EXPANDING PUBLIC RELATIONS EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues for the incorporation of public relations courses in the curricula of multiple disciplines, including such programs as business, human resources, justice studies, art history, education, culture and hospitality, political science, and health. This paper specifically explores how cultivating an understanding of basic public relations principles—such as communication strategy, media relations, international corporate responsibility, and reputation management—in a wide variety of disciplines can have a direct impact on a myriad of professions. The inclusion of these courses and key principles is not meant to create new communication professionals, but to instill a deep understanding and appreciation of the need to incorporate public relations in all fields. Introducing additional fields beyond business to what public relations does and how it can be used will expand public relations jobs and opportunities while increasing communications for and between organizations. This paper examines antidotal evidence and presents four key tenets from the excellence theory of public relations underpinning the reason public relation courses should be included into a multitude of applied academic programs: participative culture & diversity, symmetrical communication, sustainability and ethical practices.

Keywords: Public Relations, Marketing, Communication Strategy, Excellence Theory

INTRODUCTION

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics in the United States, the need for public relations is rising due to an increase in global business. As more businesses recognize the necessity of social media to create and maintain corporate reputation, and respond to the demand from stakeholders for direct engagement, they are reaching out to PR agencies and practitioners for support. Public relations professionals provide valuable communications counsel and generally are responsible for managing dialogue between an organization and its public. This in part, explains why PR's importance has risen. While in many cases the public relations professional does draft press releases, limiting the scope of the public relations definition to publicity alone greatly

underestimates the growing influence and reach of PR. Public relations has greatly expanded into areas such as public diplomacy and human resources in addition to product positioning and reputation management. More than ever, today public relations professionals are the public face of clients. The PR professional organizes community outreach and volunteer programs, and cultivates relationships with potential investors. Despite the function of public relations becoming incorporated in a variety of business segments, academically public relations remains buttonholed. Public relations courses are commonly only taught within communication programs, or within the coursework of majors. As an example, public relations co-exists with corporate public affairs, social issues management, and corporate political strategy. These paradigms, for example, lie at the interface of business and society studies and concern the area of political science also (Windsor, 2002). However, public relations, along with "corporate public affairs, social issues management, and corporate political strategy[,] deals with…related areas that are but poorly integrated theoretically and empirically; nor has there been markedly productive cross-disciplinary or cross-institutional collaboration" (Windsor, 2002, p.383) to ensure students of these fields understand the role and importance of public relation activities.

Reasons for the inclusion of public relations' principles and course work in a variety of fields stems directly from the excellence theory headed by James E. Grunig and funded by the Foundation of the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) in 1985. Constructed upon a number of middle-range theories, and tested with surveys and interviews of professionals and CEOs in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada, the excellence theory provides a benchmark *The Fall of Advertising and the Rise of PR* (Ries & Ries, 2002) that is both theoretical as well as empirical and provides credence for expanding public relations education. It should be noted that while this paper argues that basic public relations principles or courses should be included in a variety of disciplines, it is not done to produce communication professionals from these disciplines, but to instill a deep understanding and appreciation of the need for to incorporate public relations in all field. By introducing additional fields beyond business to what public relations does and how it is needed, will expand public relations jobs and opportunities while increasing communications for and between organizations.

DEFINING PUBLIC RELATIONS

There has been confusion for decades over the meaning of the term *public relations*. Most of this confusion stems from the current lack of consensus on a single definition that accurately depicts all of what public relations entails. Some of the earliest definitions of the term "public relations" represented it as a communications tool for publicity and press agentry. Yet, as the times changed, these definitions evolved. The founders of public relations, Edward Bernays and Ivy Lee, originally defined public relations as a "management function, which tabulates public attitudes, defines the policies, procedures and interest of an organization followed by executing a program of action to earn public understanding and acceptance" (Penning, 2008, pp. 344-358). By the late 1970's, there were over 400 different definitions of public relations available to the public. In an attempt to rectify this, Harlow (1977) developed a "global definition" of public relations, maintain public relations is a "distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding,

acceptance and cooperation between an organization and its publics; involves the management of problems and issues; helps management to keep informed, serve the public interest; helps management anticipate trends; and uses research and sound and ethical communication as its principal tools" (Harlow, 1977, pp. 34-42).

