

Strategic Relationship Building

An Ethical Organization Communicating Effectively

1

Vignette: The Edison, New Jersey, Pipeline Explosion:
Texas Eastern Transmission in the Spotlight

Strategic Relationships: Mutual Benefits

The Definition of Public Relations

The Five Functions of Public Relations

Public Relations and Society

Public Relations and the Rhetorical Tradition

Social Responsibility of Public Relations

Marketplace Responsibility of Public Relations

An Ethical Organization Communicating Effectively

Marketing, Advertising, Public Relations, and Integrated Communication: Similarities and Differences

Marketing: Creating and Positioning Products or Services

Advertising: Creating and Paying to

Place Informative and Persuasive Messages

Public Relations: Creating Strategic Mutually Beneficial Relationships

Integrated Communication: Creating Integrated Messages

Circumstances That Call for Public Relations

Organizations That Need Public Relations

Business Organizations

Professional Reflection: Reflections of an Account Executive

Governmental Agencies

Nonprofit Organizations

How Organizations Use Public Relations

Conclusion

Further Exploration

Ethical Quandary: Unethical Organizations and Public Relations Practice

Summary Questions

Exercises

Recommended Readings

Vignette:

The Edison, New Jersey, Pipeline Explosion: Texas Eastern Transmission in the Spotlight

On March 23, 1994, a natural gas pipeline owned by the Texas Eastern Transmission Corporation (TETCO), of Houston, Texas, exploded near the Durham Woods Apartments, in Edison, New Jersey. (TETCO was a subsidiary of Panhandle Eastern Transmission, now Duke Energy.) People for miles were shaken by the explosion, which occurred just before midnight. After the explosion, a fierce orange ball of fire could be seen all the way from network television offices in New York City. The chief engineer for the *New York Times* printing plant in Edison reported that the flames leapt 300 to 400 feet into the air and were so intense that headlights on nearby automobiles melted, giving the appearance that they were crying. Initial news reports indicated that at least 10 people were injured and that at least six apartment buildings were completely destroyed. People from the apartment complex milled about in the street, wearing only their nightclothes; many feared that all they owned had been destroyed. To make matters even worse, emergency personnel had no idea whether or not more explosions would occur. As the fire blazed, the dispatcher for the local fire department reported that the Mobil Chemical Company plant in Edison had also gone up in flames.



Explosion Creates Community Relations Crisis

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Upon hearing the news, the mayor of Edison immediately blamed TETCO for the fire. The mayor took legal steps to force the pipeline company to cease its operations because they were unsafe. If you were the vice president for public affairs for TETCO, what would you do? How would you handle the mayor's action against your company? What facts would you want to know as you researched this crisis and prepared your response?

The executives who led the response to this need for public relations solutions had answers to these questions. Compare their response to what you might have done. See the vignette at the start of Chapter 5 to learn what they did.

Welcome to *Today's Public Relations*: Imagine that it's your first day on the job as a newly employed public relations professional. You are busy at your desk at 10:18 on a Monday morning. Your boss bustles in and tells you to have a media release ready by 4:00—your first important assignment in your new professional job. “Okay,” you think to yourself, “no problem!” You have been trained to write a media release, but before you begin, you need to ask yourself why you are writing it. What do you want to accomplish with this media release? Even more important, consider what this media release means strategically for you, for your department, and for your organization. You must also consider how the media release will affect other organizations, groups of people inside and outside of your organization, and society itself. You must be strategic; you should make purposeful choices designed to achieve specific objectives.

In your preparation, you may consider rhetorical options that are SMART. The SMART approach to public relations thinks beyond tactics to consider all of the following options:

Societal value and meaning: The smart practitioner realizes that each statement and action can have consequences for the quality of society, the community where he or she works. Public relations and its clients do not operate in a vacuum. They are part of society.

Mutually beneficial relationships: Relationship building is required for public relations. A relationship is mutually beneficial when all of the involved parties gain from it and support it. Relationships are mutually beneficial when they are based on wise and sound ethical choices that foster the interests of all of the parties involved.

Advantages through objectives: Public relations is designed to achieve specific purposes, such as to raise awareness, increase understanding, align interests, share perspectives, compromise, reduce conflict, foster identification, and motivate action based on shared interests.

Rhetorical strategies: Rhetorical approaches to public relations require strategic planning based on research to decide on messages and tactics that can be used to achieve the objectives through specific message points. Rhetorical strategies include message development options: gaining awareness, informing, persuading, fostering identifications, and cocreating meaning to build bridges. Practitioners have an arsenal of strategies at their discretion to achieve their objectives: planning, research, collaborative decision making, and publicity coupled with promotion.

Tactics: Each specific public relations activity is a tactic. Writing and issuing a media release is a tactic, as is holding a media conference to respond to a crisis or creating and executing a publicity event to increase awareness for the grand opening of a shopping mall. Strategic responses force the practitioner to ask: What public relations tool should I use, what message content should we feature in our statements, and when should we implement our tactic?

4

Today's Public Relations

If you have learned to think SMART, you ask questions and develop innovative solutions that make a difference, the heart of today's public relations. This text is designed to help you think tactically, strategically, and ethically about public relations and to teach you to ask questions and develop solutions that make a difference for your client by building mutually beneficial relationships with people who can positively or negatively affect the future of your client or employer. Public relations can help businesses, nonprofits, and governmental agencies to be successful.

Public relations is an integral part of national and global economies. Today's public relations practitioners contribute to all aspects of society, from passing laws to influencing consumer purchases to funding nonprofit agencies. Today's practitioners must face challenges that were often not addressed in the past. The professional practice of public relations requires more than merely being pleasant, meeting people, working with the media, and staging promotional events. Today, the profession is committed to creating, maintaining, and repairing strategic relationships in the face of conflicting interests and ethical choices. These relationships should equally benefit both your clients (or employer) and the people whose lives they affect. The need for creativity is constant. Strategic planning and critical thinking are vital for success. Ethical standards must guide every step of the process. Making a positive difference on behalf of clients or for your employer organization is the essence of professional public relations practice. To have a solid impact, you will need to be an ethical and strategic thinker as well as an effective communicator.

This book is actually designed for several audiences. A student may use it to prepare to become a professional practitioner, but practitioners who already work in public relations can also use it to increase their career knowledge and hone their strategic, ethical, and critical skills. Practitioners may find it invaluable in reviewing for their accreditation examinations.

Our first chapter poses an ethical quandary designed to develop your ethical and strategic reasoning so crucial in successfully practicing public relations. Included in this chapter, and throughout other chapters of this volume, autobiographical insights will offer a peek into what it's like to be a professional public relations practitioner. You will also find "Web Watchers," which challenge you to consider real-life examples of how public relations is practiced using the Internet; each Web Watcher encourages you to understand and appreciate the growing potential of cyberspace communication technology in the public relations process.

This chapter strives to help the reader to understand the complexity of public relations within the United States but also as part of a daunting global society composed of many voices, interests, and cultures. Practitioners must realize public relations is neither simplistic nor isolated from other organizations, organizational units, or groups. Public relations is complex. Many theories, much research, and decades of learning best practices help students to understand its role in society and identify when public relations is required. In broad strokes, theory is used to understand the processes of communication, its content, and the quality of relationships. Systems theory helps explain processes. Rhetorical heritage informs how people deal with meaning. Interpersonal communication, especially social exchange theory, gives insights into how relationships are created, maintained, and repaired.

Strategic Relationships: Mutual Benefits

Today's public relations helps organizations build relationships. Relationships are strongest when they are mutually beneficial and characterized by "win-win" outcomes. Relationships are best when people share information that is accurate and relevant. Relationships require a commitment to open and trustworthy dialogue, a spirit of cooperation, a desire to align interests, a willingness to adopt compatible views/opinions, and a commitment to make a positive difference in the lives of everyone affected by your organization.

Before we continue to discuss this topic, let's look briefly at a relationship that has the potential for being mutually beneficial. In 2000, building-products giant Home Depot, Inc., created a relationship with the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). The goal was to work together to select and market building materials that are harvested with environmentally responsible techniques. This accord ended a long and rancorous debate in which FSC charged Home Depot and other building-materials merchants with environmental destruction. This alliance could help Home Depot claim that its marketing techniques were environmentally responsible, thereby aligning its interests with environmental groups and with its customers who want quality but environmentally safe building materials. This relationship could also help Home Depot defend its marketing policies against the attacks of the more radical Rainforest Action Network. Other building materials companies (Wicke's, Lowe's, and Anderson Corporation, a window-building giant) joined in this coalition to meet FSC's environmental standards. These organizations engaged in two-way communication to collaboratively make decisions. This process could build trust, align interests, demonstrate environmental commitment, be cooperative, adopt compatible views/opinions, and commit to supporting the global market for building materials in an environmentally responsible manner. Once this agreement had been achieved, public relations could use media relations disseminate information about the agreement, attract and keep customers, and reduce activist criticism. This agreement strengthened Home Depot's reputation as being environmentally responsible. It added to FSC's image as an advocate for wise natural resource management.

A commitment to help build relationships calls for high ethical standards, strategic thinking, and effective communication. Quality relationships exist when people and organizations have compatible interests and share compatible views of the world. To assess the quality of a relationship, practitioners ask questions such as, "Is the donation to a school an investment in the community's future or merely a publicity stunt to attract favorable yet undeserved attention to an otherwise unethical company?"

Relationships can start, succeed, fail, and need repair. Similar interpretations of events and shared benefits are critical factors in any relationship. People can see and interpret the same event very differently—watch any "judge show" on television and you will appreciate how easy it is for people to interpret events differently. Organizations and their stakeholders need to share similar interpretations of events if the relationship is to run smoothly. *Stakeholders* have something of value (a stake). A stake might be customers' willingness to purchase goods and services. Home Depot and the other

6

Today's Public Relations

companies in the FSC alliance hope to be rewarded by the stakes (purchases and praise) of happy customers, reduced likelihood of regulatory constraints (stake), and praise rather than condemnation by environmental activists (stake).

Relationships are strongest when founded on shared interpretations that result from the cocreation of meaning. Environmentalists, such as FSC, communicate with building-materials companies to adopt shared views regarding ways to reduce environmental damage while marketing products to building-materials customers. Organizations and their stakeholders cocreate meaning by engaging in dialogue about message points basic to their relationships. People do not stay in relationships if they get nothing from them or if their views clash rather than align.

Today's public relations practitioners help their employers or clients to treat individuals and groups with honesty and respect. You might imagine yourself, for instance, working as a public relations practitioner for Home Depot (or one of the other building-materials companies) to meet and discuss these issues with FSC (or you could imagine working as a senior member of a public relations agency that was working that issue for its client, for example, Lowe's or Anderson). Viewed in these terms, the relationship between an organization and key stakeholders is the same as that between good friends who want the best for each other. Likewise, customers want good businesses to succeed, and citizens want good organizations—business, non-profit, and governmental—to continue their operations. Donors and members want nonprofit organizations to serve society. In your practice, you could work for such organizations, either as an employee in a public relations department or for an agency that has a contracted relationship with these clients.

