

Importance of public relation in post modern organisation management essay



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Introduction

Communication acts as a mediator in the process of daily human activities. Men are a social animal and hence, they have to be within a society. They all are interdependent on each other and therefore, proper interaction among them is inevitable. Communication helps them in expressing their emotion, motivating, controlling, informing etc (Singh, 2009, p. 202). Earlier, during the initial period of human civilization, communication brought revolution in human life, and their lifestyles were improved significantly. However, with increasing complexities in human life, the process of communication has become complex and advanced. Presently, proper and systemic communication is considered as one of the major necessity for social improvements. In the post-modern age, communicational process has had a considerable importance. With the gradual globalisation and modernisation, various aspects of communication have been categorized and their importance has been identified for bring constant improvements. Public

relation is one of the major concepts that have been derived during the last three decades.

In addition, public relation is also an integral part of an economy and its society. The governing authorities and political powers use public relation for communicating their message to the mass population in a democratic society. David W. Guth identifies that public relation has an important contribution in emerging a democratic society as it “ plays a critical role in the free flow of information in democratic societies” (Guth, 2000). During the social crisis, proper communication through public relation is genuine remedy to settle down the prevailing issues.

This paper will attempt to present the impact of current trends or future of public relation. The briefing on the stated topic will focus to contribute for the preparations of a TED speech delivered by CEO. Therefore, it is necessary to explain and cover the important aspects of public relation that have significant impacts on public relation related philosophy, issues and multiple strategies for future success. In this process, at first, the importance of public relation in post-modern organisation will be explained. Next, the impact of recent changes in public relation practise will be analysed by focusing on specific areas. The analysis of future of mutual understandings and two way communications are necessary for understanding the future trend of public relation. Next two sections will figure out major issues in public relation followed by a discussion on public relation strategies for reputation management. Finally, the overall discussions, analysis and findings will be concluded.

Importance of Public Relation in Post Modern Organisation

The growth of modern trade and business is major area where public relation plays an essential role. Due to globalisation and technological changes business activities suffered many improvements. The process of communication and public relation has been enhanced with help of advanced technology. The post-modern organisations including non-profit and profit-making organisations have realized the necessity of proper public relation for their organisational reputation and success. It has become very vital tool for achieving the short term and long term organisational goals and objectives. The public relation practises in business organisation is major tasks in marketing activities that helps them in achieving competitive advantage and in developing consumer loyalty. Hiebing has provided a standard definition of public relation. According to him, “ public relation is the act of evaluating public opinion, and identify your organisation’s policies and practises with the interests of your audience, followed by development and execution of plans that earn public awareness, understanding, acceptance, support and action” (Hiebing and Cooper, 2004, p. 364). The above stated definition of public relation distinctly identifies its major areas for implementing effective public relation within an organisational process. Identification of target audiences is the foremost task in public relation. Public relation is act of developing and maintaining healthy relationship with target audience as a way of communication. Not being able to identify target audience is a major barrier in incorporating organisational goals and objectives.

In the post-modern era, many scholars and public relation experts have presented their perspectives regarding public relation. Some of them offered

very general views and rests focus on specific functions and importance of public relation for an organisation. As per the general view of public relation, it is considered as distinct managerial philosophy that helps managers in understanding the target audience for obtaining reputation. On the other hand, specialists in public relation have offered a specific explanation of public relation. J. C. Seidel, one of the eminent scholars in public relation philosophy and understanding has described that “ public relation is the continuing process by which management endeavours to obtain the good will and understanding of its customer, its employees and the public as large; inwardly through self-analysis and correction, outwardly through all means of expression” (Gupta, 2005, p. 17). Therefore, the primary importance of public relation is to develop organisation’s reputation among the target audience. The target audiences are the people who are directly or indirectly associated with organisation like customers, employees, suppliers, local community, government, shareholders etc.