Due to this definition's inherent complexity and detail, public relations scholars redefined public relations as "the management of communication between an organization and its publics, and emphasize that this definition equates public relations and communication management" (Lages & Simkin, 2003, pp. 298-328). The Public Relations Society of America incorporated this definition in 2011 when the organization revamped the definition of public relations, stating public relations is a "strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics" (Corbett, 2012). According to PRSA, public relations is also a management function. Thus, public relations is not simply the fourth "P" in the marketing mix (the four "P's"). However, public relations cannot be separated completely from marketing. The two fields are similar, and these inherent similarities are another reason why the confusion about public relations exists. However, teaching marketing principles is decidedly different than teaching public relation principles. Generally speaking, public relations communicates with a variety of publics (groups that influence the company) and stimulate awareness and demand for a company while strengthening a company's image and how it is perceived. Marketing works with customers (current or potential) and seeks customer interaction to increase customer conversions. One discipline is not better than the other. While marketing had been the field of choice in the past, in modernity it has become apparent that something more is needed to remain competitive, thus the field of public relations has grown.

Regardless of the confusion surrounding a definition of public relations, there is evidence that the value of public relations is broadening. According to *The Fall of Advertising and the Rise of PR*, "public relations has become the most effective way to build a brand." Examples of widespread use of public relations can be found in a myriad of professional fields such as city and state building, public administration, public affairs, political campaigning, health care, and education. Organizations in the agri-food industry use communication activities. However, a review of such communication efforts "identified an extremely fragmented delivery to consumers and a distinct lack of resources to effectively communicate the information" and shows difficulty in the evaluation of "its impact on the attitudes, perceptions and behavior of consumers" (Duffy, Fearne, & Healing, 2015, p. 27). This example illustrates how a basic public relations education can assist in solving a variety of communication issues in a variety of disciplines and industries.

Public relations is a management function that today is used to counsel the C-Suite. This idea originally emerged from the findings by Grunig (2008) in his excellence theory, where the counseling function of public relations and the cooperation it entails, was noted as one of the primary tenets of an organization being "excellent." This theory, updated in 2011, purports that businesses must continue to use public relations as a strategic managerial function, requiring someone to go beyond budgeting and hiring and firing and actually take part in strategic decision making of the organization (Grunig & Grunig, 2011, p. 41-54). Positioning public relations as a strategic management function allows someone in the organization to anticipate the risk of different decisions before they are made, and then communicate the decision. With these

concepts in mind, and considering the close relationship between marketing and public relations, at the very least, "MBA students should be required to learn about public relations, including social media and crisis communication" (Hagan, 2011, pp. 43-48).

In America at least, the inclusion of public relations in business programs, specifically Masters of Business Management (MBA) programs, began fall of 2014. Launched with a pilot program in 2012, this initiative stemmed from a 2008 research study sponsored by the Public Relations Association of America Foundation. The study encompassed 20 percent of the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) member schools, representing approximately 32 universities. Findings revealed that only 23 percent of graduate business schools consistently provided instruction in reputation management, corporate communications, and related ethical dimensions and only 6 percent of the schools required communications programs in their program. A follow-up study discovered the communications courses by MBA programs differed greatly from the idea of communications held by most public relations practitioners and educators. The courses focused on business writing, presentation skills, interpersonal communication or organizational behavior rather than communication as an essential element of management (Byrum, 2013).

