

THE EVOLUTION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS TO STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT

The *changing purpose* of public relations to the organisation (changing PR paradigms)

- From 'the public be *fooled* to 'the public be *informed* to 'the public be *manipulated* to 'the public be *understood* to 'the public's needs/concerns/expectations be *considered* to 'the public's values be *adhered* to.
- From obtaining *publicity* to disseminating *information* to *manipulation/persuasion* to developing *mutual understanding* to resolving *conflict* to building *relationships* to earning a good *reputation* to providing *reflection* to obtaining *legitimacy/license to operate*.
- From manipulating public opinion with *communication messages* to combining symbolic communication messages and *organisational behaviours* to initiate, build, nurture and maintain mutually beneficial *relationships*.
- From *relinquishing* some of PR's historic *control* of communication to *shifting it back* into the hands of stakeholders to *empowering* them with tools to keep them *engaged*.
- From *communicating* with the organisation's *own stakeholders* to *analysing, reflecting and integrating* the characteristics of *conversations in the public sphere (societal discourse)* into the organisation's mission, values and strategies.
- From focusing on *microprocesses*—mainly processes relating to the effect of the media on various groups of the public—to providing a *societal perspective (macro level)*.
- From leading only *communication processes* to also developing the organisation's *communication skills* on all levels.
- From communication as the *domain of the PR department* to co-ordinating *interfunctional and network collaboration*.
- From *one-way* communication to *two-way* communication to a *multi-dimensional* communication process which produces effective *relationships*.
- From *spin doctoring* to creating *trust* and being seen as *legitimate* (the 'authentic enterprise').
- From '*no comment*' to a commitment to *openness and responsiveness*.
- From managing *social responsibility programmes* to creating a culture/developing a *philosophy of societally responsible and sustainable behaviour* (social, environmental and economic).

Definitions of public relations reflecting changing paradigms

From the “management of *communication* between an organisation and its publics” to

- “The management function that establishes and maintains *mutually beneficial relationships* between an organisation and the stakeholders on whom its success/failure depends” and

- “A communication function of management through which organisations *adapt to, alter, or maintain their environment* for the purpose of *achieving their goals*”

to

- “Analysing *trends*, predicting their *consequences*, counselling organisational *leaders*, and implementing *planned programmes of action* which will serve both the organisation and the *public interest*” and

- “A strategic management function that assists organisations to both *formulate and achieve societally acceptable goals* such as sustainability and good governance -- thus achieving a balance between *organisational priorities* and *societally responsible behaviour*.”

Changing roles: From PR *technician* to communication *manager* to communication *strategist*

- From analysing the *situation* to understanding the *strategic landscape*.
- From the *implementation of communication activities/plans* at the *micro* organisational level to *communication strategy* development at the *meso (departmental)* level to *enterprise strategy* development at the *macro* organisational (board) level.
- From identifying *channels and activities* (HOW to get the message across) to developing *communication strategy* (WHAT the message should be and WHO should be communicated TO) to identifying *strategic goals, strategic issues and reputation risks* (WHAT should be communicated ABOUT).
- From operating at the *tactical level* of the organisation to contributing to decision making at the *strategic level*.
- From *disseminating information* to *gathering and interpreting* information to bringing this *social intelligence to top management attention* to *influencing its use* in the organisation’s deliberate strategy development.
- From waiting *outside* the board room to *hear* what should be communicated, to being *inside the board room* to *decide* what should be communicated about.
- From PR *products, programmes and activities* to communication as the *solution to critical organisational problems*.

- From *crisis management and damage control* to identifying and responding to *societal outrage/reputation risks* (before issues erupt into crises).
- From *reactive crisis* management to *proactive issues* management.
- From developing *communication objectives* to developing *communication goals* to contributing towards the development of *strategic organisational goals and key positions*.
- From managing *communication* to managing *stakeholders and issues*.
- From a *single* stakeholder focus to an *inclusive and integrated* stakeholder approach.
- From stakeholder *identification* to stakeholder *management* to stakeholder *engagement* to stakeholder *governance*.
- From *outward* communication to *inward* communication.
- From *external representation* (information disposal) to *information acquisition*.
- From *speaking* on behalf of the organisation to *listening* on behalf of the organisation.
- From an *expressive* role to a *reflective* role.
- From communication as an *end* to communication as the *means to an end*.
- From *newspaper clippings* to *scanning and monitoring* the external environment through the Internet (especially new social media).
- From creating an *image* to earning a good *reputation*.
- From communicating about *policies, rules and regulations* to developing communication strategy within the context of *corporate governance*.
- From *mass communication* back to *face-to-face communication* and *individually targeted* communication.
- From *spin doctors and publicists* to *system builders* improving communication processes, *mediators* (co-ordinating messages), *influencers* (bringing the outside in) and *coaches* (improving communication skills).
- From managing only *communication processes* to building the organisation's *communicative capacity*.
- From providing *communication support* to other organisational functions to *strategically co-operating* with other functions, e.g.

Human Resources:

- From *publishing employee newsletters* to bringing about *organisational change* through communication.
- From *writing articles* about employee activities to *solving key strategic issues* through communication e.g. innovation, productivity, downsizing, restructuring, affirmative action.
- From communicating *benefit plans and orientation manuals* to building *interdepartmental networks*.

- From arranging *press conferences about strikes* to providing *communication counselling* to both top management and labour union leaders to building/ maintaining *relationships* between them for early identification and *issue negotiation*.

Marketing:

- From *sales promotion* to creating a *service quality culture* amongst employees.
- From *product publicity* to managing media relations during a *product failure*.
- From *events* management to *lobbying* against laws and regulations.

Finance

- From *tactical assistance* with the annual report to building *relationships with investors, the financial media and analysts*.

Information technology:

- From *web page design* to co-development of *environmental scanning systems* to gather information (on organisational stakeholders, societal issues and the interest groups that form around them).

RESEARCH AND EVALUATION:

- From *flying by the seat of your pants* to *informal* research to *formal* research.
- From *press cuttings and content analysis* to *media reach and awareness* to evaluating the *impact on perceptions and behaviour* to measuring *relationship quality, reputation capital, employee loyalty*.
- From measuring *communicated messages* to measuring *stakeholder perceptions of relationships* and the outcomes of such activities on *stakeholder behaviour*.
- From measuring *communication outputs* to measuring *message outtakes* to measuring *behavioural outcomes* to measuring *relational outflows*.
- From *communication audits* and *evaluation research* to *environmental scanning, social auditing, corporate climate assessment, perception studies and relational health*.

Benita Steyn

25 February 2010