Unit 9  Public Relations

This unit deals with the applied field of public relations, which operates in both interpersonal and mass communication modes. It introduces students to a strategic planning process used for public relations campaigns.

Learning Outcomes: Students who complete Unit 9 will be able to:
- explain the social role of public relations
- give example of the various component activities of public relations
- apply the process of strategic planning for a public relations campaign

Key Concepts for Unit 9
- Definition and conceptualization of public relations and overview of components
- Definition and conceptualization of publics and overview of categories
- Planning process for public relations
- History of public relations

► Terms and Concepts in Public Relations

It is difficult to develop a single concise definition of public relations because the practice is so widespread and diverse. Nevertheless, here are some root concepts associated with the discipline:

- Management function that establishes and maintains mutual lines of communication, understanding and cooperation between an organization and its publics
- Planned, deliberate two-way communication between an organization and its publics in order to address common issues in an interdependent relationship
- Management of an organization’s reputation and visibility, leading to its engagement and interaction with various groups important to the organization’s long-term success
- Leadership function that helps an organization fulfill its mission by coordinating two-way communication both internally and externally to develop positive relationships and mutual understanding

In lieu of a formal definition, here are some additional elements that are part of a contemporary understanding of public relations.

Public relations is a management function, part of the decision-making of an organization (corporate or nonprofit), which is based on research, strategic planning and evaluation.

Public relations is built on two-way communication and exists in a mutual give-and-take relationship in which both an organization and its publics both initiate and respond to messages.
Public relations is performance based, rooted more in what an organization does than what it says. Thus it fosters accountability and exists in an open and transparent as well as competitive environment.

Public relations is rooted in high ethical standards of honesty, accuracy, decency, truth, public interest and mutual good.

Ideally, public relations is proactive, taking the initiative in developing the relationship and communicating with its publics. In crisis situations, public relations may be forced into a more reactive and defensive situation.

► Social Role of Public Relations
Public relations essentially is an aspect of corporate and organizational life in an open society in which people are able to make informed choices among various options. It flourishes in a consumer-oriented, democratic and pluralistic society because of the role it plays in the “marketplace of ideas” by which people learn of alternative and competing products, services, ideas and so on. Public relations advances socially responsible behavior, such as campaigns to encourage public health and safety concerns.

► Ethical Base of Public Relations
As a global profession, public relations involves several individual but consistent codes of ethics. Each commits members of public relations organizations to honesty and accuracy, to the pursuit of the public good, to competent service to employers and clients, and to wholesome and positive relationships with the news media. A shortcoming of such codes is that they are strictly voluntary among members of professional organizations. Nevertheless, their very existence point to the high ideals of the profession.

The International Public Relations Association is a federation of national or regional public relations organizations and individual practitioners in 95 countries. It exists to foster an exchange of ideas, professionalism and scholarship of public relations, and to promote the profession throughout the world.

The Code of Athens, IPRA’s ethical statement, calls on members to observe a strict moral code by endeavoring to support human rights, foster the free flow of information, uphold human dignity, promote dialogue, uphold truth above other consideration, and avoid manipulative methods or techniques. The organization’s subsequent Code of Venice further outlined expected contact toward clients and employers, toward the public and the media, and toward colleagues.

► The ‘Publics’ of Public Relations
Public Relations practitioners see themselves as the links between an organization and its publics. What is a public? It is an identifiable and reachable group of people who are in a potential or current
relationship with the organization. A public is a group within a wider population. It has mutual concerns with the organization, and it both impacts and is impacted by the organization.

A public is distinguished from a market (which is a type of public, a segment of an organization’s consumers with which the organization does or hopes to do business). A public also is distinguished from an audience (which is an aggregation of individuals who use a particular medium, such as the readership of a newspaper or the viewers of a television program). A public may be contained within an audience.

Public relations recognizes four types of publics:

- **Consumer publics** receive the products or services of an organization. They may be direct consumers such as clients, students, patients, fans, patrons, shoppers, members and so on. They also may be secondary publics, such as employers who will hire the graduates of a university.

