The relationship between public relations and marketing in excellent organizations: evidence from the IABC study

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Our basic premise is that organizations are best served by the inherent diversity of perspectives provided by separate public relations and marketing functions. Theory developed in the IABC Excellence Project shows that public relations makes an organization more effective when it identifies strategic constituencies in the environment and then develops communication programmes to build long-term, trusting relationships with them. Participation in strategic management provides the integrating link for public relations in enhancing organizational effectiveness. To provide its unique contribution, however, public relations must be separate from other management functions. However, communication programmes should be integrated or coordinated by a public relations department and that department should have a matrix arrangement with other departments it serves. Therefore, we advocate integrated marketing communication of advertising and marketing public relations. We add that an integrated marketing communication programme should be coordinated through the broader public relations function. Data are presented from the Excellence study confirming that public relations is most excellent when it is strategic and when marketing does not dominate public relations. However, public relations was equally excellent when housed in a single department or in specialized communication departments. Beyond structure, we add that marketing communication theories, if applied by an integrated department, differ in important ways from public relations theory and that discussion and research are needed to resolve these differences and to integrate the theories into a broader communication theory.

KEYWORDS: public relations and strategic management; integrated communication; integrated marketing communication; structure of public relations and marketing departments; excellent public relations

INTRODUCTION

The role of public relations in management and its value to an organization have been debated for at least 100 years. The debate has centered on the question of whether the role of public relations is to support marketing or whether it serves a broader social and political function. Tedlow (1979) studied the history of corporate public relations from 1900 to 1950
and concluded that the public relations function survived during that half century because it fulfilled the broader function:

Public relations has promised two benefits to business: increased sales and protection from unpopularity which could lead to detrimental governmental or regulatory agency activity... It is not as a sales device, however, but as a method for protection against the political consequences of a hostile public opinion that corporate public relations has been most influential. It it had been restricted to sales promotion, public relations might have been absorbed by advertising departments and could have been dismissed as a footnote to business history. Instead, it grew into a tool for dealing with many publics, including residents of plant communities, employees, suppliers and dealers, and politicians as well as customers. (Tedlow, 1979, pp. 193, 196).

The debate has continued, however, and has become intense in recent years as both scholars and practitioners have debated the relationship of public relations to the concepts of integrated marketing communication (IMC) and integrated communication (IC). White and Mazur (1995) captured this debate when they described three possible `futures’ for public relations:

There are a number of possible futures for public relations. In the first scenario, it becomes largely a technical practice, using communication techniques to support marketing activities and is involved in work on product and corporate branding, corporate reputation, market penetration and development.

In the second, public relations will increasingly become a social practice, helping organizations fit into their social environments, and working on relationships between groups to help bring about social and economic development, and to help in completing social tasks.

These futures are not mutually exclusive. Public relations is a strategic and enabling practice. To progress, it will need to mark out its agenda, and to invest in a programme of research and development to do this (White and Mazur, 1995, p. 266).

Both Tedlow’s (1979) two historical paths for public relations and White and Mazur’s (1995) three future scenarios centre on the relationship between public relations and marketing: is one a subset of the other, does one serve the other or do the two provide different but equally important contributions to an effective organization? In this article, we address both the theoretical and empirical literature about this relationship. In doing so, we conclude with the overarching premise that the organization is best served by the inherent diversity of perspectives provided by marketing and public relations when those functions remain distinct and coordinated yet not integrated. To develop this premise, we begin with theoretical discussions of structural relationships between public relations and marketing.

**Structural Relationships of Public Relations and Marketing**

Kotler and Mindak (1978) were among the first to address the relationship between public relations and marketing when they outlined five alternative arrangements.

1. Separate but equal functions (marketing and public relations have different functions, perspectives and capabilities).

2. Equal but overlapping functions (both are important and separate functions but they share some terrain, particularly product publicity and customer relations; in addition, public relations serves as a ‘watchdog’ on the social responsibility of marketing).

3. Separate but dependent functions (marketing and public relations are independent but market-oriented)

4. Merged functions (marketing and public relations are independent but share a common function)

5. Integrated functions (marketing and public relations are integrated and work together)

These relationships reflect the different perspectives of public relations and marketing on organizational decision making.
(3) Marketing as the dominant function (marketing manages the relationship with all publics in the same way as the relationship with customers – ‘megamarketing’).

(4) Public relations as the dominant function (if public relations builds relationships with all key publics of the organization, then programmes to build relationships with customers, i.e. marketing, would be a subset of public relations).

(5) Marketing and public relations as the same function (public relations and marketing converge in concepts and methodologies and a single department manages the external affairs of the company).

Hallahan (1992) modified Kotler and Mindak’s (1978) typology to include six arrangements: (1) celibate (only one of the functions exists), (2) co-existent (the two functions operate independently), (3) combative (the two functions are at odds), (4) co-optive (one function usurps the other), (5) coordinated (the two functions are independent but work closely together) or (6) combined (the two functions operate within a single unit).

Public relations scholars and professionals have expressed fear of arrangements in which marketing dominates public relations or when the two are combined into a single unit – arrangements that Lauzen (1991, 1992) called ‘marketing imperialism’ and ‘encroachment’ on public relations territory. Marketing professionals presumably would feel the same about public relations departments taking over the marketing function. In a book on hospital public relations, for example, Lewton (1991) described the problems of either a dominant or combined structure:

Obviously, when the issue is one of merging both functions, and either public relations being ‘under marketing’, or marketing being ‘under public relations’, some concerns are inevitable, just as there would be concerns if a hospital were going to have the human resources department report to finance, or medical staff relations report to the legal department. In a public relations-marketing merger, the PR professionals wonder why their discipline is seen as a subset of marketing (which it isn’t), and wonder what marketing number-crunchers know about media and stakeholder relations. They’re concerned that other noncustomer audiences will be ignored. If marketing is placed under public relations, marketers wonder how a PR vice-president can make decisions on pricing or set up an effective sales rep program. They’re concerned that their customers – who are their universe – will get lost in the midst of ‘all those audiences’ (Lewton, 1991, p. 51).