Closely related to business programs, programs in leadership especially would specifically benefit from having public relations principles taught to students. Leadership plays an important role in institutions. "The key tasks of leaders include the identification of intuitional mission and role; the institutional embodiment of; the defense of institutional integrity purpose and the ordering of internal conflict" (Fleck, 2007, p. 68). Public relations principles would assist future leaders to understand how even the most basic communication principles assist leaders in achieving the missions set out for them and create an appreciate for the function of public relations.

However, due the sprawling need for public relations principles in a variety of fields, students beyond MBA programs should be taught the basics of communication—specifically media relations, corporate responsibility, and reputation management in order to instill an appreciation for the need for public relations in all organizations.

SPECIFIC SKILLS INHERENT IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

The inclusion of public relations courses in a wide array of programs makes sense for a variety of reasons. This is because promoting cooperation, through interdisciplinary or trans disciplinary programs, plants and nurtures the idea that people must work together to sustain the world we live in. The collaboration among multiple academic departments, necessary for the inclusion of public relations into existing applied academic programs, leads to increased creativity. This creativity extends far beyond the boardrooms of companies and is indeed useful in solving basic society problems. Creativity that stems from the marketing and public relations functions can lead to conversations and strategic plans that could include working to increase volunteerism, mobility, agriculture, education, and transportation issues, just to name a few. A partnership between diverse academic areas and public relations can support manufacturing, human

resources, and creative and cultural sectors, as well as education. Public relations education uses scenario-building that can assist fields "to embed creative, forward looking thinking into their practices and explore beyond expectations of business as usual" (McKie & Munshi, 2007, p. 134). This is important as creativity; specifically, diversity-fuelled creativity (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2000) is seen as increasingly essential for success in business and organizations (Kao, 1997).

The need for effective communication and coordination drives organizational design and managerial behavior (Thompson, 1967), and drives corporate and organizational reputation. Public relations is the driving force behind this. Mass and social media has become such a pervasive presence in society that nearly every profession deals with some kind of media outlet. Learning how to reach out to media outlets and dealing with them when they reach out to your organization goes hand-in-hand with reputation management. "It is vital that all…activists have regular media training, as more and more situations are arising where a nurse or midwifes opinion is being sought on a particular issue. And health will always be on the news agenda" (World of Irish Nursing & Midwifery, 2014). Regardless of the field, it is important to promote the organization in a positive light. "In today's Internet-savvy world, you have to pay attention to how patients can easily affect your online reputation" (Romano & Baum, 2014, p. 370) and this type of basic training would be provided through public relations courses, leading to a deeper understanding for the need for public relations in all organizations.

Public relations can also drive consumer social responsibility (CSR). "A CSR orientation argues that financial concerns should not be the only concern of corporations" (Öksüz & Görpe, 2014, p. 245). Businesses need to take into consideration their effects on all of their stakeholder groups, and must consider the effects of business decisions on a variety of environments (Coombs & Holladay, 2012, p. 6). Ewing (2014) found that "corporate responsibility attempts are more effective when they are integrated and understood by all levels of people in an organization" (p. 367). Public relations has a special role in the communication of CSR (Öksüz & Görpe 2014, 245), and public relations already has an established role in managing communication and relationships (Bartlett, 2011, p. 81). As there are a variety of tools used to communicate CSR, creating a baseline of understanding public relations in a variety of disciplines can lead to stronger global communication efforts.

Recognizing the need for public relations by understanding basic principles can provide "a significant opportunity to communicate with our executive teams about how…issues feed into the organization's larger risk position. Furthermore, it is an excellent opportunity to influence our organizations' strategic direction" (American Society of Safety Engineers, 2014). From the corporate reputation management perspective, public relations assists managers and firms in enhancing their firms' cumulative reputations (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990).

Expanding basic courses/principles of public relations will have a direct impact on business and non-profits of America. However, if graduates are not introduced to public relations as a viable business solution in multiple disciplines, such as human resources, political science, public heath, science, justice studies, visual arts, education, and culture and hospitality (just to name a few), corporate and organizational sustainability are not being built for future generations. This is because in the most simplistic terms "communication equals understanding" (Murray, 1967).