BOX 1.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF A MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL RELATIONSHIP

- **Openness:** fosters two-way communication based on listening for and sharing valuable information, as well as being responsive, respectful, candid, and honest. One-way communication occurs when an organization "speaks" but does not listen to or acknowledge the merit in what other people and organizations "say."
- **Trustworthiness:** builds trust among publics and clients by being reliable, nonexploitative, and dependable.
- **Cooperation:** engages in collaborative decision making that ensures that the needs/wants of the organization and its stakeholders are met.
- **Alignment:** shares interests, rewards, and goals with those of its stakeholders.
- **Compatibility of views/opinions:** fosters mutual understanding and agreement, cocreates meaning.
- **Commitment:** supports the community by being involved in it, investing in it, and displaying commitment to it.

Relationship building is more than a buzzword. At its foundation, this concept is based on the principle of symbiosis, the foundation of biology—and even ecology. According to systems theory, all elements of nature prosper when they are in balance or experience harmony. This logic is applied to human society. Interpersonal relationship communication points out that people like relationships that reward them. When the relationship is not rewarding, they have no incentive to remain a part of it. The same can be said for the role of public relations. It seeks to foster harmony and balance between organizations and the people whose goodwill and support they need.

The Definition of Public Relations

The most effective way to begin to understand public relations is to define it. We have, in fact, repeatedly used the term *public relations* without pausing to define it! You may have your own definition, so let's not take for granted that your definition is the same as ours. Too often, people use a narrow and misleading definition of public relations. One such view considers public relations as little more than image building, a caricatured view that can reduce the practice to “flacks” who create a glossy or downright false image of an organization by “spinning” the truth. Those terms describe people who know how to lie and twist or spin issues during press conferences and other public forums to take the heat off of the organizations they represent. Another myopic view of public relations sees it as reputation management or impression management, whereby public relations mops up the mess left by unscrupulous business practices.

True, organizations want to be seen in the best possible light, but a good reputation is only part of their success. Let's avoid featuring a view of reputation management that leads some people to believe incorrectly that public relations distorts the truth to make a bad organization seem good. As we try to define public relations, we pay attention to the value that public relations adds to the organizations it serves as well as the people whose goodwill those organizations need. The essence of creating a good reputation or impression is to prove to stakeholders that the organization can create and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with them.

Our definition is lengthy but has to be in order to capture public relations' complexity. Public relations is the management function that entails planning, research, publicity, promotion, and collaborative decision making to help any organization's ability to listen to, appreciate, and respond appropriately to those persons and groups whose mutually beneficial relationships the organization needs to foster as it strives to achieve its mission and vision. This definition points to five key characteristics: (1) a management function, (2) the five major functions of public relations, (3) the practitioner's need to listen, appreciate, and respond, (4) the emphasis on mutually beneficial relationships, and (5) the achievement of a particular mission and vision. It is actually more important to appreciate these five characteristics than to memorize the definition verbatim.

The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) officially defines public relations as a management function. As part of management, public relations managers should be intimately involved in selecting and implementing the organization's strategic goals by working alongside other managers who lead the organization. In this management function, public relations practitioners assist other managers to make sound strategic-planning and operating decisions. To do so, they anticipate, analyze, and respond to opinions of people and groups (stakeholders)—both inside and outside the organization—whose opinions and actions can affect the organization in positive or negative ways.

Because practitioners must work closely with other managers, they need to have a broad knowledge of the organization and all its operations, as well as an interest in the public policy and public opinion issues that are likely to affect the plans, activities, and outputs of the organization. Only then can practitioners anticipate and effectively help management respond to the needs of the organization and the interests of its stakeholders. You cannot have a meaningful discussion with other managers about operations or pending legislation if you have not bothered to analyze and understand them. The five functions of public relations—planning, research, publicity, promotion, and collaborative decision making—help to bring our definition to life.

Viewed in detail, these functions emphasize strong communication skills but entail a lot more than writing media releases or seeing that the balloons ordered for an event are the right color. Those tactics are important for successful public relations, but the definition asks practitioners to master strategic rhetorical processes of listening, appreciating what is heard, and responding to and even yielding to comments by stakeholder groups whose opinions and actions can make or break an organization. These public relations functions can achieve outcomes that are beneficial to the individual or the organization. Finally, the definition recognizes that an organization should be goal directed—pursue a mission and vision—and that public relations should help its employer or client organization to achieve those goals.

The Five Functions of Public Relations

The definition of public relations in this book spotlights five functions of public relations management: strategic planning, research, publicity, promotion, and collaborative decision making. In any organization, *functions* are the strategic actions that a person or an entire unit performs, including day-to-day operations as well as long-term planning. Let's look more closely at each of these functions to understand how each one helps to build mutual understanding needed to develop relationships among individuals, groups, and institutions.

The *strategic-planning* function positions the organization to respond to the needs, wants, and opinions of others. Planning involves counseling management's efforts to align their interests with those of their stakeholders. Public relations uses research to obtain data that can be used to refine planning decisions regarding which publicity activities and promotional campaigns can get the organization's message to its customers. Research helps define threats and opportunities that exist around the organization. Public

relations activities are planned to support the plans and objectives of the organization. Public relations research and planning recognize the advantages of using collaborative decision making to build, maintain, or repair strategic relationships. For instance, building-materials companies seek positive relationships with environmental activists and customers. Thinking back to the vignette used to open this chapter, we can imagine that senior management at Texas Eastern Transmission (TETCO) wanted to repair its relationships with persons harmed and inconvenienced by the explosion and fire.

In recent years, public relations' role in strategic planning has become so influential that many organizations have created a new management position called the *chief communication officer* (CCO), the head of public relations, who works alongside others in top management. Capturing the essence of the CCO's job description, the *PRSA Blue Book* stated, "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" (PRSA, 2003, p. B3). The CCO works alongside other key executives: chief executive officer (CEO), chief operating officer (COO), chief financial officer (CFO), and general counsel (the top lawyer for the organization). The CCO's duty is to ensure that the organization communicates effectively with its key markets, audiences, and publics, both internal and external.

The CCO is responsible for communicating with three kinds of people (stakeholders) with whom an organization wants to build mutually satisfying relationships: markets, audiences, and publics (we will refer to these as an organization's "MAPs"). A *market* is an identifiable group, current and potential customers, whom executives believe will want or need a product or service or will join and contribute to the community service activities of a nonprofit organization. An *audience* is some identifiable group of people an organization wants to reach with its message. A *public* is an identifiable group, either inside or outside of an organization, whose opinions on issues can affect the success of the organization. An *inside public* might be women or minority employees who feel they have not been treated fairly in terms of promotion and pay. An *external public* is an organization (such as FSC) or a group of individuals who share awareness of a problem, such as environmentalists. A public can pressure an organization to change its plans, policies, and priorities. MAPs need careful attention by any organization that seeks to foster effective and strategic relationships.

Public relations research is contextual and situational. Research seeks to understand *contexts*, such as markets (or customers), investors, employees, members of the public and business sectors, governmental officials, the media, and many other groups. Each group of people has its own opinions, concerns, and motivations. Your research can locate and examine the desires, beliefs, and attitudes of persons who can benefit or harm the organization. It is *situational* because opinions, tastes, wants, values, attitudes, and beliefs of these groups change. If a product is not selling well, that situation calls for research to discover whether it fits the tastes of targeted customers. If people are protesting a company's operations, that situation requires research to understand the merits of the activists' concerns.

PRSA advises practitioners to assist with the design, execution, and evaluation of research to understand the views of people outside of the organization. The *research*

function can help managers know what to say in response to public policy issues and consumer concerns. Public relations management uses research to assess the impact of the organization's messages. It defines threats and opportunities. One specific objective of this research is to ascertain whether people believe the organization is socially responsible. Research can determine whether customers are aware of its products and services.

Publicity involves attracting attention and supplying information about a specific activity or attribute of the organization. Publicity employs media coverage to attract attention and inform targeted MAPs about an organization, product, service, need, or issue. Publicity could include a successful public relations effort to get local media to cover the grand opening of a new store or shopping center. Publicity, in this instance, is intended to attract shoppers' attention and give them information about the store or shopping center they can use when making purchases. To publicize the opening of a new shopping mall outside of Houston, Texas, a public relations firm encouraged reporters to feature the unique mix of businesses, the interesting architecture of the center, and its location. Publicity can alert battered women, for example, to the existence of a center where they can find shelter. Houston Area Women's Center uses periodic news reports as well as counseling through health and law enforcement professionals to help women know the array of services provided by the center. Publicity can attract donors' attention to the need for funding of this kind of shelter. Universities, for instance, routinely publicize their need for funding to support the library or special programs for students.

Promotion involves a series of publicity efforts that transpire for several days, weeks, or months to attract customers' attention and supply them with useful information. A promotional effort consists of a series of publicity events and news stories that are covered by the media so that MAPs become more aware of and informed about some organization, product, service, need, or issue. In contrast to a onetime publicity activity, promotion entails sustained efforts by public relations practitioners to attract continuing media attention. For instance, the shopping center might hold a publicity event each time a new store opens. To further the promotional effort, the shopping center can sponsor some activity to foster community support, such as an event for needy children to buy back-to-school clothes and supplies. Promotional activities can create or increase awareness for the shopping center and help to foster a community-minded reputation.

Collaborative decision making in public relations involves counseling leaders within the organization and fostering a decision-making style that respects the concerns of the publics affected by a decision. Consider the example of an organization looking to expand its manufacturing facility. The expansion option favored by the manufacturer would displace residents in one part of a tight-knit community. Collaborative decision making, however, would factor the citizens' concerns into the decision. Such counseling entails not only considering the interests of the organization but also the ramifications of policy, products, services, and operations as well as the organization's social and citizenship responsibilities. As a counselor, practitioners advise people at all levels of an organization about tactics, ethical actions, strategic

solutions to problems, public policy decisions, and the best communication options to use in a given situation. Counseling involves taking stands and developing messages needed to participate in public dialogues, such as forums, town hall meetings, debates, and community or civic events to anticipate, understand, and represent the organization as having ideas that are valuable to the community in which it operates. The manufacturer, for instance, might run several open-door community forums to get a sense of citizen concerns and to better understand how to expand the facilities, which offer added local employment, though at the expense of some members of the community.

