PUBLIC RELATIONS

Chapter 2 – Theories, Models and Levels of Communication

All material is adapted from Botha, D. et al. 2007. Public Relations: Fresh Perspectives. Pearson Education SA
Environmental Scanning

• This involves a detailed examination of the internal and external environment to find issues or opinions that could be seen as opportunities or threats to the org, or that the public outside the org would find worth knowing.

• The info is then made available to the internal publics, such as management, in the form of reports, as well as to the external environment through public relations activities, such as the issuing of media releases.
Environmental Scanning

- So, the public relations practitioner operates on the boundaries of the system (the organisation) and the subsystem (the public relations function) and is called a boundary spanner.
- *This is someone who forms a link between boundaries, almost as a bridge forms a link between two sides of a river.*
- This of the PR person/dept as someone who stand with one foot in the org and one foot in the community outside the org.
- They have to tell the org what the community is saying, and visa versa.
Environmental Scanning

• These two functions are known as:

1. **Mirror Function**: This means holding up stakeholders’ perceptions to the organisation like a mirror to see what the external publics think of it (representing the external stakeholders’ viewpoints to the org).

2. **Window Function**: This means acting as a window into the org, so that people outside can see into the org to understand it better (representing the org’s viewpoints to the stakeholders in the external environment).
Stakeholder Theory

• An NB part of interrelated organisations is the management of relationships between the org and the various stakeholders in its environment.
• The more stakeholders there are, the more complex it gets.
• Think of your family. Organising a lunch for your immediate family is a lot simpler than arranging a wedding where the whole family and friends are invited.
Strategic Constituencies Theory

• Constituency: A group of people whose support the org needs.
• This theory concentrates on those parts of the environment that most threatens the org.
• The PR function of the org will be judged on its ability to tell which stakeholders in the environment fall within this category, and to advise the top management on how to structure communication with these stakeholders.
• It is NB to remember that these strategic constituencies could change, depending on the context and situation the org is in at any given time.
Strategic Constituencies Theory

- For example: employees are always a key *stakeholder group*, but at the beginning of the year, when wage negotiations are being finalised for the coming year, they become a *strategic constituency*.
- This is when unions could threaten the org with strikes that could disrupt its activities.
- In this situation, the employees become organised around a specific issue of wages, which affects both them and the org.
- They become an active public that could threaten the survival of the org.
- During this period they are considered a *strategic constituency*.
- Later in the year, when negotiations have been finalised successfully, they are no longer a strategic constituency, as the immediate threat to the orgs survival is over.
Issues Theory

• Issue: A disagreement between parties, which is based on differences in facts, values or policies.

• Issues management: The process by which organisations anticipate issues and resolve conflict before it becomes a crisis.

• The process of issue management involves monitoring, analysing and communicating with strategic stakeholders about their disagreements with the org.

• Apart from preventing misunderstandings by communicating the correct facts, values and policies, and the reasons for them, to stakeholders, public relations will also be involved in communicating when an issue becomes a crisis.
Crisis Communication

• Communicating to internal and external publics about a crisis is an important part of public relations.

• A crisis can be seen as a significant, tragic and/ or unexpected event, which can occur naturally or as a result of human error.

• A crisis can harm an organisation by causing the loss of assets, such as buildings, or the loss of credibility which could cause damage to the org's image and reputation.
Crisis Communication

- Crises share some common characteristics:
  - Surprise: Nobody expects them.
  - Not enough info: one of the major tasks of PR when a crisis occurs is to send out info about the who, what, where, when, and how.
  - Speed: Everything happens very quickly during crisis. There is no time to think, which means a good crisis and crisis communication plan must be in place to help people make decisions.
  - Intense Security: Media attention will be focused on the org. Media spokesperson must be prepared beforehand, so that they can cope with the pressure during crisis.
Crisis Communication

• Types of crisis: Most occur suddenly, but as with issues theory, the org can sometime see an issue develop before it actually happens.
  1. An immediate crisis happens suddenly and unexpectedly, such as Pick ‘n Pay poison case.
  2. An emerging crisis takes some time to develop and then suddenly erupts into a full-scale crisis. An example is the peoples dissatisfaction with the rate of housing delivery in the WC. Suddenly, they had had enough and started protesting in the streets and damaging property to make a point.
  3. A sustained crisis is a disagreement that drags on for a long time with no solution. An example would be the disagreement between the SA gov and the trade union movement about privatisation of state assets such as Telkom, which has been dragging on for more than ten years and is not yet resolved.
Excellence Theory

• This theory is made up of four models and was developed by James Grunig in 1992 in the USA.

• They loosely show the history and development of Public Relations practice.

