

Public Relations Journey into Management: Building Bridges between Public Relations and other Managerial Functions

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Key Themes

- Reviewing the main categories of public relations literature to understand why and how public relations history has internally and externally contributed to the definition of what the profession is today
- Understanding the implications of public relations history in the profession's quest to be recognized at the managerial level
- Considering eight challenges facing public relations professionals as they move into and work in management positions at different organizational levels

INTRODUCTION

Through the Looking Glass: Turning an Inward Focus into Outward Relationships

When Grunig and Hunt (1984) described public relations as 'the management of communication between an organization and its publics' (p. 6), their intention was

undoubtedly one of seeking to position public relations as a mainstream ‘managerial’ function within organizations, to be treated on a par with the other more traditional organizational functions such as human resource management, finance, production, and marketing. While perhaps recognizing that such a claim for equal status in the functional hierarchy within organizations might prove controversial, it is highly unlikely that Grunig and Hunt would have forecast the degree of debate and controversy that has gradually emerged around the use of the term ‘management’ to describe the function and practice of public relations. Indeed, public relations scholars perhaps saw little reason to view the use of the term ‘management’ *per se* as at all controversial; yet as we will show later, by the time that Grunig and Hunt’s book was published, a long-running debate was already well under way among management scholars about the nature of management and managerial work. It is not, however, our intention to challenge the basic premise contained in Grunig and Hunt’s definition or any of the many other definitions of public relations, namely, that public relations should be treated as a ‘managerial function’ as opposed to a largely communication oriented, technical function. Moreover, we acknowledge and support the arguments that for public relations to be fully effective in a managerial role, practitioners need to have access to and influence among the senior management team within organizations. However, as a number of academic and professional commentators have pointed out, such access and influence has to be earned, and here we argue that this demands that practitioners demonstrate the necessary skills and business acumen to deserve their place at the ‘top table’ within organizations. What we intend to do within this book is to examine in more depth what the ‘management’ of public relations involves, what management practices and processes are involved, and what skills and competences those aspiring to be communication/public relations ‘managers’ need to possess or develop.

The Excellence Concept

Perhaps the single most influential piece of extended research that has been conducted into public relations practice over the past two decades has been the so-called Excellence Study conducted by James and Larissa Grunig and their co-researchers, which set out to address the fundamental question of ‘How, why, and to what extent does communication affect the achievement of organizational objectives?’ (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 1992: 2). In articulating some 14 principles of ‘excellent’ public relations, the research team emphasized the importance of having public relations recognized as a distinctive ‘management function’ in its own right, and argued that senior practitioners should have access to and participate in the strategic decision-making process within their respective organizations. However, it clear that in advancing their theoretical framework, the excellence team was concerned almost exclusively with the most senior levels of management and with the ability of public relations to function effectively at that level by contributing to strategy and policy making within organizations. While acknowledging the importance of such senior level involvement for public relations, as many studies have shown, such involvement remains far from the ‘norm’ found in most organizations where public

relations is often still treated as a largely functionary and tactical function. Moreover, we also believe that this emphasis on public relations involvement at the ‘strategic decision-making level’ within organizations tends to overlook the need to also examine public relations ‘management’ as manifested at the operational/departmental levels. In fact, if we are to develop a comprehensive theory of communication/public relations management there is a need to explain and understand both the strategic and operational dimensions of management as manifest in different levels of public relations practice. Indeed, management scholars (e.g. Hales, 1986, 1999; Mintzberg, 1994; Stewart, 1976, 1982) have acknowledged that much management time is spent on what is often quite ‘messy’, largely tactical and operational activities, rather than dealing with the more rarefied levels of policy and strategy formulation. This distinction between tactical and strategic management work is something again which we intend to clarify, examining how these terms apply in the context of public relations work.

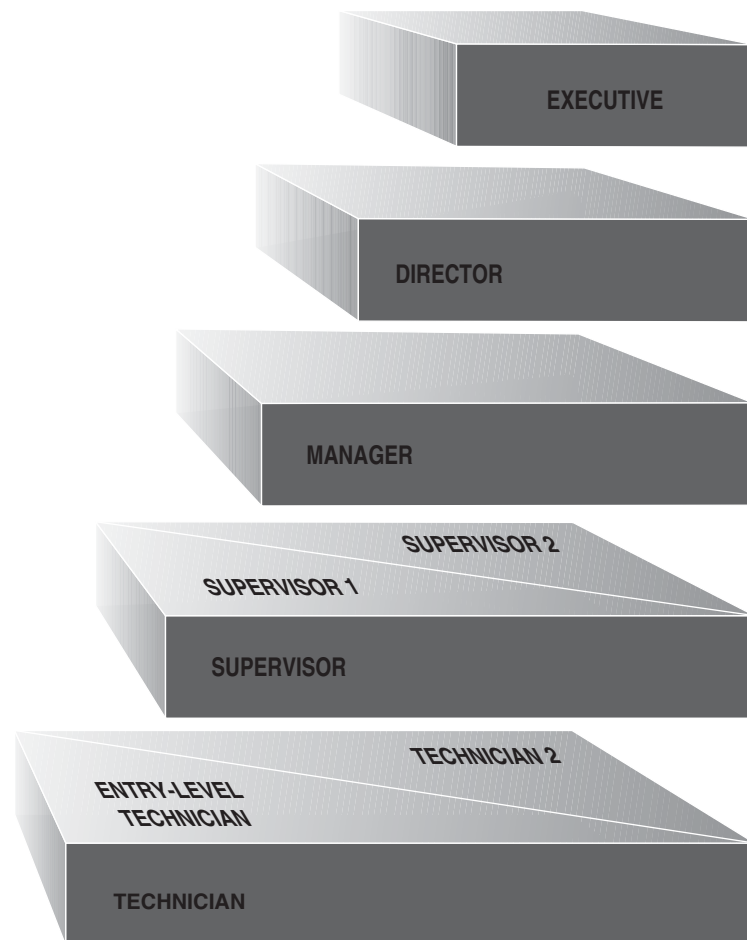
The Public Relations Society of America’s Manager Description