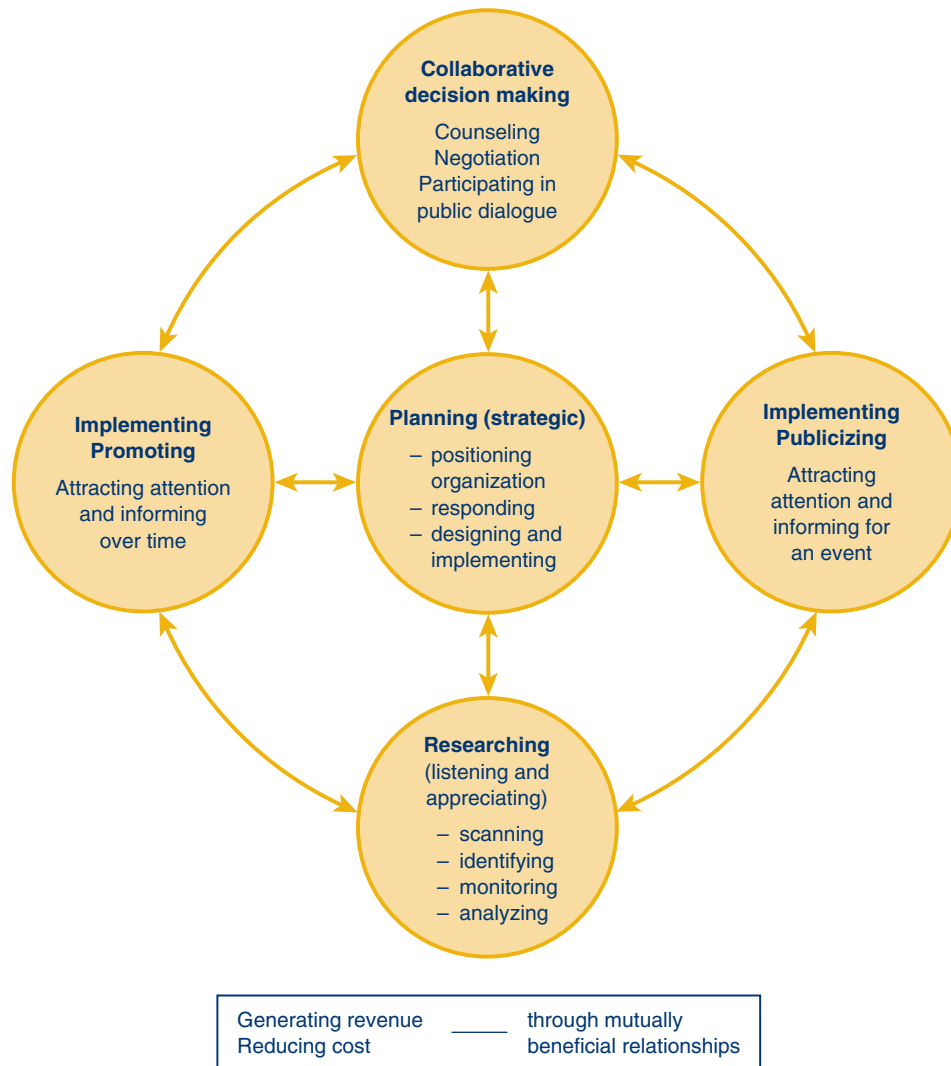
Public dialogues express differences of opinion and may result in conflict between the positions taken by the organization and concerned groups. For instance, environmentalists in the Pacific Northwest have opposed logging practices that they fear will destroy the habitat of spotted owls and damage water quality, due to erosion. In doing so, environmentalists threaten the jobs of the loggers, who worry that they may no longer be able to earn a living and care for their families. In this instance, practitioners could attend meetings to hear concerns expressed by loggers and environmentalists. Using this research, they can decide with their management the most constructive role for the organization. Based on the position taken by management, practitioners can inject opinions and data into the public dialogue, for instance, through media releases and public meetings. They can create and facilitate collaborative decision-making meetings, where the interested parties hammer out a mutually satisfying agreement.

Figure 1.1 depicts the five functions of public relations. The centerpiece in this model is strategic planning, the foundation of all activities. All public relations activities require planning for successful tactical implementation and goal achievement. The four outer circles capture the remaining functions of publicity, promotion, research, and collaborative decision making, all of which should be designed to build strategic relationships. The functions of public relations are interactive, helping the organization to attract and wisely use the resources it needs to accomplish its mission and vision.

Public Relations and Society

Public relations does not occur in a vacuum, but is the product of societies whose people and organizations interact to better themselves and shape their society. Through public discussion, people assert their points of view, criticize those of others, establish laws, and govern their behavior. This dialogue gives rise to each society—its arts and sciences, education, morality, and marketplace. Democratic society and free enterprise could simply not exist without this public examination of ideas.

To understand today's public relations, we need to discuss its social responsibility to serve the best interests of the marketplace and to wisely address ethical principles that define the public policies of society. A useful way to explore these points is to locate public relations within the rhetorical tradition. From there, we can appreciate why public relations must adhere to societal and marketplace responsibilities.

Figure 1.1: Five Functions of Public Relations as Relationship Building

► Public Relations and the Rhetorical Tradition

As a practice, rhetoric focuses on the skills needed to be effective in informing, persuading, making collaborative decisions, and cocreating meaning. Rhetoric ideally exists because people—MAPs—want information and evaluations they can use to make ethical and satisfying decisions. A rhetorical view of public relations assumes that factual evidence, reasoned argument, and ethical judgment are crucial to effective communication and solid relationships.

Why do we draw on rhetorical philosophy to support the practice of public relations? Writers on rhetoric examine the communication processes by which people influence the thoughts and actions of others by cocreating meaning. The very foundation of society is a body of law and constitutional principles that members of society contest and refine through discourse. Rhetoric assumes that people and groups publicly assert their views and demonstrate that their ideas are correct. They share in the formation of meaning that guides the choices people make in their daily lives. The cornerstone of rhetoric is strategic listening, appreciating, and responding to the concerns and opinions others hold.

We can trace the connection between rhetoric and public relations. In keeping with the tradition of rhetoric, public relations professionals can serve society to the degree that they meet or exceed societal expectations for ethical and effective public communication. Are they good listeners? Do they appreciate others' concerns? Are they committed to base judgment on sound fact and good evaluations? Do they prefer dialogue to monologue?

For centuries, rhetoric has been a critical part of the education of effective and responsible citizens. Today, the term *rhetoric* has fallen on hard times and is often used to refer to statements that are hollow, without substance. ("That is mere rhetoric!") The term can cause some people to feel discomfort because it is associated with a speaker or writer who cleverly manipulates an audience with empty statements. Students, however, encounter a more correct version of rhetoric in English, philosophy, classics, classical history, or speech communication classes, a definition that is far more positive and more accurate for understanding public relations. This debate over the best approach to rhetoric reaches back to the age of Plato, who criticized some of his contemporaries (for instance, Gorgias and Protagoras) who did manipulate audiences.

Rhetoric Is the Strategic Art of Effective Public Communication

That conclusion was formulated during a robust period in the history of Ancient Greece and Rome. In those societies, philosophers of rhetoric carefully developed principles for effective public communication and prescribed how people should manage their lives to be useful and ethically responsible citizens. The rhetorical heritage champions the principle that public communication is best when ethical people communicate effectively. As you shall see in Chapter 2, public relations practitioners have had identical concerns for centuries. Chapter 9 features the topic of public relations ethics.

The rhetorical heritage arose from dramatic changes in the government of Greece during the 5th century BC. Citizens needed to communicate effectively in court in order to reclaim property that had been unlawfully taken from them. Many of these people were not articulate. They wanted to know the principles and develop the skills of effective strategic communication so they could defend their property rights. In those days, there were no lawyers, so citizens had to be their own advocates.

Ancient Greeks respected the practical power of discourse and believed that individuals must use it ethically. Realizing that some statements were more effective than others, they sought answers to two basic questions: First, what are the best tactics and strategies of message development, design, and delivery for speaking and writing? Second, does good character help people to communicate with greater impact

in society? These eternal questions are still being explored by today's public relations practitioners.

Not all ancient Greeks believed that skillful public communication was good for society. Plato thought, as many people do today, that rhetoric was a craft devoid of truth and devoted to trickery. His experience with courts in Greece led him to fear that tricky speakers could win their cases by using arguments that lacked substance and were not well reasoned, but rather appealed to people's prejudices and irrational impulses. Similar concerns persist about public relations practitioners who focus on image at the expense of substance. Remember how our definition of public relations sought to avoid the narrow definition of public relations as image?

BOX 1.2 IMAGE AND ADVERTISING

To help you think about image, we have included samples of communication tactics to demonstrate the interconnectedness of public relations and image-advertising campaigns. One of the most interesting public relations campaigns using advertising was sponsored by Mobil Oil Company, today part of ExxonMobil. Mobil's campaign was designed to convey the message that large companies are needed to solve large problems. Mobil's public affairs personnel believed that issue advertising could reach opinion leaders. To do so, they knew that ads had to be interesting and informative. One means for gaining interest was to tell a story—a fable. Does the use of a narrative in the "Peanuts" ad make its message more interesting and memorable? For more detail, see additional discussion of this campaign in Chapter 2.

Aristotle (1952), a Greek philosopher of rhetoric, believed that when people communicate in public, their arguments, evidence, and ideas naturally become better because they must withstand public scrutiny. Rhetoric is vital to society because it champions the open discussion of ideas and the careful examination of facts and information. People become persuaded by the quality of the evidence and reasoning that are provided to them by speakers or writers. They also are moved by emotional evaluations and the character of the communicator.

For Aristotle (1952), the essence of persuasion was factual evidence as well as careful and serious reasoning; he reasoned that rhetoric is "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (p. 595). Either a statement is persuasive and credible because it is self-evidently truthful or because it can be proved so. Public communication gives other members of society the opportunity to democratically assess the quality of ideas that are advocated.

Of course, Aristotle also recognized that people can be fooled by false or flashy arguments. But he saw the positive rather than the negative side to this problem. Aristotle believed that people are not easily swayed from the opinions they hold. They resist influence and are thoughtful critics of what they hear and read. Aristotle concluded that even if people are misled for a while, eventually sound argument will



A Fable for Now:

Why Elephants Can't Live on Peanuts

The Elephant is a remarkable animal . . . huge, yet able to move quickly . . . stronger than any person, yet willing to work hard if properly treated.

One day, an Elephant was ambling through the forest. To her surprise, she found her path to the water hole blocked by a huge pile of sticks, vines, and brambles.

"Hello?" she called out over the barricade. "What gives?"

From behind the pile popped the Monkey. "Buzz off, snake-snoot," the Monkey shouted. "It's an outrage to little folk how much you take in, so the rest of us animals have seized the water hole and the food supply. You're gross, and we're revolting!"

"You certainly give that appearance," the Elephant noted quietly. "What's eating you?"

"It's *you* that's doing too much eating," the Monkey replied, "but we're going to change all that. Strict rations for you, fat friend. No more of your obscene profiteering at the feed trough." Overhead, a Parrot screamed: "From each according to your ability. To each according to our need. Gimme your crackers, gimme *all* your crackers!"

The Elephant was upset at this enormous misunderstanding. Yet, though her heart pounded, between the ears she was quite unflappable. "A moment, please," she said. "Though it may seem that I consume a great deal, it's no more than my share. Because I am large—not fat—it just takes more to keep me going. How can I work hard if you won't let me have the proper nourishment?"

The Monkey sneered. "Knock off that mumbo-jumbo, Dumbo," he said. "You already net more than a million Spiders. You take in more than a thousand Pack Rats. You profit more from the jungle's abundance than a hundred Monkeys!"