• These models have not replaced one another over the years. Instead, organisations use a mix of them to suit the situation and context of communication activity.
Excellence Theory

• **Press Agency Model:** Is characterised by the attitude of early PR practitioners that the public could be fooled.

• Orgs employed press agents, who issued statements on behalf of the org to the press.

• These statements did not necessarily reflect the truth, but represented info that the org wanted the public to believe.

• Communication was aimed at persuading the public to believe the org’s viewpoint, regardless of what the actual facts were.
Excellence Theory

• **Public Information Model:** Was characterised by the attitude that the public should be informed.
• It was an improvement on the press agentry model, but still only allowed for one-way communication.
• This way of managing relationships between the public and the org still relied on press agents to supply info to the press on behalf of the org, and the org still controlled what info would be supplied, and when.
Excellence Theory

• Both these models represent on-way approaches to public relations: the distribution of information to the public, usually through the mass media.
• They are much like a husband coming home late from work and lying to his wife about where he was.
• He is telling her what he thinks she needs to know (that he is hardworking and spends long hours at the office) instead of telling her the truth (that he was out playing golf with his friends and forgot to check the time).
• Due to good investigative reporting about what was really happening in orgs, society was able to pressurise orgs into giving out reliable info.
Excellence Theory

- Two-Way Asymmetrical Communication Model: This came as a response to the change in what society expected and allowed for minimal feedback from publics to the org, and still relied heavily on the public relations practitioner’s ability to persuade the public of the org’s viewpoint.

- The org started listening to its stakeholders, but used the info it got from minimal research to reframe or redirect messages in order to convince the public of the orgs viewpoint.

- This is an unbalanced relationship.
Excellence Theory

- **Symmetrical (or ideal) situation**: indicates that all participants in the comm relationship have equal chance of convincing the other party or parties of their viewpoint.
- In this situation, it is therefore possible that stakeholders in the environment of the org can change the attitudes and behaviour of the org through comm activities.
- Ors started doing extensive research to find out what the perceptions and viewpoints of their stakeholders were and to use this info to influence decisions made in the org.
- This model represents excellent communication in the current business environment.
- It is very necessary for healthy organisational-public relationships.
Excellence Theory

• Think of our husband and wife example again.
• Everybody wants to be in a relationship where their opinion is valued and decisions are made jointly.
• You also want to feel that you are informed of important events and facts (such as that your husband is playing golf instead of working).
• Talking to each other when making decisions is important in a personal relationship as well as in a business relationship.
Relationship Theory

• This is another important theory about comm in org.
• In the USA, Ledingham, in 2000, argued that PR is a management function and the desired outcome of PR is public relationships.
• Public organisational relationships are linked to attitudes, behaviour, perceptions and knowledge on both sides.
• The existence of a public-organisational relationship indicates that the actions of either participants can have effect on the economic, social, cultural and political well-being of the other participant.
Reflective Theory

• In contrast to these theories developed in the US, the unique cultural worldview of society in Europe caused a different approach to PR to develop.

• Reflective theory argues that society allows orgs to exist, therefore the org’s values and culture should reflect those of the society in which it operates.

• To make sure that this happens, PR should constantly remind top management of the changing views of the community and make sure that the org’s goals are in line with community goals.

• PR helps to build understanding and trust between the different social systems, moving from confrontation to collaboration.

• Social responsibility, or solving conflict between organisational behaviour and public perception of how orgs should behave, is the most NB aspect of PR practice, according to this theory.
Corporate Communication Theory

• In South Africa, Benita Steyn identified the role of the corporate communication strategist.
• This theory argues that PR is a strategic management function, and should form part of the decision-making group of an org.
• Its strategic role includes the proactive management of an org’s strategic issues.
• It also acknowledges that orgs have ethical and social responsibilities apart from their economic and legal responsibilities.
• PR assists orgs to achieve a balance between business goals and socially acceptable behaviour.
• PR builds, maintains and manages relationships with stakeholders in the organisational environment.
• Orgs are socio-economic systems that recognise stakeholders as partners, and create value through combined problem solving.
## Models in PR (Grunig & Hunt)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Press Agentry/Publicity</th>
<th>Public Information</th>
<th>Two-way Asymmetric</th>
<th>Two-way Symmetric</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose</strong></td>
<td>Propaganda (certain point of view)</td>
<td>Dissemination of Information</td>
<td>Persuasion</td>
<td>Understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nature of Communication</strong></td>
<td>One-way (complete information lacking)</td>
<td>One way; Truth important</td>
<td>Two-way; imbalanced</td>
<td>Two-way; Balanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication Model</strong></td>
<td>Source to Receiver</td>
<td>Source to Receiver</td>
<td>Source to Receiver &amp; Feedback</td>
<td>Group to Group and Feedback</td>
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