- **Producer publics** are those that provide input to the organization by creating its products or services. Examples are be employees, volunteers, suppliers and financial backers.

- **Enabler publics** are those that help create the environment in which the organization operates, such as regulators, government and community leaders, allies and so on.

- **Limiter publics** are those that disturb the environment in which the organization operates, such as opponents and competitors.

► **Components of Public Relations**

Following are various components of a comprehensive public relations program. Not every organization engages in each of these activities, though collectively they would fall within the domain of public relations. Additionally, some organizations might consider categories such as marketing communication, lobbying or inter-religious affairs to be related areas rather than components.

**Community Relations.** Interaction (both proactive and reactive) with a geographic or cultural community in order to enhance mutual understanding, goodwill and support.

**Constituent Relations.** Interaction by an elected official with his or her voter constituents, for the purpose of serving public needs and creating potential support for re-election.

**Consumer Relations.** Interaction (both proactive and reactive) with consumer groups and media for the purpose of generating consumer understanding and support. A sub-category, **Customer Relations**, also involves interaction with individual customers.

**Corporate Communications.** The production and dissemination of messages by an organization through both internal media such as brochures and Web sites as well as through external media such as news and advertising.

**Crisis Communication** or **Crisis Management.** The conscious endeavor of an organization to communicate during a crisis or negative situation, in order to minimize the reputational damage to the organization and to both rebuild public confidence and return to prior levels of support.

**Donor Relations.** Interaction with donors and other financial backers of nonprofit organizations. Also called **Development** or **Fund-Raising**.
Employee Relations or Employee Communication. Interaction (both proactive and reactive) with employees, volunteers, members, and other internal publics in order to enhance mutual understanding, goodwill and support.

Financial Relations or Investor Relations. Interaction (both proactive and reactive) with financial media and with members of the financial community, such as stockbrokers, analyses and investors.

Government Affairs and Lobbying. Interaction with legislators and regulatory agencies of government to generate support for an organization and its causes. Lobbying specifically refers to interaction with legislators and regulators for the purpose of influencing their votes and/or official decisions.

Intercultural Affairs. The engagement by a cultural group of other similar groups for the purpose of mutual understanding and/or coordinated action. This category sometimes overlaps with Inter-religious Affairs.

Inter-religious Affairs. The engagement by a religious organization of other similar groups for the purpose of mutual understanding and/or coordinated action. This category sometimes overlaps with Intercultural Affairs.

Issues Management. Identifying, analyzing and addressing potential public issues of concern to the organization.

Litigation Public Relations. The engagement of the news media in a bid for public understanding and support within the context of lawsuits and litigation.

Marketing Communication. Interaction (both proactive and reactive) with consumer and trade media, particularly associated with the introduction of new products and services. Sometimes called Marketing Public Relations.

Media Relations. Interaction (both proactive and reactive) with the news media in order to gain publicity or editorial support or to respond to journalistic inquiries.

Media Training. Coaching organizational spokesperson to effectively communicate with reporters.

Public Affairs. Development of effective participation in public policy issues and helping an organization adapt to public expectations. (Note: This term also is used by government and military organizations and by some corporations as an overall term for public relations.)

Public Information. Another term for Media Relations, used primarily by military and government agencies.

Publications and Productions. Presentation of organizational messages through specific print or online publications or through radio or television productions.

Reputation Management. The conscious endeavor of an organization to affect its reputation and visibility among key publics.

Research. Development of a program of formal research (such as with surveys and focus groups) for both formative and evaluative purposes, as well as a program of informal research, information gathering and interviewing.

Risk Management. The conscious endeavor of an organization to communicate with its publics about potential or existing risks such as those that threaten public health, safety or the environment.
Social Marketing. Public education campaigns based on issues of public health, welfare, social justice and other public issues, for the purpose of providing information, understanding, acceptance and eventually a change in public behavior.

Special Events. Planning and coordination of resources to execute planned activities.

The Process of Public Relations

Public relations calls for a strategic planning process that systematically guides the planner. This generally is presented as a four-step process, or a four-phase process with a variety of sub-steps.

