

Strategic Reflection as the Strategic Role of PR

If the purpose of PR is *reciprocal strategic reflection*, consisting of both a reflective and expressive task (Holmström, 1996), then the strategic role of PR (as the reflective task/ mirror function) is *strategic reflection*. The author thus relabels her original PR 'strategist' role (which now includes a reflective dimension, previously referred to in this article as the PR 'strategist/ reflectionist') to the 'reflective strategist'.

Focused on *strategic reflection*, the 'reflective strategist' acts as a coordinating mechanism between organization (business, government or non-profit) and environment, providing management with an outside (societal) perspective, assisting them to reflect on the organization's position in the bigger context with the aim of balancing organizational goals with the well-being of society (the collective interest/ common good). By spanning the organizational boundary, gathering information by means of environmental scanning, transmitting this information to management, providing it as input to the strategy formulation process, the 'reflective strategist' enlightens management on societal/ stakeholder values, norms and expectations for socially and environmentally responsible behavior. Management is also influenced to state the organization's position on, practice two-way communication and build trusting relationships with stakeholders about, issues of strategic importance.

The 'reflective strategist' acts as an advocate for key stakeholders by explaining their views to management, making the latter aware of the impact of their behavior/ organizational policies and strategies on key stakeholders and societal interest groups. The 'reflective strategist' approaches any problem with a concern for the implications or consequences of organizational behavior towards and in the public sphere/ external environment, constantly on the lookout for new stakeholders or interest groups significant to the organization's well-being, solving or avoiding conflict between organizational behavior and the public perception of how socially responsible organizations should operate. The 'reflective strategist' acts as an early warning system to management before issues in the environment erupt into crises, initiating dialogue with pressure groups limiting the organization's autonomy, drawing management's attention to the importance of accommodating perspectives different from their own.

The 'reflective strategist' influences management to adapt strategies to societal/ stakeholder values, norms and expectations, balancing the quest for the realization of organizational goals with respect for the natural environment (the planet) and its inhabitants (the people). Management is made to understand that public trust is not earned by simply changing outward communication to signify responsibility -- an organization has to behave accordingly, show concern for broader societal issues and values considered publicly relevant, and practice self-restriction to obtain legitimacy and a good reputation, and garner trust. Social responsibility is thus at the core of strategic public relations practice, the lens through which to determine the boundaries of acceptable behavior and the collective interest.

<p>Reference: Steyn, B. (2009). The strategic role of public relations is <i>strategic reflection</i>: A South African research stream. <i>American Behavioral Scientist</i>, 53(4) 516–532. (The extract above appears on p528-529).</p>
--