Communication is critical "for countries, companies, and individuals to remain competitive in a global market where historical and geographical divisions are becoming increasingly irrelevant" (Friedman, 2005).

It should be noted that the field of communications is expanding in academia with the creation of new programs such as public interest communications (a growing discipline that uses science-based, strategic communications to drive positive social change on issues like education, better health and climate change), health communication (communicating promotional health information, such as in public health campaigns, health education, and between doctor and patient), science communication (presenting science-related topics to non-experts), and agricultural communication (providing issue education for public issues). However, adding new programs that indeed use public relations principles within communication programs is not enough to craft ethical, targeted, creative, and strategic communication in the plethora of fields that both use and need communication and public relations efforts. Therefore, at the very least, basic public relations courses should be included into a multitude of academic programs because having students from a wide variety of academic areas understand the theories supporting the strategic management function of public relations will only assist in making the world a better place, and creating mutually beneficial relationships between diverse groups of interconnected people.

THE EXCELLENCE THEORY AS JUSTIFICATION

In addition to the anecdotal support presented above, specific justification for an expansion of public relations into a broad spectrum of academic disciplines can be found from the excellence theory of public relations. The excellence theory first explained the value that public relations has to organizations and indeed society based on the social responsibility inherent in managerial decisions as well as the quality of corporate/organizational relationships with stakeholders. They theory posits that for an organization to be effective, it must behave in ways that both solve problems and satisfy goals of stakeholders and management. The theory confirmed that organizations "must scan their environment to identify publics who are affected by potential organizational decisions or who want organizations to make decisions to solve problems that are important to them" (Grunig, 2002, p. 9), and behave within strict ethical guidelines. Organizations must also communicate symmetrically with publics (weighing the interests of both the organization and publics when making determinations). This two-way communication model cultivates the high-quality, long-term relationships necessary to sustain a corporation/organization.

While investigating public relations activities that would form the excellence theory, a theoretical premise was formed about the value of public relations (Grunig. 2002) and several principles/tenets were derived. Since the completion of the excellence study, significant research concerning environmental scanning, scenario building, ethics, relationships, return-on-investment (ROI), relationship cultivation strategies, conflict resolution, and global strategies (Grunig, 2006) have been undertaken using the excellence theory as a basis (Toth 2007). Therefore, support for an expansion of public relations education fits within a growing body of

literature concerning expansion of public relations duties and overall empowerment of the field. Specifically four key principles/tenets present in the excellence theory support the argument for public relations education expansion: 1) participative culture & diversity, 2) symmetrical communication, 3) sustainability, and 4) ethical practices (Grunig & Grunig 2011).

Tenet One: Participative Culture & Diversity

The idea of a "participatory culture" is a key component to life today. Adding public relations and communication courses to a wide array of academic programs promotes a "participative culture" in which internal dialogue within the organization is valued and welcome (Laskin, 2009). Related to this idea is the principle of diversity. Having a participative culture allows for a wider view, and provides more creativity regarding solving problems and overcoming challenges. For instance, the number of women joining the workforce is a growing trend in western culture. Thus, we need to be concerned about the role of women in management positions. "Women are especially well suited to meet the global challenges of the next decade" (Toth & Grunig, 1992, p. 194). Without the addition of multiple voices in business decisions, we "risk continuing to reinforce the existing knowledge base that was provided by only one-voice, the white male voice, of what is known of reality" (Toth & Grunig, 1993). Including the communication function, specifically public relations, into additional programs in universities will provide a foundation for students to learn how to engage others in conversation, understand cultural and gender differences in communication styles, and build stronger ties to key publics. This baseline will create stronger collaborations and shape organizational culture, general management styles and strategy–making models across disciplines (Moss, Vercic, & Warnaby, 2002). In fact, wider inclusion creates new "alliances, cooperative efforts, joint efforts, and even business-as-usual carried out across cultural lines" (Jelinek & Alder, 1998, pp. 11-19).