Phase One: Formative Research

In this phase, also called the situation analysis, the planner draws on existing information and creates a research program for needed additional information to obtain an effective understanding for campaign planning.

- **Step 1: Analyzing the Situation.** Research the background of the specific issue. Indicate if it presents an opportunity or an obstacle for the organization.
- **Step 2: Analyzing the Organization.** Research the reputation and visibility of the organization, as well as its mission, resources and quality of its performance or products.
- **Step 3: Analyzing the Publics.** List the various publics (as noted in the section above) and identify those few that are key to the specific situation at hand. Analyze each key public as to its wants, interest, needs and expectations.

Phase Two: Strategy

This phase deals with the heart of planning: making decisions dealing with the expected impact of the communication.

- **Step 4: Establishing Goals and Objectives.** Articulate the overall goals and the desired positioning. Then develop clear, specific and measurable objectives to identify the organization’s hoped-for impact on the awareness, acceptance and action of each key public.
- **Step 5: Formulating Action and Response Strategies.** In a proactive campaign, the organization will consider options about what initiatives it can do. In a reactive campaign, the organization will consider how it might best respond to criticism and opposition.
- **Step 6: Using Effective Communication.** Identify appropriate message sources and develop specific messages. Consider the verbal and nonverbal presentation of messages and other aspects of persuasive communication.

Phase Three: Tactics

This phase considers the various communication tools and other visible elements of the campaign.

- **Step 7: Choosing Communication Tactics.** Select tactics from a four-part inventory of (1) face-to-face communication and opportunities for personal involvement such as speeches, meetings and demonstrations; (2) organization media such as brochures, Web sites and internal video; (3) news media such as newspapers, radio and television; and (4) advertising and promotional media such as print ads, TV commercials, billboards, posters and so on.
Step 8: Implementing the Strategic Plan. Develop the schedule, budget and other aspects to execute the plan.

Phase Four: Evaluative Research

This final phase assesses the success of the campaign.

Step 9: Evaluating the Strategic Plan. Develop the specific methods to measure the effectiveness of each recommended tactic in meeting the stated objectives.

► Trends Within Public Relations

Integrated Communication. Conscious efforts are being made in many organizations (both business and nonprofit groups) to merge their public relations and marketing functions into a cohesive and unified program. The logic and value of this is that both disciplines are part of the management and decision-making processes that deal with the reputation and visibility or organizations or their products, services and/or ideas. Both use the same tools of news and advertising media as well as internal organizational media. And both are focused on the organization’s “bottom line,” the ultimate measure of its effectiveness.

Globalization of Society and Media. The world is becoming smaller. Much of this is due to the media, particularly (1) the transportation of media from one country or culture to another, which allows people to learn about, understand, and empathize with other peoples, and (2) the Internet, which is available virtually everywhere in the world and which can transcend cultural and political boundaries. Meanwhile, organizations increasingly are looking beyond national and cultural boundaries to increase their support and service. Because of the globalization of society, multinational corporations often are a strong element in the development of public relations. The very nature of multinational groups makes it necessary for them to operate within various media and social systems, leading to a spread of practices through various cultures.

Segmentation of Society. Paradoxically, at the same time as society is becoming global, it also is becoming more segmented and insulated. Both social trends rest on a basis of targeting particular publics and using communication vehicles particularly appropriate for them. This is a departure from previous practice, which generally focused on presenting a message to the widest-possible audience.

Long-Term Relationships. Public Relations increasingly is focusing its attention on long-term relationships between and organization and its publics, rather than short-term maneuverings.

New Role for Public Relations. Increasingly, the profession is seen as moving from mass media to targeted media, from manipulation to adaptation, and from a specific program within an organization to part of the management process itself. The practitioner, meanwhile, is evolving from a media craftsperson to a communication strategist, from a firefighter to a fire prevention expert, and from an external spokesperson to an internal communication consultant.
History of Public Relations

The origins of public relations are rooted deep in the history of human society. The earliest foundations for public relations activity lie in ancient Egypt where from 2200 BCE we find writings about the need for truthful and audience-centered communication, and in Mesopotamia where in 1800 BCE we find stone tablets encouraging new farming techniques.