In the post-modern organisation, public relation is important for two major areas of management. Firstly, in case of crisis management, public relation is important problem solving tool. Due to advanced electronic media technology, information travels at very high speed and any bad news like allegation or rumour directly attacks on reputation of an organisation. However, in such critical situation, the management has to take initiative at faster rate, and in this process, public relation is the only tool for managing such crisis (Coombs, 2007). Secondly, in brand building process, public relation is one of the major tools along with value added products or services. Reputation is very important in developing brand image in the mind

of target consumers and public relation helps to achieve higher brand image (Blackett and Robins, 2001, p. 130).

Impact of the Pace of Change on the Practice of Public Relations

The pace in post-modern organisation has become faster than ever. Organisational activities have been passing through many significant changes and improvements. This faster pace of improvement has also affected the philosophy and practises of public relations. The growing importance of public relation has led to bring multiple improvements in this field. In the post-modern organisation, managerial thought process and concerns have changed dramatically. For example, in traditional organisation, the business owners used to perceive employees as an expense but in post-modern management, employees are perceived as vital investments. There are five major factors that have shaped the current trend of public relation and these factors have also influenced the trends in prevailing public relation.

Firstly, technology is the most important factor in the current trend of public relation practises. The use of internet and social network sites have played very important role. Many companies are using the social network sites like Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, etc to promote their image. The social network media has become major trend in public relation as “ the impact of social media on the promotion of travel is particularly powerful and growing exponentially” (Dilenschneider, 2010, p136).

Secondly, due to globalization, the market expansion and exposure of public relation activity has expanded. A multinational organisation in international
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market faces difficulties due to cultural differences and diversity. In this respect, public relation is the major tool in understanding the cultural characteristics and needs of target consumers which facilitates the communicational process.

Thirdly, increasing concern for the society and environment is also major trend. The business organisations have identified their responsibility towards society, environment and community and hence, they are focusing more on corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs. These activities are also helpful in building corporate brand image and for social marketing. In this respect, CSR activities must be communicated to target audiences and this task is executed through public relation practises (Shen, 2006).

Fourthly, the necessity of increasing transparency is another major trend in public relation practises. The consumers, employers and shareholders want higher level of transparency in organisation. Companies commit to be more open as “ the public is demanding more accountability from all of society’s institutions” (Patrick Harwood.).

Finally, the pace of competition has also impacted the public relation practises. Most of the companies have implemented public relation strategies to achieve competitive advantage and upper hand position in market.

Future of Mutual Understanding and Two-way Communications

Increasing importance of public relation has led to develop certain specific theories and concepts in public relation activities. Johnston and Zawawi have
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described multiple theories relating to public relation practises and some of the important theories are situational theory, cultural theory, stakeholder theory, relationship management theory, symmetrical or excellence theory etc. Among these theories, the symmetrical or excellence theory is one of the most popular as it primarily focuses on two-way communication and mutual understandings. Johnston and Zawawi have explained that “ the Symmetrical/Excellence model of public relations theorises that there can be a ‘ win-win’ situation if parties to a discussion are able to reach agreement or at least partial agreement” (Johnston and Zawawi, 2009, p. 52). Grunig has characterizes this model that “ uses communication to negotiate with publics, resolve conflict, and promote mutual understanding and respect between the organization and its public(s)” (Grunig.).

The earlier section has explained major reasons that have brought new trends in public relation practises. These factors also lead to enhance the significance of public relation in post-modern organisation. The task of managing a business organisation has been becoming more complex and therefore a better communication process is very necessary for controlling, coordinating and managing. The organisations are more focusing on developing two-way communicational system with their employees, customers and shareholders. The market has become more challenging and it is expected to rise further in future. Reputation risks are major concern for the existing corporation as it determines the stock value. Recently, the issues like ‘ WikiLeaks’ has made the organisations more conscious in maintaining their reputation in market. In this respect, importance of two-way communication and mutual understanding is expected to increase

(Trivitt, 2010). Besides, organisations often face troubles due to agency problems. The management often fails to communicate properly with the stakeholders and it causes conflicting situations. However, two-way communication and mutual understanding is the primary way to resolve such issues. Therefore, increasing demand of transparency will require better two-way communication within organisation.

Issues Impacting on the Public Relation Profession

The above sections have analysed and explained the growing necessity of public relation practises in organisation. In future, the complexities in organisation activities will increase and hence, public relation practises will play very crucial role in reputation, conflict and brand management. This fact clarifies the public relation profession will keep emerging and growing with time. However, there are certain underlying issues that have impacted the public relation profession.