In contrast to the frequent discussion in the theoretical literature about subservient relationships between public relations and marketing, in a representative sample of 75 of the 300 largest US corporations Hunter (1997) found that public relations and marketing most commonly are separate but equal management partners. Of these corporations, 81% had separate public relations and marketing departments. In two-thirds of the cases the two departments were on the same level and when one was above the other, public relations was as likely to be above marketing as below.

Approximately one-third of the public relations departments reported directly to the chief executive officer (CEO) and one-third to a vice-president of corporate communication. The other third reported to other vice-presidents or lower managers. Few public relations departments reported to or were integrated into a marketing department in these companies. As might be expected, Hunter (1997) also found that marketing is more likely to be dominant in consumer product companies, for whom the consumer stakeholder is most important. Public relations, however, dominated in utilities, which are regulated and for which government and other stakeholders are crucial.
Hunter (1997) followed up his survey with qualitative interviews with public relations executives in six companies. In contrast to discussions in the literature of conflict between public relations and marketing, he found that these executives described their relationships with marketing as positive. Marketing and public relations departments cooperated as equal partners who respected the contributions of the other.

The situation that Hunter (1997) found in the US suggests that we should examine not whether public relations and marketing should be integrated or merged but how they work together most truthfully in successful, well-managed organizations. That question was a major one that we addressed in a 10 year study of excellence in public relations and communication management.

**Principles from the Excellence Study**

Together with four colleagues, we began a major research project in 1985 with financial support from the IABC (International Association of Business Communicators) Research Foundation. The project addressed two major research questions.

1. What values do public relations/communication management have for an organization?
2. How should the public relations function be organized to contribute most to organizational effectiveness?

The answer to the first research question provided an overarching theoretical principle that explained why the principles for organizing the public relations function make an organization more effective. One of these key principles defined the relationship of public relations to strategic management. Two others defined the relationship of public relations to marketing and other management functions. (The theoretical principles were developed in Grunig, J. (1992); some results were presented in Dozier et al. (1995) and complete results will be presented in L. Grunig, J. Grunig and D.M. Dozier (in preparation)).

**The value of public relations**

The literature on organizational effectiveness indicates, first, that organizations are effective when they attain their goals (Grunig, L. *et al.*, 1992). However, it also suggests that these goals must be appropriate for the organization’s internal and external environment – which consists of strategic constituencies (stakeholders or publics). If an organization chooses appropriate goals, strategic constituencies will support the organization and, in doing so, provide it with a competitive advantage (Vercic and Grunig, 1995). If it chooses inappropriate goals, the constituencies will organize and constrain the ability of the organization to achieve its mission. To be effective, therefore, organizations must build long-term relationships with the publics in their environment that have consequences on organizational decisions or upon whom those decisions have consequences.

Organizations plan public relations programmes strategically when they identify strategic publics and use communication programmes to build stable, open and trusting relationships with them. Thus, the quality of these relationships is an important indicator of the long-term contribution that public relations makes to organizational effectiveness.

**Strategic management as the key to excellent public relations**

Participation in strategic management provides the integrating link that makes it possible for the public relations function to contribute to achieving the goals of an organization. Excellent
Public relations departments contribute to decisions made by the dominant coalition that runs an organization by providing information to those senior managers about strategic publics. Organizations use strategic management to define their missions and make ‘relatively consequential decisions’ (Mintzberg, 1994, p. 27), but they do so through an iterative process of interacting with their environments. Most theories of strategic management do not suggest a formal mechanism in the organization for interacting with the institutional, social and political component of the environment and do not acknowledge the presence of public relations (see, e.g. Ring, 1989). To a public relations scholar, however, public relations departments provide the obvious mechanism for organizations to interact with strategic constituencies that make up their social and political environments (for additional conceptualization of public relations and strategic management, see Grunig and Repper (1992), Vercic and Grunig (1995) and Grunig, J. (1996, 1997)).

When public relations is part of the organization’s strategic management function, public relations departments are likely to manage communication programmes strategically. The senior public relations manager helps to identify the stakeholders of the organization by participating in central strategic management. He or she then develops programmes at the functional level of the public relations department to build long-term relationships with these strategic publics. In this way, public relations communicates with the publics that are most likely to constrain or enhance the effectiveness of the organization.

The role of public relations in strategic management is most clear if we take a post-modern view of strategic management as a subjective process in which the participants from different management disciplines (such as marketing, finance, law, human resources or public relations) assert their disciplinary identities (Knights and Morgan, 1991; Knights, 1992). A rational approach to strategic management would suggest that participants come together to find the best solution to problems they agree on. The subjective view, however, suggests that participants in strategic management from different disciplines recognize different problems as important as well as different solutions. Marketing would see the problem of selling products as most important, manufacturing the problem of producing products, human resources the problem of motivating employees and finance the problem of acquiring resources. The value of public relations, therefore, is that it brings a different set of problems and possible solutions into the strategic management arena. In particular, it brings the problems of stakeholder publics into decision making – publics that make up the environment of the organization.