An interesting perspective on the application of the management concept in the public relations context can be seen in the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) *Professional Career Guide* (1993) (see Figure 1.1), which describes the interpretation of the various career levels in public relations work. Here, the term ‘manager’ is identified as the middle level of the five career levels, which like Grunig et al.’s excellence model, suggests that some time and experience in the practice are needed before it is possible for practitioners to assume managerial responsibility. The PRSA’s description of managerial work provides a useful reference point in developing our explication of managerial work and managerial responsibilities at different levels within organizations, and in particular, how they apply in public relations work.

The *Career Guide*’s description of a public relations manager focuses on skills and knowledge needed to be a manager, including responsibility for ‘planning, organizing, directing, and motivating staff, budgeting, problem-solving and problem identification. Managers must be able to ‘sell’ programs, both inside the department and in other areas of the organization. They often conduct meetings and make presentations or speeches, analyze situations and develop plans of action’ (PRSA, 1993: 4).

Thus, in developing our perspective of the manager’s role and managerial work in the communication/public relations context, we have drawn on both the existing academic and professional literature to help formulate what we believe is a more comprehensive and effective framework for examining the work of practitioners operating at different levels within organizations and therefore, by implication, having different levels of responsibility in terms of both tactical/operational and more strategic managerial tasks and challenges.

Here, the PRSA *Professional Career Guide* provides a useful basis for examining the types of tasks typically performed as a combination of strategic and tactical, representative of both the levels below and above the managerial level (see Figure 1.2).



Note: In 1993 the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) developed a career progression structure for practitioners. Each step was defined by roles and responsibilities. The emphasis in this book is on the manager/director levels.

FIGURE 1.1 The PRSA Five Levels of Career Practice

Source: Public Relations Professional Career Guide © 1993 by The PRSA Foundation.

In this book we attempt to provide insights into how public relations practitioners can address such managerial challenges, which will enhance not only the individual practitioner's status, but also the status of the profession. Armed with this knowledge, we believe practitioners will be better equipped to manage the communication/public relations function more effectively while also demonstrating a general level of managerial competence comparable to that of managerial-level staff from other functions within the organization.