Most of large and medium size organisations maintain their public relation personnel and they are responsible for building higher corporate reputation among the target audience or public. However due to certain contemporary issues, the public relation professionals encounter hurdles. Firstly, the views and opinions of general public regarding public relation profession is one of the major issues. Target audience and population often interpret public relation practises for influencing people's opinion by providing, instruction, information and persuasion. This perspective often leads to degrade the public relation profession. However, the primary reason for such negative opinion is due to the gap between the publics' expectations and actual performance of an organisation. The people also perceive it as a tool of

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organisation for image building. People also observe that public relation leads to develop an illusionary nature which causes accountability problem (Plessis, 2000, p. 59).

Another major issue in public relation profession is job dissatisfaction due to ethical dilemma or conflict. In many organisations, the public relation professional faces ethical issues as the top managements are not serious about the ethical responsibilities. Lack of corporate standards is one the major issues in this respect. Sometimes, the public relation practitioners “ who have recognised ethical conflicts were likely to leave their companies because the conflicts affected their mental and even physical well being in the workplace” (Kang, 2009).

When public relation professionals engage into certain specific task in any specialised organisation, they must have sound knowledge regarding organisation’s core activities, products, technical know-how etc. The public relation professional has to communicate with target audience on the behalf of their organisation. Lack of such information makes their tasks difficult and misguiding. The organisations often fail to provide proper training to their public relation professional (CERP, n. d.).

Reputation Management and PR Strategies

In the fast changing environment of business, corporate image is one the major criterion for organisational success. Corporate reputation management primarily focuses on the managing the corporate risk within a business environment. There are a number factors associated with business that drives the reputation of a business organisation. Adam Jolly have identified

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and characterized six major attributes and drivers of corporate reputation. The flowing model portrays these attributes and drivers.

Figure 1: Attributes and Drivers

(Source: Jolly and Public Relations Consultants Association, 2001, p. 31)

The public relation professional must identify and analyse the above stated attributes and driver before drafting and implementing public relation strategy. Watson and Noble have developed specific model for public relation strategy which include four phases. The following table presents these four phases for implementation and formulation public relation strategy.

Table 1: Phases of Public Relation Strategy

(Source: Watson and Noble, 2007, p. 56)

The above stated nine steps cover the necessary tasks in public relation strategy formulation. The first phase deals with analysis of various attributes and drivers that affects image of a company. The second phase involves the development of specific goals and objectives followed by formulation of communication focused strategy. In third phase, management must choose proper communicational tactics and implement it within cross functional departments. Final phase involves constant evaluation and control the implemented public relation strategy and if necessary, favourable modification should be executed.

For developing a comprehensive public relation strategy, there are a number of different approaches available like one one-way communication, two-way communication etc. However, at present, integrated communication approaches is the most popular and effective for post-modern organisations. Integrated communication approaches consider symmetrical or excellence theory i. e. two-way communication (Grunig, Grunig and Toth, 2007, p. 302). Integrated marketing communication should not be confused with integrated marketing communication (IMC) as the former focuses on reputation building through communication and later on marketing communication. Grönstedt defined that “ integrated communication is the strategic management process of facilitating a desired meaning of the company and its brand by creating unity of effort at every point of contact with key customers and stakeholders for the purpose of building profitable relation with them” (Grönstedt, 2000, p. 8).

Conclusion

This paper has presented various aspects relating to public relation. Public relation is an emerging field with increasing competitiveness and constant improvements due to technological advancement, globalization and economic enhancements. In the post-modern era, there are certain factors that have influenced the trend of public relation. The social networking sites and social & environmental concern are two major trends in public relation practises. Issues relating to ethical conflict and negative public opinions are main hindrances for public relation profession that leads to degrade the public relation practises. However, proper public relation strategy with two-way communicational systems is helpful in resolving the underlying issues.

In this respect, integrated communication approach is the best and suitable for planning and executing public relation in post-modern organisation as this approach involves the symmetrical or excellence theory.