

MACO 3108.3

Lesson I

INTRODUCTION TO PUBLIC RELATIONS

What is Public Relations?

Public relations is a strategic communication process companies, individuals, and organizations use to build mutually beneficial relationships with the public. It is the way organizations, companies and individuals communicate with the public and media. The main objective of public relations is to maintain a positive reputation of a company and maintain a strategic relationship with the public which include prospective customers, partners, investors, employees and other stakeholders etc....

Public relations is the practice of managing the flow of information between an individual or an organization and the public. The aim of public relations by a company often is to persuade the public, investors, partners, employees, and other stakeholders to maintain a certain point of view about it.

In another way “Public relations is a planned process to influence public opinion, through sound character and proper performance, based on mutually satisfactory two-way communication.”

Public relations can also be defined simply as the practice of managing communication between an organization and its publics

A PR specialist communicates with the target audience directly or indirectly through media with an aim to create and maintain a positive image and create a strong relationship with the audience. Main tasks of a public relations specialist is to drafts a specific communication plan and use media and other direct and indirect communication mediums to create and maintain a positive image and a strong relationship with the target audience.

Let us first try and understand the meaning of the term ‘Public Relations’.

Public relations is all about how an organization communicates with public, either through the spoken word or written word, or by using a visual or some other means of communication. Public relations involves a two way communication process between an organization and its public. It is a way of communication with a view to changing the mindsets of the public in a certain direction. Therefore public relations can be defined as a form of communication used to persuade or influence people using ethical means.

The most important aspect of public relations is to focus on the 'key public' and establishing meaningful 'relations'.

"Public" A group of similar individuals; an assortment of persons having the same interests, problems, circumstances, goals; it is from such persons that opinion originates. Public is a varied creature; it comes in many forms and sizes. Public has a multitude of wants and desires; it has its likes and dislikes, sometimes, strong likes and strong dislikes. Employers make for a public and employees another public; the government is a public and citizens constitute another public, and so on, each of these groups is a public of the sort, tries to attract a different audience with its own tools and techniques.

"Relations" Human wants to create the need to establish relations with one another. The representative wants of the individuals will profoundly affect their relationship. To understand any relationship, therefore, one must understand the wants of those involved. Relationships are of all possible types. We have relationship by ran-superior to inferior, inferior to superior, and equal to equal. We have relationship by sentiment-benevolent, Friendly, suspicious, jealous, hostile. A relationship may be active, or it may be passive it may be good or it may be bad, or it may be neutral. At any rate, the relationship is there to be accepted, ignored or altered, as desired.

In order to manage the public image and stakeholder relationships of companies and organizations, public relations practitioners employ a variety of communication tactics, including media releases, social media accounts, media events, backgrounders, fact sheets, flyers, pamphlets, annual reports, newsletters, and other materials. Also these practitioners are responsible for protecting the company's public reputation by identifying issues, and by using effective communication to align the interests of organizations with those of the significant publics in their operating environment.

DEFINITIONS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

“Public Relations is the deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organization and its publics.”

- Institute of Public Relations, USA

“Public relations is the art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organization leaders and implementing planned programs of action which will serve both the organization’s and the public interest.”

- The 1978 World Assembly of Public Relations Associations in Mexico

“Public relations is the attempt by information persuasion and adjustment to engineer public support for an activity, cause, movement or institution.”

- Edward L. Bernays

“Public Relations is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and understanding between an organization and its publics.”

- The Institute of Public Relations (IPR) 1987

“Public Relations is a combination of philosophy, sociology, economics, language, psychology, journalism, communication and other knowledge into a system of human understanding.”

- Herbert M. Baus

“Merely human decency which flows from a good heart.”

- Charles Plackard

“Everything involved in achieving a favorable opinion.”

- George F. Meredith

Former President of the American Public Relation Association

“The Management function which gives the same organized and careful attention to the asset of goodwill as is given to any other major asset of business.”

- John W. Hill

"Public Relations is 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 or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilize change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and sound and ethical communication as its principal tools."

- Rex F. Harlow

According to Grunig and Hunt (1984) **“public relations is about the management of communication between an organization and its publics”**. Cutlip et al. (2000) expands on this definition: **“public relations is the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends”**. Similarly, Harlow (1976) describes the profession as the **“management function’ that maintains ‘mutual lines of communication’ between an organization and its publics, and which uses ‘research and ethical communication as its principal tools’**. As these definitions highlight, public relations is a diverse profession that seeks to ensure that organizations manage their relationships with a variety of stakeholders and broader publics.

The 1978 World Assembly of Public Relations Associations in Mexico agreed that, **“Public relations is the art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organization leaders and implementing planned programs of action which will serve both the organization’s and the public interest.”**

The words ‘art’ and ‘social science’ are helpful in explaining the continuing tension between understanding public relation as a measurable, science-based application of communication tools. In the USA the social science elements dominate the understanding of PR, as is reflected in their education and texts about the subject. In the UK, PR is largely – though not exclusively – considered a management function and is taught in business schools. In both countries it is sometimes found in schools of journalism.

The Institute of Public Relations (IPR) established in 1948 framed below definition in 1987. **“Public Relations is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and understanding between an organization and its publics.”**

According to above definition, words like ‘planned’ and ‘sustained’ suggest these relationships are not automatic or effortless. Indeed, they have to be ‘established’ and ‘maintained’. Public relations work exists in time – it is not a series of unrelated events. Also note that the aim is not popularity or approval, but goodwill and understanding. Many think that PR is just about promoting an organization, whereas most PR work involves ensuring publics have an accurate view of the organization, even if they don’t like what it does.

However, to stress that public relations is not about dealing with ‘the public’ as people often think. In PR we say there is no such thing as the public – there are instead many different groups of people – not just consumers, but suppliers, employees, trustees, members, local and national trade and political bodies, local residents, among many others. One of the key concepts of PR is the idea that these groups – or publics –

have different information needs and exert different demands on organizations. Understanding these differences is a vital skill of PR.

Summarizing PR definitions Philip Kitchen (1997) suggest that public relations:

- is a management function
- covers a broad range of activities and purposes in practice
- is regarded as two-way or interactive
- suggests that publics facing companies are not singular (i.e. consumers) but plural
- suggests that relationships are long term rather than short term.

Further considering recent developments in the PR industry, The IPR has extended extending its definition to, **“Public Relations practice is the discipline concerned with the reputation of organizations (or products, services or individuals) with the aim of earning understanding and support.”** This has been simplified further as, **“Public relations is about reputation – the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you.”**

References

1. Theaker Alison, The Public Relations Handbook, 2nd Edition, Routledge Publications, 2004
2. Oliver Sandra, Public Relations Strategy, 2nd Edition, Kogan Page Publications, 2007
3. Plessis Du D F, Introduction to Public Relation and Advertising, 1st Edition, Juta and Company Ltd, 2000
4. Newsom Doug, Haynes, Public Relations Writing (Form & Style), 8th edition, Thomson Wardsworth, 2008

In text Question

1. What is Public Relation? Discuss with the help of any five definitions given in above text.

Instructions

1. Read the Text.

2. Use given references (available online) and additional available reading materials (offline/online) for further understanding.

3. Answer above in text question. Word Limit 800-1000 words.

4. Send your answers to marcus@sjp.ac.lk

5. Kindly mention your name, registration number, course unit and lesson number at the bottom of your answer sheet.