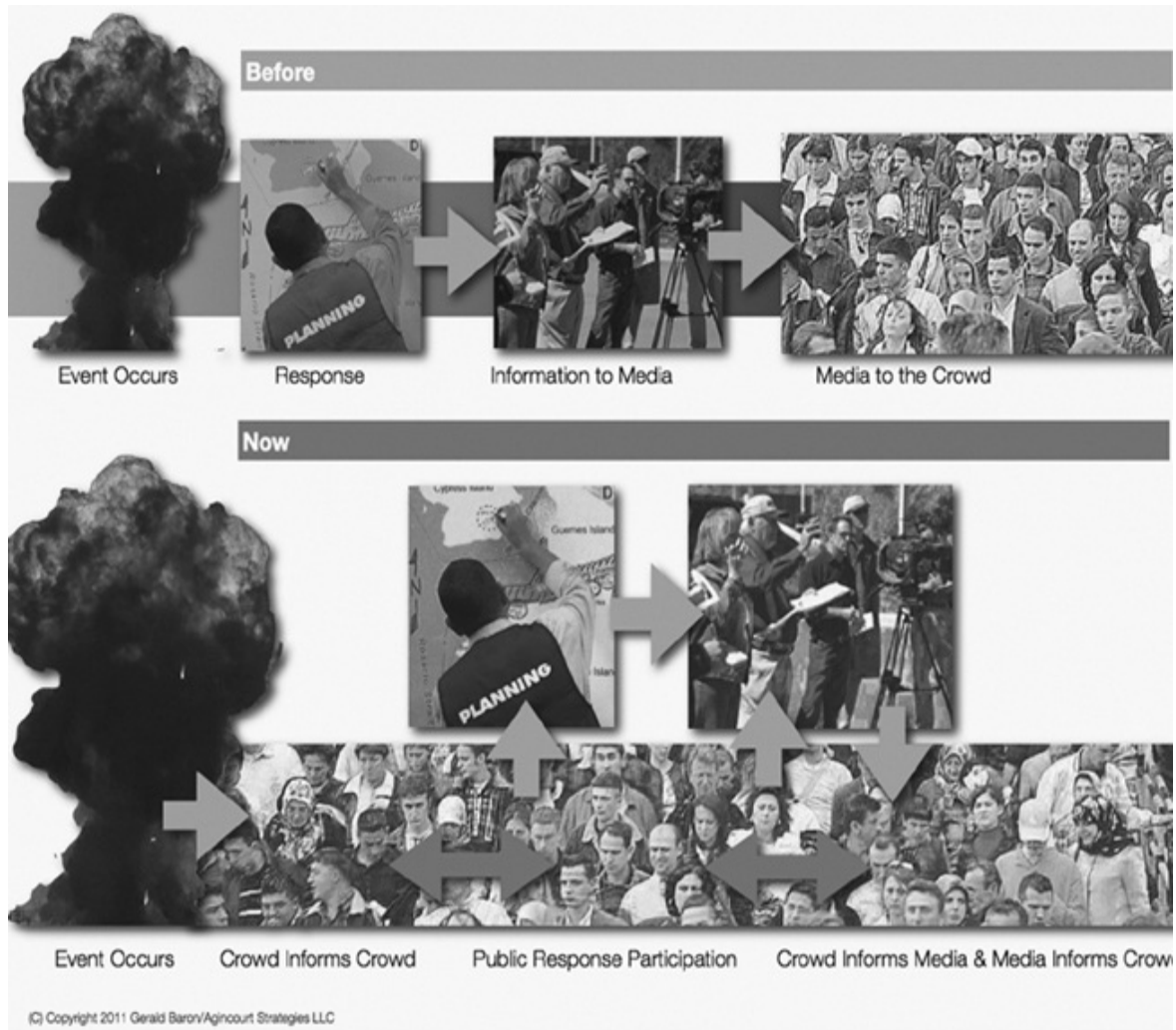


Figure 10.1 “Social Media Change the Process”

Courtesy Gerald Baron. Used with permission.

This kind of citizen journalism via cell phones and the Internet has the potential not only to inform communities during crises, but also to promote democracy around the world by empowering individuals to share their voices. After a terrorist attack in Madrid, for example, angry text messages about the conservative government’s poor response to the crisis resulted in the Socialist party winning the next election.⁶⁵ Similarly, when exit polls in a presidential

election in South Korea showed that the candidate most popular with young voters was losing,

His supporters hit the chat rooms to drum up support. Within minutes more than 800,000 e-mails were sent to mobiles to urge supporters to go out and vote. . . . By 2 p.m., [their candidate] took the lead and went on to win the election. A man with little support from either the mainstream media or the nation's conglomerates sashayed into office on an Internet on-ramp.⁶⁶

Representing Organizations in the Social Media

Conceptually, public relations is about building organization–public relationships, but the tools to do so have been woefully inadequate . . . until now. Traditional media outlets worked well for disseminating information (one way) to specific target publics. Getting the publics' responses, however, could be difficult and, in some cases, expensive. Practitioners often had to seek out public reactions, opinions, and behavioral responses through surveys or complex monitoring systems.

Social media changed all of that. Instead of “telling and selling,” and hoping for the desired response, social media make it possible to actively engage stakeholders, to create a conversation exchanging information and views. Social media tools build communities, empower stakeholders, and facilitate two-way communication. For example, during the 2008 presidential campaign, the Obama campaign relied on social media to demonstrate transparency and to build relationships with the grassroots: “Campaign managers used the Internet strategically to create a conversation, even when comments might have been negative about the candidate.”⁶⁷

That ability to engage stakeholders in ongoing two-way communication gives social media an advantage over almost all other media in the practitioner's tool kit. For example, Goodwill Industries International Inc. organizes its Twitter followers by interests so they can monitor tweet activity and share

information. Its Facebook page engages volunteers and supporters, demonstrating Goodwill values them and their hard work in helping people “reach their fullest potential through the power of work.”

Social media also transform employee communication, replacing the top-down model of old with a participative network of engaged employees. An example of how social media changed internal communication occurred at the international consulting and accounting firm, U.S.-based Deloitte. Many of the almost 46,000 employees work at client locations, not in Deloitte offices. In exit interviews, one in four departing employees said that feeling isolated was the primary reason they were leaving Deloitte. The company responded by creating a social networking site, “D Street,” to encourage employee interactions. Employee communication counselor Alison Davis reports that 80 percent of Deloitte employees use the site to find other employees and to participate in groups, share experience and build a sense of community. According to Davis, social media require a different approach: “It’s evolutionary. It starts small and gradually builds an audience. It morphs, often in unexpected directions.”⁶⁸

Describing developments in new media technology produces information with the shelf life of an avocado or guacamole. By the time this chapter is published, no doubt some of the examples will be passé. How will BranchOut on Facebook impact professional networking and the 120 million users on LinkedIn? How will Google+ impact Facebook? Whatever happens, the overriding conclusion is obvious: Rapidly evolving technology is changing how media tools are used to communicate with stakeholder publics. The key for public relations is that the new technology facilitates interactive communication, the essence of building and maintaining relationships.

Working with the Media

Knowing about the media—knowing how to work with each medium, create content for each, address each medium’s audiences, adhere to specific style requirements, and meet the deadlines of each—is a major part of many practitioners’ jobs. Practitioners must build and maintain relationships of mutual respect and trust with media gatekeepers. These relationships,

although mutually beneficial, remain somewhat adversarial at their core, because journalists and practitioners are not in the same business and often do not have the same communication goals.

The Person in the Middle

To be effective in the go-between and mediating roles, practitioners must have the confidence of both their organization's management and the media. This is not an easy job. CEOs and other line managers are naturally suspicious of the media, just as journalists are by nature questioning and somewhat untrusting of those they put in the spotlight. Practitioners and others in organizations complain: "Why do the media always sensationalize things?" "Journalists never get things right." "I didn't say that!" "They take things out of context or twist things to fit their story." For example, the Queen of England's late father, King George VI, collected newspaper clippings in a scrapbook titled "Things my daughters never did."⁶⁹ And that was before the days of Star, National Enquirer, and Rupert Murdoch's News of the World (no longer publishing)!

Journalists counter: "That organization never tells the truth!" "We don't get to talk with the person who has the real story and real news." "What we get is PR fluff." "You get the feeling they're trying to hide something." "Spacegrabbers!"

This is not breaking news. The conflict between journalists and public relations practitioners has a long history of contradiction:

Journalists wanted information to be easily available, yet resented the men and women who made it available. By the mid twentieth century, journalists were dependent upon PR practitioners for a large percentage of the stories appearing in newspapers. But admitting their dependence would shatter cherished ideals. Journalists were proud of their ability to uncover stories, verify details, and expose sham. Thus, they were unlikely to admit their dependence, lack of skepticism, failure to verify, and failure to expose every sham.⁷⁰

The adversarial—sometimes even hostile—feelings that exist between practitioners and journalists often spill over into public debate. Herbert Schmertz, Mobil Corporation vice president of public affairs in the 1980s, criticized journalists and media performance by providing what he called “constructive, responsible criticism.”⁷¹ Mobil periodically used its advocacy advertising to criticize the media (see [Figure 10.2](#)), to which Schmertz credits substantial progress in improving print coverage of his corporation and business in general. He saved his harshest criticism for television news and:

The questionable values that afflict TV journalism—the slavery to ratings . . . the pandering to the lowest common denominator . . . the emotional presentation to entice a larger audience . . . the subversion of news values to entertainment values . . . the ruthless compression of facts to fit preordained timetables.⁷²

Schmertz was not alone in his criticism. General Motors counterattacked when NBC News reporters staged accidents and fires involving GM’s full-sized pickups, claiming that the vehicles were unsafe because of fuel tank design and placement. The report aired on “Dateline NBC” under the title “Waiting to Explode.” The report did not disclose, however, that incendiary rockets had been taped under the trucks and timed to go off on impact to ignite any spilled gasoline. The gas tanks had been “topped off” before the “test” and fitted with a nonstandard cap that allowed the gasoline to escape. GM sued NBC and the Institute of Safety Analysis, which had conducted the

Mobil Corporation's Advertisement on "The Myth of Open Airwaves."

4. The myth of the open airwaves

There is a simple, yet overwhelming, difference between the print media and television journalism. Newspapers and magazines offer regular access to their pages to those who wish to rebut what has been printed. The major television networks do not.

Access to television is supposed to be governed largely by the Federal Communications Commission's Fairness Doctrine. That doctrine owes its existence to the theory that the airwaves are a scarce resource and must therefore be allocated among potential users. The doctrine requires owners of broadcast licenses "...to encourage and implement the broadcast of all sides of controversial public issues..." and to play "...a conscious and positive role in bringing about the balanced presentation of the opposing viewpoints." In theory, the Fairness Doctrine doesn't preclude anything. In reality, the networks have turned it into a doctrine of unfairness.

Under a mandate to present all sides of a public issue, the networks confine debate through controls imposed by their own news departments. Through their news staffs, the networks exercise total control over the agenda of issues, and who may speak to the public. Unfortunately, the result of this network control, with no system or forum for rebuttal, has resulted in a narrow and selective discussion of major public issues—and the systematic exclusion or distortion of many viewpoints.

Mobil has often been denied the opportunity to rebut inaccurate television news broadcasts. Frequently, the broadcasts appeared at times when critical energy legislation was under debate in Congress—legislation regarding oil company divestiture, natural gas deregulation, oil decontrol, and the "windfall profit" tax. At such times, the networks' systematic exclusion of ideas and information impaired the public's ability to rationally

decide fundamental policy issues.

Other companies have experienced similar frustrations in their attempts to gain adequate airtime to rebut erroneous television newscasts. Kaiser Aluminum & Chemical Corporation had to threaten a slander suit and had to ask the FCC to order ABC to give it time to respond to charges made on a 1980 *20/20* segment, before ABC finally gave the company the opportunity for an unedited reply. It took more than a year, however, before the rebuttal was aired on prime-time TV.

In response to a 1979 CBS *60 Minutes* broadcast, Illinois Power Company produced its own tape to point out the network's distortions. Called "60 Minutes/Our Reply," the power company's rebuttal exposed the bias of the broadcast by including CBS film footage not included in the original segment. The program has been widely shown to various groups across the country, but it has not been aired on television.

The networks not only block rebuttals, they refuse to air advertisements on "controversial" issues, and have rejected Mobil advocacy commercials since 1974—despite evidence that public support for issue advertising is strong. (Network policies would preclude the very message you are currently reading.) A 1980 survey by the Opinion Research Corporation found that 85 percent of the American public think corporations should be allowed to present their views on controversial matters in television commercials. And most independent stations and network affiliates have opened their doors to advocacy advertising, without creating the chaos the networks profess to fear.

As the Supreme Court affirmed in its 1978 *Bellotti* decision: "The press does not have a monopoly on either the First Amendment or the ability to enlighten."

Mobil

© 1983 Mobil Corporation

Courtesy Mobil Corporation.

Figure 10.2

Mobile Corporation's Advertisement on the "Myth of Open Airwaves"

Courtesy Mobil Corporation.

crash tests—a first in GM's history. After GM presented a convincing challenge to the Dateline NBC segment, NBC admitted fault and apologized to viewers and to GM. GM dropped the lawsuit. NBC fired three reporters, and NBC News President Michael Gartner resigned.

Others share the acrimony. When Meg Greenfield was The Washington Post editorial page editor, she issued a memo barring practitioners entry to editorial offices: "We don't want any of that damned crowd around here." Subsequently, Post executive editor Ben Bradlee extended the ban, forbidding reporters to talk to public relations sources, a directive quickly ignored because reporters depend on public relations sources for news leads.⁷³ In fact, 90 percent of journalists admit to getting story ideas from news releases, and 89 percent say they rely on public relations contacts for information.⁷⁴ Researchers in the United Kingdom recently learned that about three of every five stories in British newspapers and in radio and television news reports came from reprinted or rewritten press releases. They said their findings "illustrate that journalists' reliance on these news sources is extensive and raises significant questions concerning claims to journalistic independence in UK news media and journalists' role as a fourth estate."⁷⁵

Thus, practitioners and journalists operate in a mutually dependent and mutually beneficial relationship, sometimes as adversaries and sometimes as colleagues cooperating in each of their self-interests. Not as frequently, but occasionally, the news media are manipulated by practitioners, who may have more resources, as well as controlling access to news sources. With at least equal frequency, news media frustrate practitioners in their attempts to get information to publics.

The growth of new media outlets and the continuing reduction of staff resources for traditional journalism outlets pose a threat to the integrity of the public information system. The influential magazine, The Economist, raised this concern in an article titled, "Slime-slinging: Flacks Vastly Outnumber Hacks These Days. Caveat Lector." According to the article, the number of

public relations staff doubled from 45 per 100,000 U.S. population to 90 between 1980 and 2009. During the same period, the number of journalists dropped from 20 to 15 per 100,000 U.S. population.

Job cuts and online obligations mean journalists are also more desperate for copy, making them a softer touch . . . As newsrooms have been slimmed and PR agencies have grown fatter, for each American journalist there are now, on average, six flacks hassling him to run crummy stories.⁷⁶

In short, the underlying conflicts of interest and of mission necessarily make the practitioner–journalist relationship adversarial. The practitioner advancing a particular cause or organization stands in stark contrast to the journalist’s drive to dig up news through good reporting and journalistic initiative. Researchers in one study, however, concluded: “The two fields have advanced from their beginnings to a point where they can recognize that their counterparts are professionals with similar news values and, in their own ways, are also serving beneficial social roles.”⁷⁷

Based on the experience of more than a century, the adversarial relationship appears to serve the public interest and the needs of the public information system.

Guidelines for Good Media Relations

The sound approach for organizations and practitioners is to view media relations as an investment. Accuracy and fairness in press coverage does not result from reporters’ work alone. Ultimately, the relationship between practitioners and journalists has an impact on the quality of news coverage about organizations.⁷⁸ Those relationships can best be achieved when practitioners follow a few basic rules:

1. Shoot straight.

It is not just politically correct to counsel “honesty is the best policy” in dealing with the media; it is good business and good common sense. Jerry Dalton Jr., past PRSA national president, says the practitioner’s most important asset in dealing with the media is credibility: “It must be earned, usually over a period of time. It means simply that a reporter can trust [the practitioner] totally, and vice versa. It means never lying. If you can’t, for some legitimate reason, speak the truth, then say nothing.”⁷⁹

Journalists point out that good and bad news tend to even out over time, so if practitioners are honest with bad news, then they are more likely to be trusted with good news. Another fundamental principle is that a practitioner cannot favor one news outlet at the expense of others. The safest rule is that spot news should go out to all relevant media as fast as possible, letting the media determine the cycle in which it breaks. Less time-sensitive feature material should be alternated evenly among the competitors. As a corollary, practitioners must protect journalistic initiative. For example, if a reporter gets a tip and asks for information, the story belongs to that journalist. The same information should not be given to other outlets unless they come after it. This is a policy with which no reporter can justly quarrel, because each of them would demand the same protection for their scoops.

2. Give service.

The quickest, surest way to gain the cooperation of journalists is to provide them with newsworthy, interesting, and timely stories and pictures that they want, when they want them, and in a form they can readily use. Author Carole Howard suggests, “Be a reporter’s reporter. When asked for information, do not hesitate to ask enough questions so you have a full understanding of the story the reporter is working on.”⁸⁰

Journalists work with fixed and sometimes tight deadlines. Practitioners who hope to place stories in the news media must know and adhere to media lead times. Again, Howard advises:

Learn the regular and late-breaking deadlines of all the media that normally cover your organization. A reporter’s life is controlled by

very short deadlines, especially in the broadcast and Internet media, and you must meet the reporter's deadline or your information is useless.⁸¹

Journalists also count on and cooperate with the practitioner who willingly responds to a midnight call for a photo and biographical sketch of an executive who just died. News, a highly perishable commodity, occurs around the clock, as do news deadlines in the global media environment. Therefore, some practitioners are on call around the clock. Howard suggests keeping key materials at home, for as Dalton points out, "News doesn't wait—for anyone or anything." Technology has changed the process for giving service (see [Exhibit 10.3](#)).

3. Do not beg or whine.

Nothing irritates journalists and their editors and news directors more than the practitioner who begs to have stories used or complains about story treatment. Journalists have finely developed senses of journalistic objectivity and news value. If information is not sufficiently newsworthy on its own merits to attract their interest, no amount of begging and whining can change the quality of that information. Some practitioners (or their interns!) call journalists to ask, "Did you receive my release?" One online editor succinctly states how most journalists react to such follow-up calls: "Assume that whatever it was you sent, we got it. If you don't hear back from us, we're not interested."⁸²

Nothing, however, is more offensive to a journalist than a practitioner who tries to pressure the editorial staff to use a story, change a story treatment, or kill a story by holding hostage the organization's advertising business. That kind of pressure does not work when up against journalistic integrity and will surely lead to resentment or to an immediate public response.

4. Do not ask for "kills."

Practitioners have no right to ask journalists or editors to suppress or kill a story. It seldom works, is unprofessional, and brings only ill will. To journalists, this is a crude insult and an abuse of the First Amendment. It

is asking journalists to betray their public trust. The best way to keep unfavorable stories out of the press is to prevent situations that produce such stories.

At the same time, there are occasions when it is perfectly legitimate to request a delay in publication or to explain to the media any part of the story that might be damaging to the



Exhibit 10.3

Journalists Used to Find Sources, Now Sources Find Journalists

Carol Perruso

Journalism Librarian

California State University, Long Beach*

Finding experts for reporters to interview used to be one of the main jobs of news librarians/researchers.

Now, journalists say, the experts find them.

Richard A. Serrano, a reporter in the Washington Bureau of the Los Angeles Times, tracked the changes he has seen over the last several years: Ten years ago, when you had to find an expert, “it took forever to go from person to person,” waiting for call backs. “Then about five to seven years ago, law firms, think tanks, research groups and accounting firms started hiring people to watch for breaking news.” When a story broke, they would do a blast email to reporters, “I understand you are writing about AT&T . . .” telling reporters about an expert they might want to interview. “It was a kind of telemarketing.

“Then about two years ago, many of these organizations decided they didn’t get enough bang for the buck with this approach.” Instead, when a story broke, “a PR person would quickly interview the expert and email reporters transcripts of the interviews, four or five grafts, often with the best quotes in boldface. At first we thought that this was great. Then we decided, whoa, we don’t know enough about the expert. Maybe it was a lawyer who had lost most of his cases.”

Serrano described one law professor who sent him emails every time something legal happened. “One time I called him, and he didn’t really know anything.”

Then nonprofit organizations started adapting the strategy. These were organizations known to reporters to be credible. For example, Serrano said, with stories about the detainees at Guantanamo Bay, reporters would want to interview the top people at organizations such as the ACLU or Human Rights Watch, but these nonprofits didn’t have time for all of the interviews. So, he said, they would do an interview internally and send reporters a transcript.

More recently, politicians started using this strategy, Serrano added. When the acting director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives resigned in August, “I started getting emails from senators with quotes. It was very

easy for me to pick one or two. What used to take me a half hour, could be done in ten minutes. Everybody gets the same quotes. It's an instant news release. It's very, very beneficial, especially on a fast moving story when you want to get something on the Web right away." The same quote will frequently then appear on the politician's website, according to Serrano.

Perruso formerly was President, LATimes.com, Los Angeles Times. Used with permission.

public interest. For example, the Departments of Defense and Homeland Security do not release, or may legitimately request media to delay releasing, information potentially compromising to military operations or threatening to public safety. Then again, in the latter cases, some will remind us of what California U.S. Senator Hiram Johnson said in 1917: "The first casualty when war comes is truth."⁸³ That is why public relations specialists in those organizations establish and maintain relationships of trust with their media counterparts. (See [Chapter 16](#) on government and politics, and [Chapter 17](#) on military public affairs.)

Do not flood the media.

Study and experience teach the boundaries of newsworthiness, and common sense dictates respect for them. If a financial editor receives information appropriate for the sports or real estate editor, the financial editor loses respect for the practitioner who engages in blanketing the media with email blast releases. The best advice includes the following: (1) stick to what journalists will consider news, (2) keep media email lists current, and (3) send to only one—the most appropriate—journalist at each news medium.

An avalanche of public relations materials reaches newsrooms around the globe. Not all of it will get through the careful scrutiny of media gatekeepers, and they quickly learn which sources provide information with real news value.

Working with the Media

The late former CBS news reporter and long-time counselor Chester Burger said the press “is often unfair, unreasonable, and simply wrong. But even if it isn’t our friend, it is the best friend the nation has, and we should be thankful for it.”⁸⁴ Based on notions of a free and independent press, as well as principles of sound public relations practice, seasoned practitioners offer the following guidelines for working with the media:

1. Talk from the viewpoint of the public’s interest, not the organization’s.

The soft drink bottler who launches a campaign to collect and recycle bottles can frankly admit that it does not want to irritate the public by having its product litter the landscape.

2. Make the news easy to read and use.

Use a short, punchy headline to attract attention and give potential users an indication of the topic. Do not use jargon, unfamiliar acronyms, or technical terms. Personal pronouns, names, and quotations make your copy easier to read and more interesting. Put the name, email address, and phone number of the news source and contact at the top of releases.

3. If you do not want some statement quoted, do not make it.

Spokespersons should avoid talking “off the record,” because many bloggers and other new media sources have no formal journalism training and do not know the traditional “rules.” Some news organizations forbid reporters to accept such information. Moreover, it is absolutely too late to qualify something as off the record after you make a statement to a reporter.

4. State the most important fact at the beginning.

A manager’s logical presentation may first list the facts that led to a decision, but news reporters want the decision. The first-level response to a reporter’s question is a short summary of your position or

newsworthy announcement. The second-level response includes a concrete example or evidence to back up your first statement. If the reporter persists, return to the first-level summary statement.

5. Do not argue with a reporter or lose your cool.

Understand that journalists seek an interesting story and will go to great lengths to get the story. To paraphrase an old public relations maxim, do not argue with people who buy printers ink by the barrel or with people who are influential bloggers; these people have the final say.

6. If a question contains offensive language or simply words you do not like, do not repeat them even to deny them.

Along the lines of having the final say, reporters also can select quotes, portions of quotes, or even single words for the final story. Reporters often use the gambit of putting words into subjects' mouths, such as, "Do you mean . . . ?" or "Is what you are really saying . . . ?"

7. If the reporter asks a direct question, give an equally direct answer.

If the appropriate answer is "yes" or "no," give the correct response and say no more. Some reporters will remain silent after getting an answer in hopes that the subject will volunteer more information. Do not respond to the pressure to say something more. The tougher the question, the shorter the answer should be. Assume that the camera is on at all times; otherwise the unguarded comment will be the sound bite on the evening news!

8. If spokespersons do not know the answer to a question, they should simply say, "I don't know, but I'll get the answer for you."

This is a commitment to follow through by providing the information as quickly as possible. Better yet, prepare for the interview by anticipating what questions will be asked, by developing succinct answers, and by rehearsing with someone playing the role of the reporter.

9. Tell the truth, even if it hurts.

Treat bad news as you would any other story: Prepare as if it were good news and take it to the media. Not only does that mean that you will keep some control over the story and how it is covered, but it also means that you are not on the defensive, making yourself vulnerable to charges of trying to hide the facts and being exposed by the media. This may be the most difficult position to sell to those in top management, who often see the practitioner's job as keeping bad news out of the media.

10. Do not call a news conference unless you have what reporters consider news.

When is a news conference justified? Seldom. In fact, call a news conference only when there is no other means to get an important breaking story to the media in a timely fashion. The determining factor is the need to give reporters an opportunity to ask questions and pursue the story rather than simply issuing a statement or making an announcement



Figure 10.3 Pentagon Press Conference

Courtesy Department of Defense. Photo by R. D. Ward.

(see [Figure 10.3](#)). Complex matters that require backgrounding and detailed explanation, such as a technological breakthrough, may justify a news conference. If you do call a news conference, follow the suggestions outlined in steps 1 through 9.[85](#)

Working with International Media

When working with news media from other countries, public relations practitioners must not only follow the same basic principles discussed in this chapter but also keep in mind linguistic, cultural, and political differences. William Hachten categorized media systems around the world into five types:[86](#)

1. Authoritarian.

The media are subordinate to the state, which controls the press and restricts what they can cover. Examples of this would be the media systems in many of the Middle East autocracies that were deposed by protesting citizens.

2. Communist.

The state controls the media and requires it to espouse and promote Marxist ideals and philosophy. Media in Cuba and China are examples of this type of system.

3. Revolutionary.

This media system often exists clandestinely in conjunction with

authoritarian or communist media systems. Characterized by its effort to spread information suppressed by the state media, the revolutionary media system today is often Internet based, such as websites in Iran, China, and Singapore that get shut down for disseminating information not authorized by the government.

4. Western.

Despite its name, this media system can be found in any country where the news media are free to report on whatever they wish, as long as they balance that right with their social responsibility, for example, by not reporting inaccurate or misleading information.

5. Developmental.

Found in so-called “developing” countries, this media system is relatively free, as long as it supports national goals toward development. One example is the media system in India, where news channels are unrestricted, while social programming encourages such government initiatives as the elimination of the traditional caste system.

Hachten’s classification is useful in reminding public relations practitioners that they cannot conduct media relations abroad the way they do at home. Other tips include being careful of cultural differences and sensitive issues (e.g., some Chinese media resist company news releases with boilerplate statements about corporate social responsibility); translating all documents into appropriate languages (e.g., mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan require three distinct types of Chinese characters); refraining from potentially insulting language (e.g., saying your U.S.-made product is “the best,” when the country you are targeting produces something similar); and including local information and sources whenever possible.[87](#)

These suggestions can help practitioners build and maintain good relations with journalists in the news media, both at home and around the world. Because of the crucial gatekeeper role played by reporters and editors in print, broadcast, and online media, practitioners have little choice but to earn and keep the respect of journalists. At the same time, although the public has a right to public information, there are limits. Some information is

confidential, and some information cannot be disclosed because of individual privacy or because of the proprietary nature of the information in a competitive business environment.

Also, sometimes, news may be “embargoed,” meaning that information is made available to credentialed journalists with the understanding that they will not share it with a wider audience until given permission to do so. An example of why news might be embargoed occurred when an Australian magazine “broke the embargo”—without authorization—about Britain’s Prince Harry serving with his British Army unit in Afghanistan. When the news broke, Prince Harry was recalled home amid concerns for his safety and that of his military unit. Whether the news media were right to honor the embargo, denying people the right to know the prince was serving in Afghanistan, was the subject of subsequent debate among journalists.⁸⁸

For the public relations practitioner, knowing how to keep control of the agenda when dealing with journalists is part of the media training required for all those acting as spokespersons and managers of media relations. In the final analysis, however, the practitioner–journalist relationship is an adversarial relationship. After being accused of doing something immoral by teaching people how to deal with the press, former media consultant Roger Ailes told a journalism seminar:

We always advise our clients to tell the truth. But the thing that disturbs me most is that you are here in journalism school learning how to ask the questions, yet you would deny a person the right to learn how to answer those questions.⁸⁹

Part of the motivation for giving managers media training is that the top executives in many organizations are public figures without training or experience in dealing with this aspect of their public life. CEOs are obliged to deal with the media and to face the public when their organizations make important decisions or are involved in crises that have impact beyond the organization. This obligation applies equally to leaders in corporations, nonprofit agencies, health and health care organizations, educational institutions, government, and all other organizations concerned about their relationships with publics.

Because a free press plays a central role in a free society, this is the era of the media savvy top executive. Media training designed to help executives deal directly with the press is a responsibility of the public relations department and an essential investment in building and maintaining good media relations, whether with traditional or new media outlets.

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Study Guide

1. Explain the differences between controlled and uncontrolled media.
2. Discuss why newspapers remain an important part of the public information system, even as they struggle to survive in the new digital environment.
3. Outline how new media technologies give public relations practitioners

controlled media for reaching target publics.

4. Explain how social media are changing the way organizations communicate with their publics.
5. What impact can social media have on the concept and practice of public relations?
6. Discuss how the relationship between practitioners and journalists is “mutually dependent” and “mutually beneficial,” but still adversarial.
7. Outline basic guidelines for building good media relations and working with the media.

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Part III Management Process

1. [Chapter 11. Step One: Defining Public Relations Problems](#)
2. [Chapter 12. Step Two: Planning and Programming](#)
3. [Chapter 13. Step Three: Taking Action and Communicating](#)
4. [Chapter 14. Step Four: Evaluating the Program](#)

Chapter 11 Step One: Defining Public Relations Problems

Learning Outcomes

After studying [Chapter 11](#) this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Outline the four-step problem-solving process as it applies to public relations.
2. Define research, identify its major purpose as reducing uncertainty in decision making, and discuss why it is essential in public relations program management.
3. Diagram and explain the “benchmarks model” of using research to plan, manage, and evaluate public relations programs.
4. Describe the three attributes of useful problem statements.
5. Discuss the major differences between informal (“exploratory”) and formal methods of research, and give examples of both approaches.

It ain't what you don't know that gets you into trouble. It's what you know for sure that just ain't so.

—Mark Twain

The savvy PR person will have at least a basic understanding of different types of research and the sorts of information the different forms of research can provide.

—Mark Weiner

In 1969, Dr. Edward Robinson wrote the obituary for the “flying by the seat-of-the-pants” approach to doing public relations. He saw the new public relations practitioner as “an applied social and behavioral scientist” using “research to help in the problem-solving process.”² He may have been a bit premature in his assessment, however, when he wrote those words in the first public relations research book. Intuitive, individualistic approaches to problem solving often still guide the practice in many settings, even though, as Robinson wrote, research is “the most powerful tool available to the applied practitioner.”³

The open systems approach discussed in [Chapter 7](#) combines research-based problem solving and strategic planning. From its origins as the art of reacting to outside threats to organizations, public relations has evolved into an applied science anticipating threats and managing organization–public relationships. No longer do hunches, gut feelings, and personal experiences, alone or in combination, serve as an adequate basis for public relations programs. And rarely do top managers or clients—many holding MBAs—accept on faith alone a practitioner’s recommendations, or simple assertions that there is a problem, or that a program was successful. The question will be, “Where’s your evidence? Show me the data.”

Management Process

In its most advanced form, public relations is a scientifically managed part of an organization’s problem-solving and change processes. Practitioners of this type of public relations use theory and the best available evidence in a four-step problem-solving process:

1. Defining the problem (or opportunity).

This first step is determining “What’s happening now?” that created the perception that something is wrong or could be improved. It involves probing and monitoring knowledge, opinions, attitudes, and behaviors of those internal and external publics concerned with and affected by the acts and policies of an organization. In essence, this is an organization’s intelligence function. It provides the foundation for all the other steps in

the problem-solving process.

2. Planning and programming.

Information gathered in the first step is used to make strategic decisions about program goals, target publics, objectives, action and communication. This involves factoring the findings from the first step into the policies and programs of the organization. This second step in the process answers, “Based on what we have learned about the situation, what should we change or do in order to solve the problem or seize the opportunity?”

3. Taking action and communicating.

The third step involves implementing the program of action and communication tactics designed to achieve the specific objectives for each of the publics to accomplish the program goal(s). The questions in this step are, “What should we do and say, who should do and say it, when and in what sequence, where, and how?”

4. Evaluating the program.

The final step in the process involves assessing the preparation, implementation, and impact of the program. Adjustments are made while the program is being implemented based on evaluation feedback on how it is or is not working. Programs are continued, modified, or stopped after learning, “How are we doing, or how did we do?” This step sums up the results of the evaluation and provides the basis for the next phase.

Each step is as important as the others, but the process begins with gathering intelligence to diagnose the problem. Information and understanding developed in the first step motivate and guide subsequent steps in the process. In practice, of course, diagnosis, planning, implementation, and evaluation cannot be so neatly compartmentalized, because the process is continuous, cyclical, and applied in a dynamic setting. [Figure 11.1](#) shows the continuous, overlapping, and cyclical nature of public relations problem solving.

How an oil company's public relations staff managed a problem situation illustrates the four-step process. The company decided to close one of its sales divisions as part of a reorganization to increase efficiency. This meant that 600 employees would have to move or find new jobs, the community where the division was located would suffer economic loss, customers of the sales division would be concerned about getting equally good service under the new setup, and investors would be curious about how the move would affect the stock price.

The first task was to marshal all the facts through research so the move could be explained and justified to those who would be affected. The next step was to plan the announcement. Timing was important. The news had to be broken swiftly, before rumors started, released simultaneously to all those affected, and communicated in such a way as to explain satisfactorily the necessity and wisdom of the change, and to address stakeholder concerns.



Figure 11.1 Four-Step Public Relations Process

Materials included a procedure memorandum to guide the staff, a presentation script for meetings, letters to several different groups of employees, letters to all dealers, a news release, a statement on banking arrangements for community banks, a general office letter, and plans for meetings. The news was released in a coordinated program of meetings, letters, and media coverage.

Finally, evaluation focused on the adequacy of the department's original assessment of the problem situation; monitoring the program as it was being implemented, with an eye to improving procedures; and assessing the reactions of those affected by and concerned about the move. The lessons learned were put to good use a few years later when the company closed a plant in another location, demonstrating how systematic research and evaluation improves the practice over time.

Obviously, this is an oversimplified presentation of what actually happened. The process includes many smaller steps within each of the four major steps represented in the model. These will be outlined in greater detail in this and the following three chapters. Defining public relations problems will be outlined in greater detail in this chapter. This chapter describes the research and fact-finding methods necessary for beginning the strategic planning process.

Role of Research In Strategic Planning

Monitoring the social, technical, and political environment is not only the first step in the process but also the most difficult. The fable of the elephant and the six blind men of "Indostan" illustrates the challenge: Each blind man

encounters only a single part of the beast and describes the elephant based on that limited information. For example, the one who grabs the trunk concludes, “The Elephant is very like a snake!” The one who feels the knee says, “Tis clear enough the Elephant is very like a tree!” This process continues, with each experiencing only a portion of the elephant. In the end, each was partly right and mostly wrong about the nature of the beast but argued “loud and long” based on his respective encounter with the elephant.⁴ Without researching a problem situation, practitioners run the risk of acting like the six blind men from Indostan.

Surveys of practitioners routinely show that research training (read “metrics”) is near the top of the list of requested professional continuing education. Practitioners often say that they do not do more research because they lack funds and have too little time. A better explanation of why so little research is used in public relations, however, is a combination of the following: (1) some employers and clients do not think that research is necessary, or do not want to pay for it, so they do not demand it, and (2) many practitioners do not know how to conduct and use scientific research.

As one corporate public relations executive responded in a Ketchum Public Relations survey, “The problem is not with research methodology, but with the inability—or perhaps laziness—of PR professionals who prefer to fly by the seats of their pants.”⁵ The Excellence Project researchers pointed out the consequence of that approach: “Public relations less often conducts research or uses other formal approaches to gathering information for strategic planning—an indication that many communication units are not qualified to make a full contribution to strategic planning.”⁶

Until recently, few practitioners studied research methods while in college or anticipated that research would be part of their professional work. Once they began professional practice, they felt little pressure from employers and clients, who often did not demand or fund research. An instructor in one master’s degree program even encountered resistance the first day of the required research process and methodology class: “We’re the creative people, not numbers crunchers. We’re supposed to be intuitive—that’s why people hire us!”⁷

For years, executives and practitioners alike bought the popular myth that

public relations deals with intangibles that cannot be measured. David Rockland, Ketchum’s global research director, says, “What I hear all the time is, ‘You can’t measure that. You can’t test that. Let’s just go with our gut’ ”⁸ With each passing day, it becomes increasingly difficult to sell that position to results-oriented management accustomed to making decisions based on evidence and objective analysis. A practitioner in a nonprofit organization attributes “the decline of PR . . . to the lack of monitoring and substantive evaluation of results. That’s why PR is seen by CEOs as ‘fluff.’ ”⁹

Without research, practitioners are limited to asserting that they know the situation and can recommend a solution. With research and analysis, they can present and advocate proposals supported by evidence and theory. In this context, research is the systematic gathering of information to describe and understand situations and to check out assumptions about publics and public relations consequences. Its main purpose is to reduce uncertainty in decision making. It is the scientific alternative to tenacity, authority, and intuition.

Even though it cannot answer all the questions or sway all decisions, methodical, systematic research is the foundation of effective public relations throughout the process—before, during, and after the program. The research benchmarks model in [Figure 11.2](#)

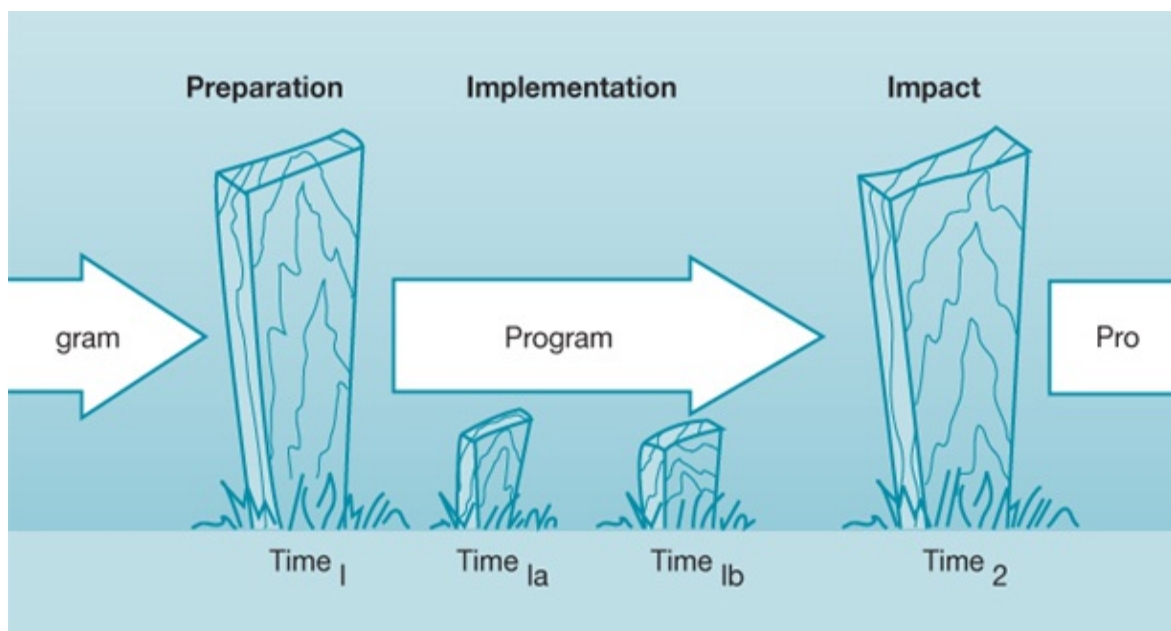


Figure 11.2 Research Benchmarks Model

illustrates the continuous nature of how research is used to plan, manage, and evaluate public relations programs:

Before the program begins, research is used to define the problem situation and formulate the program strategy—represented by the Time_1 stake. During the program, research is used to monitor the program in progress—represented by the Time_{1a} and Time_{1b} stakes—in order to reformulate (adjust) the strategy or fine-tune the tactics. After the program, research is used to measure and document overall program impact and effectiveness—represented by the Time_2 stake in the model. Of course, Time_2 becomes the Time_1 benchmark for the next program cycle.

Research Attitude

Computers, the Internet, online information sources, research organizations, and management information specialists have greatly increased organizations' abilities to gather, process, transfer, and interpret information. The increase in MBA-prepared, information-conscious middle and upper managers intensifies the pressure on public relations for accountability. In short, a research orientation is necessary for those practicing public relations in the information age. An early researcher who helped build the automotive industry, C. F. Kettering, once described this attitude toward research thusly:

Research is a high-hat word that scares a lot of people. It need not. It is rather simple. Essentially, it is nothing but a state of mind—a friendly, welcoming attitude toward change. Going out to look for change, instead of waiting for it to come. Research . . . is an effort to do things better and not be caught asleep at the switch. The research state of mind can apply to anything. Personal affairs or any kind of business, big or little. It is the problem-solving mind as contrasted with the let-well-

enough-alone mind. It is the composer mind, instead of the fiddler mind; it is the “tomorrow” mind instead of the “yesterday” mind.[10](#)

Research is no longer a specialized activity delegated to “chi-square types” tucked away in the bowels of an organization. As Rossi and Freeman said: “It is also a political and management activity, an input into the complex mosaic from which emerge policy decisions and allocations for the planning, design, implementation, and continuation of programs to better the human condition.”[11](#)

Modern managers are a fact-minded lot; they want figures. In many organizations, these executives tend to be isolated from problems by cadres of specialists and subordinates. When the public relations aspect of organizational problems must be brought home to them, the research-based approach is most effective. Because other parts of organizations—such as marketing, finance, and personnel—have adapted a research-based approach, so must public relations. In fact, studies of practitioners show that earning one of the few seats at the management strategy table increases if practitioners do research:

In particular, their role is as environmental scanners, providing information needed about strategic publics affected by managerial decisions. They get this information through formal research and various informal methods of gaining information about organizational constituencies.[12](#)

Researchers studying the relationship between environmental scanning research and participation in management decision making concluded the following:

This study demonstrates that formal environmental scanning is the necessary link between environmental uncertainty and instrumental use of research Scientific, numeric data from formal scanning best fits the needs of management decision making; by itself, informal or “seat-of-the-pants” scanning does not.[13](#)

Listening As Systematic Research

The International Listening Association defines “listening” as “the process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages.” Effective public relations starts with listening, which requires openness and systematic effort. Too often, what purports to be communication is simply opposing ideas passing each other in different one-way channels. This can occur, for example, in management-versus-labor bargaining when each side merely wants to score points, not listen to the other’s views. As the late communication scholar Wilbur Schramm explained, “Feedback is a powerful tool. When it does not exist or is delayed or feeble . . . then the situation engenders doubt and concern in the communicator, and frustration and sometimes hostility in the audience.”¹⁴ Also in his words, “Feedback tells the communicator how his message is being received.”¹⁵

Listening is not an easy task. Channels from the worker out in the plant far from headquarters or from the alumnus now living in Seattle must be created and kept open. Failure to listen often leads to purposeless “communications” on issues that do not exist to publics that are not there. Unless you know the language, orientation, and predisposition of your audience—learned through empathetic listening—you are not likely to communicate effectively. Research is simply one method of structuring systematic listening into the communication process (see [Exhibit 11.1](#)).



Exhibit 11.1

Walter Barlow on Research as Listening

Walter G. Barlow, President Research Strategies Corporation

At the end of a meeting with the CEO of a large corporation some years ago, he asked me, “Son, tell me, just what kind of ‘racket’ are you in?”

I replied, “Well, if you will let me ask a few questions, I think I can demonstrate what I do, but I warn you, the questions might cause you to throw me out of this office.”

“Go ahead,” he said.

“Well, how much of your business day would you say is spent in communication of some sort—having a conversation like this, attending meetings and conferences, reading reports, calling on the phone, and all the rest?”

He thought for a moment and replied, “You have pretty much described how I spend all of my time. I’m either communicating in some way, preparing for it, or seriously thinking about it.”

That warmed me up a bit, because I felt safe to proceed. “Well, you have just told me that your time, valued at about \$800,000 in salary last year, is spent in the process of communication. Now, tell me, in this communication, do you do all the talking?”

He smiled right away, “Of course not!”

“Would you say you spend, say, 40 percent of your communicating time in listening, or taking in information in some way?”

“That would probably be about right. I know I talk a lot, but I do listen too.”

“Suppose I had asked the top fifty executives in your company the same question, do you think I would have gotten agreement on at least 40 percent?”

Again, he replied immediately, “I damned well hope you would.”

“Now, we have established something else, and that is that you allocate around \$320,000 of your base salary to the process of listening, and if I multiplied that 40 percent times the salaries of the fifty others, we would have a figure in the millions.”

He was now totally absorbed in the interchange. “Yes, I see. I had never thought of it that way.”

Here I had a chance to move in with the clincher: “Well, I happen to know that your advertising budget is in the neighborhood of \$35 million, and if we added in all the other corporate ‘talking,’ we would certainly come up with a figure over \$100 million.” I had his total attention now.

“And just how much does your corporation spend in listening? Is it any wonder that from time to time you must feel that nobody really understands you?”

I did not get an answer to the question, because the point had been made: whatever listening was going on had to be a tiny fraction of the talking, a situation he would never have brooked in his personal corporate life.

“Well, corporations like yours can’t listen like you’re doing now. The only way we have found yet to do that is through scientifically planned research. It can reflect back to you how people are reacting to the corporate talking you do in so many ways.”

“And that is the racket I am in: helping corporations close the loop and listen to their constituencies.”

Courtesy Walter G. Barlow, President, Research Strategies

Corporation, Princeton, NJ.

An able listener of another time, Abraham Lincoln, knew the importance of listening. Twice a week, Lincoln set aside a time for conversations with ordinary folk: housewives, farmers, merchants, and retirees. He listened patiently to what they had to say, no matter how humble their circumstances or how trivial their business. A military aide once protested to the president that he was wasting valuable time on these unimportant people. Lincoln rebuked him, saying, “I tell you, Major . . . that I call these receptions my public opinion bath . . . the effect, as a whole, is renovating and invigorating.”¹⁶

Today the White House has sophisticated and elaborate methods for monitoring constituent opinion: daily analyses of media (traditional and new); sophisticated mail, voice mail, and email tabulations; Internet monitoring programs; as well as regular public opinion polls. Still, however, the president uses social media and conducts “town hall meetings” with constituents, engaging them in modern-day “public opinion baths.”

Prudence dictates the systematic listening to an organization’s publics through scientific research. Yet many organizations fail to utilize this public relations tool fully, because systematic listening to obtain reliable feedback takes effort and skill, as well as time and money. The amount of information input, however, determines the extent to which an organization operates as an open system rather than as a closed system in dealing with problems.

Defining Public Relations Problems

In closed systems, problems are allowed to define themselves, often as crises. The public relations effort then necessarily reverts to “firefighting” rather than “fire prevention.” Examples include spending millions of dollars to counter proposals made by dissident stockholders; paying millions of dollars for advertising time and space to apologize for past actions and to announce corrective measures; and suffering costly construction delays because activist citizen groups resorted to legal action to stop proposed, yet unexplained, projects.

Such situations have long histories, and sometimes neither side recalls what caused the blow-up. Heading off such blow-ups is part of the task. The earlier a complaint is caught, the easier it is to handle. Continuous fact-finding uncovers many problems while they are still small enough to permit corrective action and communication before they become major public issues. The same attentive listening catches rumors before they become widespread and part of the public's perceptions of the organization.

Problem definition begins with someone making a value judgment that something is either wrong, soon could be wrong, or could be better. Implicit is the notion that organizational vision and mission statements, as well as goals, provide the criteria for making such judgments. Goal states serve as the basis for deciding if and when a real or potential problem exists. Once a judgment is made, however, the process becomes an objective, systematic research task designed to describe in detail the dimensions of the problem, the factors contributing to or alleviating the problem, and the stakeholders involved in or affected by the situation. In short, research is used to determine "What's happening now?"

Problem Statement

A useful problem statement summarizes what is known about the problem situation:

1. It is written in the present tense, describing the current situation.

Avoid words such as "will," "could," and "should," because they address some desired future state, not "what's happening now."

2. It describes the situation in specific and measurable terms,

detailing most of or all of the following:

- What is the source of concern?
- Where is this a problem?

- When is it a problem?
- Who is involved or affected?
- How are they involved or affected?
- Why is this a concern to the organization and its publics?

3. A problem statement does not imply solutions or place blame.

If it does, program strategies are predetermined and limited. The classic example of a problem statement that has an implied solution is the overused, “We have a communication problem.” Communication may be part of the solution, but it is not the problem. What problem do you think communication will solve? Another example is, “Poor training of the field staff is the problem.” It appears that someone has already determined that the training program needs to be improved. Maybe so, but what is the problem that makes someone jump to this solution and blame the training staff—the very people who will have to be part of the solution?

A problem for a university’s alumni association could be that only 5 percent of new graduates join the alumni association during the first year following graduation, compared with 21 percent of all graduates, resulting in lost contact and reduced support for the university. If you had worked for one of the major oil companies several years ago, you might have been concerned about the “divestiture problem”: A plurality (47 percent) of Americans agree with proposals to break up each of the major oil companies into four separate and competing operating companies, thus encouraging some in Congress to vote in favor of divestiture legislation.

Notice that both of the problem statements above contain concrete measures of the problem situation based on objective research and documentation. Notice also that solutions are not implied, meaning that no particular strategy is suggested in any of the problem statements. In other words, communication may be part of the solution, but it is not stated as part of the problem. Finally, notice that the two examples describe the current situation —“What’s happening now?”—not the future.

Writer Todd Henry explains the importance of the first step defining public relations problems in the process: “The better we are at defining and refining the problems we’re trying to solve, the more likely our minds will do what they do best—identify potentially useful insights.”¹⁷

Situation Analysis

A problem statement represents a concise description of the situation, often written in a sentence or short paragraph. In contrast, a situation analysis is the unabridged collection of all that is known about the situation, its history, forces operating on it, and those involved or affected internally and externally. A situation analysis contains all the background information needed to expand upon and to illustrate in detail the meaning of a problem statement. This step in the process results in what some practitioners call their “fact book”—the information assembled in three-ring binders or digital files.

Internal Factors

The section on internal factors deals with organizational policies, procedures, and actions related to the problem situation. Rather than direct all the attention to the publics and other external factors, a situation analysis begins with a thorough and searching review of perceptions and actions of key actors in the organization, structures and processes of organizational units relevant to the problem, and the history of the organization’s involvement (see [Exhibit 11.2](#)).

Exhibit 11.2

Content of Situation Analysis: [Part I](#)—Internal Factors

1. Statements of the organization’s mission, charter, bylaws, history, and structure

2. Lists, biographies, and photos of key officers, board members, managers, and so forth
3. Descriptions and histories of programs, products, services, and so forth
4. Statistics about resources, budget, staffing, sales, profits, stockholders, and so forth
5. Policy statements and procedures related to the problem situation
6. Position statements (quotations) by key executives regarding the problem situation
7. Description of how the organization currently handles the problem situation
8. Descriptions and lists of the organization's internal stakeholders
9. Lists of organizational media (two-way) for communicating with internal groups

The internal situation analysis also includes a “communication audit”—a systematic documentation of an organization’s communication efforts for the purpose of understanding how it communicates with its publics. The Encyclopedia of Public Relations describes the communication audit as follows:

Today, such audits focus on evaluating an organization’s communication vehicles, such as newsletters, annual reports, brochures, press materials, Web sites, and video programs. . . . [Respondents] often rate the effectiveness of various communication vehicles they receive on the basis of accuracy, timeliness, and usefulness. . . . Results of a communication audit may be used to improve the content, design, and distribution of publications, or to revamp or discontinue communication vehicles that are not achieving desired results.[18](#)

Consistent with the open systems model, practitioners do an audit to learn in detail how, what, and with whom they communicate. An audit provides decision makers a clear picture of what is currently done and a basis later for deciding what changes may need to be made to help solve the problem.

Another essential part of the internal portion of a situation analysis is a constantly updated organizational almanac. This file not only serves as an essential organizational background reference when working on specific problems, but also provides ideas and information for speeches, pamphlets, special reports, exhibits, and media requests. Most organizations do not have librarians or historians, so public relations departments often handle queries that cannot be answered by others. Journalists expect and need quick answers. Ready access to complete and accurate information on an organization, its history, performance, and managers can give the public relations department a start on crises or rumors in the making.

External Factors

After helping to develop an understanding of the organizational side of the problem situation, an analysis focuses on the external factors, both positive and negative. The starting point may be a systematic review of the history of the problem situation outside the organization. A situation analysis also calls for detailed study of who is currently involved or affected and how. Much of what is done under the banner of public relations research includes gathering information about stakeholders: what they know, how they feel, and what they do that is related to the problem (see [Exhibit 11.3](#)).

Exhibit 11.3

Content of Situation Analysis: [Part II](#)—External Factors

1. Clippings from newspaper, magazine, trade publication, newsletter, and online coverage of the organization and the problem situation

2. Reports, transcripts, and tapes of radio, television, and cable coverage
3. Content analyses of media coverage and Internet sources— websites, blogs, social media, and so on.
4. Lists of media, journalists, columnists, talk-show hosts, freelance writers, online bloggers, websites, and producers who report news and features about the organization and issues related to the problem situation
5. Lists of and background information on individuals and groups who share the organization's concerns, interests, and positions on the problem situation (including their controlled internal and external media outlets)
6. Lists of and background information on individuals and groups who oppose the organization's concerns, interests, and positions on the problem situation (including their controlled internal and external media outlets)
7. Results of surveys and public opinion polls related to the organization and the problem situation
8. Schedules of special events, observances, and other important dates related to the organization and the problem situation
9. Lists of government agencies, legislators, and other officials with regulatory and legislative power affecting the organization and the problem situation
10. Copies of relevant regulations, legislation, pending bills, referenda, government publications, and hearing reports
11. Copies of published research on topics related to the problem situation
12. Lists of important reference books, records, and directories, as

well as their locations in the organization

Stakeholder analysis is the process of identifying who is involved and who is affected in a situation. Stakeholders—in the imagery of system theory—are part of the same system as an organization. They are people in interdependent relationships with an organization, meaning that what they know, feel, and do has an impact on the organization and vice versa. In the interest of building and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships, organizations undertake periodic stakeholder analyses—sometimes referred to as “public relations audits”—to monitor how organizational policies, procedures, decisions, actions, and goals affect others. The different stakeholder groups can be ranked or rated according to the extent to which each is interdependent with an organization in a particular problem situation. Notice that not all those identified as stakeholders in a situation necessarily become target publics for the program designed to address a particular problem (the next chapter discusses defining publics).¹⁹

How could program planners set objectives for each of the publics if they do not know what people currently know about the issue at hand, what their related opinions are, and how they behave with respect to the issue? How could planners develop action and communication strategies without a detailed understanding of and empathy for the target publics? At least four additional questions must be answered through research:

1. How much do people use information in the problem situation?
Communication is effective only if receivers see a need for information. The situation analysis research must determine to what extent different people actually feel a need for and use information related to a given problem situation.
2. What kinds of information do people use or seek? Whereas “why” questions make up 20 to 35 percent of the questions people typically ask in situations, these are the ones least likely to be answered successfully in communication programs. Programs that respond to audience needs rather than the interests of the source are based on knowledge of what information different people want.
3. How do people use information? Information is rarely an end in itself,

because people use information in many different ways. Receivers see information as useful if they think that it relates to a specific action, topic, or plan they consider important. Rarely are they helped simply because they received general information.

4. What predicts information use? Demographics or other cross-situational characteristics often do not predict how people use information. Rather, where receivers are in the decision-making process with respect to a problem, and how they see themselves in the situation, determine whether or not they will use the information. In other words, planners must know how different individuals see themselves involved in or affected by the situation.[20](#)

Researching the stakeholders before planning program strategies tests the accuracy of assumptions about who they are, what they know, how they feel about the situation, how they are involved or affected, what information they see as important, how they use it, and even how they get information. With that information in hand—and only then—can program planners write objectives for each public and develop strategies to achieve them.

Systematic definition and study of the stakeholders also determine their order of priority. Rarely do practitioners have the need or resources and staff to mount programs directed to all stakeholders. Priorities must be assigned based on which stakeholders are most central to the particular problem at hand and the program goal to be achieved, not based on past efforts or routine approaches unrelated to the current problem situation.

Increased understanding of the stakeholders helps determine their information needs and uses; thus, this understanding helps practitioners develop the appropriate message content. Researching their communication patterns and media preferences helps practitioners select the most effective and efficient media strategy for delivering those messages.

Only after the situation has been completely analyzed can practitioners set realistic program goals. Lacking complete and accurate information, practitioners can be guilty of overpromises and underdelivery. Without a complete understanding of the problem situation, practitioners run the risk of developing programs that do not address the major causes of the problem. No

amount of public relations communication can change bad performance into good performance, or socially irresponsible action into responsible behavior. Neither can it compensate for lack of integrity or persuade publics that an unfair or self-serving policy is fair and unselfish. Overenthusiastic selling of the public relations function often results from incomplete comprehension of the problem situation and leads to the appearance of program failure.

Researching the situation gives practitioners and their employers and clients the timely, complete, and accurate information they need to understand the problem, which serves as a basis for making decisions. Research is simply an attempt to reduce uncertainty, or as one executive put it, “to help really see what’s there to be seen.” (See [Exhibit 11.4](#).)

Swot Analysis

Detailed analyses of the internal and external factors in the problem situation provide practitioners with the information they need to assess organizational strengths (S) and weaknesses (W) and to identify the opportunities (O) and threats (T) in the external environment. In practice, practitioners refer to this approach to summarizing the situation analysis as “SWOT” or “TOWS” analysis. Several strategic implications logically flow from this analytic framework:

1. SO strategies build on organizational strengths to take advantage of opportunities in the external environment.
2. ST strategies also build on organizational strengths to counter threats in the external environment.
3. WO strategies attempt to minimize organizational weaknesses to take advantage of external opportunities.
4. WT strategies attempt to minimize both organizational weaknesses and environmental threats.[21](#)

Another analytic technique for summarizing the findings of a situation analysis is “force-field analysis,” based on the theories of Kurt Lewin, which originated in the 1950s. Before researching the situation, practitioners and others on the management team brainstorm the negative forces contributing to or causing the problem, as well as the positive forces alleviating or solving the problem. The research on the internal and external forces helps determine the extent to which each contributes positively or negatively to the problem situation. Just as with SWOT analysis, the weighted forces identified in the force field analysis lead to targeted strategic decisions designed to minimize or neutralize the impact of negative forces and to maximize or enhance the contributions from positive forces.[22](#)

In the process of analyzing the situation, one is able to clearly and specifically define and refine the problem statement. Typically, the cyclical process begins with a tentative problem statement, followed by investigation of the situation that then leads to refining the problem definition. Defining and redefining the problem continues for the duration of the program.

Exhibit 11.4

Nearly Over the Brink: How Research Radically Changed a Campaign Plan



Julia McHugh, APR Director of Public Relations Santa Barbara Zoo Photo by David Bazemore

The Santa Barbara Zoo’s marketing department was exhilarated when we met to create a public relations strategy for the opening of the new \$7.5 million “California Trails” exhibit complex featuring endangered species of the Golden State.

The exhibit showcased California condors, the most endangered bird in North America—and our Zoo would become only the third in the world to exhibit these huge, prehistoric scavengers.

We quickly identified our approach: Focus on the condors’ recovery from near extinction. There were only 22 condors left in 1988, now there are more than 350, with more than half flying free in the wild. Zoos played a major role in their recovery. We targeted Earth Day of the next year as our opening date—what an environmental success story!

For this group of seasoned zoo professionals, this seemed to be the perfect plan. “Back from the Brink” made a great campaign theme.

But what would our guests think? There was little budget for

research, so we conducted just two simple surveys. One tested guests' familiarity with endangered animals. In the other, guests were asked to rank choices about "what is most interesting about California condors?"

That's when our plan went over the brink.

Did the guests say they cared about the recovery story? Not so much. How about that the last wild condor was captured 40 miles, as the condor flies, from the Zoo? Nope. That condors, born in captivity and later released, are nesting in the wild nearby? A bit. Condors are living relics of the Pleistocene era, and used to feast on woolly mammoths? Somewhat—mostly kids.

The guests' overwhelming interest: Condors are big.



Photo by Sheri Horiszny

Their wingspans are nearly 10 feet, making them the largest bird in North America.

The data also showed that locals and Santa Barbara Zoo members were more informed and cared about the condor's recovery. Out-of-town visitors were polarized: Some found condors amazing, others didn't care—very few opinions were in-between. But when told the condors' story, most guests reacted quite positively.