Organizations with predominantly participative cultures infuse employees with shared values. This method ensures employees pull together as a team to accomplish a common mission. This type of management style is open to outside ideas and favor innovation and adoption over traditional and domination. This culture provides a "superior setting for excellent communications" (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig 1995, p. 17). Participative cultures are known as being nurturing, and feature teamwork, involved employees and have a greater openness to new ideas and people. High job satisfaction and empowerment are also found in this type of the dominant coalition.

One-Way A-Symmetrical	Two-Way Symmetrical

This communication model has no feedback loop. It uses persuasion and manipulation to influence targeted groups to behave as the organization desires. It is sometimes also called scientific persuasion.	This communication model incorporates feedback. It is used in negotiation, to resolve conflicts and to promote mutual understanding and respect between an organization and its publics, targeted or not.

FIGURE I.
GRUNIG & HUNT'S COMMUNICATION MODELS

Tenet Two: Symmetrical Communication

The sublimation of the public relations and/or communication function, in any field, focuses attention only on the stakeholder, such as onto consumers for marketing. This strategy results in a more asymmetrical approach, where "organizations lose the valuable function…. of managing interdependencies with publics that constrain the autonomy of organizations to pursue and meet their goals" (Toth, 2009). This is detrimental to any organization, as organizations need to be concerned about the welfare and the interest of their stakeholders as well as the organization's interest itself. Despite "bilateral communication" efforts being discussed in recent marketing literature, marketing communications typically is all about persuasion and advocacy. Generally, public relations theory is more likely to be symmetrical, whereas marketing theory is asymmetrical (Figure 1). Symmetrical communication requires "sophisticated use of knowledge and understanding of publics" (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995, p. 13), and provides a feedback loop for targeted publics. This two-way communication manages conflict and promotes mutual understanding with a variety of key publics. This communication model also greatly assists in "relationship marketing," which assists organizations in capturing clients and the process by which to keep them. Thus, symmetrical communication provides the mechanisms for a diverse participative culture in any type of organization.

Tenet Three: Sustainability

Symmetrical communication/two-way communication supports social responsibility. A key concept in any sustainable business is that community relations and social responsibility must be integrated into overall business strategy. More succinctly, businesses must consider the impact of managerial decisions on a variety of publics beyond those the traditional stakeholders of customers. The idea of sustainability is a newer concept that has incorporated what we used to

call CSR, corporate social responsibility, or corporate responsibility. The inclusion of public relations into courses or lessons in curriculums of digital media, and culture and tourism, human resources and other applied programs, provides students with a basis from which to make decisions for organizations based on social responsibility. According to the Stakeholder theory, an organization is only effective by behaving in ways that solve the problems and satisfy the goals of various publics as well as of management (Freeman, 2010). "Organizations must scan their environment to identify publics who are affected by potential organizational decisions or who want organizations to make decisions to solve problems that are important to them" (Grunig, 1992). In this way, symmetrical communication allows organizations to take the interests of both the organization and publics into account, thereby cultivating high-quality, long-term relationships (Jakubowska, 2006).

Training students in various disciplines to use the principles of public relations creates better decision-making. Grunig, in his 2011 speech at the Public Relations Association of America International Conference, used this example to explain how considering community relations when making business decisions makes an impact on the organizational goals:

> One of the people we interviewed was talking about a marketing decision his company took and put a gas station on a particular corner at an intersection where there wasn't a service station existing at that time. He said this made really good sense from a marketing perspective because here was an underserved market, but then he said from a public relations perspective it was a very poor decision because we knew the community. They had a strong community relations program there and they knew that children would be walking past that intersection on their way to and from school. A quick mart or whatever fast food place it was that was attached to the chain of gas stations would be something that kids would be tempted to stop in everyday after school and their parents would not appreciate this. So he said the CEO had to make this decision. They made their best case for public relations, and the marketing people made their best case, and fortunately the decision came down on the side of community. They didn't want to risk children being hurt by being hit by a car in the gas station as they crossed the parking lot. We didn't want them eating junk food and so forth. But things that make perfect sense from that marketing perspective may look very different when public relations looks at it. (Grunig & Grunig, 2011)