"But I also can haul tree trunks too heavy for any other creature," the Elephant said. "I can explore for

new food supplies and water holes, and clear paths through the jungle with my strong legs. My feet can crush, my shoulders can pull, my trunk can lift. I am full of energy. I even give rides to the little ones. But I can't survive on peanuts."

Hours passed. The Elephant, denied access to her eating and drinking grounds, felt hungrier and hungrier, thirstier and thirstier. But soon, so did the other animals. For the sticks and vines that the animals had dragged together and woven into a barricade had become a solid dam, diverting the stream that fed the watering hole. "Help, help," the animals shouted, "crisis, crisis!"

The Elephant surveyed the scene. "Friends," she said, "see what a fix we're all in. Thank goodness I still have the energy to help. And, with your permission, I will." They quickly consented, and she set to work on the dam, pushing earth and pulling plants until the water hole again began to fill. "That's nice," the animals cried, greeting her undamming with faint praise.

"You see," the Elephant said, "you need a big beast for a big job, and a big beast has big needs. Not just to stay alive and growing, but to put a bit aside for tomorrow. And to have a bit extra for working especially hard, or for sharing with have-not animals."

She noticed that everybody had resumed drinking thirstily. Well, that tickled her old ivories, for all she really wanted was to be allowed to go on doing her customary work without any new wrinkles. No need for hurt feelings. After all, who ever heard of a thin-skinned Elephant?

Moral: Meeting America's energy needs is a big job and it takes big companies. If an energy company doesn't earn a profit proportionate to its size, it won't be able to seek and produce more energy. And that's no fable.

Mobil Oil's "Peanuts" Ad

© 1979 Mobil Corporation

This ad appeared in the *New York Times* of August 30, 1979.

prevail. Only through public discussion do people have the chance to hear many sides to each argument as they work to decide which is best.

You might agree that some people are not easily swayed yet concede that people of unethical character have the ability to manipulate others. Addressing this problem about 380 BC, Isocrates (1929b) argued that people who have good ethical character (ethos) are more likely than unethical people to gain acceptance for their ideas over time. Character, good or bad, cannot be hidden or suppressed. It is revealed, sooner or later, by what people say and do. The same is true for large organizations, whether for profit, nonprofit, or government. Their character, and that of their executives, is revealed in their language and actions, how they present their messages and conduct their business. The advantage in public discourse goes to people of sound ethical character. Realizing this fact, Isocrates challenged people to be honorable, because those whose reputations are tarnished have difficulty persuading people as others examine their character, motives, and ideas.

What features distinguish good ethics? Aristotle (1952) answered, “Good sense, good moral character, and goodwill” (p. 623). Goodwill is a crucial part of character, because, as Isocrates (1929a) realized, ethics keeps people from looking only at their own narrow interests. It challenges them to supply the ideas and arguments other members of society want in order to thoughtfully form their own opinions.

These traits are exhibited by excellent organizations and the persons who speak and write on their behalf. They are not the traits of the unscrupulous person or organization that would try to manipulate others’ opinions and actions at all costs. Can a public relations practitioner go wrong by putting Aristotle’s words on the wall of his or her office and living by them as simple, but sound, ethical principles?

The best advice from the rhetorical heritage is to be a good person—or a good organization—that communicates effectively. The 1st century AD Roman rhetorician Quintilian (1951) set forth a lofty challenge:

My aim is to educate the true orator, who must be a good man (or woman) and must include philosophy in his studies in order to shape his character as a citizen and to equip himself to speak on ethical subjects, his special role. (p. 20)

What is the ideal orator—or anyone who engages in public discourse? On this point, Quintilian was firm: “My ideal orator, then, is the true philosopher, sound in morals and with full knowledge of speaking, always striving for the highest” (p. 20). He reasoned, “If a case is based on injustice, neither a good man nor rhetoric has any place in it” (p. 106).

Whether man or woman, today’s practitioner cannot escape the challenge made by Quintilian two millennia ago. Public communication is inseparable from the character of the communicator. Table 1.1 summarizes the principles of the rhetorical heritage. These benchmarks still guide today’s public relations practitioners’ decisions about communication practices.

This brief insight into the rhetorical heritage is intended to cause you to think about challenges facing today’s public relations practice; it may even give you a more positive view of rhetoric. This textbook presents public relations as a means for building

Table 1.1: Principles of the Rhetorical Heritage for Today's Public Relations Practice

The quality of public communication is inseparable from the character of the person and the accuracy of the ideas being advocated.

Public communication should be ethical, since no wise person will lie or distort the truth in public because critics can—and probably will—disclose those lies.

An individual's or organization's reputation can be harmed by not being ethical.

Ideas are improved when they are subjected to public scrutiny, where strong ideas inevitably prevail over weak ones.

Public statements should be built on well-selected evidence and sound reasoning that can withstand public scrutiny.

Public communicators should know and live an ethical life and achieve excellence in communication.

Public communicators of good ethical character are more likely than their unethical counterparts to gain acceptance for their ideas over time.

Public communication helps members of society listen to and read persuasive messages as a means by which important decisions are made.

People lose faith in society when they do not obtain information and advocated opinions that can be used to make individual and collective decisions.

strategic relationships through the ethical application of rhetorical principles. Thus, it is essential that these principles of rhetoric help you to examine the social responsibility, marketplace role, and ethical imperatives of public relations.

► Social Responsibility of Public Relations

Society is a marketplace of ideas, facts, values, and policies. Recall the flow and exchange of ideas you encounter when you pick up a magazine, read a book, listen to a commentator on radio, watch a television interview program, or listen to a public speech. Someone in public relations is a part of the public dialogue and must bear the social responsibility that goes with it.

Capturing these dynamics, Kenneth Burke (1969), a modern philosopher of rhetoric, called society “the Scramble, the Wrangle of the Marketplace, the flurries and flare-ups of the Human Barnyard, Give and Take, the wavering line of pressure and counter pressure” (p. 23). The “wrangle” transpires in public through various media and forums. The jargon of public relations features the concept of *publics*—groups of individuals who have a stake in the outcome of issues. Thus, the term *public* is a rich part of our language: public inquiry, public debate, publication, public record, public scrutiny, key publics, public opinion, public expectations, and public relations.

Public relations is conducted in view of society. As any savvy public relations person knows, every fact, action, choice, and preference has a way of suffering public scrutiny. The fabric of society is strengthened by public examination of solid facts, sound reasoning, and high ethical standards. Sham and deceit may occur in the

substance and strategies some professionals choose to utilize. However, time and public scrutiny will reveal that they lack character and that their arguments lack credibility, as Isocrates taught. Reporters are keen to find and disclose sham, deceit, lies, and dishonesty.

Practitioners help alter the values of a society. Consider the activist group that works to create awareness that certain timber-harvesting methods will have undesirable long-term effects. The activist group may advocate legislation and regulation that alters how harvesting occurs, and society as a whole may benefit from such changes. Also think about the company that defends its practices by demonstrating how its conclusions are based on solid fact and sound reasoning. Such dialogue can mature to the point where collaborative agreements bring environmental practices into the marketing of home-building products.

Public relations professionals may assist in creating lifestyle or cultural changes. For instance, societal culture may change because what was unpopular becomes popular and fashionable. In these ways and thousands more, public relations can contribute to the society where it is practiced. Alcoholic beverage companies, for instance, have become sensitive to the potential for bad relationships with critics of their products. One countermeasure by this industry has been to preach responsible use of alcoholic beverages. One leader, Anheuser-Busch, has pressed its case on college campuses. These social responsibility campaigns have escalated in response to highly publicized cases of college students' deaths due to irresponsible alcohol consumption. Anheuser-Busch has contributed hundreds of thousands of dollars to campuses to promote safe and moderate consumption for students. The campaign has cautioned against underage consumption and binge drinking. These campaigns have used typical public relations tactics: posters, news stories in campus papers, T-shirts, coffee mugs, and screen savers that carry the message, "Drink responsibly if you drink." Beverage companies have even created management-level positions assigned the responsibility of promoting safe consumption practices.

Society expects professional public relations practitioners to meet high standards of truthfulness, candor, and openness. If public relations professionals do not rely on credible facts, they earn a bad reputation as "flacks." That term, along with "spin doctors," has become a part of the jargon in this society. Such derisive terms reflect a concern that mere words without substance can come to drive decisions.

The challenge of creating messages sensitive to society is dramatized by the difficulty companies have in becoming international and achieving harmony with different cultures around the globe. For instance, in the United States, companies are legally prohibited from engaging in fraud and graft. In many countries around the world, "consultants" receive pay to increase the chances a business will be allowed to operate or that the local newspaper will carry a practitioner's media release. This "consulting fee" may be nothing more than a payment—even a bribe—to be allowed to do business.

The social responsibility of public relations is to represent members of society in public discussions. Today's public relations is more likely to be based on decisions of what must be said to enhance the public dialogue. The outcome of this dialogue is a better society, building a strong community through the examination of sound

reasons. Misusing public relations will only result in long-term damage to relationships and a reduced ability for the organization to function effectively.

► Marketplace Responsibility of Public Relations

People and organizations use discourse to publicize, promote, and evaluate ideas and actions. Some ideas and actions relate to the purchase and use of products and services. Products would go unsold if sellers could not use a combination of publicity and paid advertisement to communicate with buyers. Services would go unnoticed if promotion and advertising did not tell consumers which organizations provide those services, where the services can be obtained, and how much they cost.

The marketplace requires the exchange of information. What do buyers want and need? What can sellers say that will help customers know what constitutes a good product or service? How can vendors build relationships if customers cannot trust the information and evaluations contained in public relations messages? A promotion for a Web site, for instance, might tout how it will save consumers time and money. The timing of such publicity might increase during the year-end holidays to encourage customers to choose between buying toys with a click of a mouse instead of fighting long lines at crowded toy stores.

Similar challenges face nonprofit organizations that must attract funds from members, donors, and supporters. How can nonprofit organizations convince persons to join and support the causes of the organization with their financial contributions? How can nonprofits convince persons who need their services that they are available and in a fashion that helps rather than harms persons whom the nonprofit should serve? A Web Watcher of sites such as iVillage's sponsored links to sites on breast cancer can help you appreciate how the Web allows for nonprofits to supply information to persons who are concerned about breast cancer and who want to engage in Internet conversation with others who have similar experiences (www.ivillage.com). By typing "breast cancer" into the iVillage "search" feature, for instance, an interested person can quickly gain access to M. D. Anderson Cancer Center and the National Breast Cancer Organization. These communication efforts serve the interests of victims of cancer and allow donors to conveniently contribute their finances to battle cancer.

Nonprofit organizations, such as the National Wildlife Federation, make statements that contain facts, values, and policy recommendations. These statements often conflict with what other organizations, particularly businesses and governmental agencies, say and do. Without rhetoric, how can nonprofits seek to convince others that their views are correct? Without such statements, how can they attract members—their markets—and form themselves into a potent public that organizations must negotiate with to solve the problems of society?