Public relations and other management functions

Among the principles of excellent public relations that increase organizational effectiveness, the research team proposed that integrating all communication functions through the public relations department enhances the ability of the communication function to participate in strategic management. With such integration, public relations departments are arranged into horizontal structures that reflect the strategic publics or stakeholders of the organizations. The managers of these subfunctions – such as employee relations, marketing communication, investor relations or community relations – have a matrix relationship with both the public relations department and the functional department they serve (see also Tierney, 1993, pp. 217–21).

However, the decision of which publics are most strategic at a particular time is made by the senior public relations officer in collaboration with the CEO and other members of the organization’s dominant coalition and resources are moved from programme to programme
depending on which publics are most strategic in different situations. With such integration, marketing communication reports to public relations but serves marketing, employee communication reports to public relations but serves human resources and so forth.

Four principles of public relations excellence specify the relationship of public relations to strategic management and to other management functions such as marketing.

(1) The public relations function should be located in the organizational structure so that it has ready access to the key decision makers of the organization – the dominant coalition – and so that it can contribute to the strategic management processes of the organization.

(2) All communication programmes should be integrated into or coordinated by the public relations department.

(3) Public relations should not be subordinated to other departments such as marketing, human resources or finance.

(4) Public relations departments should be structured horizontally to reflect strategic publics and so that it is possible to reassign people and resources to new programmes as new strategic publics emerge and other publics cease to be strategic.

Integrating communication: IMC or IC

In the US and throughout the world, there has been an intense debate over whether public relations, advertising and sales promotion should be integrated into a programme called ‘integrated marketing communication (IMC)’. IMC consists of integrating what Harris (1991) called ‘marketing public relations’ with advertising. In Harris’ (1991) terms, ‘corporate public relations’ remains a separate function and is not placed under the marketing function. This concept of IMC fits the definition of the American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA):

A concept of marketing communications planning that recognizes the added value of a comprehensive plan that evaluates the strategic role of a variety of disciplines – general advertising, direct response, sales promotion, and public relations – and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency and maximum communication impact (quoted in Duncan and Caywood, 1996, p. 18).

One can hardly deny the merits of integrating all marketing communication functions (see e.g. Hunt and Grunig, 1994, Chapter 19). However, the view of public relations held by most adherents of IMC is extremely narrow, as has been documented by several studies (e.g. Tierney, 1993; Canonico, 1994; Tillery, 1995; Hunter, 1997). Most adherents of IMC see public relations as a technical support function and not as a management function, consider public relations to be press agentry or product publicity alone and deal solely with customer publics. In addition, most interest in IMC seems to have come from advertising professionals and agencies (Tierney, 1993; Hunter, 1997) and most studies that have shown support for IMC from the profession have been studies of marketing managers and have been sponsored by advertising associations (see Duncan and Caywood, 1996, pp. 19–20).

To overcome the objections to IMC from public relations scholars and professionals, adherents of the concept began to use the term ‘integrated communication’ (IC) in place of IMC (Newsom and Carroll, 1992; Duncan et al., 1993). Dropping the ‘M’ from ‘IMC’ was intended to make the concept more palatable to public relations as well as advertising and
marketing professionals by expanding the definition to include stakeholders other than consumers.

Duncan and Caywood (1996) proposed seven stages through which communication programmes can be integrated: awareness, image integration, functional integration, coordinated integration, consumer-based integration, stakeholder-based integration and relationship management integration. Their last two stages closely resemble the integration of communication through the public relations function that we have proposed in this article. Indeed, Duncan and Caywood (1996) state that public relations will come to the fore in the last two stages of integration, while pointing out the first five stages emphasize marketing communication and customer relations only:

Although the full role of public relations may have seemingly been limited in the first five stages to the promotional aspects of marketing public relations, the sixth stage demands a fully integrated corporate communications function. Communication at the corporate stage of integration must include employees, the media, community leaders, investors, vendors, suppliers, competitors, government at all stages, and so on (pp. 31–32).

Gronstedt (1996) proposed a similar ‘stakeholder relations model’ that included 11 stakeholder groups, only one of which was consumers and described several ‘receiving tools’, ‘interactive tools’ and ‘sending tools’, that come from the toolbags of public relations, marketing and advertising. Nevertheless, Gronstedt (1996) placed consumers at the centre of his stakeholder diagram in the belief that the consumer is always the most strategic stakeholder.

We disagree with that fundamental premise. One can make an equally good case that employees or investors are the most strategic public. In reality, however, different publics are more or less strategic for different kinds of organizations and which public is most strategic changes as situations change. For example, investors may be most strategic during a take-over attempt, employees may be most strategic following downsizing and donors generally will be most strategic for non-profit organizations.

The integration of communication functions that we propose, therefore, incorporates these higher levels of integration proposed by IMC theorists. The major difference is that we do not propose moving integration upward through the marketing communication function. Rather we propose beginning at the highest level of integration and then pulling marketing communication and communication programmes for other stakeholders into the public relations function. Drobis (1997–1998), the CEO of Ketchum Public Relations Worldwide, took the same position recently when he declared that ‘integrated marketing communication is dead’:

It died because we never could decide if it was a tool to help sell advertising and public relations agency services or if it was a true, complete communications discipline. As a result, the term ‘integrated marketing communications’ was frequently abbreviated to ‘integrated communications’ and came to stand for many things, but nothing in particular. Admittedly, integrated marketing communications as it was originally conceived seemed to stand for the blending of multiple forms of marketing communications. Still, given its potential for greatness, the discipline withered under the chronic stress of being misunderstood by public relations professionals, many of whom consider the role of public relations in ‘integrated marketing communications’ too narrow. Let’s just call its cause of death ‘unknown’ (p. 6).