The principles of public relations communication are associated with the classical Greeks, particularly Aristotle, and later with the Romans, all of whom taught about the nature of communication and its ethical components. In the civil realm, Greek generals such as Philip of Macedonia and his son, Alexander the Great, and later the Roman emperors used public relations principles in their administration of their expanding empires.

Examples of effective public relations can be found in religious history as well: the adaptation to new cultures as both Buddhism and Christianity expanded beyond the cultures of their birth; the re-use of Greek concepts of rhetoric and persuasive communication in the framing of written and oral messages in the expansion of both Islam and Christianity; the audience appeals of the Christian Reformation period.

Perhaps nowhere can principles of public relations be found in greater abundance than in the history of military campaigns and political movements. Both the American and French revolutions used public relations principles such as focusing the message on the audience, activist organizations, themes and slogans, staged events, and visual communication techniques.

Modern public relations came into its own as a distinct profession in the early part of the 20th century, as businesses and nonprofit organizations alike realized the importance of courting public opinion and generating public support. The early 1900’s saw the beginning of public relations agencies and corporate PR departments. That era also saw the beginning of serious academic research into principles of persuasive communication, as well as the first formal college classes and textbooks on public relations.

Careers in Public Relations

Public relations calls for a variety of skills, including writing and editing, research and information gathering, public speaking and group presentations, strategic planning and evaluation, management and decision-making. It also requires an understanding of the media, of organizations, and of various communication technologies. Additionally, public relations calls for individuals who are committed to ethical and honest communication, who can listen effectively, who are curious, and who are creative.

Careers in public relations take one of two forms. Some practitioners work as individual consultants, as an employee of a public relations agency, or within the public relations division of an advertising or marketing or management agency. They serve a variety of clients, often with a specialized skill. Other practitioners are hired by a specific organization to serve either a specialized or a general skill, depending on the size of the organization. The organization itself might be a public relations department of a company (such as a business, manufacturer, sports, health care, entertainment, hospitality/transportation, or industry association); the public relations or communication department of a nonprofit organization (education, charity, religious, arts, professional); or a public affairs team of a military or government entity.
Some public relations practitioners are technicians who specialize in a particular skill, such as speechwriting, editing, polling, serving as a spokesperson, etc. Others are managers, either tactical managers who make day-to-day decisions on practical matters and supervise the work of technicians, or strategic managers who are executives who make decisions on management, trends, policies and issues.
APPENDIX TO UNIT 9

► Relevant Web Sites

www.arab.de – Arab German Consulting
www.arab-pr.com – Arab-PR (Arabian Establishment for Research and Public Relations)
www.barrowandschuck.com – Barrow and Shuck Public Relations (Dubai)
www.ipra.org – International Public Relations Association (including codes of ethics, member organizations, and free newsletter articles)
www.iranpr.org – Kargozar Public Relations (Iran)
www.prsa.org – Silver Anvil awards for excellence in public relations campaigns, given annually by the Public Relations Society of America

► Relevant Books


► Unit Quiz

Distinguish between public relations and publicity.
Distinguish between a public relations and an audience.
Define public.
Identify a consumer public for an airline.
Identify a **producer public** for an airline.
Define **lobbying**.
Cite a recent or current example of **social marketing**.

► **Freewrite & Discussion**

Discuss the value of public relations to an organization.

Explain the differences among the **four types of publics**.

Give an example from recent or current events of **crisis communication**, and evaluate how it was handled.

Explain the difference between a **tactical manager** and a **strategic manager**.

Discuss the impact that **globalization** of society has on the practice of public relations.

► **Exercises**

Give students (individually or in pairs) an organization such as a bank, hospital, airline or school. Have them outline how they would apply the four-phase strategic planning process to this organization in a campaign aimed at seeking new customers.

Ask students to research a major civic event (the birth of a nation, or the progress of a war or social movement). Then have them outline the role that public relations played in this event.