In these ways, organizations use rhetoric to respond to conditions in the marketplace. Such statements, however, are evaluated in light of standards of social responsibility. Every seller of goods or services must respect the social responsibilities of public communication. Nonprofits also compete in the marketplace for donations by addressing the concerns of key publics, such as environmental advocates who want building products without irresponsible destruction of nature.

► An Ethical Organization Communicating Effectively

Public relations professionals must adhere to four principles in order to fulfill their social responsibility to society:

- Know what each key individual, group, or institution believes constitutes ethical behavior.
- Listen to what other members of society have to say.
- Ensure that public relations uses two-way communication.
- Build community through cocreated meaning.

First: *Know what each individual, group, or institution believes constitutes ethical behavior.* A public relations practitioner needs to appreciate which actions and policies please as well as offend members of the public. He or she should know which actions or policies foster community support, satisfied customers, or pleased donors. Once those standards are known, the organization should plan and manage its actions to meet them.

Public expectations are a standard that organizations must meet or exceed. Sometimes those expectations are unsound, but they cannot be ignored. Debates over environmental issues serve as excellent examples of potentially unsound expectations. Citizens often believe that they do not contribute to clean-air problems and therefore do not need to change their lifestyles. They are quick to blame air quality problems on industry. They may demand a quick and inexpensive solution when in fact a great deal of time and money is required to meet Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) clean-air standards. As a profession, public relations exists because it can help organizations to meet rather than fall short of public expectations. Such efforts begin with knowing the standards of social responsibility that must be met. The public relations person counsels his or her management regarding the standards others use to evaluate the organization—its policies, products, and services.

By professional training and engaging in best practices, the public relations practitioner serves as the eyes and ears of the organization. Through years of experience and a nearly compulsive consumption of news, practitioners know the ethics of what can be said and done in public and are wise to counsel executives about those standards. Such executives are often sheltered and are not routinely confronted with facing angry reporters and an unhappy public. In contrast, the public relations professional must meet the press and explain the actions of the organization in public. A wise practitioner learns to use news reports to know the concerns people voice about the organization.

The public relations professional needs to counsel the managers of organizations to listen to and heed criticisms. Executives of major and even minor organizations are often angered and insulted when they learn that key members of the public doubt the ethics of their operations, policies, products, or services. However, if organizations did not suffer criticism, public relations would be less needed. By the same token, if public relations practitioners can help organizations to act in ways that avoid criticism, the profession has served the organization and society quite well.

Second: *Listen to what other members of society have to say.* Public relations does not occur in a vacuum, but in situations where people interact to influence one another.

Their messages provide practitioners with valuable insights regarding the operating standards an organization must meet in its performance or address through public communication. An understanding of rhetoric helps practitioners recognize and analyze the strategic communication choices they have in light of the messages set forth by the organization's critics. The Fisher family, which founded Gap chain stores, learned this lesson. Gap stores market reasonably priced natural products for all ages. The controversy began when the Fisher family purchased 350 acres of timberland in Mendocino County, California, one of the hotbeds of environmental activism. The project began with high ideals, since the Fisher family is also a major donor to the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC). The timber controversy came to a boiling point when the family failed to realize the level of controversy that was being publicized by Julia Butterfly Hill, an outspoken Fisher foe who spent 738 days in an ancient redwood tree to save it from the lumber mill. Activists, including the NRDC, engaged in a boycott against Gap by publicizing the slogan "Save the Redwoods/Boycott the Gap."

Responding strategically requires knowing what others think and how strong their convictions are. By listening to the comments of others, people can become aware of what they must do to satisfy and not upset members of society. To know what must be said and done, a communicator learns to listen to and carefully consider the thoughts, concerns, needs, wants, and opinions of others.

An organization can meet the needs and avoid collisions with stakeholder concerns only if it listens to them and is responsible and responsive. An organization can decide to change its performance to satisfy those worries or seek to persuade people that their concerns are unfounded. To meet this professional expectation, practitioners need a firm sense of communication strategies, ethical perspectives, and practical challenges. Through strategic listening, practitioners can determine what information others should know. They realize which arguments will and will not succeed. Careful listening helps practitioners realize that relationships depend on constructive actions as well as words. This analysis can lead them to recognize strengths and limits of what they are saying and doing to build mutually beneficial relationships.

Listening is an important public relations skill. Public relations practitioners should be able to appreciate what others say and write. Research is part of the public relations. Listening and carefully considering points others make can lead practitioners to appreciate the accuracy and persuasive power of those statements. No wise counselor



Protesters Pressure Companies to Change Policies

SOURCE: Reprinted with permission from Shaun Walker, OtterMedia.com.

ignores or dismisses reasonable positions. Conflicts should be resolved, not ignored, so that they do not boil over into controversy that attracts negative attention. After listening to the concerns of others, practitioners can devise communication plans—tactics and strategies—and counsel other managers to make decisions that lead to mutually beneficial relationships with MAPs.

Third: *Ensure that public relations is two-way communication.* Statements made in public invite response. Public statements are expected to withstand the challenges by other interested and articulate parties. For this reason, Lentz (1996) defended the principle that the public airwaves should foster dialogue rather than privilege some narrow interest; he concluded: “Truth should prevail in a market-like struggle where superior ideas vanquish their inferiors and achieve audience acceptance” (p. 1). In this manner, members of society contest ideas and weigh competing points of view to determine which ones should be adopted or rejected.

Public relations as two-way communication helps dispel the view of the public relations practice as a negative, manipulative approach to reputation management—to merely make the bad seem good. This view sees the public relations person as being able to put a “spin” or clever interpretation on what the organization has done or is doing that may be questionable. With such a spin, the individual is expected to restore the reputation and reduce public criticism even though the organization continues to act in ways that some think are offensive. The view that public relations is “spindoctoring” weakens the credibility of the practice and damages its professional status. Let’s consider an illustration of this technique. Imagine a large school district that has purchased some land for a new school. Some local residents sell their homes, but others refuse to do so. The school district obtains appraisals of the homes and offers to pay “market value.” The problem is that the price of the homes is too low for the sellers to purchase comparable property. The school district threatens legal action against the home owners and begins proceedings to force them to sell at the offer price. Local reporters quote elderly citizens who say they will be on the streets if they sell. When asked about this deal, members of the school district say they have paid “fair market price” and believe the citizens have been treated fairly and that they are merely using the press to get higher prices for their property. Will the school district be believed, or rather tearful elderly poor citizens who are featured on camera at the top-of-the-hour television news? What is spin, and what is truth?

People who are interested in representing any organization, especially as public relations professionals, need to be two-way communicators. They must be committed to expressing views that support their client organization as well as community interests. They need to listen to people who criticize their organizations and recognize when such criticism has merit and when it deserves rebuttal. In fact, public relations practitioners should work to encourage comments even when they are negative. Properly examined ideas, evidence, values, and reasoning exchanges through dialogue can lead people and organizations to improve themselves and society (Wallace, 1963; Weaver, 1953, 1970). Two-way communication helps to reveal expectations of publics and to communicate to publics how those expectations are being met.

Fourth: *Build community through shared, cocreated meaning.* The savvy practitioner realizes that one voice, such as that of its employer, cannot dominate opinion. As parties engage in two-way communication in the effort to create, refine, and change opinions,

meaning is cocreated. The attempt to build community through shared meaning is inherently rhetorical. Bryant (1953) defined rhetoric as “the function of adjusting ideas to people and people to ideas” (p. 413). Applying this principle, today’s public relations seeks to cocreate meaning that adjusts organizations to individuals, groups, and institutions and adjusts individuals, groups, and institutions to organizations—“adjustment” is positive, not negative.

The imbalances of power in society are not etched in stone; they are subject to change. People who do not like the actions of organizations can oppose them. One of the most insightful commentaries on the cocreation of society was offered by George Herbert Mead (1934), who concluded that the mind, self, and society develop through dialogue. He observed,

We tend to ignore the others and take into account only those which are immediate. The difficulty is to make ourselves recognize the other and wider interests, and then to bring them into some sort of rational relationship with the more immediate ones. There is room for mistakes, but mistakes are not sins. (pp. 388–389)

Shared identifications help forge lasting relationships. Nonprofit organizations, for instance, seek members of society who share their concerns and values. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) serves as a good example. The organization targets the use of furs taken from animals for the purpose of human vanity. Fur coats are not necessary to the quality of human life. Getting those identifications are easy. A more difficult identification results from PETA’s criticism of the use of animals in research. They do not believe that animals need to be sacrificed for medical research. Segments of the population that oppose the sale of furs might not be so quick to identify with the criticism of using animals for medical research. (See PETA’s Web site for examples of a variety of public relations tools.)

Today’s public relations realizes that shared meaning allows people to identify with one another. Shared meaning lays the foundation for individuals to come to know and understand one another, as well as refine and shape each other’s thoughts and preferences. Organizations and publics can come to agree on expectations as part of shared meanings—they operate from the same page. The only way to arrive at shared meaning is through two-way communication.

These four principles can serve as beacons to guide your practice of public relations. These principles seem very modern, but they result from controversies over the centuries. People have considered the role of language, messages, and meaning—rhetoric—in the building of societies and marketplaces that foster mutual interests. In future chapters, we will revisit the notion of shared or cocreating meaning to build community. For now, know that organizations are not entities with concrete boundaries. Organizations and the opinion environments in which they operate are cocreated through public discourse through tactics used to support rhetorical strategies.

Our trip through the rhetorical tradition may seem like a detour for understanding public relations. While students may question the current value of ideas taken from antiquity, the rhetorical tradition grounds public relations within a larger, older intellectual tradition. Public relations practitioners are public communicators, just like the rhetors of ancient Greece and Rome. Why is this important? Public communication carries a heavily ethical burden, a theme we will continue in Chapter 2 and feature in Chapter 9.

Even when selling goods or services, false information and weak arguments lead to inadequate conclusions. A community that is confronted with false information and weak arguments is likely to lose faith in collective decision making and the power of public relations. If customers cannot trust claims about products and services, they become cynical, angry, frustrated, and willing to punish the offending organization.

Social responsibility results when organizations respond to the power of public approval—the opinions, attitudes, or beliefs that define and justify an organization's operating principles and procedures. Opinions people hold about an organization—its positive reputation, services, policies, operations, or products—are vital to its ability to operate as it thinks best. By expressing approval or disapproval, opinion leaders set the boundaries on organizational action. They prescribe how the organization should conduct its activities. Favorable opinions are the basis of power. As long as organizations have the support of key segments of society, they have power to chart and realize their destinies. Favorable opinion is not given. It is earned by what organizations say and do. Even large companies (ExxonMobil comes to mind) realize that environmental spills, such as the *Exxon Valdez*, become part of its history. Those blotches on company image linger for years, even decades.

Drawing on principles of organizational citizenship, this text will emphasize ethics, effective communication, and best professional practices needed to build strategic mutually beneficial relationships. These principles should help you prepare for a successful career. The goal of this text is to help you think strategically about public relations and to learn to ask questions and develop solutions that make a difference and help your client organizations to be good citizens of society. We ask you to be SMART as you think and act as a professional practitioner. Learn the best tactics needed to achieve rhetorical strategies. See these as being the means by which you achieve advantages for employers and clients. Know that mutually beneficial relationships are crucial to your success. Recognize that you operate within societal constraints.