Drobis (1997–1998) went on to say that IC must
... go beyond marketing to encompass employee and labor relations, investor relations, government affairs, crisis and risk management, community affairs, customer service and just about any other facet of management where effective communications is a critical success factor (p. 7).

He concluded that

Public relations practitioners are in the best position to manage the integrated communications process because, unlike other communications disciplines, they are involved in every facet of the organization. It is their job to listen and respond to the full range of important stakeholders (Drobis, 1997–1998, p. 9).

In summary, the theoretical discussions of and research on the relationship between marketing and public relations suggest that few public relations and marketing functions actually have been merged into single departments and that the two separate functions generally work well together. They work together well because public relations departments possess the environmental scanning and communication expertise needed by marketing and other management functions. The discussion of IMC and IC then suggests that all communication functions should be integrated into or coordinated by the public relations department, that is IC.

In practice, communication professionals who provide marketing communication skills (both advertising and marketing public relations) have different technical expertise than other specialized public relations people (Spicer, 1991). Therefore, marketing communication programmes are often housed in separate departments from other public relations functions even though they practice IMC – usually in business units rather than at headquarters (Hunter, 1997, Chapter 10). We propose for strategic reasons, however, that marketing communication report to or at least be coordinated by a corporate-level public relations department.

The IABC Excellence study provided evidence both on the strategic role of public relations and its relationship to marketing – evidence to which we now turn.

RESEARCH EVIDENCE FROM THE EXCELLENCE STUDY

The Excellence Research Project consisted of two empirical stages. In the first stage, the research team administered three questionnaires to the head of public relations, the CEO and a mean of 14 employees in 323 organizations in the US, Canada and the UK. These organizations were chosen to include corporations, government agencies, non-profit organizations and associations, large and small organizations and some organizations believed to be excellent and some less than excellent.

The Excellence Project theory consisted of relationships between variables from such subtheories as public relations roles, participation in strategic management and models of communication. The subtheories were operationalized into some 1700 questions on the three questionnaires. We used factor analysis to reduce these variables to a single index after first combining a number of indicators of variables into indices. We then correlated the overall index of excellence with related variables, such as the relationship between public relations and marketing. Finally, we used the index to identify 24 organizations with the highest and lowest scores on the overall excellence factor and conducted qualitative research on these organizations to gain insight into how excellent public relations came about in different organizations as well as detail on the outcomes produced by Excellence.
The value of public relations

The major premise of the Excellence Project theory stated that communication has value to an organization because it helps to build good long-term relationships with strategic publics, so measures of the value of public relations were perhaps the most important variables to be included in the Excellence factor. We measured the value of communication through the method of compensating variation (Ehling, 1992), by which we asked the CEO to estimate the value of public relations in comparison with other management functions and to estimate the rate of return to communication. We also asked the top communicator to make similar estimates and to predict the estimates that the members of senior management who made up the dominant coalition of decision makers in the organization would make on the same variables.

Both the CEOs and top communicators estimated the return to public relations highly – 186 and 197%, respectively. However, the heads of public relations underestimated the CEO’s estimate: 131%. On the question that asked the CEOs and public relations heads to compare the value of the public relations department with the typical organizational department, respondents were told that 100 was the value of a typical department. CEOs provided a mean score of 159 and heads of public relations a mean score of 189. Again, the public relations heads underestimated the value that the CEO would assign to the department: 138.

In the qualitative portion of the study, we asked CEOs to explain why they assigned the value they did to their public relations departments. Their explanations provided further evidence that our theory of the contribution of public relations to organizational effectiveness was accurate (Grunig, L. et al., 1994). However, the support came more in the form of their explanations of the value of public relations than from estimates of monetary value. As we had theorized, CEOs and public relations managers said they believed that credible, positive relationships serve as a buffer between the organization and its key constituencies in times of conflict and crisis.

At least one top communicator was reluctant to link dollar figures to public relations efforts because of fear that the numbers would seem almost unbelievably high. When participants in the qualitative research did attempt to talk about the value of public relations in dollar amounts, the numbers were actually high. Some estimated that they had saved their organization millions of dollars in fending off law suits. One CEO acknowledged that his entire association had been saved by the successful handling of a crisis.

Contribution to strategic management

Our research into the value of public relations was most useful when we could correlate estimated values with the characteristics of excellent public relations, such as involvement in strategic management and the relationship between public relations and marketing. For strategic management, we asked CEOs and heads of public relations units to describe the extent to which public relations contributes to four strategic functions in their organizations: strategic planning, response to major social issues, major initiatives such as acquisitions or new products and programmes and routine operations such as employee communication or media relations.

For the overall sample, we found that public relations units most often contribute to routine operations and in response to major social issues. They are less likely to participate in major
initiatives and, particularly, in strategic planning. We also asked what public relations units do to contribute to strategic management when they are involved in the process. The responses showed that communication units that participate in strategic planning most often do so through informal approaches, contacts with influential people outside the organization and judgement based on experience. The typical public relations department less often conducts research or uses other formal approaches to gathering information for strategic planning – an indication that many communication units are not qualified to make a full contribution to strategic planning. However, this picture changed dramatically when we looked at the departments that were most valued by their CEOs and that conform most to our criteria for excellence.

