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Chapter 10

The Practice of Public Relations

Public relations is a large discipline that can be subdivided into many types of functions. There are four primary areas of functional responsibility or different locales in which we can categorize the profession of public relations:

1. Corporate public relations
2. Agency public relations
3. Government/public affairs
4. Nonprofit/NGO/activist public relations

These primary functional areas differ but also have the commonality of using the strategic management process. In the earlier chapter briefly outlining public relations subfunctions, we promised more specificity on how those functions actually operate within an organization. Now that we have thoroughly discussed the strategic management of public relations, we will relate how they operate in day-to-day corporate and agency settings, and how they relate to government and public affairs as well as nonprofit, NGO, and activist public relations.

10.1 Corporate Public Relations

Unlike some corporate functions, such as legal and finance, the communication function does not have as its primary mission fulfilling specific regulatory or compliance requirements. As a result, the function is rarely organized in a uniform fashion from one organization to the next. Similarly sized organizations can vary widely in the resources and number of employees devoted to communication. Reporting relationships and functional responsibilities also differ depending on the nature of the company.

For example, companies that are heavily focused on building and sustaining strong consumer brands may devote far more employees and greater attention to the communication function than organizations that operate exclusively in the business-to-business sector. A company that sells directly to consumers has a greater need for a large media relations team since it can field dozens of calls each day from both mainstream and trade media. When a new product is being launched, the staff will be called upon to plan press conferences, conduct satellite media tours with local television stations, and organize customer events.

Companies that sell their products to other businesses rather than directly to consumers may have similar needs from time to time, but they are usually on a much smaller scale. Some industries, such as fashion, entertainment, packaged goods, and travel, place a greater emphasis on communication than those with longer selling cycles, such as construction, manufacturing, and engineering. Newer fields, such as computing, also tend to rely more on public relations and social media programs than through traditional advertising channels.

In many organizations, the senior leader of the communication team reports directly to the CEO, whereas in others, that individual may report to the head of legal, marketing, or human resources. Regardless of the specific reporting relationship, in virtually all companies, the function is responsible for communicating with the media and usually has the lead role in developing employee communication as well. Public relations activities, such as the management of corporate events, press conferences, product launches, large employee gatherings, and leadership meetings normally also are managed by the chief communications officer (CCO) and his or her team.

In some companies the function is also charged with managing investor relations—that is, communicating with the company’s shareholders and financial analysts who follow and report on the company. In a publicly traded company, the

investor relations function must comply with a number of securities regulations regarding the company's disclosure of its financial results. These activities involve the release of quarterly and annual financial results and providing timely information to shareholders regarding any event that meets the definition of **materiality**¹, an event that could have a positive or negative impact on the company's share price. In fulfilling these requirements, the investor relations function works closely with the finance and legal departments, as well as the company's outside audit firm.

Most CCOs would maintain that there is no such thing as a typical day. Some of the most important qualities of successful CCOs are flexibility, patience, analytical ability, and the ability to remain calm under pressure. All organizations face potentially damaging issues every day. The CCO must monitor these issues on an ongoing basis, much like a chef watching many simmering pots on the stove. The objective in this pursuit is not to let any of these issues boil over into full-fledged crises. This task has been made harder by the ubiquitous presence of the Internet. The Web has provided the means for unhappy customers, disgruntled employees, or disappointed shareholders to voice their concerns in a very public manner with a few computer keystrokes.

Although the corporate public relations function is extremely complex and varied by industry, what follows are a few of the main responsibilities and areas of focus for any CCO.

1. An event that can have either a positive or a negative impact on a company's share price.

10.2 Responsibilities and Focus of the Chief Communications Officer

Although not every organization is newsworthy or wishes to be, most larger size organizations seek to develop ongoing relationships with local, national, and international media. These relationships facilitate the flow of information to and from the organization to publics outside its boundaries. The size of the **media relations** staff is relative to the amount of press coverage the company receives. For example, a firm with a large headquarters in a major city will probably have a more active relationship with the press than a smaller organization located in a small town. Due to their level of controversy or public interest, some industries generate more media attention than others. Organizations with highly visible chief executive officers (CEOs) also tend to attract more press interest, and many CEOs have a presence on social media forums, such as Facebook or Twitter, to facilitate public interest. The CCO normally has some hand in managing these communications, as well as preparing executives for major media appearances, key industry speeches, employee meetings, testifying before government entities, and participating in community events. This facet includes speechwriting, ghost writing op-eds, and rehearsing key messages for media interviews.

Many CCOs are also responsible for overseeing **internal relations** and conducting research on employee publics. Though sometimes undervalued, a company's communication efforts with its own employees can yield the highest returns. Employees often feel they are the last to hear of major developments within their organizations, but the most successful organizations are now placing greater emphasis on keeping employees well informed, conducting an ongoing *dialogue* with internal publics, and incorporating their views into management policy in a symmetrical manner. Much of the focus in internal communication is now centered on the role of the first line supervisor. When that individual does a good job of communicating about issues, employees are more willing to pay attention to organizationwide initiatives.

