

# Public relations issues assignment

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This report will discuss ethics, effective media relations and campaign evaluation methods; three prominent issues that affect public relations (PR) practitioners. The report will compare the relationship between pertinent literature and theories on the topics with the experiences and opinions of a PR practitioner. Iodine Moscow, director of Polkaed Public Relations, will inform this report, drawing on her involvement and wealth of experience in a number of industry related sectors. 2. Issue 1: Public Relations Ethics 1.

Role of ethics in Public Relations Johnston and Awake (2004, p. 06) state that in a PR context, “ ethics is about proportioning moral values for an organization and ensuring its behaviors are aligned with those values”.

Practitioners therefore need to be concerned with not only their personal and professional ethics, but also the ethics of the organizations they work for.

Siebel and Fitzpatrick (1995) identify oneself, the client, the employer, the profession and society as the groups a PR practitioner must consider when faced with an ethical dilemma.

It is the balancing of these potentially conflicting interests which makes ethics such a intentions issue in PR. Essentially, ethics is about doing the right thing, something that has not always been associated with the industry.

Fitzpatrick and Guthrie (2001 , p. 1 95) argue that the field has done a poor job in defining what PR professionals actually do and in justifying their value and worth to society. The result “ is that public relations professionals continue to be plagued by charges of unethical conduct’(Fitzpatrick & Guthrie, 2001, p. 95). Despite this, PR scholars are increasingly inclined to believe that contemporary public relations has “ moved beyond persuasion ND rhetoric as fundamental concepts, and that professional public relations

work is driven by principles of negotiation and & Guthrie, 2001, p. 194).

Ethics have played a central role in the formation of best-practice public relations that “ serves the public interest by developing mutual understanding between an organization and its publics” (Johnston and Awake, 2004, p. 11 1).

Whilst ethical frameworks, such as Para’s Code of Ethics, have been developed by numerous associations in order to ensure a minimum standard of practice, membership is voluntary and codes of ethics can not be enforced. Although Moscow (2008) admits that codes of ethics are not at the forefront of her mind, she recognizes that “ credibility and reputation is everything in public relations” and that any unethical behavior can have a detrimental effect on results. 2. Models of Ethical public Relations Krueger and Starts (1 988, p. ) argue that “ despite a few voices to the contrary, public relations practitioners generally and readily accept persuasion and advocacy as their major function”. Twenty years on, Moscow (2008) shares the same perception of her primary role as a PR practitioner in “ highly competitive and results driven industry’(Moscow, 2008). However Moscow is aware that “ rather than an optional extra, corporate social responsibility... Is becoming a vital aspect of business public relations” Nonstop and Awake, 2004, p. 391).

The “ social responsibility model”(Baker, 1999) for public relations states that “ corporate citizens have a responsibility to societies in which they operate and 1999, p. 76). The weakness of this model is that it focuses on the obligations of institutions “ rather than on the ethical obligations of the public relations & Guthrie, 2001, p. 199). Despite his, Moscow (2008)

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identifies its usefulness in her refusal to work with clients that do not embrace a “social responsibility model” (Baker, 1999). Grunting and Grunting (1996, p. ) offer an alternative two-way symmetrical model of ethical public relations in which practitioners “play key roles in adjusting or adapting behaviors of dominant coalitions, thus bringing publics and dominant coalitions closer together”. However, Grunting and Grunting (1992, p. 320) themselves observe that “practitioners of the two-way symmetrical model are not completely altruistic; they also want to defend the interests of their employers – they have mixed motives”. Moscow (2008) embraces the “professional responsibility theory of public relations” (Fitzpatrick & Guthrie, 2001, p. 10) as the most realistic, practical and useful model to address ethical issues. The model recognizes that the PR practitioner’s greatest loyalty is to the client. However, it is the practitioners responsibility to ensure that the client considers the interests of stakeholders. Fitzpatrick & Guthrie (2001, p. 210) argue the theory superior as “it attempts to reconcile the dual roles of the public relations professional as institutional advocate and public conscience for that institution”. 3. Issue 2: Media Relations 1.

Relationship between media and public relations Johnston and Awake (2004, p. 260) note that “dealing with the media is an integral part of much public relations activity, and its impact and power should never be underestimated”. The power of the media lies in the fact that “major public impact can be driven by a small number of people using the 1999, p. 1). It is for this reason that public relations practitioners almost exclusively use the

media in their attempt to influence attitudes, behaviors and opinions of their targeted publics.

The ability to both create and maintain successful relationships with the media has therefore emerged as one of the most prominent issues faced by PR practitioners. 2. Creating and maintaining successful relationships with the media Bollixing (2003, p. 20) states that “journalists/ editors just don’t trust public relations practitioners and have a poor attitude towards the profession”. Moscow (2008) agrees with this assertion in most cases, however sides with Choc (2006, p. 563) who suggests that “regular contact between reporters and sources forms personal relationships”.

Moscow (2008) stresses the importance of making personal contact with key figures in the media, as Choc notes (2006, p. 563), “journalists respect and evaluate more highly those practitioners with whom they have regular contact than practitioners in general; regular contact breeds close relationships, respect, and trust”. Creating relationships with the media in the first instance, given journalists apparent skepticism toward the profession, emerges as one of the most dominant issues facing PR practitioners. Moscow (2008) acknowledges that building a strong rapport with journalists can be difficult.