**Strategic management as seen by CEOs**

To develop a relatively simple picture of how CEOs view excellent public relations, we placed organizations into three categories based on responses to a questionnaire item that asked respondents to compare the value of public relations with the value of other management functions. Most (212) of the responses fell into the category between 100 and 200, which is labelled medium value in Table 1. Thirty-eight CEOs rated public relations in the low category (below 100) and 34 rated it in the high category (above 200).

Table 1 shows that participation of public relations in these strategic organizational

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Low value</th>
<th>Medium value</th>
<th>High value</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contribution to organizational functions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic planning</td>
<td>6.56</td>
<td>8.89</td>
<td>13.04</td>
<td>21.96**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response to major social issues</td>
<td>8.78</td>
<td>11.95</td>
<td>14.27</td>
<td>22.57**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major initiatives</td>
<td>8.24</td>
<td>10.90</td>
<td>14.20</td>
<td>30.06**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routine operations</td>
<td>10.09</td>
<td>12.71</td>
<td>15.17</td>
<td>26.98**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contribution to strategic management (if any)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular research activities</td>
<td>5.05</td>
<td>8.29</td>
<td>11.07</td>
<td>15.86**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research for specific questions</td>
<td>6.76</td>
<td>9.56</td>
<td>11.88</td>
<td>15.74**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other formal approaches</td>
<td>6.11</td>
<td>9.12</td>
<td>11.72</td>
<td>18.22**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal approaches</td>
<td>7.74</td>
<td>10.54</td>
<td>14.21</td>
<td>33.18**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacts with knowledgeable people outside organization</td>
<td>8.88</td>
<td>11.32</td>
<td>15.55</td>
<td>32.52**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judgement based on experience</td>
<td>8.89</td>
<td>11.38</td>
<td>14.45</td>
<td>19.37**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage return on public relations</td>
<td>126.00</td>
<td>178.00</td>
<td>265.00</td>
<td>9.36**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Calculated after scores were transformed to a square root to reduce skew. **p < 0.01. Except for the percentages, the means in this table came from an open-ended 'fractionation scale'. With this scale, respondents provided a score from zero to as high as they wanted to go. They were also told that 100 is a typical response on all of the items in the questionnaire as a reference point. To reduce skew, a square-root transformation was performed. Thus, in this table a mean of 10 – the square root of 100 – represents this reference point.
functions significantly and strongly distinguished the levels of value CEOs assigned to public relations. Likewise, Table 1 shows that the CEOs of highly valued departments assigned a return on investment in public relations approximately twice as high as for the weakly valued departments.

Factor analysis and canonical correlation of characteristics of public relations and value of communication

The first column in Table 2 shows the results of the factor analysis that identified 20 key characteristics of excellent public relations departments and the organizational context that

### Table 2. Factor analysis to produce index of excellence and canonical correlation of variables measuring value of public relations with other excellence variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Factor loading</th>
<th>Canonical variate score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of public relations and organization (variable group 1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CEO variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public relations in strategic planning</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of communication with external groups</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preference for two-way asymmetrical model</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preference for two-way symmetrical model</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preference for managerial role</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preference for senior adviser role</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public relations head variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public relations in strategic planning</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimate of preference for the two-way asymmetrical model by the dominant coalition</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimate of preference for the two-way symmetrical model by the dominant coalition</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public relations head in manager role</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public relations head in senior adviser role</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of two-way asymmetrical model</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of two-way symmetrical model</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of managerial role</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimate of support for women in organization</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participative organizational culture</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Value of public relations (variable group 2)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CEO variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for public relations by dominant coalition</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of public relations department</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public relations head variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived support for public relations by dominant coalition</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated value dominant coalition would assign to public relations</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Canonical correlation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>0.70</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p < 0.01**.
were measured in the questionnaires completed by CEOs, heads of public relations and employees. A reliability analysis verified that all of these characteristics made up a single index of excellence in public relations (Cronbach’s $\alpha$ was 0.85).

In this article, we have conceptualized only the strategic management variables in Table 2. Detailed conceptualizations of the other variables can be found in Grunig, J. (1992) and Dozier et al. (1995). However, all of these variables are included in Table 2, so that the contribution of strategic management to the perceived value of public relations can be compared with the other public relations variables.

After constructing this scale of excellence, we used canonical correlation to separate the characteristics of public relations from the values assigned to public relations and to show the strength of the relationship between the two sets of variables. Canonical correlation works much like factor analysis, but the technique makes it possible to determine whether two groups of variables correlate with each other simultaneously – in this case excellence of public relations and value of public relations. Canonical correlation produces ‘canonical variates’ that are much like factors except that the variates separate the blocks of variables and the procedure computes an overall canonical correlation between the blocks. The correlations of each variable with the underlying variate also indicate the strength of the relationship of each variable with the underlying variate.

The second column in Table 2 shows that canonical correlation essentially reproduced the excellence factor. All but one of the variables have high correlations with the underlying variate: participative organizational culture has a positive but low correlation. The canonical correlation between the two sets of variables is high, supporting the theoretical soundness of the Excellence Project theory. In addition, the second column in Table 2 shows that involvement of public relations in strategic planning and the CEO’s preference that the senior public relations person be a manager or senior adviser increased the perceived value of public relations most. As we theorized, CEOs estimated higher values for public relations when it fulfils a strategic managerial role.

Relative support for public relations and marketing

In the questionnaire completed by the senior public relations officer, a series of three questions asked whether the organization had separate communication units for ‘marketing-related public relations’ and another for ‘public affairs’ – essentially the distinction that Harris (1991) and others have made between ‘marketing public relations’ and ‘corporate public relations’. A second question asked which unit had the larger budget. We then asked, ‘Regardless of whether you have separate units, which function – public affairs or marketing-related public relations – receives more support from senior administrators – the dominant coalition?’