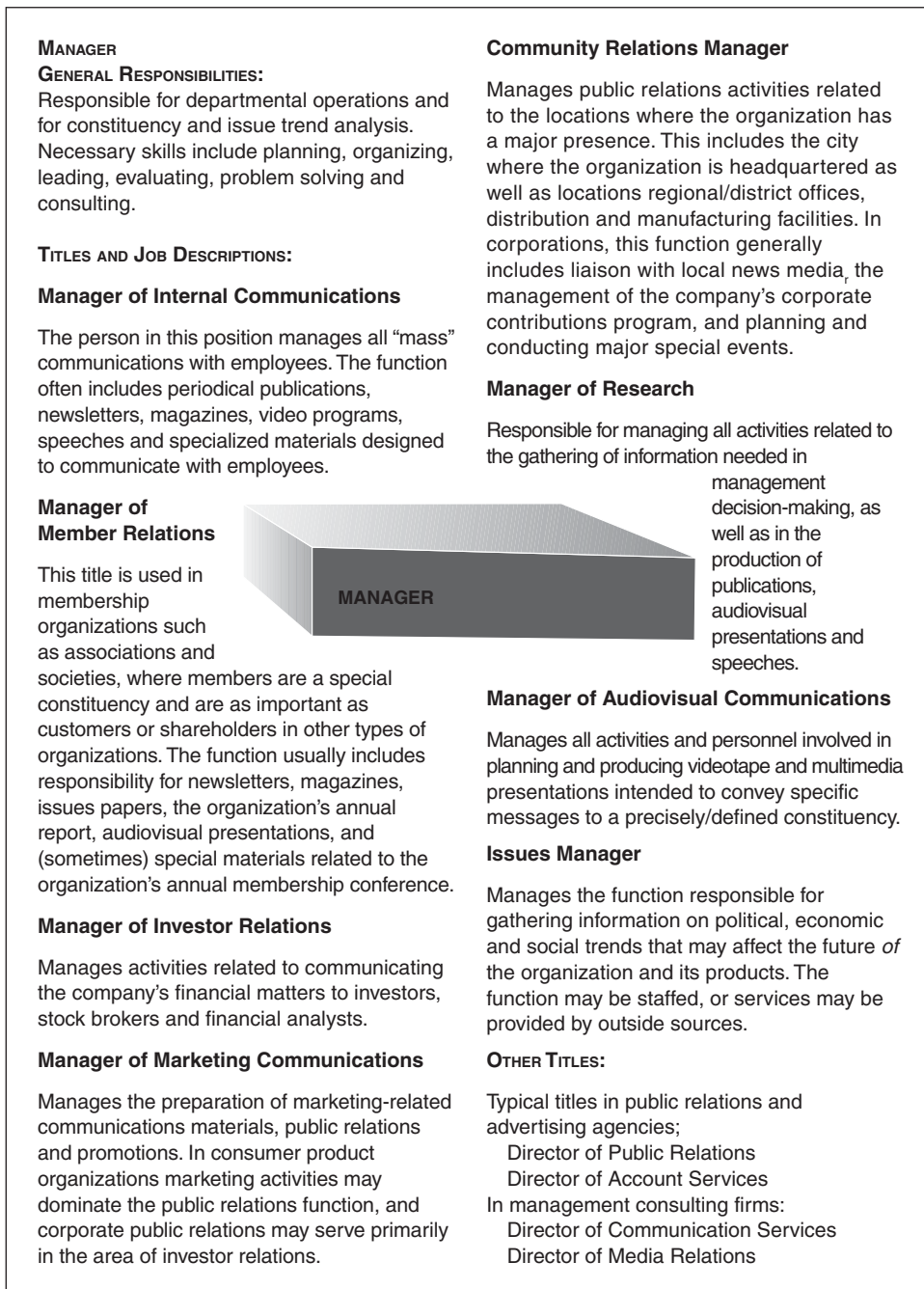


FIGURE 1.2 PRSA Descriptions of Managerial Responsibilities

Source: Public Relations Professional Career Guide © 1993 by The PRSA Foundation.

Developing an Identity and Finding an Organizational Home: Learning from the Past

Things often make more sense when we understand what has preceded the position/situation we find ourselves in right now. So it is with public relations. Only when we fully appreciate how public relations itself has come to be understood, including how professionals and academics think about it as a concept, function, or discipline, is it possible to carry out a meaningful examination of what it means to manage in the public relations context and what the challenges are that public relations managers face. This section looks back at the last four decades of public relations research by academics and professionals to identify the main perceptions of public relations as a starting point to use in moving into the managerial ranks.

By the time that Grunig and Hunt's (1984) book was published, public relations had begun to emerge from journalism and communication studies curricula as an academic discipline in its own right. By the latter quarter of twentieth century, public relations had become established as a full-fledged, stand-alone major course of study in colleges and universities, beginning in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s, followed by rapid curriculum growth in many parts of Europe in the late 1980s and 1990s. Now, in the twenty-first century, academic programs of study in public relations can be found in countries around the world. Such rapid growth in the number and sophistication of academic and professional training programs in public relations can be seen as an indicator of the growing recognition afforded to public relations as an established 'management-level' discipline within the business world, albeit that such recognition may vary from sector to sector, between organizations, as well as varying across cultures and contexts around the world.

The establishment of formal academic programs in public relations has generated a plethora of academic research focusing on public relations from a variety of perspectives, including the ongoing development and maturing of the profession and practice as it earned its way into different management levels. Perspectives ranged from the effects of gender on managerial or technical roles (e.g., Toth & Grunig, 1993; Creedon, 1991; Choi & Hon, 2002), through the development of the four-step process at different levels of management (e.g., Cutlip & Center, 1971) and the boundary-spanning capabilities of public relations practitioners (e.g. Aldrich & Herker, 1977; Jackson & Center, 1975), to the concept of relationship management as a function of public relations (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000; Grunig & Repper, 1992).

A FRAMEWORK FOR REVIEWING THE PUBLIC RELATIONS LITERATURE

Understanding what research has been completed in the public relations field provides a useful framework within which to develop this book on public relations management. Pavlik (1987) produced one of the first assessments of what research had been done and what research directions might be useful, and *Public Relations Review*,

one of the leading public relations academic journals devotes one of its issues to an annual index of research articles and publications in the field. I have developed a framework for categorizing the public relations literature into a number of core thematic areas which, although used primarily as a teaching aid, also serves as a useful way of framing the literature.

I reviewed a wide range of sources along with other indices covering more than 30 years of public relations research, dividing the identified material into four broad thematic categories (see Figure 1.3): (1) public relations as a concept or idea; (2) public relations as a function; (3) public relations as a process; and (4) public relations as a role. These four distinct but related areas are important because each contributes to building an overall perspective of what public relations is and what it should and can do. Moreover, arguably each of these thematic areas also contribute to building an understanding of the ‘messy’ work of public relations *management*, where functions, departments, and managers overlap in their work.

The outer four areas of the model represent four interrelated areas of research that, when viewed together, reveal something of the contested nature of our understanding