Tenet Four: Ethical Practices

Lastly, the inclusion of public relations courses into a variety of applied academic programs on the university level will impact ethical communication in organizations across the U.S. Ethics must play a key role in any communication effort. However, it is not just the action of communication that must be ethical; any organization's employees must provide the base for ethical decision-making. Employees and management must be counselors and supporters of ethics in the organization itself and champion ethical decision-making across all divisions. Ethics are considered both an inherent feature of symmetry (symmetrical communication) and a stand-alone principle of ethics. The ethics within the excellence theory stem from a Kantian ethical model where management has the autonomy to determine what makes a good action. This action

must take into consideration the interest of the publics in addition to those of the organization, including profit margins. While it is a challenge to truly have symmetrical communications between an organization and the publics in ethical determinations, organizations must "do the right thing." This is where basic public relations courses and principles can assist organizations to make the most ethical communication determination. Public relations has long advocated for the ethical practice of communication, and organizations dedicated to the practice of PR stand behind this today, implementing and enforcing strict codes of ethics. These organizations include the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), the UK based Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR), and the International Public Relations Association (IPRA).

The codes of ethics from these organizations have been found to be generic enough to be applied differently to different societies and cultures in a variety of settings. These principles, including concepts such as transparency, protecting the free flow of information, avoiding conflicts of interest, and protecting confidential information, provide a strong foundation for any study of public relations practices. These universal ideals form a common set of principles that are needed throughout the world to provide a solid base from which to build or sustain an ethical corporate culture. Incorporating public relations into course work and program design in the fields of business, human resources, diplomacy, public policy, and culture and tourism assure that young people familiar with the local culture learn to apply the principles.

The four tenets of excellence (participative culture and diversity, symmetrical communication, sustainability, and ethical practices), are fused into any course on public relations. This is important in gaining positive public opinion for any organization. Modern publics are opinion controlled. To remain competitive in the world market, it's vital for organizations to control the message using public relations principles in tandem with marketing's persuasive techniques. To accomplish this, academic institutions must incorporate public relations into various academic programs. It is no longer enough to just teach marketing principles. It is now necessary to teach future business and organization leaders how to *participate* in the conversations that are taking place around the organizations and within organizations as well as about organizations.

CONCLUSION

When contemplating the incorporation of strategic communications courses into existing academic programs, institutions are encouraged to consider their particular market approach and discern how strategic communications and reputation management will fill the academic and career-based needs of students (Byrum, 2013). The collaboration among multiple academic departments, necessary for the inclusion of public relations into existing applied academic programs, leads to increased creativity and problem-solving techniques needed to keep organizations sustainable.
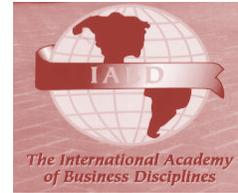
This paper argued for the incorporation of public relations courses/core principles in the curricula of universities with programs not only in in business, but human resources, justice studies, visual arts, education, and culture and hospitality as well. This inclusion will provide

respect and better understanding of the role public relation has in a myriad of fields, and hopefully will lead to wider adoption of public relations in management structures. This paper specifically explores the impact that lessons in public relations—such as communication strategy, media relations, international corporate responsibility, and reputation management—can have in a variety of professions ranging from business to visual arts and presents four key tenets underpinning the reason public relations courses should be included into multiple applied academic programs. These tenets are present in the excellence theory, and are prudent for all universities to consider: participative culture & diversity, symmetrical communication, sustainability, and ethical practices (Grunig & Grunig, 2011).

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