This third question was most useful in analysing the relationship between support for marketing and public affairs communication programmes and overall public relations excellence. Table 3 shows the mean score for the overall index of excellence and each excellence variable when support for marketing communication was higher, when support for public affairs was higher and when support was ‘approximately equal’. On the overall index, excellence was below average when marketing received greater support, average when public affairs received greater support and above average when the two received approximately equal support. The differences were statistically significant.

Table 3 shows essentially the same pattern for most of the individual excellence variables,
TABLE 3. Comparison of means on 20 excellence variables and overall index of excellence by public relations heads' perceived support for public relations and marketing by dominant coalition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of public relations and organization</th>
<th>Greater support</th>
<th>(Z-Scores)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CEO variables</strong></td>
<td>Marketing ((n = 75))</td>
<td>Public relations ((n = 104))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public relations in strategic planning</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of communication with external groups</td>
<td>-0.19</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preference for two-way asymmetrical model</td>
<td>-0.29</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preference for two-way symmetrical model</td>
<td>-0.32</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preference for managerial role</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preference for senior adviser role</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public relations head variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public relations in strategic planning</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimate of preference for the two-way asymmetrical model by the dominant coalition</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimate of preference for the two-way symmetrical model by the dominant coalition</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public relations head in manager role</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public relations head in senior adviser role</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of two-way asymmetrical model</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of two-way symmetrical model</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of managerial role</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimate of support for women in organization</td>
<td>-0.31</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participative organizational culture</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Value of public relations</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CEO variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for public relations by dominant coalition</td>
<td>-0.19</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of public relations department</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public relations head variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived support for public relations by dominant coalition</td>
<td>-0.31</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated value dominant coalition would assign to public relations</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall excellence index</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0.22</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(* p < 0.10, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01.\)
although some of the differences were not significant. In some cases, though, the mean for the variables was highest either when public affairs received greater support or when the support was even. Almost always, the mean was lower when marketing communication received greater support. The most important lack of difference in the means indicated that public relations was approximately equally likely to perform a managerial or senior adviser role with all three levels of support and CEOs were equally likely to prefer such a managerial role. Levels of knowledge to perform a two-way symmetrical or asymmetrical model of public relations and the managerial role also were not significantly different.

However, CEOs valued and supported public relations significantly less when marketing communication received greater support and when the public relations head estimated less support from the dominant coalition. Most importantly, CEOs were significantly less likely to see public relations as a strategic management function and as a two-way function when marketing communication received greater support from the dominant coalition. The same was true when the top communicator said he or she participated in strategic planning and when he or she estimated that the dominant coalition would prefer the two-way symmetrical model. Interestingly, the public relations heads estimated that women received significantly less support in organizations where marketing communication dominated. In contrast to the pattern of Table 3, however, organizations that emphasized marketing communication over public affairs were most likely to have participative organizational cultures, in contrast to authoritarian cultures.

Overall, then, Table 3 supports the idea that public relations is most likely to be excellent when marketing communication does not dominate the communication function. Public relations has its greatest value when that function and the marketing function are treated as equal partners in management.

Organization of the communication function

The initial Excellence Project theory specified that organizations should integrate or coordinate their communication activities through a central public relations function rather than having independent units for such communication programmes as marketing communication, employee communication, investor relations or media relations – either as stand-alone units or units that are subordinated to other functions such as marketing, human resources or finance. Independent units challenge strategic public relations because it is difficult to shift resources from one set of stakeholder publics to another when those publics become more or less strategic to organizational interests.

Some of the organizations we studied had a single public relations department, some had one or more specialized departments and some had public relations programmes administered by non-public relations departments. The latter were most likely to be programmes for consumers (marketing), employees (human resources) or investors (finance). However, even these latter programmes were relatively rare. Most public relations functions were organized either through a central public relations department or one or more specialized departments (see Table 4).

Table 4 compares the means on the overall index of excellence for these three departmental arrangements. Excellence was slightly above average for centralized departments, about average for specialized departments and below average for programmes in non-public relations departments. The differences were not significant, however. Although Table 4 shows
that the non-public relations departments have the lowest maximum and minimum scores, the standard deviations for all three groups are close to the standard deviation of 1.0 that characterizes z-scores.

In short, the departmental arrangement seems to make little difference, although these organizations rarely subordinated public relations to other functions. Central public relations departments were no higher in excellence than a series of specialized units, although our data could not show what if any coordination occurred between the specialized units. What seemed to matter most was the support given to a broad public relations function by the dominant coalition and the world view of the dominant coalition that public relations is a strategic management function rather than merely a supporting function for other units such as marketing.

**Qualitative results**

When we followed up the quantitative survey and data analysis with long interviews of the heads of public relations and the CEOs of the most excellent organizations in the sample, we found further evidence that public relations is valued most when it operates as a strategic management function, as a two-way symmetrical model and as an equal partner with a marketing and other management function.

