Applying Public Relations Theory to Practice: Bridging Academic Research with Professional Challenges and Opportunities

Katy Sputo

October 31, 2018

Presented to: Girls on the Run International, Board of Directors

Today's Agenda

- Historical Theoretical Perspectives
- Open-Systems and Excellence
- Persuasion and Listening
- Social Media
- Crisis and Corporate Advocacy
- Ethics and Values
- Social Responsibility
- Global/International
- Leadership and Engagement
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Girls on the run

Historical Theoretical Perspectives

History of Public Relations:
- Scholarship often begins around 1900 (Lamme and Russell, 2010).
- Dates to the dawn of ages. ("Museum," n.d.)
- Public relations= tough to define, but consistent across cultures.

Emergence of Public Relations:
- "To secure profit, recruitment, legitimacy, and participate in marketplace of ideas through agitation and advocacy" (Lamme and Russell, 2010, p. 355-356).

Four Sectors of Public Relations:
- Religion, education/nonprofit/reform, politics/government, and business.

Historical Theoretical Perspectives: Actionable Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Determine your public relations driver.

Recommendation #2: Define your own definition of public relations.

Open Systems and Excellence

Focal Concept:
- What is important
- Provides rationale and motivation (Broom, 2006).

Concept Analysis Process:
- Eight steps.
- Focuses on building theory and knowledge in field (Broom, 2006).

Strategic Public Relations:
- Challenge to institute in many organizations.
- Many think it's a buffering activity.
- More of a bridging activity- brings value (Grunig, 2006).

Open Systems and Excellence: Actionable Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Practice building theory using the steps outlined in the concept analysis process.

Recommendation #2: Shift from view of public relations as a buffering activity to a bridging activity.

Persuasion and Listening

Persuasion is Necessary:
- Inevitable and necessary in PR practice.
- Ethically advocate perspective.
- PR efforts= influence attitude/ behavior (Porter, 2010).
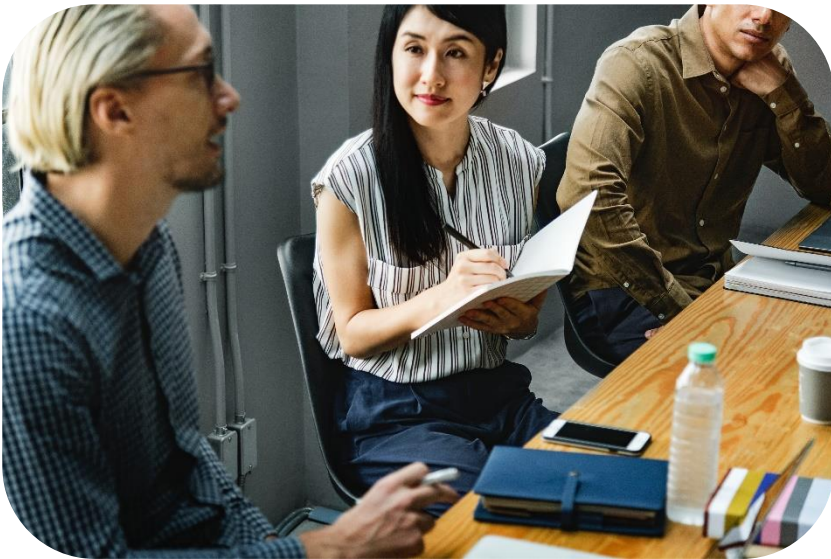
Two-way Communication:
- Must include speaking and listening.
- Central to excellence theory (Macnamara, 2016).

Barriers to Listening:
- Company culture and company structure (Macnamara, 2016).

Persuasion and Listening: Actionable Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Evaluate how the organization is engaging with individuals who hold different views.

Recommendation #2: Determine how to ethically integrate persuasion into the public relations strategy.

Social Media

Importance:
- Enhances organization- public relationships to improve community relations.
- Communicate *with* audience, not *to* (Allagui and Breslow, 2016).

Strategy:
- Incorporate social media in PR plan.
- Guided by strategic planning.
- Disconnect between social media research and strategic planning (Plowman and Wilson, 2018).

Challenges:
- Individuals have influence on strategic objectives.
- Tension between openness and purposeful communication management (Smith, 2012).