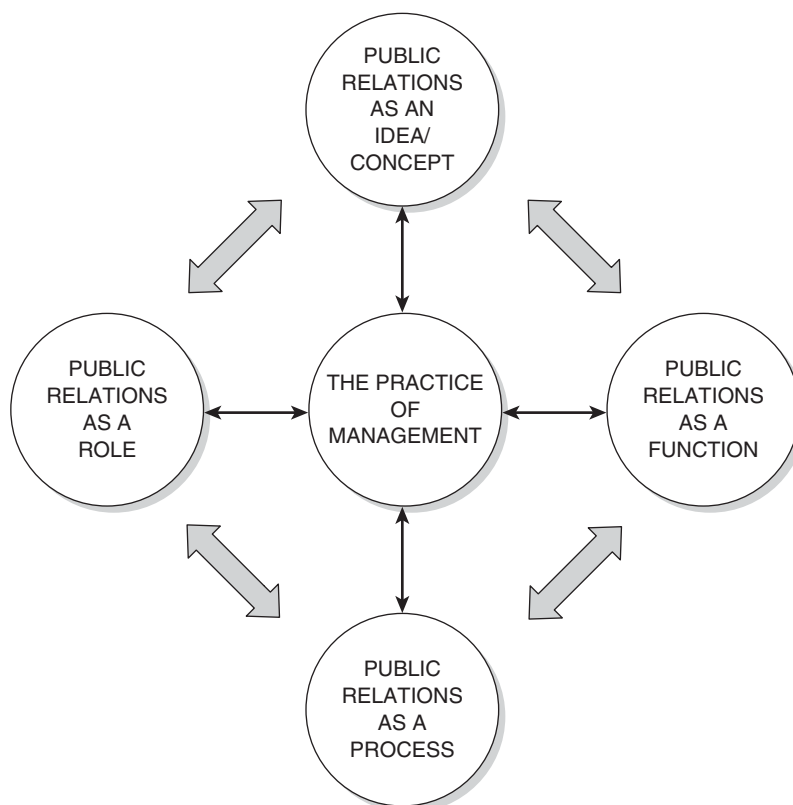


FIGURE 1.3 The Four Categories of Public Relations Research

of public relations as a discipline, as a form of professional practice, and as a set of work-related roles that practitioners perform. Here I have pointed to the strong self-reflecting inward focus of much of this research, with little attention paid to exploring the external context and/or environment outside of the public relations field itself. The concept of ‘management’ in the public relations context has admittedly been discussed in some depth, particularly within the roles literature, but often without drawing comparisons with how management is understood in other functional disciplines, most notably within the mainstream management literature.

For the purposes of this book, we have placed the concept and practice of management at the center of this model to focus attention on understanding what might constitute the tasks and responsibilities of those practitioners occupying ‘managerial level’ roles within organizations; this may also help to highlight where and how practitioners can make substantial contributions to the achievement of broader organizational objectives at all levels of management, not just at the most senior level. Public relations practitioners who begin to think beyond their own functional area and link their communication objectives to the business/organizational objectives of other managers are then in a position to demonstrate the impact that communication/public relations can and should have in organizations. In short, they can participate in the conversation where strategy is developed and implemented.

Category 1: Public Relations as a Concept/Idea

The first of these categories or areas contains literature concerned with public relations as a ‘concept or idea’, and here researchers have sought to uncover a single universal definition of public relations. In essence, agreeing on one definition has the potential benefit of facilitating clearer recognition of what public relations is and stands for. In the 1940s, American practitioner and PRSA founding member Rex Harlow (Cutlip, Center, and Broom, 1985) undertook the monumental task of gathering together all of the definitions of public relations he could find. From the nearly 500 definitions that he catalogued, he worked with the fledgling PRSA to create one ‘official’ definition that he hoped would be sufficiently broad yet sufficiently definitive to be universally recognized and accepted. The resulting definition (see Figure 1.4), while comprehensive, was not terribly memorable or useful as a shorthand way of explaining public relations to a wider audience. And, of course, while the PRSA and other professional bodies may have similar official definitions, this has not stopped academics and professionals from continuing to devise new definitions, which may add to the lack of clarity about what the term ‘public relations’ stands for. Of course, the challenge of identifying one universal definition is made all the more difficult by the realization that public relations practice and people’s understanding of it may well vary in different environmental or organizational contexts, as well as over time and in different cultures, all of which suggests there may be a need to at least adapt how public relations is defined.

OFFICIAL STATEMENT ON PUBLIC RELATIONS

(Formally adopted by PRSA Assembly, November, 1982)

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

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

The managements of institutions need to understand the attitudes and values of their publics in order to achieve institutional goals. The goals themselves are shaped by the external environment. The public relations practitioner acts as a counselor to management and as a mediator, helping to translate private aims into reasonable, publicly acceptable policy and action.

As a management function, public relations encompasses the following:

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

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

FIGURE 1.4 PRSA Statement of Public Relations

Source: Formally adopted by PRSA Assembly, November 6, 1982 http://www.prsa.org/official_statementonpublicrelations.

On the other hand, scholars such as Hutton (1999) have warned that unless public relations finds a way to develop one recognizable identity, it will continue to be relegated to the more technical ranks of practice charged with carrying out the decisions largely taken by others.

While the idea of finding one universally acceptable definition of public relations may prove an impossible challenge, what seems a more logical and achievable goal is