When asked why they assigned high values to the contribution of public relations, the CEOs of several of the top-ranked organizations said they particularly valued the contributions of public relations in dealing with activist groups. One CEO, for example, explained his top communicator’s influence within the organization as a result of his training all members of the management staff in what he, the CEO, called ‘symmetrical negotiations or communication’. That training has resulted in an approach to communication that the CEO considered ‘uniform’ and described as ‘an open, discussed decision that we will engage in discussions no matter how frustrating, no matter how unnerving, no matter how ignorant they [the activist publics] are’. He told us that although some other senior executives in his industry may not value this kind of sophisticated public relations, many do. Their understanding of two-way communication, in particular, has served them well. Through this and numerous other, equally compelling interviews, we determined that two-way symmetrical public relations, touted in the scholarly literature as the normative approach to excellence, seems to be emerging in the actual practice of the field as well.

We also found evidence that public relations makes its greatest contribution when it is aligned with the strategic management of the organization. The vice-president of public affairs

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**TABLE 4. Comparison of means on overall excellence by type of communication department**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department type</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation (Z-scores)</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central public relations</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>-1.93</td>
<td>3.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialized public relations</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>-1.98</td>
<td>3.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-public relations</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>-2.40</td>
<td>2.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

F = 0.64, not significant
in one of the top-ranked companies explained the relationship between public affairs and strategic planning as follows:

Most people perceive strategic planning over here at this end of the corporation and if you get through R&D, marketing and manufacturing and all these things somewhere at the other end you have someone worrying about public affairs and public relations. My answer is that they have a linear view of a corporation. If you view a corporation as being a [cyclical] work process ... then you take that linear view of the corporation and bend it around into a circle. Then it's funny, what comes together in the circle – strategic planning and public affairs.

This astute professional argued that everything in a company has to do with relations with the outside world. He also explained public affairs as more of a two-way than a transmittal process. Thus, in his opinion, ‘It is perfectly logical for the public relations function to be directly tied to the strategic function’.

If public relations is to participate in the strategic planning process of the organization, then what must be its position relative to marketing? According to several of the executives we interviewed in both public relations and in top management per se, that relationship should be characterized as ‘peer professional’, that is public relations practitioners must be on a par (in terms of expertise, brains, respect and salary) with their counterparts in marketing – as in law, science, lobbying and so forth. At times, of course, the functions may actually operate in opposition.

One public relations manager in a gas and electric company we studied pointed out that although public relations and marketing do many similar things, marketing has an easier time demonstrating its impact. As a result, the potential for subjugation exists. So far, public relations in that utility has been able to maintain its critical role in the arena of customer service because utilities are increasingly adopting a demand-side philosophy. She called this ‘demarketing’ or trying to give customers what they want while pushing for energy conservation.

Our interviews with CEOs with excellent public relations departments showed that top management is better prepared to make informed decisions when it relies on the distinct perspectives of both marketing and public relations. The CEOs told us they value public relations most for the broad view of the environment – both internal and external – that it provides. We came to understand that the environment of any organization and even its inner workings are truly enacted. ‘Enacted’ means that the organization or its surroundings will not be perceived as the same by different people in the same organization. Thus, top management’s exposure to a variety of perceptions becomes critically important.

Thus, public relations counsel is not the only wisdom CEOs hear – and rightly so. They listen as well to financial people, to legal staff and to marketing experts. To some of the people we interviewed, the advice coming from the communication department balances counsel emanating from other quarters. As one top communicator said ‘You are going to find people in the organization – some of them at pretty senior levels – who are going to say, “Do not talk; do not say a word. We might be sued or we are going to damage our market”’. He saw his role as countering that closed attitude. However, he reminded us that communicators must be at a level of responsibility and respect to guarantee that their opinion carries equal weight. And, sometimes that counsel is most credible when it emanates from an outside firm rather than a member of staff. As one agency head described his value to a client:

I believe he trusts my opinion and judgement and he knows above all that I will not bullshit him, that I will tell him what the truth is. ... I still maintain that the PR guy has got to bring to the
table the outside perspective that is by definition lacking by those inside the organization. Otherwise, the outside perspective is not going to be at the table when decisions are made.

In a comment typical of the two dozen CEOs we interviewed at length, one top manager explained ‘Those of us who think lawyer like, those of us who think CEO like, those of us who think technical like do not always take the big picture. And that’s what the public relations/communication expert’s forte is: to take that big picture, to place it in the instant context and to make sure that the system responds to what the real issues are …’

This quote is a plain language, real world version of the more theoretical argument proposed by social psychologist Weick (1979). His notion of requisite variety held that there must be as much diversity inside the organization as outside for the organization to build effective relationships with all of its strategic publics – both internal and external. More specifically, Weick (1979) maintained that what he called the ‘enactment pool’ or the perspectives of those (such as public relations professionals or marketers) who do the enacting should be matched to the degree of variation present in the market-place. Enacting the environment takes place at the boundary between the organization and the groups that matter to it – groups we call ‘strategic publics’. Public relations professionals are boundary spanners. We assume the primary responsibility for defining, characterizing and then responding to those stakeholders that have the potential to most help or hinder our organization.

FROM STRUCTURE TO THEORY:
DIFFERENT APPROACHES OF PUBLIC RELATIONS AND MARKETING

The Excellence study, therefore, seems to provide compelling evidence in support of separate marketing and public relations functions and of integrating communication programmes – not just marketing communication programmes – through the public relations department or by coordinating a set of specialized public relations departments. One major hurdle remains, however, before communication programmes can be fully integrated: public relations theorists and marketing communication theorists – particularly advertising scholars – conceptualize communication in very different ways. Many integrated communication programmes, however, apply marketing communication theory rather than public relations theory to communication management and in ways that we believe do not result in effective communication.

Although we prefer our conceptual approach to that of an advertising or marketing approach, we recognize the value of different approaches and conceptual world views. Therefore, in concluding this article, we describe differences between the two types of theory that require discussion and debate to find the contributions that each approach can make to a comprehensive theory of public relations and to resolve conceptual differences between the approaches.