Marketing, Advertising, Public Relations, and Integrated Communication: Similarities and Differences

In today's public relations, it's not enough to know about your department or area of responsibility. To be effective within your organization, you must know the similarities and differences between your public relations responsibilities and those of other departments, especially advertising and marketing.

What distinguishes public relations from advertising or marketing? All three advance the goals of the organization through strategic planning and effective communication. One answer is to say that public relations positions the organization to enjoy long-term, mutually beneficial relationships. All three can foster an organization's reputation and increase its brand equity.

Advertising, marketing, and public relations are different, but they overlap. Let us consider the activities typical of marketing, advertising, public relations, and integrated communication. You should understand where each discipline is separate

and where all of them overlap. This section examines marketing, advertising, public relations, and integrated communication to clarify and focus your understanding of professional public relations practice.

► Marketing: Creating and Positioning Products or Services

The primary responsibility of marketing is to create and position products or services. A *market* is a group of people who purchase or have the potential to purchase a product or service. A *product* is some object you can feel, touch, see, hear, smell, or taste, for example, a soft drink, an automobile, a telephone, or your favorite ice cream flavor. A *service* is a task or process performed for you, such as a haircut, an airplane trip, or an insurance plan; an insurance policy, however, would be a product. To create or position products or services, marketing departments must engage in the following activities.

Identifying and Developing Markets

Markets may be discovered by examining what people want or need. Some markets are carefully created by convincing people that they want or need something. For instance, soft drinks are wants rather than needs, while diapers are needs and not wants!

Positioning Products or Services, Including Creating Surrounds

The concept of market share suggests that any product or service fits into some complex of products or services. For instance, under the heading of movies, each movie, whether new or old, is a product line. Current-run movies compete against one another, television runs (new or old), and videos (new or old). *Surrounds* include items such as clothing, games, and toys that spin off from a movie, as well as popcorn, soft drinks, and candy. Movie theaters may also have video games. They may be located in malls, so some folks can go to the movie while others shop, or vice versa.

Pricing and Packaging

Within a product (or service) line, products can be positioned by price. People may prefer inexpensive products as bargains. Others may want the expensive ones because they believe you get more if you pay more. Price is a key consideration in marketing. Packaging can help to sell products and services. Packaging attracts attention to the product or service. For instance, the packaging for candy bars can be an important consideration. If “Hershey Kisses” were to change their foil packaging to waxed paper, would it attract or turn away consumers?

Advertising and Promoting Sales

Advertising is the paid placement of messages that attract attention to products or services, provide information, and recommend purchase. Marketing can advance sales by using advertising as well as gaining publicity and doing promotions through public relations. If you are doing public relations and your job is to attract publicity and pass out product coupons, you are in promotions.

Controlling Product Mix

By monitoring sales of products (or services) by types in markets and by regions, marketing people know how many to manufacture or order. They also know that

they should not saturate a market, thereby killing the steady sale of products. Or they may want to flood a market that they believe will have a short half-life. Flooding damaged the “dot.com” segment of the new communication, e-commerce industry. Internet tools have been developed and sold to make fast profits rather than being used to build lasting business relationships.

Conducting Market Research

Companies and other organizations want to know whether they are reaching and satisfying people. They monitor sales and trends and work out complex models to track market trends and product/service preferences that can make or damage markets. Research begins with the assumption that the best predictor of future sales is the past satisfaction people have had with a product or service. Market research may use some version of *psychographics*, the study of personality traits and buying preferences. Such research might refine marketers' understanding of tastes in automobiles by age. Younger persons might favor small and responsive automobiles that are also economical to operate. Older persons prefer larger, safer, and more comfortable automobiles, for instance.

► Advertising: Creating and Paying to Place Informative and Persuasive Messages

The primary responsibility of advertising is to create informative and motivative messages and pay to place them in media designed to reach targeted audiences. Advertising is often a support department reporting to the marketing department. Some advertising departments stand alone. Advertising is a process and a tool. It helps marketing goals by informing and persuading customers, donors, and such. It also is a valuable tool for public relations. It assists efforts to create image, manage reputation, and address issues.

One key use of advertising is to help marketing create and respond to customer preferences and to interest consumers in a particular product or service. In addition to featuring products and services, advertising uses paid messages about the company, what some call “corporate” (institutional or image) advertising. To fulfill their responsibilities, advertising departments engage in certain activities.

Conducting Message Research

Research can be done as an ad campaign develops to reveal when customers are aware of the product/service and their intent to make a purchase. Messages can be pretested to determine whether they have flaws and if they are likely to have their intended impact on consumers. For instance, focus groups can be used to assess buyer satisfaction and whether reactions to products or services are positive or negative. They can determine the attention impact of messages as well as their appeal and believability. Such research can uncover questions audiences have about a product, service, or organization that advertising can address.

Creatively Developing Appeals and Messages

This traditional advertising function is art, not science, the ability to create an appealing message that catches and focuses attention and presses the activation buttons. Some

advertising campaigns create cultural icons, from fictional characters such as Joe Camel, the Marlboro Man, and the Virginia Slims Woman to real-life personages such as Shaquille O'Neal or Michael Jordan. Kids want to "Be Like Mike!" Persuasive appeals and messages can be creatively established through visual images, fragrances, textures, and sounds.

Positioning advertising messages in relation to or as a response to competitors is everything in advertising and marketing. The goal is to feature products and services that do a better job of satisfying customers than competitors do. Automobiles are sold on the basis of the advantages they have in price, style, design, color, accessories, and durability.

Buying Time or Space

Advertising personnel are responsible for buying the media time or space desired to reach the targeted audiences. Buying time or space means that they purchase specific amounts of media time or print space. In addition to creatively using purchased time and space to feature products and services, advertising messages can be used in support of organizational positive reputation. They can address issues of importance to public policy debates. For instance, the Chemical Manufacturers Association (today called the American Chemistry Council) has used paid issue advertising to explain to target audiences and publics the operating changes that were reducing the environmental impact of chemical manufacturing facilities.

Creating Advertising Message Delivery Media Other Than Mass Media

Advertising specialists may select, design, or create means for reaching the targeted market with messages in ways other than the traditional mass media. This might include direct-mail advertising or impressive packaging, which creates an impression and increases the incentive for customers to buy a product while it is in their hands. Packaging can gain attention and use advertising messages related to the traits and advantages of the product to meet needs and satisfy wants. Advertising specialists create posters and other devices for attracting attention to products and services. These responsibilities may also involve the development of brochures, flyers, and direct-marketing devices such as product- or service-oriented key chains.

Assessing Message Reach and Impact

As a campaign is initiated and conducted, it may be monitored to determine whether key audiences and markets are receiving, noticing, reading, listening to, televiewing, believing, and acting on the messages.

► Public Relations: Creating Strategic Mutually Beneficial Relationships

Some marketing and advertising professionals might say that public relations' sole role includes putting out press releases and getting favorable "unpaid" media attention to aid in selling products, services, and the organization itself. But while these professionals might claim that public relations is merely image building, we will show you how public relations consists of much more than press releases and media events.

You have already read about the five functions of public relations: planning, research, publicity, promotion, and collaborative decision making. Below is a list of

relationship-building activities that might be primarily the responsibility of public relations professionals. Note that we feature these as relationship-building responsibilities. Chapter 3 adds depth to the discussion of relationships that follows here.

BOX 1.3 PUBLIC RELATIONS, MORE OR LESS

“One of the unique characteristics of the public relations profession is how ill-defined the role is in most corporations” (Woodrum, 1995, p. 7). This observation should motivate practitioners to know what public relations is and to help other influential persons to adopt that view. Public relations is often more—as well as less—than what others expect it to be. It is more because it is a rich blend of five functions used ethically. It can be less, however, because practitioners cannot easily or ethically spin facts and solve problems merely by issuing a cleverly developed press release.

Marketing Relationships

By using publicity, promotion, articles, features, and similar techniques, public relations professionals assist their colleagues in marketing and advertising. Through marketing-communication efforts, public relations practitioners encourage people to learn about products or services (or fund-raising needs) and to see them as being of value. Public relations can use news stories, feature stories, events, and endorsements to increase the effectiveness of marketing efforts. Many people believe this is public relations' only function, which is unfortunate. Marketing relationships can also include relationships with donors, voters, or members.

Media Relationships

Building media relationships is one of the traditional tactics of public relations practitioners. In fact, some people mistakenly limit the practice of public relations to publicity through media relations. Advertising buys time and space in which to feature an organization's messages. In contrast, public relations practitioners prove to reporters that they have a newsworthy story the reporters need to tell to inform the public. Wise public relations persons know what reporters, editors, and program directors think are “newsworthy” details used to create and pitch stories. Each day, thousands of events and activities go unreported because of limited time and space in the news media. Mutually beneficial relationships with media reporters can increase the likelihood of an organization getting favorable commentary and exposure. During a crisis, positive relationships can reduce the damage caused by poorly chosen responses to the press, which lead to statements such as, “Spokespersons for the company refused to answer our efforts to contact them.” Practitioners can be sources of choice if they build mutually beneficial relationships with the media. Commitment to be the first and best source of information regarding their organizations can create a trusting relationship with reporters.

Public Affairs/Governmental Relationships

Companies in particular, as well as activist groups, need highly educated personnel to monitor, create, modify, and kill legislation and regulations. Some people are offended by the notion that a company, for instance, should wield enough power to influence government policy. But if the interests of the company (or industry) and its key publics—the community—would be better off without a piece of legislation, then it should not exist. That message needs to be professionally communicated to build a relationship with other parties that have similar public policy agendas. Collaborations forge useful legislation and regulation in the public interest.

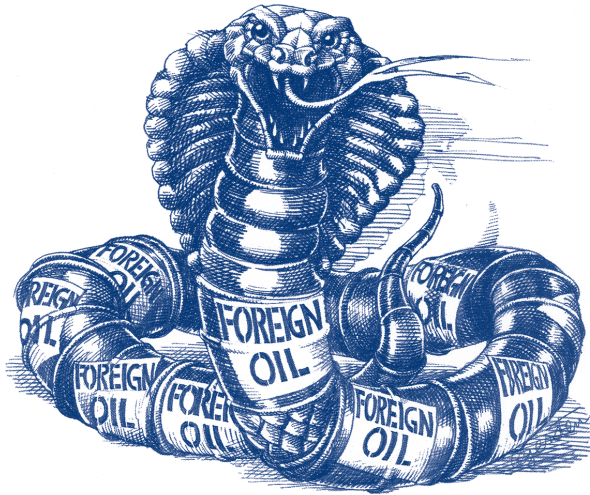
Community Relationships

Companies, governmental agencies, and activist groups seek to create, strengthen, and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with citizens. Such activities could be as limited as corporate sponsorship of a symphony or Little League teams. Even more vital goals center on doing what is necessary to improve and strengthen the community. Risk communication, for instance, is one aspect of community relationships. People who live and work in proximity to sources of danger, such as chemical companies or nuclear generation plants, want to know how safe they are and what to do in the event of an emergency. (To better understand this process, you may want to examine ChevronTexaco's home page as a Web Watcher.) Chevron (today ChevronTexaco) has been a leader in communicating with customers and neighbors about its environmental policies. The company became legendary for television and print ads that drew attention to its efforts and those of others to defend species and promote environmental quality.