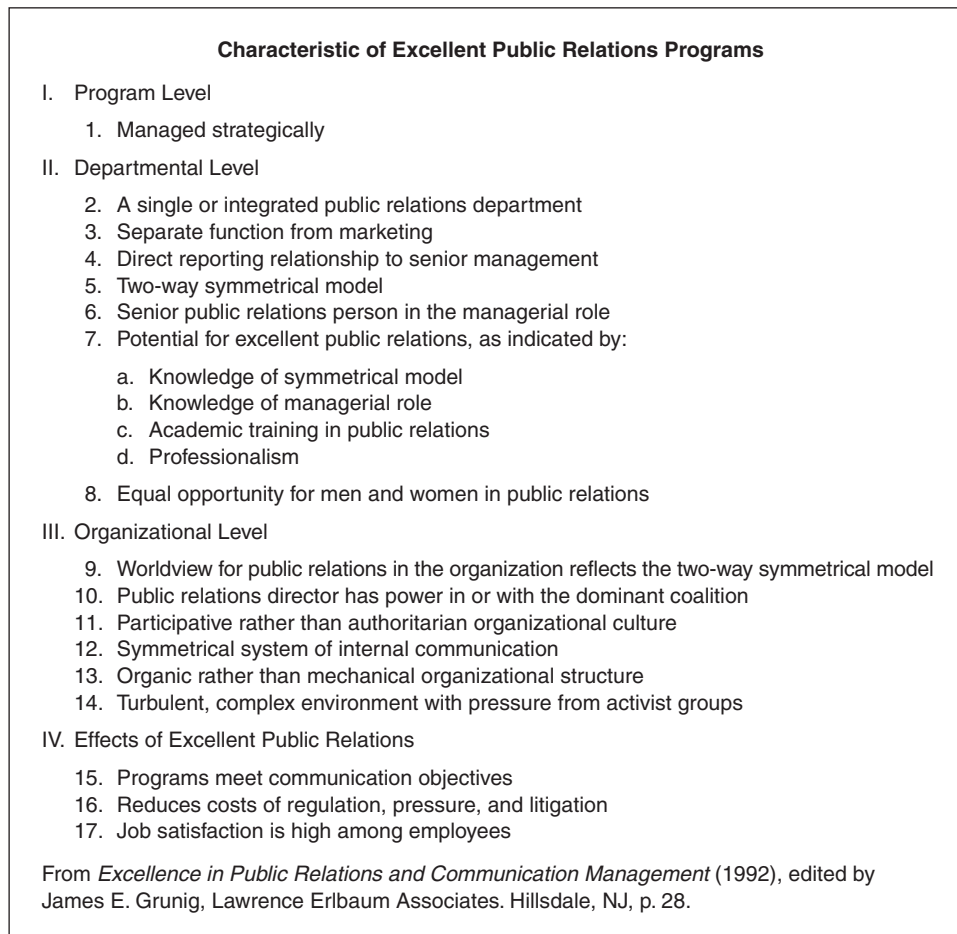


FIGURE 1.5 Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier's Characteristics of Excellent Organizations

to move toward the idea of identifying some more or less common core characteristics of public relations practice and the associated professional skills required of practitioners. For example, Guth and Marsh (2003) propose that the elements of 'management function', 'two-way communication', 'planned activity', 'research-based social science', and 'socially responsible' behavior form the core elements of any definition of public relations (p. 7). Wilcox, Cameron, Ault, and Agee (2003) identify the key words to defining public relations as including: 'deliberate, planned, performance, public interest, two-way communication, and management function.' (p. 5). Clearly these examples show that while the context and environment can greatly vary, the concept displays consistent elements and values. Similarly, as we have already pointed to earlier, one of the key outcomes of the 'excellence study' was the identification of a set of key characteristics of excellent communication and public relations practice, as shown in Figure 1.5 (Grunig, 1992; Grunig et al., 1992).

Category 2: Public Relations as a Function

The second category of literature focuses on the idea of public relations as a function that relates to the purpose for which public relations exists. Here the literature looks at what public relations should or can contribute to the organization's overall goals and objectives and in what specific and general ways. Examples include public relations as the conscience of the organization (social responsibility and reputation management), the organizational mouthpiece (media relations), the environmental scanner (issues management or environmental interpreter), or, one of the most often cited, the boundary spanner. Grunig et al. (1992) maintained that the level at which these functions are performed affects whether the practitioner is thought of as a 'manager' or a 'technician', although their focus was limited to identifying the truly excellent organizations and the senior executives in them. Nevertheless, the logic here is that the location of the function within the organizational hierarchy is likely to reflect the dominant coalition's perceptions of public relations which, in turn, will have a significant influence on how far practitioners are able to enact a predominantly managerial rather than technical role. In addition to its relationship with the dominant coalition, public relations must also define its position and contribution in relation to other mainstream organizational functions and levels, such as marketing, human resources, legal, and finance.

Interestingly, 'crisis management' is the one of the areas that appears fairly well defined as the responsibility of the public relations function. One plausible explanation for this link between public relations and crisis management is the often very strong media component present in crisis situations. This harkens back to public relations roots as a 'journalist-in-residence' function (Grunig & Hunt, 1984: 22), when organizations attracted journalists into becoming advocates for them because of their well-developed understanding of the media and how to use it for organizational objectives. Even in crisis situations, however, the level at which the function is carried out depends on the organization's understanding of the public relations function. At one extreme public relations might operate simply as a 'mouthpiece' for disseminating the company line supplied by dominant coalition members, while at the other extreme public relations practitioners may play an active part in helping to construct strategically important messages that might impact significantly on the organization's short- and long-term objectives. Crisis management also provides an interesting insight into how fluid yet crucial the functional level of public relations can be. During a crisis, public relations is often sought out by dominant coalition members for ideas and input, yet once the crisis declines in intensity, public relations may often be relegated to fulfilling a much more routine role within the organization until the next crisis flares up. Figure 1.6 shows typical titles and responsibilities the PRSA has identified as functions of public relations managers.