This research, as informal as it was, pointed out what we, the message planners, couldn't see—the bird itself. Just the size of it, as many responders said, is "awe inspiring."

That became our “A Sense of Awe” campaign: Wonder at their size, be amazed at California condors’ story of survival. This theme resonated with both locals and visitors.

The condors’ huge wingspan may get guests in the gate, but they leave knowing that human beings brought a species back from the brink of extinction.

It is a valuable lesson: Don’t overlook the big black bird staring you in the face. Smart public relations planners ask audiences, rather than assume their opinions . . . or they take the risk of going over the brink themselves.

Courtesy Santa Barbara Zoo.

Research Methods

The uses of research in modern public relations are introduced in this chapter introduced here are addressed in more detail in [Chapter 14](#) . Sometimes practitioners do the research themselves. Other times they hire research specialists or research firms to design the research, gather the information, and analyze the data. In either approach, practitioners must know research concepts and processes. Simply put, you cannot satisfactorily explain to someone else something you do not understand yourself. Ann H. Barkelew, former senior vice president and general manager of Fleishman-Hillard’s Minneapolis office, says, “You cannot practice public relations today—successfully or effectively—without research.”²³

Scientists long ago developed a generally accepted approach to doing research, simply referred to as the “scientific method.” The process begins with a clear statement of the problem under investigation. Some choose to phrase the problem in the form of a question. Others pose hypothetical relationships between observable phenomena for testing and building theory. The next step is to develop the research design, the plan for making the observations related to the research problem. Is a survey needed? An experiment? Existing data in organizational records? Or will the observations

be taken from published census reports? This step is followed by choosing the specific methods for gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data.[24](#)

Whereas two research projects are seldom the same in the specifics of how they are implemented, they share a common goal of increasing understanding of situations and relationships among phenomena. The approach and methods chosen for a particular project will depend on the problem being addressed, the skills and preferences of the researcher, the available resources, and the constraints imposed by others or required in the situation. Informal and formal research methods differ primarily in their sample selection and sample size, and—as a result—in the generalizability of the findings they produce.

Informal or “Exploratory” Methods

Informal methods still dominate public relations research, even though highly developed social scientific methods are available. Informal methods are useful, however, if practitioners recognize their weaknesses and purposes. The major problem—samples of unknown representativeness—results from how samples are selected. The samples in informal research typically limit the extent to which the results from samples represent anybody other than the few from whom information was gathered. For example, the results may represent only the opinions of a vocal minority rather than the majority, those eager to volunteer rather than those reluctant to speak out, or the few who choose to participate in the online survey rather than the many more who do not.

If viewed as methods for detecting and exploring problem situations and for pretesting research and program strategies, then informal methods serve valuable purposes. When the results are used as the basis for describing problem situations and stakeholders for program planning and evaluation, then these methods are misused. “Exploratory” best represents the probing nature of informal methods, as the findings may not accurately represent the reality being studied.

The following sections describe some of the informal methods used in public relations.

Personal Contact and Observation

In 1893 Lord Bryce said, “The best way in which the tendencies at work in any community can be best discovered and estimated is by moving freely about among all sorts and conditions of men.” Politicians have been doing this for a long time. Likewise, skill in sizing up people’s awareness, opinions, and attitudes has long been and always will be a prime qualification of public relations professionals.

For example, when management requested an employee communication campaign against drug abuse, a corporate practitioner, posing as a patient, checked into a drug treatment center and spent three days acquiring firsthand knowledge about drugs, their use, and their potential effects on employees. Others have worked in wheelchairs to gain perspective on what it is like to go for coffee breaks, use the bathroom, or complete other tasks in facilities not designed for easy access. Trade shows, community and professional meetings, or other occasions that attract stakeholders provide opportunities for practitioners to listen carefully and gain understanding.

Managers in one company visited shareholders in their homes after business hours. Each year management personnel in various locations personally talked with shareholders about the company’s business. The annual shareholder meetings held each year by publicly owned corporations represent yet another example of more structured use of personal contact. In an aggressive approach to getting feedback, a state highway department used a travel trailer as a mobile information center to collect citizens’ views on proposed highway projects. The trailer provided an atmosphere for candid one-on-one discussions with highway personnel and gave people who are reluctant to speak in public meetings an opportunity to air their views.

Key Informants

Practitioners commonly talk with key informants, a variation on personal contacts. This approach involves selecting and interviewing knowledgeable leaders and experts. The interview typically takes the form of an open-ended

discussion in which selected individuals are encouraged to talk about the problem or issue in their own terms. Because in-depth interviews with key informants take so long to complete and require such careful content analysis, the technique is limited to a relatively small number of respondents.

Many practitioners regularly consult influential people such as authors, editors, reporters, religious leaders, labor leaders, professors, civic leaders, bankers, and special-interest group leaders. Some retain panels of “knowledgeables” who are on call or consulted periodically. The basis for selecting key informants is their perceived knowledge of an issue and their ability to represent others’ views. The major limitation, of course, is that because they were selected due to their special knowledge and leadership roles, by definition they may not reflect the views of less informed followers. In-depth interviews with key informants often yield early warning signals on important issues, however.

Focus Groups

It is only a short step from personal contacts and key informants to asking groups for ideas and feedback. “Focus groups” represent a structured approach for gathering data from groups. The technique is commonly used in both public relations and consumer marketing research. For example, Twentieth Century Fox conducted focus groups to see how audiences felt about a little movie that a young director—George Lucas—wanted to call Star Wars.[25](#)

Practitioners use focus groups to explore how people will react to proposals and to gather information useful for developing questionnaires to be used in formal research methods. Unexpected insights are gained from the sometimes-spirited dialogue among participants. Researchers call such information “serendipitous findings,” but unanticipated reactions may be the best reason for using these informal research methods. It is better to learn such things before going to the field with a full-blown survey or program test.

Typically, focus groups include 6 to 12 carefully selected representatives from a target public. They are asked to discuss a specific issue or program

proposal in depth. Sessions are videotaped, and the recordings are carefully analyzed to catch the smallest detail in participants' comments. The process is guided by an effective moderator who is an able interviewer and facilitator of group process. The moderator is the key to the success of the focus group method.

One authority says the major strength of focus groups is the open, spontaneous, and detailed discussions they generate, even among people who did not know each other before the session began.²⁶ They can be planned, conducted, and analyzed in a matter of days, providing insights and understanding that can be factored into program planning.

Even when members of a group are carefully selected, as with information gained from personal contacts, the results cannot be used to make inferences to a larger population or public. Because the group is small, selection is usually not truly random, and the group-discussion context introduces an artificial setting. So, the results are not representative—in a scientific sense—of a public or the publics from which the participants were selected. As with other informal methods, focus groups are typically small groups of unknown representativeness.

Moderators also can have an effect on what and how the group discusses. In addition, those viewing and interpreting the session filter what is said through their own subjective perceptions. It is simply not appropriate to suggest that findings from this approach can be used in place of data gathered objectively from scientifically selected samples. The major uses are to identify and explore issues for further study in formal surveys and to pretest program strategies before full-blown field testing.

Some marketers are using a new twist on the focus group—online community networks.²⁷ Instead of 6 to 12 people sitting in a room for a short time, organizations can create social networks of selected “representatives” to respond to questions, consider various proposals, try out new procedures, or even use products in development. The “group” can include hundreds, if not thousands, of participants. Organizations can keep different panels of participants for different kinds of issues. Questions about how representative these groups and the social-network experience are of the real world keep this approach in the informal exploratory category of information gathering.

Community Forums

Government agencies have long used the community forum exploratory strategy to solicit information and participation. The USDA Forest Service, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the Environmental Protection Agency regularly conduct public meetings and hearings to get information and reactions to various project and program proposals. One of the lessons learned from their experiences is that community input must be sought early and often to keep agencies responsive to citizen interests. The findings from an experimental study of citizen input, however, found that sincere agency–citizen power sharing was more important than the timing of the input:

The findings of this study provide strong empirical support for the conclusion that true power sharing in the public participation process causes increased levels of satisfaction with the decision-making process and with the final decision reached. At the same time, this study also provides strong empirical evidence that the timing of public participation (early vs. late) in the decision-making process exerts no measurable impact on the process and outcome satisfaction among publics.[28](#)

Community forums also include open town hall meetings, such as those used by the White House and political candidates, and the “community engagement meetings” often required by public policy. The nature of the community engagement, however, can vary greatly: (1) Pseudo-participation—“We are required to hold public meetings before we begin construction, but we do not intend to factor in your input. The project is already designed.” (2) Information-only—“We are here to tell you about the project so that you know what is going to happen. If you give us input, we will attach it to the final proposal or environmental impact report.” (3) Consultation—“We want your input on the project, because you may have some ideas and concerns that affect our final design.” (4) Full participation—“We want to collaborate with the interested parties to share decision-making, so the final project incorporates community ideas and addresses community concerns.”[29](#)

Advisory Committees and Boards

A standing committee or board can sometimes be more useful than a single group session, particularly for long-running programs and issues. In some instances, such a group can serve as a continuous feedback mechanism for detecting possible changes in public opinion on issues, even before they would show up in polls and surveys. There is a price, however, for using advisory committees and boards. Their advice must be given earnest consideration, or this method will backfire. Members quickly sense when they are being used for cosmetic purposes or being showcased to demonstrate concern for community input. Appoint such a committee or board only when the major motivation is to sincerely solicit input and guidance on a regular basis, and be prepared to act on the input.

Nonprofit organizations use this approach to tap the professional public relations community for both expertise and services. Almost every chapter of the United Way, Arthritis Foundation, Easter Seals, Salvation Army, and similar organizations has a public relations advisory committee. Committee service also gives public relations practitioners a way to fulfill their public service obligation as professionals.

Other organizations—for-profit and nonprofit alike—use advisory committees and boards. For example, hospitals, chambers of commerce, and police departments typically use this method for gathering information from the communities they serve. Although advisory committees and boards provide valuable information and guidance, they cannot substitute for formal approaches to determining the actual distribution of opinions and reactions among target publics. They also provide effective forums for increasing interaction, participation, and in-depth probing of issues. In other words, they too are exploratory techniques used to supplement more formal methods.

Ombudsman or Ombuds Officer

The ombuds officer in an organization is someone who listens to the concerns of internal organizational publics. This person may also review organizational

policies and mediate disputes between the organization and its employees. The term “ombudsman” originated when the Swedish government established the first such position in 1713. Growing dissatisfaction with ever-longer lines of communication to increasingly isolated managers and bureaucrats has brought about widespread adoption of this informal information-gathering method in government agencies. In countless corporations, the ombudsman concept has proven useful in providing feedback and ideas for solving problems while they are still manageable.

Two kinds of ombudsmen are used. One, true to the roots of the original, investigates and solves problems. The second, who at best parries problems, often is there to protect the bureaucracy and to create the illusion of a responsive organization. The former has independent authority to take action on complaints; the latter facilitates communication and seeks authority from others to implement remedies.[30](#)

The ombudsman’s role and scope of its authority vary widely. Dow Chemical Company once established an “ombudswoman” to help promote the advancement of women in the company. At Bronx Community College, the ombudsman, appointed by the president, acts as a conduit for student complaints but has no authority to make full-scale investigations. At the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, on the other hand, the ombudsman sees the job as “reporting to nobody and responsible to everyone.” The U.S. Navy started its family ombudsman program in 1809 and sees the ombudsman’s role as one of cutting governmental red tape and acting as liaison between interested parties and the Navy offices. The ombudsman “investigates organizational problems and makes recommendations for remedial action to improve the quality of administration and redress individual grievances.” A large New York hospital employs, as do many hospitals, a “patient representative” to serve as an advocate of patients “to help them and their families find satisfactory solutions to problems.”

In each of these settings, the ombudsman provides an effective means for facilitating greater management awareness of public reactions and views. But because this method relies on people who seek out the opportunity to make their feelings and complaints known—a self-selected sample—it also is an exploratory, informal approach to gathering information. Although

information gathered by an ombudsman may not accurately describe the frequency or distribution of problems or concerns among the larger group, particularly among less assertive members, it can help detect that they exist for some.

Call-In Telephone Lines

Toll-free 800 numbers are used to obtain instant feedback and to monitor the concerns and interests of various publics. Johnson & Johnson tracked telephone calls during the consumer panic associated with the seven deaths caused by cyanide-laced Extra-Strength Tylenol capsules. Similarly, Procter & Gamble (P&G) monitored more than 100,000 calls on its 800 number when a rumor was circulating that P&G promoted Satanism. The calls not only gave the companies opportunities to respond to concerned consumers, but also provided constantly updated information on public concerns and reactions.

Companies also recognize the public relations value of giving consumers and customers access to the corporation and of answering questions directly. By doing so, consumer and customer hotlines provide companies feedback on their products, services, facilities, and employees. Some organizations use call-in lines to field questions from employees; some hospitals use it to provide information and take complaints from patients and their families; other health care centers use toll-free numbers both to provide help and to determine the extent of health problems; and many government agencies use them to help citizens find their way through the bureaucratic maze.

To be effective, however, a call-in service must be used with sincerity. For example, the U.S. Bureau of Mines, acting in the wake of several major mine disasters, announced with great fanfare that it was installing hotline telephones at the entrance of every coal mine so that miners could alert the bureau if they found unsafe conditions. The bureau promised “instant action” on the reports. A few months later, a reporter for *The Wall Street Journal* found that the bureau had not monitored the recorded calls for almost two months. The newspaper reported that bureau employees “had forgotten about the machine.”

A pejorative description of radio talk shows, however, serves as a reminder of the danger in putting too much stock in analyses of telephone calls —“SLOP,” which stands for a “self-selected listener opinion poll.” While analyses of telephone calls can provide early evidence for detecting potential problems and public opinions, the caution is that detecting problems and opinions cannot substitute for describing the frequency of problems or the distribution of opinions among an organization’s stakeholders.

Mail and Email Analyses

Another economical way of collecting information is periodic analysis of incoming mail—traditional and online. Stakeholders’ correspondence reveals areas of favor and disfavor, as well as information needs. Letter writers, however, tend to be critical rather than commendatory. Letters may serve as early warnings of ill will or problem relationships, but they do not reflect a cross section of public opinion or even the views of a particular public.

President John F. Kennedy borrowed a leaf from Franklin D. Roosevelt’s book on keeping in touch with constituents. Kennedy directed that every 50th letter coming to the White House be brought to him. Periodic mail samples helped both these leaders bridge the moat surrounding the White House. Other chief executives in organizations of all kinds use daily or weekly reports on the mail to read the pulse of citizens’ concerns and opinions. Many organizations file brief summaries of letters to track public concerns.

At its peak, Ford Motor Company’s “We Listen Better” campaign brought in 18,000 letters a week from Ford owners. Letters were answered personally, not with form letters, which required a large investment in money and human resources. Comments, suggestions, and criticisms were carefully coded and keyed into a computer file. Printouts of the running tallies provided Ford executives useful information, even though the data came from a self-selected sample.

Similarly, the U.S. Census Bureau analyzed more than 12,000 emails from concerned residents about various issues related to the census. This analysis gave the agency a better idea of the census-related questions that people had,

so that preparations could be made for the next census to address these concerns proactively.

The exploratory nature of mail and email analysis provides information useful for detecting concerns and problems before they become widespread. Those who feel so strongly about something that they take time to write letters or emails may not be representative of entire publics, but they may be the first of many to follow. In this role, those who write letters join those who call 800 numbers as early warning signals of situations that need attention and may indicate a need for formal research.

Social Media and Other Online Sources

New communication technology creates opportunities for friend and foe to talk about each other, as well as about organizations, causes, and events. Prudent public relations practitioners also monitor what is being said about their organizations online. Rumors on the Internet have the potential to influence labor negotiations, attract regulatory attention, drive stock prices up or down, and increase or decrease sales. Among those accessing messages on the Internet, an organization's reputation can be damaged, its brand franchise can suffer, and its hard-earned goodwill can be diminished.

Jackson and Stoakes referred to the Internet's "dark side, where the spread of false and misleading information can cause serious injury to an unprepared target." They recommend that public relations practitioners monitor the Internet to prevent a "cybercrisis" because "rumors that originate on the Internet often make their way into print and broadcast media before a company even knows they exist."³¹ Some of the search engines useful for scanning what is being said on the World Wide Web include Google, Bing, Yahoo, and AltaVista, to name but a few.

Chat rooms, online forums, discussion groups, and blog posts also can be important sources of feedback. Many public relations practitioners now monitor the array of online social media in order to detect what is being said

about the organization and important issues. Some professional research firms such as Nielsen BuzzMetrics, BuzzLogic, and Radian6 have established listening, tracking, monitoring, and engagement tools specifically to “harvest” online comments for clients and to report what is said about brands, products, and organizations. “Buzz,” as this online word-of-mouth (or “word-of-mouse”) is called, represents the spontaneous comments of people interacting. Although target publics cannot be easily identified in Internet chat, monitoring online comment is another way to detect emerging views and opinion.

Again, such searches are informal methods for detecting what is being said on the Internet; they cannot produce profiles of public opinion. And that may be the most important point: Monitoring online sources can help practitioners tap into the rapidly expanding channels of interactive communication and to join the virtual conversation.

Field Reports

Many organizations have district agents, field representatives, or recruiters who live in and travel the territories served. These agents should be trained to listen and observe and be given an easy, regular means of reporting their observations. In this way they can serve as the eyes and ears of an organization.

Studies of organizational intelligence and communication demonstrate, however, that such representatives tend to “gild the lily” and to report what they think will set well with their bosses. This is particularly true if field staff know that their reports will pass through a gauntlet of superiors, the same people who hold power over their futures in the organization. For example, researchers studying “why employees are afraid to speak” in one organization concluded:

Why? In a phrase, self-preservation. . . . [W]e found the innate protective instinct so powerful that it also inhibited speech that clearly would have been intended to help the organization. . . . A culture of collective myths proved chilling—for example, stories of individuals who had said

something . . . were “suddenly gone from the company.”³²

In another example, attempting to assess the impact of a company’s “progress week,” management asked sales representatives to evaluate the program. Forty percent ventured no opinion. About half of those who did respond said the week’s promotion had produced more favorable opinions of the company. A formal survey later found that only about 1 in 10 of the target population was inclined to be more favorable in their opinion of the company. After comparing the field reports with the survey results, it was clear that only 12 of the 42 grassroots observers accurately assessed the results of the promotion. The comparison serves as a reminder that all subjective reports such as field reports must be used with caution. Like the other informal methods, field reports serve best as an early warning to detect situations that may call for more thorough, formal investigation.

Formal Methods

The purpose of both informal and formal methods is to gather accurate and useful information. Formal methods, however, are designed to gather data from an entire population or group (a “census”) or from a scientifically representative portion of a population or group (a “sample”) using objective measures. Formal methods help answer questions about situations that simply cannot be answered adequately using informal approaches.

The danger is that practitioner–researchers can become more concerned about the methods used than the purpose of the study. As one writer put it, “In science as in love, concentration on technique is quite likely to lead to impotence.” Those who get bogged down in research techniques at the expense of usefulness often spend time and resources to produce volumes of data that sit unused on shelves.

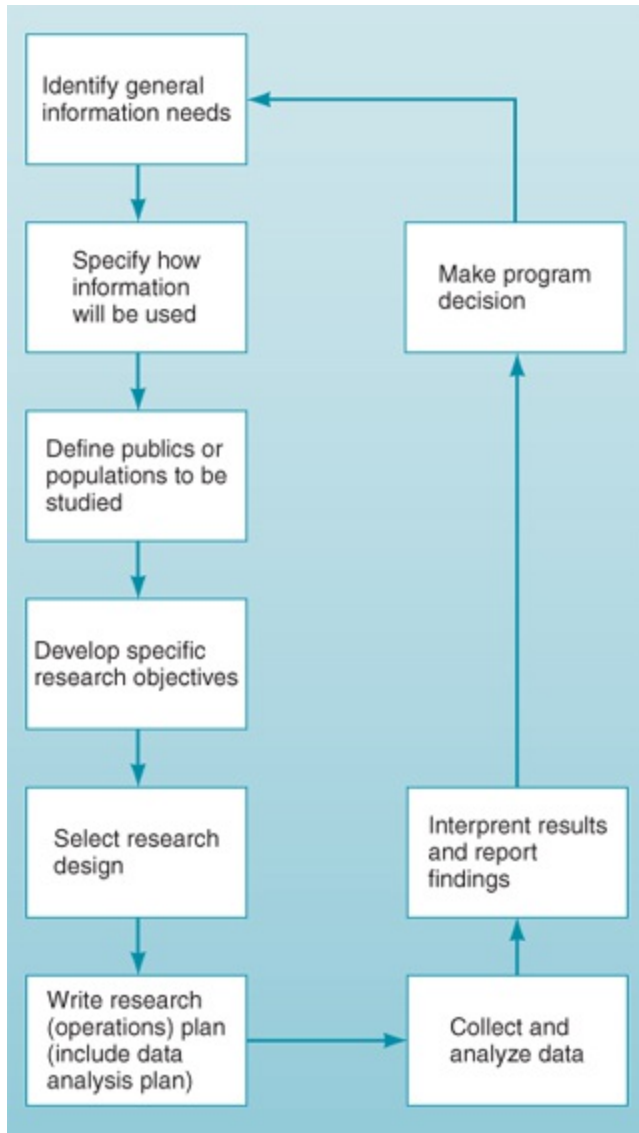


Figure 11.3 Flowchart for Designing a Research Project

Source: Glen M. Broom and David M. Dozier, *Using Research in Public Relations: Applications to Program Management*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990, p. 97. Used with permission.

Formal methods are useful, however, only if the research question and

objectives are clearly determined before selecting the research design. Other questions that need to be answered include the following:

1. What information is needed and why is it needed?
2. What publics should be targeted when gathering data?
3. When are the findings needed?
4. How will the findings be used?
5. How should the information be gathered? In other words, what is the most appropriate research method for gathering the information?
6. How will the findings be summarized and interpreted?
7. When and to whom will the findings be presented?
8. Who will be responsible for making sure that the findings are used? (See [Figure 11.3.](#))

Done correctly, each formal approach can yield information that describes phenomena and situations within established ranges of accuracy and tolerance for error. These approaches also make it possible to use inferential statistics—the process of using data from representative samples to estimate characteristics of populations. In other words, systematic formal research methods help practitioners to make accurate statements about publics based on evidence drawn from scientifically representative samples.

Successful public relations managers know about formal research methods and statistics. Public relations education at many universities now includes at least one research methods course as part of the curriculum. Continuing education programs for practitioners typically include offerings on how to use research in program planning, management, and evaluation. The following sections introduce some commonly used methods for conducting formal research.

Secondary Analysis and Online Databases

Doing research does not always call for gathering new data. Secondary analysis reuses data gathered by someone else, often for other purposes.[33](#)

Numerous governmental and commercial organizations conduct national, regional, and local surveys. Some of these surveys track issues and trends. For example, the U.S. Census Bureau has a long history of developing standardized definitions, sampling techniques, sophisticated methods, and reports of findings. Within government, specialized departments have large research staffs tracking major developments and trends in agriculture, health, labor, business, the economy, and education, to name but a few of the areas under constant study.

Since the 1930s, major commercial polling firms such as those formed by A. C. Nielsen, George Gallup, Elmo Roper, and Louis Harris have made their names synonymous with measures of public opinion. Almost every major city has similar research firms tracking local public opinion trends and conducting marketing research. Major newspapers, television stations, and other news organizations regularly conduct their own formal surveys and report their results. (These do not include the almost daily opinion “polls” in which readers, listeners, and viewers are asked to respond to a question by texting, emailing, or calling in their answer. Review the earlier discussion on “SLOP” discussion on page [254](#) .). The results of commercial surveys—usually available for a fee—often can be segmented on the basis of geography, demographics, and other attributes relevant to public relations problem situations.

Also not to be overlooked are the survey research centers maintained by almost all major universities. Research conducted with public funds is often published and available for the asking. Most public agencies can provide listings of data sets and publications. For much less than the cost of conducting a survey, additional analyses of available data sometimes can be done to help answer questions not asked in the original analysis.

Special interest publications and scholarly journals regularly publish research data. A great deal of research is conducted to answer questions previously answered by competent researchers and reviewed by knowledgeable editorial boards. Online searches now make it easy and cost effective to search research literature for studies done on specific topics. It makes little sense to design and conduct research before exploring the possibility that someone else has already done the work and published the results.

The most frequently used research approach to information gathering in public relations, however, is researching online databases. Some of the most-used databases include LexisNexis (www.lexisnexis.com), Dun and Bradstreet (www.dnb.com), and Dow Jones (www.dowjones.com). Practitioners use these services to access and search through news and technical publications, business information services, market research, financial reports, government records, and broadcast transcripts. Some online database companies customize services to meet the specific needs of subscribers. For example, to track the over-the-counter cold remedy field, the manager of information services at Ketchum Public Relations in New York subscribed to Dow Jones' customized service to get relevant information faxed to her office as soon as it went online. LexisNexis will customize files for subscribers, making it easy for customers to access information without the usual cost of a conventional search of the entire database. Of course, a Google search, or a specialized search engine, also can deliver lists of related research sources, but often without the benefit of credible third-party review of the validity of the data.

Content Analysis

Content analysis is the application of systematic procedures for objectively determining what is being reported in the media.³⁴ Press clippings and broadcast monitor reports, all available from commercial services, have long been used as the bases for content analyses. They indicate only what is being printed or broadcast, not what is read or heard. And they do not measure if the audiences learned or believed message content. For example, a content analysis of newspaper clippings provides a useful measure of what messages are being placed in the media, but does not indicate readership or impact.

Analyzing the editorials and letters to the editor may yield little more than the views of the editor, publisher, and selected readers. And the editorial page does not represent public opinion, as is made abundantly clear when candidates receiving newspaper endorsements do not win elections. As John Naisbitt demonstrated in his popular books on trends, however, content analysis can provide valuable insights into what is likely to be on the public agenda in the future. Recognizing the role of the media in reporting and influencing trends, Naisbitt began in 1968 publishing a quarterly newsletter, *Trend Report*, based on content analyses of 206 metropolitan newspapers. Many organizations worldwide now produce similar reports to give subscribers an early warning system for forecasting social and economic conditions, often long before they are apparent to most observers. The content analyses, however, cover newspapers, magazines, websites, blogs, social media, books, television and cable news, newsletters, advertising, research journals, and many other sources depending on the trends or issues being tracked. Research firms providing content analysis reports in the United States and worldwide include Biz360, CARMA International, Cision, CyberAlert, Cymfony Maestro, Echo Research, MediaTrack, Metrica, Millward Brown Précis, Report International, and Vocus, as well as many other smaller and specialist companies.

Increasingly, public relations firms are helping their clients anticipate issues by either subscribing to issues-tracking services or by doing their own media and digital content analyses. It is important to note, however, that these media content analyses employ a more systematic, formal method than the usual informal approaches—unsystematic scanning. The key differences are the representativeness of the content selected for analysis and the objectivity used in measuring and coding the content.

Surveys

Surveys are systematic queries of subsets of the population under study. They are administered in many ways, including by mail, in person, via telephone, and—increasingly—online. The adequacy of the administration method depends on the sampling procedures used, what questions are asked, and how the questions are asked.

Mailed Surveys

Mailed questionnaires—the traditional method—have the advantages of considerable savings of time and money, convenience for respondents because they choose when to answer the questions, greater assurance of respondent anonymity, standardized wording, no interviewer bias, access to respondents not readily reached in person by interviewers, and opportunity for respondents to take time to gather information needed to complete the questionnaire. According to one professional, another advantage to using surveys for information gathering is that people view quantitative data as being accurate.³⁵

The biggest disadvantages of mail surveys are that researchers have no control over who responds and that low response rates are typical. Whereas the original mailing list may have been a randomly selected and representative sample, unless all respond there is no assurance of an unbiased sample. Even a 90 percent response rate could be inadequate if those not responding represent a significant and uniform segment of the population being studied. Remember that elections are often won by fractions of a percent. There is no basis for the conventional wisdom that a 50 percent return is adequate. The unanswered question remains, which half of the sample did or did not respond?

Other disadvantages include researchers' lack of control over the conditions under which the questionnaire is completed, no assurance that the intended respondent completed the questionnaire, lack of flexibility in how questions are asked if the respondent does not understand what is being asked, and difficulties in getting and maintaining current mailing lists.

A variation of the mailed questionnaire takes the form of a questionnaire inserted in publications or distributed with other materials. Whereas the cost of a separate mailing is saved, all the advantages and disadvantages of the mailed questionnaire apply and in some cases are magnified.

In-Person Surveys

In-person, face-to-face administration of surveys often generates higher response rates compared to mail surveys, greater flexibility in dealing with the respondents, more control over conditions under which the questions are asked, increased control over the order and completeness of questioning, and the opportunity to observe and record reactions not covered by the questionnaire. However, disadvantages include relatively greater research costs, the tendency of respondents to answer certain questions differently when facing an interviewer, greater inconvenience imposed on respondents, less anonymity for respondents, increased difficulty in contacting those selected in the sample, and respondents' reluctance to participate because of misuse of "survey" approaches by salespersons and other solicitors posing as researchers. Furthermore, during both in-person and telephone survey administrations, the interviewers themselves can influence the information gathered, so interviewer training is an essential element of these approaches.

Telephone Surveys

Telephone interviews offer a faster and more cost-effective way to complete interview studies while providing somewhat greater anonymity to respondents. However, a major challenge for telephone-administered surveys is sample selection: More than 95 percent of households have telephones, but not all are listed in directories, and one in four has switched to cell phones only. Computer-assisted random digit dialing (RDD) has helped solve the sampling problem caused by incomplete directory listings. But even with the most sophisticated software, sampling phone numbers produces only about two working phone numbers for every three numbers dialed. The reasons for the relatively low—and dropping—rate of working phone numbers among those dialed are answering machines, modems, faxes, and second and third phone lines. New area codes make frequent changes in the dialing software necessary, and special area codes for cell phones add to the challenge of finding respondents without inconveniencing them. So, although the numbers selected for calls may be representative, answering machines, caller ID, and refusal rates have made it more difficult to obtain representative samples and have driven up telephone surveying costs.³⁶

One common variation in the telephone survey is computer-assisted

telephone interviews (CATI). In this method of survey administration, researchers enter respondents' answers directly into a computer system, which directs the flow of these complex surveys by skipping questions or asking supplemental ones depending on how respondents answer various "filter" questions. Another variation on the telephone survey is the IVR—interactive voice response—survey in which respondents call a number and complete the questionnaire at their convenience, responding verbally to questions asked by a computer, which in turn codes responses by recognizing key terms in participants' answers.

Online Surveys

Finally, the online administration of surveys is viewed by some researchers as the inevitable wave of the future. These methods may include graphics-based questionnaires that respondents access through a special URL and complete by clicking on various multiple-choice options, text-based questionnaires sent and completed via email, or a combination in which an emailed note invites respondents to access a particular URL to participate in the survey. Advantages of the online administration of surveys include greater convenience for the respondent, as well as greater efficiency for the researcher, who can rely on computer systems to translate the data automatically into numeric form, rather than hand-coding each response.

Today, websites such as surveymonkey.com and zoomerang.com offer free downloadable sample survey questionnaires available for customizing. Some other survey websites offer similar services, but charge based on use. Some sites provide ready-made templates that can be easily customized and also offer automatic tabulation of the data collected. Mini surveys and feedback forms for many purposes can be created and administered by practitioners with little formal research training.

However, one challenge for online survey administration remains—obtaining adequate sampling frames, or lists of email addresses from which researchers can select their samples. Another challenge is low response rates, usually resulting from the junk mail filtering services provided on most email accounts. However, organizations that build and maintain email lists can

productively use the online survey to gather data from samples of interested and involved stakeholders.

Cross-Sectional vs. Trend and Panel Surveys

Usually single surveys are conducted on cross-section samples of a population or public at a single point in time. If the study is designed to learn how people change over time or to track a process, however, a longitudinal study, either as a panel study or trend study, is the better approach.

In panel studies the same respondents are surveyed several times during the study, are asked to complete a series of questionnaires on a fixed schedule, or are required to maintain a diary during the study period. For example, the “Baccalaureate and Beyond” study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics surveyed the same group of bachelor’s degree recipients over a period of ten years. Two problems common to panel studies are that respondents drop out over the course of the project (“panel mortality”) and that respondents become more attentive to the issues being examined because of the repeated contact with researchers (“sensitization”).

A trend study uses different samples drawn from the same population to track change over time. Because different people are in the samples, however, not being able to attribute changes to particular types of people is the cost of solving the panel mortality and sensitization problems. On the other hand, if the purpose is to track the distribution of public knowledge, opinion, or behavior over time, trend studies provide the most economical approach.

In summary, formal research methods follow the rules of science, typically use representative samples, and employ other systematic and objective procedures for making the observations, taking the measurements, and analyzing the data. Like other skills based on specialized knowledge, doing formal research requires study and practice. Done correctly, however, formal research helps practitioners describe reality accurately. Research findings, combined with experience and judgment, provide the foundation for defining

public relations problems and for designing programs to address those problems. In other words, research builds the information foundation necessary for effective public relations practice and management.

This chapter highlights only some of the approaches for gathering the informal and formal information needed to understand and define public relations problem situations. Whereas research is often viewed as a necessary step for evaluating program impact, it is equally necessary in the initial step of the problem-solving process—defining the problem situation. Not only does research provide the information necessary for understanding the problem, but also the “benchmark” data serve as the basis for monitoring the program in progress and for evaluating program effectiveness at the end of each program cycle. And, as pointed out in [Chapter 14](#), the methods and measures used in the evaluation phase must be the same as those used in the problem-definition phase.

How can practitioners plan a program strategy if they do not know what they are dealing with? How do they determine how the program is working if they do not know where they started? How do they know if the program failed or succeeded without having a baseline for comparison? In other words, research initiates, monitors, and concludes the problem-solving process. It is the essential ingredient that makes public relations a management function, as well as a managed function.

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Study Guide

1. Diagram the four-step problem-solving process and describe each step as it applies to public relations.
2. If the major purpose of research is to reduce uncertainty in decision making, discuss some of the ways research accomplishes this in public relations programs.
3. Diagram the “benchmarks model” and explain how it applies to the three phases of public relations program management.

4. What are the three attributes of useful problem statements?
5. Describe the major differences between informal (“exploratory”) and formal methods of research, and give examples of both.

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Chapter 12 Step Two: Planning and Programming

Learning Outcomes

After studying [Chapter 12](#) this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Explain how planning and programming fit into the four-step process of public relations management the public relations management process.
2. Identify the two components to strategic thinking in public relations.
3. Articulate why public relations goals must fit in the context of organizational missions and operational goals.
4. Outline the major steps in the strategic-planning process.
5. Explain the various cross-situational and situational approaches to defining publics.
6. Distinguish between goals and objectives.
7. Discuss the four characteristics of appropriate program objectives and write examples.
8. Distinguish between action and communication strategies.
9. Distinguish between strategies and tactics.
10. Describe and give examples of the three major categories of disasters and crises that practitioners must anticipate and plan for.

Strategy is a driving force in any business or organization. It's the intellectual force that helps organize, prioritize, and energize what they

do. No strategy; no energy. No strategy; no direction. No strategy; no momentum. No strategy; no impact.

—Jim Lukaszewski¹

There's no point in having a strategy if you aren't going to pretend to follow it.

—Dilbert's Pointy-Haired Boss²

As discussed in [Chapter 11](#), the strategic management process in public relations involves four steps: research, planning and programming, implementation (of actions and communications), and evaluation. By conducting research and analysis as the first step, strategic management represents the open systems approach to public relations, whereby the organization takes stock of its environment. Contrast this to the closed-systems, reactive approach, whereby the organization simply implements actions and communications without research, planning, or evaluating. One counselor defines strategic management as “a process that enables any organization—company, association, nonprofit, or government agency—to identify its long-term opportunities and threats, mobilize its assets to address them, and carry out a successful implementation strategy.”³

In the strategic management process, once the public relations problem or opportunity has been defined through research and analysis, practitioners must determine what goal is desired by organizational management, either to mitigate the problem or to capitalize on the opportunity. Once the public relations goal is set, then practitioners must devise a strategy for achieving that goal. In short, strategic thinking is predicting or establishing a desired future goal state, determining what forces will help and hinder movement toward the goal, and formulating a plan for achieving the desired state.

This chapter covers the two main aspects of strategic thinking: goal setting and strategic planning. Goal setting for public relations programs must take place in the context of organizational missions and goals. Strategic planning in public relations involves making decisions about program goals and objectives, identifying key publics, and determining strategies and tactics. In short, step two of the strategic management process in public relations is

planning and programming—making planning and programming involve making the basic strategic decisions about what will be done in what order in response to or in anticipation of a problem or opportunity.

The effectiveness of the tactics used in the next step of the process—taking action and communicating ([Chapter 13](#))—depends on the sound planning done in this, the second step. Yet many practitioners do not take the time necessary to plan; they do “pseudoplanning.”⁴ Skimping on the strategic planning step in the public relations management process results in programs that may reinforce controversy rather than resolve it, waste money on audiences that are not there, or facilitate misunderstanding and confusion instead of understanding and clarification.

Many difficult public relations problems were born of spur-of-the-moment decisions, made without strategic planning. For example, the American Heart Association’s short-lived “seal-of-approval” program for food products was canceled under heavy pressure from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and other interested parties. Major League Baseball is still trying to recover from its inactivity and later anemic response to the steroid crisis involving some of the biggest names in the “nation’s pastime.” An embarrassed U.S. military regretted giving Afghan children soccer balls imprinted with a picture of the Saudi Arabian flag. The well-intentioned but spontaneous gesture backfired because the flag included Arabic script of “Allah” and “Prophet Muhammad.” Not something respectful Muslims would kick around!

In all these cases, program planners apparently made strategic decisions based on inadequate situation analyses or without fully considering possible unintended consequences of their program tactics. In effect, both planners and their organizations are held responsible for nonstrategic interventions and responses, regardless of their intentions.

Public Relations Goals

Crisis management expert James Lukaszewski summarized the value of goal-directed strategic thinking:

Have a destination before you start the journey, and understand the outcome you seek to achieve before you begin. More good intentions perish for want of a clearly defined destination than for almost any other reason. A focus on the goal tends to reduce the wandering generality tendency and to force people to focus on more meaningful specifics, more meaningful actions that construct the desired outcomes. If the goal is missing, you and the boss are going nowhere.⁵

Exhibit 12.1

Johnson & Johnson Mission Statement

Our Credo. We believe our first responsibility is to the doctors, nurses and patients, to mothers and fathers and all others who use our products and services. In meeting their needs everything we do must be of high quality. We must constantly strive to reduce our costs in order to maintain reasonable prices. Customers' orders must be serviced promptly and accurately. Our suppliers and distributors must have an opportunity to make a fair profit.

We are responsible to our employees, the men and women who work with us throughout the world. Everyone must be considered as an individual. We must respect their dignity and recognize their merit. They must have a sense of security in their jobs. Compensation must be fair and adequate, and working conditions clean, orderly and safe. We must be mindful of ways to help our employees fulfill their family responsibilities. Employees must feel free to make suggestions and complaints. There must be equal opportunity for employment, development and advancement for those qualified. We must provide competent management, and their actions must be just and ethical.

We are responsible to the communities in which we live and work and to the world community as well. We must be good citizens—support good works and charities and bear our fair share of taxes. We must encourage civic improvements and better health and

education. We must maintain in good order the property we are privileged to use, protecting the environment and natural resources.

Our final responsibility is to our stockholders. Business must make a sound profit. We must experiment with new ideas. Research must be carried on, innovative programs developed and mistakes paid for. New equipment must be purchased, new facilities provided and new products launched. Reserves must be created to provide for adverse times. When we operate according to these principles, the stockholders should realize a fair return.

Used with permission. Courtesy Johnson & Johnson.

Public relations goals should reflect the problems or opportunities defined in the research step. In addition, public relations goals should never stand in isolation; they must make sense within the context of the organization's broader vision, its mission, and its operational goals. In fact, the four-step public relations process outlined in [Chapters 11](#) through [14](#) is based on two assumptions: that the organization has clearly defined its overall mission and goals and that public relations is part of the plan to achieve them.

As discussed in [Chapter 9](#), vision and mission statements are designed to give those in the organization a sense of purpose and direction. Such statements without management commitment and support, however, become simply cosmetic additions to brochures, reports, and speeches. The challenge is to instill a sense of vision, mission, values, and behavior standards throughout an organization. Each organization has to define its own unique vision and mission, matching its strategy and values and creating its own culture.⁶ (For some examples, see [Exhibit 12.1](#), as well as [Exhibit 9.3](#) on page [199](#).) Whether these documents are kept private for competitive or security reasons or are open for public consumption, public relations staff are privy to them. In organizations where no such statements have been set down, there is an urgent need for the top public relations officer to propose one.

Statements of organizational goals, obligations, values, and social responsibility serve two important purposes in public relations: First, they commit the whole organization to accountability, and that means visibility or

communication of some sort. Second, the attitudes expressed provide a framework in which practitioners can devise public relations goals and objectives, plan programs, build budgets, direct staff, and assess program impacts. In short, an organization's vision, its mission, and its operational goals serve as the framework for public relations goals, which in turn address the problems and opportunities facing the organization.

Public Relations Planning

Once a public relations goal is set, the next steps are identifying key publics, articulating objectives, and determining strategies and tactics. There must be a close linkage between the overall program goal, the objectives established for each of the publics, and the strategies and tactics selected to accomplish each objective. The next sections of this chapter cover the specific planning steps necessary to gather and develop the elements that will comprise the bulk of the final public relations plan. Although each program calls for specifically tailored and unique elements, the overall approach is similar from plan to plan.

Excuses for Not Planning

Public relations practitioners often work with other managers to develop strategic program plans. And, like other managers, practitioners sometimes offer excuses for not engaging in strategic planning:

1. "We don't have time."

Many practitioners feel that they are already overloaded with work. Of course, they are missing the point that those with a plan typically make better use of their time, thus making time spent planning a wise investment.

2. "Why plan when things are changing so fast?"

Plans get modified in light of changing circumstances; they are not cast

in concrete. Having a plan, however, provides the baseline from which modifications can be made with full awareness that changes in strategy and direction are occurring. In fact, the more turbulent the environment, the greater the need to chart the changing course to the desired result, to have a plan.

3. “We get paid for results, not for planning.”

Many public relations practitioners tend to focus on “doing” rather than on “thinking” or “planning.” A dollar spent on research and planning is often viewed as a dollar not available for implementing program activities. This mind-set generally leads to counting activities rather than to results that count. In fact, clients and bosses pay practitioners for results that happen according to a plan to achieve goals—outcomes.

4. “We’re doing okay without a plan.”

Short-term success can change to failure if conditions change. For example, it is easy to see how an injury to a football team’s star quarterback can change an entire football season. Such was the case in a business setting when the founder and CEO of a new and successful computer company died in an automobile accident the very day the company’s stock went public. The stock offer was withdrawn until new management was in place. A few weeks later the company stock was again offered but commanded a substantially lower price. Soon thereafter, Eagle Computer went out of business. Part of planning involves building in strategies for handling contingencies, such as industrial accidents and other operational crises; top management decisions that attract media and public scrutiny; changes in management and other key personnel; and charges by government agencies, consumer groups, unions, or whistle-blowers.⁷

Role of Working Theory

[Chapter 8](#) introduced There are several communication theories that help explain the contexts for public relations programs. This chapter and the next

offer several more offers several theories, as well as explanations for how theories can be applied to the strategic planning process. The program strategy usually represents someone's working theory of what has to be done to achieve a desired outcome. A working theory is simply an idea of how things might work. For example, "If we implement this action and communication plan, then we will achieve these outcomes with our publics, which should lead to accomplishing the program goal."

Theory also determines the selection of tactics. Someone's working theory (strategy) guides how a special event is designed, how a newsletter or press release is worded, and how a community function is conducted. The theory that guides how each tactic is executed represents the practitioner's idea of what will cause a desired result. So when people say a program is "all theory," they are right! They are talking about the thinking behind the strategy. The role of theory is obvious, although not always made explicit, at every step of the planning process. Otherwise, how would decisions be made? Theory clearly guides the process when writing program objectives and determining the strategies to achieve them.

For example, assume that the goal of an employee communication program is to reduce the number of employees seriously injured or killed while driving to and from work and while driving on the job. The situation analysis background research shows that traffic accidents are the leading cause of workplace fatalities and cost U.S. employers almost \$55 billion annually. The federal Department of Transportation estimates that 2,000 people die each year in work-related crashes, or 40 percent of all workplace deaths. Investigation shows that a surprisingly large percentage of employees do not wear seat belts while driving or when a passenger. Program planners decide to develop a program to increase seat belt use among employees. Clearly, their overall working theory is that getting employees to increase seat belt use will lead to a reduction in serious injuries and deaths.

In summary, working theory drives every program decision, whether the assumptions about the causal relationships behind the decisions are made explicit or not. Practitioners are continually devising and testing their working theories. But, working theories should be based on more than practitioners' gut feelings about outcomes and strategies. Working theories

should also be grounded in established communication and public relations theories, which have been backed up by research and experience. Those who can bridge the gap between theory and practice are the ones most likely to achieve management positions in the twenty-first century.⁸

Target Publics

Before practitioners can develop strategies to accomplish public relations goals, they must select and define the program's target publics from among all of the organization's stakeholders. To do this, practitioners must first discard notions about "the general public." Sociographic and demographic variables (such as age, education, and income) naturally segment society into different groups. Add to that the many different ethnic, racial, religious, geographic, political, occupational, social, and special-interest groupings and the result is that the concept of a general or mass public holds little, if any, value in public relations.

Rather, effective programs communicate and build relationships with specifically defined "target publics" or "strategic publics." Without such specific definitions and detailed information about intended audiences of messages, how do program planners measure public opinion, establish program objectives, develop meaningful message and action strategies, select media to deliver messages effectively, and determine whether the program worked? They don't. Practitioners must carefully select, define, segment, and target the publics for whom public relations programs are intended.

Target publics, however, are frequently abstractions imposed by program planners, as they typically do not exist as monolithic real groups. Planners must reify publics so as to develop the objectives, strategies, and tactics necessary for implementing a program. Reification means treating an abstraction as if it exists as a concrete or material entity. The "general public" is the grandest and least useful reification of all; there simply is no such thing. Given unlimited resources, practitioners could avoid the need to reify by targeting individuals, but that is seldom possible. Useful and practical definitions of publics, then, necessarily represent some degree of reification. Effective reification of target publics requires an understanding of "publics"

both as they arise in response to specific situations and as they identify with specific groups across situations. [9](#) Targeting situational publics requires more sophistication and research, whereas targeting cross-situational publics is relatively easy, if not as effective.

Publics Across Situations

Cross-situational publics are groups of people that can be identified by something they have in common, regardless of the situation in which they find themselves. For example, practitioners frequently segment target publics by age and gender; it's easy to do, and the results don't change with the situation. For example, a 30-year-old woman is a 30-year-old woman; her age and gender when she is protesting the closing of her child's daycare center is the same as her age and gender when she is leading a meeting at work.

The usual demographic and cross-situational approaches to defining publics typically provide minimal useful guidance for developing program strategy. Simply listing general categories of potential stakeholder groups gives those planning and implementing a program little information about how people in each of the categories uniquely contribute to or are affected by the problem situation and organization. In short, defining publics by superficial characteristics alone is insufficient. The key to defining publics strategically is to identify how people are involved and affected in the situation for which the program intervention is being developed.

Publics Specific to Situations

Philosopher and educator John Dewey defined a public as an active social unit consisting of all those affected who recognize a common problem for which they can seek common solutions. He wrote that publics were formed when “recognition of evil consequence brought about a common interest.” Without communication, however, it “will remain shadowy and formless, seeking spasmodically for itself, but seizing and holding its shadow rather than its substance.” [10](#)

Expanding Dewey's concept, public relations scholar James Grunig developed a "situational theory of publics," which uses three factors to predict whether publics will be latent, aware, or active, given a specific situation. Latent publics include people who are simply unaware of their connections to others and an organization with respect to some issue or other problem situation. Aware publics are those people who recognize that they are somehow affected by or involved in a problem situation shared by others but have not communicated about it with others. When they begin to communicate and organize to do something about the situation, they become active publics.[11](#)

Grunig lists three predictive factors in his situational theory of publics: Problem recognition represents the extent to which people are aware that something is missing or amiss in a situation, thereby knowing that they need information. Level of involvement represents the extent to which people see themselves being involved and affected by a situation. In other words, the more they see themselves connected to a situation, the more likely they will communicate about it. Constraint recognition represents the extent to which people see themselves limited by external factors versus seeing that they can do something about the situation. If people think they can make a difference or have an effect on the problem situation, they will seek information to make plans for action.[12](#)

These three variables predict how active or passive the communication behavior of a public is. Active communication behavior is called information seeking because people in that group are likely to seek information on the issue. Passive communication behavior is called information processing because a passive audience may or may not attend to a message. The latest research on types of communication behaviors is summarized in [Exhibit 12.2](#).

The situational theory of publics has been widely studied using a variety of issues, also known as "situation sets." The studies consistently produce four types of publics:

1. All-issue publics

are active on all issues in the situation set.

2. Apathetic publics

are inattentive and inactive on all issues in the set.

3. Single-issue publics

are active on one or a limited number of related issues.

4. Hot-issue publics

are active after media coverage exposes almost everyone to the issue, making it a topic of widespread social conversation.[13](#)

The implication of Grunig's situational theory of publics is clear: Messages must be individually tailored to fit the information needs of different publics, based on how active or passive their communication behavior is and what issues are important to them. Thus, useful definitions of program publics include how people are involved in or affected by the problem situation or issue, who they are, where they live, what relevant organizations they belong to, what they do that is relevant to the situation, and so forth. The definitions derive from the particular



Exhibit 12.2

A Situational Theory of Problem Solving

Jeong-Nam Kim, Ph.D., Assistant Professor

Brian Lamb School of Communication, Purdue University

As noted already in this chapter, the situational theory of publics uses problem recognition, level of involvement, and constraint recognition to predict information seeking and information

processing in organizational publics. In recent years, James Grunig's situational theory of publics has evolved into a situational theory of problem solving (STOPS). This enhanced theory explains the communicative behaviors of organizational publics (i.e., "problem-solvers") in three areas: information acquisition, information selection, and information transmission.*

First, information acquisition behaviors explain how people get information. Information seeking is the planned scanning of the environment for messages about a specific topic (i.e., a premeditated information search). On the other hand, information attending is the unplanned discovery of a message followed by continued processing of it.

Second, information selection behaviors explain why people pay attention to or seek some information, but not others. Information forefending is the extent to which a communicator fends off certain information in advance by judging its value and relevance for a given problem-solving task. For example, a college student who is pro-choice (as opposed to pro-life) on the issue of abortion would engage in information forefending behavior when presented with a pro-life brochure; she will disregard the information in the brochure because she deems it irrational or irrelevant to her perspective. Information permitting is the extent which a communicator accepts any information related to a problem-solving task. For example, a high school student who plans to go to college will engage in information permitting behavior by reviewing any and all information pertaining to the college-application process.

Finally, information transmission behaviors explain the giving of information to others. Information forwarding is the voluntary, premeditated, and self-propelled giving of information to others; this could be the giving of information about problems and about solutions. In contrast, information sharing is the involuntary, reactive, and unplanned giving of information to others, usually only when solicited by others to give an opinion or to share an experience.

In short, the situational theory of problem solving offers a comprehensive conceptual framework to explain when and why people communicate in problematic life situations, specifically, how people get, select, and give information regarding problematic states, i.e., perceived problems. After all, communication is not something senders do to receivers, but something a problem-solver does to cope with life problems.

Thus, the theory reminds us that public relations efforts will be more effective when practitioners understand and facilitate problem-solvers' communicative actions by identifying publics that are more likely to seek out information, to give and share acquired information with others, as well as when, how, and why they judge and select information available to them in a purposeful way.

*Adapted from Jeong-Nam Kim, James E. Grunig, and Lan Ni, "Reconceptualizing the communicative action of publics: Acquisition, selection, and transmission of information in problematic situations," *International Journal of Strategic Communication* 4, no. 2 (2010): 126–154.

situation for which a public relations intervention is being planned, not merely from shared cross-situational traits.

Approaches to Defining Publics

Following are approaches used alone and in combination to define target publics from among the various stakeholder groups. The list begins with cross-situational approaches and progresses toward increasingly situation-based approaches.

1. Geographics

—natural or political boundaries—indicate where to find people but give little useful insight about important differences within the boundaries. This approach is useful for selecting media outlets and allocating

program resources according to population density. ZIP codes, telephone area codes, city limits, county lines, voting districts, and so forth are examples of the geographic approach to defining publics.

2. Demographics

—gender, income, age, marital status, education—are the most frequently used individual characteristics but provide little understanding of why or how people are involved or affected. Demographics and geographics help practitioners make the first cut, but without additional information about how people are involved or affected by an issue, problem, or situation, they usually give little guidance to developing strategy and tactics.

3. Psychographics

—psychological and lifestyle characteristics (cross-situational) widely used under the name “VALS”—segment adults on the basis of “psychological maturity” and personality traits assumed to predict behavior. Knowing about lifestyle and values is useful, but typically only when combined with other attributes that tie the segments to something related to a particular situation.

4. Covert power

—behind-the-scenes political or economic power—describes people at the top of a power pyramid who operate across situations. They exert power over others on a wide range of issues but often not in ways easily observed. Identifying these people requires a combination of careful observation over time, interviews with others in the problem situation, analyses of documents that record or track the exercise of covert power, or any combination of the three.

5. Position

uses the positions held by individuals, not attributes of the individuals themselves, to identify target publics. People are identified as important in a particular situation because of the roles they play in positions of

influence in those situations. The positions they hold make them important players in the efforts to achieve program goals and objectives.

6. Reputation

identifies “knowledgeables” or “influentials” based on others’ perceptions of these individuals. These publics are referred to as “opinion leaders” or “influencers,” but they are defined as such by people in the situation of interest and are not to be confused by the cross-situational covert power group or defined as opinion leaders by the observer using some cross-situational definition.

7. Membership

uses appearance on an organizational roster, list, or affiliation as the attribute relevant to a particular situation. For example, membership in a professional association or special-interest group signals a person’s involvement in a situation, not the individual attributes of the member. Usually members receive controlled media from the organization with which they are affiliated and on social networks based on their membership affiliation.

8. Role in the decision process

calls for observing the decision-making process to learn who plays what roles in influencing decisions in a particular situation. This approach helps identify the most active among the active publics, those who really make decisions, take action, and communicate. Again, knowing their individual attributes can be less important than knowing how they behave in the process that leads to decisions related to the issue or problem of interest.

9. Communication behavior

means documenting with whom participants share information, from whom they seek information, and what media they use when seeking and sharing information about the particular issue or situation. These observations provide the basis for making decisions about who should

be seen as thought or opinion leaders and what media should be used.

Program Objectives

Goals and objectives are not the same thing. Goals are broad, summative statements that spell out the overall outcomes of a program. Such a program may involve many different parts of an organization as well as many different strategies. Goals state what the coordinated effort is intended to accomplish and by when it will be accomplished. Goals establish what will be accomplished if the objectives set for each of the publics are achieved.

Objectives represent the specific knowledge, opinion, and behavioral outcomes to be achieved for each well-defined target public, what some call “key results.” The outcome criteria take the form of measurable program effects to be achieved by specified dates. In practice, objectives are important for three reasons. First, objectives provide focus and direction for developing program strategies and tactics. Second, they offer guidance and motivation to those implementing the program. Finally, objectives spell out the criteria for monitoring progress and for assessing impact. In short, objectives are smaller-scale outcomes that, collectively and over time, achieve the broader goal of the public relations program.

Management by Objectives

As executives have become sophisticated in the ways of public relations, they have become more demanding. Most organizations operate on the basis of management by objectives (MBO) or, as others term it, management by objectives and results (MOR). Simply put, MBO systematically applies effective management techniques to running an organization. It specifies the outcomes (consequences, results, impact) to be achieved, thereby establishing the criteria for selecting strategies, monitoring performance and progress, and evaluating program effectiveness. Thus, the clear articulation of public relations goals and objectives places practitioners squarely into the organization’s overall management process, which, in turn, helps them

participate in the decisions of the dominant coalition, as discussed in [Chapter 3](#).

Writing Program Objectives

Public relations objectives must be carefully written. Appropriate objectives contain four specific elements:

1. Target Public.

Objectives must include the public being targeted, as defined earlier in the planning process. If the objective fails to include the target public, implementation of the strategic plan becomes difficult, as programmers won't know who they are supposed to reach.

2. Outcome.

Each objective in the sequence should spell out a single, specific outcome to be achieved. There are only three categories of outcomes: what people are aware of, know, or understand (knowledge outcomes); how people feel (predispositional outcomes); and what people do (behavioral outcomes). This is the “learn-feel-do” causal sequence that typifies the working theory behind most public relations programs:

Information Gain \Rightarrow Opinion Change \Rightarrow Behavioral Change

Behavioral change can only happen when there is opinion support in favor of the desired behavior. Opinion change happens only with appropriate informational support or knowledge gain (see [Chapter 8](#)). (Note: Over time, attitude change may also occur.)

3. Measurement.

To provide useful and verifiable outcome criteria, objectives must state the magnitude of change or level to be maintained in measurable, quantifiable terms. Of course, the levels must be realistic and consistent with the resources available to those implementing the program.

Experience and judgment, plus evidence from the situation analysis research, provide the bases for setting the levels of outcomes to be achieved. Without benchmark data, judgment dominates when setting the outcome levels.

4. Target Date.

Objectives spell out the target date for when the outcome is to be achieved. Typically, outcomes must be achieved in a certain order, with one necessary before another and each successive outcome a logical consequence of the previous outcomes. Target dates also provide guidance for those developing strategies and tactics, even down to deciding when to schedule communications and events. Dates also help practitioners determine when the implementation phase is finished and when evaluation can begin.

Objectives in Practice

To summarize, program objectives for each public specify the desired outcomes, in what sequence, in what magnitude, and by what dates they are needed in order to achieve the overall program goal (see [Exhibit 12.3](#) for one example). The more specific the objectives, the more precise everything that follows.

Exhibit 12.3

Sample Program Goal and Objectives

Program Goal

To reduce the number of delivery drivers seriously injured or killed while driving on the job from a five-year average of five per year to no more than two in the next fiscal year.

Objectives for Delivery Drivers

1. To increase, within six weeks after starting the program, the percentage of drivers from 8 percent to at least 90 percent who are aware that in a typical year four company delivery drivers are seriously injured and one is killed while driving on the job.
2. To increase, within two months after starting the program, the percentage of drivers from 5 percent to at least 80 percent who know that 55 percent of all fatalities and 65 percent of all injuries from vehicle crashes could be prevented if seat belts were used properly.
3. To increase, within two months after starting the program, drivers' awareness to at least 85 percent that 95 percent of all city employees, police, and emergency vehicle drivers use shoulder restraints and seat belts any time they drive on the same city streets.
4. To reduce, within three months after starting the program, the number of drivers from 67 percent to less than 25 percent who feel that using seat belts while driving adds to delivery time and extends the time needed to complete routes.
5. To decrease, by the end of the third month after the program begins, the number of drivers from 70 percent to less than 35 percent who "agree" or "strongly agree" with the statement that their own safe driving prevents serious driving accidents to the point that seat belts are not necessary.
6. To increase the percentage of drivers who use seat belts from the current 51 percent to at least 70 percent within three months after the program begins, to at least 80 percent within five months, and to at least 90 percent by the end of the first year.
7. After the 90 percent level of use is achieved, to maintain that

level of seat belt use among all permanent and all temporary replacement drivers.

Without objectives, programs drift according to the whims and desires of clients and employers, and the intuitions and preferences of practitioners. People in power choose program strategy and tactics because they like them, not because they are logically related to intended outcomes. Practitioners select strategy and tactics because of habit or familiarity based on previous experience, not because of research results or working theory. Appropriately written objectives can prevent these problems.

But simply writing down the objectives is not enough; each person working on the program should have a copy of the objectives. Objectives thus become the primary basis for developing and implementing program strategy and tactics. Objectives should be discussed frequently, because they provide the guidance for planning, managing, and evaluating program elements and the overall program. As the topic of staff discussions, objectives keep the program on track. As conditions change, program planners change the objectives to reflect the evolving program environment. After all, objectives provide the road map—derived from the working theory—to the desired goal.

All too often, however, public relations program “objectives” either describe the tactic, or means, rather than the consequences, or ends, to be achieved. For example, “To mail out 12 monthly issues of . . .” and “To inform people about . . .” both describe activities, not results or outcomes. To avoid this common pitfall, practitioners should review their written objectives and ask “Is this something that we think needs to be done by the organization?” (If so, then the statement describes a tactic, not an objective.) An appropriately written objective will get the answer “Yes” to the question, “Is this an impact we need to achieve in a target public?”

Following are examples of useful program objectives for the three levels of outcomes discussed above:

1. Knowledge outcome:

By July 1, to increase from 150 to 300 the number of local homeowners who know that wildland fires destroyed 2,500 homes during the past

three fire seasons.

2. Predisposition (opinion) outcome:

To increase neighboring property owners' confidence in our ability to conduct field tests safely, from a mean confidence rating of 2.7 to 3.5, by January 15.

3. Behavioral outcome:

To increase the percentage of employees who use seat belts when driving on the job from the current 51 percent to at least 70 percent within 30 days after the program begins.