Many corporate CCOs spend a great deal of time interacting with the chief marketing officers (CMOs), or marketing heads, of their organizations. Although the marketing function usually has primary responsibility for managing product brands, the corporate communication function normally manages the corporate or organizational brand, as well as the overall reputation of the organization for quality, customer service, and so on. This activity may include corporate advertising that speaks to the attributes and values of the entire organization rather than of a specific product or service. It also includes participation in industry coalitions, thought leadership forums, and academic panels. Recent research by Stacks and Michaelson found parity between public relations messages and

advertising messages, meaning that public relations should be equally incorporated into the marketing mix alongside, rather than as subservient to, advertising. Stacks and Michaelson (2009), pp. 1–22.

Increasingly, **key messages** must be delivered through Web-based channels since that is the source of information for a growing percentage of the audience. Most organizations also operate internationally, meaning that messages must be tailored for global audiences. The communication strategy must include adequate feedback mechanisms so that the organization knows how effectively key messages have been received and what further steps must be taken to provide informative and useful content to publics.

CCOs have the weighty responsibility of **issues management**, and that may include crisis and risk management in industries that are prone to hazards, risks, or product failure (such as the airline industry, the automotive industry, pharmaceuticals, and so on). The key to issues management is providing wise counsel to the senior team whenever major decisions are debated. Organizations face many choices in the course of business and virtually all the major ones have a communication dimension. As stated earlier, the CCO and the communication team act in many ways as representatives of the many publics who are not in the room when these decisions are made. An effective corporate communication function counsels the organization of potential risks, provides its publics a constant voice that can be heard by decision makers, and helps the organization translate strategy into action. The effective CCO has a thorough understanding of the organization's business objectives and the role of the communication function in helping meet these objectives.

The best counselors are those who take the time to listen carefully to the issues and concerns of the other functions to whom they are providing advice and the publics whose views they represent. In order to understand the position of these publics, the communication team relies on research. This research, which was covered more extensively in a previous chapter, provides the team with a better sense of how employees, customers, shareholders, and others view the organization generally, as well as specific issues that relate to the organization. Indeed, it is research that allows our decisions to be strategic rather than happenstance.

Finally, in a day-to-day environment, much of the time and attention of the CCO is focused on managing the public relations staff. Recruiting and developing the best talent, as in all corporate functions, is fundamental to building credibility within the organization and being positioned to offer the most useful counsel. CCOs are constantly seeking employees who can think critically, write and present articulately, and develop and maintain excellent personal relationships with their

internal publics, as well as external publics. They can help their colleagues become better leaders by enhancing their skills in listening empathetically to employees and increasing their focus on workgroup communication.

The overriding mission of the CCO is to enhance the relationships an organization has with its publics by helping the organization make better, more informed decisions that take into account the impact and likely reaction to those decisions. The CCO uses all the tools available to accomplish this goal. In fulfilling this mission, the CCO works with his or her team to develop and distribute key messages that advance the organization's mission. Corporate communicators who understand this mission and can deliver tangible results are highly valued by the organizations they serve.

10.3 Agency Public Relations

In addition to in-house departments, most organizations—from small firms to huge global entities—work in partnership with public relations agencies to develop and implement communication programs. These agencies generate billions of dollars in revenue, employ thousands of counselors, and serve as the source of training and development for hundreds of young entrants to the field each year.

Agency Definitions

There are four major types of public relations agencies. They range from full service agencies to specialists who fill a particular organizational or client need. Further, they range from being units of larger, umbrella organizations to individually owned agencies.

Full Service Agencies

Some of the largest agencies offer a full spectrum of services, from traditional media relations and event planning to highly specialized research, training, and social media expertise. Some of these large agencies, such as Ketchum, Burson Marsteller, Weber Shandwick, Porter Novelli, and Fleishman-Hillard are part of large media conglomerates like Omnicom, WPP, and Interpublic. A number of large agencies, most notably Edelman, have remained independent.²

Public Affairs Agencies

Agencies such as APCO Worldwide are recognized primarily for their expertise in public affairs. These agencies focus on developing advocacy positions for or against legislative initiatives, organizing grassroots campaigns, lobbying members of Congress and other government leaders or coaching their clients to do so, and participating in and often leading coalitions that link together like-minded members.³

Strategic Counsel Services

Kekst, Sard Verbinnen, Abernathy MacGregor, and others focus specifically on what often is referred to as “strategic communication,” including mergers and acquisitions, investor relations, and defending hostile takeovers. These agencies are brought in to supplement corporate staff and agencies of record when a company decides to make a major move, such as buying another company or selling a large subsidiary. They are also retained when a company is facing an unwanted takeover

2. Public relations agencies that offer a spectrum of services, from traditional media relations and event planning to highly specialized research, training, and social media expertise.