We identify, therefore, these characteristics of marketing communication theory that differ from our public relations approach:

(1) The recurring ideas that all publics can be treated as though they are consumers, that consumers are the only publics that matter and that there is no difference between markets and publics. Markets essentially consist of individuals making individual decisions. Publics are collectivities – groups – that try to change organizational behaviours and the societal or governmental structures that make up the social–political environment of organizations. Thus, marketing strategies aimed at individuals, such as
the social marketing campaign of the US Partnership for a Drug Free America, have little effect when a problem such as drug use results from the structure of society (see Wallack et al., 1993). Likewise, marketing concepts are of little use in dealing with activist groups, which affected nearly every organization in the sample for the Excellence study.

(2) A tendency to overgeneralize the importance of marketing or of communication, with statements such as ‘everything is marketing and marketing is everything’ or ‘all communication is marketing and all marketing is communication’ (Schultz et al., 1993, p. 45). Philosophers of science say that if something is everything, one cannot distinguish it from anything else and, therefore, it is nothing. We believe there is more to marketing than communication and to communication than marketing.

(3) The application of the concept of exchange to all relationships. Economic relationships, such as those important in marketing, may usually involve an exchange, but one needs to build social and personal relationships on the expectation that reciprocity may not occur. For example, Fisher and Brown (1988) proposed what we consider to be one better principle of relationship building: be unconditionally constructive, even if the other side does not reciprocate. Huang (1997) also developed a typology of relationships with publics that include such concepts as trust and mutuality of control.

(4) ‘Speaking with one voice’ as an advantage touted for integrating the communication functions of the organization. The concept also goes by the terms ‘orchestration’, ‘consistent voice’ and ‘seamless communication’ (Duncan and Everett, 1993). Newsom and Carroll (1992) decried what they considered the ‘Tower of Babel’ that results from people in public relations and marketing communicating with different voices. Moriarty (1993) called for a ‘synergy of persuasive messages’. We question, however, whether these catchy phrases mean that dialogue, interaction, learning and innovation – the essence of what we call two-way symmetrical communication – are to be discouraged. We believe all members of organizations should be encouraged to speak and listen to many members of publics and markets in many voices so that they obtain new ideas and innovate. The organization may gain an advantage in speaking with one voice, but it suffers the disadvantage of listening with one ear.

(5) Defining two-way communication as a response to a message rather than a reciprocal and continuous process of listening and dialogue (e.g. Schultz et al., 1993, p. 123). In our strategic theory, public relations is an ongoing process built into the organizational structure in which the ideas of publics are brought into the decision-making processes of management is just as important as affecting the behaviour of publics.

(6) Overemphasis on the behaviour of publics and underemphasis on the behaviour of management. It is much easier to control one’s own behaviour than that of others. Thus, the purpose of public relations is to contribute to organizational decision making so that the organization behaves in ways that publics are willing to support rather than in ways that publics oppose with their own behaviours.

(7) An emphasis on symbols and their effects on the cognitions and attitudes of publics rather than on the behavioural relationship of organizations and publics (see Grunig, 1993a,b). Marketing communication concepts such as identity, image, brand and reputation (e.g. Van Riel, 1995; Rebel, 1997) suggest that the right message can implant the corporate ‘identity’ into the public’s ‘image’ and, by implication, that one can manage reputation by managing the production and distribution of symbols. In our view, the reputation of a corporation consists of the behaviours of the corporation that...
publics recall cognitively. The value of a brand lies not just in the recognition of a name but in the trust people have in a company and its products. Thus, we believe the most effective way to manage a reputation or brand image is by using two-way symmetrical communication to help manage the organizational behaviours that produce a bad reputation and to develop a trusting relationship with both consumer markets and publics. To a great extent, these marketing concepts have been derived from personality theories whereas our concepts come from theories of participatory democracy. A Danish handbook on public relations explained the difference this way:

Parallel with the fact that modern marketing sees the organisation as a personality, we see the business as a *citizen* with what that implies of duties (in the form of responsibility for and *adaptation* to the whole) and rights (in the form of a right to *argument* [*sic*] for and pursue one’s objectives) (Blach and Højberg (1989), cited in Biker and Hovgaard (1994) emphasis by Biker and Hovgaard).

**CONCLUSION**

We began with the premise that organizations are best served by the inherent diversity of perspectives provided by the marketing and public relations disciplines. The data presented from the IABC study have confirmed that premise: public relations is most excellent when it exists as a separate strategic management function from marketing. We concluded, however, by pointing out that marketing communication theories when applied in an integrated communication department differ in important ways from our public relations theories. The discipline of communication management, like organizations, should benefit from the diversity of these perspectives. Much discussion and research are needed, however, to resolve the differences and integrate the most useful concepts from each perspective.

**REFERENCES**


BIOGRAPHIES

James E. Grunig is a professor of public relations in the College of Journalism of the University of Maryland, College Park. He is the co-author of Managing Public Relations, Public Relations Techniques, and Manager’s Guide to Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management. He is editor of Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management. He has published over 150 articles, books, chapters, papers and reports. He has won three major awards in public relations: the Pathfinder Award for excellence in public relations research of the Institute for Public Relations Research and Education, the Outstanding Educator Award of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) and the Jackson, Jackson and Wagner Award for behavioural science research of the PRSA Foundation. He directed the $400,000 research project for the International Association of Business Communicators Research Foundation on excellence in public relations and communication management.

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