Category 3: Public Relations as a Process


The third category/area of literature concerns the view of public relations as a 'process'. This area has attracted significant research interest over the years as scholars have attempted to map, explain and conceptualize the public relations process. Here,

MANAGER

TYPICAL TITLES:

Issues Manager

Manager of Audiovisual Communications
Manager of Community Relations
Manager of Corporate Communications
Manager of Internal Communications
Manager of Investor Relations
Manager of Marketing Communications
Manager of Media Relations
Manager of Member Relations
Manager of Public Relations/Public Information
Manager of Publications
Manager of Research



USUAL RESPONSIBILITIES AT THIS LEVEL:

Using advanced skills to provide constituency and issue trend analysis; departmental management including planning, organizing, budgeting, leading, controlling, evaluating and problem solving,

SKILLS & KNOWLEDGE TYPICALLY REQUIRED AT THIS LEVEL:

For each item, rank your competency on a scale from 1–10 where 1 = Poor, 5 = Average and 10 = Outstanding

- Managing research projects
- Managing internal communications
- Managing media relations
- Managing external communications
- Developing strategics for actions
- Writing objectives
- Reviewing proposals and plans
- Analyzing proposed budgets
- Selling public relations programs to internal/external clients
- Presenting to groups
- Managing speakers bureaus
- Conducting staff conferences
- Giving media interviews
- Interviewing, selecting personnel
- Training staff members
- Coordinating the writing of public relations plans
- Measuring results
- Directing contributions programs
- Supporting marketing with public relations activities
- Selecting, preparing spokespersons
- Supporting fundraising with public relations activities

FIGURE 1.6 The Public Relations Professional Career Guide Description of Managerial Titles Knowledge and Skills

Source: Public Relations Professional Career Guide © 1993 by The PRSA Foundation.

for example, perhaps the best-recognized model of the public relations process is the ubiquitous four-step process model, consisting of research, planning, communication, and evaluation, pioneered by Cutlip and Center (1971) in the fourth edition of their

classic textbook, *Effective Public Relations*. Indeed, the four-step process has spawned a plethora of models describing the sequence of actions to achieve communication/public relations objectives. One possible suggestion for the wealth of literature in this area is that is perhaps the easiest or most visible area to study because researchers can, in effect, observe the sequence of actions as they unfold, producing results that can be relatively straightforward. Indeed, the majority of public relations textbooks tend to adopt a ‘process perspective’ in examining the field and tend to portray the process as essentially a ‘linear one’ in which activities and actions follow in a logical sequential way, which of course is not always the case in reality. Moreover, the examination of ‘process’ generally tends to be rather superficial and inward-looking rather than seeking to explore where and how public relations might interlink with other managerial functions and processes that contribute to the realization of organizational objectives.

Finally, a common theme in the public relations literature is the exhortation that practitioners should be involved in the strategic management process within organizations (part of the dominant coalition) and should contribute to such decisions. In reality, as we have suggested earlier, public relations tends to be omitted from the top policy-making/decision-making work of the dominant coalition and is often only called in to help implement and communicate strategic decisions developed at a higher level in the absence of any public relations input (White & Dozier, 1992). The implementation of strategic decisions made without public relations input simply reinforces the tactical emphasis found in much of the process of public relations work. Moreover, if one examines the management literature, little if any reference can be found to a role for public relations, particularly in the context of any discussion of strategic decision-making (e.g., Mintzberg, 1994; Johnson & Scholes, 1993). This mutual lack of acknowledgement on the part of public relations and management scholars reflects the difficulty in practice of integrating public relations into the mainstream management processes in the majority of organizations.

Category 4: Public Relations as a Role

The final major category of literature identified in this model centers around the concept of public relations as a ‘role’ enacted within an organizational setting. The emergence of practitioner roles theory has provided the basis for explaining the recurring patterns of behavior adopted by practitioners in response to the situations they face and, importantly, the expectations of others as to how they should conduct themselves in their jobs. Research into practitioner role enactment is particularly relevant to our examination of the managerial dimensions of public relations work as it has provided the basis for identifying the managerial and technical profiles and specific responsibilities of practitioners working within different organizational structures. Although we will examine the application of roles theory to public relations in greater depth in Chapter 2, where it will be used to inform and underpin our own model of public relations management, here it may be useful to briefly outline the principal practitioner role typologies advanced by Glen Broom (Broom, 1982, Broom & Smith, 1979) and subsequently by David Dozier (Dozier,

TABLE 1.1 The Traditional Four- and Two-Role Typology Models

Four-Role Public Relations Typology	Two-Role Public Relations Typology
Expert Prescriber	
Problem-solving Facilitator	Manager
Communication Facilitator	
Communication Technician	Communication Technician

1984; Broom & Dozier, 1986, Dozier & Broom, 1995). The two dominant roles frameworks that have emerged from roles research, Broom and Smith's four-role typology and Dozier's manager–technician dual typology, are outlined in Table 1.1.

As will be examined further in Chapter 2, Broom and Smith's four-role typology and, more particularly, Dozier's (1984) manager–technician role dichotomy have provided a quite robust framework for broadly explaining practitioner work patterns within the industry. However, these role typologies are acknowledged to be simplifications of the range of activities that practitioners may perform in the course of their jobs and as such are open to a variety of criticisms, not the least being the way in which they conceptualize the essential components of managerial work in the public relations context – a weakness we will explore further in Chapter 2.