Strategies and tactics

Once public relations objectives have been clearly articulated, practitioners must determine the strategies and tactics necessary to accomplish those objectives. Borrowed from the military, the terms “strategy” and “tactic” are often confused. In public relations practice, strategy typically refers to the overall concept, approach, or general plan for the program designed to achieve an objective. Tactics refer to the actual events, media, and methods used to implement the strategy. Long-time public relations leader and counselor John Beardsley summed up the difference this way: “Strategy is a ladder leading to a goal. Tactics are the steps on the ladder.”¹⁴ For example, the Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board’s (WMMB) successful program to pass a referendum illustrates the difference between strategy and tactics.

WMMB wanted to win dairy producers’ support for increasing, from 5 to 10 cents per hundredweight of milk produced, the amount directed to state and regional promotions of dairy products. Congress mandated that dairy farmers nationwide contribute 15 cents for each hundredweight of milk they sell to do research and to promote the sale of dairy products. Of the mandatory check-off, 5 cents goes to the National Dairy Promotion and Research Board, and 5 cents goes to state or regional organizations. Dairy farmers then choose which organization gets the other 5 cents, often called the “middle nickel.”

WMMB wanted Wisconsin producers to direct the discretionary 5 cents to the state organization.

Program strategies included reinforcing the producers' belief in the need to build markets for Wisconsin dairy products; demonstrating WMMB's successes in marketing, research, and education; and enlisting influential third-party endorsements to reach targeted groups of producers. Tactics included check stuffers, newsletters, informational meetings, an 800–telephone number information service, the annual report, and exhibit booths at Farm Progress Days and the World Dairy Expo. The effect of these strategies and tactics was that 93 percent of the producers who cast ballots in the referendum voted in favor of directing the middle nickel to WMMB.

The key point is that strategy is selected to achieve a particular outcome (as stated in a goal or objective), and tactics are how the strategy gets implemented.

Action and Communication Strategies

Public relations has matured into the role of helping organizations decide not only how to say something and what to say, but also what to do, according to Harold Burson. In its infancy and into the 1960s, public relations simply crafted and distributed the message handed down from management. Reflecting their view of public relations, management asked, “How do I say it?” In response to the social changes of the 1960s, organizations and their CEOs were increasingly held accountable on such issues as public and employee safety, equal opportunity, and the environment. In addition to how to say something, management asked public relations, “What shall I say?” Beginning in the 1980s, however, public relations entered a third stage; in addition to asking communication questions, management now asked, “What do I do?”¹⁵

Burson attributes this new role to unavoidable and increasingly detailed public scrutiny of what organizations do and say. This scrutiny has

intensified in the wake of BP's role in and response to the environmental crisis caused by the Gulf of Mexico oil spill; controversial responses by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the American Red Cross after Hurricane Katrina; and performance-enhancing drugs and "doping" in sports such as Major League Baseball and professional bicycling events like the Tour de France. Public response is also quick because of almost instantaneous worldwide communication and social media; what an organization does can be reported as quickly as what the organization itself says. As a result, all organizations need public relations more than ever to help determine what to do (and not do) and what to say (and not say).¹⁶ That constitutes action and communication strategy.

In the words of an old adage, "Actions speak louder than words." Yet many people in management, and unfortunately even some in public relations, believe the myth that communication alone can solve most public relations problems. Typically, however, public relations problems result from something done, not something said. The exception is when the "something said" becomes an event itself, such as when someone in authority or in a prominent position makes a sexist remark, uses a racial slur, or simply lies. For example, when a blogger reported that former New York 9th District U.S. Representative Anthony Weiner had Tweeted sexually explicit photos of himself to women he knew only online, he denied the charge at a press conference. After ten days of intense media attention, he held a second press conference admitting that he had lied, but that he would not resign. Ten more days of continuing pressure from Congressional colleagues and media scrutiny produced a third press conference to announce his resignation from Congress. Political pundits and crisis management experts agreed that it was the lie and delayed admission, not the deeds, that led to the seven-term representative's resignation. He became a victim of his own words, distributed worldwide by the 24/7 media.

Action as an Open Systems Response

Public relations action is "socially responsible acts taken by public relations

departments or other parts of the organization with your counsel.”¹⁷ Action strategies typically include changes in an organization’s policies, procedures, products, services, and behavior. These changes are designed to achieve program objectives and organizational goals, while at the same time responding to the needs and well-being of an organization’s publics. In short, corrective actions serve the mutual interests of an organization and its publics.

Action strategy results from knowing how an organization’s policies, procedures, actions, and other outputs contribute to public relations problems. As pointed out in the situation analysis section of [Chapter 11](#), a thorough understanding of the problem situation is essential for designing the action strategy. For example, when the Atlanta Bureau of Police Services (ABPS) tackled the problem of not enough police for public safety and security, it began by studying its own recruiting and training program. Before developing any external recruitment communications, ABPS changed how it operated its recruiting program. First, ABPS expanded the search area from the metropolitan Atlanta area to the entire state of Georgia. Second, it staffed an office specifically to handle recruiting. Third, ABPS equipped the office with the computer equipment necessary for expediting applications. These internal changes and the accompanying communication campaign resulted in more than 1,800 applicants and a net gain of 80 new officers on the force in one year. Previous attempts at statewide recruiting without the other changes in structure and processing had not reversed the attrition problem.

Action strategies concentrate on adjustment and adaptation within the organization. An opportunity to implement such changes, however, requires that both top management and practitioners define public relations as something much more than publicity and persuasive communication. As Harold Burson pointed out, in its mature form, public relations helps clients determine what is done as well as what and how something is said.

Action Before Communication

As described in the previous section, an organization should implement corrective internal actions before reaching out to external publics with its

communication efforts. In any case, action and communication strategies should be coordinated, so that they do not contradict. For example, a company cannot simply say that they are sorry for dumping toxic waste into the river and then keep doing it! The organization must first stop the dumping (internal, corrective action), plan and explain how it will clean up the toxic mess (another internal, corrective action), and then describe to concerned stakeholders how the company will safely dispose of toxic waste in the future (communication to both internal and external publics). Details on communication strategies and tactics, as well as how action and communication can be coordinated, are discussed in [Chapter 13](#), even though planning how they will be implemented should be part of the second step of the strategic management process.

The Public Relations Plan

Planning the public relations program is only part of the challenge; the other part is putting the program elements together into a coherent, written plan that is both acceptable to management and realistic for implementation.

When the public relations program meshes with organizational missions and goals, the employer knows that the public relations practitioner understands what management is trying to do and is part of the management team.

Counselor Jim Lukaszewski paraphrases the CEO's position: "Please spare me from another amateur corporate strategist—the person who doesn't have a clue about how the company operates, my goals, or our critical strategic needs; but who yaps at me every day and calls it strategy."¹⁸

The task of writing an overall program or a proposal would rarely fall on a new member of a staff, but all members of the public relations team should understand how proposals and presentations evolve. By seeing how all the parts come together, all practitioners are better able to perform their own segment or specialty when programs are implemented. Plans and programs are generally infused with enthusiasm. That helps get approval by employers and clients. But over-enthusiasm carries with it the serious danger of overpromising: "This employee communication program has everything necessary to eliminate the turnover problem." Those are dangerous words. Suppose the program falls short, reducing employee turnover by "only"

50 percent? Ordinarily such a reduction might be considered an acceptable performance, but evaluated against the unrealistic earlier statement, it might be considered not up to the level promised.

Plan Components

A public relations plan starts with the organization's mission statement. It proceeds from the specific role assigned to it in the form of a public relations mission. It engages in whatever fact-finding is indicated, as discussed in [Chapter 11](#). This information is used to build the foundation of the program: the problem statement and situation analysis (discussed in [Chapter 11](#)) and the public relations program goal. The final plan (or proposal) typically includes the components outlined in [Exhibit 12.4](#).

Exhibit 12.4

Public Relations Strategic Planning Outline

Four-Step Process	Strategic Planning Steps and Program Outline
	1. The Problem, Concern, or Opportunity
	“What’s happening now?”
	2. Situation Analysis (Internal and External)
A. Defining the Problem (Chapter 11)	“What positive and negative forces are operating (SWOT analysis)?”
	“Who is involved and/or affected?”
	“How are they involved and/or affected?”

3. The Problem Statement

“What is the public relations problem or opportunity the program should address?”

4. Program Goal Statement

“What is the desired situation?”

“By when?”

5. Target Publics

“Who—internal and external—must the program respond to, reach, and affect?”

6. Objectives

“What must be achieved with each public to accomplish the program goal?”

7. Action Strategy and Tactics

“What internal changes must occur in the organization to reach the desired objectives?”
(strategy)

“What specific actions must occur internally for organizational changes to happen?”
(tactics)

“What is the budget available to implement these internal changes?”

8. Communication Strategy and Tactics

“How will the organization best reach its target publics?” (strategy)

B. Planning and Programming ([Chapter 12](#))

“What specific message content must be communicated to achieve the outcomes stated in the objectives?” (tactics)

“What specific media best deliver that content to the target publics?” (tactics)

“What is the budget available to implement this program?”

9. Coordinating Action and Communication

“Do organizational actions correspond to organizational communications?”

“Is the organization just ‘talking the talk’ or is it actually ‘walking the walk’?”

C. Taking Action and Communicating ([Chapter 13](#))

10. Program Implementation Plans

“What are the actual steps necessary for executing the planned tactics for action and communication?”

“Who will be responsible for implementing each of the action and communication tactics?”

“What is the sequence of events and the schedule?”

10. Evaluation Plans

“How will the outcomes specified in the program goal and objectives be measured?”

D. Evaluating the Program [Chapter 14](#))

11. Feedback and Program Adjustment

“How will the results of the evaluations be reported to program managers and used to make program changes?”

Budgeting

There is as much art and artistry in public relations budgeting as there is science. Budgets generally relate to one of four control factors: (1) total income or funds available to the enterprise; (2) “competitive necessity”; (3) overall task or goal set for the organization; and (4) profit or surplus over expenses.

When total income or funds available is the basis for budgeting, as in marketing or fundraising activities, public relations is generally allocated a percentage. The percentage relates to the organization’s total operating budget, to gross sales, to funds raised, or to funds allocated from taxes. When competitive necessity is the criterion, the amount spent by a similar charity or a competing organization is matched or exceeded. This method is very risky. The task or goal basis for budgeting usually provides for public relations to have a share of the funding set aside to achieve the desired end result. For example, to achieve a fund-raising goal, a museum might increase the percentage of the operating budget allocated to “development” activities. The final approach—profit, based on how much money is “left over”—usually sets a fluctuating figure that can go up or down, depending on “the point at which we break even,” or in a nonprofit operation, “the point at which we cover all expenses.” Not only are planning and staffing difficult under this option, but it also reinforces the impression that public relations is something you do only if you have money to spend after covering the essentials.

Budgeting is rarely a one-person job. Each specialist is called on to estimate and itemize variable costs that will be incurred to implement the public

relations plan during the next budget year. Variable costs are those associated with projects and activities, such as printing, rent for special events facilities, speakers' fees, photographers, advertising, travel, and entertainment. The department head, or someone designated, adds the estimated variable costs to the unit's fixed costs, including such expenses as salaries and benefits, plus overhead for office space, phone service, equipment leases, supplies, subscriptions, and service contracts. The next executive up the line evaluates the budgets from the departments for which he or she is responsible, negotiates and adjusts the budget requests to fit the total available or needed, and finally either approves or forwards the budgets to the next level for approval (see [Figure 12.1](#)).

Practitioners typically follow three guidelines when budgeting:

1. Know the cost of what you propose to buy.

If you plan to do a special mailing, find out the exact costs for photography and artwork, printing and folding, mailing lists, labeling and sorting, delivery, postage, and everything else needed to complete the job. Do not guess, because you will have to live within the budget that gets approved and deliver what was promised.

2. Communicate the budget in terms of what it costs to achieve specific results.

The details of actual variable and fixed costs used to develop the budget may not be of interest to management or to a client. Managers who must approve the budget typically want to know how much it will cost to achieve goals and objectives. They look to you to manage the process in a cost-effective fashion.

3. Use software to manage the program.

Many commercial software programs are available to help develop a master spreadsheet, as well as spreadsheets for individual projects. By tracking each project and linking each to the master spreadsheet, you can estimate cash-flow requirements in advance and monitor expenditures against cost estimates.

Too often, budgets are put aside after they are approved and are not used as management tools. But, when used in conjunction with other elements of program planning, budgets provide guidance for scheduling staff resources, contracting for services, tracking project costs, and establishing accountability. Individual staff members, as well as the entire unit, should refer to the budget when assessing performance against expectations.

Also, budgets often play an important part in shaping and maintaining the relationship between the public relations staff and their clients and top management. In the final analysis, practitioners must have realistic budgets, use them to direct staff efforts, review them frequently with clients and top management, and be able to link costs to staff performance and program outcomes.

Pretesting Program Elements

Once the strategic plan is formulated, it should be tried on a pilot basis. Many qualitative and quantitative tools are available for pretesting efforts: interviews with opinion leaders, focus groups, controlled laboratory tests, and field tests in pilot communities. Careful pretests of strategy, tactics, and program materials provide estimates of how they will work, provide comparisons of alternatives to determine which work best, and detect possible backlash effects of unanticipated, unfavorable results.

Backlash effects can be avoided by conducting a response analysis. This means using a sample audience to observe immediate reaction to specific communication content. As an example, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) would have been spared much embarrassment had it pretested its 16-page booklet *Safety with Beef Cattle*. A pretest would have eliminated such nonsense warnings as, “Be careful not to step into the manure pits,” “If your ladder is broken, do not climb it,” and “Beams that are too low can hurt you ”.

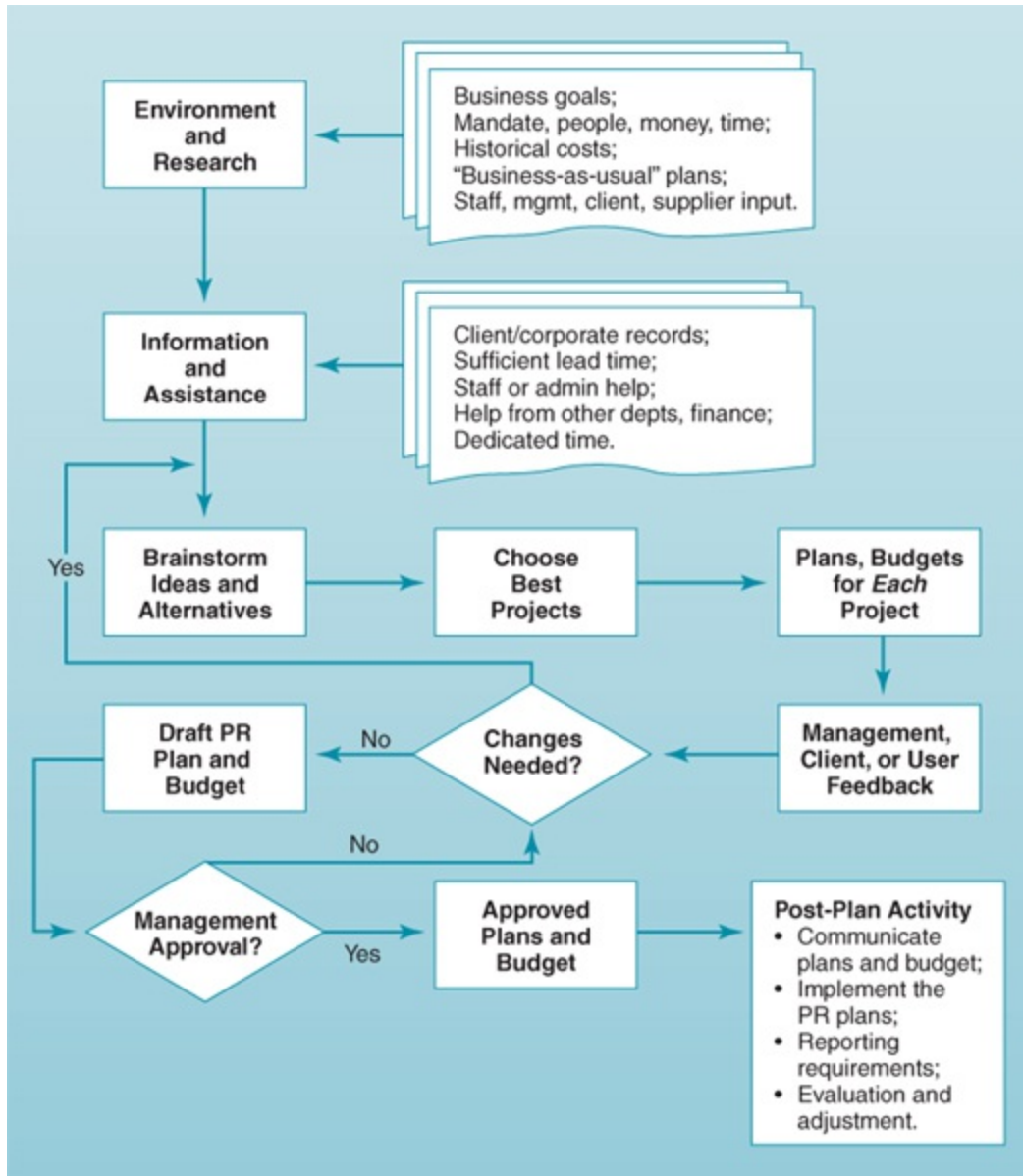


Figure 12.1 Public Relations Budgeting and Planning Flowchart

Source: Bob Delaney, APR, SIRIS Consulting, Mississauga, ON, Canada. Used with permission.

Message pretesting also can help increase the understandability of the information for its intended audience. The symbolism chosen for a public relations document may represent perfect clarity to its creator but be both uninteresting and unintelligible to the reader. Or the symbol may be inappropriate, as when Caterpillar, Inc., sent 10,000 calendars to its Saudi Arabia dealer, Zahid Tractor. When government inspectors opened the shipment, they found that the calendar contained a picture of a village in Iceland showing a church with two crosses. Workers blotted out the crosses with heavy black markers because Christian symbols are forbidden in the devoutly Islamic nation. The blotches created 10,000 reminders of the need to pretest even the smallest detail in program communications and activities.

A word of caution about pretesting: Public opinion is a process, and that process is constantly moving, as discussed in [Chapter 8](#). Thus, an idea that worked well in a pretest might prove a fiasco upon widespread use because of a time lag. Seasons change and with them change people's concerns, recreational pursuits, and so forth. Overpowering and unexpected events can also quickly alter the public opinion climate. For example, the American Red Cross' questionable response to Hurricane Katrina dramatically changed the climate for fund-raising campaigns run by local Red Cross organizations. When using pretest results as a guide to public relations programs, practitioners need to be as certain as possible that program conditions are similar to those that existed during the pretest and that pretest subjects are representative of the program's target publics.

Getting Buy-In for the Plan

Research, analysis, precedents, and experience must be converted into program forms acceptable to those who are not public relations executives and to clients. Some are not sensitively attuned to public opinion. Some are cost oriented, or publicity gun-shy, or both. Some do not commit comfortably to speculative expenditures without a guarantee of return. Some are nervous about issuing information to news media. Goals and objectives not tied directly to sales or profits are ephemeral to many.

Thus, the best way to get buy-in for the public relations plan is to

demonstrate how the program will help achieve organizational goals, or in the words of some managers, “affect the bottom line.” After all, management expects public relations to help manage threats from the environment, to enhance the organization’s competitive edge, and—most of all—to protect an organization’s most important assets, its good name and reputation. So, there are several “bottom lines” addressed by public relations.

Often the health of the bottom line depends on the health of an organization’s reputation. An organization’s market share, its ability to attract and retain valuable employees, its attractiveness to prospective donors and members, its autonomy and freedom to carry out its missions, and even its stock price are affected by its reputation among various stakeholders. Management expects the public relations unit to manage the organization’s reputation and good standing with the same strategic thinking that goes into managing other assets.

Practitioners must thus demonstrate how the proposed public relations plan will contribute to the organization’s mission, its operational goals, and its good reputation. To get buy-in for the public relations plan from managers and clients, practitioners must also use their persuasive and technical communication skills. Such skills include effective writing, persuasive speaking, effective use of presentation audiovisual materials, and careful reading of those around the conference table. But effective selling of the plan begins with an effective program plan.

After a program has been approved at the policy level, it becomes necessary to familiarize colleagues with what is to follow. Otherwise, these important collaborators may wind up uninformed, like an outside counselor who is not allowed to participate in the planning. Then, they would not be able to do their part. They would not be in a position to solicit support from the people under their supervision.

Following are some tips for introducing others to the public relations program: Explain the basic problems in terms of the harm that can be done if they are left unattended. Then, explain the immediate remedial measures in relation to long-term plans. Use similar case examples, precedents, and survey results to substantiate the plan. Eliminate personal opinion except as it applies to special knowledge of related cases. Relate the program to the

climate in which the organization operates and that it hopes to enjoy in the future. Emphasize that the planned tactics will have a desirable ultimate effect on program objectives. Keep explanations short and to the point. Be decisive and have conviction in the plan, qualities highly respected by administrators. And, as Lukaszewski advises, focus on the future: “The trusted strategic advisor can only be a force for tomorrow. The closer you are in tune with tomorrow, the more compatible you are likely to be with the leaders you are advising.”¹⁹

It is important for future relationships that the programming agreed upon be a matter of record. Getting the plan on paper tends to make the planning and programming steps real and tangible for those charged with implementing the program. Furthermore, practitioners should plan not only strategies and tactics, but also their implementation.

Planning for Program Implementation

Planning is for the purpose of making something happen or preventing it from happening, for the purpose of exploiting a situation or remedying one. Public relations practice is engaged more often in trying to create a viewpoint or a happening than in trying to prevent one, and in trying to take advantage of an opportunity more often than in trying to remedy an undesired situation. There remain, however, many situations and occasions when remedial public relations measures are required because preventive measures were not taken or were taken but failed.

Preventive public relations is tied most often to long-term planning. Remedial public relations actions tend to be of short duration and have minimal time for planning. The immediate need quite often is to pick up the pieces of a negative situation or to exploit a positive one. The latter works best if done within the framework of a long-term plan that includes strategies for such contingencies.

Writing Planning Scenarios

Writing planning scenarios is the art of anticipating and describing the range of possible future states. Scenarios provide either longitudinal or cross-sectional summative statements about the future for the purpose of planning. Forecasters working in the Rand Corporation in the 1950s were the first to refer to “scenario writing” when describing their more qualitative approach to forecasting the future. The process differs from more traditional quantitative forecasting in that planners develop a number of plausible predictions of the future rather than relying on a single projection as the basis for charting strategy.²⁰ The pioneer of the technique said that the most important parts of the process are “simply to think about the problem” and to engage in “systematic conjecture.”²¹ The goal is to help clients anticipate more than one possible future state and plan for events that may have no history on which to build.

Futurists generally agree that the range of useful scenarios is two to four, but that the ideal number is three. And although the labels may vary, they represent high-, low-, and middle-ground future states, with the middle-ground scenario often viewed as the one most likely to occur. Some experienced planners, however, argue that to avoid the appearance of assigning probabilities, scenarios should be titled according to some major theme or major attribute. The danger of labeling one scenario as “most likely” or “probable” is that program planners tend to develop strategy for only that one possible future state, thereby defeating the purpose of having developed scenarios. After all, the purpose of writing scenarios is to construct descriptions of possible future states so that contingency planning can help prepare for the range of possibilities.

The greater the future uncertainty, the greater the need for planning scenarios. Predictions based on historical data, traditional forecasting models, and trend analyses may not meet the needs of public relations planners who must be prepared for the unexpected.

Anticipating Disasters and Crises

A common type of planning scenario involves anticipating the worst things that could possibly happen to an organization; this is crisis planning. An effective corporate crisis communications plan is essential because “[I]t’s only a matter of time before all companies experience an organizational or product crisis that could threaten their performance—or their very future.”²² Crisis communication scholar Kathleen Fearn-Banks summarized the need for planning: “. . . Successful crisis communication depends on crisis anticipation and thorough planning as well as open and honest policies with stakeholders and the news media.”²³

Whereas public relations practitioners typically cannot predict a specific disaster or crisis, they can anticipate that the unexpected will occur. It is the “unexpected” nature of events that creates a crisis situation: “An organizational crisis is a low-probability, high-impact event that threatens the viability of the organization and is characterized by ambiguity of cause, effect, and means of resolution, as well as by a belief that decisions must be made swiftly.”²⁴ But, such “unexpected” events all too often motivate too-late planning: “After an organization without a plan or a program has suffered a crisis, it then sees the need for crisis planning and proactive public relations programs . . .”²⁵

First, though, practitioners must determine the types of crises, because the response depends in part on the type and probable duration of a particular crisis. One scholar of crisis management categorized eight types of crises caused by either management failures or environmental forces: natural, technological, confrontation, malevolence, skewed management values, deception, management misconduct, and business and economic.²⁶ Somewhat in jest, some use the “banana index” to describe crises: green—new and emerging issues and problem situations; yellow—current and ripe; and brown—old and moldy. A more serious attempt to define crises also uses time as the critical variable:

1. Immediate crises

—the most dreaded type—happen so suddenly and unexpectedly that there is little or no time for research and planning. Examples include a plane crash, product tampering, sudden death of a key officer, fire, earthquake, bomb scare, and workplace shooting by a disgruntled former

employee. These call for working out in advance a consensus among top management for a general plan on how to react to such crises to avoid confusion, conflict, and delay.

2. Emerging crises

allow more time for research and planning, but they may erupt suddenly after brewing for long periods. Examples include employee dissatisfaction and low morale, sexual harassment in the workplace, substance abuse on the job, and overcharges on government contracts. The challenge is to convince top management to take corrective action before the crisis reaches the critical stage.

3. Sustained crises

are those that persist for months or even years despite the best efforts of management. An all-too-common aspect of sustained crises is rumor. Rumors or speculations get reported in the media or circulated by word of mouth, outside the control of public relations. No amount of denial or countering seems to stop the rumor or purge the news database, meaning that reporters working on a new story will see the old story and may repeat the misinformation. Authors Doorley and Garcia say that, left unaddressed, rumors “can cause significant reputational harm—sometimes even more harm than the crisis.”²⁷ (For an example of a sustained crisis, see [Exhibit 12.5](#).)

Most organizations know how to deal with operational crises internally. It is the “unplanned visibility” following such crises, however, that can turn them into events that threaten reputation, credibility, and market position.²⁸ A quick public relations response is critical because, as a former vice president for CNN says, “If you don’t respond quickly to what happens, you create



Exhibit 12.5

Procter & Gamble's Sustained Rumor Crisis

For decades, Procter & Gamble has faced the false rumor that the organization's logo contains Satanic symbolism. "Word was" that P&G was in "league with Satan" and giving part of the corporation's money to the "church of Satan." Supposed evidence for such claims was Procter & Gamble's logo, which had evolved over almost two centuries, showing the man in the moon and 13 stars, the latter of which represented the original 13 colonies. To deal with this rumor, the company went to the media, the pulpit, and the courts to stop the wild charges emanating from religious fanatics. But in April 1985, Procter & Gamble gave up the fight and announced that it would remove the logo from its products. In 1991, Procter & Gamble modernized its logo for the first time since 1930 but did not use it on products or in advertising for several years thereafter. The company now uses the letters-only version, because the rumor persists even after many attempts to discredit it and to explain the real meaning of the original logo. Procter & Gamble's handling of this wild rumor illustrates the difficulties of dealing with a sustained crisis. (And this exhibit is an example of how such rumors get repeated to new audiences!)

a vacuum. And everyone else—the news media, your competitors—is going to step into that vacuum and tell your story the way they want to tell it, not the way you want it to be told.”[29](#)

An example of how a slow response can harm the organization is the Catholic Church's protracted delay in addressing the issue of child sexual abuse by some of its priests. Because the church's leadership was slow to acknowledge the problem and to take timely steps to address it, the church lost the trust and financial support of many of its members, faced numerous court cases, and paid large settlements to victims.

The key to anticipating and avoiding crises is assessing what can go wrong, what can affect people or the environment, and what will create visibility. Guidelines for preparing for public relations crises include the following:

1. Identify things that can go wrong and become highly visible; assess vulnerabilities throughout the organization.
2. Assign priorities based on which vulnerabilities are most urgent and most likely.
3. Draft questions, answers, and resolutions for each potential crisis scenario.
4. Focus on the two most important tasks—what to do and what to say—during the first critical hours following a crisis.
 - a. Guidelines for “what to do” may include a telephone call tree showing the order in which key decision makers need to be informed.
 - b. Guidelines for “what to say” may include “Q&As” that list questions likely to be asked by reporters and other publics, as well as the appropriate answers to these questions, and “standby statements” that are stock organizational positions regarding possible scenarios, with situation-specific information left blank to be filled in once the crisis occurs.
5. Develop a strategy to contain and counteract, not react and respond.[30](#)

The Virginia Tech campus shooting, the deadliest in history, highlighted the value of having a well-developed crisis plan. After a student killed 32

students and faculty, and then himself, more than 500 journalists with 125 satellite trucks descended on the rural campus within hours. Larry Hincker, the university relations (read: “public relations”) leader charged with managing the crisis communication and media relations, said, “One of the first things you learn is you have to have a plan in place. It doesn’t matter whether it’s sophisticated or simple—you’ve got to have one. Frankly, the simpler the plan, the better.”³¹ Even with his plan at hand, Hincker also pointed out the need to react and adjust as the crisis unfolds:

I violated crisis communications 101, which says appoint a single spokesperson and only that person interacts with the media. I had 500 journalists on this campus; that was not going to work. The second thing is that this crisis was so complex, so fast moving, that I was the one constant. I was the only person who was at all 10 of those press conferences, but I brought in the different experts.³²

Successful handling of this and other crises requires an ability to anticipate possible emergencies and vulnerabilities, skills in planning strategy for responding to possible emergency scenarios, recognition of the early stages of crises, and the capacity to respond immediately as part of a systematic crisis management planning process (see [Exhibit 12.6](#)). Crisis management expert Lukaszewski adds, “The first challenge is always to make certain that the company, organization, or individual being advised behaves in a way that community, victim, and public expectations are met. If that happens, it’s amazing how much of the rest takes care of itself.”³³

Exhibit 12.6

Checklist for Crisis Communication

Do the Following:

- Get out your prepared crisis plan, call together the crisis management steering committee, call in experts to help

analyze and explain the crisis, and open the lines of communication.

- Notify top management and refer them to the crisis plan. Give them the task of making impact projections in preparation for inquiries from employees, government agencies, and the media.
- Channel all inquiries to the designated spokesperson, who was selected and trained in advance as part of the crisis planning preparation. Notify receptionists, operators, secretaries, and others to direct all inquiries to the designated spokesperson without giving their own versions or opinions.
- Make sure that all messages are consistent, including those disseminated by the designated spokesperson, by staff working at the direction of the crisis team, and by any frontline staff responding on the phones, online, or via social media.
- Set up a news center for media and begin providing information as quickly as it becomes available. Provide background information packets and a place for television interviews away from the crisis scene. Make sure that the news center location has good cell phone reception and speedy wi-fi.
- Be open and tell the full story. If you do not, someone else will, and you will lose control as journalists turn to other sources and outside experts to fill in gaps in the story.
- Demonstrate the organization's concern for what is happening and for the people who are involved and affected. At the same time, explain what the organization is doing or planning to do to solve the problem.
- Have someone on call 24 hours a day and stay with the story as long as the media are interested.

- Reconvene the crisis management team afterward to summarize what happened, to review and evaluate how the plan worked, and to recommend improvements in the crisis plan.

On the Other Hand:

- Do not speculate publicly about what you do not know to be fact. And do not respond to reporters' questions designed to solicit speculation.
- Do not minimize the problem or try to underplay a serious situation. The media will find out the truth soon enough.
- Do not let the story dribble out bit by bit. Each new disclosure becomes a potential headline or lead story.
- Do not release information about people if it will violate their privacy or if it blames them for anything.
- Do not say "no comment" or make off-the-record comments. If you cannot say something on the record, then explain why and tell reporters when they can expect the information. If information is simply not available, say so and assure reporters that you will get it to them as soon as you can.
- Do not play favorites among the media or the reporters. Respect reporters' work by not undercutting their scoops and enterprise.
- Do not try to capitalize on media attention and interest by trying to promote the organization, cause, products, or services. Do not do what will be perceived as a self-serving pitch while in the crisis spotlight.

Adapted and updated from Claudia Reinhardt, "Workshop: How to Handle a Crisis," *Public Relations Journal* 43, no. 11 (November

1987): 43–44. Used with permission of Public Relations Journal.

Establishing an Information Center

Many organizations have discovered the dangers of rumors and the need to provide authentic information. When a crisis arises, it suddenly becomes apparent that some seemingly unimportant facets of an operation have been overlooked and must be given hurried attention. Inevitably, one such area of weakness is the availability of accurate information. A knee-jerk response usually results in an information center that operates through the crisis period, then fades away without serious thought until the next crisis comes. A planned, strategic response would include a standing information center that takes into account three major considerations:

First, the center must be recognized for what it is: a place where information moves from the institution directly to an organization's publics. It is not a media operation. To saddle an organization's media relations office with an added responsibility of answering questions from other publics reduces the effectiveness of both functions. Media and public information centers must be closely coordinated, but where the organization can afford it, they must be separate entities, each directed toward its own specific function.

Second, the center should be in two parts. Rumor-response centers are almost exclusively telephone operations. Of course, there must be an answering service or information center, so one group deals directly with the publics, taking questions and providing answers. If that group does not have the information, they promise to have it within a certain period of time. The second group, however, is a coordinating agency—the point of contact between the information center and the institution's staff and agencies. The coordinating agency goes to the organization's staff for information and checks material with the highest level of the administration for accuracy, coordinates it with the media relations office, and relays it to the center for use. Hence, all information flows through the coordinating agency, where it can be accounted for and logged. In addition to raw information—the factual material used to answer direct and simple questions—the coordinating agency should have qualified people available to speak on policy or to

conduct philosophical discussions of current issues. As the sole source of material for the information center, this agency controls the center and what is being said to the various publics. Although not an official spokesperson, it does provide for a “one-voice” response to the institution’s problems in a crisis situation.

Third, and perhaps the most important, any such center must have credibility established long before any crisis; it must be the accepted source of accurate information. This cannot be accomplished during the period of crisis alone. The flow of credible information must be established during routine times. The function must become an accepted part of the institution on a full-time, continuing basis, identical in crisis or routine situations. It must also, over an extended period, encourage both internal and external publics to use it with faith and confidence. This amounts to more than establishing a reputation for truth; it involves education.

Internally, all parts of the organization must be made aware that such a system exists and must be encouraged to use it to make available the information for which they are responsible. At the same time, employees at every level in the organization must be advised to direct all calls to the information center. Crisis management specialist Lukaszewski warns,

The most damaging information or story points will come from individuals who work with us or who have worked for us; from documents or studies that should never have been written or done; from hand-written notes in the margins of otherwise innocuous documents; or from dumb, colorful statements or phrases a spokesperson just couldn’t resist saying.³⁴

Such an information or fact center, operating normally over a long period of time, sets the pattern within an organization for quickly and efficiently moving information. If the organization is tuned to such an operation in routine times, the transition is far less challenging in troubled times.

Summary

In short, the second step of the public relations management process is planning and programming. This step must be grounded in strategic thinking, which includes (1) setting public relations goals that are in line with the organization's mission and operational goals and (2) planning public relations programs that identify target publics, articulate appropriate objectives, and distinguish between action and communication strategies and tactics.

Clearly, strategic planning is necessary for effective implementation of strategies and tactics. After all, "excellent strategists must have the executional capability to implement the strategy. . . . You can't divorce the two [strategy and implementation]." [35](#) Implementation is the topic of the next chapter.

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Study Guide

1. How do planning and programming fit into the four-step process of public relations management?
2. What are two components to strategic thinking in public relations?
3. Why must public relations goals fit in the context of organizational missions and operational goals?

4. What are the major steps in the strategic planning process?
5. What is the difference between cross-situational and situational approaches to defining publics? Give some examples of each approach.
6. How are objectives different from goals?
7. What are the four characteristics of appropriate program objectives? Write some examples.
8. What is the difference between action strategies and communication strategies?
9. What is the difference between strategies and tactics?
10. What are the three major categories of disasters and crises that practitioners must anticipate and plan for? Give some examples of each.

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Chapter 13 Step Three: Taking Action and Communicating

Learning Outcomes

After studying [Chapter 13](#) this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Differentiate between the action and communication components of program strategy.
2. Discuss major issues related to (a) crafting messages, (b) framing messages, and (c) encoding and decoding messages.
3. List and explain the six criteria traditionally applied by gatekeepers to determine the news value of messages.
4. List the stages of the diffusion process and the source of information most likely to be influential in each stage.
5. Define opinion leaders.
6. Identify barriers to the implementation of public relations campaigns.

Words are merely words, and they can be purely cosmetic if they aren't backed by convictions, actions, and policies.[1](#)

—Harold Burson

In all such settings and outcomes, there are winners and losers. More and more, it is the ability to control information and its flow that determines who is which.[2](#)

—Jarol B. Manheim

The third step of program management advances the public relations process from strategic planning—the conceptual stage—to putting the program into operation—the implementation stage. Whereas planning involves selecting action and communication strategies and tactics, implementation is the coordinated execution of both strategies and their tactics.

The Action Program

As explained in [Chapter 12](#), the The action strategy primarily involves internal organizational change. In the language of systems theory (discussed in [Chapter 7](#)), an organization’s action strategy is its open systems response to change pressures in its environment; such adjustments and adaptations are necessary for organizational survival. But, the action program cannot merely be to the organization’s own benefit; it must also be socially responsible.

Acting Responsively and Responsibly

It stands to reason that if something done caused the problem, then something must be done to solve the problem. In other words, corrective action is necessary to eliminate the original source of the problem. An example of the need for corrective action is a university that had difficulties attracting freshmen. Investigators discovered that the word was out: “Don’t go to State; freshmen can’t get classes.” Sure enough, freshmen had the lowest priority for registering for classes. Even when admitted to the university, they ended up at two-year community colleges to get required general education classes. Only after the university gave freshmen registration priority did the number of first-year students increase significantly.

Another example is the Bureau of Land Management’s (BLM) “wild horse problem.” The BLM, part of the Department of the Interior, png the program mandated by the Wild Horse and Burro Act of 1971 (“The Wild Horse Annie Act”) to manage the wild horse and wild burro populations on federal lands.

With no real predators, the wild herds can double every four years. Without proper management, the herds in ten western states increase to be far too large for the range and invade grazing lands leased to ranchers. Since 1971, the BLM has placed more than 225,000 horses and burros through the “Adopt-a-Horse” program (see [Figure 13.1](#)).³ Because not all horses and burros are desirable to potential adopters, who pay an adoption fee averaging \$125 per horse or burro, the BLM waived adoption fees for ranchers who took large numbers of the surplus animals.



Source: U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management.

Animal-protection protesters charged the BLM with condoning the slaughter of wild horses, “our national heritage,” by giving them to ranchers. They alleged that the ranchers shipped the animals directly to slaughterhouses, making a handsome profit in the process. BLM officials disavowed any role in the commercial slaughter of wild horses and burros for pet food,



Figure 13.1 Public Affairs Specialist at Adoption Event

Courtesy California State Office, Bureau of Land Management, The Department of the Interior.

but questioned the wisdom of spending millions of dollars each year to board surplus captured horses at a time when government programs for the poor were being cut. Still, the angry protests continued. No amount of communication appeared to ease the problem. When BLM officials recognized that their fee-waiver program was a major contributing factor, the program was canceled. Moreover, the agency changed policy with respect to ownership—ranchers would not take title of adopted horses and burros for one year. For that year, even though the rancher is responsible for care and feeding, the animals remain public property and cannot be sold. Again, actions spoke louder than words.

The classic case study of responsive and responsible public relations actions, however, remains Johnson & Johnson's handling of the Tylenol crisis (review [Exhibit 1.3](#)).

Coordinating Action and Communication

The Tylenol poisoning crisis also illustrates the need for coordinated action and communication. Late in 1982, McNeil Consumer Products, a subsidiary of Johnson & Johnson, was suddenly confronted with a crisis when seven persons on Chicago's West Side died mysteriously. Authorities determined that they had died from cyanide poison that had been inserted in Tylenol capsules. The news spread rapidly over television and the news wires. Panic among consumers, hospitals, doctors, and pharmacists ensued nationwide. The crisis called for an immediate action response supported by communication. The following were the action components of the company's response:

1. Stopped production of Tylenol capsules and halted promotional advertising.
2. Established liaison with the Chicago police, the FBI, and the Food and Drug Administration.
3. Recalled all Tylenol capsules: 31 million bottles with a retail value of more than \$100 million.
4. Designed and produced tamper-resistant packaging.
5. Returned Tylenol capsules—in new packaging—to the market with a stepped-up marketing effort to assure users of the product's safety.

Communication strategy supports the action program (see [Exhibit 13.1](#)): (1) to inform internal and external target publics of the action; (2) to persuade those publics to support and accept the action; and possibly (3) to instruct

publics in skills needed to translate intention into action. For example, the following highlights summarize the communication components of Johnson & Johnson's strategy:

1. Publics:

Consumers, pharmacists, management and staff of food chains, hospital administrators and staff, doctors, the Food and Drug Administration contacts, FBI contacts, medical press, and general press.

2. Message strategy:

Intensive effort to gather facts on production of the lot of capsules in the Chicago market. Full cooperation with the Food and Drug Administration. Assurance to alarmed inquirers of the company's determination to solve the mystery and to ensure the purity of its products.

3. Media strategy:

Full, candid cooperation with the media to get facts to the public as quickly as possible, including the use of a 30-city press conference conducted via television satellite. Centralized release of all information. Appearance of Johnson & Johnson chairman on television, including 60 Minutes.

Although communication is important, it is not enough—as one practitioner put it, “You simply can't communicate your way out of a situation you've behaved your way into.”⁴In these cases, the organization's communication efforts must be supported by action. According to author Donella Meadows, “Purposes are deduced from behavior, not from rhetoric or stated goals.”⁵



Exhibit 13.1

Coordinating Action and Communication

Mike Rose, Senior Vice President,

Fleishman-Hillard International Communications, San Diego

Consumer trust is a perishable commodity, and that's quite evident in the fresh produce industry when the food we eat jeopardizes our health. The fresh produce industry, particularly in California where much of the nation's produce is grown and harvested, realized the pangs of declining trust immediately following a nationwide outbreak of food-borne illnesses related to contaminated spinach—and a federal advisory to avoid that particular commodity.

Several months prior to the September 2006 E. coli outbreak, a noted industry leader had forewarned those along the supply chain of the risks within the industry's food safety standard. Most notably, the warning highlighted the multiple competing and conflicting standards imposed upon handlers (growers, shippers, processors, packers) by buyers in the retail and foodservice channels. Furthermore, there was very little, if any, common ground within the varying food safety standards—all of which were voluntary—and there was no oversight from the likes of the Food

and Drug Administration or the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The forewarning had been published in *The Packer* as an opinion piece that was initially crafted as part of a leadership positioning strategy for its author, a respected and influential buyer in foodservice known for high expectations in food safety. But, ultimately, the opinion piece led to the foundation of change in fresh produce food safety. Shortly after the September outbreak, which sickened more than 200 people and caused three fatalities, the opinion-piece author convened a meeting of buyers from retail and foodservice to lay the framework of changing food safety standards in fresh produce. Imparting influence through their collective buying power in the billions of dollars, the buyers' coalition called upon Produce Marketing Association, Western Growers Association, and United Fresh Produce Association to work with handlers in setting common standards that were specific, verifiable, and measurable.

With common standards as the objective, the action strategy of the buyers' coalition was to build support within the industry and apply pressure on the industry associations. What initially started as a small handful of buyers signing on to the coalition's initiatives eventually led to nearly two dozen buyers agreeing on a common set of standards and committing to buy from growers who meet them. Alongside that was the communication strategy: an aggressive media outreach campaign—contributed articles, opinion pieces, and media briefings—to maintain pressure on the industry associations and to build support among critics, legislators, and consumers. The campaign reached out to agribusiness, retail and produce verticals, as well as leading consumer publications such as *USA Today* and *The Los Angeles Times*.

As a result, in 2007, the California Leafy Green Products Handler Marketing Agreement was formed. More than 100 handlers, representing about 99 percent of the volume of leafy greens produced in California, are members of the agreement. Membership implies a commitment to grow products in compliance

with the agreement's food safety standards, including mandatory government audits, which were established collaboratively by academic and industry scientists, food safety experts and handlers. The agreement and common set of standards now serve as a model for other U.S. states that are home to leafy green growers.

Note: Mike Rose conducted this campaign while with the San Diego public relations firm Nuffer, Smith, Tucker.

Courtesy Mike Rose & Nuffer, Smith, Tucker

The Communication Program

Action strategy necessarily makes up the main thrust of a program but represents the part of the public relations iceberg that might not show above the surface. Communication, typically the more visible component, serves as the program catalyst to interpret and support the action strategy. [Chapter 8](#) outlines several communication theories and contexts that serve as the foundation for this section. What follows are fundamentals and principles for applying those theories and others to the two critical aspects of the communication program: message content and message delivery.

Whereas the focus of the action program is internal organizational change, the focus of the communication program is messaging. Message content strategy deals with how messages are developed, created, and expressed. Message delivery strategy deals with the channels through which message dissemination takes place. Both message content and message delivery must be carefully planned in the second step of the strategic management process; their effective execution depends on that strategic planning. Because planning and implementation go hand-in-hand, the remainder of this chapter offers specific theories helpful to the planning process, so as to enhance the implementation effort.

Message Content

The construction of communication messages is more difficult than it may first appear. Often, public relations practitioners are so rushed to disseminate information that they fail to carefully consider how that information should be presented so as to attain maximum results. But, practitioners who can strategically and effectively craft communication messages are both highly sought-after and very well paid. Message content should be carefully crafted and strategically framed, keeping in mind not only what the organization wishes to say, but also to whom it is speaking and under what circumstances.

Crafting the Message

There are many techniques for crafting communication messages. These techniques can be used alone or combined with others to effectively achieve organizational objectives.

Compliance-Gaining Strategies

Communication messages are often persuasive in nature, designed to get “receivers” to behave in ways desired by the “sender.” (Review the mass communication model in [Chapter 8](#).) For this reason, strategies for crafting messages are frequently called compliance-gaining strategies, defined as “a form of symbolic behavior designed to shape or regulate the behaviors of others.” ⁶ Some common compliance-gaining strategies are as follows⁷:

1. Sanction.

Message focuses on the rewards and punishments that the receiver may experience if he engages in the requested behavior. Examples: “If you study hard, you will earn a good grade on the exam” (external reward). “If you eat that entire pint of ice cream, you will regret it later” (internal punishment).

2. Altruism.

Message focuses on how the requested behavior will help either the

sender or a third party. Examples: “Please buy girl scout cookies to support my troop” (helps sender). “Donate money to help the tsunami victims” (helps third party).

3. Argument.

Message relies on explanations, and they can include either direct requests or hinted requests. Examples: “Stop belching!” (direct request). “What a rude noise!” (hinting).

4. Circumvention.

Message relies on deceit or exaggeration. Examples: “Email me your bank account number, and I will deposit a million dollars into your account” (deceit). “If you don’t stop making that noise, I’m going to kill you” (exaggeration—assuming that the sender does not truly plan on murder).

Power and Fear Appeals

Research on message effects suggests that gaining compliance is a complicated process. If the sender has little power or control to exercise over the receiver, then persuasion becomes the primary strategy. If, on the other hand, the sender has power or control, then instruction or direction becomes the relevant strategy. Research on the impact of message characteristics also supports the general conclusion that message impact is mediated or conditioned by receivers. For example, the classic study of order of presentation—“primacy” versus “recency”—demonstrated that the first part of the message has the greatest effect on receivers with low initial interest. The last part of the message has the greatest effect on those with high initial interest.⁸

Another line of message research has dealt with the use of fear to achieve compliance. After conducting an experiment using messages about dental hygiene, researchers concluded that low-fear messages produce more compliance than do high-fear messages. High-fear messages apparently

produce defensive reactions in the receiver that lead to distortion, denial, or rejection of the message.⁹ Subsequent research on fear appeals, however, suggests a much more complicated relationship in which several factors influence the relationship between fear messages and subsequent compliance.

For example, high-fear messages about the dangers of smoking and of venereal disease, when combined with believable recommendations, produce high scores on intended compliance. Three factors affect the impact of fear messages: (1) the seriousness or harmfulness of the subject, (2) the likelihood or probability of the feared event, and (3) the efficacy of the recommended course of action. Apparently receivers evaluate fear-producing messages on these three characteristics before making a decision to adopt recommended courses of action. Researchers refer to this decision process as “protection motivation.”¹⁰

One-Sided and Two-Sided Arguments

In public relations, many organizations must deal with public opinion, as discussed in [Chapter 8](#). In these cases, should the message contain only one side of an issue, or should it address both sides of an argument? Early persuasion research on message characteristics provided guidance still used in public relations today:

1. If receivers oppose your position, present arguments on both sides of the issue.
2. If receivers already agree with your position, your message will have greater impact—probably reinforcement—if you present only arguments consistent with the receivers’ views.
3. If receivers are well educated, include both sides of the argument.
4. If you use messages containing both sides of the argument, do not leave out relevant arguments on the opposing side, or receivers who notice the

omission will grow suspicious of your presentation.¹¹

5. If receivers are likely to be exposed later to persuasive messages countering your position, use two-sided messages to “inoculate” the audience to build resistance to the later messages.¹² This strategy is commonly referred to as “inoculation theory.”

Framing the Message

Framing means putting the message into a context that will facilitate compliance, understanding, or agreement. Framing is important because, without it, practitioners risk losing the already-limited attention of their target publics. The “30-3-30” formula devised by the late author-scholar Clay Schoenfeld illustrates this point.¹³ The first number means that many in the audience will give you no more than 30 seconds to get their attention; this means that your key points must be strong, positive, and dominantly displayed. The second number indicates that some will give you up to three minutes, meaning that you can count on bold lines, subheads, illustrations, photo captions, and even highlighted summary statements to carry the message. Thirty-minute audience members will spend the time necessary to get message content, even though the details are reported in small type. Maybe a 3-30-3 formula should replace Schoenfeld’s optimistic 30-3-30 formula when framing most public relations messages today.

Coorientation and Framing

The first principle of framing message content is to know the client’s or employer’s position and the problem situation intimately. The second principle is to know the needs, interests, and concerns of the target publics. In the words of one practitioner, “Get smart and put yourself in the other party’s shoes.”¹⁴ Thus, one tool for message framing is the coorientation model discussed in [Chapter 8](#); this tool can help practitioners determine the organization’s position, the public’s position, their mutual orientation, as well as their orientation to the issue or problem. The following time-tested

techniques help reduce the discrepancy between the communicator's position and the audience's attitudes:

1. Use the media most closely identified with the audience's position.
2. Use a communications source that enjoys high credibility for the audience on the topic of communication.
3. Play down the differences between the positions of the communicator and those of the audience.
4. Seek identification in vocabulary and anecdote with the audience in an area removed from the issue.
5. Establish the communicator's position as being the majority opinion, defining the majority from the audience itself.
6. Bring the audience's group identifications into play when those identifications will help develop a positive response. The converse is also true.
7. Modify the message to fit the organization's need.[15](#)

Framing for News Media

Besides framing their message for the target public, public relations practitioners must also frame their messages for the media through which dissemination will occur. In the case of traditional news media, practitioners must frame their messages to make them newsworthy, by whatever standard (hence the requirement to know the media and media gatekeepers; see [Chapter 10](#)).

According to some estimates, nine out of 10 news releases get discarded.[16](#) Practitioners can increase their chances of getting the attention of journalists by carefully adhering to the Associated Press Stylebook and using multimedia tools in the presentation of their messages.[17](#) Most importantly, framing the message for the media and media gatekeepers requires attention

to news value or newsworthiness. Traditional criteria applied by gatekeepers, who see their role as acting on behalf of media audiences, include the following:

1. Audience impact

—the number of people affected, the seriousness of the consequence, the directness of cause and effect, and the immediacy of the effect. This criterion applies not only to news, but also to other information.

2. Proximity

—the distance between the audience and the problem or issue of concern. This criterion simply suggests that local connections or news angles increase news value.

3. Timeliness

—perishability. Like bread, news gets stale. This criterion also explains why journalists and media compete to be first with the news, but why traditional print media cannot compete with broadcast media on timeliness. As a result, print media may be more interested in why and how rather than in when, although daily newspapers remain concerned with the timeliness of information.

4. Prominence

—recognizable and well known. Almost by definition, politicians and celebrities are of interest to large numbers of people; they are newsworthy. Prominence means that journalists and their audiences are interested in the private lives of public organizations and figures.

5. Novelty or oddity

—the unusual, bizarre, deviant, and offbeat. Some even define news as deviation from the normal. Journalists and editors know that people are attracted by and interested in what is new, unique, and unexpected.

6. Conflict, drama, or excitement

—strikes, fights, disputes, wars, crime, politics, and sports. All too often, conflict is the major ingredient in news, not only because of its appeal to journalists, but also because of media pandering to public interest in the sensational and uncertain. Conflict situations often have issues that are not clearly defined, uncertainty about what is right or wrong, and oversimplified versions of winners and losers.[18](#)

Defining news may not be that simple, however. Some contend that news is anything that affects the lives and interests or stimulates the concern and curiosity of a significant number of people. In the final analysis, the distinction between hard news and soft news changes to accommodate audience interests in an ever-expanding range of topics, including science, culture, environment, social change, and education, to name but a few. Day-to-day news selection by gatekeepers, however, may result more from routine, deadline pressures, mechanical requirements, and their perceptions of what other journalists are saying and doing.[19](#)

Besides being newsworthy, messages designed for media consumption must also be understandable—uncomplicated, free of jargon, and simple to grasp. They must be topical or local to take advantage of audience interest in information that is both timely and close to home. Most important, however, is that messages must be immediately actionable. In the same way that the action strategy must be mutually beneficial, so must messages. The content should be framed in such a way that the information answers questions, responds to audience interests

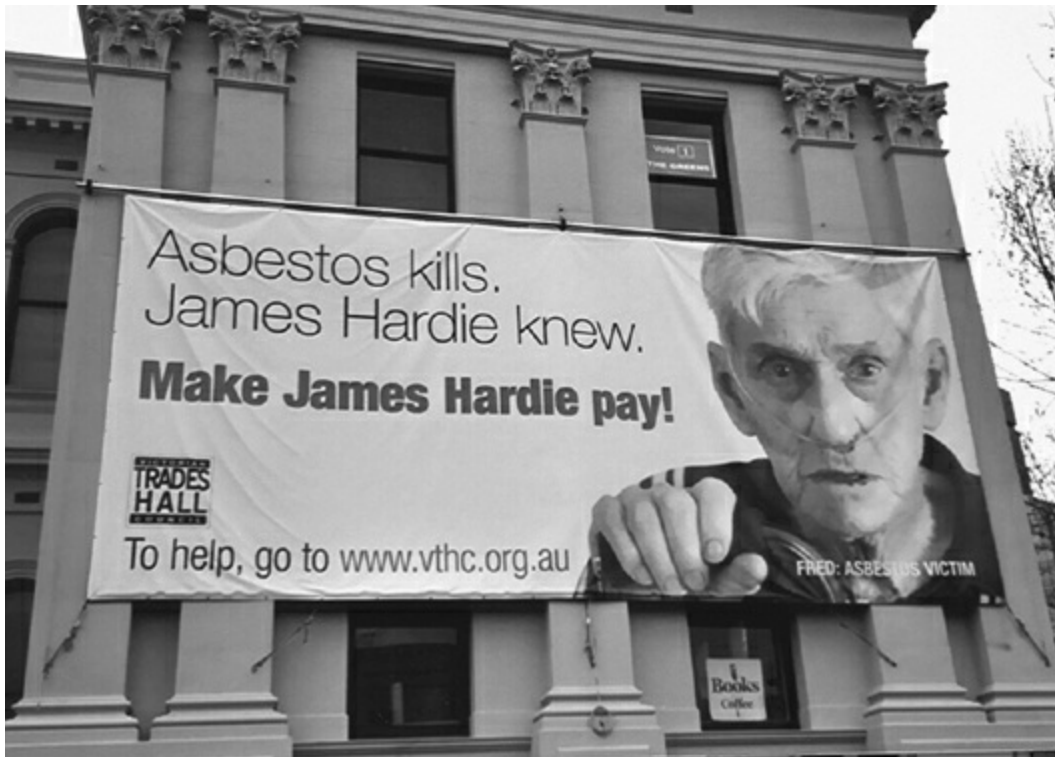


Figure 13.2 Message Framing —“Make James Hardie Pay!” (Trades Hall, Melbourne, Australia)

and concerns, and empowers members of the audience to act on their interests and concerns(see [Figure 13.2](#)). The actionable quality deserves special attention.²⁰

Journalists systematically tend to shy away from including “mobilizing information” in their news stories. This is the information about identification, location, and instruction or direction that audience members would need to act on their predisposition. One could speculate that journalists might feel that providing such information would be a departure from their perceived role as objective news reporters. When they include mobilizing

information in stories about charities, other community drives, and crises, journalists may see this either as a forgivable departure, given the positive context, or as acceptable professional behavior.[21](#)

Priming for Effective Framing

Recent research has explored what influences audience receptivity to message frames. Priming theory suggests that previously learned information affects how receptive people are to new messages and how they interpret new information. According to scholar Alex Wang, “The priming effect states that by making some issues more salient than others, a prime influences the standards by which a particular issue is judged.”[22](#) After his experiment testing the effects of priming and framing, he concluded:

When people read primed messages that offered an important issue but did not carry a specific evaluative implication, they consider the primes. When people read a news report that offered a direct link between an issue and a target corporation and carried a specific evaluative implication, they tended to adopt this frame of reference in their own thinking based on their previous positions held toward the issue.[23](#)

In a related study, Bae and Cameron also found a similar effect, what they called the “conditioning effect of prior reputation.” Participants in their experiment were exposed to fictitious news stories about a company’s reputation and later to another news story describing the company’s charitable gift to a nonprofit health organization. Those who read that the company had a good reputation concluded that the charitable gift was a mutually beneficial gesture. In contrast, those who read that the company had a bad reputation inferred that the company’s charitable giving was simply another self-serving behavior. The researchers concluded (1) that if a company has a bad reputation, even prosocial activity “triggers severe public suspicion toward the company’s overall strategy” and (2) that practitioners should “commit to enhancing intrinsic trustworthiness” of the company before attempting to influence publics with prosocial messages.[24](#) Indeed, consistent with the apparent relationship between priming and framing, information held prior to new communication affected subsequent judgments.

More Framing Tips

Finally, developing strategy for framing the message requires attention to four fundamental facts:

1. The audience consists of people. These people live, work, worship, and play in the framework of social institutions in cities, in suburbs, in villages, or on farms. Consequently, each person is subject to many influences, of which the communicator's message is typically only one small source of influence.
2. People tend to read, watch, or listen to communications that present points of view with which they are sympathetic or in which they have a personal stake. For example, communication scholarship has shown that people who are Republican tend to pay more attention to television ads featuring Republican candidates, whereas Democrats tend to pay more attention to ads featuring Democratic candidates.
3. Media create their separate communities. For example, those who read *Soldier of Fortune* and *The National Enquirer* are not likely to read *Scientific American* and *Architectural Digest*. Followers of an organization on Twitter or "fans" of an organization on Facebook create a sense of community among themselves using these specific social media, regardless of whether the organization participates in the community or not.
4. Media have a wide variety of effects on individual and collective knowledge, predisposition, and behavior, not all of which are readily measurable. Careful framing must take into account both the intended and unintended effects of message content, which brings us to the issue of message encoding and decoding.

Encoding and Decoding the Message

[Figure 8.1](#) on page [168](#) shows that communicators Communicators are both encoders and decoders. Encoding is the process of putting meaning into messages; decoding is the process of getting meaning out of messages. Ideally, target publics will decode a message in the same manner that a practitioner encoded it, but this is not always the case. In fact, many things can affect encoding–decoding processes. The effective practitioner will consider these things and create messages in ways that facilitate accurate decoding, which avoids miscommunication.

Semantics

Semantics is the science of what words mean. Language is constantly changing, with new words appearing (such as “googled”) and words dropping from use (such as “groovy”). The meanings of words can change (such as “politically correct”). Others take on so many meanings that they become almost meaningless (such as “bottom line” and “strategic planning,” according to some in public relations!).

This is not a book about linguistics, but practitioners Practitioners acknowledge the importance of semantics in public relations. The subject really deserves and gets a great deal of attention from practitioners because they live by words and make their living by them. For example, Edward Bernays referred to the “semantic tyranny” represented by the title of what is widely recognized as one of history’s greatest special events, “Light’s Golden Jubilee,” the celebration of the 50th anniversary of Thomas Edison’s invention of the incandescent lightbulb. There is no escape for communicators from what T. S. Eliot described as “the intolerable wrestle with words and meanings.” Practitioners must seek mastery of word meanings and nuances.

When communicating with diverse audiences, the challenge is further complicated by the need to translate English-language words with accuracy, yet with a careful eye toward semantics in the end-language. For example, when the U.S. Census Bureau wanted to encourage Hispanics to complete and return their census forms in 2000, the English-language tagline was “This is your future. Don’t leave it blank.” In the initial Spanish-language

translation, “blank” became “blanco,” which some Hispanic community leaders felt implied that failure to complete the ethnicity question on the census form would lead to Hispanics being counted as non-Hispanic whites. Thus, the Census Bureau decided to go with the tagline “Es nuestro futuro. Hagase contar” (“This is our future. Make it count.”) for its Spanish-language campaign.