3. Public relations agencies that help organizations navigate public policy both globally and locally.

by another firm. It is common for both parties in hostile takeover attempts to retain competing strategic agencies. These are often waged in highly publicized battles that command the front pages of major media for days. The strategic counselors develop long-term relationships with a few key mergers and acquisitions (M&A) reporters for *The Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, and others, which they try to use as leverage on behalf of their clients.⁴

Corporate Identity Services

Corporate identity specialists—Landor, FutureBrand, InterBrand, and others—develop branding strategies and programs for both organizations and brands. These agencies utilize extensive research to develop brand platforms for their clients that build on the existing perceptions of companies or their products. Their expertise includes graphic design, naming, brand engagement programs for employees, and complete identity systems.⁵

Corporate Social Responsibility

In recent years a number of agencies have chosen to specialize in corporate philanthropy programs. They work with clients to determine areas in which they can match their areas of expertise with global human needs, such as hunger, health, the environment, and poverty. They design programs that help address these needs by utilizing the employees, technical expertise, and financial resources of their clients.

Trends in Agencies

Regardless of their particular area of focus, all of these agencies are being affected by a number of new industry trends.

According to a survey conducted by the Council of Public Relations Firms, the industry's trade association, agencies are finding that their clients are increasing their *outsourcing* practices. With pressures on profit margins intensifying, many companies find that they can better manage the ebbs and flows of communication activity by hiring an outside agency for certain communication activities in lieu of using internal staff. Council of Public Relations Firms Web site (2009). When times are good and the needs multiply, organizations can increase the amount of agency support they receive; when times are lean they can cut back the support of outside firms.

Companies and agencies are also using more *virtual teams*, meaning teams that include the client's employees, the agency's employees, and independent

4. Public relations agencies that focus on strategic communications, including mergers and acquisitions, investor relations, and the defense of hostile takeovers.

5. Public relations agencies that help organizations develop brand strategies and programs for organizations and brands.

contractors all working on the same project. Council of Public Relations Firms Web site (2009). In many cases, these teams are located in different offices, cities, time zones, even continents, all connected through the Internet.

Most agencies are expected to provide strategic counsel, not just tactical solutions that involve executing programs. In order to do this effectively, the agency team must employ thorough *external research* that identifies pending issues and opportunities for the client. Their recommendations often go beyond the realm of communication, challenging the organization to consider the implications of policy changes or major operational decisions.

Regardless of how the agency-client relationship is structured, clients expect the agency to anticipate issues and provide a fresh perspective that can assist them in making critical decisions and recommendations to their CEOs and internal publics and colleagues. To do this well, the agency team must spend time conducting *internal research*—getting to know the unique aspects of their client’s business. These aspects normally include competitive threats, labor relationships, legislative and regulatory constraints, and the global trends that will affect the future of the business.

Most large agencies have a *global reach*, they operate global networks, with major offices in North and South America, Europe, and Asia. Some do this with their own employees and others form partnerships and networks with independent agencies in other countries. Either way, it is increasingly important for multinational clients to be able to call upon an agency that can offer counsel throughout the world.

Agency Life Versus Corporate Life

The resumes of many practitioners often include experience in both agency and corporate positions, and many of the management responsibilities of the corporate CCO are also conducted by agency professionals. Agency professionals oftentimes build an area of expertise with long-term service for a client or within an industry, and work as expert prescribers resolving problems and crises as an outside consultant from the agency, and return to their agencies once the problem is solved.

The agency world offers the opportunity for varied assignments with multiple clients. A career path through the agency can provide opportunities in a wide range of areas, including media relations, issues management, crises management, brand building, event planning, and corporate reputation work. To some, one of the negative aspects of entry-level jobs in agencies is that they are highly focused on conducting events, publicity, and media pitching.

On the corporate side, most employees, especially at the entry level, are focused on a single industry or line of business. Since corporate departments are often smaller, the career path may be more limited, whereas agencies may have a diverse client list and numerous opportunities for travel. On the other hand, corporate communication positions can provide a more strategic focus, depending on the company. From a practical standpoint, the benefits offered in corporations are usually better for new hires, though this is not always the case.

Clearly, the line between corporate and agency roles is becoming less distinct. With the use of virtual teams increasing, clients are more focused on results than on the demarcation between the agency and the corporation. In both worlds, leaders are looking for ways to improve their value to the organization, whether they are serving internal or external clients.

10.4 Government Relations and Public Affairs

Government relations and public affairs are the types of public relations that deal with how an organization interacts with the government, with governmental regulators, and the legislative and regulatory arms of government. The government relations and public affairs are discussed together in this section; the two functions are often referred to as synonyms, but there are very minor differences.