Social Media: Actionable Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Perform a social media audit.

Recommendation #2: Develop a long-term social media calendar for the next year.

Crisis and Corporate Advocacy

Crisis Communication:
- Crisis= events that can negatively affect organization.
- Linked to risk communication and issues and reputation management.
- Tied to reputation management (Coombs, 2010).

Crisis Communication Functions:
- Instructing information, adjusting information, managing reputation (Coombs, 2010).

Corporate Political Advocacy:
- Support for ideas/values to persuade others to follow (Wettstein and Baur, 2015).

Crisis and Corporate Advocacy: Actionable Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Build a crisis communication team.

Recommendation #2: Develop a crisis communication plan for a few potential crises that could occur.

Ethics and Values

Remember SMART:
- Societal value/meaning, mutually beneficial relationships, advantages through objectives, rhetorical strategies, tactics (Bowen, 2010).

Collaborative Decision Making:
- Ethical= create own destiny.
- Often termed symmetrical public relations (Bowen, 2010).

Responsibility in Public Relations:
- Consider it a duty to do what is right in moral law.
- Commitment to taking right action (Bowen, 2010).

Ethics and Values: Actionable Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Educate all public relations and communication staff on the SMART approach.

Recommendation #2: Encourage more collaborative decision making internally and externally.

Social Responsibility

What is Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)?:
- Actions an organization takes to pursue goals, with a responsibility to stakeholders (Waters and Ott, 2014).
- Benefits= increased profits, volunteerism, workplace environment, etc.

CSR and Non-Profits:
- Waters and Ott (2014) found non-profits reluctant to label CSR efforts as such.
- Efforts distract from mission.

What Does the Public Expect?:
- Who is benefiting, social causes company supports, commitments, CSR goals, previous CSR achievements (Kim and Ferguson, 2014).

Social Responsibility: Actionable Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Look at current CSR efforts and determine their relation to the organization mission and values.

Recommendation #2: Discuss with stakeholders their perceptions of the organization's CSR efforts and if they detract from the overall mission.

Global/International

Relationship between Culture and Public Relations:
- Culture- antecedent for practice.
- PR itself as a culture.
- Impact on society (Sriramesh, 2010).

Media System Considerations:
- Media control, media diffusion, media access (Sriramesh, 2010).

Tailor Messaging:
- Rare for an organization to roll out same message in every country.
- Modify messaging to be culturally relevant (Oosthuizen, 2018).

Global/International: Actionable Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Begin to connect with PR practitioners in regions for potential program expansion to assess cultural landscape.

Recommendation #2: Revisit brand messaging as related to the United States versus Canada and make any necessary adjustments.

Leadership and Engagement

Three Qualities of Excellent Leadership:
- Strategic decision-making capability, solve problems/ produce desired results, communication knowledge and expertise (Meng, Berger, Gower, & Heyman, 2012).

Three Sources Contributing to Excellent Leadership:
- Work experience, initiative/ desire, role models (Meng, Berger, Gower, & Heyman, 2012).

Employee Engagement/ Authenticity:
- Favorable internal reputation= increased employee identification with mission, values, etc.
- Authentic leaders have ethical foundation= trust (Men, 2015).

Leadership and Engagement: Actionable Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Senior leaders should meet with their team to listen to their concerns and foster a collaborative work environment.

Recommendation #2: A mentor program should be developed to connect lower-level employees with leaders.

Transparency and Authenticity

Transparency and Stakeholder Needs:
- Measure from perspective of stakeholders versus those inside the organization (Rawlins, 2008).

Transparency Reputation Traits:
- Integrity, respect, and openness (Rawlins, 2008).
- Respect for others and openness= most important.

Authenticity:
- Defined by Molleda and Jain (2013) as, "the degree to which stakeholders believe an organization is acting in accordance to its identity, values, and mission" (p. 2).

Transparency and Authenticity: Actionable Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Reach out to key stakeholders to identify transparency needs.

Recommendation #2: Do an internal and external audit to ensure Girls on the Run is acting in accordance to its overall values and mission.

Key Overall Takeaways

- Implement strategic public relations.

- Utilize two-way communication with publics/stakeholders.

- Integrate social media into public relations strategy.

- Look how your CSR efforts relate to mission.

- Be transparent.

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