Another example: Someone who lives near a nuclear power plant wants to know that it has three different types of sirens for specific types of emergencies and deserves to know what the various sirens mean and what emergency responses to follow when the sirens sound. Such persons also want to know—and deserve to know—about the safety features built into the plant. Closely examine the advertisement about the use of nuclear energy versus imported oil that was used by the U.S. Council for Energy Awareness (USCEA). The USCEA placed this ad in newspapers and magazines shortly after the Chernobyl disaster in the Ukraine, the world's worst nuclear accident. Do this ad and the public relations messages that would have accompanied it positively address community concerns? This ad was also part of the campaign to seek public support for nuclear generation by demonstrating that it can be safe if properly designed.

Activist Relationships

In the past three decades, companies and governmental agencies have learned that they often cannot ignore the concerns and complaints of activists, such as those involved with environmental issues. When people recognize problems and set out to correct them, they may band together and thus create or join an activist group to magnify their power. Companies and governmental agencies work proactively to understand, appreciate, and achieve mutually beneficial solutions to problems recognized by the activists. Companies and governmental agencies can use collaborative decision making to build strong relationships with activists. For example, you may recall the efforts of Home Depot to market environmentally safe building materials, mentioned earlier in this chapter.



THE KISS OF DEATH?

We now import more than 40 percent of all the oil we use, and that percentage continues to grow. This excessive dependence on foreign oil could poison America's economy and our national security if our supply were ever disrupted.

But the more we use nuclear energy, instead of imported oil, to generate our electricity, the less we have to depend on uncertain foreign oil supplies.

America's 112 nuclear electric plants already have cut foreign oil dependence by 4 billion barrels since the oil embargo of 1973, saving us \$115 billion in foreign oil payments.

But 112 nuclear plants will not be enough to meet our rapidly growing demand for electricity. We need more plants.

Importing so much oil is a danger America must avoid. We need to

rely more on energy sources we can count on, like nuclear energy.

For a free booklet on nuclear energy, write to the U.S. Council for Energy Awareness, P.O. Box 66080, Dept. SK01, Washington, D.C. 20035.



U.S. COUNCIL FOR ENERGY AWARENESS

Nuclear energy means more energy independence.

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As seen in May 1990 issues of The New York Times, The Washington Post, Natural History, The Leadership Network, The Economist, and Barron's; the May/June 1990 issue of State Legislatures; June 1990 issues of Reader's Digest, National Geographic, TIME, Sports Illustrated, Newsweek, U.S. News & World Report, Smithsonian, Business Week, Scientific American, Governing, and National Journal; July 1990 issues of Forbes and The Wall Street Journal; the July/August 1990 issue of American Heritage.

Foreign Oil Equals Loss of Freedom

SOURCE: Reprinted with permission from the Nuclear Energy Institute.

Customer Relationships

Someone in the organization needs to listen to the needs, concerns, and complaints of customers, donors, and others who purchase products or services. Public relations professionals should be intimately involved in customer relations. They can learn customers' preferences as well as their concerns and doubts about the quality of the product or service. With this knowledge, practitioners become advocates for customers to personnel in marketing and advertising so that the concerns can be addressed and problems can be solved. Practitioners can build mutually beneficial relationships so the products and services they promote are the first choice of customers, donors, and others.

Employee Relationships

While businesses, nonprofits, and governmental agencies communicate with external audiences, they also need to foster effective relationships with their employees. The goal of these relationships is to satisfy employees in order to increase productivity as well as motivate them to work toward increased product and service quality. Employees want to work for good organizations that communicate well. In turn, employees become ambassadors by speaking well of the organization.

Investor Relationships

Publicly traded companies (as well as other financial institutions) employ communication and relationship development specialists to ensure that companies are properly valued by financial analysts and fund managers. This public relations function requires a highly skilled and unusually highly paid practitioner to create, strengthen, and maintain long-term relationships with persons who invest in the company. In good times and stormy ones, a wise company seeks to demonstrate how investment—new and continued—is in the interest of the investor.

This list indicates that public relations professionals do more than merely support advertising and marketing, although savvy public relations people always realize that their immediate activity needs to be tied to some goal relevant to obtaining and wisely managing the revenue of the organization. In Chapter 3, we will elaborate further on the nature of strategic organizational relationships and public relations practice.

► Integrated Communication: Creating Integrated Messages

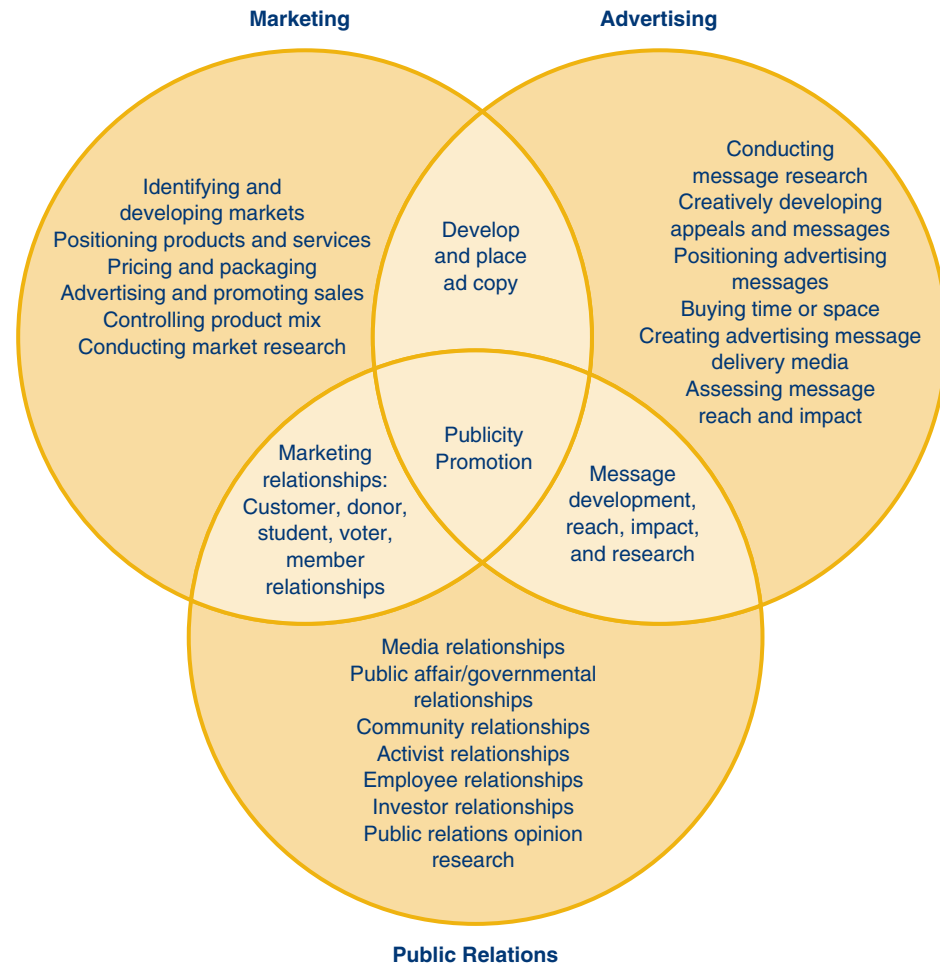
As we near the end of this comparison of public relations, advertising, and marketing, we have one more topic to consider. In the past decade, a serious movement has occurred to create what is called *integrated marketing communication* or *integrated communication*. This trend has challenged marketing, advertising, and public relations to work together closely to support the organization's marketing effort. This movement, at least in part, was motivated by rising advertising costs and a realization that public relations messages may have more clout because people are more resistant to advertising messages than to publicity. The public questions the credibility of advertising but trusts the statements by reporters and other ostensibly objective third parties.

This integrated communication movement has resulted in battles regarding the relationships among marketing, advertising, and public relations. These battles have two dimensions: One is the struggle to control budgets, and the other is for "turf." Whether it is operating on a constrained or ample budget, each organization must think about how that budget needs to be divided. To make an effective decision, senior executives sometimes rely on what's called *return on investment* (ROI). That simply means that if senior management (or any other body with budget oversight) were to give you, the head of public relations, \$500,000, they would want to know what you would do with that money. They would like an adequate return on investment. If they are a business, they want you to make more money for the organization than you cost. If they are a nonprofit, they want sufficient income to accomplish their charitable mission.

The second battle is for turf, managerial power. Managerial responsibility results in prestige, status, and visibility, as well as the budget authority to procure personnel, supplies, and office space. One sticking point in the discussion of integrated communication is the fear that marketing will control public relations. Such control can compromise the organization's ethics and limit the scope of its strategic activities. If public relations reports to marketing, many nonmarketing relationships will go unmanaged. And the ethics of public relations can be compromised. Public relations may be limited to speak well, even if inaccurately, about the organization's products and services. Integrated communication works best when public relations helps to get the marketing messages out, but public relations is not limited in the scope and ethics of this function.

This issue, a matter of budget and organizational turf, has become increasingly important and the contest more robust as managements have asked marketing departments to have a greater impact with less money. Over the past decade, advertising costs have increased dramatically. As a consequence, managers, including the head of marketing, look to public relations to help obtain "free" advertising: publicity and promotion. Public relations is expected to offset reduced budgets with free publicity.

This movement challenges public relations to engage in at least three activities with marketing and advertising. One is to share responsibility for reaching and satisfying customers. The second is to ensure that all organizational messages are integrated with and supportive of the advertising and marketing messages. In this sense, the organization is challenged to promote one theme even if it is tailored to its

Figure 1.2: The Relationships Between Marketing, Advertising, and Public Relations

different audiences' and markets' needs and wants. The third challenge is to promote and publicize goods and services in ways that reduce costs.

For some, integrated communication is a new theme. For many experienced public relations practitioners, it is standard practice. Public relations professionals realize that messages need to help inform, convince, and motivate audiences by reinforcing the same themes advanced by marketing and advertising. An organization will have problems if its product advertisements promote customer service while its financial messages and employee training stress reduced costs by spending less time with customers.

One major advantage to public relations, however, is its commitment to be the ethical conscience of the organization. It is expected to provide ethical balance to

marketing and the interests of MAPs. And, as was demonstrated above, public relations needs to support marketing and advertising, but it has many additional relationship-building responsibilities.

One of our objectives in this discussion was to see where each of these three disciplines is unique and appreciate where they merge as one, at which point they constitute integrated communication. Figure 1.2 depicts the relationship between marketing, advertising, and public relations. Each circle contains the unique activities of marketing, advertising, and public relations. The intersection among circles indicates how the disciplines overlap. For example, the overlap between public relations and marketing centers on building relationships with customers; the overlap between public relations and advertising is message development, reach, impact, and research. Furthermore, all three intersect in the activities of publicity and promotion.