Examples abound of translation issues causing miscommunication. There is evidence that a mistake in translating a message sent by the Japanese government near the end of World War II may have triggered the bombing of Hiroshima and thus ushered in atomic warfare. The word “mokusatsu,” used by Japan in response to the U.S. surrender ultimatum, was translated as “ignore” instead of its correct meaning, “withhold comment until a decision has been made.” And some years ago, semantic difficulties caused a crisis between the United States and Panama: Panamanians interpreted the English verb “negotiate” as a commitment to work on a new treaty, the meaning of the Spanish verb “negociar.” The U.S. State Department intended it simply in its noncommittal sense of “to discuss.”

Even when everyone is using the same language, decoding messages can be challenging because words have two different kinds of meaning: denotative and connotative. Denotative meaning is the common dictionary meaning, generally accepted by most people with the same language and culture. Connotative meaning is the emotional or evaluative meaning we read into words because of our experience and background. For example, all people will agree that “dog” denotes a four-legged, usually furry, canine animal. For most people, “dog” connotes a friendly, faithful animal and usually awakens nostalgic memories about a childhood pet. To others, however, the word connotes a dangerous animal or the cause of dander that causes a severe allergic reaction.

In this midst of the wrestle with words—in any language—is the public relations practitioner. Studying the words that leap out of people’s mouths, stare up from newspapers, and Tweet out in 140 characters, the practitioner is expected to react and then to be able to tell what those words mean—not what they say, but what they really mean. Then the public relations specialist is expected to combine words and actions that will correct

misunderstandings, educate where there is a lack of knowledge, and, in general, clear up confusion.

Practitioners are constantly making decisions about word meanings, so the basic importance of semantics must not be overlooked. For example, deciding what the refusal of people to work should be called represents a decision in semantics. Is it a strike, a work stoppage, or an outrage against the people? Cutbacks are referred to as “downsizing” or “rightsizing.” Procter & Gamble called its notification that the company was about to cut 13,000 jobs and close 30 factories “the global initiative announcement.” Weapons of mass destruction are called “peacekeepers,” military invasions are referred to as “police actions,” and new taxes are camouflaged as “revenue enhancements.” Republicans opposing the 2010 health care reform bill derogatorily labeled it “ObamaCare.” Clearly, there is no one-to-one ratio between a word and its meaning. The same signs and word symbols have different meanings for different people.

Thus, public relations practitioners must be able to carefully select and transmit for various publics words that will be received in the manner in which they were intended. Poet Anne Sexton cautioned, “Words, like eggs, must be handled with care; once broken, they are beyond repair.” Practitioners must have a flair for picturesque, memorable terms, a feeling for words, and the ability to encode words in ways that will enable target publics to accurately decode them.

Symbols

Communication involves not only semantics, but also symbols and stereotypes. Years ago, Lippmann explained the need met by symbols and stereotypes as “introducing(1) definiteness and distinction and (2) consistency or stability [emphasis his] of meaning into what otherwise is vague and wavering....We tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture.”²⁵

The symbol offers a dramatic and direct means of persuasive communication with large numbers of people over time and distance. Symbols have been

used since the dawn of history to compress and convey complex messages to the multitudes. The Star of David and the Cross of Christ remind us of this. Most people need the shorthand of symbols to deal with whatever is abstract, diffuse, or difficult.

The value and use of a venerated symbol is seen in the British monarchy. The greatly diminished British Commonwealth of Nations today is a free association of independent nations loosely held together, not by legal ties, but by the symbol of the Queen of England. She symbolizes the traditional loyalties, the common interests, the traditional institutional forms held more or less in common, and the family ties.

Symbols play an important role in the public relations and fund-raising programs of health and welfare agencies. Probably the best-known symbol of the kind is the Red Cross, from which that agency takes its name. The Red Cross originated in Switzerland in 1863 and created its symbol by reversing the white cross and red background of the Swiss flag. But, remember how receivers may decode messages in ways that differ from how senders encode them? The cross is associated strongly with Christianity, which is not always well received in countries whose people have a different faith. For this reason, the organization that most Americans simply know as the Red Cross actually has the formal name The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (www.ifrc.org). When providing humanitarian assistance in Muslim countries, the organization operates under the banner of the Red Crescent; of course, the crescent is a symbol of Islam.

One of the most effective American symbols ever created is that of Smokey Bear, used by the U.S. Forest Service, the Association of State Foresters, and the Advertising Council to promote forest-fire prevention. The idea originated in 1944 with a group of foresters and advertising specialists concerned about the need to protect U.S. national forests. After experimenting with drawings of deer, squirrels, and other small animals to carry fire-prevention messages, they had the idea of using a bear. A bear—with its humanlike posture, its way of handling itself, and its universal appeal to young and old—seemed ideal to build into a persuasive symbol (see [Figure 13.3](#)).

The Smokey Bear symbol changed over the years, as did the appeals used in

the public service announcements. More than six decades of public awareness campaigns have produced

Smokey Bear



Figure 13.3 Smokey Bear

Courtesy U.S. Forest Service, The Advertising Council, and the National Association of State Foresters.

almost universal awareness of Smokey Bear, with 98 percent aided recall in some parts of the country. Surveys typically show that about 95 percent of adults and 85 percent of children recognize Smokey's message: "Only you can prevent forest fires." But even though the symbol enjoys widespread recognition, many of the young urban children exposed to Smokey Bear in school programs do not know what to do to prevent forest fires. The bear, however, remains a credible symbol of forest-fire prevention.[26](#)

Increasingly, for-profit and nonprofit organizations emphasize symbols (designs and logos) to create a public image and instant recognition or to capitalize on widespread public awareness and acceptance. A current example of the latter is the symbol for recycling, which marketers and organizations use to demonstrate their concern for the environment. In fact, another new term—green—has entered the language to describe communication and an action strategy shaped to demonstrate sensitivity and commitment to protecting the environment.



To be effective, symbols should be distinct, different, and in character for the institutions using them. But careful encoding and proper decoding remain key. For example, Drake University ran into a problem in 2010 with its new symbol "D+." Intended to stand for "the Drake Advantage: your Potential + our Opportunities," the new symbol was derided as inappropriate for an educational institution, because many associated "D+" with a mediocre grade, not with a great university and its advantages![27](#)

Furthermore, a changing public climate governed by new and different values can make symbols obsolete or offensive, as the decoding process shifts among broad segments of the population. For example, new public sensitivity for the rights and feelings of minority groups has forced the University of

Illinois, Syracuse University, St. John's University, and Stanford University to abandon American Indian symbols and names for their athletic teams. Clearly, the universities and the tribes hold different views of the use of Native American symbols.²⁸ Florida State University continues to use the Seminole warrior Osceola as its symbol and calls its marching band the "Marching Chiefs," whose signature piece is the "War Chant." The university and the Seminole Tribe of Florida continue to collaborate on the appropriate use of symbols, in the face of continuing pressure to drop long-standing Indian symbols and mascots.

Stereotypes

People have impressions about everything that touches their consciousness. All people live in a world of their own symbols. Public figures, for example, during their lifetimes and afterward, are known partly through a personality created by images fixed in the public imagination. Politicians, rock stars, and sports heroes are good examples. Their families and associates know them as people entirely different from their public personalities. People who live on one side of town tend to know people on the other side of town, as well as those in remote cities, in a half-fictional, half-imagined way. The only feeling that people can have about an event they do not experience or a person they do not know is by their own mental image of the event or person, developed from fragmentary, secondary sources.

In communication, nothing raises more problems than the reality that most mass media audiences have limited access to the facts. With limited access, and with some information tending to confuse as much as it clarifies, people rely heavily on stereotypes. Specific and significant impressions become generalities. As Lippmann pointed out, the "pictures in our head" derive mainly from what we see and hear in the mass media. Certainly our impressions of the war on terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan, a nuclear power plant in Japan, and riots in Egypt and Syria, as well as our stereotypes of the people in each situation, came from television, social media, news magazines, newspapers, and radio.

Incomplete and distorted stereotypes pose public relations problems. For

example, a newly elected president of the California State Bar announced that she would make addressing negative and distorted public stereotypes of lawyers her highest priority. Unfortunately for lawyers everywhere, however, cartoonists took advantage of her announcement by exploiting stereotypes in a new rash of cartoons portraying lawyers as snakes, vultures, wolves, sharks, and so forth. The media help create new stereotypes by reducing complex people, groups, countries, and situations to their simplest and most general—sometimes distorted—attributes.

Lippmann emphasized the sacrosanct regard that people have for stereotypes as “the core of our personal tradition, the defense of our position in society.”

They may not be a complete picture of the world, but they are a picture of a possible world to which we are adapted. In that world people and things have their well-known places, and do certain expected things. We feel at home there. We fit in. We are members. We know the way around....The stereotypes are, therefore, highly charged with the feelings that are attached to them. They are the fortress of our tradition, and behind its defenses we can continue to feel ourselves safe in the position we occupy.[29](#)

Stereotypes, then, serve as a defense mechanism against having to exert the effort required to learn about and understand the uniqueness and details of each person, group, and situation. They also form a moral code from which personal standards of behavior are derived. Practitioners must learn to recognize the influence and the presence of symbols and stereotypes in what appear to be the contradictions and contrariness of public opinion. Symbols are used to counter symbols, and stereotypes are used to counter stereotypes.

There is yet another side to stereotypes, however. In the context of a multicultural society, media are trying to be more sensitive and respectful of differences based on age, gender, sexual orientation, race, body shape, and ethnicity. Some criticize efforts to purge the language of stereotypes as yielding to the “politically correct language” movement. They say the movement is headed by the kind of “thought police” George Orwell warned us about.[30](#) Others see eliminating words and phrases that are pejorative stereotypes as a way to promote acceptance of diversity and to make media content more inclusive and less offensive.[31](#) To avoid having the words

themselves become a public relations problem, practitioners must be sensitive to word choice. As one writer put it, “[t]argeting a multicultural audience takes more than a dictionary—it takes tact, understanding, and relevance.”³²

Finding Commonalities

In short, to communicate effectively, the sender’s words and symbols must mean the same thing to the receiver that they do to the sender. The word “communication” is derived from the Latin *communis*, meaning “common.” So communication means establishing a sense of commonness. A sender can encode a message and a receiver decode it only in terms of their own experience and knowledge. But if there has been no common experience, then communication becomes virtually impossible. This explains a layperson’s inability to understand an Einstein. It explains why—despite the tremendous flow of words to and from China—Americans and Chinese still have little understanding of each other.

Common knowledge and experience provide the connections. The greater the overlap in common interest and common experience, the easier it is to communicate. Commonalities in communication are essential to link people and purpose together in any cooperative system. Practitioners can establish commonalities between an organization and its target publics either by emphasizing these in the content of communication messages, or by using channels for delivering messages that a public has in common with an organization.

Message Delivery

In addition to message content, the communication strategy in any public relations effort must include message delivery. There is no point in creating, framing, and presenting an effective message if there is no way of getting that message to the intended public. As is the case with developing message content, determining the appropriate channels for message delivery can be facilitated by knowledge of communication theories. Accordingly, this

section covers some theories that are helpful for the selection of message delivery channels.

Disseminating Messages

Gaining acceptance of an idea or an innovation is more than simply beaming it to an audience through a mass medium or internal publication. To illuminate, communication must be aimed with the precision of a laser beam, not cast in all directions in the manner of a lightbulb. Even after many years of research, there is still not definitive evidence of a single model of how ideas are disseminated among people.

But, Elmo Roper, after decades of opinion research, formulated a hypothesis that has some value as a guide. His concentric-circles theory says that ideas penetrate to the whole public very slowly through a process similar to osmosis.³³ Histories of public information campaigns substantiate this. Ideas move out in concentric circles from great thinkers to great disciples to great disseminators to lesser disseminators to the politically active participating citizens to the politically inert (see [Figure 13.4](#)). Although Roper noted that the categories are not mutually exclusive, his hypothesis assumes that American society can be stratified as indicated and emphasizes the importance of using opinion leaders in the public relations process.

Another theory that helps explain how ideas are adopted is Everett Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations Theory, which was already explained in [Chapter 8](#).³⁴ To review, diffusion refers to the process by which new ideas and practices are spread to members of a social system. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has been working at this task longer than most. It learned from experience that getting new ideas accepted involves more than simply discovering a new grain and

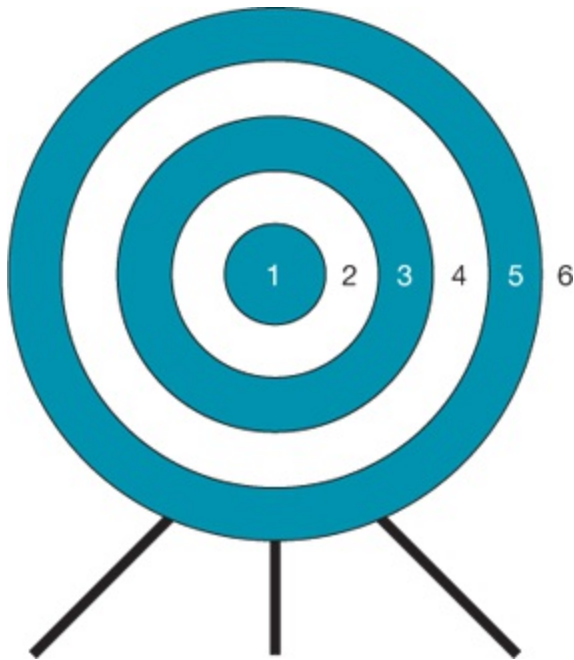


Figure 13.4 Roper's Concentric Circles Theory

1. Great Thinkers—Famous people with powerful and original ideas that shape the thinking of others, for example, Adam Smith, Thomas Jefferson.
2. Great Disciples—Famous people who follow great thinkers, elaborating upon and clarifying the original powerful ideas, for example, John Maynard Keynes, Abraham Lincoln.
3. Great Disseminators—Well-known people who help to spread ideas widely at a national or international level, for example, Ronald Reagan, Walter Cronkite, Oprah.
4. Lesser Disseminators—People who help to spread ideas within their own circles of influence, for example, religious leaders, news editors, teachers.
5. Participating Citizens—People who take active interest in

public affairs and provide local leadership.

6. Politically Inert—People who seldom voice opinions, but who may vote, buy, and make decisions.

publicizing it. It took 13 years to gain widespread adoption of hybrid seed corn on America's farms, for example. Out of their long experience and evaluation research, agricultural sociologists have concluded that acceptance goes through five stages, which Rogers summarized thus:

1. Knowledge.

People learn about an innovation and some gain understanding of what it is.

2. Persuasion.

Potential adopters develop interest in the innovation. They seek more information and consider its general merits.

3. Decision.

Potential adopters decide to adopt or reject the innovation after weighing its merits for their own situation.

4. Implementation.

Those willing to try the innovation actually apply it to their situation, usually on a small scale. They are interested in the practice, techniques, and conditions for application.

5. Confirmation.

Adoption is either reinforced or the decision to adopt is reversed based on the evaluation.[35](#)

Selecting Delivery Channels

An understanding of how ideas and innovations spread through society is important for public relations practitioners, who are usually paid to make that process happen. To be effective, practitioners must know what stage of diffusion an innovation is in, because that information helps to select the appropriate channel for delivering messages about the idea or product.

Sources of Influence

Decades of research has shown that mass media have their greatest impact and usefulness in creating awareness in the knowledge stage of the diffusion process. But, mass media become less influential as the diffusion process advances toward confirmation of the adoption. In contrast, interpersonal influence increases with each step. Put into the perspective of the public relations strategic planning process, these research results suggest that, when the campaign objective is to change knowledge, mass media would be an effective message delivery channel. Then again, if the objective is to change behavior, interpersonal methods are the better channels for message delivery. The diffusion process and sources of influence are illustrated in [Figure 13.5](#).

The late communication scholar Steve Chaffee suggested several reasons for this pattern of diffusion:

The media are comparatively rich in news content, whereas personal associates are likely to have had relevant “consumer” experience. Further, since consumption is partly a matter of defining one’s social “self,” other persons would be able to offer normative social guides to appropriate consumption patterns that the media cannot. Finally, some matters may not be dealt with by the media in sufficient depth or detail to satisfy personal information needs.³⁶

Public’s Stage of Adoption	Public Relations Objective	Best Sources of Influence
Awareness	Knowledge Change	Media
Interest	Attitude Change	Media or People
Evaluation	Attitude Change	Media or People

Trial	Behavior Change	People, especially family & friends
Adoption	Behavior Change	People, especially family & friends

Figure 13.5

Sources of Influence

Research conclusions demonstrate that communicating a new idea or practice can be a long, tedious task. Different communication tactics are effective at different points and in different ways. Communicators must know what media and techniques to use at different stages and how to mobilize these influences effectively. (See [Chapter 10](#) for the uses of mass media as message delivery channels.)

Opinion Leaders

Early research on the impact of mass media found a two-step flow model of media effects, whereby media messages first reached a select group of individuals—the “opinion leaders”—before being passed on by those individuals to others in their social system.³⁷ Opinion leaders are people who can influence the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of other people. Since this foundational research, scholars and practitioners alike have tried various ways to identify opinion leaders, using demographic, social or behavioral characteristics.³⁸

For example, applied research in the areas of public health and health communication has found that influential people often have technical expertise, control of communication channels, or positions of authority.³⁹ Opinion leaders also tend to be social and positively received by others; in other words, they tend to be popular.⁴⁰ The key is that opinion leaders are defined and identified by the people on whom they have influence. Thus, public relations practitioners must carefully research who are considered to

be opinion leaders in the eyes of their target publics. If done effectively, such research can lead to strategic targeting of opinion leaders and, through them, members of the target publics.

Other research suggests a distinction between traditional opinion leaders and what one scholar called influentials.⁴¹ [Figure 13.6](#) compares the classic opinion leaders to modern influentials.⁴² No matter how they are labeled, influentials and opinion leaders have great power in many situations, particularly in the later stages of the diffusion process.

Using Special Events

In the early stages of the diffusion process, when knowledge or attention is the desired public relations outcome, media serve as important channels for information dissemination. Special events are designed to get a message in the media. Practitioners use special events and “media events” to attract the attention of target publics directly and through media coverage. For example, public relations specialist Debra Lynn Ross produced “The Battle of the Hospital Chefs” to attract the attention of those attending an annual hospital services conference and to secure media coverage about the improved quality of hospital food (see [Exhibit 13.2](#)).

	Classic Opinion Leaders [*]	Modern Influentials ^{**}
Research Period:	Post-WWII	Late 1970s
Socioeconomic Status:	Evenly distributed across social strata	Concentrated in higher socio-economic groups
Topics of Influence:	Specific, with little overlap	Several, with considerable overlap
Mass Media Exposure:	Higher exposure levels	Consumption of particular (not more) media types
Nature of Influence:	Leader or follower	Gradations of influenceability

* Katz & Lazarsfeld (1955).

** Weimann (1991); also supported by other studies subsequent to Katz & Lazarsfeld (1955).

Figure 13.6

Opinion Leaders and Influentials

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Exhibit 13.2

Special Event: The Battle of the Hospital Chefs



Debra Lynn Ross, Director, Corporate Communications

Consorta, Inc., Schaumburg, Illinois

Sometimes you just have to seize a good opportunity and run with

it despite the fact that there may be time and financial limitations. “The Battle of the Hospital Chefs” was one of those. Designed as a national competition to raise awareness of a growing hospital food trend—gourmet, heart-healthy dishes that are part of normal hospital fare—the first of its kind special event was created as a cooking challenge similar to the Iron Chef. The “Battle” was created to help target audiences put aside outdated ideas about hospital food.

Each year, Consorta, a health-care group purchasing and resource management organization, holds an educational conference for its members. The conference also features an exhibition hall that links more than 350 exhibiting companies with conference attendees.

While over the past years, the number of conference registrants representing the food and nutrition area has grown markedly, exhibitors in the food and nutrition area of the exhibition hall were underrepresented. With fewer than 120 days left until the conference began, exhibit sales were not at the expected goal. We needed to find a “different hook” to bring these companies to the exhibit floor and actively engage them in demonstration cooking in the Food & Nutrition Pavilion.

We found our inspiration in hospital food.

A successful event would increase supplier participation and therefore revenue. It would also expand visibility for member hospitals and their foodservice efforts by debunking the outdated notion that hospital food is bad.

With a nod to the Food Network, “The Battle of the Hospital Chefs” was born.

The Corporate Communications team created The Battle as a unique competition that pitted three chefs from Consorta member hospitals against one another as they created tasty, heart-healthy, low-cost gourmet meals. Finalists would have one hour to prepare a healthy menu, which was judged on many attributes, including the

fact that it had to cost less than \$4.95 a plate. The three finalists, along with their sous chefs, received all-expense-paid trips to Chicago to compete for the top prize.

Prior to the competition, Consorta staff worked with the finalists and their respective public relations departments to create videos highlighting their facility and showing colleagues cheering on their finalist. The videos would be shown the day of the event as each finalist was introduced.

Consorta brought together a judging panel consisting of three celebrity Chicago chefs, and Consorta's president and its chief operating officer.

A four-page brochure featuring the finalists' recipes was produced for the media kit and used as a handout at the event. In addition, we created an event website that contained information on hospital foodservice trends, finalists and their recipes, the judges, as well as a media link with downloadable documents and photos.

The Battle aired live and was carried on the in-house TV channel for those who preferred watching from the comfort of their hotel room. We designed the cooking stations to be similar to those seen on television cooking shows, with mirrors positioned above the work surfaces so the audience could see technique and how things were assembled. While the chefs were preparing their courses, each of the celebrity judges presented a healthy cooking tip. The emcee also engaged the audience in a true/false game about healthy eating and participants won healthy food-related prizes. The drama of the event picked up as the time remaining was called out. In the end, William Reed's Macadamia Crusted Tilapia with sweet soy reduction and mint sauce, spicy cucumber slaw, sesame soba noodle salad, and tofu-berry smoothie wowed the judges, winning him the Gold Chef Award.

As part of Consorta's social responsibility efforts, donations in the names of the winning chef and the three celebrity judges were made to charities and a charity for the homeless program received

all the new cooking equipment used at the event.

The event also proved tremendously successful for Consorta, meeting our goals and objectives:

- Signed 18 new food and nutrition suppliers as exhibitors for the next conference, exceeding goal by 80 percent and resulting in \$60,000 additional revenue
- Increased attendance at the Food & Nutrition Pavilion by 38 percent, exceeding target of 20 percent
- Secured more than 12 million possible media impressions, including the following:
 1. Live broadcast coverage on Fox TV, and a 3 1/2-minute segment on ABC World News Tonight.
 2. National print coverage in the Wall Street Journal, AARP The Magazine, and the Associated Press. We also provided information for Parade Magazine's "What America Eats" issue.
 3. Local broadcast and print coverage in the Chicago Sun Times and in the finalists' local media.
 4. Coverage in trade magazines, including Acute Care News, Chef, Seafood Business, and Healthcare Foodservice Management.
 5. Visits to www.hospitalchefs.com, which had 1,782 visitors, 6,958 page views, and 641 visitors who downloaded heart-healthy foods recipes.

"The Battle" proved that the title "Hospital Chef" is not an oxymoron. The event is now an annual competition at the conference and attracts more chefs and attention each year.

Courtesy Consorta Inc.

Few would deny that events promoting a cause in the public interest or calling attention to newsworthy events have a legitimate place in public relations and the public information system. But, phony events to promote dubious causes and to “hype” self-serving interests justify the criticism often leveraged against special events. Historian and former Librarian of Congress Daniel Boorstin argued that “pseudo-events” blur, rather than clarify, public issues. As he wrote, “our whole system of public relations produces always more ‘packaged’ news, more pseudo-events.”⁴³ Such events are “planned, planted, or incited” to be reported by the media, they may or may not reflect the underlying reality, and they are intended to be self-fulfilling prophecies. “The news they make happen, the events they create, are somehow not quite real.”⁴⁴

Although Boorstin primarily blamed journalists, practitioners produce the majority of pseudo-events covered by the media. Precious news space and time given to a celebrity’s latest stunt, production of the world’s largest sub sandwich, or an orchestrated confrontation of the opponents in the next wrestling match photo opportunity preempts explaining the complexities of the plight of the homeless, the national debt, the need for health care reform, or international trade relations. Produced with the public interest foremost, however, special events contribute to clarification of public issues, not to their displacement, distortion, or obfuscation.

Adapting to New Media

Given the importance of media in the delivery of organizational messages to target publics, practitioners must keep up with the latest developments in new media technologies. [Chapter 10](#) of this text covers some basics on types of controlled and uncontrolled media, even though the The media landscape today is constantly and quickly changing. Although some practitioners argue that new media have fundamentally altered the public relations environment, media are merely tools for communicating messages. The basic principles of the four-step strategic planning process remain critical to effective public relations.

Barriers To Implementation

The difficulty of public information campaigns can be clearly seen in the battle to save us from polluted air, polluted water, and chemically dangerous foods. America's pioneer ecologist, Aldo Leopold, in his early years said, "[I]f the public were told how much harm ensues from unwise land-use, it would mend its ways." In his twilight years, he knew that this conclusion was based on three mistaken assumptions: the public is listening or can be made to listen; the public responds, or can be made to respond, to fear of harm; and ways can be mended without any important change in the public itself.[45](#)

Traditionally, rhetorical scholars identify three sources of barriers in the communication process; they call these barriers rhetorical obstacles or challenges. Obstacles to communication can arise from the audience, the speaker, or even the subject or purpose of the communication effort.[46](#)

Audience Obstacles

As Lippmann noted, each person lives in the protective cocoon of his or her own spinning. This cocoon insulates the individual from the incessant communication babble that is steadily increasing in intensity. There are social barriers, age barriers, language or vocabulary barriers, and political and economic barriers. There is also the race barrier; the barriers and distortions that block communication are seen starkly in the gulf between racial and ethnic groups in the multicultural American society. There is peer pressure exerted within groups, where "reality" is shared and interpreted. There is also the often-overlooked barrier of the audience's ability or willingness to absorb messages. Finally, there is the constant roar of competition for people's attention in the noisy public arena. [Chapter 8](#) noted that communication receivers or audiences are bombarded with messages and are thus selective about which ones they pay attention to. Even when their attention is caught, audiences may perceive or interpret messages differently; this is the decoding problem discussed earlier in this chapter.

To overcome these communication obstacles that arise from audiences or

organizational publics, practitioners have several options. They can focus on the needs of organizational stakeholders or on the personal or cultural values of audience members. Also, communication messages can offer calls to action that are specific and feasible.[47](#)

Speaker Obstacles

In public relations communication, the “speaker” or message sender is not only the practitioner or other organizational spokesperson, but also the organization itself. Yet, the fundamental rhetorical problem that arises from the speaker—the problem of source credibility—can be just as applicable in organization-public communication as in interpersonal communication.

In most cases, especially in this digital age, audiences already have a perception about the organization even before a particular instance of communication. Rhetorical scholars would call this a communication obstacle related to the “prior ethos” of the speaker, meaning the reputation it is perceived to have even before intentional communication begins.[48](#) In public relations, much research has been done on organizational reputation and its impact on organizational effectiveness.[49](#)

To deal with communication obstacles arising from an organization’s reputation, practitioners can craft messages that explain or reinforce organizational credibility or trustworthiness. They can also try to establish identification with the organization among target publics, emphasizing what the organization and its target publics have in common. Finally, practitioners should encourage audience participation in the communication process.[50](#) Perhaps this traditional rhetorical strategy of participation, more so than any other reason, is an excellent justification for the two-way use of new media tools by organizations trying to communicate effectively with their target publics.

Subject and Purpose Obstacles

Sometimes, barriers to the implementation of public relations programs come from the very subject or purpose of the campaign itself. Rhetorical scholars point to the complexity of subjects as an obstacle to communication; related to this problem is the cultural history associated with some topics.⁵¹ For example, launching a national campaign to educate people about the prevention of child sexual abuse was very difficult because of the sensitive topic, as well as the myths and misinformation surrounding it.⁵² Implementing such a campaign may be even more challenging if the target public is Catholic, given the history of that cultural group with the sexual abuse of some children by some priests.

Obstacles related to the purpose of a public relations campaign can include those of cost and control. Specifically, people are resistant to engage in behaviors that are too “expensive,” in terms of how much they might cost in time, effort, or money. People also resist complying with requests when they don’t see how they can control the outcomes or why their actions can have an impact.⁵³ For this reason, it would be very difficult for, say, an aquarium to mount a public relations campaign against eating sushi. Even though the oceans are projected to run out of fish in the next five decades (if present consumption levels continue), most people don’t or won’t believe that not eating that little slice of raw tuna will make a difference.

Ways to overcome obstacles related to the subject or purpose of communication include crafting messages using argument strategies (see above), as well as empowering audience members to believe that their individual choices can indeed affect collective outcomes.

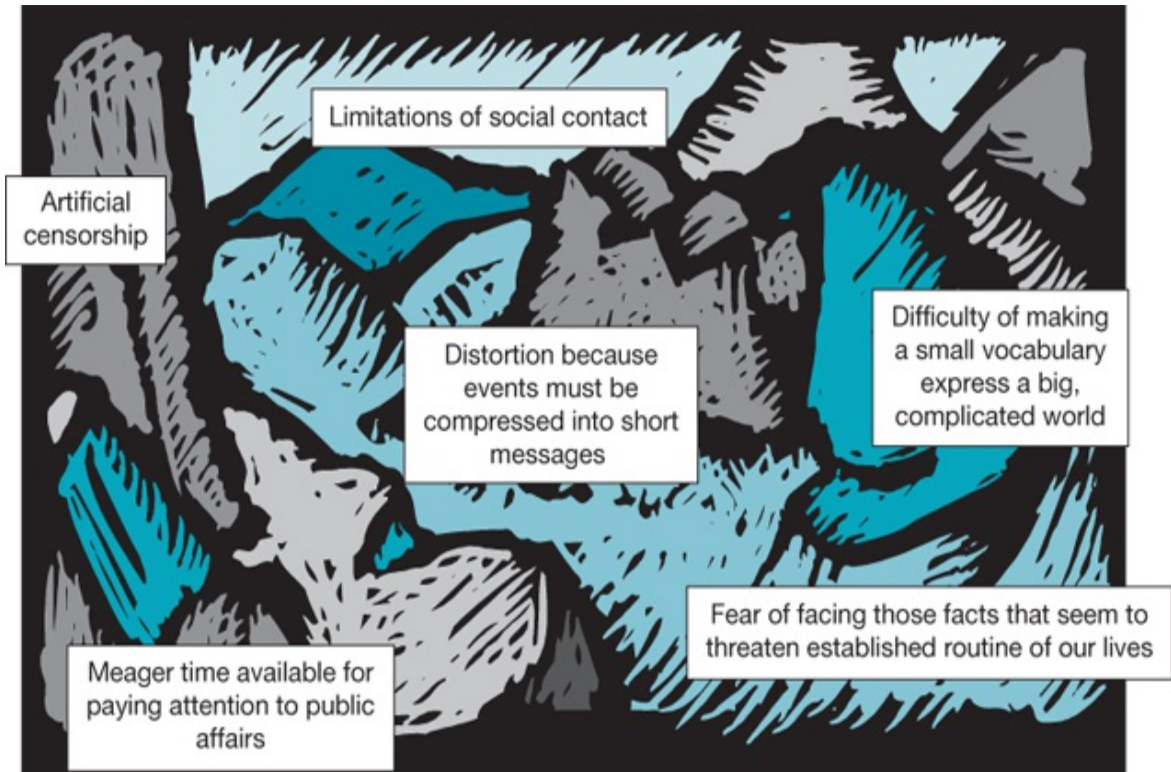
Diffusion Obstacles

Barriers to communication (and hence to the implementation of public relations campaigns) have been articulated not only by scholars in the rhetoric tradition, but also by researchers from the mass communication perspective presented in [Chapter 8](#). The rate of flow in the transmission and acceptance of ideas is governed by many factors other than the characteristics of the people involved or the subjects they are communicating about. These include Lippmann’s “barriers to communication,” illustrated in [Figure 13.7](#),

as well as George Gallup's "regulators of absorption rate," illustrated in [Figure 13.8](#).

In their now-classic article, Hyman and Sheatsley codified the major reasons why many information campaigns fail. They include the following:

1. There exists a hard core of chronic "know-nothings." These people are difficult to reach, no matter what the level or nature of the information.
2. Interested people acquire the most information. Motivation is essential to learning or assimilating knowledge, yet there are large groups in the population who admit that they have little or no interest in public issues.
3. People seek information that is compatible with their prior attitudes and avoid exposure to that which is not compatible.
4. People interpret the same information differently. Selective perception and interpretation of content follow exposure. Persons perceive, absorb, and remember content differently.
5. Information does not necessarily change attitudes. Changes in views or behavior following exposure to a message may be differentially affected by the individual's initial predisposition.[54](#)



**Figure 13.7 Lippmann's
Barriers to Communication**

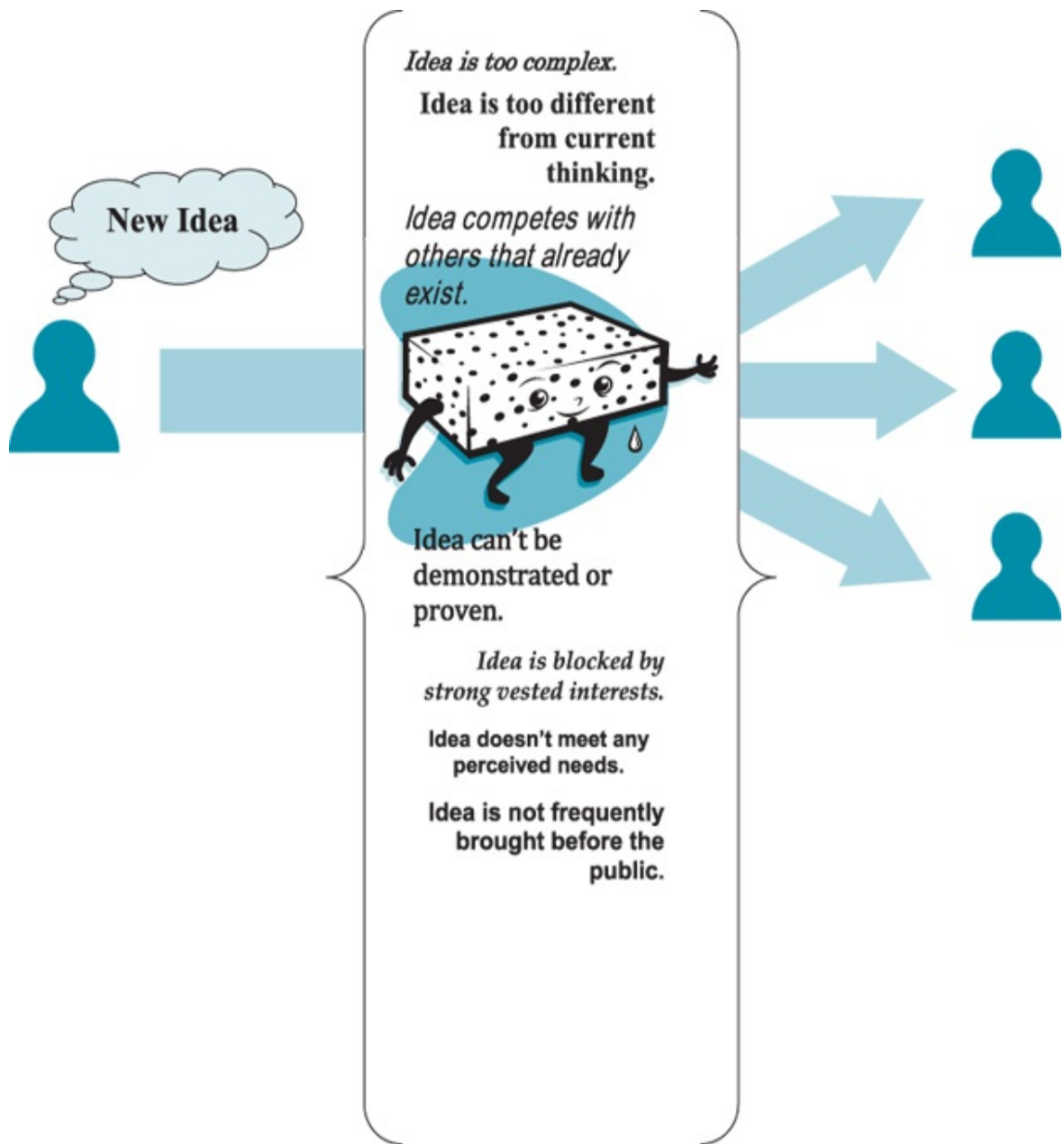


Figure 13.8 Gallup's Regulators of Absorption Rate of New Ideas

Another researcher, Harold Mendelsohn, countered with an analysis of why

information campaigns can succeed:

What little empirical experience we have accumulated from the past suggests that public information campaigns have relatively high success potentials:

1. If they are planned around the assumption that most of the publics to which they will be addressed will be either only mildly interested or not at all interested in what is communicated.
2. If middle-range goals which can be reasonably achieved as a consequence of exposure are set as specific objectives. Frequently it is equally important either to set up or to utilize environmental support systems to help sheer information giving become effective in influencing behavior.
3. If, after middle-range objectives are set, careful consideration is given to delineating specific targets in terms of their demographic and psychological attributes, their life-style, value and belief systems, and mass media habits. Here, it is important not only to determine the scope of prior indifference, but to uncover its roots as well.⁵⁵

That public information campaigns can succeed has been demonstrated by numerous campaigns against smoking in public places, the highly successful effort by Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), the “Back to Sleep” campaign by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, and American Cancer Society efforts promoting cancer detection and prevention, to name but a few. The jury is still out on campaigns to prevent HIV infections, reduce drug abuse, and promote social tolerance. But, according to a Hopi maxim, “The one who tells the stories rules the world.”⁵⁶

Crisis Communication

Even with strategic planning and careful implementation, public relations

programs can fall victim to crises, as discussed in [Chapter 12](#) . Crisis communication, although important, is merely the implementation step of the crisis management plan; crisis communication should not constitute the entire plan for managing a crisis! Often, proactive crisis management can defuse or minimize the damage in advance by planning out both action and communication strategies. Other times, reactive crisis communication is the only recourse available to practitioners. In either case, some common mistakes in handling crises include the following:

1. Hesitation

—which leads to public perception of confusion, callousness, incompetence, or lack of preparation.

2. Obfuscation

—which leads to the perception of dishonesty and insensitivity.

3. Retaliation

—which increases tension and intensifies emotions rather than reducing them.

4. Prevarication or equivocation

—which creates the biggest problem, because nothing substitutes for truth.

5. Pontification

—which creates vulnerability by taking a high-handed approach without really dealing with the issue at hand.

6. Confrontation

—which provides others visibility by keeping the issue alive, giving them a platform, and giving them more to respond to.

7. Litigation

—which guarantees even greater visibility and may eliminate more reasonable solutions.[57](#)

Implementation Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to introduce some of the major considerations and principles of implementing public relations programs. However, entire books devoted to the topic cannot adequately cover the range of issues and practices related to putting the program in place. Attempting to establish any single set of surefire rules for developing and distributing messages would be disappointing, if not futile. Effective communication messages must be designed for the situation, time, place, and audience. It requires careful selection of media and technique.

All public relations problems, however, do have people as a common denominator and require communication to bring the people and their viewpoints closer together. The three elements common to all communication efforts are the source or sender, the message, and the destination or receiver. A communication breakdown can involve one or more of these three elements. Effective communication requires efficiency on the part of all three. The communicator must have adequate information and credibility in the eyes of the receiver. The communicator must use a channel that will carry the message to the receiver. The message must be within the receiver's capacity to decode and comprehend and be relevant to the receiver's interests or needs. Finally, the message must motivate the receiver's self-interest and cause a response. The chapter concludes with the venerable seven Cs of public relations communication:

1. Credibility.

Communication starts with a climate of belief. This climate is built by performance on the part of the organization, reflecting an earnest desire to serve stakeholders and publics. This performance drives organizational reputation. Receivers must have confidence in the sender and high regard for the source's competence on the subject.

2. Context.

A communications program must square with the realities of its environment. Mass media only supplement the words and deeds of daily living. The context must provide for participation and playback. It must confirm, not contradict, the message. Effective communication requires a supportive social environment, one largely set by the news media.

3. Content.

The message must have meaning for receivers, and it must be compatible with their value system. It must have relevance to the receivers' situation. In general, people select those items of information that promise them the greatest rewards. The content determines the audience.

4. Clarity.

The message must be put in simple terms. Words must mean the same to the receivers as to the sender. Complex issues must be compressed into themes, slogans, or stereotypes that have simplicity and clarity. The farther a message has to travel, the simpler it must be.

5. Continuity and consistency.

Communication is an unending process. It requires repetition to achieve penetration. Repetition—with variation—contributes to both learning and persuasion. The story must be consistent. An organization must speak with one voice, not many voices.

6. Channels.

Established channels of communication should be used, channels that receivers use and respect. Creating new ones can be difficult, time consuming, and expensive. Different channels have different effects and serve effectively in different stages of the diffusion process. Selective channels are called for in reaching target publics. People associate different values with the many channels of communication. New media

channels facilitate public participation in the communication process, which helps to overcome rhetorical obstacles.

7. Capability of the audience.

Communication must take into account the capability of the audience. Communications are most effective when they require the least effort on the part of receivers. This involves factors of availability, habits, reading ability, and prior knowledge.

Communication and action are not the ends, but only the means to ends. The ends of public relations are the outcomes spelled out in program goals and objectives, as discussed in [Chapter 12](#). Assessing the effectiveness of program strategy—the fourth step—is the topic of the next chapter.

Notes

1. [1](#). Harold Burson speech to Raymond Simon Institute for Public Relations, Utica College, Syracuse University, March 5, 1987.
2. [2](#). Jarol B. Manheim, *The Death of a Thousand Cuts* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2001), 308.
3. [3](#). Bob Abbey, “National Wild Horse and Burro Program,” Bureau of Land Management, June 28, 2011, <http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/whbprogram.html> (accessed March 19, 2012).
4. [4](#). Don Etling, Senior vice president, Fleishman-Hillard, quoted in Craig McGuire, “From the Top Down: A Sturdy Reputation Program Requires Buy-In from All Parts of a Corporation,” *PRWeek*, January 19, 2004, 17.
5. [5](#). Donella H. Meadows, *Thinking in Systems: A Primer* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing Co., 2008), 14.
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Study Guide

1. What is the difference between action strategies and communication strategies?
2. What are some ways in which messages can be crafted and framed? What are some challenges to the encoding and decoding of messages?
3. When framing messages for news media, what are the six criteria

traditionally applied by gatekeepers to determine the news value of messages?

4. What are the five stages of the diffusion process? What source of information is most likely to be influential in each stage?
5. How are opinion leaders defined?
6. What are some barriers to the implementation of public relations campaigns?

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Chapter 14 Step Four: Evaluating the Program

Learning Outcomes

After studying [Chapter 14](#) this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Define formative and summative evaluation research.
2. Discuss how research is used to evaluate the preparation, implementation, and impact phases of public relations programs.
3. Outline the recommended steps for conducting evaluation research.
4. Outline the criteria used in evaluating the preparation, implementation, and impact phases of public relations programs.
5. List and describe research methods commonly used for evaluating public relations programs.

When you can measure what you are speaking about, and express it in numbers, you know something about it. But when you cannot measure it, when you cannot express it in numbers, your knowledge is of a meager and unsatisfactory kind.

—Lord Kelvin,¹ British physicist

Evaluation is not simply a postmortem exercise but an ongoing process and a means for managing continual improvement in public relations.

—Mark Weiner,² Public relations research executive

No topic dominates the practice as does program evaluation—the final step in

the public relations management process. But not all practitioners “walk the talk,” because systematic measurement and research lag behind practitioner interest in and rhetoric about program evaluation.

Increasingly, practitioners are being asked to document measurable results and returns from public relations programs compared with costs, to demonstrate “return on investment” (ROI). Or, to paraphrase one practitioner, “The heat is on to meet the numbers.” Public relations, like other staff and line functions, is being evaluated by how much it contributes to advancing the organization’s mission and achieving organizational goals. Executives in all types of organizations, from the largest corporations to the smallest nonprofit groups, ask for evidence of program impact—“metrics” has become the buzzword for such measures. Top management increasingly asks for such data when budgets are reviewed and new budgets are negotiated, when organizations downsize to be more competitive, and when new management restructures operations and priorities.

The Push For Measurable Results

Top management’s “results orientation” and “the heat to meet the numbers” account for much of the increased use of evaluation research to track program progress and to measure impact. Many executives look with suspicion at claims not supported with data. As Opinion Factor, Inc., CEO Richard Kuchinsky says, “One of the single most important steps in developing a communication program is to first conduct benchmark research and then track the program’s effectiveness with follow-up studies.”³

More sophisticated use of measurable outcome criteria in public relations objectives(see the “Management by Objectives” section of [Chapter 12](#)) also makes it possible to measure program impact. Few practitioners get by with the claim that program impact cannot be measured. The oft-used excuse that “it’s intangible” is not supported when the financial and accounting sectors now measure the contributions of “brand value,” “goodwill,” and “reputation” to the balance sheet. The following exchange illustrates the trap of the “intangible” position:

- We can't measure the results of public relations the way you measure other things.
- Why not?
- They're intangible. You can't actually see the results of public relations.
- Why should I pay you for something that can't be detected—what you call “intangible results”?
- Because public relations is different and can't be held to the same performance standards as other departments.
- Well, OK. Here's your money.
- Where? I don't see any money.
- Of course not. It can't be detected—it's what you call “intangible.”

Knowledge, opinions, and behavior can be measured. So what excuse justifies not knowing if the action and communication strategies are making progress toward achieving program objectives? What justifies not documenting the extent to which the program worked? Public relations scholar Don Stacks summarized the case for research: “Without research the practitioner cannot assess where a public relations program begins, how it evolves, or what the end product will be. Quite simply, without research you cannot demonstrate the efficacy of your program.”⁴

This recognition of the central role of research led to evaluation research courses now taught in a growing number of public relations curricula. As noted in [Chapter 5](#), the The Commission on Public Relations Education identified research for planning and evaluation as one of the five areas of study in the core undergraduate curriculum.

Among senior practitioners, however, are many who did not study research methods and even some who question whether research and evaluation are necessary. Some clients, some line managers, and even some public relations practitioners still do not budget for research or see research as an integral part

of the process. It seems that many practitioners are content with counting their media clips, according to many who work in public relations. If they feel it's working, they don't want to spend the money to find out otherwise. The trend is clear, however, as more are budgeting for research because top management is asking them to be more accountable.

An encouraging trend is that research is increasingly vital to firms seeking new business accounts. The ability to document baseline data and subsequent results gives firms a competitive edge. In short, good research is fundamental, not an extra. As Ketchum research director David Rockland said:

Many of us, caught up in our day-to-day responsibilities, don't always take the time to connect what we do to the larger, organizational goals of a project—or to evaluate our progress toward achieving those goals. The measurement part, though, is critically important: If you cannot measure what it is you do, the output will have less value and respect in the marketplace. There also will be less willingness to pay for it.⁵

An increasing number of public relations firms build evaluation research into the services they offer clients, using their own staff, those of a research subsidiary, or those of a contractor. “Outsourcing” is a popular approach as most public relations firms do not staff a telephone survey center or keep data-entry specialists on payroll, choosing instead to contract with outside research firms to do most of their data gathering and compilation. Also, some research requires expertise that may not be present in a public relations department or consultancy firm.

Research firms such as CARMA International, Cision, Echo Research, Millward Brown Précis, and a growing number of others have staff trained in content analysis and familiar with quantitative and qualitative research methodology and statistics. Others such as Biz360, CyberAlert, Cymfony, and Vocus have expertise and sophisticated tools for searching and retrieving content from the Internet. Survey research firms in all major markets provide focus group and survey research capabilities to gather data to help evaluate programs. For example, some staff “call centers” to conduct telephone surveys (see [Figure 14.1](#)).

In addition to acquiring expertise without having to employ full-time specialists internally, another benefit of using an independent research firm is the objectivity that a “third party” can bring to the research. Usually free from real or perceived vested interests (but not necessarily all), the findings of an independent researcher or research company can be viewed as more credible by management than are findings that practitioners present about their own work. Nevertheless, practitioners can use a range of do-it-yourself as well as outsourced research methods to gather information to help evaluate programs.



Figure 14.1 Telephone Survey Call Center

Courtesy Opinion Factor, Inc., Murray, Utah.

Preparing For Evaluation

Many practitioners profess good intentions to evaluate their programs but fail in the face of what they see as insurmountable obstacles.

Anecdotal reports typically identify cost (lack of budget) and lack of time as the most commonly cited reasons for not conducting evaluation. Although evaluation requires some degree of both, these are really just excuses, usually not valid reasons for not carrying out evaluation. Walter Lindenmann says practitioners with limited budgets can and should “consider piggyback studies, secondary analysis, quick-tab polls, Internet surveys, or intercept interviews. Mail, fax, and email studies are good for some purposes. Or, do your own field research.”⁶ First, outsourcing the work to outside vendors can reduce the time input of internal public relations staff to project briefing and supervision. Alternatively, if budget is not available for outsourcing and time is short, there are quick basic methods of evaluation research available that can provide the “best available evidence,” as discussed in [Chapter 11](#) .”.

This is not to suggest that there are not obstacles or barriers to evaluation. Clearly there are—otherwise most or all practitioners would be carrying out evaluation, given the growing demand for accountability within management and competition for budget. Practitioners must achieve the following to be ready and able to implement program evaluation:

1. Understand communication, media effects theory, and audience effects.

It is not within the scope of this chapter to review the vast amount of research on communication, media and audience effects. Decades of research document media and communication impacts and effects in societies and in markets, such as the media’s agenda-setting role and other effects discussed in [Chapter 8](#) . But practitioners should remember that early “injection” thinking based on transmission models of communication no longer hold currency for human communication. Messages are not simply transmitted from a sender via a medium to a receiver, causing the intended effect.⁷ In reality, audiences ignore, reject, misinterpret, and reinterpret messages in various ways, as

discussed in [Chapter 12](#) . Overcoming assumptions about audience effects is fundamental to embracing and implementing program evaluation to identify what is working and what is not.

2. Understand the difference between outputs (effort and process) and outcomes (impact and effects).

One of the major obstacles observed in reviewing public relations plans and program reports is that what are listed as “results” are often outputs—that is, what has been disseminated or implemented. A large body of research, however, shows that outcomes cannot be assumed simply because information is disseminated to audiences. Commonly, practitioners mistake the number of news releases distributed, the number of media clippings gained, the number of attendees at events, and so on as the end point of a program and thus as markers of success. Even a cursory reflection reveals that these are not end points, but means to an end. This confusion is an obstacle to program evaluation in that it focuses evaluation on interim processes and fails to address the more important level of impact. As one senior public relations executive said when a public relations firm presented him a detailed report of the firm’s activities and output: “I don’t care how much work you have done and how much stuff you have put out. I want to know what impact you have had and what value you have contributed to our business.”

3. Articulate “SMART” objectives.

Broad and imprecise program objectives also represent an obstacle to program evaluation. Objectives need to be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time bound. Some replace “realistic” in the SMART acronym with “relevant,” meaning objectives must be relevant to and aligned with the organization’s overall goals and mission. A simple example such as “To increase awareness of ABC Corporation” is not SMART. Why? Because it does not identify what level of awareness exists now, among whom, by how much it is to be increased, or by when it must be achieved. A SMART version of this objective could be: “To increase, within the next 2 months, awareness of ABC Corporation’s

Exhibit 14.1

Three Reasons Why You Shouldn't Measure Public Relations,
and Three Reasons You Should



Sean Williams, CEO, Communication AMMO, and member,
Institute for Public Relations Measurement Commission

Forget measurement when:

1. You cannot make a difference.

Sometimes business will hand you a dirt sandwich, and you have no choice but to eat it. There's no need to weigh the sandwich, examine the types of dirt, evaluate the sandwich-maker, and so on. Just eat it and move on.

2. You're unwilling to do what it takes to make things better.

Often, the worst media situations are when you're making tough choices: layoffs, facility closures, relocations, or hiring more executives. The path to turning the story around leads through the organization

revisiting its management decisions—deciding not to outsource, keeping the plant open and operating, and renovating existing headquarters rather than pitting your incumbent city against somewhere else. (See #1.)

3. It's more expensive to measure than the program you're measuring.

Advanced statistics are miraculous. We absolutely can measure the specific impact of public relations/communication activity on the bottom line. We just need a lot of data to isolate our impact from everything else that influences the bottom line. That costs money (not as much as you might think, but still,) so let's spend wisely.

Do measurement when:

1. You care about whether what you're doing is working or not.

You have objectives, and hopefully, they're specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time bound. They have a benchmark, target, and timeframe. So, if you don't measure, how do you know whether you're making progress?

2. You know you need to change.

Make data-driven decisions. Your intuition is flawless, of course, but as I've said many times, the days of public relations/communications being able to wave a hand and say, "trust me" to the c-suite are over. A former boss told me, "facts and data win the day," and that's good advice.

3. You need numbers to share with the numbers people.

There are times when the people you need demand

numbers—qualitative or quantitative. Measure to give them what they need. That may include share of voice/discussion, peer comparison of tone, trends in coverage overall, message presence/absence, or correlation of coverage to Web traffic. Do measurement when you need to do it.

There is one other reason to measure public relations: It's the right thing to do. It puts us on a firmer foundation. It informs our opinions and enhances our credibility.

Courtesy Sean Williams - www.CommunicationAmmo.com

emergence from bankruptcy from X percent to Y percent among financial analysts who track the industry group.” (Review [Chapter 12](#)'s section on “Management by Objectives.”)

4. Be numeric as well as rhetorical.

Many public relations practitioners are educated and trained in arts and humanities. In broad terms, they deal in rhetoric—not in the colloquial sense of false words, but in the Greek tradition of words used to inform and persuade. Few are numbers oriented—math was not a big part of their education. Conversely, studies show that management ranks are dominated by executives with numeric backgrounds, coming from fields such as accountancy and finance, sales and marketing, engineering, and so on (see [Exhibit 14.1](#)). There is no way to sugarcoat this: Practitioners must learn basic skills in math and statistics in order to generate and present data to inform, support, test, manage, and evaluate their programs.

Evaluation Research Process

As discussed in [Chapter 11](#), research should be conducted for strategic planning, managing, and evaluating public relations programs. Research conducted before and during implementation to inform planning

and program adjustment is called formative research. Research conducted after the program to assess progress and to document program impact is called summative research. Others broadly refer to research conducted to evaluate public relations programs as “evaluation research” or simply as “measurement,” which has become an industry buzzword.

Rossi and Freeman used the terms “evaluation research” and “evaluation” interchangeably to represent “the systematic application of social research procedures for assessing the conceptualization, design, implementation, and utility of social intervention programs.”⁸ This definition emphasizes the focus of evaluation on the preparation, implementation, and impact of public relations programs (see page [240–42](#)). Furthermore, it explains the various stages by outlining the basic questions posed in evaluation:

- Program conceptualization and design
- What is the extent and distribution of the target problem and/or population?
- Is the program designed in conformity with intended goals; is there a coherent rationale underlying it; and have chances of successful delivery been maximized?
- What are projected or existing costs, and what is their relation to benefits and effectiveness?
- Monitoring and accountability of program implementation
- Is the program reaching the specified target population or target area?
- Are the intervention efforts being conducted as specified in the program design?
- Assessment of program utility: Impact and efficiency
- Is the program effective in achieving its intended goals?
- Can the results of the program be explained by some alternative process that does not include the program?

- Is the program having some effects that were not intended?
- What are the costs to deliver services and benefits to program participants?
- Is the program an efficient use of resources, compared with alternative uses of the resources?⁹

Also, evaluation research should be used to learn what happened and why, not to prove or justify something already done or decided. For example, one organization set up an evaluation project for the sole purpose of justifying the firing of its senior communication officer. In other cases, public relations and other communication staff do evaluation research with a predetermined objective of supporting their decisions and programs. True evaluation research is done to gather information honestly and objectively to provide data for decision making with an open mind. “Symbolic” evaluation, on the other hand, is conducted to provide managers with supportive data from what can be called “pseudoresearch.”¹⁰

Program managers use pseudoresearch for three reasons:

1. Organizational politics:

Research is used solely to gain power, justify decisions already made, or serve as a scapegoat.

2. Service promotion:

Pseudoresearch is undertaken, often in a slanted way, to promote products or services and impress clients or prospects.

3. Personal satisfaction:

Pseudoresearch is done as an ego-bolstering activity to keep up with fads or to demonstrate acquired skills.¹¹

In the long haul, these spurious efforts are self-defeating.

Evaluation Research Steps

After preparing themselves to undertake program evaluation and reviewing the evaluation research process, public relations managers must implement the following 10 steps:

1. Establish agreement on the uses and purposes of the evaluation.

Without such agreement, research often produces volumes of unused and often useless data. Commit to paper the problem, concern, or question that motivates the research effort. Next, detail how research findings will be used. To avoid buying “canned” or “off-the-shelf” services, these written statements are doubly important when hiring outside research specialists.

2. Secure organizational commitment to evaluation and make research basic to the program.

Evaluation cannot be tacked on as an afterthought. Build research into the entire process, with sufficient resources to make it central to the problem definition, planning and programming, implementation, and evaluation steps.

3. Develop consensus on using evaluation research within the department.

Even practitioners not eager to trade in their notions of public relations as creative activity dealing with “intangibles” must be part of the effort. They have to accept that research is a necessity to build the strategic foundation, although it will not replace completely their creativity and lessons gained from experience.

4. Write program objectives in observable and measurable terms.

Without measurable outcomes specified in the program objectives, evaluation research cannot be designed to evaluate program impact. If an objective outcome cannot be measured, it is not useful. The evaluation imperative forces clarity and precision in the planning

process, particularly when writing specific objectives for each of the target publics.

5. Select the most appropriate criteria.

Objectives spell out intended outcomes. If increasing awareness of an organization's support of local charities is stated in an objective, for example, then column inches and favorable mentions in the media are not appropriate measures of the knowledge outcome sought. Identify what changes in knowledge, opinions, attitudes, and behaviors are specified in the objectives before gathering evidence. The same applies when the program seeks to maintain existing levels of desired states. (Review the "Writing Program Objectives" section of [Chapter 12](#).)

6. Determine the best way to gather evidence.

Surveys are not always the best way to find out about program impact. Sometimes organizational records contain the evidence needed. In other cases, a field experiment or case study may be the only way to test and evaluate a program. There is no single right way to gather data for evaluations. The method used depends on (1) the question and purposes motivating the evaluation; (2) the outcome criteria specified in the objectives; and (3) the cost of different research approaches resulting from the program complexity, setting, or both.

7. Keep complete program records.

Program strategies and materials are real-world expressions of practitioners' working theories of cause and effect. Complete documentation helps identify what worked and what did not work. Records help reduce the impact of selection perception and personal bias when reconstructing the strategy and tactics that contributed to program success or failure.

8. Use evaluation findings to manage the program.

Each cycle of the program process can be more effective than the preceding cycle if the results of evaluation are used to make

adjustments. Problem statements and situation analyses should be more detailed and precise with the addition of new evidence from the evaluation. Revised goals and objectives should reflect what was learned. Action and communication strategies can be continued, fine-tuned, or discarded on the basis of knowledge of what did and did not work.

9. Report evaluation results to management.

Develop a procedure for regularly reporting to line and staff managers. Documented results and adjustments based on evidence illustrate that public relations is being managed to contribute to achieving organizational goals, or “bottom lines.”

10. Add to professional knowledge.

Scientific management of public relations leads to greater understanding of the process and its effects. Most program evaluation tends to be specific to a particular organization and time, but some findings are cross-situational. For example, findings about how many employees learned about a proposed reorganization from an article may be relevant only to that one article and organization. On the other hand, learning that employees want more information about organizational plans not only provides guidance for future communications, but also may apply in other organizations. Sharing with colleagues the knowledge gained from relevant research distinguishes the professional practice from the technical crafts practiced under the public relations rubric.

Levels of Program Evaluation

Evaluation means different things to different practitioners. To some it is an email from the boss or client complimenting the new website content and design. To others, it is an award such as a Public Relations Society of America Silver Anvil trophy, an IABC Gold Quill Award, an International Public Relations Association (IPRA) Golden World Award, or similar recognitions from the Public Relations Institutes of the United Kingdom,

Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, China, or wherever. To some it is clippings from newspapers around the world. To others the only meaningful evaluations are scientific measures of increased awareness, or changed opinions, attitudes, and behaviors. To those concerned about public policy or social problems, only evidence of economic, political, or social change satisfies their requirements for program evaluation. In fact, all these represent different levels of program evaluation.

Some researchers and public relations academics group these levels into stages of evaluation—inputs, outputs, and outcomes.¹² Scholar Tom Watson refers to four stages—inputs, outputs, impact, and effects—in his “Unified Evaluation Model.”¹³ A high degree of consistency is evident in the various models of evaluation. In particular, all best-practice approaches recommend conducting evaluation in three stages: (1) preparation/inputs, (2) implementation/outputs, and (3) impact/outcomes/effects.

This approach does not make program evaluation more difficult or more time consuming. To the contrary, it breaks evaluation into manageable stages. Also, very importantly, it breaks program evaluation into a strategically important sequence. If evaluation is skipped during the planning stage or during the implementation stage, the chance of impact in line with desired objectives is greatly reduced. Early stage 1 and stage 2 evaluations often pick up problems that can be rectified, or identify opportunities that can be exploited.

[Figure 14.2](#) shows the levels of program evaluation based on the preparation, implementation, and impact program phases.¹⁴ The stair-step model represents the typical sequence of program elements and steps leading to the desired program impact.

