

The professionalism of the public relations industry essay sample



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The term professionalism is defined as the “ skill, competence, or character expected of a member of a highly trained profession” (Microsoft Corporation). This definition from the Encarta Dictionary of Microsoft Corporation denotes the fact that professionalism is an expectation from a person called professional to act or demonstrate characteristics in relation to either formal or informal standards set by the profession. In different professions, there are therefore demands to be fulfilled by someone who is in that particular profession or is a member thereof.

The most often cited values of professionalism is serving the public interest but is not the lone value of it (Bivins, p. 117). As Berhman said, “ a dedication of the profession to social service...” and “ substitution of service for income and wealth as the primary motvation of members, plus high quality service regardless of fees received” are among the top ten characteristics of a profession (qtd. in Bivins, p. 117). In addition, Crable and Vibbert includes a “ group commitment to social responsibility” as among the charactersitis of a profession (qtd. in Bivins, p. 117). Grunig and Hunt considered “ that serving others is more important than their own economic gain” to be a primary belief in the different professions (qtd. in Bivins, p. 117).

To further stregthen this claim, Cutlip et al. mentioned “ nobility of purpose” to emphaasize the mix of public service and social responsibility (qtd. in Bivins, p. 117). All of these arguments point to profession, and professionalism indirectly, to serve the demands of the greater community and help in the development of all instead of putting their own personal interests in the frontline. Such is a good idea that most of the companies

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today are adopting programs that relate to corporate social responsibility. For example, Colgate-Palmolive conducts dental missions for free in the Philippines to help in the fight against oral problems. In their dental missions, they provide the people with free oral health advice and consultation and free products for them to use.

On the other hand, public relations involves the “ management, function that creates, develops, and carries out policies and programmes, to influence public opinion or public reaction about an idea, a product, or an organization” (Microsoft Corporation). Public relations, on a much clearer and simpler note, actually involve interacting and relating with the people considered to be the public. On a wider perspective, it involves communicating with the public to convey a fact or an opinion, a product to be endorsed, or an organization. All are aimed to ensure the support and acceptance of the people especially for new ideas, products, or organizations. Also, the scope of public relations exists in all sectors of the society and the most apparent of which is that in the private and government spheres. The work of a public relations manager starts with planning and extends all the way to the event of interacting with the public.

Since the public relations industry knows that they have a responsibility to the public they are dealing with and their employers and managers, there is a need for standards to be set and to be followed by all the members of the public relations industry. In Australia, there is an established Public Relations Institute of Australia which is a “ professional body serving the interest of its members” (SourceWatch. org). It is this body which has the Public Relations

Institute of Australia Code of Ethics which shall be binding among its
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members. This Code of Ethics provides guidance to those who are in the public relations industry to serve in their profession dutifully. It is not to say that this Code of Ethics will entirely encompass the work public relations employee but it is rather a guide to every action taken. It is more of a general rule to the professions.

Since professionalism in the public relations field has in its heart the value of serving the public interest, it should be that the Code of Ethics formulated for that industry is directed towards serving this purpose, too (Bivins, p. 118). In the Public Relations Institute of Australia Code of Ethics, it is shown that there is a need to fulfill the needs of different parties involved and affected by the industry. An example guideline of which is that which states “Members shall deal fairly and honestly with their employers, clients and prospective clients, with their fellow workers including superiors and subordinates, with public officials, the communications media, the general public and with fellow members of PRIA” (SourceWatch. org). This is a provision that puts into writing the need for fairness and honesty to all of the people involved in its performance of its duties. However, it is not provided to what extent a public relation practitioner should be honest and fair. Is it at all times? Should it be to all of those mentioned above at the same time? How does a public relation practitioner relate to conflicts in such? If one would follow the characteristics of professionalism as that which serves the public interest, then it would be clear that a public practitioner should go for the side which gives more to the interest and service of the public.

If the previous argument that professionalism is on the side of the interest of the public, then it would be contentious of another guideline of the Public <https://assignbuster.com/the-professionalism-of-the-public-relations-industry-essay-sample/>

Relations Institute of Australia Code of Ethics which states that “ Members shall avoid conduct or practices likely to bring discredit upon themselves, the Institute, their employers or clients” (SourceWatch. org). There may be times when their employees or clients are not into the full disclosure of information which may be of importance to the public. What, then, are the options left for the public relations practitioner?

So, the question now lies on how professionalism can actually push through in the public relations industry without hurting any of the parties involved. Professionalism in this complex industry can still exist through “ both the profession as a whole and through the contributing actions of individual practitioners” (Bivins, p. 124).

Lasch suggests that “ the mere provision of information is not sufficient to promote public debate on important issues, and that the press has abdicated that position, then it may be that the profession of public relations can help fill that void” (qtd. in Bivins, p. 125). Bivins enumerated three means by which the profession could help in filling that void. The first one is by “ strengthening its code to clarify the public service function of individuals” (Bivins, p. 125). The code, PRIACE, has certain loopholes that can be addressed through a convention to be attended by the members of the Public Relations Institute of Australia. It is only those who are involved in the profession that has first-hand experience of the issues in the field. More so, it is only them who could provide for an agreement on the specific and stringent rules to be included in their Code of Ethics.