The “Magic Earth” Web site (Web Watcher) offers insights into the ways in which the advertising messages of a business mix with its public relations to position and promote its image. This company sells its products and services to other businesses. Public relations personnel issue media releases to announce business activities of interest to customers. We invite you to read the press releases, note the logos of the companies involved, and think about how they increase the value of the business, its brand equity.

Circumstances That Call for Public Relations

The study of public relations forces us to think about how organizations build effective relationships. Whether they are governmental agencies, businesses, or nonprofits, organizations wish to increase their monetary resources and achieve positive reputations. To earn these resources, organizations must create and maintain good relationships with key people or groups. Let us now consider the variety of organizations that require the strategic practice of today’s public relations professionals.

Organizations That Need Public Relations

► **Business Organizations**

Public relations can help companies increase their competitiveness by establishing mutually beneficial relationships with customers. Businesses use public relations to attract people to buy their products or services. Hospitals stay competitive by using public relations to demonstrate that they care about patients and provide excellent medical service. Automobile companies use special events to entice customers to buy the latest model. Customer relations programs look to reduce customer dissatisfaction and help customers to use products properly. Public relations can reduce conflict and friction between companies and their critics.

Reflections of an Account Executive



Lisa K. Merkl
Former Account Executive
Vollmer Public Relations
Houston, Texas

NOTE: This professional reflection was written by Lisa Merkl when she was in

her second job. As is often the case, professionals move from one employer to the next as they advance. Today, Lisa is a Senior Science Writer/Editor in the Office of External Communication at the University of Houston. This reflection is offered to help students realize what they may be called on to know and to perform as they enter the profession. These challenges may be unique to a person in a large and diversified agency, but they are part of the skills and knowledge of the practice needed to participate in the profession.

Variety and time—two of the most outstanding elements you'll experience working in an agency. You've got to be versatile and think quickly. In a single day, I am likely to cover the gamut from the petroleum to the entertainment industries. I've worked with clients in an array of industries, including popular music, real estate, education, retail, motor oil, telecommunications, industrial plant repairs, petroleum, aerospace, home services,

film distribution, health care, fine arts, and museums. No two days are alike.

Coming out of journalism and public relations degrees, I expected and looked forward to the wide variety of clients and industries I'd encounter, but the close eye kept on time has admittedly been the biggest adjustment. Living by a daily time log that's split up by 15-minute increments really gives you perspective on time as a commodity. The quarter hours that measure my day are critical—my salary and the agency's profit are a direct result of the hours I "bill" to each individual client.

I've dealt with both business-to-business and consumer media on local and national levels. I've pitched stories to print and broadcast outlets, including daily newspapers, business journals, oil and gas magazines, lifestyle magazines, aerospace journals, entertainment publications, AP reporters, local television news affiliates, and national network and cable television programs.

In a given day, I might perform any of a number of tasks:

- Write press releases, fact sheets, back-grounders, media alerts, and pitch letters.
- Build media lists.
- Brainstorm media angles.
- Create and personally deliver "media drops" that will draw extra attention to press materials.
- Make follow-up calls to the media regarding releases, press kits, or drops sent out.

► Governmental Agencies

Governmental agencies must establish communication links with legislators as well as with the citizens they serve. They can use public relations to inform legislators and the

- Monitor the media and journalist message boards for leads on possible stories that might be appropriate for given clients' expertise or current offerings.
- Gauge analyst perceptions of publicly held clients.
- Set up and attend backgrounding sessions for clients with members of the media.
- Correspond and visit with reporters and assignment editors just as a "get to know you" for future reference.
- Attend live media remotes for TV or radio.
- Develop sponsorship packets for the launch of new projects, events, or products.
- Ghostwrite bylined articles on successful projects performed by the scientists, engineers, and technicians employed by clients.
- Write public relations plans and strategies for clients.
- Maintain client timelines.
- Review and edit clients' billing reports and compile status reports that explain the charges.
- Prepare meeting agendas and meet with clients.
- Maintain daily telephone and e-mail contact with clients.
- Monitor the media for trends relevant to clients' target industries.
- Review broadcast hits and print clips and calculate corresponding ad values for publicity recaps.
- Write speeches.
- Coordinate special event logistics.
- Attend special events surrounding new client products or services.
- Obtain collateral quotes for press kit folders, brochures, and direct mail pieces.
- Write brochure, Web site, and, occasionally, advertising copy.
- Liaise with advertising agencies and design firms for clients' non-public relations needs.

At times hectic, but more often exciting, I am on the cutting edge of setting public relations precedents. I mingle with media personalities and ultimately help shape the news and trends that billions of people follow each day. Opportunities abound. As a public relations professional, I create, innovate, and persuade, making my mark on the world. The power of PR to shape people's perceptions and make a difference in the way even one person goes about some facet of their life is a valuable gift.

Writing public relations plans, managing clients' public relations strategies, targeting media, writing press releases, and pitching stories creatively are rewarding tasks that I encounter every day, but when I get back evidence of measurable results, it takes it to a whole new level. One of my favorites is a "thank you" e-mail I received from one of my clients to tell me that the case study I wrote and placed for them in a publication brought them \$1.5 million in new business. A testament to the power of public relations.

SOURCE: Reprinted with permission from Lisa K. Merkl.

public about services they provide and problems they solve. If agencies do not achieve and maintain public support, they can lose their funding and go out of operation. For instance, the mayor's office must attract attention to needed city services to justify increased taxes or to justify shifting funds from one budget priority to another. Federal

agencies use media relations to report success stories. The Environmental Protection Agency reports success and failure in protecting endangered species.

► Nonprofit Organizations

Nonprofit organizations use public relations to compete for membership and vie for political, volunteer, and monetary support for causes they represent. Hundreds of thousands of nonprofit groups operate in society, including the American Cancer Society, the National Wildlife Federation, agencies that serve battered women, and hundreds of colleges and universities. Although called “nonprofit,” they have to compete for funds and communicate with donors and supporters. They must explain how they benefit society.

What types of organizations do not need public relations? Organizations that have no reason for strong and mutually beneficial relationships. Organizations that are indifferent to their reputations. Organizations that have little or no need to inform or persuade persons or groups. Can you identify any organizations that do not need public relations?

How Organizations Use Public Relations

Public relations enters the picture when an organization realizes that it needs to strategically build, maintain, or repair its relationships with persons, groups, and other organizations. Consider the following situations that challenge today's professional practitioners to make a difference for their organizations:

- Organizations want favorable attention and work to reduce criticism.
- Organizations need good working relationships, especially with reporters. Reporters can be powerful allies in disseminating information favorable to the organization. They can also discredit its reputation by revealing damaging details.
- Organizations work to survive crises.
- Organizations strive to inform people, as well as persuade them and shape their behavior.
- Organizations need revenue. Businesses want investors and customers. Governmental agencies want the support of legislators and citizens. Nonprofits work to attract supporters and donors.
- Organizations demonstrate how their interests align with those of citizens and customers.
- Organizations want to reduce costs that result from unproductive conflict.
- Organizations want to understand their MAPs.

This brief, but incomplete, list can help you imagine what public relations professionals do on a day-to-day basis, by serving the interests of clients, employers,

and a wide array of individuals. Today's professional practitioners understand the dynamics of relationship building. They use their rhetorical and management skills to inform and persuade through the information that flows from an organization to people outside. They listen to opinions and concerns of people outside the organization and bring that information to the attention of management.

Conclusion

Chapter 1 should help you have a clearer picture of what public relations is and is not. The definition and five functions of public relations reveal its complexity. Public relations is not simply people skills or event planning; public relations requires the use of various management functions to build mutually beneficial relationships. A practitioner must learn a variety of skills and concepts that are central to the remainder of this book. The best practitioners are dedicated to truth, sound ethics, and policies that blend many interests.

Public relations is part of a larger rhetorical tradition. Public communication carries with it social responsibilities for maintaining the integrity of public discussions. We translated those responsibilities into four principles for organizations wishing to communicate ethically and effectively. We consider public relations' rhetorical roots as significant. These roots shape our views of what public relations is and how it should be practiced. We hope that you now have a better understanding and appreciation for how this book approaches public relations. We have asked you to think and act in ways that are SMART. The challenge is to learn tactics that can be used strategically to achieve outcomes that serve your clients and employers, as well as society.

Ethical Quandary: Unethical Organizations and Public Relations Practice

Classical thinkers knew, as we do today, that rhetoric could be used ethically or as a tool for achieving selfish ends. Consider the following questions: Can an unethical organization communicate effectively and sustain a positive reputation in public? Can unethical statements be effective over time? Should a public relations professional accept an assignment to work on a project that conflicts with his or her ethics?

Write a two-page position paper that answers these questions. Use comments from the chapter to justify your conclusion. Be sure to state the supporting reasons for your position. Come to class prepared to discuss your position.

FURTHER
EXPLORATION



Summary Questions

1. What kinds of organizations need public relations? What kinds of organizations do not need public relations? List five reasons why organizations need public relations. List five reasons why public relations helps those who want or need relationships with organizations.
2. What does "PRSA" stand for, and what does the organization that goes by those initials advocate regarding the practice of public relations?
3. Define *public relations*.
4. What are the five basic functions of public relations? Explain each function and tell what it does on behalf of the organization as well as its markets, audiences, and publics (MAPs).
5. Differentiate public relations, marketing, and advertising. How can they work together to achieve integrated communication?
6. What are the characteristics of a mutually beneficial relationship?
7. Define *rhetoric* and the *rhetorical heritage*.
8. What are the social and the market roles of public relations?
9. What four principles does rhetoric provide for the socially responsible practice of public relations?
10. What best practices are needed for an organization to achieve social responsibility?

Exercises

1. Study Table 1.1. Select one of the principles of the rhetorical heritage for today's public relations practice. Based on your reading in Chapter 1 and your experience, do you agree or disagree with the statement? Write an editorial in which you use three points that support or challenge the principle you have chosen.
2. Imagine that someone has just told you that public relations is nothing more than advertising and marketing. Based on your reading in Chapter 1, do you agree or disagree? Write a statement to be published by the PRSA that expresses your views.
3. Make contact with a public relations practitioner in your community. Show this person the Professional Reflection that is featured in Chapter 1. Ask the person to comment on how accurate that author's account is of publicity and promotion.
4. Do you agree with the definition of public relations in this chapter? If somebody made a derogatory comment about "public relations," what would you say in response? What three points would you make? Use the definition of public relations to justify your response.

5. Find a business, nonprofit organization, or governmental agency. See whether you can determine what it does to publicize and promote itself. How does it build relationships with its markets, audiences, or publics (MAPs)? Does it engage in collaborative decision making? If you can, contact the organization to help get answers to these questions. Also, ask whether it conducts research. How does it go about strategic planning?
6. Locate and study a nonprofit organization. What rhetorical positions does it take in its efforts to serve society when solving its problems?

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