Each phase in program evaluation contributes to increased understanding and adds information for assessing effectiveness. Preparation evaluation assesses the quality

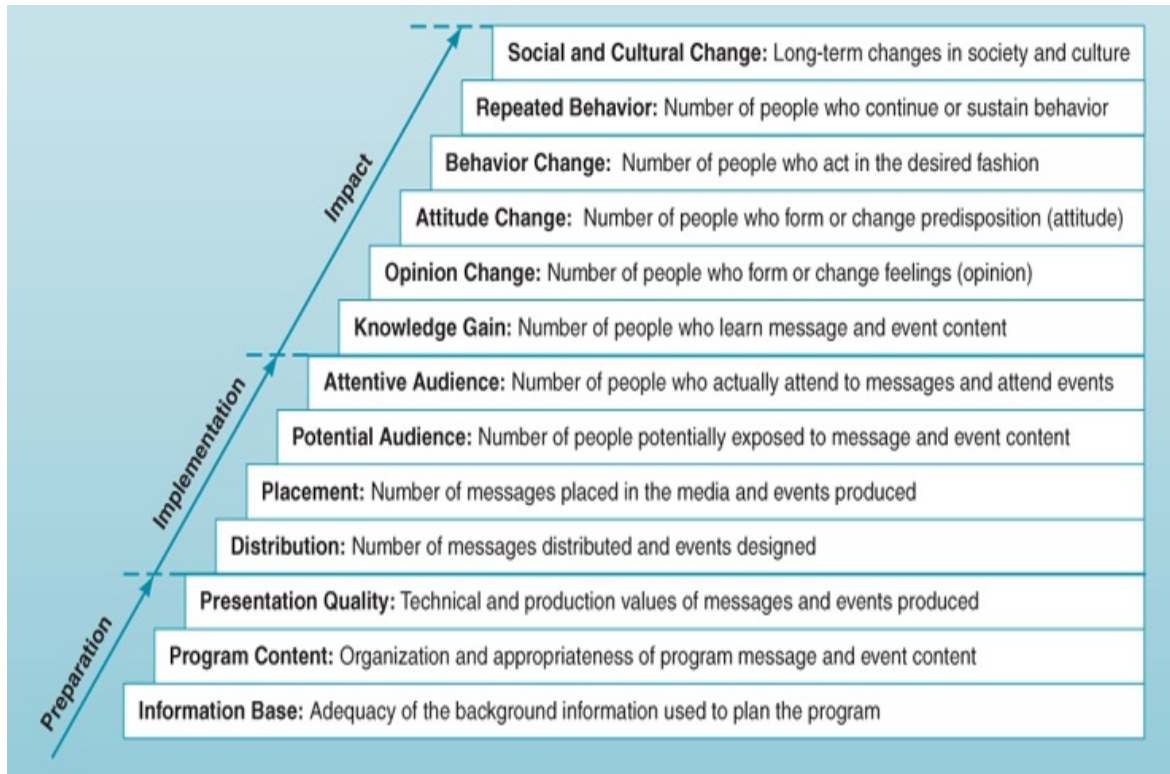


Figure 14.2 Phases and Levels for Evaluating Public Relations Programs

and adequacy of the information used to develop the program strategy and tactics. Implementation evaluation monitors the effort and progress as the program unfolds. Impact evaluation documents the consequences of the program and provides feedback on the extent to which objectives and goals were achieved. No evaluation is complete without addressing criteria at all levels.

The most common error in program evaluation is substituting measures from one phase for those at another level. This is most clearly illustrated when practitioners use the numbers of news releases sent, websites visited or pages viewed, brochures distributed, or meetings held (implementation efforts) to document alleged program effectiveness (impact). These are not measures of

the changes in target publics' knowledge, predisposition, and behavior spelled out in program objectives. Evaluation researchers refer to this as the "substitution game." Somewhat analogously, magicians talk of "misdirecting" audience attention from what is really happening in order to create an illusion.

Preparation Criteria and Methods

Information Base

During a program, practitioners periodically find that vital information was missing from the original situation analysis. Done systematically and recorded, this assessment represents an evaluation of the adequacy of the background information used for planning the program. Were key publics missed in the original determination of stakeholder groups? What assumptions about the publics proved to be in error? Did targeted journalists and bloggers request information that was not readily available in the background materials or fact book? What last-minute crises called for additional research and organization of information? Had all the key actors in the situation been identified? In effect, this part of the evaluation assesses the adequacy of the information gathering and intelligence steps in the preparation phase of the process—great intelligence for planning the next program.

Program Content

The second step in evaluation assesses the organization and appropriateness of program and message content. Critical review of what is being said and what is being done occurs before implementation. Evaluating the appropriateness of messages and program content with the advantage of hindsight gives guidance for future program efforts. For example, pretesting the content of brochures, websites, speeches, video scripts, and other materials can identify early on if it is appropriate to the target public. It goes

without saying that this review should be done with the motivation of constructive criticism.

In politics, campaign planners study their candidate's statements in blogs, speeches, and televised debates in light of media reactions and voter responses in follow-up polls. Did program message content match the problems, objectives, and media? Were communications accurate, timely, and appropriate for the intended publics? Were there adverse reactions to messages or actions? Did the events, corrective actions, and other activities support the program effort? Was enough done? Did the communication capitalize on and complement the action components of the program? Were staff and budget adequate for the task? This phase of the evaluation calls for a review of how well the program content matches the demands of the situation.

Content analysis of materials produced, speeches and other presentations, as well as the "messages" communicated by activities and special events also provides information for determining the extent to which program content addresses the objectives spelled out for target publics and the overall program goal. Practitioners also use the results of content analyses of media coverage during the preparation stage. If certain media have been critical of an issue, these media may need to be targeted with a briefing or additional information. If some media have never reported on a certain topic or issue, alternative media with an interest in the subject may need to be targeted with the desired message content. (Content analysis will be explained in more detail under the section "Implementation Criteria and Methods.")

Presentation Quality

Assessing the technical and production values of messages and other program elements constitutes the final step of preparation evaluation. Many professional societies' awards programs employ criteria from this step. The "best" annual report, the most creative website, and even the "most effective" overall program often are picked on the basis of style, format, and presentation. Best graphic design, best written speech, and best multimedia presentation are examples of award categories judged on the basis of

production values and presentation merit. These are often the attributes that writing courses and professional workshops emphasize. This step in program evaluation considers the quality of professional performance in light of conventional wisdom and consensus among practitioners as to what is good and bad technique. Presentation quality is not judged by subjective criteria alone, however.

Readability tests are sometimes used to objectively assess message preparation. These tests, however, take into account only the approximate ease with which printed material can be read and comprehended; they do not consider the content, format, organization, and other elements of writing style. These factors, coupled with an understanding of what writers bring to their writing and readers bring to their reading, all shape the reception and impact of printed words. If used with this perspective in mind, readability tests are useful guides for making copy more readable and for increasing comprehension.

For example, the Gunning Fog Index is one method used for measuring readability. Robert Gunning's formula measures reading difficulty based on average sentence length and the percentage of words with three or more syllables.¹⁵ The index is based on the number of whole sentences in at least two samples of text containing 100 words. Divide the number of words in the sentences by the number of whole sentences. Next, count the number of words with three or more syllables (but not counting capitalized words; those ending in "es" or "ed"; and those that combine simple words, such as "heretofore"). Enter the counts into the following formula:

Fog Index = $0.04 \times (\text{average number of words per sentence} + \text{number of long words per 100 words})$

The Fog Index indicates the number of years of education needed to find copy easy to read (see [Table 14.1](#)).

Table 14.1

Interpretation of Gunning Fog Index

Source: Adapted from Robert Gunning, *The Technique of Clear Writing*, rev. ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), 40.

Fog Index	Grade Level	
17	College graduate	
16	College senior	
15	College junior	
14	College sophomore	
13	College freshman	
		“Danger line”
12	High school senior	
11	High school junior	
10	High school sophomore	
9	High school freshman	
8	Eighth grader	“Easy-reading range”
7	Seventh grader	
6	Sixth grader	

Irving Fang’s Easy Listening Formula (ELF) provides a comparable measure for estimating the “listenability” of broadcast copy, speeches, and other scripts. In fact, ELF scores correlate highly with print readability scores. Simply calculate the average number of syllables (above one per word) in sentences. The ELF score represents the approximate grade level required to follow and easily understand what is being said. Fang found that good television news copy averages below 12 on the ELF.[16](#)

Readability and listenability scores provide only rough indicators of how comprehensible messages are to target publics. Jargon, technical terms, and even dialect may make written or spoken material difficult to understand even when the Gunning or Fang indices indicate otherwise. These measures can help writers gauge the extent to which their copy matches audience needs for easy-to-read and easy-to-understand messages. The measures simply give quantitative and objective indicators useful for monitoring one aspect of writing style.

Clearly, evaluation of the preparation phase of the program includes a mix of subjective and objective assessments of (1) the adequacy of the background research, (2) the organization and content of program materials, and (3) the packaging and presentation quality of program materials. The next phase of evaluation assesses the implementation of program activities and the dissemination of communication messages and materials to target publics.

Implementation Criteria and Methods

Public relations evaluations are most often based on the implementation phase, but erroneously presented as measures of “impact.” This level of evaluation typically involves counting the publications printed; news releases distributed; stories placed in the media; “hits” or “page visits,” and readers, viewers, or listeners (potential and actual). The ease with which practitioners can amass large numbers of column inches or centimeters of press coverage, broadcast minutes, readers, viewers, attendees, and “gross impressions” probably accounts for widespread use—and misuse—of evaluations at this level. As Fleishman Hillard’s Justin Goldborough wrote in his blog, “If you can’t have a conversation about PR and measurement without it reverting back to impressions...you might be hurting the PR industry.”¹⁷

Whereas records of program implementation are essential for program evaluation, measures at this level cannot be substituted for program impact. Evaluation researchers warn of substituting “countable activities” or recorded effort for achievement of program objectives. This amounts to using the amount of effort and resources expended (means) in place of measures of intended outcomes (ends). Without complete documentation and evaluation of the implementation phase of the program, however, practitioners cannot track what went right or wrong, and why.

Criteria and some methods for evaluating the communication portions of program implementation follow. Analogous evaluations must be done on the action components to complete the assessment of implementation.

Distribution

This phase begins with keeping records of the number of messages distributed. This step is a straightforward documentation of the number of letters, news releases, feature stories, publications, public service announcements, website page updates, and other communications that were produced and distributed. It also includes the number of speeches, broadcast appearances, audiovisual presentations, and exhibits that were used in the program. In other words, this step calls for documenting all the materials and activities produced and distributed. During the program, such records provide evidence that the program is being implemented as planned. Unsatisfactory results identified in subsequent steps can often be traced back to breakdowns in the distribution phase of implementing the program.

Placement

Regardless of how much is produced and distributed, however, the number of messages placed in the media may determine whether or not target publics have an opportunity for exposure. Clippings and broadcast logs have long been used to measure how many and what portions of news releases and public service announcements were used by “earned media.” Similarly, the number of organizations using a speakers’ bureau, audiovisual presentations, and exhibits indicates effectiveness in getting messages placed in the intended channels of communication.

Evaluations at this level sometimes detect fatal flaws in program procedures. Lindenmann reports the case of a client who launched an expensive publicity campaign that produced little use of the materials sent to the media. A poll of the media found that the materials were not being used because the right people were not receiving them:

The press contact list that the client had been using was sorely out of date.... Since the individuals to whom the materials were being sent were no longer at the media at which they were addressed, most of the materials were ending up in the garbage.[18](#)

Even the most effectively written materials have no chance of impact if they are not available to the intended publics.



Clipping and monitoring services such as Cision and BurrellesLuce in the United States and Canada; Durrants, Precise Media Monitoring, and MediaTrack in the United Kingdom; and Media Monitors in the United States, India, Australia, and Asia Pacific track national and international print and broadcast media placements for clients. Also, regional and local services in many areas provide documentation of media placements. Specialized monitoring firms track video news release (VNR) placements on television. A growing number of firms now monitor the Internet to identify content placement and mentions in online media, blogs, social media, and RSS feeds. Cymfony (TNS Media Intelligence), CyberAlert, DNA13, and Vocus On-Demand Software for Public Relations Management are examples of new technology monitoring companies that cover cyberspace.

With growing maturity and integration in the media intelligence and monitoring market, suppliers will increasingly offer complete services providing tracking of mainstream press, radio and television, online media editions, websites, blogs, and social media. For instance, Radian6, Collective Intellect, Lithium, and Sysomos are just four of many companies offering social media monitoring tools and services.

Services vary in how they operate, but the general procedure calls for the client to provide key words and topics to watch for in social media conversations, such as the organization's name, staff names, products or services, and even similar or competing organizations. Typically, the client also sends its monitoring service copies of news releases and broadcast scripts sent to the media.

Most local organizations maintain their own clipping files and placement records. Interns and entry-level practitioners often find "clipping the media" in their job descriptions. Rather than being a dreaded chore, however, the task should be viewed as an opportunity to systematically study content and style preferences of the various media. Maintaining the clipping files also gives

beginning practitioners opportunities to practice media surveillance and learn about issues relevant to their organizations.

Clippings and similar media placement records have been overemphasized in public relations and often misrepresented as measures of program impact. A pile of clippings does not necessarily mean that the coverage was favorable, or that the organization's messages were effectively communicated. Used properly, however, media placement is a useful link in the chain of program evaluation steps.

One measure all too often used to evaluate publicity placement is "advertising value equivalents" (AVEs), also called "equivalent advertising value" or simply "advertising equivalency." This approach calculates how much money an organization would have had to pay to secure the same amount of space or time in the media as paid advertising. There is no theoretical or empirical basis for making the leap from editorial to paid advertising. In fact, the calculation of alleged advertising equivalents is seriously flawed and misleading on several grounds (see [Exhibit 14.2](#)).

Exhibit 14.2

The Fallacy of AVEs

Because big numbers can be impressive, many practitioners use "advertising value equivalents" (AVEs) and publicity multipliers as measures of "return on investment" to build their case for public relations "effectiveness." John D. Bergen, former president of the Council of Public Relations Firms and now vice president of Alcoa, Inc., concluded, "AVE is a totally inappropriate measure of what we do."¹

Advertising equivalency measures are not justified for the following reasons:

1. Editorial publicity can be in irrelevant or low-priority media, whereas advertising typically is placed only in selected media

that reach target publics.

2. Editorial publicity also can be neutral or negative. Clearly, it is spurious to compare neutral and negative publicity with the best creative advertising.
3. Editorial publicity often contains coverage of competitors, including favorable references to or comparisons with competitors. Advertising never favorably compares competitors and usually does not mention competitors.
4. Editorial publicity can be poorly positioned, which affects its impact. Advertising is almost always positioned prominently, often with guaranteed placement based on extra fees or through volume booking rewards.
5. Editorial publicity can be poorly presented. It may have ambiguous or misleading headlines, the organization's name or important information buried in the story, and outright errors. Advertising content is carefully crafted by creative professionals and designed for maximum impact.
6. AVE calculations are usually based on casual advertising rates. These are usually higher than the rates negotiated for advertising campaigns, which further inflates the value of publicity used to calculate AVE.
7. AVE calculations actually measure cost, not "value." Even if editorials were to meet all the key criteria of advertising, the AVE totals represent the cost of buying equivalent media space and time for advertising. Clearly, AVE calculations also involve no effort to measure the impact or effect of the content. Unlike the claim being made for publicity AVE, advertising "value" is not measured in terms of what it cost. Value is determined by what is achieved, not what it cost.

Some practitioners apply multipliers ranging from 2 to 13 times the advertising cost to calculate a so-called PR value. Researchers,

however, comparing the credibility of news and advertising found no consistent advantage of news over advertising.² Likewise, one scholar concluded, “The weightings for ‘third party’ endorsement are totally made up. Research does not support the idea that there is such a thing as third-party endorsement [effect].”³

1 “Is Ad Value Equivalency a Credible Measurement of PR’s Effectiveness?” PRWeek (October 8, 2001), 10.

2 Findings from studies by Glen T. Cameron, “Does Publicity Outperform Advertising? An Experimental Test of the Third-Party Endorsement,” *Journal of Public Relations Research* 6, no. 3 (1994): 185–206; and Kirk Hallahan, “No Virginia, It’s Not True What They Say About Publicity’s Third-Party Endorsement Effect,” *Public Relations Review* 25, no. 4 (1999): 331–350.

3 Jim Grunig, International Public Relations Association e-group posting, August 4, 2000.

A more useful and rigorous way to evaluate media publicity is content analysis, which typically looks at variables such as the following:

- Place or position

—Where in the media did the content appear? For example, a page [1](#) story or lead item on television news is likely to have greater impact than a single-column “filler” item buried on page [8](#) of a newspaper.

- Prominence

—Is the organization mentioned in the headline, in the first paragraph, prominently throughout, or does it receive only passing mention?

- Share of voice

—Is the organization reported in the whole story, half of it, or just in one or two paragraphs? How much space or time did competitors have in the story?

- Issues or topics

—Is the content about things of strategic importance, or simply a general reference?

- Messages

—What messages were communicated in the story, both favorable and unfavorable?

- Visuals

—Are photos, video footage, or logos shown and, if so, how and in what context?

Clearly, media content analysis can include both quantitative and qualitative evaluation variables. Quantitative coding can reflect the overall tone of articles and may involve in-depth assessment of individual messages, sentences, or words. Qualitative content analysis draws on research techniques from text analysis, discourse analysis, and semiotics. (See [Figure 14.3](#).)

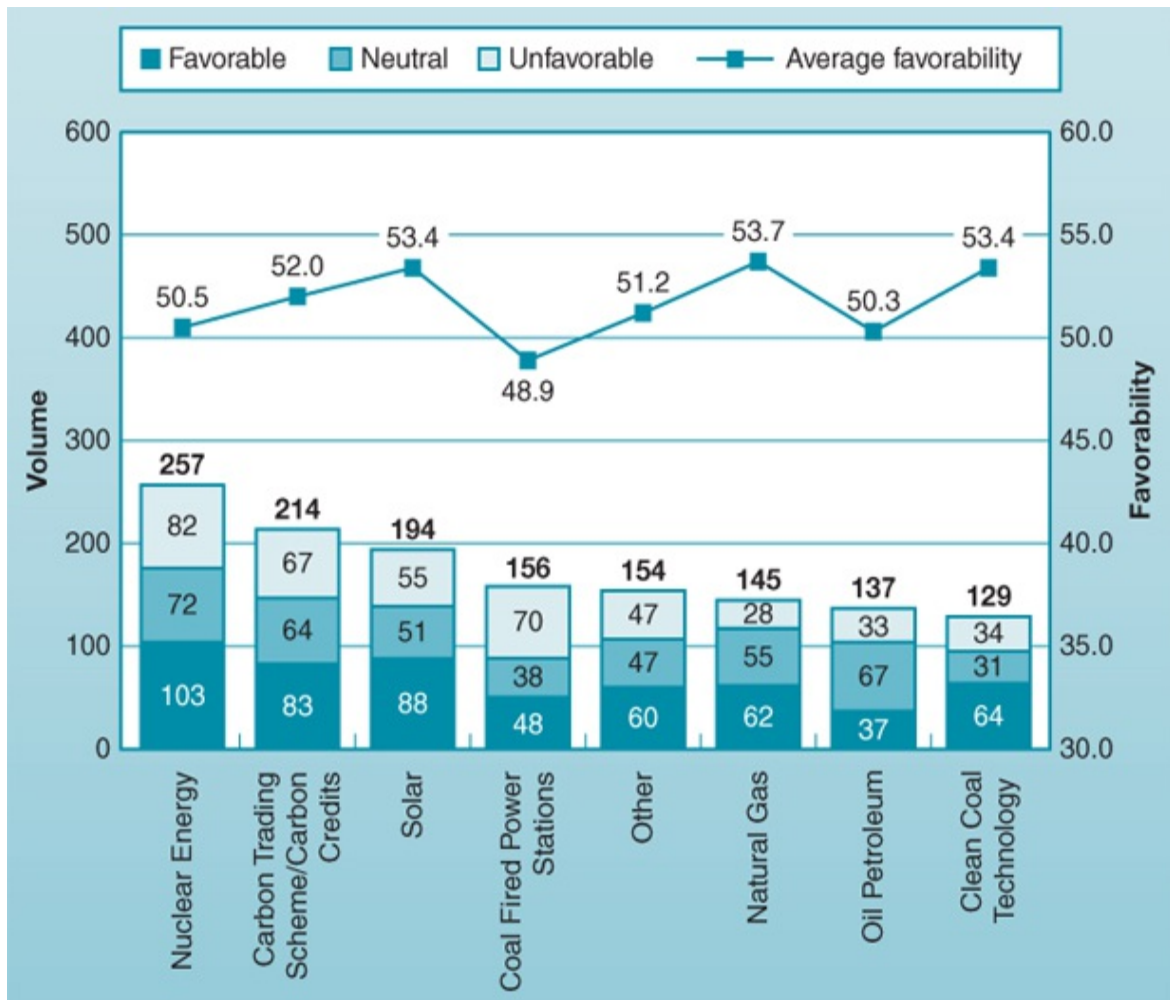


Figure 14.3 Publicity Content Analysis Chart

Courtesy Media Monitors–CARMA Asia Pacific, New South Wales, Australia.

Potential Audience

The next step in implementation evaluation is determining how many in the target publics received the messages the program is attempting to

communicate; that is, the number of people potentially exposed to program messages. Care must be taken, however, to separate the delivered audiences from the effective audience. The delivered audience includes all potential readers, viewers, listeners, or those attending events. The effective audience represents only those who are in the target publics. Audience size is seldom the major consideration; rather, the makeup of the audience is more important to program evaluation. For example, placement or coverage in a prestigious publication may look impressive, but probably contributes little to program success if the target public is middle-income earners. Practitioners could capitalize on such placement by reprinting the article (with permission) and distributing it themselves to key publics. However, the expense of such a strategy usually makes initial placement in appropriate media a more cost-effective practice. The effective audience is called “audience reach” in advertising, and this metric is relevant to public relations programs. Identifying target audience reach is a first basic step of media audience analysis.

Circulation figures and audience data are readily available for most publications and broadcast media. Most newspapers and major magazines belong to the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC), which publishes verifiable circulation figures for member publications. Circulation departments of local newspapers and magazines regularly report the number of paid subscriptions, as well as audience size and characteristics. A. C. Nielsen and Arbitron report audience estimates for “fixed media,” such as television and radio stations, and their online audiences, as well as the growing use of “mobile media,” such as smartphones and other Web-connected devices. Along with other companies, they also compile circulation and audience data in other countries. Some media individually report their claimed circulation or audience data in their own promotional materials, but third-party audited data typically are more reliable.

Audience reach can be further analyzed by accessing demographic and even psychographic data. A number of media research companies collect and provide demographic breakdowns, such as the number of 18- to 24-year-old males within a medium’s total circulation or audience. This is important, for instance, if the client organization is targeting young males. Others segment audiences by socioeconomic strata or by attitudinal factors. For example,

technology companies look for data on how many in media audiences are “early adopters” of technology rather than followers.

Companies such as Traffic Audit Bureau for Media Measurement (TAB) and Simmons Market Research Bureau report audience reach and frequency figures for outdoor advertising. These are based on local transportation authorities’ “ridership” figures and can be used to estimate audience size for transit public service advertising placed inside buses, subways, and trains. Attendance figures for events, meetings, and exhibits also provide data to measure potential exposure to program messages.

Social media and other online media audience data include numbers of users, followers, posts, visits, fans, page views, tab views, and other “counting metrics” tracked and made available by most online platforms. Although such data provide indicators of potential audience, they can represent “digital trivia,” according to one authority on social media measurement.¹⁹ These measures do provide evidence of “site traffic,” but that makes them parallel with other measures of potential audience—or program implementation.

While such data indicate the number of people who may have been exposed to messages, it is naïve to think that these figures alone indicate program effectiveness. Not unexpectedly, the next question should be, “Of those potentially exposed, how many actually paid attention to the message?”

Attentive Audience

The number of people who attend to messages and attend events, that is, pay attention to them, constitutes the next criterion in program implementation evaluation. Remember that some people drive or ride past outdoor signage and do not see it, skip through newspapers without reading many of the articles, and have the television on but do not pay attention to all that is shown and reported. Readership, listenership, and viewership studies measure audience attention to media and messages. Readership studies, usually based on surveys or interviews, identify how many read publications, and what they read, how much they read, as well as who reads and who does not. Studies of broadcast audiences produce similar data on viewers and

listeners. Numerous audience measurement firms now employ a range of metrics to indicate the number of people who attend to messages on the Internet in online media, blogs, and social media sites.

A well-known print advertising readership evaluation technique is Daniel Starch's recognition method used by Starch INRA Hooper, Inc. Results divide readers into three levels of readership. "Noted" readers simply recall having seen the advertisement. "Associated" readers not only recall seeing the advertisement but also remember the name of the advertiser. "Read most" readers say that they read at least 50 percent of the copy and recall enough of the content to support their claim. This method is called "aided recall" because respondents are shown the advertising or other published material and then asked if they recall having read the material. A number of market research firms provide magazine and readership data. The National Newspaper Publishers Association and the Magazine Publishers of America also commission numerous readership studies to track audience characteristics and reading habits.

Audience research firms use four primary methods to measure radio and television audiences:

1. Diary.

The diary method requires some member (or members) of a household to keep a written record or log of listening or viewing. This method has a built-in bias, because those who agree to participate may differ significantly from nonparticipants.

2. Meter.

The meter method electronically records individual set tuning by frequency or channel and time of day. The information is sent over telephone lines to a central computer. This is the method used by both A. C. Nielsen and Arbitron in major cities for the "overnight" ratings reported for major television programs. A major problem with this method is that the meter cannot always reliably detect who (if anyone), or how many people, are watching or listening.

3. People meter.

Audience measurement companies use sophisticated meters in an attempt to solve the missing-information problem of audimeters and television meters. Each person in a metered home has his or her button to push when watching television. The meter records who in the household is watching what program and feeds the information over telephone lines to the base computer. The people meter is also used in marketing research to report purchasing behavior and then to correlate purchases with television viewing. Not surprisingly, people tire of having to “punch in” and “punch out” and of entering all the other information requested, such as entering for small children too young to manage the technology that goes with living in a metered home. Another problem is that not all television sets in a home are metered, so the people meter yields incomplete reports of household viewing.

4. Telephone interview.

The telephone interview method involves calls either during or following a given program to determine audience size and composition. The most common approach is the telephone coincidental survey, meaning that calls are made while the program is running. Answering machines, cell phones, caller-ID technology, and abusive and high-pressure telemarketers causing nonresponses are making it increasingly difficult to obtain representative samples using this technique.²⁰

Readership studies of employee publications are also commonplace. For instance, when Jim McBride surveyed San Diego Kaiser Permanente hospital and clinic employees, he was surprised to learn that fewer than half read the employee newsletter. However, further analysis showed that readership was high among those who actually received the publication, but about half of all employees did not receive the newsletter. His findings prompted changes in the method of distribution, not changes in the content, which received high marks from readers. This case illustrates the necessity of evaluating every step in the program implementation process.

Again, attempts to measure attention in social media and other online sites are works in progress. Common counting metrics include number of “likes,”

interactions, comments, bookmarks, posts, referrals, and other indicators of people having actually attended to messages. These remain, however, measures of success or failure in attracting audience attention, not the outcomes of that attention.

This section addressed only measures of the implementation or outputs phase, not program impact. Program impact is the next phase of program evaluation.

Impact Criteria and Methods

Impact measures document the extent to which the outcomes spelled out in objectives for each target public and the overall program goal were achieved. In [Chapter 11](#), the term “benchmark” was used to describe The term “benchmark” describes how formative research findings define the problem situation and establish the starting point for the program. Intermediate impact assessments monitor progress toward objectives and goals while the program is being implemented, and media analysis is an example of an intermediate or interim impact assessment. Summative impact assessments provide evidence of success or failure in reaching the planned ending point.

The benchmark model in [Figure 14.4](#) illustrates the program evaluation cycle, showing how summative impact evaluations (Time₂) serve as formative evaluations (Time₁) for the next program cycle. The sections that follow describe only general categories and methods for impact assessment, because intended outcomes are unique to each program. Specific criteria for evaluating program effects should be clearly stated in the objectives that guided program

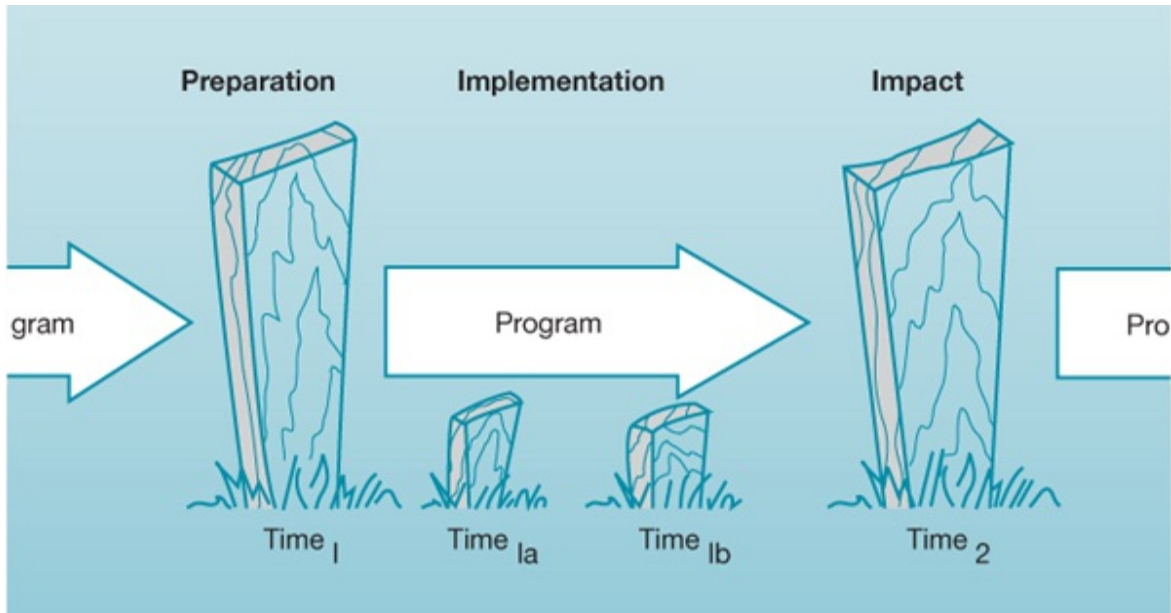


Figure 14.4 Benchmarks Evaluation Model

preparation and implementation. For impact evaluation, these same criteria identify both the nature and the magnitude of changes in (or maintenance of) knowledge, predisposition, and behaviors of internal and external publics. These criteria were chosen because they were viewed as essential steps to achieving the overall program goal in the working theory that was the basis of the program strategy.

Knowledge Gain

The first impact assessment measures the number of people who learn message content. This is clearly the logical follow-on from how many attended to the message in the implementation evaluation. Most programs seek to communicate information to increase knowledge, awareness, and understanding among internal and external target publics. Increasing knowledge is often critical to increasing their interest or motivation, a sequence leading to taking action (learn 1 feel 1 do). What people know

about an organization—regardless of where they got the information—affects how they feel and act and, therefore, the organization’s relationships with them. What they do not know may be even more critical: As long as explorers believed that the world was flat, they dared not sail too far toward the horizon. Similarly, what people know or do not know about issues and events may influence opinions and behaviors toward an organization and issues of mutual interest.

The key to evaluation of what people learned from a program (or concurrent sources) is to measure the same knowledge, awareness, and understanding variables that were measured before the program began. To determine change, comparisons must be made between at least two comparable measures: by repeating the measures among the same or similar people at different times, or by making comparable measures in a control group of similar people not exposed to the program at the same time. This same principle applies to all assessments of program impact.

For example, an employee communication specialist in a manufacturing organization evaluates a program to increase employees’ awareness of safety procedures by comparing pre- and post-campaign survey results. In another case, a gas and electricity utility staff wants to pretest an energy conservation program designed to increase knowledge of how much energy is saved with proper insulation. The research design calls for comparing survey results from a sample of homeowners who received the information (treatment group) with results from a similar survey of homeowners who did not receive the information (control group). Similar research designs are used to assess changes in opinions and attitudes.

Opinion Change

The gas and electric utility may also want to know the number of people who change or form opinions about the value of home energy conservation efforts. The manufacturer conducting the safety information program could be interested in increasing employee interest in on-the-job safety. Surveys used to measure changes in knowledge, awareness, and understanding also can be used to determine if a program had an impact on audience predisposition.

Different questions would be required, however, because increased knowledge and opinion change are different outcomes and one can occur without the other. Similarly, changes in opinions that are specific to a particular issue or situation may or may not reflect changes in more basic underlying attitudes.

For tracking opinion change in social media, program evaluators use the number of people who switch from criticizing to praising, from negative to positive mentions, from arguing to agreeing, and other customized indicators in the postings and exchanges. These metrics are spelled out in the objectives that identify the intended program impact on how people feel about issues, organizations, and so on.

Attitude Change

Trying to change the number of people who change or form attitudes is a higher-order program impact than is opinion change. Attitudes represent broad, cross-situational predisposition. They are less subject to short-term change. They result from a lifetime of reinforcement and experience, so they typically require time and effort to change. And what you see expressed in a situation may or may not represent the underlying attitude. For example, just because a homeowner holds the opinion that adding attic insulation will save on energy bills does not necessarily mean that the person qualifies as a conservationist attitudinally. The homeowner may simply be a penny pincher—“cheap.” Determining whether or not people hold an attitude about energy conservation requires measuring their predisposition across many energy-related issues and situations. (Review the “Orientation” section of [Chapter 8](#) for the distinction between opinions and attitudes.)

Behavior Change

The number of people who act in the desired fashion—behavioral change—likewise may or may not follow a sequence of knowledge and predisposition changes. Chain-link fences, for example, negate the need for information and

persuasive communications designed to keep all but the most determined people from entering restricted areas. Seldom do public relations programs have such powers, so typically people must be informed and persuaded before behavioral changes occur. Assessments of program impact on behavior include self-reports of behavior through surveys, direct observation of people's actions, and indirect observation through the examination of official records or other "tracks" left by those engaging or not engaging in the behavior.

Surveys sometimes yield unreliable measures of behavior, especially if respondents are asked to report sensitive or socially acceptable actions. Not surprisingly, few employees willingly report that they ignored management policy. Imagine how many students would admit to not doing assigned readings on the professor's class survey, or how many taxpayers would mark, "Yes, I cheated on last year's income taxes" on an IRS questionnaire! With validation questions built into the survey, however, many types of behavior can be measured using self-reports in surveys.

Examples of direct observation are turnstiles at events, head counts at meetings, tallies of telephone or mail responses, and participant observation. The local Red Cross or blood bank does not need to develop an elaborate measurement technique to determine how many people respond to a call for donations of a rare blood type. Nor does an organization hire a research consultant to learn if protestors stopped picketing the main lobby. Some public relations research executives have even considered using direct observation in the form of ethnography—observing people in their natural habitats, such as in their home or at the store—but this method can be expensive and sometimes difficult for clients to understand.²¹

Indirect methods for observing behavior include a social service agency's records of client appointments, a museum's maintenance records showing where worn floor tiles are most frequently replaced, and library checkout records. By studying these by-products of behavior, assessments are made about how many people used agency services, which areas or exhibits in the museum are most popular, and how many students checked out assigned readings in public relations reference books. This type of observation technique is called "unobtrusive measures."²² This approach to assessing

impact does not depend on the cooperation of those being observed, and the measurement technique does not contaminate the behavior observed.

The National Park Service's "Keep Yosemite Bears Wild" campaign caused behavior change—as measured by indirect methods. The program educated campers about how their own behavior—feeding wild bears—was encouraging bears to become more aggressive in damaging people's cars and other property in their search for human food. The campaign strategy was "to shift responsibility for the situation to people by persuading visitors to act properly, rather than blaming the bears." As a result of the six-month campaign, incidents of property damage at Yosemite National Park fell from around 1,600 incidents in the previous year to 760. Property damage dropped to one-third of previous levels. The property damage records served as an indirect indicator of changed human behavior (as well as changed bear behavior!).[23](#)

Social media measures of behavior change are no different than for other media and program efforts: How many joined, contributed, quit, started, and so on. The medium or activity may differ, but the intended program behavioral outcomes for each target public were set before the tactics were chosen.

In summary, measures of behavior call for a combination of research skills and ingenuity to get valid evidence for the evaluation and to avoid influencing the behavior of those being observed.

Repeated Behavior

Public relations programs are usually designed to increase the number of people who continue or sustain the desired behavior. Counts of the number of people who give up smoking on the day of the Great American Smokeout are not sufficient measures of program success for those wanting to decrease the number of people engaging in this health-threatening habit. As any reformed smoker will attest, success in quitting cannot be determined by checking only once shortly after a quit-smoking campaign.

Likewise, the Australian government's National Skin Cancer Awareness Campaign is designed to get teenagers and young adults (other campaigns target other publics) to adopt five "normal and socially acceptable" sun-protection behaviors:

1. Put on a broad-brimmed hat that shades your face, neck, and ears.
2. Wear sun-protective clothing that covers as much of your body as possible.
3. Seek shade.
4. Wear wrap-around sunglasses.
5. Apply SPF30+ broad spectrum water-resistant sunscreen liberally to clean dry skin, at least 20 minutes before being exposed to the sun, and reapply at least every two hours when outdoors.

Evaluation must include follow-up measures that sometimes continue for months or even years. The United Nations' family-planning programs are more interested in repeated use of contraceptive methods, not just short-term trials motivated by an educational movie and product samples. The same applies to those interested in assessing the impact of safe-sex education programs among at-risk high school and college populations. Evaluating program success in changing long-term behavior calls for an extended period of observation and measurement to document program impact on sustained behavioral change.

Goal Achieved

At some point in this series of impact levels, the program goal is achieved or the problem solved. Election and referendum results, legislative victories or defeats, and fund balances provide summative indications of the success or failure of political, lobbying, and fund-raising programs, respectively. The program goal spells out the appropriate summative evaluation criteria. It should also be clear that evaluation must extend to this level, because it is

possible that some or many of the intermediate impact outcomes may occur without the program goal being achieved. In other words, while each level may or may not be necessary in the process, no single level or even combination is a sufficient measure of goal achievement.

For example, the goal of an energy conservation program was to reduce total energy consumption. Increased knowledge of cost-saving practices, increased interest in energy conservation, and even changes in energy-use habits do not indicate success or failure in achieving the overall program goal. The utility reported program success this way:

The average cost of all conservation advertising to provide you with information on how to save energy is about 11 cents per month per customer. An analysis conducted on the actual savings realized by customers through conservation indicates that the savings averaged \$10 for each \$1 spent on conservation advertising.

The utility's suggestion that the conservation advertising caused the savings illustrates a major problem in program evaluation—the tentative nature of cause-and-effect claims. To list but a few alternative explanations for reduced consumption, the drop in energy consumption occurred during a period of escalating energy costs, energy conservation was a topic of many news stories and features in the national and local media, and manufacturers were introducing more energy-efficient appliances. In the uncontrolled environment of most public relations programs, evaluation research only helps answer questions about impact. Definitive answers are elusive, but objectively and systematically gathered evidence certainly beats assertions and strengthens the case for or against claims of program success or failure.

Social and Cultural Change

The ultimate summative evaluation of programs and the practice of public relations is their contribution to positive social and cultural change. This step completes the range of impact assessments. Evaluation at this level is confounded by the passage of time and the existence of other causal factors and is usually left to scholars in sociology and anthropology. Early U.S.

government programs promoted settlement in the West. Health and nutrition education programs have both reduced infant mortality and extended life. Programs that resolved conflicts and built new relationships maintained the dynamic public consensus necessary for meeting human needs. Those in the calling derive their professional motivation and fulfill their social responsibility by being concerned about the impact of their work on society and culture. Both individual practitioners and the practice of public relations will be judged accordingly by future generations.

Macnamara's pyramid model of program evaluation in [Figure 14.5](#) also depicts a hierarchy of program evaluation similar to the levels described here.²⁴ Like the evaluation levels model in [Figure 14.2](#), the pyramid model reads from the bottom up, the base representing the start point of the strategic planning and preparation process, culminating in achievement of the program goal. The pyramid metaphor is useful in conveying that, at the base when communication planning begins, practitioners have a large amount of information to assemble and a wide range of communication and action options. Selections and choices are made to direct certain messages at certain target audiences through certain media and, ultimately, achieve specific objectives and goals—the peak of the program or project in the model.

Some have criticized both the evaluation levels and pyramid models for not incorporating feedback loops. However, it is implicit in these models that findings from each stage of research are looped back into planning. The literature accompanying both models suggests that practitioners should not proceed to the next step unless formal and informal feedback gathered from the previous step has been incorporated into ongoing planning and management of the program. For instance, if early feedback or formal measurement (such as pretesting) finds that a selected medium is inappropriate, no practitioner would reasonably proceed to distribute information using that medium—at least one would hope not.

Another important feature of the pyramid model is the lists of the most common research methods for carrying out evaluation relevant to each stage of the process. Many of these have been mentioned and discussed throughout this and previous chapters.

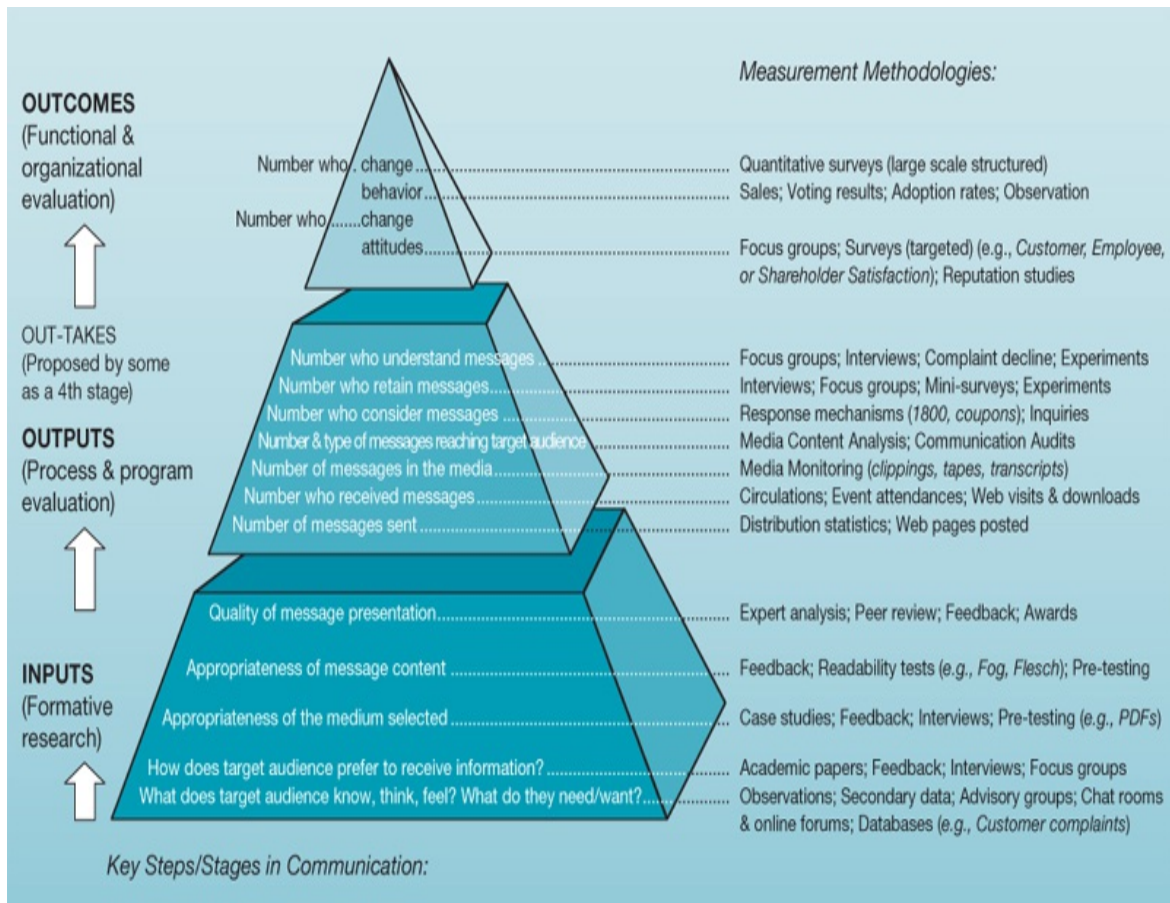


Figure 14.5 Pyramid Model of PR Research

Copyright © Jim R. Macnamara 1991 & 2001. Used with permission, Jim R. Macnamara, Ph.D., FPRIA, CARMA International, Chippendale, NSW Australia. Macnamara is now Professor of Public Communication and Deputy Dean for Faculty Administration, University of Technology, Sydney, Australia.

Interpreting and Using Results of Evaluation

Two key steps in interpreting and making sense of data gained from research are data reduction and data display. Data from statistical analyses or large spreadsheets—which can be vast and overwhelming—must be converted into tables or charts that display the main categories, themes, groupings, and leading statistics. For instance, data gained from a survey of staff and students at a major university with 40 questions on environmental health and safety ran to more than 60,000 rows in an Excel spreadsheet across multiple columns. The answers to closed-end questions were “reduced” by tabulating the most frequent responses from each, and the answers to open-end questions were grouped into categories. Once this was done, tables and charts could be produced to display distilled data in meaningful summaries.

In this simplified format, researchers and practitioners can start to make sense of data and interpret what they mean to the organization management. Interpretation (hermeneutics) is a challenging field, and researchers learn special techniques to minimize the risks of overlooking and oversimplifying important data. But data reduction is essential whenever large amounts of data are collected, and data display is vital for both helping researchers and practitioners interpret the data, as well as helping management understand it.

Katie Paine made this point in *Measuring Public Relationships: The Data-Driven Communicator’s Guide to Success*:

To make information meaningful and actionable, relate each conclusion back to your original objectives. ... I quickly learned that the key to action was to communicate with my top management in language they could understand. The language of business is charts and graphs. Therefore, to put measurement to work for you, you must learn to translate your raw data numbers into charts and graphs with short headlines that draw conclusions from the data. Once you’ve done so, you’re one step closer to actionable information.[25](#)

Interpreting and applying the results of evaluation also make clear that the end point of research is not data. The ultimate aim is to learn what has worked and what has not, and if not, why, as well as what should be done. Even armed with evidence, however, practitioners need to exercise care when interpreting and using evaluation results. Three major interpretations are possible when the expected impact is not detected in the evaluations:

1. Even though preparation and implementation were adequate, the theory behind the program strategy was faulty. This type of failure is typified by the common notion that “telling our side” will win arguments. Remember the warning earlier in this chapter that we cannot assume communication will work. Often it does not for a range of reasons, some of which may be beyond the control of the communicator.
2. If the theory guiding the program was useful, then the absence of impact may be attributed to program errors made when preparing and/or implementing the program.
3. It is also possible that the program succeeded in all respects but that the evaluation methods did not detect the program impact. Observations were made on the wrong people—the “general public,” not the target public, for example; the observations were not valid or used unreliable measures; or the effect was so small or elusive that it could not be detected using conventional measurement techniques.

In the final analysis, program evaluation requires knowledge of scientific research techniques, abilities to interpret data, and a willingness to learn from and apply findings. But top management support and acceptance determine the extent to which the findings of evaluation research in public relations are used. The following recommendations can help increase the probability that research will be accepted by senior management and become central to managing public relations:

1. Show how research findings relate to managers’ current concerns, policies, procedures, and practices before discussing long-term applications.
2. Maintain frequent and direct participation and communication with potential users of the findings throughout the research.
3. Limit research reports to findings with immediate application or to those with implications for long-term changes. Save the other findings for another report and setting.
4. Report only implications that are logically derived from and supported

by the data.

5. Use researchers with established credibility and integrity; avoid using people who might be seen by others as having a vested interest in the results.
6. Use research designs and methods that conform to rigorous scientific standards and technical soundness.
7. Emphasize corroborating information over information that contradicts users' expectations and frames of reference, minimize negative surprises, and avoid early closure on politically sensitive recommendations.
8. Enlist sponsorship of key managers in encouraging serious consideration and use of what was learned from the research.
9. Take the time and effort necessary to persuade potential users to consider and understand the findings and to help them apply what was learned from the research.
10. Conduct the research and use the findings in an ethical and socially responsible manner; respect basic human and civil rights.[26](#)

This chapter concludes with a reminder of an important point made at the beginning: Evaluation applies to the planning (inputs) phase, implementation (outputs) phase, as well as the impact (outcomes) phase of public relations programs. Effective program planning and effective program evaluation are inseparable and interrelated, as the following quote attests:

The sins of the program are often visited on the evaluation. When programs are well concept-ualized and developed, with clearly defined goals and consistent methods of work, the lot of evaluation is relatively easy. But when the programs are disorganized, beset with disruptions, ineffectively designed, or poorly managed, the evaluation falls heir to the problems of the setting.[27](#)

Research should be seen as central to the management of public relations, not

simply as the means by which practitioners are held accountable and the worth of their programs assessed. As the benchmark model suggests, evaluation research can tell practitioners both where they started and where they want to end, as well as give insights on how best to get there. And because it is data driven, the research pays off in getting public relations to the management table. But of course, that is not the real goal of evaluation research. Rather, the goal is to improve program effectiveness, but it takes practice, according to Harry Pforzheimer, the chief communication officer and corporate marketing leader at Intuit, Inc.:

We measure and research everything you can think of—and sideways, upside down—not necessarily measure for the sake of measurement, but so we understand better how we continue to improve to enhance the measurement process, and we do it fast![28](#)

Notes

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5. [5](#). David Rockland, “If You Can’t Measure It, It Doesn’t Count,” Blog posted September 14, 2009, at <http://comprehension.prsa.org/?p=628> (accessed September 14, 2011).
6. [6](#). Walter K. Lindenmann, “Research Doesn’t Have to Put you in the Poorhouse,” Online at http://www.instituteforpr.com/measurement_and_evaluation.phtml?

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11. [11.](#) Stewart A. Smith, “Research and Pseudo-Research in Marketing,” *Harvard Business Review* 52, no. 2 (March–April 1974): 73–76.
12. [12.](#) Jim Macnamara’s Pyramid Model of PR Research uses the terms inputs, outputs, and outcomes. Walter Lindenman discusses three levels—outputs, outtakes, and outcomes—in his “Guidelines for Measuring the Effectiveness of PR Programs and Activities” (Gainesville, FL: Institute for Public Relations, 2003). Available at http://www.instituteforpr.org/research_single/measuring_activities (accessed March 5, 2012).
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19. [19.](#) John Lovett, *Social Media Metrics Secrets* (Indianapolis, IN: Wiley Publishing, Inc., 2011), 23.
20. [20.](#) Will Lester, “Hang-Ups Bedevil the Telephone Pollsters,” *San Diego Union-Tribune* (November 30, 2002), A11.
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Study Guide

1. How are “formative” and “summative” research different with respect to their roles in program evaluation?
2. What are some of the research questions that can be answered in the preparation, implementation, and impact phases of public relations programs?
3. What is the difference between “outputs” and “outcomes”?
4. List and describe briefly the recommended steps for conducting evaluation research.
5. Give examples of the major criteria used in evaluating the preparation, implementation, and impact phases of public relations programs.
6. What are some of the most commonly used research methods used for evaluating public relations programs.

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Part IV The Practice

1. [Chapter 15. Business and Industry](#)
2. [Chapter 16. Government and Politics](#)
3. [Chapter 17. Military Public Affairs](#)
4. [Chapter 18. Nonprofits and Nongovernmental Organizations](#)
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6. [Chapter 20. Education](#)
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Chapter 15 Business and Industry

Learning Outcomes

After studying [Chapter 15](#) this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Describe how corporate public relations is different from the profession as it is practiced in other sectors.
2. Outline the impact and constantly changing effect that social media can have on corporate reputation.
3. Discuss the importance of corporate social responsibility programs to businesses and the role public relations plays in creating and implementing programs.
4. Describe the impact of globalization on the practice of public relations.

All business in a democratic country begins with public permission and exists by public approval.

—Arthur W. Page

It would be difficult to find an environment more challenging and energizing for the practice of public relations than the corporate sector. For one, a broad array of stakeholders play an active role in giving American business permission to operate. Because many different stakeholders are interested in the outcomes of business activity, the corporate sector is likely one where many functions, if not all, of the functions outlined in [Chapter 1](#) are integrated to build and manage relationships and advance the agenda of the enterprise.

Second, it is a place where public relations is often practiced in the context of a borderless society, whether it's the impact of globalization on the profession that shatters geographic boundaries or the pervasiveness of social

media that obliterates information boundaries among stakeholders. As interests of the corporation may extend to the far reaches of the globe, so do the needs to engage with stakeholders including employees, customers and consumers, government officials, and NGOs.

The pervasiveness of social media (covered in [Chapter 10](#)) means, for example, that the priorities of the corporate public relations professional can sometimes be dictated not by a tightly defined and easily identified circle of journalists, as was the case in the past, but by thousands if not tens of thousands of citizen journalists



Figure 15.1 “Corporate Greed

Courtesy Rex Babin, Sacramento Bee. Used with permission.

who can launch a global attack on the company with the click of a mouse. At the same time, this is the first generation of public relations professionals who will enjoy the ability to communicate directly with stakeholders of all stripes on a mass scale without dealing with the filters and biases that often creep into communications through third parties.

The public focus on corporate social responsibility, and sustainability in particular, has given business a platform to demonstrate to stakeholders that it is possible to do well and do good at the same time. Corporate citizenship continues to be a highly rated driver of corporate reputation among stakeholders and companies and businesses. Those with a strong record in this space and ability to share it effectively and efficiently with stakeholders will reap benefits in terms of enhanced public trust and respect.

Finally, the work of the public relations professional in the corporate sector is done against a backdrop of general public mistrust of business and institutions. This is nothing new, as surveys conducted over the past decade show that trust in business and other institutions tends to ebb and flow with economic trends and, more specifically, the acts of business itself. Fueled, in part, by events like BP's Deepwater Horizon explosion and spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, Toyota's recall of millions vehicles in 2009 and 2010, and the global financial meltdown that began in 2008 due in part, to egregious acts by some of the country's leading financial institutions, American business today is largely not trusted by Americans.¹ (See [Figure 15.1](#).)

Amid all this, the opportunities for professionals to demonstrate their skill at being wise counselors, trusted advisors, the conscience of the corporation, and consummate communicators have never been greater.

Public Relations In Corporate Organizations

The role of the public relations professional in corporate organizations has evolved significantly over time. And given the seismic changes referenced in the introduction to this chapter, changes in the profession in recent years have been the most profound of all. And experts predict those changes will continue, and likely at an accelerated pace.

Much has been written about the ideal organizational scheme to make optimum use of the public relations function. Most senior practitioners prefer reporting directly to the chief executive officer. This makes for the most informed and best-supported public relations officer because of the removal of “filters” in the form of organizational layers. There are other benefits, however. One study revealed a positive correlation between a company’s corporate communications organization (and the practitioner’s reporting structure) and its ranking on Fortune’s “World’s Most Admired Companies” list. Specifically, 53 percent of chief communications officers in “Most Admired” companies report to their CEOs vs. only 33 percent in what the survey calls “contender companies.”²

A 2009 survey of public relations professionals in corporate communications settings revealed that 42.5 percent of senior public relations executives reported directly to a member of the “C-Suite” (Chairman, Chief Executive Officer, or Chief Operating Officer). According to the survey, the second most frequent reporting relationship for senior practitioners was into the marketing function (16.1 percent) with significantly lower numbers for reporting relationships into legal, finance, human resources, or strategic planning departments.³

Titles for senior public relations executives in corporate settings are a mixed bag. Traditional titles include “executive vice president,” “senior vice president,” or “vice president,” depending on the hierarchy and culture of the organization. As the function has evolved in status, however, and particularly where the executive reports directly to the CEO, the titles “chief communications officer” and “chief reputation officer titles” are moving into the mainstream.

Regardless of titles or organizational structure, the public relations function is taking on increased stature in corporate organizations as top professionals are being asked to play more of a strategic and interactive role within the

leadership of the organization. As the corporate function arguably in touch with the broadest range of internal and external constituencies—and one that is regarded as expert in establishing and managing relationships—public relations professionals function as the company’s eyes, ears and conscience; bring objective opinions and perspectives to the decision-making table; and help manage the priorities of senior management. In short, the function that once focused largely on influencing and transforming public perception is now one that plays a significant role in shaping and determining companywide behaviors, policies, and actions.

Corporate Social Responsibility

A growing area of involvement for the practitioner in the corporate environment is active engagement in the organization’s corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs. Because of their ability to see across a diverse assortment of stakeholders whose attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors can impact the performance of the company and their role as the chief steward of an organization’s reputation, public relations executives are increasingly engaged in the kinds of decisions that determine how corporate social responsibility programs are developed, implemented, and communicated.

There are a number of terms used interchangeably with CSR, including corporate citizenship, corporate responsibility, philanthropy, and varying definitions of CSR. Regardless of the term or definition in use, business leaders and stakeholders agree that CSR programs help shape a corporation’s reputation. A recurring series of studies conducted by the Boston College Center for Corporate Citizenship affirms the power of CSR as a driver of reputation. Only ratings of a company’s products and services rank higher in terms of reputational impact.⁴

The recession that pummeled the American economy in 2008 and 2009 had little or no impact on the public’s expectations of business when it comes to CSR or, surprisingly, business’ commitment to CSR during a downturn. A survey conducted in 2009 by GolinHarris revealed that nearly three-quarters of Americans believed that corporate citizenship should remain a high business priority compared to other business priorities,⁵ and a Boston

College survey of business executives showed that despite the downturn, most businesses maintained or expanded their programs and budget for corporate citizenship.⁶

Dozens of corporations have launched meaningful programs that demonstrate their social obligations. Three examples illustrate CSR in action:

The Chicago Bulls' "Read to Achieve"

The professional basketball franchise, demonstrates its commitment to metropolitan Chicago and surrounding areas. Their effort serves both the Bulls and their primary publics—current and prospective ticket holders and community organizations that benefit from exposure to successful professional athletes. In the process, the Bulls and the National Basketball Association (NBA) contribute positive impact on Chicago-area communities.

One program, the "Read to Achieve" program is active in all NBA cities, but Chicago takes the program several steps further. Each October, Bulls players start their new season with an event for young students at Chicago's Bertie Center. Each month thereafter, the Bulls send players to libraries, schools, and youth centers to promote literacy as a key to success in the adult world (see [Figure 15.2](#)). Special "Reading Time-Outs" are scheduled during the December holidays, on Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday in January, and during February's Black History Month.

The organization builds a new Reading and Learning Center each year at a school, library, youth center, or group home. Each center is designed to increase students' literacy skills by giving them access to books, computers, reference materials, and learning aids. Along with Bulls memorabilia, the renovated facility has new furniture. In conjunction with the Chicago Public Schools, the Bulls also host an annual spring Spelling Bee involving more than 30 schools. Winning foursomes are recognized at a Bulls halftime ceremony.

McDonald's Corporation's "Good Neighbor" Programs

McDonald's Corporation is continually recognized for its strong commitment to corporate citizenship and whose practitioners do an excellent job of

sharing these programs with stakeholders. The company defines social responsibility as “striving to do what is right, being a good neighbor in the community and integrating social and environmental priorities into restaurants and relationships with suppliers and business partners.”

From creating an independent advisory council on animal welfare to working with suppliers to phase out the use of growth-promoting antibiotics in its dedicated poultry supply,

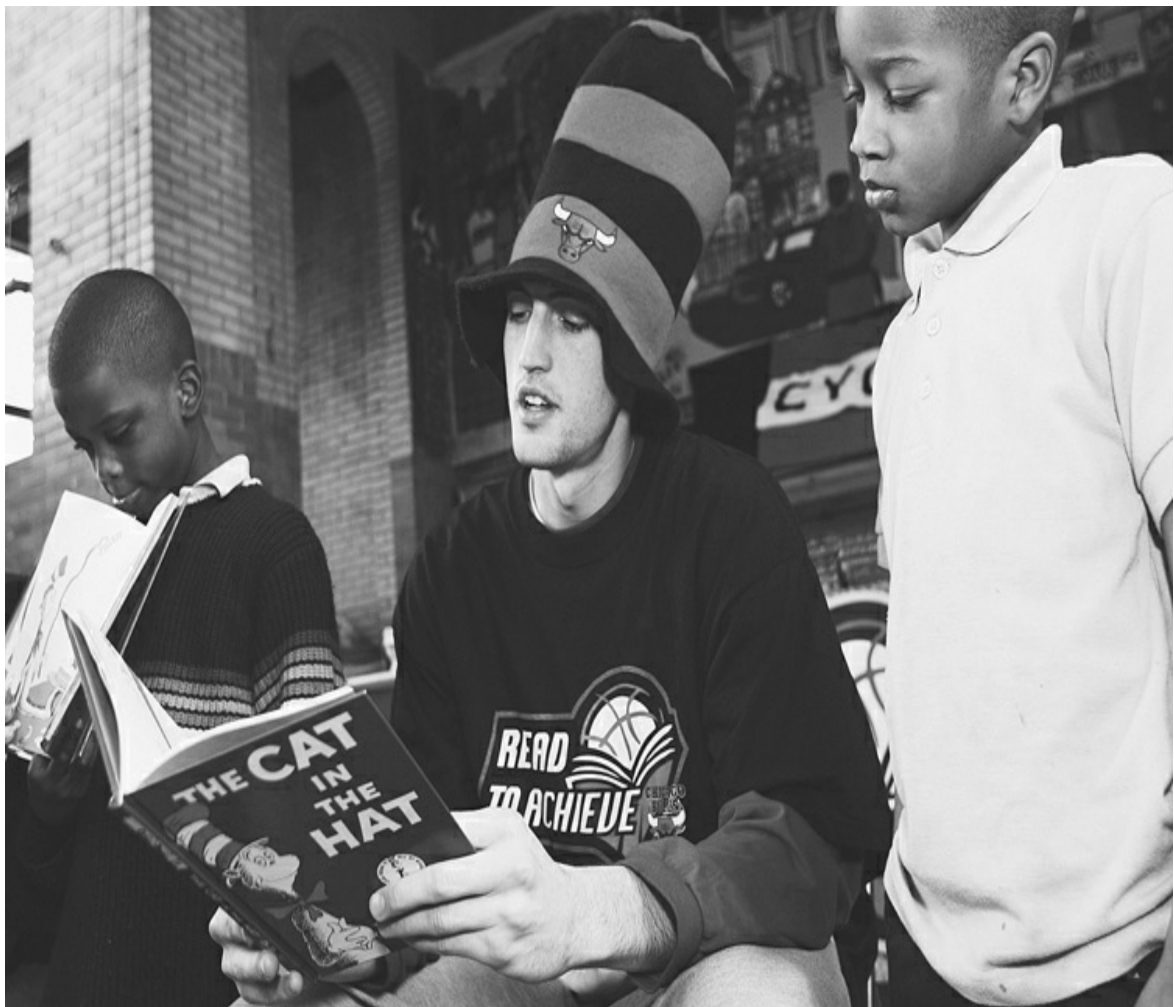


Figure 15.2 Chicago Bulls at Boys & Girls Club

Courtesy Chicago Bulls Used with Permission.

to measuring environmental performance, and to setting goals for improvement, social responsibility is a key part of the company's heritage and business strategy.