Government relations is the branch of public relations that helps an organization communicate with governmental publics. **Public affairs** is the type of public relations that helps an organization interact with the government, legislators, interest groups, and the media. These two functions often overlap, but government relations is often a more organization-to-government type of communication in which regulatory issues are discussed, communication directed to governmental representatives takes place, lobbying efforts directed at educating legislators are initiated, and so on. A strategic issue is any type of issue that has the potential to impact the organization, how it does business, and how it interacts with and is regulated by the government. Heath contends that “**public policy issues**⁶ are those with the potential of maturing into governmental legislation or regulation (international, federal, state, or local).” Heath (1997), p. 45.

Public affairs is the external side of the function that deals more broadly with public policy issues of concern among constituents, activists, or groups who lobby the government on behalf of a certain perspective. Public affairs are often issues of public concern that involve grassroots initiatives, meaning that everyday citizens organize and create a movement in favor of a certain issue or perspective. In that case, public affairs specialists would work to resolve conflict or negotiate on behalf of an organization, working with these groups to create an inclusive solution to problems.

Public affairs specialists act as lobbyists on behalf of their organizations, and they interact with publics who are interested in lobbying the government for legislation regarding particular issues. Public affairs specialists might focus on a particular area of public policy, such as international trade agreements or exchange rates, security and terrorism, equitable wages and working conditions, the regulatory process, safely disposing of production by-products, and so on. The list of public policy issues with which an organization must contend is practically endless.

In some organizations, the governmental relations arm or public affairs unit is coupled with issues management, or it can even be the same public relations executive responsible for both roles. Issues management and public affairs are extremely close in their responsibilities, goals, and activities. Both issues

6. Issues with the potential of maturing into governmental legislation or regulation.

management and public affairs seek to facilitate interaction between organization and the government or governments with whom it must deal, and to incorporate and update organizational policy in accordance with governmental standards. However, issues management is the larger function because it deals not only with governmental and regulatory publics but also many other types of publics. The governmental relations or public affairs function is more narrowly focused on legislative, regulatory, and lobbying issues.

Public affairs can be used in a corporate setting to interact on policy and legislation with the government, interest groups (or, as discussed in the following section, activist publics), and the media. An organization must also use public affairs to communicate about policy and procedures with investors, regulatory publics, employees, and internal publics, as well as communities and customers. Lerbinger (2006).

Case: Horse Public Policy

Public affairs issues often center on a conflict of ethical values or rights between organizations and publics, and sometimes organizations, publics, and one or more branches of the government. An example would be the grassroots movement in the United States to protect wild horses from slaughter for human consumption in Europe and Asia. Many animal protection and rights organizations have lobbied officials on behalf of the horses, and those officials introduced legislation to make horse slaughter for human consumption illegal. According to the Associated Press, the U.S. House of Representatives voted 263 to 146 to outlaw the killing of horses for human consumption based on the active public affairs initiatives of the National Thoroughbred Racing Association and grassroots initiatives, such as “Fans of Barbaro.” The source of information for this case example is “House OKs ban on horse slaughter for meat” (2009).

A sponsor of the slaughter-ban legislation, former Congressman Christopher Shays (R-CT) said, “The way a society treats its animals, particularly horses, speaks to the core values and morals of its citizens.” Defenders of horse slaughter, including the meatpacking industry and its public affairs lobbyists as well as the U.S. Department of Agriculture argue that it provides an inexpensive way to dispose of these animals. “These unwanted horses are often sick, unfit or problem animals,” said Rep. Collin Peterson (D-MN). Clearly, the two sides of this debate and all the businesses and organizations involved on each side are lobbying their point of view with governmental officials and also using the mass media to build public understanding and support for their position.

At the core of this debate is an ethical divergence over the value of equine life and the role of horses in America's society and history. At contest is the future of both those horses who live free in American herds and former sport or pet horses, and even stolen horses sold to the slaughter industry. Much money is at stake for the ranching and meatpacking industries, the Bureau of Land Management, the Department of Agriculture, and the resources invested in this legislation by the animal rights lobby.

10.5 Issues Management and Public Policy

A large part of public affairs is ongoing issues management, and the issues management function is often grouped within the same department or set of responsibilities as public affairs. For example, the public relations function at Johnson & Johnson is divided into several functional departments, the highest level being “public affairs and group issues.” *Hoover’s Handbook of American Business* (1997). In most organizations, especially in corporations, issues management and public affairs are inextricably linked. Organizations must manage public policy issues that they create as a consequence of their doing business. Organizational policy must continually be revised and updated to reflect the current regulatory environment as well as the demands placed on it by publics.

Issues management is the process through which an organization manages its policy, and identifies potential problems, issues, or trends that could impact it in the future. The issues management process is a long-term, problem-solving function placed at the highest level of the organization through which it can adapt organizational policy and engage in the public affairs process. Issues management allows the top professional communicator to interact with government and publics, advising the CEO about the values of publics and how they enhance or detract from the organization’s reputation with those publics.