Despite such criticisms, roles research has provided some valuable insights into a range of influences on the way practitioners perform their jobs as well as into the status and influence of public relations within organizations. Here, in particular, roles researchers (e.g. Broom & Dozier, 1995; Toth, Serini, Wright, & Emig, 1998; Cline, Toth, Turk, Walters, Johnson, & Smith 1986; Choi & Hon, 2002) have established a strong link between role enactment and gender, arguing that women have traditionally been under-represented within managerial ranks and paid less than their male counterparts for performing similar work. One further comment worth making at this stage is that the vast majority of practitioner roles studies have been conducted among samples of practitioners themselves, rather than gathering data about how other functions and, in particular, how senior management see the role performed by practitioners. Only a few studies, such as Wright (1995) and Hon (1998), have attempted gather this 'outside-in' perspective, which can provide a valuable reality check on how the function is really perceived by powerful elites and others within the organizational setting.

CHALLENGES FACING PUBLIC RELATIONS MANAGERS

This brief overview and classification of key areas of public relations literature helps to highlight some key challenges that we believe public relations practitioners and academics have to address if they are, first, to develop a better appreciation of the managerial dimensions of the work practitioners perform, and second, to

secure both externally and internally the recognition and respect for the public relations function. Here we have identified eight key challenges that public relations faces in gaining wider recognition as a mainstream organizational function working alongside other organizational functions, rather than operating in isolation. Each challenge represents an opportunity for professionals and academics to explore public relations as a management function. Considering these eight challenges individually and collectively provides insights into why current thinking about the management function in the communication/public relations context often remains poorly developed and, in many senses, ambiguous. It also suggests areas in which progress needs to be made if public relations is to be recognized widely as a serious and important management function. The eight challenges identified are:

1. The ongoing challenge of defining public relations.
2. Organizational and social ignorance of the value of public relations efforts to organizational efforts.
3. The lack of a formally recognized managerial-level function for public relations within the organization.
4. The overlap and/or encroachment of other managerial functions on public relations functions and roles.
5. The size of the public relations function/presence in most organizations.
6. The breadth and variety of public relations practitioner roles.
7. The varied background of public relations practitioners.
8. The lack of general managerial/business education for public relations technicians and managers.

Challenge #1: *Defining public relations*

As mentioned earlier, how public relations is defined continues to be a problem for both practitioners and academics. Despite a veritable explosion of academic and professional textbooks and publications devoted to the subject, there has been, if anything, even more controversy over how the boundaries of the discipline or function should be defined. The growth of concern over ethics and corporate social responsibility, the emergence of debates about terminological distinctions such as ‘corporate communications’ or ‘public affairs’ and ‘public relations’, and the increasing use of controversial terms such as ‘spin’ and ‘propaganda’ have all added to the confusion. Naturally, the lack of consensus merely adds to the difficulty in establishing a clear understanding of what the term ‘public relations’ comprises and, hence, what needs to be managed. Ironically, a common theme found in many of the often-cited definitions of public relations is the notion of a function that is primarily concerned with the ‘the management of communication between organizations and their publics or stakeholders’. However, while many of the definitions make reference to the idea of public relations having responsibility for ‘managing’ communication and relationships

with organizational stakeholders, there is little elaboration of what such management processes involve, and equally, at what level within organizations this 'managerial function' occurs.

Challenge #2: Organizational and social ignorance of the value of public relations to organizational and societal efforts

Partly because of the lack of a widely accepted and understood definition of public relations, and partly because of the very diverse nature of public relations practice itself, understanding what value public relations can add to social causes, organizational objectives, or corporate outputs is also often confused, and at worst, completely misunderstood. Indeed, public relations has been seen as a form of propaganda, designed to mislead people for the greed of some organizational entity or to persuade people to behave in ways they might otherwise resist. The profession's failure to devise ways to communicate effectively what public relations is and what it can achieve has allowed commentators outside the profession to fill the vacuum and propagate the image of public relations as a manipulative force, working to obscure or cover up government blunders or corporate malfeasance, or engage in rather frivolous publicity stunts. Public relations receives very little recognition for its role in promoting important social change such as reductions in smoking and poor dietary practice, partly at least because much of this work is low visibility, taking place through the media or other third-party entities or venues. Clearly, in so far as the value of public relations continues to be misunderstood, it makes it all the more difficult for practitioners to gain recognition as performing a significant managerial function.

Challenge #3: The lack of a commonly recognized place for public relations within the organizational structure

A frequently cited complaint from practitioners is that public relations often does not have the appropriate access and reporting relationship it deserves and needs within organizations to be fully effective. Again such complaints can be traced at least in part to the lack of clear understanding of what public relations is and how it contributes to organizational goals. The authors' earlier research (e.g. DeSanto & Moss, 2004) found a range of reporting relationships and locations for the public relations function within organizations, in some cases reporting to marketing or even finance directors. Where public relations is positioned as subordinate to other managerial functions, it is impossible for public relations practitioners to be recognized as having equal status to other managers. As a consequence, public relations is unlikely to be working to its full potential as a contributor at the managerial level.

Challenge #4: The overlap and/or encroachment of other managerial functions on public relations

Linked to the previous challenge, because public relations is considered a subordinate function with a limited scope for operation, there is always the danger of other *organizational* functions, such as human resource management or marketing, encroaching into what might traditionally be recognized as

the domain of public relations. This is particularly the case with marketing that has tended to annex the publicity element of public relations as a part of the marketing communications and has increasingly sought to annex other elements of public relations work, particularly those concerned with stakeholder relationship-building activities. The emergence of concepts such as 'Marketing-PR' (Harris, 1993) typify this attempt by marketers to encroach into traditional public relations territory. The consequence of such encroachment is to often to diminish the standing of public relations and hence handicap its ability to realize fully the managerial potential of its role.