And McDonald's takes responsibility for environmental impacts. Since 1990, the company has worked with suppliers to reduce the amount of material used in its packaging and to increase the amount of recycled material in use. Many McDonald's restaurants around the world recycle used cooking oil and wastes, such as corrugated paper packaging.

Community involvement is also a cornerstone of the McDonald's business approach, with a philanthropic focus on programs that benefit children's well-being. That was the impetus behind the creation of McHappy Day®—a signature global fund-raising event that takes place each November in McDonald's restaurants worldwide. Since its inception in 2002, McHappy Day has raised more than \$170 million for Ronald McDonald House Charities® (RMHC®) and other children's charities around the world.⁷

Ronald McDonald House Charities has been McDonald's "charity of choice" for more than 37 years. Together with individual donors and other corporations, McDonald's, its owner-operators, and its suppliers are key supporters of RMHC and its three core programs.

The Ronald McDonald House® program provides a "home away from home" for the families of seriously ill children being treated at nearby hospitals (see [Figure 15.3](#)). Started in 1974 in Philadelphia, the program has grown to more than 308 Ronald McDonald Houses in 31 countries and serves more than 72,000 families each day, saving them \$257 million in hotel costs.⁸

In addition, 171 Ronald McDonald Family Rooms have been created within hospitals in 19 countries and regions to provide a place of rest and comfort for families of critically ill children. The Ronald McDonald Family Rooms provide comfort to 3,500 families each day.

The Ronald McDonald Care Mobile® program delivers cost-effective medical, dental, and health education services to children who are uninsured

and/or unable to access quality health care. By the end of 2010, more than 44 Ronald McDonald Care Mobile programs were operating in eight countries, bringing health-care services to where it's needed most. The Ronald McDonald Care Mobile program saves U.S. families more than \$10 million in health care costs and, on average each year, serves 154,000 children in vulnerable populations around the world.⁹

McDonald's involvement in RMHC extends beyond monetary support and the annual fund-raiser. For example, franchises partner with local RMHC chapters for promotional and



Figure 15.3 Ronald McDonald House

Courtesy Ronald McDonald House Charities. Used with permission.

fund-raising events, and McDonald's employees are dedicated volunteers. Also, RMHC donation boxes are hosted in restaurants, representing the largest ongoing fund-raiser for RMHC. In 2010, nearly \$25 million was collected.

SC Johnson's "Sustainability" Programs

One component of CSR that is gaining increasing visibility is that of sustainability or sustainable development. Sometimes interpreted as environmentalism, sustainability covers much broader territory. The Brundtland Commission, formally the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), coined the phrase "sustainable development," defining it as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."[10](#)

Many companies are discovering that sustainable business practices are not just good for reputation building but, equally important, they're also good business. This is the "green to gold" philosophy espoused by authors Daniel Esty and Andrew Winston in their book of the same title.[11](#)

Privately held SC Johnson takes a holistic view of sustainability, targeting four areas where the company believes it can make the biggest impact on quality of life, economic impact, the company's product mix, and the planet. The four areas are improving products (focus on eco-friendly ingredients), reducing resource use (focus on reducing energy consumption and emissions), strengthening communities (focus on advancing social progress and public health), and protecting families (focus on preventing insect-borne diseases). Two of SC Johnson's programs are notable:

- Greenlist™ is an award-winning ingredient classification system that helps SC Johnson scientists select the most earth responsible raw materials for inclusion in the company's products. Raw materials are rated according to their environmental and health impact. Greenlist gives consumers products that perform well and are as cost-effective and environmentally friendly as possible. The company involved various

third parties, including the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the World Wildlife Fund to develop Greenlist. The company also makes the process available to other companies that want to improve the health and environmental profile of their products.

- The company's "Bottom of the Pyramid Protocol" (BOP) is a process for creating mutually beneficial businesses in communities where people live on a per capita income of less than \$1,500 a year. One of many programs focuses on key ingredients of some of the company's pest control products—pyrethrum, or "py"—a natural, fast-acting insecticide extracted from the dried flower heads of chrysanthemums. SC Johnson has worked closely with third parties to help farmers in Kenya and Rwanda organize a co-op system that eliminates middlemen who siphoned money away from the value chain, introduce new methods that allow farmers to grow more on the same amount of land, and develop a crop management system that helps ensure long-term benefits to farmers. In doing this, SC Johnson helps develop a sustainable supply of py while increasing farmers' profits and improving their quality of life.
- One of the company's many BOP programs is in Nairobi, Kenya, where most toilets in the city's poor neighborhoods are shared by multiple families. Sanitation and odor control are major problems. SC Johnson helped create Community Cleaning Services, employing people from the neighborhood, to clean the toilets. Now, families can hire CCS to clean the toilets and share the cost for just pennies. CCS teams service more than 200 facilities per week. In doing this, SC Johnson creates jobs for employees of CCS, allowing them to improve the quality of life for their families, improves the community with cleaner and more sanitary toilets (which helps reduce disease), and helps to develop a market for its cleaning products in Kenya.

As the internal protector and promoter of the company's reputation, the practitioner is able to help align the public's expectations for social good with the company's business activities and goals. That ability positions the practitioner well for a continuing and increasingly important role in helping to shape and implement a company's CSR strategy.

Corporations As Targets

No matter how much corporations do in the public interest or how much money they spend on social and community causes, they will remain visible targets of advocacy groups on some basis. The Internet and social media in particular have empowered corporate critics in a way unparalleled in history. With the click of a mouse (or in some cases, the well-orchestrated clicks of many mice), critics can trigger a rapidly developing attack that is, at the very least, a corporate inconvenience—as is the case in numerous Facebook “takeovers.” For example, an orchestrated series of Facebook postings spelled out “DK BUNNY BUTCHER” on the DKNY Facebook wall. Or, at the worst, hobbles the enterprise completely as happened in 2011 when “hactivists” forced Sony to take down its popular Playstation Network by stealing personal information such as names, birth dates, emails, passwords, and user names of 77 million network users. The PlayStation Network was offline for two months following the attack. Sony executives estimate that the hack cost the company \$170 million, to say nothing of reputational damage.¹²

The role of the public relations professional in instances like these will depend largely on familiarity not just with social media but also with the growing number of analytic tools that can help better understand the nature of the attack and calibrate an appropriate response. Of course, the practitioner also can help the company prepare for an attack with appropriate levels of crisis preparedness (see [Chapter 12](#) for specific examples).

Business Misconduct

No discussion of public relations in the corporate setting would be complete without some attention paid to the missteps and misdeeds of companies and their executives. There are many arguments for what seems to be a near-constant stream of news about companies and their crises: enterprising investigative journalists, corner cutting by companies seeking to gain competitive advantage, our litigious society and now—the democratization of media that can make every citizen a “journalist” with an agenda.

Consider just three crises, as ranked by public relations industry commentator Paul Holmes:[13](#)

1. Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill:

While a number of companies were involved, BP took the biggest share of blame from the public and the U.S. government for what turned out to be the worst accidental oil spill in history, triggered by an explosion on a rig that killed 11 and injured 17. An estimated 4 millions barrels of oil surged into the Gulf of Mexico before the well was capped four months after the explosion. BP spent \$17.7 billion related to the spill as of the end of 2010 and closed the year with a 29 percent fall off in its stock price since the disaster.[14](#)

2. Toyota Recall:

From October 2009 to March 2010, Toyota had a constant presence in the headlines as it was forced to recall 8.5 million cars. The recall was triggered by the improper installation of an all-weather floor mat from an SUV into a loaner Lexus sedan by a dealer that led to the vehicle's accelerator getting stuck, causing a tragic, fatal accident. The recall was estimated to cost Toyota between \$2 billion and \$5.5 billion in repairs and lost sales. In February 2011, a government-commissioned NASA study found zero evidence of electronic problems causing unintended acceleration and only a handful of accidents were due to improperly installed floor mats and sticky gas pedals that could be slow to return.[15](#)

3. Goldman Sachs and the Global Financial Crisis:

As Wall Street's largest and one of its most successful investment banks, it was no surprise to many when a federal investigation cast Goldman as a central villain of the financial crisis and accused it of misleading clients about mortgage-linked securities. Arrogant behavior by executives in the wake of the crisis, and the company's rapid return to profitability made it a target again for Wall Street's

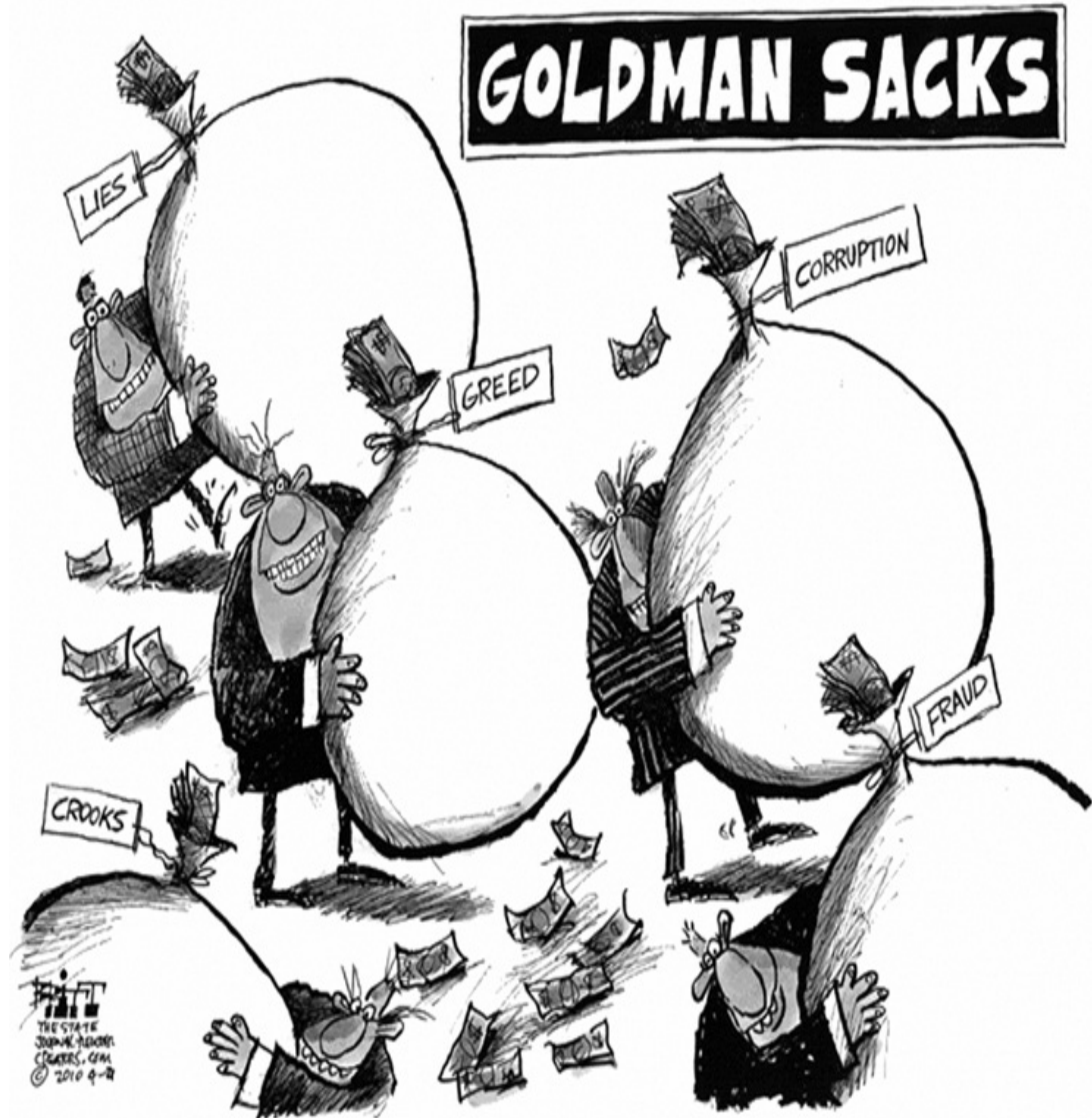


Figure 15.4 "Goldman Sacks

Courtesy Cris Britt.

critics (see [Figure 15.4](#)). The firm is being investigated by several government authorities, including the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), the Justice Department, the New York State Attorney General, and the Manhattan District Attorney's office. As of July 2011, Goldman's stock was trading near its 52-week low and analysts were speculating about reputational damage and client

defections.[16](#)

There are many commonalities among these incidents—companies were slow to accept responsibility for these events as they transpired; executives who either were not accessible to explain the company’s actions or, when doing so, appeared insincere or uncaring; third parties who expanded and prolonged coverage of events to drive their own agendas; and the “always-on” nature of news as a result of social media. Practitioners in the corporate environment must prepare for and address these and many more factors in crisis situations, often in the glare of scrutiny by media, activist groups, and the public in general.

Restoring Public Trust

Public trust in American business is flagging as a result of continuing battles between business and government; high unemployment rates; lingering effects of the recession; and a series of headline-grabbing crises, such as product recalls, and the downfall of long-standing financial institutions. Restoring public confidence in business will take time. Public relations practitioners can either view the task as hopeless—or as a once-in-a-career opportunity to really turn things around. Corporations will need the best thinking of public relations professionals and other resources as they navigate their way back to a more robust position in the eyes of the public.

One way for practitioners to help is to remind their business colleagues (as well as themselves) of the power of authenticity as a means of earning back the trust and respect of stakeholders. Authenticity in words and deeds has been shown to be the top characteristic consumers look for companies to demonstrate as a good corporate citizen.[17](#) It is not surprising

Exhibit 15.1

UPS Code of Business Conduct

Public relations practitioners are no strangers to corporate mission

and value statements. They write the documents, oversee writing by an outside consultant, or sit on a company committee that hammers out a draft, which then goes through a lengthy clearance process leading up to, and including, the board of directors. Unfortunately, many (if not most) such documents are full of passive language, platitudes and buzzwords, and attempts to satisfy every imaginable stakeholder group the company deals with.

A refreshing change is the Code of Business Conduct at UPS, the “brown” delivery company. The entire document can be found on the company’s informative Web site (www.ups.com), but a review of the key elements is useful to future practitioners who may someday be doing the writing, with clear messages for would-be violators:

1. A brief, one-paragraph statement introducing the code of conduct.
2. A description of the reason for a code of conduct, including ways it relates to other company policies.
3. A message from Michael L. Eskew, chairman and CEO of the company, including this warning, “Employees who get results at the cost of violations of laws or through unscrupulous dealings do more than violate our standards—they challenge our ability to grow our business and undermine our reputation.”
4. A statement of corporate values and management philosophies.
5. A “Checklist for Leading with Integrity,” which asks a dozen questions employees should consider as they create an ethical work environment.
6. A description of the way the UPS Business Conduct Program is administered.

7. Encouragement to raise questions and voice concerns about possible violations of company policies, including access to a UPS Help Line that is available around the clock, seven days a week.
8. A clear statement about retaliation, or the fear of retaliation, for those who raise questions or voice concerns.
9. Additional statements on workplace environment, equal employment opportunity, workplace health and safety, substance abuse, and workplace violence, among others.
10. Policies on conflicts of interest, giving and/or receiving gifts and nonincidental entertainment, customer relationships, doing business with governments, and dealing with confidential information.
11. Antitrust and insider trading policies.
12. Policies on intellectual property, proprietary company information, and protection of trademarks.
13. A description of company political activities, processes, and contributions.

Courtesy United Parcel Service of America, Inc.

that the Arthur Page Society in its treatise on the “Authentic Enterprise” affirms, “Authenticity will be the coin of the realm for successful corporates and for those who lead them.”[18](#)

Another approach in which practitioners can play an important role is in codifying and publicly declaring the behaviors their companies demand of their employees. (See [Exhibit 15.1](#) for a description of one company’s strong code of business conduct.)

Globalization

A few final words about globalization and the impact it has on business and the public relations function. In his book *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the 21st Century*, Thomas Friedman tells the compelling story of a borderless world where goods, intellectual and human capital, and information move virtually at will and with alarming speed (see Additional Reading list). The world is in the midst of a global reordering, the likes of which hasn't been seen since the dawn of the Industrial Age. Consider the following:

- By 2020, Euromonitor International projects that China will overtake the United States to lead the world's economies.[19](#)
- By 2020, China, India, Russia, Brazil, and Mexico, which were considered "emerging" countries in 2010, will be half of the world's ten largest economies.[20](#)
- The decade from 2010 to 2020 will be the first in 200 years in which emerging market countries will contribute more to global growth than developed ones.[21](#)
- In 2010, nearly half of the sales of the S&P 500 companies came from abroad, and some companies like Coca-Cola, Caterpillar, Intel, and McDonald's derived well over half of their income from overseas sales.[22](#)
- And a recent study conducted by McKinsey & Company affirmed that gearing up for this rebalancing of economic power is the top priority for CEOs of American corporations.[23](#)

Communicating in a borderless world requires special skills for the public relations practitioner, including the ability see the business and stakeholders from a global perspective, sensitivity to cultural differences, understanding the global media environment, and ability to leverage technology stay in touch with colleagues around the globe.

Here is just one example—recognized by the trade publication PRWeek as the global campaign of the year for 2011—of how one company brought the story of its social commitment to life with stakeholders around the world:

The Dow Chemical Company teamed with GolinHarris in an effort to raise the global profile of the necessity of water and the nearly 1 billion people who lack access to it. Along with Kevin Wall and former Vice President Al Gore's Live Earth, Dow and GolinHarris launched a single-day event campaign across 200 cities and 81 countries on six continents, targeting people active in the community and politics, Dow's 52,000 employees, environmental advocates, NGOs, the running community, and celebrity supporters.

Kicking off Earth Week 2010, this became the largest solutions-based campaign on record, comprising 6K run/walks (the average distance many women and children walk each day to fetch water), as well as concerts and educational activities taking place over the course of 24 hours worldwide. The one-day event was supported through an online resource center, which provided key communications tools, artwork, and event activation materials for partners to execute the global event locally.

Postevent research saw a 12 percent increase with Dow's water and environmental commitments among key influencers. The global effort also helped Dow build a network of 30 NGOs. The event led to 3,000 media placements across 40 countries, totaling more than 1.35 billion impressions, as well as more than 20,000 tweets and 40 million-plus Facebook impressions. Dow employee engagement also grew, with more than 60 percent getting involved in some way.

In summary, that is what corporate public relations practitioners do to help their organizations adjust to changing environments locally, regionally, and globally.

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Study Guide

1. Explain the increasing importance and constantly changing effect that social media can have on corporate reputation.
2. What are some of the ways by which public relations in the corporate environment is different from the profession as it’s practiced in other sectors?
3. In the context of public relations in the corporate sector, what does the term “borderless society” mean?
4. As a professional, why is it important to understand the impact of globalization on business?
5. Why is the corporate public relations executive well suited to be actively involved in a company’s corporate social responsibility programs?
6. What role can public relations professionals play in helping restore public trust in business?

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This chapter was revised in collaboration with Scott Farrell, President, Global Corporate Communications, GolinHarris, Chicago, Illinois. Scott joined GolinHarris in 1999, becoming managing director of the headquarters office in 2005, and president of the global corporate communications practice in 2009. He began his career with Burson-Marsteller, and then spent time with Cohn & Wolfe and Culligan International Company.

Chapter 16 Government and Politics

Learning Outcomes

After studying [Chapter 16](#) this chapter, you should be able to:

1. List and discuss the seven major goals of government public affairs programs.
2. Outline the three major barriers to effective public relations in government.
3. Identify the major aspects of government–media relations.

A popular government without popular information or a means of acquiring it is but a prologue to a farce or tragedy, or perhaps both.

—James Madison

Government public relations specialists—typically called “public affairs officers” in the United States and “information officers” in most other countries—are the critical link between the people and the government. The diversity of technical skills, organizational goals, and public activities of the function of government public affairs is far greater than of specialized and/or traditional public relations practices. And the paramount difference is the public advocacy role played by government communicators to government decision makers.

Today’s public affairs practitioner must possess a solid mix of communication skills linked to a comprehensive understanding of the organization’s culture, policies, practices, and constituents. The public affairs officer is an integral member of the organization’s executive management

team. And public affairs practitioners vehemently believe their expanded responsibility performed under statutory restrictions justifies a distinction in name from their counterparts practicing public relations.

One public affairs specialist may write an op-ed article describing the U.S. Department of Agriculture's "enhanced surveillance plan" to reduce consumers' anxieties about "mad cow" disease in the U.S. beef industry. Another practitioner may prepare "infomercials" seeking to gain public compliance for stricter inspection measures launched by the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) to thwart terrorism. No matter the level of government, a public affairs officer is available to inform the public about an elected official's programs or an agency's doings.

In a very real sense, the purpose of public affairs itself closely matches that of democracy. Abundant and accurate information is used by effective democratic governments to maintain responsive relationships with constituents, based on mutual understanding and continuing two-way communication.

The Goals of Public Affairs In Government

Government touches every aspect of society, and virtually every facet of government relies on, or is closely tied to, public affairs. The overall goals for government public affairs, regardless of the level and, to some extent, type of government, have at least seven purposes in common:

1. Informing constituents

about the activities of a government agency.

2. Ensuring active cooperation in government programs

—voting, curbside recycling, as well as compliance with regulatory programs, such as mandatory seat belt use, antismoking ordinances.

3. Fostering citizen support for established policies and programs
 - census participation, neighborhood crime watch programs, personal health awareness campaigns, support for disaster relief efforts.
4. Serving as the public's advocate to government administrators
 - conveying public opinion to decision makers, managing public issues within the organization, encouraging public accessibility to administration officials.
5. Managing information internally
 - facilitating and advancing management's messages through a variety of communications tools.
6. Facilitating media relations
 - maintaining relationships with local media; serving as the organization's conduit for all media inquiries; educating the media on the organization, its practices, and its policies.
7. Building community and nation
 - using government-sponsored public-health campaigns and other public-security programs and promoting a variety of social or development programs.

Informing Constituents

The primary job of government public affairs practitioners is to inform. A multitude of other roles and responsibilities—many of enormous importance and scope—are assigned to specific government practitioners, and ensuring the constant flow of information to persons outside and inside government is generally the top priority. This information function can be global, as the need to inform could well extend beyond the nation's borders to allies or to warn enemies. Bear in mind, however, that political systems may enable or

constrain this particular role, especially when communication efforts are directed outside a nation.

For the United States, every federal department and agency retains a public affairs function, ranging from a single individual to an organizational department as large, aggressive, and sophisticated as a top-tier public relations firm. Regardless of size, the focus of the public affairs function is informing general and specific audiences about the organization's services. (See [Figure 16.1](#) for examples of related program materials.) These activities are accomplished through external, internal, and media-specific information services. These information transfers are predicated on informing and educating the public, not lobbying for a desired outcome. Likewise, at levels below the federal government, the focus remains the same for all—to inform constituents about governmental activities and services. The exception to informing—as opposed to influencing—a constituency occurs when information services are intended and disseminated to overseas audiences.

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Affordable Insurance Exchanges

Starting in 2014, Affordable Insurance Exchanges will provide new, transparent marketplaces for individuals and small businesses to buy health insurance. On August 12, 2011, HHS awarded \$185 million to help States continue to set up these new marketplaces. HHS also proposed new rules to provide a simple, streamlined, and affordable path for consumers to use the Exchanges to buy insurance, receive premium tax credits, or enroll in Medicaid or CHIP.

Read the Press Release.
 Learn more about Affordable Insurance Exchanges.

Spotlight

New Rules for Sunscreens

FDA has announced new requirements to help consumers better protect themselves and their families from the sun.

Watch this video: Sunscreen: Stronger Rules, Better Protection

Learn more: FDA Sheds Light on Sunscreens

Viral Hepatitis

One in every 12 persons worldwide is living with viral hepatitis. Fortunately many cases of viral hepatitis are preventable and, for those living with viral hepatitis, effective treatments are available.

Learn more about the action plan to combat viral hepatitis.

Read the White House Proclamation.

Secretary's Key Initiative Sites

Health HealthCare.gov
 Take health care into your own hands. explore insurance coverage options and learn

HHS Operating & Staff Divisions

The Department of Health and Human Services is the principal agency for protecting the health of all Americans. It is comprised of the [Office of the Secretary \(18 Staff Divisions\)](#) and [11 Operating Divisions](#).

News

August 15, 2011
 CDC awards more than \$49 million to strengthen State and local health departments

August 12, 2011
 HHS, Treasury take new steps to help states build Affordable Insurance Exchanges

August 9, 2011
 HHS awards Affordable Care Act funds to expand access to health care

Health Information Privacy (HIPAA)

The HIPAA Privacy Rule creates national standards to protect individuals' medical records and other personal health information.

Figure 16.1 Information from Government

Courtesy Departments of Energy, Health and Human Services, and Housing and Urban Development; Environmental Protection Agency, and Natural Resources and Conservation Service.



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Figure 16.1b



Healthy Homes

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development • Office of Healthy Homes and Lead Hazard Control



Seven Tips for Keeping a Healthy Home

- 1. Keep it Dry**
Prevent water from entering your home through leaks in roofing systems, rain water from entering the home due to poor drainage, and check your interior plumbing for any leaking.
- 2. Keep it Clean**
Control the source of dust and contaminants, creating smooth and cleanable surfaces, reducing clutter, and using effective wet-cleaning methods.
- 3. Keep it Safe**
Store poisons out of the reach of children and properly label. Secure loose rugs and keep children's play areas free from hard or sharp surfaces. Install smoke and carbon monoxide detectors and keep fire extinguishers on hand.
- 4. Keep it Well-Ventilated**
Ventilate bathrooms and kitchens and use whole house ventilation for supplying fresh air to reduce the concentration of contaminants in the home.
- 5. Keep it Pest-free**
All pests look for food, water and shelter. Seal cracks and openings throughout the home; store food in pest-resistant containers. If needed, use sticky-traps and baits in closed containers, along with least toxic pesticides such as boric acid powder.
- 6. Keep it Contaminant-free**
Reduce lead-related hazards in pre-1978 homes by fixing deteriorated paint, and keeping floors and window areas clean using a wet-cleaning approach. Test your home for radon, a naturally occurring dangerous gas that enters homes through soil, crawlspaces, and foundation cracks. Install a radon removal system if levels above the EPA action-level are detected.
- 7. Keep it Well-Maintained**
Inspect, clean and repair your home routinely. Take care of minor repairs and problems before they become large repairs and problems.

www.hud.gov/healthyhomes

Figure 16.1c

U.S. Department of State

The United States dramatically changed how it manages the flow and purpose of its overseas informational services on October 1, 1999. The U.S. government, consistent with the Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act (FARRA) of 1998, transferred the functions of the United States Information Agency (USIA) to the United States Department of State.

USIA functions were transferred largely to three bureaus and a bureau-equivalent office within the Department of State: the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), the Bureau of Public Affairs (PA), the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, and the Office of International

Assessment of the Effects of Conservation Practices on Cultivated Cropland in the Chesapeake Bay Region



Figure 16.1d

Information Programs (IIP). All report to the secretary of state. A new position, undersecretary of state for public diplomacy and public affairs, has immediate responsibility for ECA, PA, and IIP. The IIP is the principal U.S. government organization for

engaging, informing, and influencing key audiences around the world about U.S. policies, principles, and values—to provide a context for understanding U.S. policy, to help set the international agenda, to forge consensus on common approaches to global challenges, and to help shape the preferences of international actors.[1](#)

DOE/SC-0127



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF
ENERGY

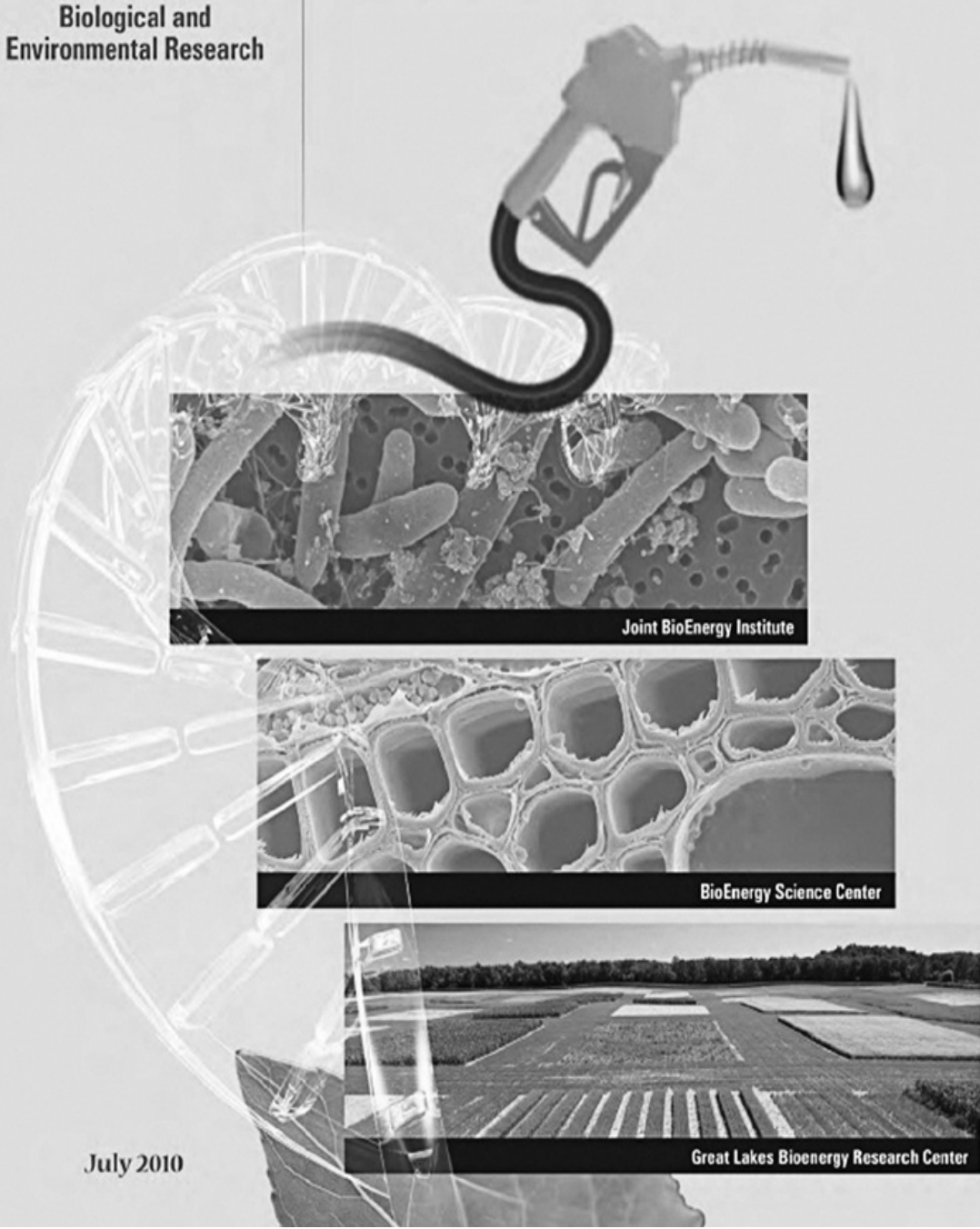
Office of Science

Office of
Biological and
Environmental Research

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY'S

Bioenergy Research Centers

An Overview of the Science



Joint BioEnergy Institute

BioEnergy Science Center

Great Lakes Bioenergy Research Center

July 2010

Figure 16.1e

To achieve their purposes, ECA and IIP use direct contacts, speaker programs, the Internet, media in the host nation, public events and forums, film, and exhibits to communicate the U.S. message abroad. To facilitate two-way communication, their programs include cultural and educational exchanges of scholars, journalists, students, and cultural groups around the world. In much of Europe and in the developing world, ministries, agencies, and institutes—similar in organization to that of the U.S. Department of State—are charged with image making, news gathering and dissemination, and information posturing to counter negative developments that have national or international implications—or both.



Figure 16.2 Reporting Poppy Cultivation in Afghanistan

Courtesy Voice of America.

International Broadcasting

U.S. international broadcasting functions are managed by an independent executive branch: the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG). BBG's nonmilitary international broadcasting reaches an estimated 165 million people each week in 137 markets worldwide. BBG oversees the International Broadcasting Bureau, which in turn operates the following federal entities: the Voice of America, Radio/TV Marti, WorldNet Television, and Alhurra,—an Arabic-language television network. It also manages Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Radio Free Asia,—both of which operate as independent, nonprofit corporations,—and program initiatives such as Radio Sawa, Radio Farda, and Afghanistan Radio Network (see [Figure 16.2](#)). Consistent with the Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act, the BBG and the secretary of state must respect the professional independence and integrity of the International Broadcasting Bureau and its services. The secretary sits on the board, providing information and guidance on foreign policy to the BBG and coordinating its efforts.

All in all, the public affairs practitioner, whether working overseas striving to responsibly expose American culture and values or as an agency representative focused on new policy direction, seeks to provide the targeted publics with the most up-to-date and accurate information available.

Ensuring Active Cooperation In Government Programs

How do citizens expand their knowledge about their civic obligations and duties? What actions should citizens take to fulfill them? Why is it important for citizens to comply with government regulations? And what changes in regulations are in the offing? These are some of the questions that frame governments' use of communication campaigns to remind Americans about the importance of having infants immunized, funded health care benefits, personal security while traveling, or something as simple as changes in filing tax returns each year—to list but a few of many topics.

Without an informed and active citizenry, elected and appointed officials may lose touch with the true needs and interests of their constituents. Programs costing millions of dollars may be undertaken to address public needs that have been overestimated, while more pressing needs remain hidden. Special-interest politics may dominate decision making. Citizen discontent may linger just beneath the surface, and then suddenly appear and be fueled by simplistic rhetoric in place of a deeper understanding of issues.

Even in emerging nations where governments may not be as directly responsive to citizen interests, public affairs is still used as a tactical information tool—albeit in much more constrained ways. Public affairs as a two-way activity depends on the degree to which there is media freedom in a nation. The more independent the news media are of governmental control, the more freedom government public affairs specialists have to conduct public affairs responsively.

Government is intended to provide services that would otherwise be impractical for individuals to provide, such as police and fire protection, civil and national defense, transportation systems, justice systems, social programs, and response to natural disasters. These programs, although administered by government officials, are responses to needs originating with ordinary citizens. As the needs of society have expanded in scope and complexity, government at all levels has also grown. Now, some see government as no longer an extension of the people but rather as an adversary or “big brother.” A labyrinth of bureaus, offices, departments, agencies, divisions, authorities, commissions, councils, boards, and committees has developed. Thousands of forms and reports are generated annually, most containing technical terms and jargon that inhibit many citizens’

understanding and confidence in working effectively with government.

U.S. citizens have increasingly grown to expect more from all levels of government, however. What may start as an offhanded remark such as “There ought to be a law against that!” often leads not just to new regulations but also to agencies with oversight to ensure that the new laws are obeyed. More than ever, government is viewed as the primary mechanism to address injustices and inequities in virtually all activities. Examples of governments’ responsiveness to protect their citizens include the Fair Housing Act, which prohibits discrimination in the sale and rental of housing; labor laws that address discrimination in employment; and government-approved services such as Medicaid.

Fostering Citizen Participation and Support

Specific public affairs objectives vary from agency to agency, but the basic justification for government public affairs rests on two fundamental premises: (1) that a democratic government must report its activities to the citizens and (2) that effective government administration requires active citizen participation and support. Even the staunchest critics of “government propaganda” concede that as government becomes more complex and ubiquitous, the challenge of maintaining citizen involvement and ensuring government responsiveness to societal needs becomes more acute. Elected officials often claim credit for their election on their ability to keep a finger on the pulse of constituents. However, because of the sheer magnitude and complexity of the job, much of that responsibility falls to government public affairs specialists (see [Figure 16.3](#)). In *Communicating for Results in Government*, James L. Garnett discussed the importance of straightforward communication with citizens:

As with planning, budgeting, program evaluation, and other managerial tools, communication is important because it affects people’s control over government. It influences employee morale and productivity and permeates all facets of government. Because government decisions and

actions often affect more people and with greater consequences, communicating in government tends to be more important and often more difficult than communicating in business.²

Thus, governments use communication to seek public understanding and their participation in assisting the less fortunate or disenfranchised as a measure toward building community.

The screenshot shows a website for the Chesapeake Public Communications Department. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links: Economic Development :: Schools :: eServices :: Employment :: Library :: Maps :: News Room :: Taxes. Below this, the page title is "Public Communications Department" with "Print" and "Email" icons. The main heading is "Mission Statement, Goals and Values". A quote reads: "...to ensure communication between the City and citizens." The "MISSION STATEMENT" section states: "The Chesapeake Public Communications Department's overall mission is to ensure communication between the City and citizens to foster a more productive, mutually beneficial relationship." The "GOALS" section lists six bullet points: 1. To provide useful information to Chesapeake residents about the City government, Schools and community at large. 2. To facilitate citizen input and feedback concerning the programs and policies of the City government to aid in the decision-making processes of the City. 3. To encourage citizen involvement and participation in government and community activities. 4. To reinforce the city's identity and community pride among Chesapeake's growing population. 5. To promote a stronger, positive city image outside Chesapeake among specific target publics that is vital to the community's economic well-being. 6. To support the City Council and administration in achieving overall goals and specific community programs. The "VALUES" section states: "The success of the Public Communications Department is attributable to the individual department employees and the values they hold for themselves, their profession and others." A left sidebar contains various links: "Request a City Service" (with phone number 382-CITY), "Bulk Trash", "Recycling", "CHESAPEAKE ALERT" (Sign up for notifications), "CITY DEPARTMENTS", "+ OTHER CITY TOPICS", "Public Communications Department" (HOME), "WCTV Chesapeake Television - Live & On Demand", "WCTV Schedule", "WCTV Streaming", "Citizen Survey", "Contacts", "News Releases & Tip Sheets", "City Council", "City Government", "Agendas", and "Resources for the Media".

Figure 16.3 Public Relations in Chesapeake, Virginia

Courtesy City of Chesapeake, Virginia

The complexity of public affairs work is thus apparent in local government, which provides face-to-face community services. This level is closest to its constituents, both in the support it provides and in the accessibility of elected and appointed officials. Moreover, the growing influence of neighborhood-level activist groups places a unique burden on local governments:

Although the neighborhood associations are infrequently direct initiators of new agenda items, they play an important secondary role in creating a policy-making environment that will be hospitable to some kinds of proposals and unkind to others. They incrementally alter agendas, force initiators to anticipate their preferences, and play a vital role in the planning process at both the neighborhood and citywide levels.³

Also frequently overlooked is government practitioners' responsibility in soliciting and motivating involvement of citizens in governmental decision-making processes. For example, in Australia, federal and state laws require citizen input in planning major infrastructure projects, making "community engagement" a fast-growing part of public relations practice Down Under. Finland, the Netherlands, and Spain have policies in place to promote representative input and to encourage community participation in government processes. In Asia, particularly when dealing with urban environments, governmental and agency reforms call for citizen participation.⁴

In the U.S. Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) of 1972, Congress formally recognized the benefits of seeking advice from, and assistance of, citizens. Although FACA is not a public participation statute, its perhaps unintended effect might very well achieve just that. FACA stimulates discussion of important public issues with private individuals, nongovernmental organizations, or the public at large. Thus, FACA allows for collaboration as a means of obtaining public involvement in a broad range

of issues affecting federal policies and programs. Federal agencies establish or sponsor advisory groups (or committees) that (a) provide advice that is relevant, objective, and open to the public; (b) act promptly to complete their work; and (c) comply with reasonable cost controls and record-keeping requirements.

Often the major obstacle to such public involvement is internal, because elected officials and administrators may be reluctant to have their carefully formulated plans altered by the multitude of interests and viewpoints citizen involvement inevitably generates. In *Policy Studies Review*, Mary Kweit and Robert Kweit discussed the trade-offs inherent in encouraging citizen input:

In the ideal bureaucracy there is no place for citizen participation. Citizens lack the technical expertise, are unfamiliar with bureaucratic routines, and are emotionally involved in issues rather than being detached and rational. Citizens are outside the hierarchy and therefore hard to control. As a consequence, participation may increase the time needed to reach decisions as well as the level of conflict.⁵

Serving As The Public's Advocate

Governments may be public institutions, but they are characteristically bureaucratic, sometimes riddled with process complexity, and often contradictory to the meaning of service. Except for campaigning, elected officials are routinely shrouded behind the machinery of their administrations, rarely interacting with and understanding the day-to-day issues of their constituents. The public affairs officer bridges the desires of the official for accessibility with the people and in turn represents the people's values, opinions, and interests to that official. Public affairs officers provide the frontline "face" for an administration before the public through polling, interviewing, and maintaining constant contact in the community.

The practitioner straddles the need for communicating the organization's agenda and the need to communicate the public's desires, conflicting as they may be, back to the organization. For example, in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, U.S.—

based airlines and the government took restrictive steps regarding passenger movement through airport terminals. Initially, the public accepted the protracted screening process as necessary for better security, but in time sentiment soured to outright complaints of governmental bungling. Public affairs officers in the Department of Transportation and the TSA, the targets of this backlash, brought to their officials a well-researched argument to review the status quo despite accusations of being “soft on security.” Management listened, and the screening processes were modified, which aided in repairing TSA’s credibility.

With the support of their officials, these government public affairs officers performed their traditional public information role, namely, disseminated objective information about their agency (public information model), and, to a lesser extent, used research to develop a basis for advising officials about the need to make changes internally (two-way symmetrical model). This mix of models suggests a mixed-motive approach in which organizations seek to balance their own interests with those of their stakeholders.⁶

Electronic Government and Citizen Participation

Governments in developed democracies, more so than those in developing countries, view information as a rights issue, that citizens are entitled to information on the workings of their government. In 2000, Sweden became the first country in the world to adopt a policy that promotes the civic and political uses of information and communication technology to enhance democracy.⁷ That national policy has aided Sweden’s focus toward becoming an electronic information-sharing society using the latest technology to communicate among citizens and between citizens and their government.

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Conserving the Nature of America

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News & Feature Stories

Fisheries: Conservation and Management
Quilcene National Fish Hatchery Turns 100!
 August 17, 2011

 This Saturday, August 20th, Quilcene National Fish Hatchery in Washington state will be celebrating 100 years of conservation. Quilcene has produced and raised coho, chum, pink, Chinook, and sockeye salmon; and brook, cutthroat and rainbow trout during the last century of operation. There is a public celebration this Saturday where attendees can tour the hatchery, see inside the fish marking trailer, and participate in numerous hands-on, family friendly activities. Photo Caption: Quilcene staff handling fish. Credit: Larry Telles / USFWS

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Threatened and Endangered Species: Achieving Recovery and Preventing Extinction
Salazar Announces Successful Recovery of Lake Erie Watersnake
 August 15, 2011

 Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar today announced that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service removed the Lake Erie watersnake, a harmless

Director's Corner

Drop by the Director's Corner and meet the Service's new Director, Dan Ashe



Our Social Media Sites

the Open Spaces blog
A talk on the WILD side



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on Facebook
 Like 18,745
 Follow @usfwsHQ · 5,577 followers

Figure 16.4 Home Page of U.S. Fish and Wildlife

Courtesy U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

Even though the United States officially may not be an “information nation” in the same vein as Sweden, its federal government uses information and communication technologies to deliver a range of services and benefits to the American people and to encourage citizen participation in governance. This is called electronic government—“e-gov” for short (see [Figure 16.4](#)).

Every federal agency and department today has established a direct electronic link to the public via an e-gov focus. The Forest Service’s e-gov initiative includes delivering Web-based information to internal and external constituents on demand, improving public access to agency services, and responding quickly and accurately to information requests, including those made under the Freedom of Information Act and those for commonly requested products, records, data, and documents.

The National Science Foundation (NSF), the federal agency responsible for promulgating basic research in science and education, serves the public and its constituents almost exclusively via the Internet. From its website (www.nsf.gov), the agency provides announcements on all grants and proposals, promotes educational and scientific findings, and supports a host of other informative sites. Capitalizing on the Internet, NSF has nearly quadrupled its service support to researchers and academe, compared to ten years ago.⁸

Managing Information Internally

Communicating internally is yet another major function of government public affairs. Although such communication per se is common in organizations, it assumes a unique significance in government for two key reasons. First, because of the near-instantaneous public dissemination of an organization’s statement, policy pronouncement, or action, it is critical that all echelons of the organization be aware of and conversant with the issues. Second, rumors or half-truths may be destructive or counterproductive to any organization, but it is absolutely disastrous to governmental organizations.

Most federal agencies maintain a public reception area at their headquarters’ offices staffed by knowledgeable greeters. Here, visitors have access to

agency's information via electronic and print media products prepared by its public affairs staff. These frontline employees meeting the public must be fully familiar with the organization's policies, proposed changes, and practices, and not merely focused on the local available services. Employees must be apprised of organizational developments so they may better respond to public requests or concerns on the issues of the day. Their knowledge of issues fosters an immediate dissemination of key messages directly to a using or inquiring constituency.

Facilitating Media Relations

Democratic traditions require that a nation's governmental agencies be accessible to the news media; hence, media relations is a fundamental function of public affairs officers. The very nature of governmental programs makes their stakes so high that media interest is also high. Political theorist Jodi Dean succinctly captured the essence of that interest: "Democracy needs media."⁹

The Department of Defense's Directorate of Defense Information (DDI) and the Department of Agriculture's Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) both have media hotlines that are good examples of executive officials recognizing the importance of immediate response to the media. The FSIS's hotline serves media outlets' expectation for timely and accurate information about the government's response to a pathogen discovered in the nation's food chain. It uses frequent media contact and early sharing of information to keep the attending press well informed about agency issues, resulting in more balanced and better informed reporting by the journalists covering the agency. Likewise, DDI staff operate around the clock and serve as the clearinghouse for all media-directed queries to the Department of Defense.

Building Community and Nation

Because the public affairs practice emphasizes relationship management, it plays an important role in community and national development.¹⁰

Governments use national campaigns for development—in promoting health, fostering tribal or ethnic relations, creating an environment for international investment, providing opportunities for acquiring job skills, expanding international trade, and advancing international relations.[11](#)

U.S. Programs

To tackle what the U.S. Food and Drug Administration calls the “nation’s obesity epidemic,” the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services launched “Steps to a Healthier U.S.,” a bold initiative to promote healthful lifestyles in communities. To support First Lady Michele Obama’s anti-obesity program aimed at children, the U.S. Department of Agriculture replaced the much-criticized “Food Pyramid” with the much simpler “Food Plate” icon. Several communities across the United States have information and practice delivery partners: faith-based organizations; employee worksites; “patient navigators,” who assist the uninsured and rural families to access health care; kids’ networks; and other nonprofit organizations, all of which advocate and promote health and prevent disease.



Courtesy of the USDA

Other Nations

Globally, the United States along with many other nations responded quickly and without restrictions to aid victims in the aftermath of the March 11, 2011, catastrophic earthquake and tsunami in northeast Japan, as well as an earlier earthquake that struck Haiti on January 12, 2010. Notwithstanding previous political relationships with the affected countries, nations poured in food supplies; medicines, medical equipment, and emergency response staffs; engineering equipment and operators; and general support in a global effort to restore the affected areas.

In parts of the developing world that are ravaged by diseases, government-sponsored health campaigns use a variety of communication channels—public service announcements, radio soap operas, billboards, slogans, posters, local entertainers, murals, and social encounters—to inform citizens of the life-threatening consequences of HIV/AIDS or malaria and their implications for their national economies. Government-sponsored HIV-prevention programs in Uganda, one of a handful of success stories in sub-Saharan Africa, use an easily recognized national slogan as the centerpiece of a massive campaign to stem the spread of the disease—“ABC,” which stands for abstain, be faithful, use condoms.[12](#)

Malaysia uses communication campaigns in a variety of nation-building programs to foster interethnic relationships among its citizens of Malay, Chinese, and Indian ancestry. Begun in the mid-1980s, that nation’s Department of National Unity launched a Neighborliness Campaign to improve awareness about social goals and to foster cooperation with other races at work, in communities, and in pursuit of national unity.[13](#)

Barriers to Effective Government Public Affairs

Public affairs practitioners in government shape much of the meaningful dialogue necessary to make democracy work. Their work carries with it a

civic obligation to serve as intermediaries between elected officials and staff on the one hand and citizen constituencies on the other. Yet, three major issues hamper the work of building and maintaining government and citizen relationships: questionable credibility, public apathy, and legislative hostility.

Questionable Credibility

The public's perceived believability and trustworthiness of public affairs practitioners in general, and governments in particular, have been an irksome issue for decades. Whenever communication practitioners are perceived to have questionable ethics, it is logical to expect that the organizations they represent reflect practitioner values and ethics. Too often, government public affairs is variously referred to as "just PR" or "propaganda machines" and its implementers as "spin doctors" or "flacks." These pejorative labels notwithstanding, the public affairs officer is often the first and probably only contact for a citizen seeking information about a program or relief from a problem or shoddy service.

To shore up its credibility among citizens, the U.S. federal government took two key actions. First, it approved the Electronic Freedom of Information Act Amendments of 1996 to harness technological innovations; to further open government to public advocacy groups, the news media, scientists, scholars, and others engaged in research; and to enhance public access to computerized government information.¹⁴

Second, it passed the Data Quality Act in 2001, which requires federal agencies to develop standards for using and disseminating substantively accurate, objective, and credible information and to develop supplementary guidelines for reviewing and disseminating scientific research information.

An example of government actions that could fuel the perception of questionable government communication was the assertion by the United States and some European governments that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Professor Edward Lordan argued that "the WMD claims have inevitably reduced the (Bush) administration's credibility, nationally and internationally, at a time when trust is at a premium."¹⁵ He further stated

that the U.S. government's reinterpretation of its earlier statements on WMD exerted pressure on various administration units that resulted in new messages that had subtle shifts from earlier positions and were sometimes contradictory. In fact, the failure to communicate accurately the circumstances of the Iraqi WMD program and other Iraqi war developments are defining examples of "spin" for the Bush administration.

The public shift from open support to public outcry was dramatically apparent in the aftermath of the release in July 2004 of U.S. and British government reports on their intelligence-gathering activities before the start of "Operation Iraqi Freedom." The perceived credibility of government information among citizens was that both governments failed in exercising their full responsibility to question the veracity of amassed intelligence. That failure further eroded citizens' confidence worldwide about the credibility of government-disseminated information. As a reflection of public perceptions of government communication, apathy looms large.

Public Apathy

Unlike most business operations, government practitioners usually cannot target small segments of broad publics to achieve desired results, ignoring the rest of the people. An automobile manufacturer, for example, may be satisfied with 10 or 20 percent of the car-buying adults in a country. Government seeks to serve all taxpayers, or at least as great a portion as possible. This is an extremely difficult task, complicated by the lack of interest among many citizens.

City councils, county boards of supervisors, citizen advisory boards, and commissions all struggle with apathy each time a public hearing is scheduled, frequently cutting meetings short when few, if any, citizens show up to voice an opinion. Local government agencies that appoint citizens to serve on advisory boards often have woefully few candidates from which to choose.

Contributing to public apathy are citizen frustration and a general sense of impotence toward government at all levels. Correct or not, the popular perception of government is one of gridlock, as exemplified by the debt

ceiling debates between the administration and Congress. Governance has grown too complicated for most citizens, either to understand or to gain access to services easily. For example, simple home remodeling often requires the help of an architect or development consultant to ensure that proper permits are acquired and that no environmental regulations are violated.

Legislative Hostility

The public affairs function has been established longer in government than in any other field of practice, yet it has never been totally effective or given the respect enjoyed by practitioners in the private sector. In government, as in other organizational settings, public affairs is a legitimate management function that helps make agencies, departments, and other public entities responsive to the citizens they serve. However, government practitioners often face more hostility and suspicion than do other practitioners. They have had a rocky status at the federal level, where Congress has been hostile to information activities in the federal executive branch.[16](#)

Legislative opposition is often stimulated by other sources of hostility. The formidability of early federal public relations practices shocked the Congress and highly placed interest groups at the turn of the nineteenth century. Beginning in 1905 through 1909, the Forest Service—an obscure, newly established agency led by its first chief, Gifford Pinchot—aggressively and successfully carried the favor of key newspapers and special-interest groups to spread the chief’s messages. (See [Figure 4.6](#) on page [86](#).) Pinchot and his “press officers” took the conservation debate straight to the people and clearly reshaped the nation’s attitude toward unchecked logging and use of public lands (see [Figure 16.5](#)).

Finally, the Roosevelt–Pinchot campaign for land conservation sparked congressional reaction, thanks largely to the efforts of spokespersons of lumber interests, mine operators, and cattle grazers who had been exploiting the nation’s public lands. Congressman Franklin Mondell



Circa 1910 illustrating Gifford Pinchot's powerfull use of the press to lobby for protection of Alaska's forests.

Figure 16.5 “Alaska” Editorial Cartoon [Circa 1910]

Courtesy of U.S. Forest Service.

of Wyoming, spokesman for sheep and cattle ranchers, won adoption of a 1908 amendment to the agricultural appropriation bill dealing with the Forest Service, which read:

That no part of this appropriation shall be paid or used for the purpose of paying for in whole or in part the preparation of any newspaper or magazine articles.¹⁷

Thus, the first effective use of public relations to promote acceptance of an administration’s policies brought congressional restriction of the function in the executive branch. Congressional ire erupted next in 1910, when Joseph T. Robinson, a representative from Arkansas, demanded an investigation of the Census Bureau for employing a special agent at \$8 per day in 1909. The agent was to explain to the public the purpose of the 1910 census. Census Bureau Director E. Dana Durand insisted that it was essential, if the census were to be complete, that all citizens and noncitizen residents be reached—through newspapers, the foreign-language press, and agricultural weeklies—and be assured that their replies would not be used for taxation purposes, as census data are confidential. The committee, after hearing this, tacitly approved.

By 1912, the number of “publicity agents” employed by executive departments was growing, and some campaigns were not beyond reproach. In May 1912, Rep. John Nelson of Wisconsin gained passage of a House resolution to investigate meat inspection in the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Bureau of Animal Industry. Early in the hearings, Nelson was angered by a circular criticizing the resolution and defending the department; the pamphlet had been published before the hearings opened. He charged that the department was using publicity to discredit one of its accusers, and he

introduced a House resolution to investigate “the expenditure of public moneys for press bureaus, postage, stationery, and employees by the Department of Agriculture and by other departments; and that said committee be directed to make recommendations to the House as to what steps are necessary to protect public funds from newspaper exploitations.”¹⁸ The resolution did not pass.

A year later, the Civil Service Commission advertised for “a press agent to help boom the good roads movement” in the Office of Public Roads. The circular called for a “publicity expert” whose “affiliations with newspaper publishers and writers are extensive enough to secure publication of items prepared by him.” The circular prompted Rep. Frederick H. Gillett to offer an amendment to an appropriations bill specifying that no money could be spent for publicity unless specifically authorized by Congress. It passed.

Today, the 1913 Gillett Amendment remains embedded in law. It is only one of six restrictions on the function that has been written into U.S. codes and is a source of much confusion. As one government public affairs officer observed, “The amendment does not prohibit the use of publicity; it merely states that such funds be clearly identified.”¹⁹ He said that the 1913 amendment continues to intimidate those who work in government public affairs.

Legislative opposition to the function at all levels has led to legal restrictions, circumvention of budgetary procedures, and wasteful practices designed to conceal legitimate government functioning. Legislative hostility and self-serving posturing by elected and appointed officials also cause many competent professionals to shy away from government service as public affairs practitioners.

Government–Media Relations

Since the very beginning of American government, the First Amendment to the Constitution has guaranteed freedom of the press. This freedom was vital to the founders of the new nation, so much so that Thomas Jefferson said, “Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without

newspapers or newspapers without government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter.”

Media Access to Government

Over the years, the constitutional freedoms guaranteed to the press have been expanded and clarified. Access to government information, in addition to the freedom to speak out or write freely about government, has been codified in freedom of information legislation and “sunshine laws.” Except for well-defined areas, such as national security, litigation, certain personnel records, and so forth, virtually every piece of information maintained by the government is open to inspection by the press, as well as by the public. In most cases, a reporter can demand to see unfinished drafts of reports and handwritten notes if the reporter has specific knowledge of these and can request them with adequate specificity.

The right of access to government information and meetings is of paramount importance. Beyond just informing citizens about the official actions of government, the indispensable role of the media as the watchdog of government helps guarantee accountability, reduce corruption, and crystallize public issues and opinions. In addition, the watchdog media serve as the citizen’s representative in the broad system of checks and balances. Consequently, government–media relationships are often adversarial. Government frequently argues it is more effective if it has a degree of privacy in formulating strategies. The media counter that the public’s business should be transparent to ensure that all activities are conducted ethically and in the public interest.

The idea of the news media having responsibilities beyond simply providing the facts and offering a few editorial columns is becoming more accepted. Sometimes labeled “public journalism” or “civic journalism,” a more activist form of news coverage is being used by a growing number of media covering government agencies and programs.

The new role of these news organizations is not without criticism. Many government officials condemn the effort as ignorant of the basic principles of

representative government. Many assert that American democracy is founded on the idea that most ordinary citizens—who do not have the time, expertise, or interest to fully research and understand complex and numerous issues facing governments—elect persons they trust to conduct the public’s business. Reaching consensus, they argue, is a difficult, arduous process already criticized for its snail-like pace. Injecting additional entities with tremendous publicity powers but no legal accountability is counterproductive. Likewise, many journalists are fearful that, by becoming newsmakers themselves, reporters and editors may lose the objectivity, independence, and courage to report on public issues.[20](#)

Government Dependence on Media

The relationship between journalists and government is simultaneously an unquestioned necessity and an obstacle to government communication with citizens. A shortage of media attention is rare, but it usually comes when government agencies want it least. On the other hand, when government agencies want media attention, journalists may decide that the information is not newsworthy, or they are so focused on other stories that they fail to notice a government news release.

The standards used by reporters and government communicators to define news are usually quite different. It is not surprising that much information considered by individual agencies to be of vital importance gets lost in the mountains of information generated by public affairs staffs. Besides, the news media do not have resources to cover all that is the public’s stake in government, in part because there are not enough journalists on media payrolls to adequately track all the activities and developments in the many agencies at all levels of government.

Media Reporting of Government

In days gone by, news of government was a relatively simple matter of personalities, oratorical political campaigns, elector’s effectiveness, and the

like. It was entirely different from reporting today's governmental activities, which include international trade and outsourcing, world affairs, nuclear energy and waste disposal, mental health, space travel, issues affecting equal opportunity, global warming and the environment, terrorism, and war—not to mention, raising the debt ceiling and the national debt crisis. Interpreting the complexities of government requires trained specialists and often takes more time than news media deadlines permit. Hence, government public affairs practitioners play an essential role in working with journalists to communicate with citizens.

The media have made much progress in their reporting of governments, but the need for governments to strengthen and supplement today's reporting by the media is greater than ever. Problems in media coverage of the U.S. federal government are not always the fault of either the media or individual journalists. Rather, shortcomings in coverage are due to the magnitude of the task, as the size of the job is staggering. Washington dominates the news system in the United States. News organizations, according to Michael Grossman and Martha Kumar, "have become one of the principal forces on the national political scene, influencing the other major forces—the President, Congress, the bureaucracy, the parties, and the pressure groups—and in turn being influenced by them."²¹

As the public affairs practice in government matures and becomes increasingly professional, however, it is demonstrating its ability to make government more responsive to citizens' needs and concerns, gain acceptance of necessary programs, and make services widely available to those who need them.

In short, the public affairs function in government is increasingly recognized as a truly essential element of effective government.

Notes

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Study Guide

1. Why do government agencies hire public affairs officers? In your answer, discuss some of the major goals of government public affairs programs.
2. What role does a public affairs officer play when dealing with both an elected official and the citizens who elected that person? Why is this role necessary?
3. What are the three barriers that limit the effectiveness of government public affairs programs?
4. The 1913 Gillett Amendment remains embedded in current law. What does the amendment restrict and how did it become law?
5. Why have public affairs officers become increasingly important in government at all levels?