Heath defines the issues management function in the following way: “Issues management is a process for establishing a platform of fact, value, and policy to guide organizational performance while deciding on the content of messages used to communicate with target publics.” Heath (1997), p. 45. Those target publics include key executives of the organization, legislators, government regulators, interest groups, and so on. Heath explained, “An issue is a contestable question of fact, value, or policy that affects how stakeholders grant or withhold support and seek changes through public policy.” Heath (1997), p. 44.

Why is issues management so important? Grunig and Repper noted that if an organization is unresponsive to the appeals of publics, they will lobby the government to regulate the organization or seek other public policy changes forced onto the organization in the public policy arena. Grunig and Repper (1992). In that case, the organization loses its autonomy, meaning that key decisions are legislated and regulated rather than made by top management, often costing the organization a great deal of money or resources. Ideally, the organization would know how to best allocate its own resources and would manage issues in a more efficient and effective way than having those legislated and standardized across an industry, so maintaining its autonomy is generally the goal of issues management.

In issues management, we not only look for emerging issues that can affect our organization, but we also seek to build long-term, trusting relationships with publics, both governmental and grass roots. Heath explains how communication is used to help in the issues management process by noting that “the more that an organization meets key publics’ need for information, the more likely they are to be praised rather than criticized.”Heath (1997), p. 149. Of course, managing the organization in a way that is ethical and does not seek to exploit publics or other groups allows the issues management function to truly contribute to organizational effectiveness: “Issues communication is best when it fosters mutual understanding that can foster trust. This communication must be two-way and collaborative.”Heath (1997), p. 149.

Issues management should be collaborative, based on the research that the issues manager has conducted. The research is what makes the issues management process “two-way,” meaning in that it is based on understanding the view of publics by bringing input into managerial decision making from outside the organization. This research can be used to provide vital information at each stage of the strategic planning process. However, Heath notes that “communication may not suffice to reconcile the differences that lead to the struggle.”Heath (1997), p. ix. Thus, issues management cannot resolve all problems with communication or make all decisions mutually beneficial. It can help to incorporate the values of publics into strategic decision making whenever possible so that less resistance from those publics is evidenced, and their lobbying initiatives do not target the organization, which could lead to a loss of decisional autonomy through legislation.

Issues management is normally conducted on a continual, ongoing basis in which the manager is monitoring, researching, advising, and communicating about a number of concurrent issues at any given time. How many issues are managed will depend on the size of the organization and the turbulence of the industry in which it operates. Successful issues managers are those who hold in-depth knowledge of their industry, problem-solving ability, negotiating skill, and the analytical ability to examine the issue from numerous perspectives. Let us take a closer look at the process of conducting issues management.

In the mid-to-late 1970s, Chase posed an early and widely accepted model of issues management. That model included the following steps:

1. Issue identification
2. Issue analysis
3. Change options
4. Action programChase (1984).

The Chase model, though easy to remember, is a bit simplistic, and others have elaborated on the steps in great detail. For example, Renfro's book on issues management summarized the process thus: "1) scanning for emerging issues, 2) researching, analyzing, and forecasting the issues, 3) prioritizing the many issues identified by the scanning and research stages, and 4) developing strategic and issue operation (or action) plans." Renfro (1993). Although Renfro's model is an excellent one, we believe that Buchholz, Evans, and Wagley offered a slightly more comprehensive, six-step model for managing issues that is directly designed for the public policy needs of management. Buchholz, Evans, and Wagley (1994). (See the following list.)

The Steps of Issues Management

1. Identify public issues and trends in public expectations
 - Scan the environment for trends and issues
 - Track trends in issues that are developing
 - Develop forecasts of trends and issues
 - Identify trends and issues of interest to the corporation
2. Evaluate their impact and set priorities
 - Assess the impacts and probability of recurrence
 - Assess the corporate resources and ability to respond
 - Prepare the issue priorities for further analysis
3. Conduct research and analysis
 - Categorize issues along relevant dimensions
 - Ensure that priority issues receive staff coverage
 - Involve functional areas where appropriate
 - Use outside sources of information
 - Develop and analyze position options
4. Develop strategy
 - Analyze position and strategy options
 - Decide on position and strategy
 - Integrate with overall business strategy
5. Implement strategy
 - Disseminate agreed-upon position and strategy
 - Develop tactics consistent with overall strategy
 - Develop alliances with external organizations
 - Link with internal and external communication networks
6. Evaluate strategy
 - Assess results (staff and management)
 - Modify implementation plans
 - Conduct additional research

Source: Buchholz, Evans, and Wagley (1994), p. 41.

Arguably, the most important phase of issues management is the **issues scanning, monitoring, and analysis phase**. If an issues manager fails to identify an emerging issue, the hope of creating a proactive plan to manage the issue diminishes. Once an issue emerges into the public policy arena, the organization loses control of defining the issue and time is of the essence in its management. Monitoring for emerging issues and predicting the future importance of issues is called **issues forecasting**⁷. Issues forecasting is a bit like fortune telling; we can never accurately predict the future emergence of an issue with all of its nuances and the dynamic interactions of the issue with publics.