Second, the profession should “ set up formal mechanisms by which balanced public debate would be fostered” (Bivins, p. 124). In light of serving the public and the clients of their profession, the profession should be able to formulate standards and means upon which a balanced public debate, where everyone is represented, will materialize. This is one of the means where professionalism through public service can be attained by those in the profession. It is also a collective effort where every member in the industry would have to cooperate.

Third, the profession should also “ encourage the establishment of private avenues whereby even unpopular cases may be given a voice, and those causes deemed most important by society may be supported” (Bivins, p. 124). Encouragement, as used here, means active encouragement where the industry will be able to compel the formulation of organizations or enhance the existing organizations to serve the demands of those unpopular views and those which are of great importance to the society.

A professional public relations practitioner, on the individual level, must also come up with a good public relations strategic plan. A strategy is one which defines what an organization decides to do and the means of achieving it (Smith, p. 69). This strategy should have two contents which are the “ action of the organization and the content of its messages” (Smith, p. 69). This strategic plan to be constructed by the public relations practitioner should be based on the organizational goals and objectives. A goal is defined to be that which is lifted from the mission and vision and with these, it tries to clear the issues arising from that (Smith, p. 69). The objective, on the other hand, is “ a statement emerging from the organization’s goals” (Smith p. 71). The <https://assignbuster.com/the-professionalism-of-the-public-relations-industry-essay-sample/>

objective is, therefore, more specific statements and are measurable forms of the constructs stated in the goals.

To create a strategic plan based on the Standards Australia requirements, a four-step project management framework can be developed by the public relations practitioner and will provide for standardization and uniformity (Harrison, p. 80). The four steps involved in the formulation of a project management framework are formulation of a project proposal which is for approval and should contain the principle of the project, formulation of the project charter which delves into the more specific details of the project, the project management which is the most important part because and requires “ careful consideration of the extent of communication required,” and finally, the formulation of a project conclusion which includes assessment and dissemination of outcomes to the different stakeholders (Harrison, p. 80-83). A standard set of procedures provided for the public relations practitioner will help them in meeting and understanding the demands of their profession and will serve as a guide when conflicts and questions arise in their undertakings. Also, there are suggestions provided for the practitioners regarding the format of the project management framework and with writing the strategic plan (Harrison, p. 86-91).

Aside from a good strategic plan, a professional public relations practitioner should also be able to adapt to the very nature of organizations which proves to be complex and dynamic (Spicer, p. 124). The public relations practitioner should be able to handle the nature of the organization as it undertakes its tasks through the familiarity with its twists and turns. It is to be remembered that the organizational life involves interests, power, and conflict (qtd. in <https://assignbuster.com/the-professionalism-of-the-public-relations-industry-essay-sample/>

Spicer, p. 110). These three factors can not be separated from the organization and will be encountered by the public relations practitioner at one time or another. To be professional, the practitioner should acquaint and adapt himself/herself to the organization and the politics in it so that when problems arise, he/she will know what button to push (qtd. in Spicer, p. 106).

Moreover, there is a need to recognize that there are multiple or plural interests that exists in organizations. The different stakeholders will also have varying mission, goals, and objectives and will result to different interests (Spicer, p. 117). These interests may or may not be in congruence with one another. If they are, then there would be no problem. But if there is a clash with one another, then the dilemma starts. In an adversarial form of democracy, the majority should rule through the secret voting to settle the disputes (Spencer, p. 119). In this model, public relations is often linked with and it is considered as persuasive in nature and results to intensifying the conflict rather than reducing it (Spencer, p. 119). When this is the case, the public relations practitioner should try to represent well with honesty and fairness the parties involved through either the public debate or facilitation (Bivins, p. 124-125). To be professional, the practitioner should make sure that the means and methods used in communication should be able to clarify and weave through the complexity of the politics of organization. When this is done, conflict can be reduced and the issues of each party will be well-represented and will have equal voices.

Professionalism could also exist in theory through the public relations measurement and evaluation. Public relations measurement means a way of “ giving a result a precise dimension, generally by comparison to some
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standard or baseline and usually is done in a quantifiable or numerical number” (Lindenmann, p. 2). Together with this, public relations evaluation has the goal which “ determines the value or importance of a PR program or effort, usually through appraisal or comparison with a predetermined set of organizational goals and objectives” (Lindenmann, p. 2). The need for doing these tasks of measurement and evaluation arises from the questions that the public relations practitioners are facing today. Among of which are the questions of public service and accountability. It is through this type of research on the field that the industry can gather information that will serve as a feedback and will have to be processed as information once more and as an addition to its literature. Also, the industry will be able to give the industry a better picture and will be able to enhance the standards by using a standard “ ruler” for the public relations field (Lindenmann, p. 1). With the standardization and continuous shaping through research and evaluation of public relations, professionalism will arise.

In conclusion, professionalism can be defined through serving the interest of the public and serving the client. However, the Code of Ethics and the profession poses ethical dilemmas for the practitioner. This could be addressed through the collective effort of the whole profession and through certain mechanisms that uplift the society through cooperation. Also, professionalism could exist through the formulation and adherence to a strategic plan to ensure that there will be smooth implementation in every public relation communications undertaking. The recognition of the politics that exists in an organization will help the practitioner familiarize himself/herself with the different conflicts in the organization and will give

him/her the necessary information to go through the process. In theory, researches on evaluation and measurement of the public relations field will help in putting standards and feedback to the profession and will serve as an addition to the existing body of literature for public relations.

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