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This chapter was written in collaboration with George D. Lennon, Director for Public Affairs, the National Science Foundation. Prior to taking his current position, he was the national director of the Office of Communication, U.S. Forest Service, Washington, DC. He is a retired lieutenant colonel, U.S. Army, where he held infantry command assignments and senior staff positions, and culminated his 21-year career as the strategic plans officer for special operations in the Office of the Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs).

Chapter 17 Military Public Affairs

Learning Outcomes

After studying [Chapter 17](#) this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Describe the roles of public affairs (public relations) in the military branches.
2. List and discuss the major goals of military public affairs programs.
3. Identify the major difference between military public affairs and public relations in other settings.
4. Explain why the military “embeds” journalists even during wartime operations.

I must study politics and war that my sons may have liberty to study mathematics and philosophy.

—John Adams¹

The first casualty when war comes is truth.

—Hiram Johnson²

The primary roles of military public affairs is to provide information to the public about military policies and operations; to enhance morale of the men and women who serve; and to showcase the efforts and accomplishments of the men and women serving in the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard. The goal is for an informed citizenry and their elected representatives to have the best information available when making decisions about the policies and operations of the military branches. Military public affairs, however, has no role in advancing or supporting a political agenda.

That is significantly different from a Pentagon news conference with the secretary of defense or his or her spokesperson (both political appointees), in which garnering public support for the president's policies or budget is part of the job. (See [Figure 17.1](#).)



Figure 17.1 Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen

Hold Press Briefing

Courtesy Department of Defense. Photo by R. D. Ward.

Public Relations is Public Affairs in the Military

That difference suggests an important nuance between the practice of public affairs in the military and the practice of public relations in the civilian sector discussed in [Chapter 1](#) : Unlike their civilian counterparts, those working in military public affairs are restricted from and do not try to influence public opinion. Military public affairs officers (PAOs)

- conduct planned and sustained programs on behalf of military leadership.
- deal with the relationships between their military organization and its publics.
- monitor awareness, opinions, attitudes, and behavior inside and outside their military organization—although the military does not survey the U.S. public.
- advise military leadership on how to adjust policies, procedures, and actions found to be in conflict with the public interest and military effectiveness.
- counsel military leadership on the establishment of new policies, procedures, and actions; that are mutually beneficial to the military and its publics.
- establish and maintain two-way communication between their military organization and its publics.

- produce specific changes in awareness, opinions, attitudes, and behaviors inside the military and changes in awareness outside in the U.S. public.
- create new and/or maintained relationships between their military organization and its publics.

Organizationally, the public affairs function is similar to “corporate America” public relations: Much like their civilian counterparts, military PAOs conduct media and community relations as an integral part of their day-to-day work. However, there is a major difference: Internal relations (employee communication) is also the domain of military public affairs, whereas that function resides in the human resources (HR) department in some civilian organizations.

The internal information program is a part of military public affairs because all men and women in uniform are de facto spokespersons for their military services. Those who wear the uniform must have a broad understanding of the service itself, as well as their particular command’s mission and vision. Also, because many military HR policies and benefits are decided by Congress, not the military, the need to inform service members becomes as much a public effort as an internal one.

Unique Challenges in the Military Setting

Many issues face the military daily in the public arena. The U.S. military spent more than a decade in sustained combat operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, and these are still high on the public and media agendas. The Defense Department (DoD) is also the second largest spender of U.S. tax dollars, behind the combined social programs of Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. In fact, if you remove these three social programs and the national debt, then DoD’s budget is the same size as the combined budget of all the other government departments and agencies. As a result, defense spending is always front and center in the budget debates.

As a public organization with major visibility, the U.S. citizens and the Congress are key stakeholders, so getting information out and getting it right are critical. Also, today more than ever, the military and civilian cultures are almost separate and distinct with little understanding between them. The role of public affairs has become even more critical as this separation grows between a citizenry in which serving in the military was once mandatory and widespread, but today less than 5 percent of the U.S. population has had military experience.

The cultural schism is further complicated in an information age of radical transparency. As a result, the communication takes on new dimensions unheard of in what has been a historically silent and somewhat secret-prone culture. (See [Figure 17.2](#)) Therefore, the need to communicate between the military and its primary public, the U.S. taxpayers, has taken on more importance in the military ethos. Add in one other dimension after more than a decade of military operations since 9/11—the potential conflict between the need to inform the public and the need to protect operation security when disclosing certain information can get soldiers on the battlefield killed. Today, more than ever, it is apparent that the skills of military public affairs officers must be sophisticated and strategic.

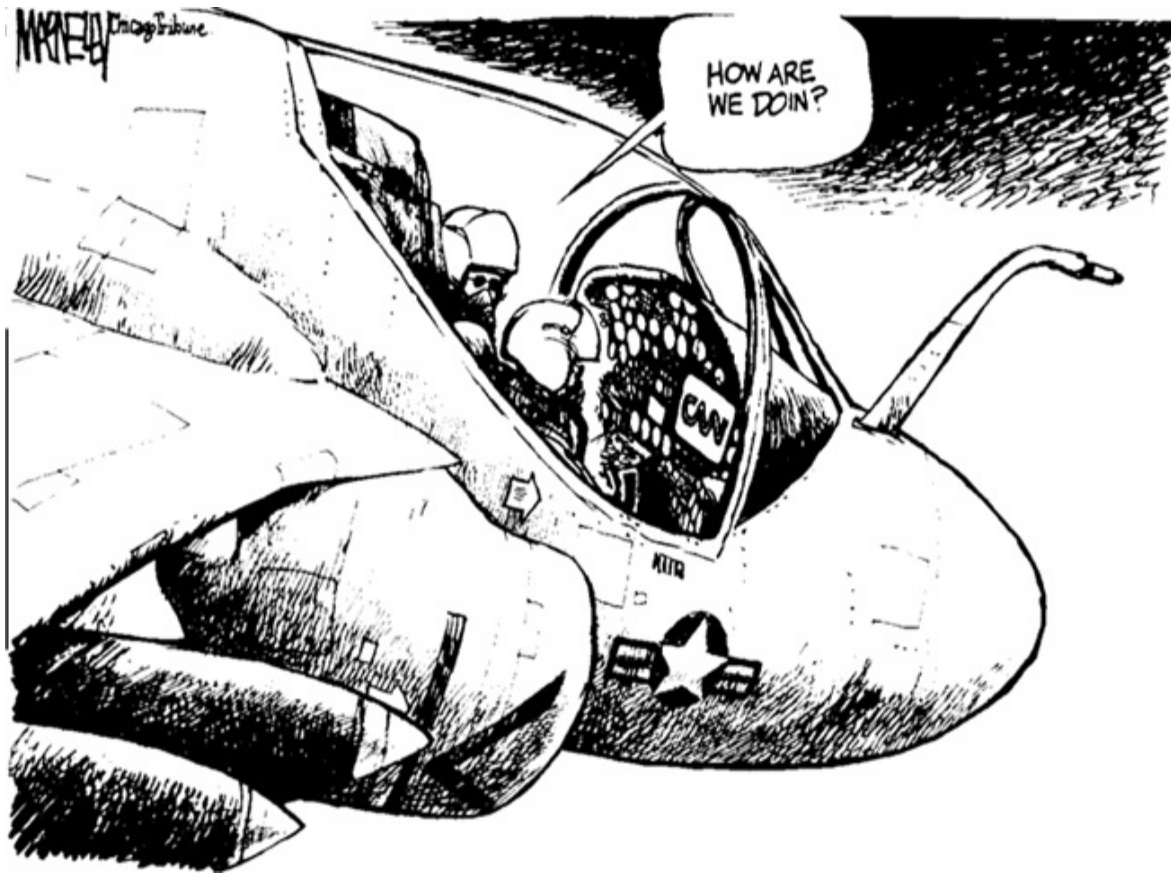


Figure 17.2 “How are we doing?” CNN War Coverage

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Additionally, environmental issues; nuclear issues; medical issues—especially suicides, posttraumatic stress, and traumatic brain injuries; and accidents with weapons, aircraft or ships are hot buttons in the public domain. And when you have a large, globally visible organization such as the military, internal issues sometimes make front-page news and lead stories for tabloid television programs. Some of the most noteworthy have little to do with national defense, security, nuclear weapons, or similar topics. Instead, the focus of many administrative investigations and news media stories are about sex scandals, sexual assaults and rapes, and military leaders being

relieved of duty. As a result, internal communication skills are also widely practiced. PAOs regularly discuss issues with commanders so they can help them communicate on internal issues such as pay, allowances, behavior, and policy. The military public affairs officers oversee production of numerous internal print, online, and broadcast media to reach the globally dispersed audience of military members and their families.

The Need for Transparency and Engagement

To deal with the natural tensions created by the coverage of difficult issues and tension between the press and the military, DoD developed Principles of Information (<http://www.defense.gov/admin/prininfo.aspx>) for telling its own story to the public, setting its own ethic standards and guiding its relationship with the media (see [Exhibit 17.1](#)). These principles reflect the long-held view that “The American public must be informed about the United States’ military operations, and this information must be provided through both the news media and the government.”³

Exhibit 17.1

Principles of Information



U.S. Department of Defense

Washington, DC

It is Department of Defense policy to make available timely and accurate information so that the public, the Congress, and the news media may assess and understand the facts about national security and defense strategy. Requests for information from organizations and private citizens shall be answered quickly. In carrying out that DoD policy, the following principles of information shall apply:

- Information shall be made fully and readily available, consistent with statutory requirements, unless its release is precluded by national security constraints or valid statutory mandates or exceptions. The Freedom of Information Act will be supported in both letter and spirit.
- A free flow of general and military information shall be made available, without censorship or propaganda, to the men and women of the Armed Forces and their dependents.
- Information will not be classified or otherwise withheld to protect the Government from criticism or embarrassment.

- Information shall be withheld when disclosure would adversely affect national security, threaten the safety or privacy of U.S. Government personnel or their families, violate the privacy of the citizens of the United States, or be contrary to law.
- The Department of Defense's obligation to provide the public with information on DoD major programs may require detailed Public Affairs (PA) planning and coordination in the Department of Defense and with the other Government Agencies. Such activity is to expedite the flow of information to the public; propaganda has no place in DoD public affairs programs.

The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs has the responsibility for carrying out the commitment represented by these Principles.

Courtesy Department of Defense

Another strategy for transparency consistent with the principles was to “embed” journalists with U.S. forces in many operations or deployments. The biggest effort of having media “ride along” with military forces was during Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003 (see [Exhibit 17.2](#)). Even today, many instances of media being embedded still occur.



Exhibit 17.2

Journalists Embedded on the USS Constellation

Commander Wendy L. Snyder

U.S. Defense Press Officer for policy:

Africa, Europe, NATO, Russia

Pentagon, Washington, D.C.

In January 2003, approximately 35 journalists from around the world embedded aboard the U.S. Navy aircraft carrier USS Constellation (CV 64), one of three U.S. carriers deployed to the Persian Gulf for Operation Iraqi Freedom. I was the public affairs officer (PAO) for USS Constellation and was responsible for the press embed while managing day-to-day public affairs for the ship and battle group.

Although general PAO functions working with the news media did

not change, management of information did. The 24-hour deadlines and eagerness for information put a strain on my “day job” serving the admiral and the captain of the ship. Some reporters were demanding, others more accommodating. Live news coverage, new media deliverables, and the divergence of the operational tempo meant added work to get the message out.

Target audiences were vastly different. With journalists from around the globe, “home” meant the whole world. Language barriers often required more time to explain information after an interview or background on information for their news articles or broadcasts. Cultural differences meant more time was needed to explain the daily routine aboard ship. Smoking, for example, created quite a fuss initially when the journalists first arrived. Daily routine aboard ship for sailors who smoke means going to a designated area and only when they have time for a short break during their busy workday. Many journalists were not happy about this rule as they wanted to smoke whenever and wherever. When they were restricted from doing their job because they were not willing to adhere to the ship’s rules and regulations, however, for safety reasons, among others, they eventually came around.

Working on little to no sleep was difficult, but the fact that we were all in the same boat allowed for a lighter side. The press corps, for example, showed me a news announcement they had received about “Operation Burning Candle.” I had no information but spoke with the admiral anyway. He agreed to do a press conference. Without details, I was very nervous. (Never let an admiral go into a news conference on a subject that you know nothing about!) When everyone arrived, all cameras turned on me as the entire group (admiral included) cheered, “Happy Birthday, PAO! This is your Operation Burning Candle,” and presented me with a cake.

Working closely with the news media under these circumstances gave me a new appreciation for their daily rigors. The same held true for reporters observing the PAO. Many said to me, “I had no idea...” and, “It amazes me how young the sailors are with such a

great deal of responsibility!” (Note: The average age of a sailor working on the flight deck helping launch multimillion-dollar aircraft is about 20.)

Regardless of the challenges, it was an amazing experience and one that I think every military PAO should have at least once in a career to really appreciate how the two roles are vital in delivering the message. The news media need us and we need them.



Courtesy Glen M. Broom.

The embed program resulted in broad accomplishments for the military: unprecedented access, better understanding of military life, reporters also serving as the link back home, greater trust that eased some tension, increased information exchange, and better military–media relationships. One writer summed up the program as follows:

Embedding ... humanizes both the journalist responsible for informing

the public and the soldier tasked with protecting the people. In addition to providing realistic coverage of history unfolding, it ensures that the media are not operating independently on the battlefield. Most important, embedding provides an empathetic forum for a journalistic profession with far too few former soldiers and a profession of arms with too few former journalists.⁴

The military's programs and policies frequently are criticized in the news media. For example, gays in the military stirred considerable debate on the appropriateness of the "don't ask, don't tell" rule, an attempt to avoid discharging otherwise capable military personnel because of their sexual preferences. In a larger context, the military is often held to far higher standards of conduct and performance than the general population, with very little tolerance for error or personal indiscretion. According to Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Gary Roughead:

We are not setting the bar any higher than it's been set before. ... We're not pushing the bar up. We're holding the bar, and where is everyone else? ... When we put a commanding officer in a unit, at sea or wherever it may be, there's a lot of accountability, a lot of authority, and we expect a heck of a lot of them.⁵

U.S. citizens expect the military to perform at its peak capabilities all of the time. Hence, an illicit affair or a violation of rules and procedures by a senior military official can become the main story of the day.

Aware that it is always in the public's eye, the military pursues aggressive, community relations programs that permit it to tell its story from the "bottom up." For example, the military seeks to tell the story of its members' successes and opportunities and the military's overall value to society. As good neighbors to local jurisdictions, leaders of military bases serve in advisory roles to local governments and public enterprises. Military rank-and-file members are encouraged to actively participate in their local communities as well. It is no coincidence there are higher percentages of Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops, active participants in local civic organizations, and community-based after-school programs in communities that host military bases. Participation in parades, base and shipboard open houses, and flyovers and flag presentations at public events permit the military to remind

citizens that it is involved in their communities in addition to contributing to the nation's security.

This large and visible role in media and community relations has led to an alignment of military's public affairs staffs into professional communities and provided for the professional training and recruitment of trained public affairs personnel.

Professionalization of Military Public Affairs

The practice of military public affairs has had to adapt and the military has had to professionalize the public affairs field, as well as further integrate it into the management of the military force. The military for more than two decades has been carefully nurturing the professionalism of its public affairs staff and building better relations with its stakeholders. Many of the former journalists, photographers, and the public affairs officers who fulfill the responsibilities of military public affairs were trained at the Defense Information School, Fort George G. Meade, in Maryland, or at universities offering undergraduate and graduate curricula in public relations.

For example, the Department of Defense entered into a contract with San Diego State University in 2005 to offer an accelerated master's degree program for active duty public affairs officers. The prime mover was the U.S. Navy, but students from the Air Force and Marines also are enrolled. A total of 72 officers completed master's degrees in the first seven years of the program, with many also earning PRSA accreditation (APR) while in or shortly after the program. As Air Force Major Jonathan Riley said of the program from his new assignment in Air Force public affairs at the Pentagon: "I'm thinking at a level I wasn't thinking before I went into the program. I'm more strategic now and have more of a foundation in theory. This will help me in everything I do on the job, every day. It changes everything."⁶

A new accreditation status for military public affairs specialists recognizes the professional status of this specialty: The Public Relations Society of

American and Joint Public Affairs Support Element (JPASE) combined to offer an “APR+M” certification (see [Exhibit 17.3](#)). APR+M indicates that the public affairs specialist has met all the qualifications of PRSA accreditation, and has completed a rigorous course of study about military public affairs in joint operations.

Military public affairs is increasingly active in professional public relations organizations and participating in professional development programs. As a consequence, many civilian public relations practitioners are taking lessons learned from their military counterparts and applying them to the private sector. For example, Rear Admiral (Ret.) T. McCreary and other PAOs are asked to speak at public relations conferences and to do guest lectures on university campuses.



Exhibit 17.3

Day in the Life of a Military Public Affairs Officer

U.S. Navy Lt. Cmdr. Kaye Sweetser, Ph.D., APR+M*

International Security Assistance Force

Afghanistan

When you are a public affairs officer forward deployed at the

headquarters for combat operations, there is no such thing as a typical day. The hours are long and the work can challenge your public acumen. The stakes are high: You are communicating on behalf of 48 nations and more than 130,000 troops. As some have said before, war is not a training ground—you need to come fully trained and armed with expert knowledge of public affairs.

At HQ International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, we start the day with traditional issues like management and environmental scanning at the crack of dawn as we put the final touches on a brief to the four-star general about what has happened in the news over the past 24 hours. We actively participate in what is called the “morning standup” for the commander, where we have a seat at the management table and provide public affairs council to command leadership about the media implications of actions and operations. It is in these daily meetings that you understand how the media operation indeed touches all operations on the battlefield. Nearly every kinetic operation that is briefed includes a note on whether a press release was issued about the operation, and there is discussion about content and media coverage throughout the hour-long meeting.

The bulk of the day is spent doing a good mixture of fielding media queries and strategically planning messages. With both tasks, you find yourself touching on the basics of communication and the importance of knowing one’s audience. While the core information you communicate to an Afghan TV news station is the same as the BBC, the approach should be tailored to each audience.

The same audience-centered approach goes into our proactive communication. A sad fact about Afghanistan is that the country is mostly illiterate, and citizens only have an average of nine years of schooling in their lifetimes. For communicators, we must then understand how people get their news and information. While our Western media outreach efforts might have a major print element to them, our Afghan-centered efforts are based in television and radio.

Being a public affairs officer at war is indeed the ultimate test of

your skill as a communicator. The environment itself is rough, the stories are often difficult to tell, and our target audiences would rather read other stories than about this far-off land in which we serve. If we can break through these barriers and tell the stories of the men and women on the battlefield, then we know all the challenges were worth it.

*In civilian life, Sweetser is an associate professor teaching public relations in the University of Georgia's Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication.

Courtesy U.S. Navy Lieutenant Commander Kaye D. Sweetser

Notes

1. [1](#). John Adams (1735–1826) helped write the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and was second president of the United States (1797–1801).
2. [2](#). Attributed to Hiram Johnson (1866–1945), the 23rd governor of California (1911–1917) and U.S. Senator (1917–1945).
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5. [5](#). Jeanette Steele, “Commanding Officers Face Rigid Standard of Conduct,” *The San Diego Union-Tribune* (August 11, 2011), A1, A6.
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Study Guide

1. List and discuss the seven major goals of government public affairs programs.
2. Outline the three major barriers to effective public relations in government.
3. Identify the major aspects of government–media relations.
4. What three roles does the public affairs function fulfill in the military branches?
5. Describe the major goal of military public affairs programs.
6. What is the major difference between military public affairs and public relations in other settings?
7. Describe what military public affairs officers do in their day-to-day work that is similar to what civilian public relations practitioners do.
8. What does “to embed journalists” mean in military public affairs practice?

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7. www.af.mil
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This chapter was written in collaboration with Rear Admiral (retired) T. L. McCreary, U.S. Navy. McCreary served in the Navy for 27 years, 25 of those as a public affairs officer. He rose to head all of Navy public affairs prior to retiring from the military in 2006. Following his active duty time, McCreary ran Strategic Communication for the U.S. Special Operations Command until 2008, when he became president of Military.com, an Internet company that serves the men and women of the military and their families.

Chapter 18 Nonprofits and Nongovernmental Organizations

Learning Outcomes

After studying [Chapter 18](#) this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Describe the role of public relations in the nonprofit sector.
2. Outline some of the major changes affecting nonprofit organizations.
3. List and briefly discuss major changes in recent public relations practice in nonprofit organizations.

While periods of transformation can strain the fabric of any civil society, the nonprofit sector—the people who work in it and those that support it—provides the strength that ultimately reinforces that fabric and makes it stronger.

—Laura Deitrick¹

More so in the United States than in any other country, voluntary nonprofit organizations provide many of the social, educational, cultural, and welfare services vital to society. In effect, the nonprofit sector fills the gaps in meeting the needs of society left unattended by the other two sectors—for-profit corporations and government agencies. Recognition of the role and importance of nonprofit organizations in society highlights the need for effective public relations in the “third sector.”

The Third Sector

If you attend a state university, listen to public radio, visit museums, go to

church, volunteer at a homeless shelter, buy Girl Scout cookies, or donate clothes and furniture to the Salvation Army, you have encountered a nonprofit organization.

Nonprofit organizations address a range of issues that affect people's lives, including health care, homelessness, environmental concerns, youth development, job training, arts and culture, education, and much more. They are organized to provide a variety of services and activities of public or private interest.

Today there are approximately 1.6 million tax-exempt organizations in the United States, including almost 1 million public charities, about 100,000 private foundations, and about 515,000 other types of nonprofit organizations such as chambers of commerce and fraternal or civic groups.²

Defining Nonprofit Organizations

Nonprofit organizations exist as a special category of organizations in the tax code in recognition that they provide charitable work and serve the good of the public. Although there are various types of nonprofit organizations, and legal distinctions among them, they are all exempt from federal taxes. A definition of the nonprofit sector that can be applied in many countries includes five distinguishing features of such organizations:

1. Organized.

In short, the organization has a charter, regular meetings, officers, rules, or other indicators of relative permanence.

2. Private.

Nonprofit organizations are institutionally separate from government, even if they receive government funding.

3. Not-for-profit.

Nonprofit organizations can make a profit and reinvest it in the agency,

but cannot distribute profits to those who manage or direct it.

4. Self-governing.

Nonprofit organizations govern themselves and their activities, have their own boards of directors and provide opportunities for citizen involvement.

5. Voluntary.

There must be some voluntary participation in the management of the organization, meaning that there is some aspect of charitable contribution involved.

And although debate continues over whether or not the wide variety of charitable tax-exempt organizations truly represents a distinct category that can be meaningfully defined, there is little question about the interdependence of government and the nonprofit sector. At times, public administrators contract with nonprofits for the provision of specific services. At other times, government relies on and therefore encourages and supports the work of nonprofits.

U.S. presidents have long encouraged volunteerism. George H. W. Bush recognized that nonprofit organizations are essential to the quality of life and in some instances the very survival of many citizens. “I have always felt that private citizens, banding together to lift the lives of others, can give the extra special touch of compassion that government is simply incapable of providing.”³

The Clinton administration continued to emphasize the essential role of nonprofit organizations in “building a bridge to the twenty-first century,” and President George W. Bush identified the importance of the church community in addressing pressing community needs by encouraging “faith-based initiatives.” President Barack Obama encourages volunteering, especially on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, to honor King’s commitment to service.

Volunteerism and Philanthropy

Philanthropy is the act of giving resources (money, volunteer time, etc.) to help individuals, causes, or organizations.⁴ In many nonprofit organizations, volunteers mean the difference between providing services and closing down the organization. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 62.8 million people volunteered at least once through or for an organization between September 2009 and September 2010. The organizations for which these volunteers worked were most often religious (34 percent), followed by education or youth-related service (27 percent).⁵

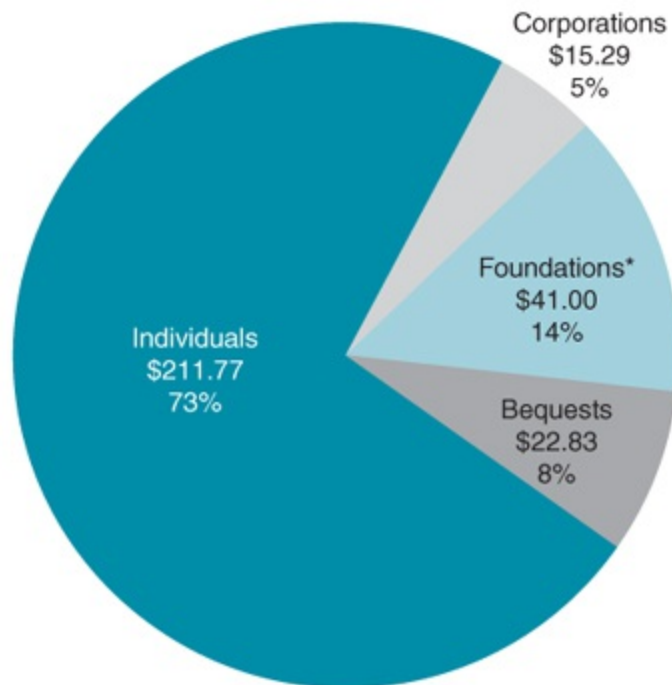
Despite these impressive figures, the number of volunteers and donated dollars are seldom enough to meet the increased demand for nonprofit organizations' services.

While the demand for government services continues to outpace revenues, state, county, and local budgets have been cut, causing even fewer staff and reduced resources for social services. This focuses attention on the importance of philanthropic support for nonprofit organizations—a key educational role for public relations to play.

Fortunately, despite the economic downturn in recent years, charitable giving in America was \$291 billion in 2010, an increase of 2.1 percent over the previous year

Giving USA: The Numbers

2010 contributions: \$290.89 billion by source of contributions
(in billions of dollars – all figures are rounded)



*The giving by foundations estimate is provided by the Foundation Center.

Figure 18.1

Charitable Giving by Source

Courtesy Giving USA 2010, Giving USA Foundation.

(see [Figure 18.1](#) for contribution sources).⁶ According to Eugene Tempel, executive director of the Center on Philanthropy, “Typically, people give because they identify with a cause . . . there are people who feel a

responsibility to give back...and often people will say if they are asked by the right person, they will give.”⁷

The charitable giving was directed to several types of organizations, with religion and education being the largest beneficiaries. [Figure 18.2](#) shows the types of organizations that received contributions.

Changing Environment

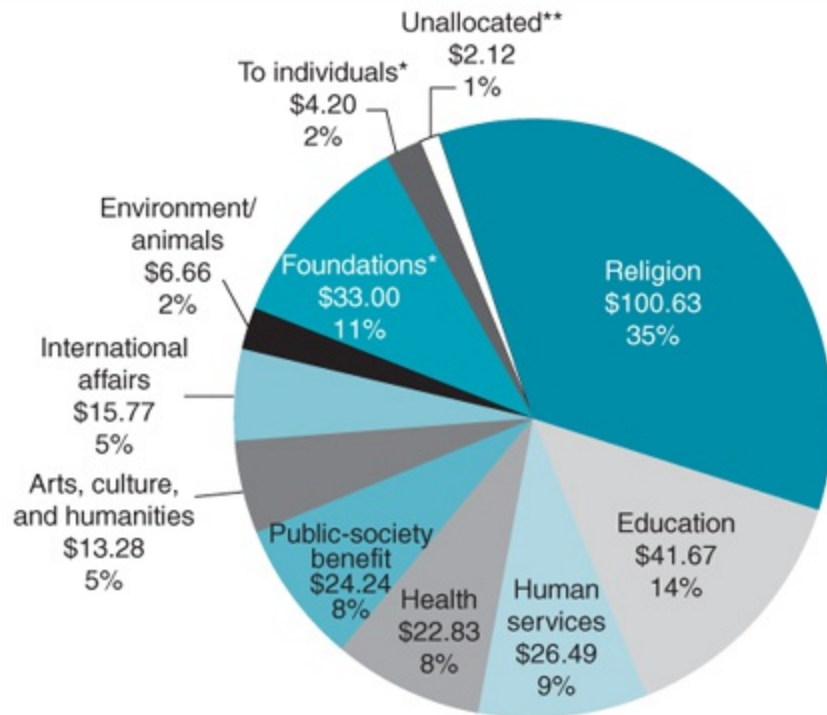
As discussed in [Chapter 7](#), change pressures from the environment cause organizations to adjust and adapt for survival. The nonprofit sector is no exception, as it faces numerous change pressures today:

1. Government cutbacks shift responsibility for public services and assistance to voluntary organizations, and may jeopardize government grants to nonprofits.
2. Competition is intense among charitable groups for financial donations and volunteer support.
3. Demand for social and support services exceed available resources.
4. Diversity and cultural issues in the workplace and among target publics must be addressed.

Giving USA: The Numbers

2010 contributions: \$290.89 billion by type of recipient organization

(in billions of dollars – all figures are rounded)



Includes rounding to get to 100%

*Estimate developed jointly by the Foundation Center and Giving USA.

**See definition in "Key Findings" section.

Figure 18.2

Charitable Giving by Type of Recipient

Courtesy Giving USA 2010, Giving USA Foundation.

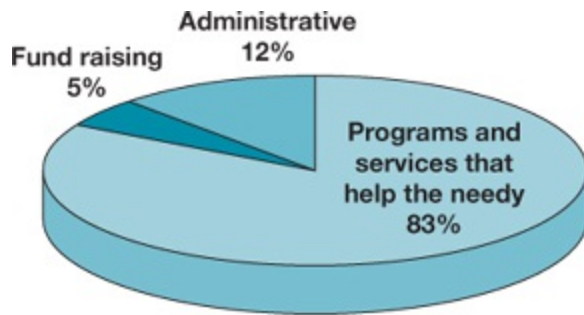
5. There is growing public concern about the credibility and accountability of tax-exempt organizations and whether increased government regulation is needed.[8](#)

6. To address community needs, nonprofits are building collaborative relationships and developing strategic partnerships with corporate donors and/or media organizations.

Scandals have rocked the nonprofit sector. Charitable agencies within the nonprofit sector have been found guilty of child sexual abuse, voter registration fraud, financial mismanagement, excessive compensation, and more. Reform-minded critics and public officials call for more effective policing of all charitable fund-raising and fuller disclosure of how nonprofit organizations spend their funds.⁹ In addition, the IRS revoked the tax-exempt status of 275,000 nonprofits for not filing legally required documents for three consecutive years.¹⁰

Public confidence in nonprofits remains low. A 2008 study by the Brookings Institution found that 34 percent of Americans reported having “not too much” confidence in charitable organizations or “none at all.” The percentage of Americans who said charitable organizations did “very good” in helping people fell from 34 percent in 2003 to 25 percent in 2008.¹¹ And even more troubling is a Harris poll finding that only 1 in 10 strongly agrees that charitable organizations are honest and ethical in their use of donated funds.¹² [Figure 18.3](#) illustrates one nonprofit’s attempt to demonstrate how it spends its resources.

Public relations is charged with both helping rebuild credibility and maintaining or trying to restore public confidence in the many charitable agencies and voluntary groups that serve the needs of so many.



Our record of efficiency and effectiveness is among the very best in the nation.



Figure 18.3 The salvation Army Contribution Solicitation Brochure (Used with Permission)

Role of Public Relations In Nonprofit Organizations

Following a historic pattern, public relations is often added, expanded, and elevated in stature when organizations are confronted by outside forces, threatened with funding cuts or outright elimination, or otherwise pressured to change or reform. The nonprofit sector faces all these crises in an environment of increasing competition for donations, diminishing government subsidies, and increasing demand for services.

Public relations plays an important role in making nonprofit agencies more

successful. In most nonprofits, the public relations role includes internal and external communication to achieve the following:

1. Define or “brand” the organization to build “top-of-mind” awareness, gain acceptance of its mission, and protect its reputation.
2. Develop channels of communication with target audiences, including those the organization serves and those that can impact the nonprofit’s performance.
3. Create and maintain a favorable climate for fund-raising and coordinate communication strategies for fund-raising campaigns. (See [Exhibit 18.1](#) for fund-raising principles.)
4. Support the development and maintenance of public policy that is favorable to the organization’s mission.
5. Recruit and motivate key organizational constituents (such as employees, volunteers, and trustees) to support the organization’s mission, goals, and objectives.

Even though these objectives are common to most nonprofit organizations, the public relations tactics may differ greatly. Some nonprofits, for example, view themselves increasingly as businesses. They take a more strategic approach to managing their operations, developing long-term business plans, and focusing attention on relationship building. Some retain professional public relations consultants.

In addition, intense competition for limited resources and advances in technology require new approaches in how public relations is practiced in nonprofits:

1. Public relations is more integrated with marketing and business development.
2. Leaders in the nonprofit sector (e.g., boards of directors, trustees and program managers) are beginning to engage professional public relations practitioners—either hiring staff or outside consultants.

3. Recruiting volunteers, gaining public support, and helping achieve financial stability are standard expectations of the public relations role.

Exhibit 18.1

Principles of Fund-raising

Preparation

1. The five essentials of a successful campaign are a strong case, effective leadership, conscientious workers, prospects willing and able to give, and sufficient funds to finance the campaign.
2. Committee work and publicity work should be coordinated and spelled out in detail in advance.
3. The cost of a campaign, within reasonable limits, should be estimated in advance.
4. All campaign activities should be given a time limit and specific deadlines.

Committee Work

1. The originating group, whether a committee or a board of directors, should be a representative body.
2. Strong leadership is a necessity.
3. The effectiveness of the group depends on the degree to which individuals accept responsibility.
4. Committees are better at critiquing than creating. Before asking for ideas or suggestions for a plan, give each member of the group a copy of the plan to critique.

Publicity

1. The first objective of publicity is to sell the idea; the second objective is to sell the means of its accomplishment.
2. Publicity materials should appeal both to the emotions and to the intellect.
3. Publicity must have continuity, with all the elements of a campaign tied together with a theme of common appeal
4. Publicity should proceed from the general to the specific.
5. Interest in an idea proceeds from an appeal of general application.
6. Cheap publicity is expensive. Quality in publicity efforts pays dividends.
7. Publicity should be positive and not negative. Effective publicity always plays up elements of strength.

Campaign Operation

1. A campaign should solve immediate financial needs and lay a firm foundation for future campaigns.
2. Effective canvassing answers five questions: why, where, who, what, and how.
3. Campaigns should periodically reach milestones to arouse and maintain interest.
4. All canvassing, even for special gifts, should be conducted in an atmosphere of universality. Prospects typically ask, "What are others doing?"
5. Campaigns should be conducted under a steady and

constant pressure and sense of urgency.

6. The time spent on a campaign varies directly with the size of the goal and inversely with the popularity of the appeal.
 7. The direct appeal for help should be made when interest is at its peak.
 8. There are four tests of the effectiveness of campaign operations: quality, quantity, cost, and time.
 9. Campaign impact is determined by the degree to which the campaign objectives were achieved.
4. Paid advertising has emerged as a major controlled communications tactic for nonprofit organizations, particularly for the health care industry.
 5. Cause marketing and strategic partnerships that link nonprofits with corporate donors and sometimes media organizations are increasingly popular as ways to enhance the reputation of nonprofits and their corporate partners.
 6. Technology—including Web-based communication, emerging electronic media, and portable communication devices—has increased the speed and capability of communication, but has raised questions about ethics and privacy. Occasionally, the convenience and speed of social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube create crises for organizations (see [Exhibit 18.2](#)).

Nonprofit organizations generate revenue from several sources, including individuals, corporations, government support, grants, contracts, reimbursements for services, and more. In addition, they regularly engage in fundraising activities such as walk-a-thons, car washes, auctions, raffles, magazine or bake sales, and so on. But with increasing responsibilities and cutbacks in federal funding, nonprofit managers also seek support from foundations.

Exhibit 18.2

Red Cross Converts Embarrassing “Mistweet”



Ryan found two more 4 bottle
packs of Dogfish Head's Midas
Touch beer.... when we drink we
do it right #gettngslizzerd

HootSuite • 2/15/11 11:24 PM

Late one Tuesday night, a small slip of a finger caused a “mistweet” from @RedCross.

Several hundred followers of the American Red Cross Twitter account who were awake at the time immediately responded—some with wonder and laughter, and others with concern.

A little after midnight, my phone was ringing and my blackberry had “blown up” with emails and Twitter DMs. The phone call was from Jackie Mitchell, head of Communications and Marketing at our Chicago chapter, and she had been alerted about the mistweet from one of our managers.

I deleted the mistweet and then began texting with Jackie about a response. We quickly agreed to think of something funny to say to clear up what happened. Jackie suggested the following response:



We've deleted the rogue tweet but rest assured the Red Cross is sober and we've confiscated the keys.

15 Feb via ÜberSocialOrig

Retweeted by WeGotty and 100+ others



After I published Jackie's pitch-perfect idea, I watched and responded until 4 a.m. as thousands of tweeters continued to react to this silly mistake. By morning, it was clear that the public was standing behind us, saw the humor, and embraced our response. I posted the whole story to our corporate blog once I got to work on Wednesday morning. It was already a viral story and many people actually found the mistake and response charming enough to pledge donations to the Red Cross because of it. Within days even the Dogfish Head beer company mentioned the mistweet and was encouraging financial and blood donations.

If I were outside the organization, I'd find this gaffe hilarious, not because I wish harm on the Red Cross or because I think its services were hindered, but because it's unexpected and therefore fundamentally funny to see a normally quite serious humanitarian organization tweet about craft beer using the lyrics to a popular song. So, my immediate thought when I saw our mistweet was to address it with an equally unexpected reaction—lighthearted humor and acknowledgment. After all, our Twitter account just "tripped on the sidewalk," and instead of throwing a temper tantrum about tripping, we acted like any self-aware person would: we dusted ourselves off, looked around to acknowledge the trip with those who caught it, and had a chuckle with them.

Our response to the mistweet assured those initially concerned that

it was OK to laugh at this anomaly and maybe even identify with and empathize with our humanity a little bit more than before.

Every time I see a nonprofit or company using social tools, my brain reminds me that there's no such thing as nonprofits and companies—there's only a network of people doing work under the same name with the same goals. Social media belong to real humans doing a very human activity connecting with one another over shared interests. We're honored that our mission can serve as a shared interest and that our community allows us to be part of their conversations and activities. In turn, our goal as an entity is to provide value and to empower people to get help and give help with these tools.



Wendy Harman

Director, Social Strategy

American Red Cross

Washington, D.C.

Foundations

Private and community grant-making foundations are part of the growing nonprofit sector. A foundation is a nongovernmental, nonprofit organization that uses its own funds to provide grants and financial assistance, primarily to other unrelated nonprofit agencies for educational, social, religious, cultural, or other charitable activities.[13](#)

There are two general types of foundations—private foundations and public foundations. Private foundations are typically funded by an individual, a family, or a corporation. Public foundations, in contrast, receive funds from multiple sources, including private foundations, individuals, government agencies, and their own service fees.[14](#)

There are more than 76,000 active grant-making foundations in the United States, with assets totaling \$622 billion and total giving of almost \$46 billion in 2010.[15](#) The largest foundation, by size of assets, is the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which has more than \$37 billion in assets. The Ford Foundation is the second largest, with assets totaling more than \$10 billion.[16](#)

Social Service Agencies

Nonprofit social service agencies, sometimes called human service agencies, fill a vital role in the health, safety, and well-being of millions of Americans. These nonprofit agencies and programs fill needs that other organizations are unable to meet, by providing services and resources that are not accessible or not readily available to those who need them. Social service organizations typically are organized to provide parent and child programs, food and nutrition programs, shelter, services for the deaf and vision impaired, drug rehabilitation, services for the mentally ill or refugees, those suffering from depression, and much more. Programs such as Medicaid and food stamps (now called SPAP—the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) are generally considered social welfare programs.

Although federal and state governments spend hundreds of billions of dollars on social welfare and social service programs annually, it is still not enough to meet the demand for services. In many communities, budget deficits are requiring cuts in government spending on social programs. The burden of

funding community nonprofit agencies thus shifts to American philanthropy, as nonprofit agencies strive to do more with less.

A common lament among nonprofit leaders is that the people who need services may not know how to access them or simply do not know that services are available. In ethnically diverse communities, communication must address cultural and language differences or low education levels. People with disabilities may present additional communication challenges.

Given this environment, enlightened nonprofit social service agencies realize that public relations expertise is required to achieve organizational goals such as maintaining existing funding and attracting new philanthropy, building a committed staff and mobilizing volunteers, educating legislators and key community leaders to gain their support, establishing strategic partnerships, and so on. A decision that social service agencies face is whether to use internal staff and volunteers, contract with an outside firm on a limited basis, or hire a public relations professional for these services.

Regardless of which choice is made, it is crucial for social service agencies to muster public support through a planned, strategic public relations program that will endure in good times or bad. [Figure 18.4](#) offers a graphic illustration of the major responsibilities of the Salvation Army that have public relations implications.

To help accomplish its mission, a nonprofit may establish a “cause marketing” relationship with a for-profit business. These relationships can take many forms. For example, a for-profit can conduct a sales campaign or underwrite an event and advertise it as benefiting the nonprofit charity. A media organization may be part of a cause marketing arrangement as well. In that case, a corporate donation is used in part to fund a media campaign featuring a nonprofit agency. As a result, the donor gets positive publicity as a responsible corporate neighbor; the media

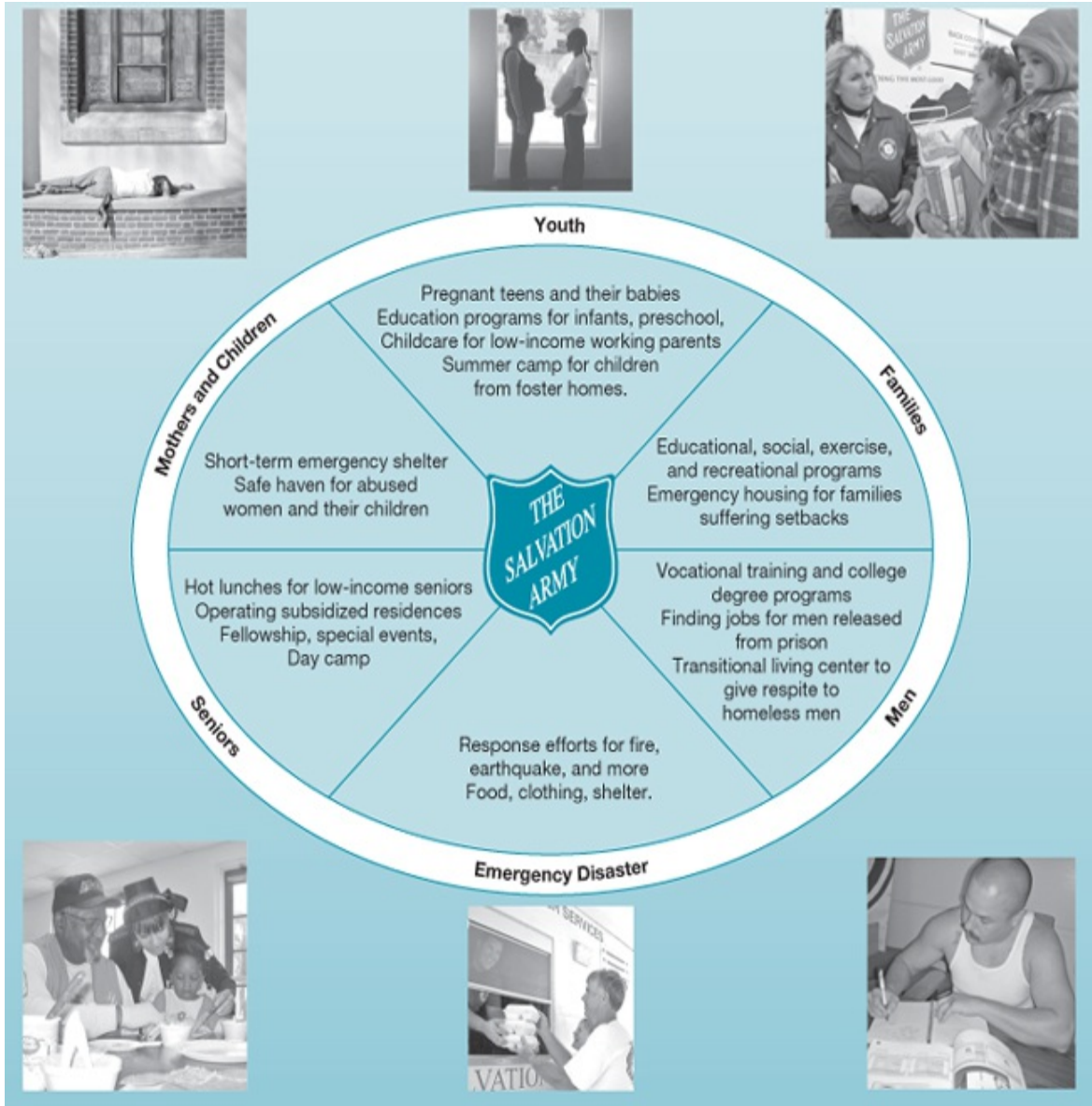


Figure 18.4 The salvationArmy —Doing the Most Good

Used with permission from The Salvation Army, San Diego.
Photos by Suszi Woodroff Lacey and Tod Lilburn.

organization gets the funds and enhances its image as a community leader; and the nonprofit agency receives significant media coverage to reach its

target publics and tell its story.

Cause marketing partners nonprofits with businesses to accomplish mutual goals, such as funding for the nonprofit and an enhanced reputation for the business, which can lead to additional sales.

For example, the Susan G. Komen for the Cure and cruise ship companies developed a cause marketing partnership called “On Deck for the Cure.” Founded by Holland America Line in 2006, the idea behind “On Deck for the Cure” was that cruise ships would organize walks around the ships’ decks, charge a small registration fee, recognize survivors, promote breast health, and donate 75 percent of the money raised to Komen for the Cure. In the first year of the partnership, Holland America donated \$400,000 to the nonprofit. Other cruise line companies joined the “On Deck for the Cure” cause marketing effort, and in one five-year period, their combined donations to Komen for the Cure totaled \$5 million.[17](#)

The funds provide a range of breast cancer services including educational materials, funding for research, free screenings, and treatment for women affected by breast cancer, and more. The cruise lines have enjoyed positive media coverage to enhance their reputation, strengthen customer relations, qualify for tax deductions, and demonstrate their commitment to helping end breast cancer.

Some cause marketing projects involve the design and sale of customized products.[18](#)

For example, Neutrogena partnered with the American Cancer Society (ACS) to fight skin cancer. An awareness campaign explained the dangers of tanning while a special “Pale is the New Tan” T-shirt was sold on Amazon.com, with \$3 for each shirt going to ACS.[19](#)

Faith-Based and Other Nonprofit Organizations

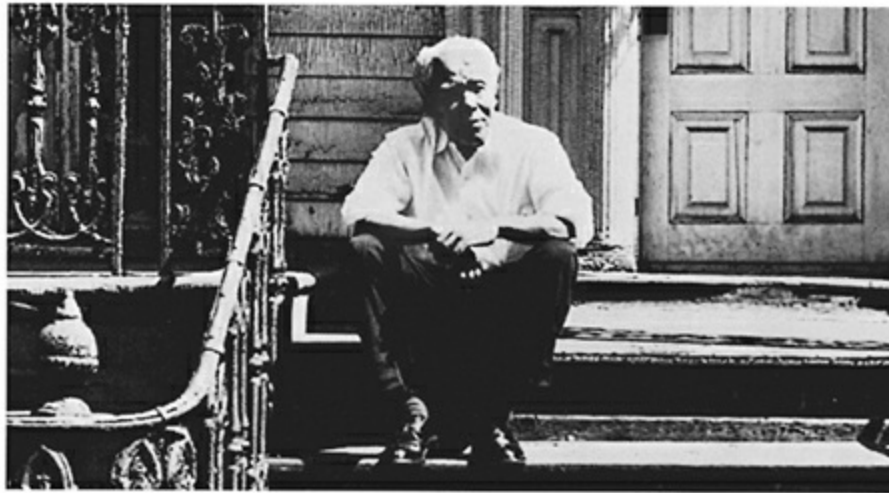
This chapter cannot possibly offer a detailed analysis of all nonprofit settings. Brief descriptions of some of the issues and pressures on churches, libraries, museums, and arts groups will illustrate how the practice of public relations is both as complex and as essential in these settings as in other nonprofit settings. Public relations plays a role in advocating for nonprofit organizations (see [Figure 18.5](#)).

Religion remains an important part of American life. More than nine in ten Americans still say “yes” when asked if they believe in God.²⁰ Religion’s increasing influence on political opinion and behavior rivals factors such as race, region, age, social class, and gender.

A Pew Research Center study reports that many Americans surveyed say religious beliefs influence their views on social issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage. Overall, 35 percent say religion is the top influence on their thinking about same-sex marriage, and 26 percent say

“Meet J. Robert Anderson, Philanthropist”

Meet J. Robert Anderson, philanthropist.



He's not a millionaire. In fact, he's not even rich. But he gives.

Most of the giving in this country doesn't come from the wealthy. Almost half of it comes from people who earn less than \$20,000 a year. Everyday, ordinary people. Like the guy down the street. Or your next-door neighbor. Or 100 million others who, every year, give unselfishly just to help people.

And while those who give

may sometimes go unnoticed, their contributions don't. Because in this country, when a lot of people give, it adds up to a lot.

It helps fund important research. It helps run community church programs. It helps support local charities.

It helps people out.

There are so many things in this country that could use your hand. Your time, your tal-

ents, your money. What you give isn't so important. That you do give is. Because you don't have to



be rich to be a philanthropist. You just have to care.



A Public Service of This Publication & The Advertising Council

From the Advertising Council.

Figure 18.5

“Meet J. Robert Anderson, Philanthropist”

Courtesy The Advertising Council.

religion is the top influence on their opinion regarding abortion. However, few Americans consider religion an important influence on immigration, the environment, or poverty.[21](#)

Organized religion is actively participating in social change efforts. For example, religious leaders in the nonprofit National Council of Churches released an open letter to President Obama urging him to end the war in Afghanistan and provide increased aid to that country.[22](#) In addition, more than 50 religious leaders joined the national budget debate by issuing a joint statement urging Congress to “resist budget cuts that undermine the lives, dignity, and rights of poor and vulnerable people.”[23](#)

Even in good times, however, faith-based organizations are not immune from public relations crises. For example, the Catholic Church was rocked by its child molestation scandal, some television evangelists and faith healers were exposed as lavish spenders and frauds, the Episcopal Church is undergoing a major split over its first openly gay bishop, and other churches are facing consolidation or closing their doors.

On top of such crises, attendance at formal religious services is dwindling, and faith-based organizations face increased competition for volunteer commitment and dollars. As a major force in society and social change, however, faith-based organizations cannot avoid the spotlight. Virtually all the major denominations, as well as many smaller organizations and faith-affiliated schools or hospitals, rely on professional communicators or public relations experts to help build relationships. With this professional help, faith-based organizations are better able to respond to crises, convey strategic messages, enhance their organizational reputation, recruit new members, increase donations, and strengthen the faith of their followers.

Although apparently much less controversial by their very nature and missions, libraries, museums, and arts groups also compete for public support in the form of volunteers, donations, and public funding. Many of these important institutions, which contribute so much to the quality of life, live in

a financial straitjacket that does not permit adequate funding either for their programs or for professional public relations assistance.

Most public libraries in major cities have public relations departments, usually called public information departments. Some establish committees to address numerous public relations and communication issues. For example, libraries face issues like the increasing demand for technology in an age of budget cuts, how to provide library services to mobile phone users, expanding job hunting services to the unemployed, helping teens address issues like homework, creating courses and reading programs, and so on. In addition, things can go wrong at libraries: difficult patrons, censorship issues, workplace violence, and so on, all of which suggest the need for crisis planning.

There are many opportunities for museums in traditional and online media, fund-raising, putting on special events and exhibits, and attracting younger audiences. For example, the San Diego Museum of Art has created a “Culture and Cocktails” event that accompanies the opening of a new exhibit. A party atmosphere is created that includes entertainment, exotic beverages, appetizers, and an opportunity to meet and socialize while visiting the gallery and the exhibit.²⁴

Of course, arts groups face a constant battle to keep the financial wolf from the door. In recent years, both foundations and governments have cut support of cultural institutions and museums.

By necessity, nonprofit organizations recognize the importance of effective public relations and have come to rely on it to attract volunteers and to obtain funding from donors and other public and private sources. Without effective public relations, many nonprofits would have to close their doors, which in some cases would leave the most vulnerable members of society with nowhere to turn.

Nongovernmental Organizations

Virtually all levels of government to some extent rely on and support or

encourage nonprofit and charitable organizations because of the vital services they provide. However, some nonprofits prefer to act independently from governments. A nongovernmental organization, or NGO, typically advocates for public policy on behalf of the people they serve. These institutions may

“Even if animal research
resulted in a cure for AIDS,
we’d be against it.”

— Ingrid Newkirk, President
People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals
USA Today



VS.



Did You Know?

PETA is using your contributions for a campaign to boycott the March of Dimes, the Pediatric AIDS Foundation, and the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation (Race for the Cure).

Why? Because these charities may use animals in their medical research.

Learn more about PETA’s extremist agenda at

ConsumerFreedom.com

The Center for Consumer Freedom is a nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting consumer choices. Help us place more ads like this one by donating online at ConsumerFreedom.com.

Figure 18.6

ConsumerFreedom.com Advocacy Advertisement

Courtesy The Center for Consumer Freedom, Washington, DC.

provide funding, technical advice, and advocacy for people in need. By focusing on a specific mission or cause and relying on the passionate support of committed volunteers, NGOs are able to address issues that others cannot or would not (see [Figure 18.6](#)).²⁵

NGOs focus on a range of issues, such as human rights, environmental protection, animal rights, disaster relief, racial and gender equity, political freedom, and more. NGOs can range in size from large international groups to local “grassroots” groups. They may be called membership or voluntary organizations, advocacy groups, development agencies, or mutual aid societies.²⁶ A few examples of NGOs include the following:

1. Greenpeace and the Sierra Club, international organizations dedicated to protecting the environment.
2. Alcoholics Anonymous, a voluntary worldwide fellowship of people who meet to attain and maintain sobriety.
3. International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, an international organization that mobilizes communities to help people prevent, prepare for, and respond to disasters.
4. UNICEF, an agency of the United Nations that develops programs to improve the health and education of children and mothers in developing countries.
5. CORE, the Congress of Racial Equality, which promotes harmony among all people regardless of race, creed, sex, disability, sexual orientation, religion, or ethnic background.
6. Doctors without Borders, an international humanitarian organization that

brings medical care to people whose survival is threatened by violence, neglect, or catastrophe.

7. Save the Children, an international relief and development organization, which works with families to create opportunities for children to live safe, healthy, and fulfilling lives.
8. The Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, which advances initiatives to eliminate nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction.
9. Catholic Church, the largest Christian church in the world that advocates for social justice around numerous issues including poverty, arms control, death penalty, refugees, and so on.
10. American Civil Liberties Union, or ACLU, a nonprofit organization that works to ensure that rights and freedoms guaranteed in the United States Constitution are not denied to individuals.

NGOs are not part of governments, but may collaborate with governments or try to influence government policies to benefit to the poor and needy. However, not all governments are willing to cooperate with NGOs. Human Rights Watch (HRW) is an independent NGO that monitors and reports on human rights violations, wherever they occur. HRW became involved in Middle East politics when it charged Hezbollah with attacking civilians during its war with Israel; rockets had been fired into northern Israel, resulting in civilian casualties. Lebanon quickly condemned Human Rights Watch, saying that its people were victims of Israeli bombings of southern Lebanon.[27](#)

In recent years, efforts have made to increase collaboration between public health agencies and faith-based NGOs. In 2001, President George W. Bush directed federal dollars to faith-based organizations to help them achieve their humanitarian missions. He doubled the percentage of U.S. foreign aid going to groups like Food for the Hungry, World Vision, and Catholic Relief Services to provide training in hygiene, childhood illness, AIDS relief in Africa, clean water in Third World countries, and so on. Many in Congress who advocate for the separation of church and state challenged the president's initiative.[28](#)

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), faith-based NGOs play a significant role in improving access to health care in developing countries and have been vital in the provision of HIV/AIDS care and treatment in sub-Saharan Africa.²⁹

There is growing awareness that NGOs not only provide traditional humanitarian services, but also help shape worldviews on social and political issues. NGOs seek to impact attitudes, policies, and practices of decision makers, and to make political and economic institutions more accountable. For example, NGOs such as Save the Children and Amnesty International have been refocusing resources on the underlying “rights” of the poor and disenfranchised. Catholic Relief Services has begun to integrate advocacy into its humanitarian work to address the structural causes of world poverty and related injustice. Global Justice Center is a human rights organization that works with world leaders to eliminate discrimination against women.

In short, whatever their mission, goal, or target public, nonprofit organizations of all kinds need public relations, especially in these turbulent and challenging times, to build and maintain relationships with organizational stakeholders, be they clients, donors, volunteers, or employees.

Notes

1. ¹. Deitrick, Laura, “A spotlight on San Diego’s Third Sector,” unpublished report written for University of San Diego’s Caster Family Center for Nonprofits and Philanthropic Research May 2010, iv.
2. ². Urban Institute, National Center for Charitable Statistics, “Quick Facts About Nonprofits,” August 2011, <http://nccs.urban.org/statistics/quickfacts.cfm> (accessed March 21, 2012).
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Study Guide

1. Why do government leaders encourage and support the third sector of society?
2. The nonprofit sector operates within a climate of change. List as many examples as you can of societal changes that are impacting nonprofits.
3. Describe why public relations is vital to the success of nonprofit and charitable organizations.
4. What are some of the objectives of public relations' communication efforts in nonprofits?
5. Describe cause marketing and explain why nonprofits are interested in pursuing a relationship with private businesses.
6. In addition to traditional humanitarian services, what else do nongovernmental organizations provide?

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This chapter was written in collaboration with Jim McBride, president of McBride Communications and lecturer in the School of Journalism and Media Studies at San Diego State University. He previously served 22 years as director of public affairs and communication for the Kaiser Permanente Medical Care Program, San Diego, California.

Chapter 19 Health Care

Learning Outcomes

After studying [Chapter 19](#) this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Describe the major challenges to public relations in health care.
2. Discuss the impact of social media on health care communication.
3. Describe the linkage between employee communication and external communication in health care.
4. Explain the value of strategic integrated communication in health care.

March 23, 2010. For years to come, public relations practitioners in the health care industry are likely to look back to this date as the day that changed their professional lives in irreversible ways. On that day, President Barack Obama signed into law the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, the most wide-ranging reform of the American health care system since the creation of Medicare and Medicaid in 1965. The new legislation would affect health care in all its diverse settings: for-profit and nonprofit systems, large and small hospital systems, physician groups, health plans, and the large integrated systems that combine all functions in a single, aligned enterprise.

Health care reform did not begin in 2010, nor did it conclude on that day. Reform of the American health care system, a complex web of interrelated institutions that touches the lives of all Americans in the most personal and vital ways, is a perpetual process, with no beginning and no end. Virtually every significant reform in history has met with public opposition and countervailing initiatives that have resulted in further reform efforts, sometimes successful, sometimes not. That pattern quickly asserted itself in the days and months leading up to and following the enactment of the 2010 health reform law, which almost immediately faced strong repeal efforts

through legislative and legal challenges by those opposed to the law.

Although most Americans strongly endorsed the main objectives of the 2010 reform law—providing health insurance coverage for tens of millions of uninsured individuals; ensuring coverage to all, despite pre-existing conditions; improving clinical quality through incentives for more coordinated, prevention-oriented delivery systems; and slowing the rapid rate of health care cost inflation—there was a lack of public consensus about the means of achieving those objectives. In fact, the political differences over the pace, scope, and especially the role of government in health care reform appears to many to be virtually unbridgeable, resulting in a policy standoff that many believe may persist for a generation or more.

Practicing in the Era of Health Reform

What does this mean for health care public relations? While the ultimate fate of health care reform remains an open question, the bitter nature of the debate generated by reform has exposed the public relations mission in health care to a number of difficult, long-term challenges. Perhaps most importantly, public opinion surveys and consumer focus groups during and following the debate—which coincided with the worst economic crisis in 80 years, involving misdeeds by large financial institutions—revealed high and growing levels of public cynicism and distrust toward large institutions of all kinds, but especially banking, insurance, the media, and government.

“Skepticism has increased as a result of the systematic impact of corporate and government crises, causing a transformation in the framework of trust,” observed Richard Edelman, president and CEO of Edelman, the world’s largest independent public relations firm, which conducts an annual “Trust Barometer” survey of public attitudes in 23 countries.¹ In the year following the congressional battle over health care reform, which was characterized by widespread demonization of health insurers, the pharmaceutical industry, for-profit hospital systems, and government, the survey found that the average “institutional trust” score in the United States had fallen to fourth from the

bottom, barely beating out Russia. Three years earlier, the United States had been among the top four countries.

This widely observed increase in public distrust of institutions has special relevance for health care, an industry in which trust—between patients and their physicians, health plans and their members, and insurers and their associated providers (hospitals and physicians)—is the bedrock on which success is built.

“The public relations challenges health care faced five years before the reform debate were difficult,” observed Lane Bailey, president of public affairs at Washington, D.C.-based GolinHarris, a national public relations agency. “But now, they’re full-scale and growing. And that means the industry has a much higher bar to reach in terms of its credibility and its ability to communicate to patients and other stakeholders through all the noise, distortion, and distrust.”²

One important result of this phenomenon, borne out in consumer focus groups, is that individuals have become more determined than ever to make health care decisions based on their own sources of information, especially trusted friends, colleagues, and personal physicians. The institutional authorities to which consumers once looked for guidance, including even third-party authorities like the American Medical Association, a professional association for physicians, have been increasingly identified as self-interested parties and relegated to the sidelines.