Challenge #5: The size of the public relations function in most organizations

The size of the department matters, because the more senior practitioners in small public relations departments with relatively few employees tend to find themselves stretched to serve the range of issues, from day-to-day activities to long-term efforts, that may confront them, the more difficult it becomes to free themselves to concentrate on those issues that may enable them to make a more significant contribution at the managerial level. Also, because there has been a noticeable trend toward 'downsizing' the number of staff employed in in-house communication/public relations departments over the past 15 years, it has been increasingly the case that in-house teams are often hard pressed simply to cope with all the routine communication work, let alone have time to contemplate how they might make a more strategic contribution to their organizations. However, even in the face of such downsizing, the most talented practitioners have continued to participate as members of the senior management team (dominant coalition) within organizations. Here the key to retaining such a 'seat at the top table' is undoubtedly the practitioner's comprehension of the business and industry, and his/her ability to contribute effectively to business decision-making. Here the obvious challenge for practitioners is to maintain their understanding of business developments and issues as well as how communication affects the business perspective, not simply keep up with and address issues from a communication perspective.

Challenge #6: The breadth and variety of public relations practitioner roles

Linked to the previous issue of department size and recognition of the public relations in an organization is a further challenge for practitioners aspiring to operate at the managerial level, namely the breadth and variety of roles that practitioners may have to perform on a regular basis. The ability of public relations practitioners to turn their hand to a wide variety of problems and challenges is recognized as one of their strengths; but equally, in becoming generalists, practitioners may struggle to gain the depth of understanding of some aspect of management necessary to play a full working part in the eyes of the dominant coalition. In effect, practitioners may have to wear 'many hats', not all of which may fit comfortably on the head of someone wishing to operate at the most senior management level within the organization. Communication is part of all areas, whereas other managers

tend to operate in relatively specific, well-defined areas (human resources, marketing, operations); this presence in all organizational areas poses the special challenge for public relations managers to develop a wide and varied understanding of all organizational functions.

Challenge #7: The varied background of public relations practitioners

A further related challenge for those practitioners wishing to be accepted as members of the senior managerial team in organizations and wishing to develop their managerial competence lies in the varied background of most practitioners. In the main, practitioners have traditionally tended to enter the public relations profession from a journalistic background or from a variety of other fields, and rarely from a mainstream managerial background. While the lack of a mainstream management background need not prove an insurmountable barrier to practitioners participating in the work of the senior management team, clearly where practitioners lack such previous experience they are going to have to work at bridging any gaps in their knowledge, particularly in terms of their understanding not only of the relevant industry and business issues affecting their organizations, but also the key operational issues that determine the success of the business. While many practitioners have bridged this knowledge gap and assumed influential positions within their organization's senior management team, others continue to emphasize their media and publication production knowledge and skills and then bemoan their lack of inclusion at the most senior management levels.

Challenge #8: The lack of general managerial/business training/education for public relations practitioners

The fact that most practitioners typically have entered the public relations profession from journalism partly explains the lack of business knowledge and acumen shown by many practitioners. However, with the growth of public relations education both in the US and in the UK, and increasingly in other parts of the world, there are a growing number of well-qualified young practitioners entering the field each year. The problem with many of these educational programs, however, is that they tend to have been designed to develop the basic knowledge and skills required for entry-level jobs, often excluding anything other than a superficial examination of management theory and practice. This is particularly true of many of the public relations programs offered at US institutions, which have historically tended to be located in journalism or speech communication schools, rather than in business schools. The challenge here is to bring about some change in the balance of the curriculum offered to public relations students, exposing them to a greater degree of relevant management theory in addition to mainstream communication and public relations theories, and thereby helping those graduating to be better prepared to assume more managerial-level positions.

Viewed collectively as well as individually, these eight challenges help explain to a large degree why it has often proved difficult for public relations to be accepted as a

mainstream ‘management’ function within organizations, and hence, why it is that senior practitioners have often struggled to gain acceptance as members of the dominant coalition within organizations. In the course of this book we will examine how such challenges impact on the way communication/public relations practitioners perform their roles within organizations, are viewed by other managerial and senior-level functions within their organizations, and also how, in some cases, practitioners have effectively addressed these challenges and, as a result, are able to perform a mainstream managerial role within their organizations. Our aim is that by helping public relations managers gain an awareness of the importance of understanding and drawing on relevant management theories and principles in performing their roles, they will be better able to earn the recognition and respect of their managerial counterparts within other areas of their organizations. This recognition, in turn, will enhance the understanding of the value of public relations in accomplishing organizational objectives.

SUMMARY

To summarize, this book’s purpose is to demonstrate that the management of communication/public relations takes place at all levels within organizations, not just at the most senior strategic levels. Hence, our theories and examples will blend both the strategic and the operational elements of management practice. Through our new framework, described in the next chapter, we intend to set out an explanatory framework that will provide a platform for holistically explicating communication management as a function, process, and role at all organizational levels, as well as providing a basis for understanding how and why management practices in the communication/public relations context may differ between organizations and cultures.



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