Another argument could be made that the research and analysis of an issue is the most important phase for determining priorities and how to best handle the new issue. The more research an organization can gather, the more informed its decisions should be. Still, an element of strategy exists within the collection of data, its analysis, and its interpretation into managerial policy. But as Heath cautions, "Data are only as good as the insights of people who analyze them." Heath (1997), p. 100.

A large part of government relations and public affairs is the **lobbying process**⁸ in which the research, knowledge, and policies formulated through issues management are communicated to legislative publics. This communication often takes place while educating elected officials on an organization's point of view, contribution to society, regulatory environment, and business practices. The legislative process is one in which organizations can integratively and collaboratively participate, helping to inform legislation. Oftentimes, lobbyists are hired to advocate for or against legislation that would potentially impact the organization. Regulatory impact, or "constraints imposed by outside groups or interests," Grunig, Grunig, and Ehling (1992), p. 67. is thought to be costly and is normally argued against by organizations that seek to maintain their autonomy in order to create more effective management. Mintzberg (1983).

7. The phase within issues management in which emerging issues are monitored and their future importance is predicted.

8. The part of government relations and public affairs in which the research, knowledge, and policies formulated through issues management are communicated to legislative publics.

10.6 Nonprofit, NGO, and Activist Public Relations

Nonprofit or not-for-profit groups⁹ are those that exist in order to educate, fund research, advocate, or lobby on behalf of a public cause or initiative. Oftentimes, nonprofit groups are those with an educational mission existing on behalf of the public interest. For instance, the Cancer Research Foundation of America educates consumers about what food products to eat to increase healthiness and lessen cancer risk. Public relations efforts on behalf of nonprofits generally involve disseminating public information, persuading publics to adopt the ideas of the organization through the use of press agency and asymmetrical public relations, and the use of symmetrical public relations to increase donor funding and governmental funding of the initiative.

Nonprofit public relations may exist for educational purposes, to promote an idea or cause, or to raise funds for research on an issue or problem. A well-known example would be the many cancer research foundations that exist to raise awareness about cancer and its risk factors, educate the public about preventive measures, lobby the government for further funding of cancer research, and occasionally provide grants for cancer study. Much of nonprofit public relations includes lobbying the government through educating legislators about the problem, ongoing research initiatives, and how the government can increase support for both funding and preventive measures. Nonprofit public relations often relies heavily on member relations, meaning that it seeks to maintain and develop relationships with supportive publics who can distribute the organization's message, and often pay a membership fee to assist in providing an operational budget for the nonprofit. Member relations is often conducted through the use of Internet Web sites, magazines, newsletters, and special events. **Fund-raising or development** is the final, vital part of nonprofit public relations. Development is tasked with raising funds from both large fund donors, writing grants for governmental support, and conducting fund-raising with smaller, private donors.

9. Groups that exist in order to educate, fund research, advocate, or lobby on behalf of a public cause or initiative.

10. Groups who exist in order to carry out initiatives, such as humanitarian tasks, that governments are not willing to handle. NGOs often form around social issues and do not have the profit motivation of corporations.

Nongovernmental organizations¹⁰, or NGOs, are “soft-power” groups who do not hold the political appointees of governmental agencies, and do not have the profit motivation of corporations. They exist in order to carry out initiatives, such as humanitarian tasks, that governments are not willing to handle. NGOs often form around social issues or causes to act in concert with the government but not to be controlled by it, although their sovereignty is at question in some nations. The employees of NGOs are often former government workers or officials. NGOs often partner with local groups or leaders to accomplish specific initiatives. Gass and Seiter noted that “non-governmental (NGOs) also are particularly good at demonstrating goodwill” and that goodwill is a part of establishing credibility. Gass

and Seiter (2009), p. 160. They explained, “Goodwill is much more likely to be communicated via ‘soft power’” Gass and Seiter (2009), p. 160. such as NGOs. Examples would be groups such as Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch.

Activist groups¹¹ are special interest groups that arise around an organization in order to establish some type of change around their particular issue of concern. Activist groups normally arise from a “grassroots movement,” meaning that it comes from everyday citizens rather than those who work in government. That fact makes it slightly different from an NGO and oftentimes activist groups are less official in the formal structure of their organization and its nonprofit status, compared to nonprofits or NGOs. Activist groups can be small and informal, such as a local group of parents banding together to protest a school board decision, or they can be large and more organized, such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals.

Activist groups can differ in their purposes and reasons for existing, and in the amount of action-taking behavior that they undertake. For example, some activist groups are termed “obstructionist” because they obstruct a resolution to the problem in order to gain media notoriety for their issue and new membership. Greenpeace is an example of an obstructionist activist group. Murphy and Dee (1992), pp. 3–20. Other activist groups might use more collaborative or integrative strategies of problem solving in an attempt to resolve their problems with an organization and have those changes integrated into organizational policy.