How does public relations operate in this new environment? The answers will certainly vary to some degree depending on where one sits. Nonprofit insurers and providers, physician groups, and community hospitals and clinics may find they have certain advantages over large profit-driven systems because they are not motivated by making profits for shareholders. On the other hand, large organizations with strong national brands have advantages of their own—and also disadvantages.

Ultimately, the answers will depend on how well public relations professionals in health care can devise strategies for turning the challenges of this era of institutional cynicism, patient-centric decision making, and information overload into new opportunities for building or rebuilding trusted

pathways of communication with their multiple stakeholders. As Politico's chief political correspondent, Roger Simon, noted in an interview following his keynote address to the Public Relations Society of America's Health Academy conference in 2011:

The effective health care communicator/public relations professional, today, is the one who has a strategy for cutting through the shouting with a clear, compelling message, one that reaches not only the professional journalist, but the mass public using social media to build a 'story line' that shapes the national discussion.³

The remainder of this chapter explores some of the basic principles, tools, and strategies for ensuring effectiveness in health care public relations.

The Public Relations Difference in Health Care

Like virtually all commercial enterprises, health care organizations, whether nonprofit or for-profit, have to be financially viable to successfully serve their patients and communities. To survive and grow in a complex, competitive, and rapidly changing environment, health care leaders seek to build strong, multiyear strategic plans that guide the decisions and actions of the organization. And, like leaders in other businesses and service industries, they rely on public relations and marketing professionals to support that strategy by developing and delivering communication strategies designed to increase consumer understanding and support of the organization's actions, as well as to position the organization as the provider or insurer of choice.

In this role, public relations in health care shares many of the objectives, strategies, and tactics common to the public relations function in most enterprises. However, in many important ways, health care is a unique enterprise with unique public relations challenges.

Protecting Patient Privacy

A major reason for this is that health is a very private matter. The interactions individuals have with health care providers, from birth to death, are some of the most personal experiences they will have with any organization. And because each encounter with the health care system at a minimum involves an individual's well-being, and in many cases difficult questions of life and death, the public relations functions in health care organizations depend for success on an unusually strong foundation of trust by consumers, employers (who are the major purchasers of health care), and policy makers. Also, because of the vital importance of health care to the nation's well-being, almost all health care functions—including how we promote and communicate about health care—are highly regulated by state and federal statutes.

For example, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996, which protects the privacy and security of patients' health care information, imposes strict limits on what information can be publicly shared. HIPAA also established an extensive regimen of health care fraud and abuse regulations, including restrictions on false or misleading promotional practices. Other regulations govern the disclosure of patient-safety information. Public relations practitioners must partner with their legal departments to ensure they are familiar and compliant with these and other regulations, or risk significant fines or other organizational penalties.

Dealing with Complexity

Helping consumers understand these often-controversial issues is challenging for a number of reasons. First, those who pay for health care services—typically private insurance companies or public programs like Medicare and Medicaid—have limited control over the pricing or cost of services, which are mainly driven by those who provide the care. Those costs are normally passed along to consumers in the form of premiums from their insurers, not their providers, resulting in a disconnect between services and costs.

For the most part, those who receive care pay only a portion of the health care bill. An employer or government agency pays the costs that exceed the patient's co-pay and deductible fees. This results in consumers' lack of

awareness of the actual cost of care, or of cost comparisons.

Despite the importance of choice among health care consumers, most people have only limited choice over insurers, providers, or services. For individuals with employment-based coverage, choice of insurers is largely determined by the employer, many of whom offer their workers only one or a few options from among many insurers. Choice of hospitals and physicians is often directed by either the insurance company's contracted network or, in the case of hospitals, where one's physician has privileges to practice. And it is usually the doctor or other provider, and sometimes the insurer, who stipulates what ancillary services, such as lab or radiology tests, are medically necessary and covered.

For all these reasons, the publics—the people who have a stake in an organization's success or failure—for health care public relations extends beyond the end consumer, or patient, and

In focus group discussions, the word “quality” rarely brings to mind safety or outcomes



Figure 19.1 Consumer Views on Health care Quality

Courtesy Kaiser Permanente.

can include a far-flung and highly varied number of stakeholders. These include employers, referring doctors, regulators and policy makers, health care advocacy organizations, labor unions (the health care industry workforce is highly organized), and more. Understanding and meeting the unique communication needs and expectations of these publics requires highly specialized and focused public relations skills, strategies, and tactics.

Consumer focus groups have revealed that many people hold negative views about health care generally, associating it with illness and suffering, in sharp contrast to their positive feelings about health and wellness.

Finally, health care professionals tend to equate quality with clinical outcomes (how a patient's condition improves or deteriorates following treatment), whereas consumers tend to equate quality with service and convenience (see [Figure 19.1](#)). Public relations professionals must be able to bridge these differences while meeting the demands of both groups.

Supporting, Promoting, and Protecting the Brand

To create positive impressions among consumers about health care organizations, professionals in health care marketing, communication, and public relations employ a range of strategies and tactics. These include traditional and online advertising, direct mail, website content, newsletters, and special events, all geared to support the organization's brand promise, or essence. This is an implicit promise to consumers about what they can expect from their total experience with the organization, and it is promoted through marketing, public relations, and advertising and then delivered through the

actual operations of the organization. As noted in [Chapters 12](#) and [13](#), an organization's communications and its actions must be aligned.

Effective branding should produce a lasting, experiential feeling that consumers take away after experiencing the totality of an organization's brand impressions—impressions from both the organization's marketing/advertising and the personal experience they have with the organization. It's the sustaining, overall impression that defines the personality of the product or organization. Thus, brand positioning and promotion are designed to predispose those who purchase health care (often employers and less often individuals) and those who ultimately receive the care to select the organization when faced with a choice.

Health care public relations professionals use research and analysis, strategic communication planning, and a wide variety of tactics to support brand positioning and to promote and protect the organization's reputation among all stakeholders. As in most enterprises, public relations tactics in health care range from news releases, media statements, press conferences, and online engagement to organizational and community partnerships, event sponsorships, stakeholder newsletters, and placing speakers at important conferences and meetings. Practitioners use multiple channels to deliver their messages, from traditional and online media to the evolving forms of social media, all aimed at building positive perceptions of their organization and mitigating negative ones, thus contributing to the organization's brand strength and its bottom line.

In health care, public relations professionals have long recognized a special advantage they have in communicating these messages—the role of the highly trusted physicians and other health care professionals who provide the care that is at the center of the health enterprise. (See [Chapter 13](#) for the definition of “opinion leaders.”) The value of physicians as advocates and spokespersons was clearly demonstrated in a 2009 Gallup Poll that asked respondents who they most trusted to provide the right approach in health reform. Physicians topped the chart at 73 percent and hospital spokespersons came in at 61 percent, while health insurance executives scored near the bottom, at only 35 percent.⁴ Thus, many health care public relations professionals, including those representing insurers, often cultivate strong

relationships with their associated physician partners to act as spokespersons on important messages (see [Figure 19.2](#)).

To create and promote effective brand messaging, today's public relations professionals must also understand the very complex business and financing of health care—issues that few consumers can be expected to understand but that nonetheless affect them deeply. Practitioners need to be acutely aware of how national, regional, and local politics, regulations, and economic conditions, such as recessions, affect the industry; how technological innovations like electronic medical records impact quality and costs; and how financial incentives support—and sometimes interfere with—the ability of the various industry stakeholders (doctors, hospitals, insurers, and others) to cooperate and succeed.



Figure 19.2 Dr. Sara Caceres-Cantu, Kaiser Permanente, Marietta, Georgia, on CNN enEspañol TV

Courtesy Kaiser Permanente.

Employee Communication In Health Care

Some think public relations aims to influence only external stakeholders. But one of the most critical stakeholder groups of any organization is its own employees, as discussed in [Chapter 9](#) . Especially in service organizations like health care, numerous studies have shown a strong “value chain” that connects engaged and satisfied employees to operational improvements and customer satisfaction and ultimately to improved financial performance. In addition, research has shown that employee satisfaction and engagement have a positive impact on retention, absenteeism, patient safety, patient care outcomes, patient satisfaction, and brand reputation.⁵

The reason for this is that how the workforce experiences the organization is reflected to the outside world through the quality of the products and services they deliver. The employee experience also colors what they say about their employer to customers, suppliers, family and friends, political leaders, and members of the community—both in person, through letters and emails, and online through social media. Public relations professionals can take advantage of this powerful communication “voice,” which in a large organization can include tens of thousands of employee champions. But doing so requires a well-planned and well-executed employee communication strategy that both promotes employee engagement and

positively influences and aligns the messages they convey to consumers directly or via various media channels.

Most organizations have policies that discourage employees from directly interacting with the media and encourage or require them to contact the public relations department when contacted by the media. Today, organizations are also developing social media policies—some organizations post them online—because communicating about an organization via social media is no different than talking to the “traditional media,” and therefore an employee’s responsibilities should be the same.

A special challenge for internal communication in health care is that a significant proportion of frontline health care workers, such as physicians, nurses, and technicians, are not sitting at desks or computers with intranet access to do their jobs. They continue to rely on written newsletters, bulletin board announcements, break-room flyers, and in-person meetings with colleagues and supervisors to receive important information. Even in this wired world, many employees still prefer to receive information about their jobs from personal communication with their immediate supervisors, a channel that is never out of vogue. Internal communicators are also employing computer kiosks in public areas, Internet websites outside the organization’s firewall (with blogs and podcasts), for conveying nonproprietary information to frontline employees at home, and smart phones (see [Figure 19.3](#)).



Figure 19.3 Employee Information Kiosk

Courtesy Kaiser Permanente, Oakland, California.

Integrated Communication Enhances Results

Consumers experience health care organizations in three ways—through the actual interactions an individual or community has with the organization, such as medical office visits; through information that the organization offers to consumers through such media as paid marketing, advertising, and Internet

websites; and through third-party influence over which the organization may have little or no control, such as newspaper stories, social media, or word of mouth. Public relations, internal communication, and marketing must work closely as an integrated team to optimize their respective strengths and utilize the most appropriate communication channels to reach the organization's many and varied stakeholders.

The integration and coordination of all communication functions are critical to achieving strategic and operational goals. When not working in a coordinated fashion, the separate communication functions are likely to deliver independent and fragmented messages, resulting in consumer confusion and distrust. When all aspects of public relations and marketing are aligned in support of the organization's overarching strategic plan, the result is greater transparency and consistency of message. In other words, each public relations function may amplify certain brand attributes and convey information in the way most meaningful to its audiences, but the voice of the organization as a whole and its messages must remain consistent.

In an integrated communication approach, public relations practitioners work closely with internal communicators and marketing professionals to customize communications to patients, employees, and other special audiences, such as physicians, policy makers, and business audiences. These communications may feature nuanced differences in language, style, or format, but the messaging remains consistent. When working together in a coordinated, seamless way, integrated communication leads to deeper understanding of the organization and its decisions, resulting in greater support of the organization's initiatives, enhanced market position, and, ultimately, growth.

Focusing Public Relations Efforts

In addition to an integrated approach to public relations communication, health care communicators must take a disciplined, focused approach to messaging. Organizations have many messages they want to deliver to a variety of target audiences and for distinct reasons, ranging from building influence to managing perceptions and enhancing brand reputation. But it's

the public relations practitioner's job to not tell every story, but to focus on those that are most strategic and aligned with the business priorities. In health care, such areas of focus may include care delivery (health care provider expertise, breadth of services, quality of care, service and safety); corporate citizenship, community support and fund-raising; technological innovations; and the changing industry landscape, including health care reform. (See [Chapter 13](#) for general information on crafting messages.)

An important aspect of strategic messaging is the ability to measure and monitor the effectiveness of communication strategies and to make adjustments where needed. But measuring the effectiveness of communication is not just about counting the number of times an organization is mentioned in the media. First, it is about making sure that the key messages—about brand attributes like quality, patient centeredness, convenience, preventive care, and technological innovation—are reflected in the coverage obtained. Second, and most important, it is about determining if the communication strategy and tactics are having the desired impact on target publics that are tied to organizational goals. See [Chapter 14](#) to review the levels of evaluation.

Blurring of Traditional and Social Media

While the media's coverage of the health care industry is as intense as ever, it is the way the media cover the news that is changing dramatically. The Internet and social media have created a fundamental shift in the nature of health care media relations. Tens of millions

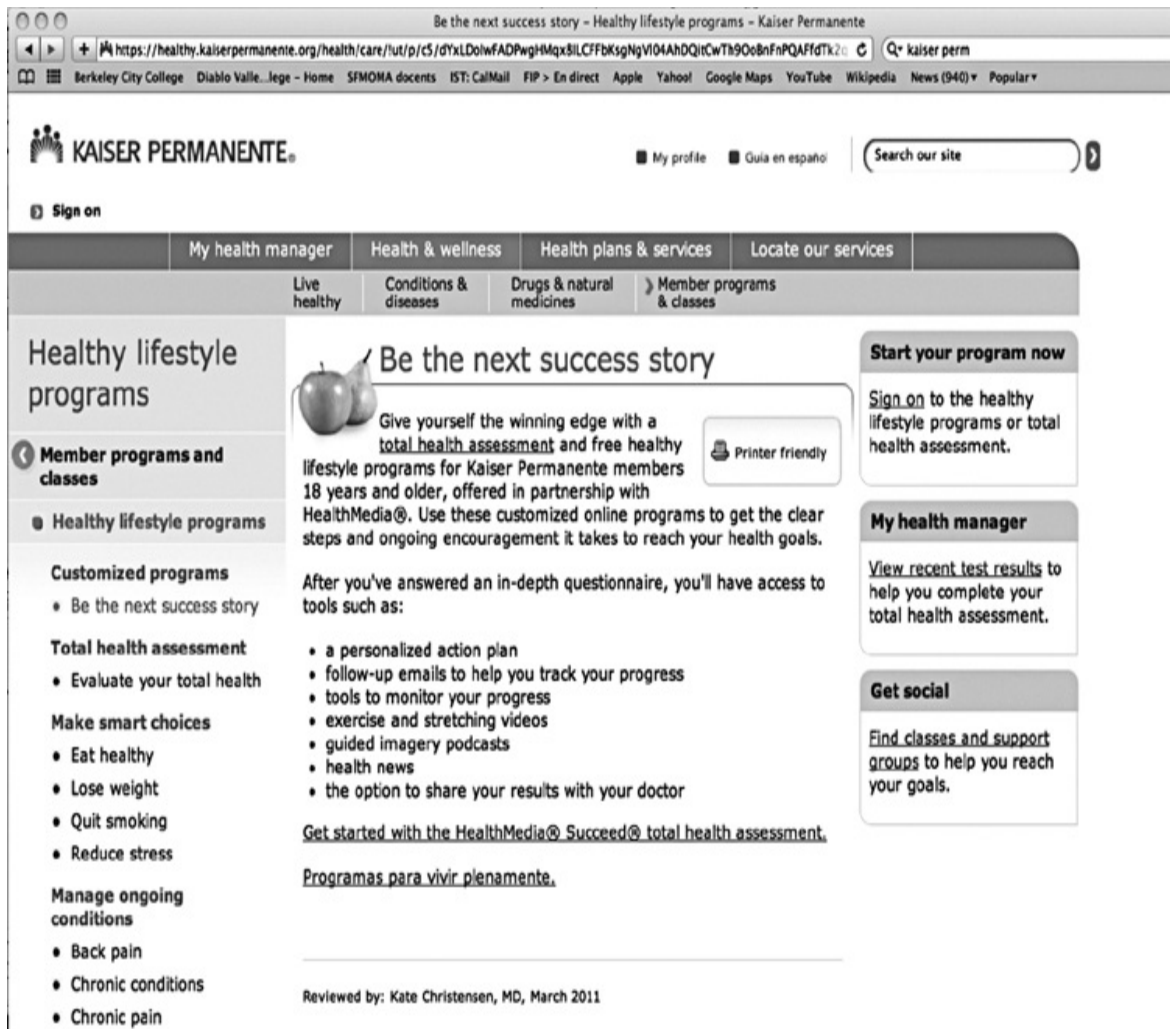


Figure 19.4 Kaiser Permanente Member Website Screen

Courtesy Kaiser Permanente.

of people use the Internet as a source of health information, and the number is growing. People expect their health plan and/or provider to have a robust and up-to-date website filled with health care information, including an online repository for news, press releases, media statements, announcements, and information updates. A 2011 survey of nearly 23,000 Americans by the National Research Corporation found that 20 percent of respondents used

social media channels to look for health information, but 50 percent said they still preferred health care provider websites as their primary source of dependable health information.⁶(See [Figure 19.4](#).)

Nonetheless, the growing use of social media may have profound impacts in health care that ultimately affect how consumers relate to their health care providers and insurers. As Carleen Hawn wrote in *Health Affairs*: “Patient portals, EHR platforms, blogs, video chat, and ‘tweets’ won’t merely substitute for many one-on-one encounters with providers, but will also allow for richer engagement and deeper doctor-patient relationships.”⁷ If this is the case, public relations professionals need to be active and informed advisors to leadership in decisions about the use of social media by health care organizations.

Just as the Internet and social media may change patient–physician relationships and care delivery, they are also changing the nature of health care media relations and reporting. Stories posted online are searchable almost immediately, and indefinitely. Readers’ tweets and blog posts about stories can extend the life of a story by days, sometimes weeks. And bloggers, who are often not trained journalists, can nonetheless influence traditional and online professional reporters, who don’t always fact-check a blogger’s information. The decline of the newspaper industry has meant that many papers have sharply reduced their reporting and editing staffs, often eliminating specialized reporting beats such as health care.

More than anything, the Internet and social media have turned what used to be one-directional communication into a two-way street. As Jonathan Schwartz, the former CEO of Sun Microsystems (and a prolific blogger) put it, “While a journalist is writing about my blog, I’m blogging about his journalism. This is a change. This obviously recalibrates the tilt on the playing field in ways that have not previously happened.”⁸

Exhibit 19.1

When Patients Go Public with Complaints

In a health care environment characterized by tight regulations, wavering public trust, high litigation, a highly critical media and public, and a 24-hour news cycle, hospitals and health care organizations often find themselves the target of allegations around numerous issues. These could include the quality of care, hospital-acquired infections, patient privacy, access to care, and coverage of treatments and procedure, as well as how organizations are responding to new provisions of health care reform.

Disgruntled patients and family members may take their complaints to the media or post them on social media networks. If a patient's complaint sounds compelling, the media may decide to cover the story. However, under rules of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), unless the patient has a signed HIPAA consent form, the hospital cannot respond to the specific allegations, even if they are untrue.

In these situations, how can an institution respond? Although HIPAA restricts the information hospitals or other health care organizations can release about individuals, the spokesperson should first express concern about the allegations and make a strong commitment to look into them and get back to the reporter or blogger. The spokesperson can explain hospital policies and procedures—and the need to get a signed HIPAA release—or convey key general messages about quality of care or the expertise of the staff. If the patient signs a consent form (or a parent for a minor patient), the spokesperson can provide more information around the facts and how the organization is responding in a specific case.

Public relations professionals work closely with organizational leadership to develop a well-informed, accurate, and timely response to the media. The responses are usually reviewed prior to being released by the legal department as well as by experts from other departments pertinent to the subject, be it quality, information technology, finance, human resources, or government relations.

To understand what is being said about the organization in general

or in reaction to a particular issue, health care practitioners carefully monitor traditional and online media. Some use a media monitoring service that provides reports on the coverage and classify it as positive, neutral, or negative. In addition, many organizations also use public relations agencies or online monitoring services to learn what is being said about the organization in blogs and social media. Understanding the tone, quantity, and frequency of media coverage and social media comments helps public relations professionals refine future messaging. It also allows them to gain insights to present to senior leaders as they work together to respond to media issues or crises.

This chapter was written in collaboration with Diane Gage-Lofgren, APR, PRSA Fellow, Senior Vice President of Brand Strategy, Communication, and Public Relations (BSCPR) at Kaiser Permanente, and Jon Stewart, Special Projects Director, MSCPR, and senior MSCPR staff.

Today, there is no line between traditional and online media and bloggers. They all disseminate information, offer perspectives, and, for better or worse, shape public opinion and reputations of hospitals, insurers, and other health care organizations (see [Exhibit 19.1](#)).

Fortunately, the keys to effective media relations in the hospital or health care settings are still the same: transparency, rapid access to decision makers and content experts, clear and credible messaging, and rapid response to inquiries. Most hospitals and health care organizations have an authorized spokesperson on call 24 hours a day to respond to inquiries from the traditional and online media and bloggers, work with senior leaders to develop written responses, and prepare leaders to be interviewed by the media—especially in crises. A public relations staff that works effectively with senior leaders to respond to media needs in routine and crisis situations can have a lasting impact on the organization's reputation.

Proactively Managing and

Mitigating Issues

When a potentially controversial issue or an actual crisis arises, public relations practitioners work with operational leaders to understand the situation, provide insights and perspective, and counsel on stakeholder expectations. Large health care organizations have public relations staff persons specially trained in issues management to address such situations. Their job is to identify, prevent, or mitigate issues whenever possible to prevent them from becoming public crises. (See [Chapter 1](#) to review the definition of issues management.)

To accomplish this, practitioners develop strong relationships with operational leaders and content matter experts. They meet proactively and regularly with these individuals to identify potential risks and develop strategies for mitigating them before they escalate. When an issue or crisis arises, the issues management team can quickly activate a network of content experts and communication colleagues to help gather relevant information and ensure themselves a voice in any crisis management communications and operational changes. They also ensure that the internal communicators and marketers have the key messages they need to communicate to their constituents.

A Voice at the Leadership Table

Whether managing issues or responding to how the organization is adapting to legislation or to economic, social, or technological change pressures, public relations in the health care industry has emerged in recent years as a vital member of the management team. Public relations leaders provide others in the organization important insights into stakeholders' wants, needs, and perceptions and direction on how best to tell the organization's story and respond when problems arise.

In health care, the best public relations leaders are thought partners to other leaders, providing a unique blend of internal and external perspectives to allow the best decisions to be made for the good of both the organization and

its many and varied publics.

“Public relations needs to be at the table when key decisions are being made,” said Nancy Hughes, chair of the Public Relations Society of America’s Health Academy, “because, in combination with government relations, they understand best how to work with and meet the needs of the key stakeholder groups while also understanding and serving the needs of their organization.” Hughes added that the greatest challenge public relations in the health care field faces today is “trying to come up with a crystal ball that can give us insights about what to expect from health [care] reform in the long run, because reform seems to be a policy in motion, and everything continues to change from one year to the next.”⁹

In this exciting—and confusing—era of health care reform, public relations professionals will continue to play a critical role in helping their organizations and the consumers who depend on them thrive and prosper as the nation moves fitfully toward a system of high-quality, equitable, and affordable health care for all.

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9. [9](#). Nancy Hughes, personal interview, June 30, 2011.

Study Guide

1. Briefly describe some of the major consumer misunderstandings about health care that public relations professionals confront.
2. How have the Internet and social media affected the public relations

functions in health care?

3. Why should employee communication be regarded as a function of public relations in health care?
4. Why is it important for the separate public relations functions like marketing, media relations, and employee communication to collaborate?

Additional Resources

1. AcademyHealth, 1150 17th Street NW, Suite 600, Washington DC, 20036. Online at <http://www.academyhealth.org>.
2. Health Academy, Public Relations Society of America, 33 Maiden Lane, Floor 11, New York, NY 10038. Online at <http://www.prsa.org/network/communities/healthacademy>.
3. Healthcare Marketing Association. Online at <http://health-caremarketingassociation.com>. (HMA is health care online community led by a virtual team of member volunteers.)
4. Jacobs, Lawrence R., and Theda Skocpol. Health Care Reform and American Politics: What Everyone Needs to Know. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. History of the Affordable Care Act and the politics for and against its passage.
5. Society for Healthcare Strategy and Market Development, American Hospital Association, 155 North Wacker Drive, Suite 400, Chicago, IL 60606. Online at <http://www.shsmd.org>.
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This chapter was written in collaboration with Diane Gage-Lofgren, APR,

PRSA Fellow, Senior Vice President of Brand Strategy, Communication, and Public Relations (BSCPR) at Kaiser Permanente, Oakland, California, and Jon Stewart, Special Projects Director, BSCPR, and senior BSCPR staff.

Chapter 20 Education

Learning Outcomes

After studying [Chapter 20](#) this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Understand the role of education in the global economy.
2. Identify current and emerging issues affecting education.
3. List and briefly discuss significant trends influencing the practice of public relations in education.
4. Discuss the changing role of public relations in higher education.

Personally, I'm always ready to learn, although I do not always like being taught.

—Sir Winston Churchill

Accountability breeds response-ability.

—Stephen R. Covey¹

Education touches the lives of virtually everyone, which explains why, throughout the world, education is widely viewed as a fundamental building block in human and economic development and in the reduction of poverty.² These views prompt international organizations ranging from The World Bank to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to provide financial and technical assistance to improve access to and the quality of education throughout the world.³

Never before has an engaged and educated citizenry been more important to our society. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), whose membership includes the United States and 33 other nations,

completed a study in 2010 that found direct correlations between countries with a high proportion of university-educated young people and future global competitive advantage. The OECD further concluded that countries need to expand their investments in education to ensure long-term economic growth.[4](#)

In 2008, about 1.4 billion students were enrolled in schools around the world, but school enrollment varies dramatically among countries, with significant enrollment declines occurring after primary school.[5](#) For example, wealthier nations, such as Japan and Sweden, report that nearly 99 percent of school-age children are enrolled in primary and secondary schools, whereas poorer, less-developed nations, such as Guatemala and Tanzania, report from 41 percent to less than 5 percent enrollment in secondary schools. Approximately 90 percent of U.S. school-age children are enrolled, and that does not include enrollment in colleges and universities. Including preschool through college, more than 77 million children and adults are enrolled in the U.S. education system, public and private.[6](#)

Spending on public education also varies significantly. Wealthier nations, such as the 34 members of the OECD, spend an average of 4.6 percent of their gross domestic product (GDP) on education. (GDP is market value of all final goods and services produced within a country in a given period and often considered an indicator of a country's standard of living.) For the 2010–2011 school year, the United States spent about \$540 billion on just primary and secondary education—almost 4 percent of GDP.[7](#)

Issues Impacting Education: Funding, Accountability, Choice

The issues affecting education and the role of public relations in the sector are varied and complex. But most educational institutions, from preschool to university, whether public or private, seem to face similar issues. Access to education remains a critical issue in poor nations, so internationally focused organizations whose missions include improving quality of life and economic prosperity invest significant time and money toward this end. In the United

States, which has a well-developed public education system, access is less of an issue than predictable funding streams, accountability for educational outcomes, and school choice. Other issues, such as non-English-speaking students and their families, remedial education, dropout rates, and poverty, also affect public education.

“It’s the Economy, Stupid”

This phrase in U.S. politics was made popular during Bill Clinton’s successful 1992 presidential campaign against George H. W. Bush. Then the phrase referred to the campaign rhetoric that Clinton was a better choice because Bush had not adequately addressed the economy, which had recently suffered through a recession. For the purposes of this discussion, however, the phrase serves to highlight the effect of unpredictable funding for public education. Individual states in the United States pay for public education in their respective geographic boundaries, and on average, states spend about 26 percent of their total budgets on K-12 education and another 14 percent on higher education.⁸ When the state (and federal) economy is robust, the amount of tax dollars and other sources available to fund public education and other basic services provided at state and local levels is generally adequate. When state revenues decline, so does funding for these important services.

Consider the State of California, the most populous state in the United States, with more than 37 million residents and the eighth largest economy in the world. Lowered revenues and roller-coaster economic conditions throughout the 2000s adversely impacted the state budget and funding of education and other vital services. By 2011, 42 U.S. states, including California, had experienced significant budget deficits that required funding cuts to nearly every aspect of the budget, including education, police, health care, and fire.⁹ These budget cuts to education resulted in layoffs; no salary increases; deferred maintenance of facilities; less money for software, computers, books, and supplies; less money for public relations programs; and in the case of higher education, increased fees and tuition to attend college. In fact, students attending California’s public universities and community colleges have seen their tuition and fees double in the past five years. Clearly, the

economy affects education, both public and private.

As a result of unpredictable funding sources, public schools have followed the lead of their private counterparts by actively fund-raising for everything from basic school supplies to salaries. It is now common to find an office or entire division devoted to “resource development,” “development,” or “advancement,” at primary, secondary, and college/university institutions. In addition, most have a 501(c)(3) nonprofit charitable entity that allows donors to receive tax deductions for their qualifying contributions to the school. It’s important that the public relations function be integrated into the efforts of these offices or divisions to develop strategies and tactics to help raise awareness, friends, and funds in support of the educational needs and mission of the institution.

Outcomes and Choice

Central to the difficult task facing public education is widespread concern that the money taxpayers spend on their schools and universities is not used effectively and that educational outcomes are unsatisfactory. School choice is one way that parents, community leaders, and education professionals have addressed this concern. “Choice” in the education sector covers a broad spectrum. School choice used to refer to a parent’s decision to send a child to a public or private school. Today, school choice means that parents have the option to send a child to the school that best fits their needs, which could be down the block or across town. Other options include charter schools, another type of public school; homeschooling; or a private institution.[10](#)

Since the 1980s, unstable funding of state education has resulted in difficult budget cuts to education and never-ending debates about the effectiveness of public education, often measured by standardized tests, college graduation rates, teaching quality, and dropout rates. Parents, elected officials, business leaders, teachers, and other education professionals—and even students themselves—have challenged hiring and firing decisions and questioned whether public schools are taking enough responsibility for student learning outcomes. What is the solution and whose responsibility is it to solve these and other issues? These questions produce more challenges and debates. The

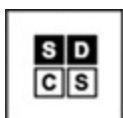
one area of consensus revolves around major structural change, especially for K-12 public schools, if questions of accountability are to be addressed to anyone's satisfaction.

For example, a total of 1.2 million U.S. students drop out of high school each year—and only about 70 percent of entering high school freshman graduate.¹¹ Many of these dropouts come from low-income families, with larger numbers of Blacks and Hispanics dropping out of high school than Whites. What is the reason and what can be done and by whom to change this situation? Privately funded and government educational enrichment programs targeting low-income and disadvantaged youth have brought about some improvement, reducing by half the drop-out rates for Blacks (from 19 to 9 percent) and Hispanics (from 35 to 18 percent) during the past 30 years. As a result, increasing numbers and percentages of Black and Hispanic students are attending college.¹²

Addressing these issues and other issues referenced is not a simple task. Education reform involves many more dimensions, including parental involvement, the physical and emotional health of children, cultural diversity, class size, relevant programming, how technology is changing learning, transportation and access issues, overcoming financial barriers, and the influence of teacher and service-employee unions on governing bodies.

The Role of Public Relations for Public Schools

In the not-so-recent past, a public relations professional working in education had a more passive role, perhaps along the lines of a publicist or marketing communications specialist. This involved writing and designing newsletters and brochures that were often just displayed



SAN DIEGO CITY SCHOOLS

EUGENE BRUCKER EDUCATION CENTER
4100 Normal Street, San Diego, CA 92103-2682



Figure 20.1 Sample school district logos, old and new

Courtesy San Diego Unified School District, San Diego.

in high-traffic areas of schools or organizing the occasional school town hall for internal or external stakeholders. Today, in a society accustomed to receiving information quickly and cheaply, a school's stakeholders not only expect, but also demand instantaneous answers to the most difficult questions. There is neither the money to print brochures and newsletters, nor the time to update printed documents that quickly become outdated. Given the more competitive and often politically charged environment in which public schools now exist, public relations professionals play a central role in managing public opinion, internal and external, and in shaping the school's brand. For example, San Diego Unified School District updated its logo and made the public relations practitioner chief of staff to the superintendent (see old and new logos in [Figure 20.1](#).)¹³

Among the goals of public relations in public education are:

1. To increase awareness of issues affecting education, including unstable and unpredictable funding.
2. To cultivate relationships with key stakeholders, including elected officials and labor unions, to build public support and help ensure adequate funding, including private donations. (See [Figure 20.2](#) for examples.)
3. To gain public acceptance of and support for education initiatives, such as staff reorganizations, facility closures, or major curriculum changes.

4. To enhance the reputation of schools among key target publics so that parents will send their child to a particular school and college-bound students will attend that school.

Education-related issues can also escalate into crisis communication situations. Depending upon the type of school, a crisis might include the broader separation of church and state issue, determining when freedom of expression becomes hate speech, violence on campus, disputes between teacher unions and school administration, decisions of elected governing boards, and clarifying the role of the school in social issues such as sex education and providing condoms on campus.

While public relations clearly plays a more central and vital role in the education sector, the continuing issue of unstable funding streams affects the function's ability to meet and manage expectations on shoestring budgets. Professionals must find creative and resourceful ways to engage and inform a broad array of stakeholder groups that range from parents with the child's best interest in mind to elected officials that want the best schools possible in their district. Yet another important stakeholder group are labor unions, which represent teachers/faculty, administrative staff, and service employees at virtually all public schools throughout the United States. Bernie Rhinerson, chief of staff to the superintendent of San Diego Unified School District, the second largest K-12 district in California, sums up the situation with these diverse stakeholder groups this way, "Expectations have increased but resources have not."¹⁴

For example, money for printed publications and materials has all but disappeared in many K-12 and community college school districts, so public relations professionals now take advantage of technology to inform and engage stakeholders and target publics. Websites

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State-Of-The-Art Technology In All Classrooms and Special Spaces

- Digital multimedia captured and management system for presentations, book organizing, broadcast, and digital lesson plans.
- Collaborative program and server platform for "equal seating" classrooms.
- Big screen for "equal seating" for master where student is in classroom.
- Wireless keyboard to facilitate using the big screen.
- Teacher control center, a wireless remote device by which to control the screen.
- Personal response system to actively engage students in classroom and facilitate sharing immediate assessment results on the big screen.
- Classroom pods of four computer workstations in every classroom.
- Mobile laptop carts capable of supporting an entire classroom.

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Williamsburg, VA

WARHILL HIGH SCHOOL

Construction: \$23.1 million

Open: August 1, 2006

State-Of-The-Art Technology In All Classrooms and Special Spaces

- Digital multimedia captured and management system for presentations, book organizing, broadcast, and digital lesson plans.
- Collaborative program and server platform for "equal seating" classrooms.
- Big screen for "equal seating" for master where student is in classroom.
- Wireless keyboard to facilitate using the big screen.
- Teacher control center, a wireless remote device by which to control the screen.
- Personal response system to actively engage students in classroom and facilitate sharing immediate assessment results on the big screen.
- Classroom pods of four computer workstations in every classroom.
- Mobile laptop carts capable of supporting an entire classroom.
- Media center, rehearsal and business lab equipped with individualized workstations.

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Williamsburg James City County Public Schools

WJCC NEWS

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WJCC School Division
and the
WJCC Education Foundation
Welcome You To The

2007
Teacher of

WJCC NEWS ID
For January 3, 2007

For larger versions of the photos, please visit the WJCC website.

ALL Students Visit Muncie Art Museum

Photo ALL 010306 Kathy of Life and Learning (ALL) students following the Museum at the College of William & Mary. From Torres (foreground) and Aaron Lee.

LHS Global Humanities Class Creates Podcast

Martha Hanks-Nicol showcase its learning through a collaborative podcast containing video or images. With Hanks-Nicol and her students learned how

Page 2
News Digest 1-3-07

Who will be 2007's
**Teachers
of the
Year?**

Who has:

- Inspired you?
- Been the most creative?
- Made learning the most fun?
- Been your most valued colleague?

If you are a student, or a parent, or a fellow teacher, an administrator, or an interested member of the community, you can help us choose the 2007 Teachers of the Year. All of our teachers are dedicated professionals who have made a difference in the lives of their students. We want to know who has made the most difference in your life. We want to know who has inspired you, who has made learning the most fun, and who has been your most valued colleague.

Save the date: May 23
Invitation coming soon!

The Williamsburg-James City County Educational Foundation invites you to find out on Wednesday, May 23, at 8:00 p.m. at a special reception to be held at TowneBank, 1214 Monticello Avenue, in New Towne. We will honor Teachers of the Year from the elementary, middle and high school levels. Join us for hors d'oeuvres, refreshments, and an opportunity to recognize some of our community's best educators!

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Who will be 2007's
**Teachers
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Figure 20.2 Public School Literature

Courtesy Williamsburg–James City County Public Schools, Williamsburg, Virginia.

and email marketing have long been de rigueur, with social media having taken the entire public relations field by storm, much the way websites, email, and the World Wide Web did in the mid-1990s. Today, social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube allow education public relations professionals to quickly and efficiently push out highly targeted messages or respond to issues, while also focusing on smaller and perhaps more influential key publics. In 2008, San Diego Unified was among the first K-12 school districts to have a Facebook page (see [Figure 20.3](#)), but today most K-12 school districts have an active Facebook page.¹⁵

The changing media landscape and the evolving nature of social media impact the way public relations professionals interact with reporters who cover education. The emergence of bloggers, who are often not professional journalists, but have powerful voices nonetheless, and the

Site Shortcuts

- Summer School Information
- Summer Fun Café
- Enrollment
- Community-Based School Reform Model
- Budget
- Academic School Year Calendars
- School Meal Info/Application
- Awards and Distinctions
- Friday Notes
- Proposition S

Featured Video

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Latest Headlines

[Kearny School of International Business Featured on Department of Education Website](#)

A website that shows how schools are helping students reach college is now featuring the School of International Business at the Kearny High Educational Complex.

[Crawford's Dismantled Car a Hit at Fair](#)

Students from IDEA Automotive Technology program dismantle a 2000 Nissan Maxima, display parts at annual Del Mar fest.

[New Area Superintendents Appointed, Assignments Realigned](#)

For the 2011-12 school year, the Area Superintendents have been realigned and there are several new faces serving as the liaison between schools, parents and our central office at the Education Center.

[IN THE NEWS: Morning Show Highlights Valencia Park](#)

Mime, dance, drama and video highlighted during visit by San Diego 6 in the Morning.

[Prop. S Update: Sustainable Technologies Project Starts at Scripps Ranch High](#)


Construction is starting this month at Scripps Ranch High School on its new Sustainable Technologies Program Building.

[IN THE NEWS: Ben Doyle growing into role of golf contender](#)

La Jolla High sophomore golfer competing in Junior World Championships, now under way at 10 courses around the county.

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Figure 20.3 San Diego Unified School District Website

decreasing number of reporters covering education require the professional to be more diligent than ever in building solid professional relationships. Jill Scofield, Director of Public Relations for the Foundation of California Community Colleges, believes that social media and its impact on journalism

have produced greater accountability on the part of educational institutions, “... teaching us new lessons in being relevant and timely, but also more thoughtful and careful before responding.”[16](#)

Technology-based tools such as the World Wide Web, email, and social media provide inexpensive means of measuring reach and evaluating engagement. Programs such as Google Analytics or Webalizer allow one to examine any number of measures, such as the number of unique visitors to a site, what pages were visited, and for how long. Social media utilities such as Facebook or Causes indicate the number of fans or friends and permit active engagement and interaction among the followers, which can assist in evaluating content for key messages.

Despite their cost-effectiveness and versatility, social media, the Internet, and email cannot replace old-fashioned face-to-face communication. For example, because teachers spend much of their day in the classroom or with students in office hours, they may not have time to sort through dozens or hundreds of emails for relevance or to check social media sites several times each day. How do you reach this important public, which influences students, parents, friends, and family? And then there are the parents who want to meet their child’s teacher or professor and to put a face to a name; therefore, traditional school open houses still command attention.

Many school districts, colleges, and universities find that in-person forums or town halls—and to a lesser extent video conferences with superintendents, principals, chancellors, or presidents—remain an important and effective means of communicating messages and encouraging dialogue that online tools cannot fully replace. Honesty, accessibility, and transparency remain constants in effective public relations, and sometimes the best way to convey these are through face-to-face engagement.[17](#)

Whether an elementary school principal or college president, the leaders of academic institutions must recognize that public relations is a required part of the job and that they are often the public face of an institution. Almost a third of university and college presidents say that they meet more frequently with their public relations officers than with any other member of the management team. The president is the key to establishing the relationships and public support needed to fulfill higher education’s mission in the new global society.

As one former president said, “The president is the one best able to sell the entire institution.”

The relationships between educational institutions and the communities they serve are many, diverse, and complex. Key target publics for education include the following:

- Parents
- School staff, from principal or president to teachers to custodian to administrative staff
- Students (who are extremely comfortable with social media and relish its immediacy without always thinking of the consequences of that immediacy)
- Business leaders and owners
- Community members at large
- Alumni (especially important for private schools and institutions of higher learning)
- Elected or appointed boards of trustees
- Local, state, and federal elected officials

Issues Affecting Higher Education Public Relations

While all of the previously mentioned issues affect public and private institutions of higher learning, some issues are unique to higher education:

- The cost to operate colleges and universities—and provide a quality education—continues to rise, along with the expectations of internal and external stakeholders to have the latest technology, the best facilities, the

leading faculty, and the brightest students.

- Competition for private support, long the mainstay of private institutions, has become keen. Donations now augment basic operations, provide scholarships, and fund improvements. Such non-state support has become essential to public institutions that traditionally relied heavily on public funding, especially in the United States and Europe.
- The desire to recruit the most qualified and motivated students often conflicts with state admissions policies and the desire to create the most diverse student population possible.
- Recruiting faculty has become challenging because of the cost of living in some states and highly competitive compensation packages offered by high-profile public research universities and prestigious private schools.

In 2010, a college education in the United States and Japan cost roughly 55 percent of the national median income of \$26,990 and \$22,790, respectively. A college education in Germany, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland cost less than 5 percent of the national median incomes in those countries. However, Norway provided the lowest-cost higher education, with a cost of just more than 2 percent of the national median income, by sending many of their students abroad.¹⁸ Declining and unpredictable funding from states and federal governments has produced record fee and tuition increases at public institutions around the United States. In California, home to the world's largest and most respected public higher education system, the cost of fees (tuition) has doubled in less than a decade. This in turn affects access to a college education for thousands of current and prospective students.



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[Laney College](#)

[Merritt College](#)

Figure 20.4 Peralta Colleges Foundation Website

Courtesy Peralta Colleges Foundation.

In the past, public relations staff at colleges and universities often operated independently from the alumni association and fund-raising or development functions. Today, public relations practitioners in higher education must work

in tandem with their colleagues in these auxiliaries to collaborate in developing messages and strategies to achieve “friend-raising” and fund-raising goals (see [Figure 20.4](#)). In addition, practitioners spend a great deal of time on reputation management and enhancing the university’s brand image, which includes building trust among internal and external stakeholders.

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Study Guide

1. Name three key issues that affect public relations practice in education settings.
2. What issue has most impacted education, whether public or private?
3. Identify target publics that are common to all types of educational institutions.
4. What tools have most impacted the practice of public relations in the education sector?
5. How do the most senior managers in an educational institution (principal, president, chancellor) support the public relations function?

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This chapter was written in collaboration with Stephanie Casenza, APR, Executive Director, Peralta Colleges Foundation, Oakland, California. Stephanie's business and nonprofit career includes management positions in higher education public relations and development, health care public relations, the arts, and public relations firms.

Chapter 21 Associations and Unions

Learning Outcomes

After studying [Chapter 21](#) this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Identify different types of associations and why they exist.
2. Articulate challenges faced by practitioners working on behalf of associations.
3. Differentiate labor unions from other association types.
4. Articulate the role of public relations in labor relations.

Associations

Associations are defined by the U.S. Internal Revenue Service as “a group of persons banded together for a specific purpose.”¹ An association is made up of people who join it by choice; in other words, membership in associations is voluntary. People join associations because they want to work together on a common cause or interest, such as to advance careers, help fight medical problems, pursue hobbies, and more.

Thus, associations exist to advance the interests of their members by offering educational and professional development, certification and standards, codes of ethics, information and research, forums to discuss common issues, and community service or volunteer opportunities. Associations typically offer members newsletters, magazines, and other publications. They often sponsor trade shows and hold conferences.

There are several types of associations, including trade associations, professional societies, chambers of commerce, philanthropic or charitable

organizations, and labor associations. The online Encyclopedia of Associations profiles more than 151,000 associations worldwide and offers separate publications detailing national associations in the United States, non-U.S. international associations, and U.S. regional, state, and local associations.²

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, there are 102,000 business, professional, and other membership organizations.³ Associations represent a significant economic impact, employing more than 1 million Americans in a wide range of industries. Business and professional associations bring in about \$33 billion in revenue annually.⁴

Types of Associations

To determine an exact number of associations, it is helpful to distinguish the types. Professional associations and professional societies typically represent individuals engaged in similar work based on common educational preparation or specialized knowledge. Examples include the American Nurses Association, the American Bar Association, and the Public Relations Society of America. Cause groups and special-interest groups function as associations of individuals with a common interest or goal. Examples include the Sierra Club, National Audubon Society, and the American Automobile Association.

A trade association is an organization dedicated to promoting the interests and assisting the members of a particular industry. Membership in trade associations includes companies, firms, or other organizations engaged in similar activities. Business competitors associate in order to organize and implement mutual-assistance efforts and to expand or protect their industry.

According to the ASAE, The Center for Association Leadership, there are more than 90,000 trade and professional associations in the United States.⁵ Examples include the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers (called the Auto Alliance, with only 12 members) and the National Automobile Dealers Association, with nearly 16,000 new car and truck dealer members. The National Lumber and Building Material Dealers Association has more than

6,000 members involved in the building industry.

Producer associations and commodity boards, such as the National Dairy Promotion and Research Board and the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, represent the interests of their members and promote consumption of their commodities. For example, the Virginia Grain Producers Association offers five annual events to support the state's corn and grain industries.

Federations—also referred to as councils or institutes—typically include other associations. For example, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions has more than 1,600 member associations and individual institutions in 150 countries. The National Cotton Council of America represents associations of cotton producers, ginner, warehouse managers, merchants, and so on to unify their efforts to promote the cotton industry. The National Pork Producers Council has 43 affiliated state associations, and its mission is “to fight for reasonable legislation and regulations, develop revenue and market opportunities and protect the livelihoods of America's 67,000 pork producers.”⁶

Federations of labor unions, such as the Teamsters and the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), represent many different occupational, trade, and craft unions. The AFL-CIO, for example, represents 57 national and international labor unions and more than 12 million members.⁷

Reach of Associations

Associations can operate at the local, state, regional, national or international levels. Examples of the reach of professional associations for public relations practitioners are found in [Chapter 5](#).

On a global level, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, founded in 1893, has more than 16,000 members in 94 countries. Even older, the International Association of Fire Chiefs was founded in 1873 and today has nearly 12,000 members in leadership positions among firefighters and other

emergency responders.

One of the most influential associations in the United States, the AARP (formerly the American Association of Retired Persons), flexed its muscle on behalf of its almost 38 million members to lobby the members of the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction. In a letter to members of the Joint Select Committee, AARP CEO Barry Rand urged them to not cut Social Security or Medicare as part of their plan to reduce the national budget deficit.⁸ The American Bar Association is an organization of nearly 400,000 legal professionals that promotes improvements in the U.S. system of justice.⁹

At the state level, the California Milk Advisory Board promotes consumption of dairy products on behalf of the state's dairy farmers, and the California Milk Processors Board promotes fluid milk consumption on behalf of the state's dairy processors. Another statewide dairy association, the Dairy Council of California, conducts nutrition education programs financed by both dairy farmers and dairy processors. In 2008, the Dairy Council of California had a budget of \$6 million, 5 offices, 30 professionals working in nutrition education, and the services of the San Diego public relations firm of Nuffer, Smith, Tucker. Their educational programs are presented in elementary and secondary school classrooms, online and offline media, and through medical and nutrition communities.¹⁰

The resources that dairy associations are able to direct to such activities illustrate the power of producer groups: Congress mandated that dairy farmers nationally contribute a 15-cent checkoff on every 100 pounds of milk produced to promote dairy products. Five cents of the checkoff goes to the National Dairy Promotion and Research Board, five cents goes to state or regional promotion organizations, and the remaining five cents (sometimes referred to as the "middle nickel") can go to either the national or state organization, depending on which one individual dairy farmers designate.¹¹ Likewise, pork producers pay 40 cents out of every \$100 worth of pigs sold to fund pork promotion, education, and research.

But despite their power and reach, associations sometimes must restructure or disband as a result of external pressures, just as other open organizational systems would in response to environmental change pressures (see [Chapter](#)

7). For example, in South Africa, the Association for Savings and Investment SA was created as its founding organizations' members disbanded their respective separate associations: Association of Collective Investments, the Investment Management Association of South Africa, the Linked Investment Service Providers Association, and the Life Offices' Association.

In the United States, the once-powerful Tobacco Institute, founded in 1958, was the trade association for that industry whose mission included the defeat of legislation that would harm industry interests. Among other questionable activities, the Institute paid and pressured scientists to minimize legitimate concerns related to tobacco, such as second-hand smoke. The Institute was forced to disband after the National Association of Attorneys General successfully sued Big Tobacco in 1998.

The Problem of Serving Many Masters

In contrast to corporations and other organizations with clearly defined business interests, associations typically serve a variety of membership interests. Association staffs must attempt to meet membership demands and serve their interests externally, but often must do so with little centralized power and authority. The challenge for public relations is to find the common ground and unifying positions that best represent member interests. Thus, associations are by nature limited to areas of action in which there is general agreement or a substantial majority in support of any initiatives taken on behalf of membership.

Associations log nearly 200 million volunteer hours with activities such as organizing blood drives for the American Red Cross, contributing to the United Way, delivering Meals On Wheels, staffing hotlines, and more. Associations also protect consumers by ensuring high professional standards, disseminating accurate information to those who need it most, or providing information on health care, tax reform, product safety, and other issues affecting everyday citizens.

Growing Importance of Public Relations

Professional groups also were paying attention to public opinion as early as the mid-1800s. In 1855, the American Medical Association (AMA) passed a resolution “urging the secretary of the Association to offer every facility possible to the reports of the public press to enable them to furnish full and accurate reports of the transactions.”¹² And in 1884, the AMA launched the first of its many programs to counter antivivisectionists’ attacks, a problem that persists to this day as animal rights groups protest using animals in research.

Association public relations practitioners design and implement programs to address a variety of challenges:

1. To provide members with helpful information
2. To expand the association by recruiting new members



**There are about 200 million eligible voters.
ALL of them have a stake in the U.S. health care system.**

Health care is the most important issue for many Americans ... because their lives literally depend on it.

Overwhelming numbers of Americans say their own physicians are "good" to "excellent," but our health care system has urgent problems that must be addressed.

As the Republican Party convenes in New York, the AMA calls on party leaders to consider the AMA's proposals for healing our nation's health care system.

Six critical issues need attention now:

- lack of health insurance and choice
- America's medical liability crisis
- patient safety
- strengthening Medicare
- financing care for low-income patients
- curbing managed care abuses

To learn more about the AMA's proposals to improve our nation's health care system, visit www.ama-assn.org/go/HealingtheSystem

**America's physicians — together with America's largest voting bloc, our patients —
are eager to work with lawmakers to help heal our nation's health care system.**

Let's work together to get it done.

American Medical Association
Physicians dedicated to the health of America



Figure 21.1 American Medical Association Advertisement

Courtesy American Medical Association.

3. To harmonize member viewpoints by promoting positive positions
4. To promote the industry or profession
5. To influence government legislation and regulation
6. To improve products and services
7. To gain popular support and combat adverse publicity
8. To train recruits and provide continuing education for all members
9. To contribute to social progress by sponsoring public service programs
10. To promote behavior standards among members that will enhance credibility and stave off government regulation

To achieve these purposes, public relations practitioners in associations are playing increasingly important roles in dealing with issues in the news that affect their members. For one example, see [Exhibit 21.1](#). As another example, when health care reform dominated public debate, the American Medical Association public information staff responded to more than 1,100 calls a month, with about 75 percent of the calls from reporters:

Associations have an advantage when it comes to dealing with the news media and other audiences. To the media and other publics, associations often have more credibility than individual companies or public relations firms because, correctly or not, they are perceived as less self-serving.¹³

The major goals of associations parallel those of public relations: to establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships among internal publics and between the membership collectively and their many external publics.



Exhibit 21.1

The Role of Public Relations at the Public Relations Society of America

Keith Trivitt, Associate Director, Public Relations

As the world's largest association of public relations professionals, the Public Relations Society of America has a responsibility to uphold the values of the profession, enhance its reputation, and advocate its value to the business community. As such, we engage in a variety of communications and advocacy efforts to help promote PRSA and the public relations industry. We do so through direct communications with our members, outreach to key industry stakeholders and influencers, traditional media outreach, as well as the development of advocacy messaging and communications, including letters to the editor, op-eds, blog posts, and regulatory commentary. And, of course, social media plays a significant role

in our communications and engagement efforts. In fact, it is quickly becoming the go-to resource for much of PRSA's public relations efforts.

For example, 2011 saw a variety of ethical transgressions in the public relations industry. Each of these incidents garnered negative media attention about the public relations profession and negatively affected its reputation.

Using PRSA's Code of Ethics, we were able to provide the industry's perspective on why responsible, ethical, and transparent communications practices are business's best option when communicating with the public and employees. We utilize a variety of communications channels, including the placement of op-eds and letters to the editor from PRSA's chair and CEO, to ensure our position on key industry issues finds its way to the right audiences. In being proactive with our advocacy efforts, we find we are able to be a more robust and successful advocate for our members and the public relations industry.

At the Public Relations Society of America, we use public relations for a variety of campaigns. Most important is to advocate the value of public relations and support our members as modern business professionals.

The Nature of Programming

Much of what associations and societies do in the name of public relations follows an annual cycle: seeking new members, making reports to them, and holding conferences. Most associations engage in some or all of the following activities:

1. Preparing and disseminating technical and educational publications, videos, and other public information materials
2. Sponsoring conventions and meetings, instructional seminars, and

exhibitions

3. Handling government contacts and interpreting to members the legislative and administrative actions of government agencies
4. Compiling and publishing relevant statistics
5. Preparing and distributing news, information, and public service announcements to the media
6. Planning and implementing public service activities
7. Establishing and enforcing codes of ethics and standards of performance
8. Disseminating governmental and other standards to members
9. Conducting cooperative research: scientific, social, and economic
10. Placing advertisements on behalf of an entire industry, profession, or business endeavor; or on behalf of public health, safety, or welfare
11. Promoting positive employee relations, accident prevention, and cooperation within an industry, profession, or other special-interest membership
12. Maintaining Internet and intranet sites serving current information needs of members and external stakeholders

Association trends include growing emphasis on public affairs and advocacy communication directed to external constituents and on the use of communication technology to meet the information needs of members. For example, in late 2011, the Newspaper Association of America launched a consumer marketing campaign to encourage people to read newspapers, rather than merely getting information from online sources. With the tagline “Smart is the New Sexy,” the campaign promoted newspaper readership as being part of the democratic ideal of an informed citizenry.

Labor Unions

Closely related to trade associations are labor unions. A labor union consists of a group of workers who organize to gain improvements in wages, benefits, and work conditions, such as flexibility for meeting job and family obligations and a voice in improving the quality of products and services produced by the companies for whom they work. Examples include the National Education Association, American Postal Workers Union, the International Association of Fire Fighters, the Screen Actors Guild, and the Communication Workers of America.

The U.S. labor movement is credited with helping bring about many of the changes and legislation in civil rights, health, education, and employee rights that have occurred since the death of President Franklin Roosevelt. Labor's clout has diminished in recent years, however, because of changes in the workforce, a series of judicial rulings supportive of management, and declining public support of labor unions.

Organized labor unions, with a total membership of about 14.7 million in 2010, represent 11.9 percent of the U.S. workforce. The union membership rate has steadily declined from a high of 20.1 percent in 1983, the first year for which comparable union data are available. Membership in unions varies by industry sector and by geography. For example, 36.2 percent of public-sector workers belong to unions, in contrast to only 6.9 percent of private-sector workers. The highest rate of union membership is found in New York state (24.2 percent) and the lowest in North Carolina (3.2 percent).¹⁴



When I began working as a young man the government had just started Social Security.



Part of every worker's paycheck would be matched by the boss and sent to the government. When we retired, we'd get enough of our money back to help us get by.



It was sort of a contract between working people and the government.



Now the administration wants to cut out some of the benefits you'd get at 65. And at 62 they want to cut your benefits... from 80% to 55%.



SOCIAL SECURITY.

**A CONTRACT,
NOT A HANDOUT.**



AFSCME

Figure 21.2 AFSCME Television Spot, “Social Security”

Courtesy American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees.

Despite the declining rates of union membership, organized labor has shaped national public opinion and policy. Labor has had a rich history of fighting against employer abuses since the early part of the twentieth century and today still stands up for civil and human rights, voting rights, access to health care, better working conditions, protection for immigrant workers, and more (see [Figure 21.2](#)).

Organized labor’s strong convictions have led to increased political influence. For example, the “America Needs a Raise” campaign by the AFL-CIO contributed to legislation raising the minimum wage. According to then-AFL-CIO President John Sweeney:

Minimum-wage workers are doing some of the hardest, most-needed and most-dangerous work in America, with minimal or nonexistent benefits and unforgiving schedules that can mean job loss because of a sick child or transportation breakdown.¹⁵

But the development of a global economy and international trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has labor leaders concerned that jobs will be lost.

For example, a pilot program that allowed a small number of Mexican trucks to travel freely on U.S. highways prompted the Teamsters Union to launch a campaign to stop the Department of Transportation from allowing this program. The union claimed that Mexican trucks on U.S. highways represented a safety hazard and would eliminate U.S. jobs. The union efforts included media outreach, rallies, posters, banners and bumper stickers, a

leafleting campaign, and more.[16](#)

The Problem of Strikes

Through the years, workers have tried to improve living and working conditions. But when their demands were not met, they have sometimes refused to work—that is, they went on strike. However, for a variety of political, economic, and social reasons, strikes are not as frequent today as they were early in the twentieth century.

Following a bitter, four-month strike by 70,000 United Food and Commercial Workers in Southern California against three grocery firms, the spokesperson for one of the companies said, “I think the lesson coming out of Southern California is clear. No one wins in a strike.”[17](#)

The biggest impediment to a prolonged strike is the growing recognition that strikes may damage both sides. For example, workers only make money when they work, a company that is struck is less able to produce products or serve clients, and customers go elsewhere. When the strike is settled, contractual gains may not offset financial losses, customers may not return, and jobs may be lost permanently.

Despite the risks, inconveniences and costs involved, the strike weapon is still considered essential to labor’s success. Media coverage tends to feature picket lines, angry strikers, and vocal labor leaders. Management, on the other hand, is somewhat restricted by law as to what it can say and do. (Review the section in [Chapter 6](#) on employee and labor relations, particularly the Wagner Act of 1935 and the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947.)

On the surface, it would be easy to advise unions not to go on strike because of the impact on public opinion and on relations with management. But strategic public relations in the labor movement often calls for leveraging labor’s position of power in ways that will not be universally popular but that will achieve labor’s goals for members.

The Challenge for Labor

In recent years, unions have been debating the best ways to reverse the trend of declining membership while finding ways to increase the power of workers. Stephen Lerner, assistant to the president of one of the nation's largest unions, Service Employees International Union (SEIU), suggested that unions need to reorganize for greater effectiveness: "Traditional organizing doesn't let you do enough fast enough, so that's why we don't do it anymore. How do we get bigger, faster and grow? We should do all sorts of experiments."¹⁸ Unions would organize faster and be more powerful, according to Lerner, if they merged and realigned to focus on perhaps 15 distinct industries, such as durable manufacturing, retail trade, or finance.

Some argue that if unions are to survive, they must become more productive partners with business. American Rights at Work, an educational and advocacy organization dedicated to improving the climate for America's workers, regularly features companies that it says treat workers with respect. Called "Partnerships That Work," recent companies included CUTCO Cutlery Corporation, Monterey Mushrooms, Inc., USA Coffee Company, and AT&T, Inc.¹⁹

Recognizing that organized labor must change with the changing environment, business forecaster David Pearce Snyder says:

We in America are reinventing our corporations, reinventing government, reinventing labor relations, reinventing health care and public education. We are reinventing all of our great institutions, and when we are all done, we will have reinvented America. The other industrial nations are beginning to reinvent themselves as well. Eventually, the whole world will be reinvented.²⁰

The Role of Public Relations

Organized labor's approach to public relations has changed since the early days of George Meany, the first president of the AFL-CIO, who for 25 years

was labor's clearly identifiable and unquestioned spokesperson. Today, the skills of public relations specialists and others have been augmented and honed to meet the needs of expanded, more sophisticated programs. Public relations is increasingly involved in identifying new target audiences, establishing and maintaining key relationships, refining messages, building trust, and more. Globalization and new media technologies have forced unions to better utilize public relations to mobilize members, tell their story, and gain public support. Public affairs management teams are now using research and social media along with traditional tools such as news releases, upgraded newsletters, and public service announcements.

In labor unions, as in all other organizational settings, public relations will play a central role as organizations reinvent themselves and their relationships with publics. Change, in the final analysis, drives the public relations management function in all organizations.

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1. What are some different types of associations? Why do such association types exist?

2. What are some challenges faced by practitioners working on behalf of associations? How are these challenges similar to or different from those faced by practitioners working for other organizations?
3. In what ways are labor unions different from other association types?
4. What roles can public relations play in maintaining relationships between management and labor?

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