Moscow (2008) ascribes journalists as being “lazy”, making it the PR practitioners responsibility to know what the media want, how they want it and when they want it. In order to create successful relationships with the media, PR practitioners must have a strong understanding of how the media operates and what it classifies as news. 3. Newsworthiness Conley (2002, p.

42) lists “ impact, conflict, timeliness, proximity, prominence, currency, human interest, the unusual” as the primary news values in the media.

Moscow (2008) agrees with the assessment of Conley (2002) and went further to identify currency and conflict as the most useful in her experience.

Moscow (2008) stated “ if you can pitch a story off the back of what is happening in the news at the time, such as the housing crisis, tax cuts or skills shortage, then it automatically becomes newsworthy’(Moscow, 2008).

Moscow (2008) also stated that adding additional elements to conflict orientated stories, such as “ David vs.. Goliath” or “ underdog” sentiments are useful in positioning her clients favorably in the conflict. . Alternative media Johnston and Awake (2004, p. 268) note that “ the media should not be thought of as one amorphous mass: rather it must be considered as a complex and multi-layered part of society’. Moscow (2008) shares this view and has been successful in using alternative media to selectively target certain publics. Johnston and Awake (2004, p. 263) reinforce the value of alternative media arguing that, “ while audiences may not be as widespread or as large as most mainstream media, they can provide avenues of publicity that should not be overlooked”.

Moscow (2008) emphasizes “ a big move into online media, you tube, backbone, namespace and the fact that most publications have online versions”, as evidence of the impact technology has had on the growth of public relations and the increased value of alternative media. However, a report presented to the senate by the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEA) (2002, p. 5) noted that “ a base of PC’s capable of efficiently

distributing on-line multi media products is a fraction of the reach Of traditional media”.

Nevertheless, the rapid growth Of on-line media may transform the nature of media relations practiced by current public relations practitioners in the future.

4. Issue 3: Campaign Evaluation

1. Evaluation of outcomes

Xavier (2006, p. 417) notes that “ public relations program evaluation plays a significant role in demonstrating accountability and effectiveness” of public relations. The evaluation of outcomes is used to determine the success of a campaign and ideally should “ reflect a change in the awareness, understanding, attitude or behavior of the target and Awake, 2004, p. 45). However the availability of time, money and human resources as well as deciding what and how to research are challenges PR practitioners are faced with. Research into practitioner attitudes towards evaluation practice has revealed the opinion that whilst evaluation is essential to practice, it is still talked about more than practiced (Gregory, 2001 Gregory (2001) identified a trend towards evaluations being based on outputs u to the “ convenience and accessibility of data to inform such evaluation”(Xavier, 2006, p. 417).

Johnston and Awake (2004, p. 144) condemn such evaluations stating, “ outputs should not be used to justify the effectiveness of a program... It is important not to confuse activity with achievement”. The method of campaign evaluation has evidently become one of the most contested issues in current practice.

2. Criticism of evaluation methods

There are numerous methods to evaluate the success of a campaign. Moscow (2008) states that “ we evaluate our campaigns on the advertising value equivalent; therefore what our client would have paid had they advertised.

Some PR agencies multiply this figure by 3 or 4 based on the principal that PR is 3 or 4 times more valuable than advertising, which generally speaking is true". Moscow (2008) reasons that the message holds more weight with audiences if it is thought to be the opinion of the media or a journalist rather than an advertisement. However, the advertising value equivalent has been deemed an invalid evaluation method by PAIR because "Eave's do not separate positive, neutral or negative coverage and the subsequent estimation of the true value of the coverage is and Awake, 2004, p. 59). Moose's reliance on Eave's is part of a larger industry reliance on media monitoring as the primary evaluation technique of practitioners (Walker 1997). A previous study by Walker (1994) reinforced criticism of this method of evaluation emphasizing a focus on counting clips rather than providing an analysis of the media coverage. This method of evaluation is not in line with the assertion that "the evaluation should reflect the size and direction of the change from an agreed and pre-determined benchmark" (Johnston and Awake, 2004, p. 45). Xavier (2006, p. 17) research indicated that "evaluation techniques remain limited to particular types that do not demonstrate true impact on publics or contributions to organizational goals"; reinforcing the contemporary relevance of this argument.

### 3. Effective evaluation methods

Whilst there is no single evaluation method that is more excellent than another, it is unanimous that a more analytical style of evaluation is necessary to justify the success of a campaign.

Criticism emphasizes the need to develop, and have all stakeholders agree on an evaluation criteria at the beginning of the planning stage that would enable outcome research to assure "the extent to which the original



campaign objectives were met” (Johnston and Awake, 2004, p. 145). Xavier (2006, p. 417) study concluded that “[O]ho inability of public relations practitioners to demonstrate such effectiveness... Leaves the discipline open to centralization by other sectors. All industry bodies and educational facilities must follow the lead of PAIR to create initiatives that focus on the development of ethical, innovative and practical methods for outcome evaluations.

5. Conclusion This report has identified three prominent issues that affect public relations practitioners. Despite its status as a developing area of both academic study and professionalism, Public Relations, like any industry, has a variety of contentious issues that are, and may remain, unresolved.