Activist groups also differ in the issue with which they are concerned, with some issues being broadly defined (such as “the environment”) and other issues being very specific (such as “toxic waste runoff”). Grunig’s study on activist group’s issues is informative here; she found that “two out of every three activist groups were concerned with a single issue.” Grunig (1992a), p. 515. That single issue could be as specific as the impending destruction of a local, historic building. Or it could be a larger issue such as the amount of pollutants exuded from a manufacturing process.

Activist groups exert power on organizations in many forms of pressure, such as appearances at “town hall” type meetings, rallies and demonstrations, boycotts, anti-Web sites, e-mail campaigns, letter-writing campaigns, phone calls to legislators, lobbying, and events designed specifically to garner media attention. Activist groups are usually filled with young, educated, and motivated ideologues with a strong devotion to acting on behalf of their cause. These groups are normally quite effective in their efforts to have organizations integrate their values into organizational policy.

11. Special-interest groups that arise around an organization in order to establish change related to their particular issue of concern. They normally arise from a grassroots movement.

How to Respond to Activism

Organizations might attempt to “ignore” activist pressure, but that approach simply does not work because it often prolongs or exacerbates the activist group’s campaign. When the organization stonewalls, activist groups normally approach elected officials and ask for the organization to be investigated, fined, and regulated. Activists also employ various forms of media that can both influence legislators and change public opinion, building support for their perspective that can be used in creating turbulence for the organization.

The most effective way that public relations can deal with activist groups is to engage them in a give-and-take or symmetrical dialogue to discover their issues of concern, values, wants, and priorities. Collaborative efforts to resolve conflict normally lessen the damage resulting from conflict for organizations; refusing to deal with activist groups protracts the dispute. The efficacy of activist groups, even very small ones, is well documented in the public relations body of knowledge. The *Excellence Study* contends that “regardless of the link of the dispute, the intensity of the conflict or the media coverage involved... all activist groups studied had disrupted the target organization.” Grunig (1992a), p. 523.

Integrative Decisions

Holding face-to-face meetings with activist leaders and members, brainstorming sessions, or joint “summits” tend to work well in building understanding between the organization and its activist. The activist group must also understand the organization’s business model and constraints, and the requirements of the regulatory environment in which it operates. Asking for the opinion of activists on organizational policy is never a popular idea with senior management; however, it can result in novel adaptations of those ideas that provide a win-win solution to issues. Hearing and valuing the concerns of activist sometimes offers enough resolution to their dilemma for them to target less collaborative organizations. The crucial point of your response is that activists must be included rather than ignored. Using conflict resolution, negotiation skill, and symmetrical dialogue to understand the activist group helps the public relations professional incorporate their ideas into strategic decision making. A collaborative approach lessens the damage that activists cause to the reputation of the organization, as well as the amount of resources and time that must be spent on responding to activist pressure.

10.7 Activism Case: No Place for Gaddafi to Pitch His Tent

In late 2009, the leader of Libya, Col. Muammar Gaddafi, visited the United States for the purpose of addressing the United Nations (UN) general assembly. His visit to the United States led to citizen activism through which we can see many of the preceding principles of citizens acting on behalf of a cause or belief and pressuring the government to aid in their efforts. First, a brief look at the history of United States–Libya relations and specifically those with Col. Gaddafi provides important context for this case of activism. In 1979, the United States embassy in Libya was attacked by a mob and set on fire, causing the withdrawal of all U.S. government personnel. Embassy of the United States in Tripoli, Libya (n.d.). Col. Gaddafi directly and publicly claimed responsibility for the 1988 terrorist bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 in which 270 people died over Scotland, including many Syracuse University students returning home from a study abroad program. Halpern (2006). According to the U.S. Department of State, diplomatic relations with Libya were not reopened until 2006. Embassy of the United States in Tripoli, Libya (n.d.). However, much hostility remains over the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 and Libya's other support of terrorist activities.

Col. Gaddafi is known for taking a Bedouin tent with him on foreign visits. A recent occasion in which this tent was problematic was when he requested to erect it on President Sarkozy's grounds in Paris in 2007, a move that caused consternation and reportedly "flummoxed presidential protocol service." Sage (2007). Gaddafi did erect this tent when he traveled to Belgium for official talks in 2004, and again when he visited Rome in 2009, using the tent to receive official guests. However, these European nations do not consider themselves as personally affected by the terrorist actions of Gaddafi in Libya. In terms of Grunig's situational theory of publics, discussed in [Chapter 7 "Identifying and Prioritizing Stakeholders and Publics"](#), citizens of these European countries have lower problem recognition with Col. Gaddafi than do Americans. The *level of involvement* that Americans experience is higher than that of Europeans, both from the burning of the U.S. Embassy, severed diplomatic relations, and the Libyan terrorist downing of flight 103. High levels of both *problem recognition* and involvement, coupled with a feeling that one can personally impact the situation (known as *low constraint recognition*) all predict the rise of an activist public.

To further complicate matters with America, general outrage ensued when Scotland decided to release from prison the terrorist who was responsible for bombing Pan Am flight 103. The convicted terrorist, Abdelbaset al-Megrahi, was released just weeks before Gaddafi's UN address to the general assembly. Al-Megrahi received a hero's welcome upon return to Libya, while the families of many American victims

watched the news stories vented their outrage in television interviews, letters to the editor, tweets, and blogs.

When Gaddafi and his associates began planning his trip to speak at the United Nations, to take place on September 22, 2009, they also began looking for a place to erect the Libyan tent. The Libyan embassy owns property in suburban New Jersey, where Gaddafi planned to stay and erect a tent. However, after public demonstrations outside the property, the town of Englewood, New Jersey, blocked Gaddafi from erecting the tent. Residents protesting Gaddafi's potential stay in the Libyan mission spoke frequently to the news media. Rabbi Boteach said, "I live right next door to the Libyan embassy. We want them to leave our neighborhood," adding that even the area's Muslims were against Gaddafi's visit. Wordsworth (2009). Syracuse University alumni also appeared on broadcasts voicing their outrage at Gaddafi visiting the very state of that university.

Gaddafi petitioned to assemble the tent in Central Park, and New York City planning and other governmental officials also rejected that request. One news report led with the headline, "Have you got a permit for that Bedouin tent sir? Col. Gaddafi meets his match... New York planning officials." Hazleton (2009). Finding no home for the tent, the Libyan delegation resorted to subterfuge, impersonation, and using intermediaries to find a temporary place for Col. Gaddafi in the United States.

At this point, Gaddafi's delegation impersonated Dutch officials and attempted to rent space for Gaddafi's tent on the roof of a Manhattan townhouse, but that deal fell through. Goldman, Radia, and Berman (2009). Gaddafi used intermediaries to rent a Bedford, New York, estate owned by Donald Trump. Aerial photos taken from helicopters buzzed on the news media as the Bedouin tent was constructed on the 113 acre estate, known as "Seven Springs." As Gaddafi wound up his 90-minute address to the UN general assembly, outrage was growing in Bedford. Citizens and media began to congregate at the front gate of the estate, and media helicopters circled. Bedford town attorney Joel Sachs said a stop work order was issued on the tent just after 5 P.M., because it is illegal to build a temporary residence without a permit. The town official called the tent an "illegal structure." Goldman, Radia, and Berman (2009). News anchors commented on the power of citizen activists. Helicopters provided visuals of the tent being deconstructed that played across media outlets for the rest of the day.

Clearly, Gaddafi underestimated the power of activist publics operating within a representative government to prevent him from engaging in the normal activities of a dictator. The day following the stop work order on the tent, after it was taken down, work began again to build the tent. "Qaddafi Tent Back Up on Trump's N.Y. Estate" (2009). However, Gaddafi did not visit the tent, as is his usual custom, to

receive state visitors or other official visits. Perhaps Gaddafi had finally understood the message issued by activist publics, and governmental officials at their behest such as Congresswoman Nita Lowey, who said Gaddafi is “unwelcome throughout the New York area.” “Qaddafi Tent Back Up on Trump’s N.Y. Estate” (2009). The battle over where Gaddafi could pitch his tent was easily won by civic activists, demonstrators, and governmental officials who acted on behalf of residents in their districts. Perhaps the case of erecting a tent is a small one, especially for a country such as Libya. It must address concerns of terrorism, human rights violations, and weapons of mass destruction, to name but a few. However, if activists can place the issue of Gaddafi’s tent onto the media agenda and the agenda of elected officials, they clearly hold the power to impact his official visit to the United States.

10.8 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, we explained the typical functions of public relations for an organization. Corporate settings were discussed, along with the importance of access to and advising the dominant coalition of function managers who often sit at the management table, experience and knowledge of one's industry, and navigating the organizational structure to gather information and be able to best advise management. Agency settings were discussed, with regard to teamwork, strategic counsel, the fast-paced environment of consulting for clients, the changing dynamics of the news media in relation to social media applications such as Facebook and Twitter, and current trends affecting agencies. Government relations and public affairs were each defined and discussed for their role in the discussion and management of public policy issues. Issues management was discussed, and the six steps to effective issues management initiative were delineated. Finally, nonprofit, nongovernmental organization (NGO), and activists public relations were discussed in light of both their ability to impact public policy and how research shows that an organization should best respond to pressure from these groups. As case examples, the public policy issue and interest groups surrounding the horse slaughter for human consumption was discussed. The chapter concluded with a detailed examination of citizen activism and local government response to the United States visit of the Libyan leader Col. Muammar Gaddafi as an illustration of the power of activists to change their environment.