
Public Relations: Strategies and Tactics

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Mr X thought 'coal is amazing'

Mr X was an active member of his community. He had realised many years ago that being a valued member of a community was the secret to a happy life. As such, during the summer Mr X would volunteer to run the canteen at his local cricket club; while in the winter he performed a similar service for his daughter's netball team. His community service extended beyond sporting clubs; Mr X also volunteered as a weekend tour guide at a local museum, and he occasionally assisted with the bookkeeping at his local Surf Life Saving Club. But recently, Mr X had begun to notice an interesting connection between many of the clubs, sports teams, and community facilities present in his city: all seemed to have a connection with one of the three major mining companies that operated in the region. The local sport fields all seemed to be sponsored by mining corporations, as they had large signs acknowledging financial support: 'The Number 1 Sports Field is Proudly Sponsored by Big Coal, "We're Here to Stay"'. He also noticed that the National Rugby League team and the A-League Football team had Big Coal as their major financial sponsors. Even the Surf Life Saving carnival was sponsored by the multinational mining company, Fossil Fuels Unlimited.

Reflecting on the generosity by the major mining companies, Mr X was initially rather impressed by their commitment to the community. After all, many of these companies were now multinational corporations headquartered in the United States, and seemed rather removed from his city and his daughter's netball team, which had recently had their new clubhouse painted thanks to a small community grant from one such company. But gradually, Mr X began to wonder why these companies provided such funds to the community—what was in it for them? And the more he thought about this question the more he began to notice other public relations activities that were clearly funded by the mining industry. Billboards at the airport showed happy youthful miners and engineers looking into the sunset or playing on the beach, under the heading: 'Our Story is Your Story'; conspicuously absent from these billboards was any sign of the gaping hole in the landscape made by an open-cut mine. Mr X had also noticed advertisements on TV and YouTube that celebrated the energy properties of coal, with one advertisement proclaiming: 'Coal, isn't it amazing'. Again, Mr X thought to himself, why spend such large sums on advertisements and community organisations? Was this about image management and promotion, or merely a generous industry sharing some of its profits? Could it perhaps be connected to the battle for public opinion on the issue of fossil fuels and their connection to anthropogenic climate change? Mr X was starting to question whether the goodwill he felt towards the mining industry might have been engineered by the industry, so that he would vote against politicians calling for new environment reforms. As such, he decided to do a little research into public relations strategies and tactics in order to better understand whether someone was trying to influence his attitude towards this controversial industry.

Introduction: Public relations and the marketplace of ideas

Our twenty-first century society is saturated by media images and information. Media conglomerates, public service broadcasters, social media, advertisers and others all compete for our attention and limited cognitive capacity. This cornucopia of information and images is empowering, entertaining and informative, and it is the lifeblood of our glittering consumer societies. This system of communication also connects us in ways that were impossible for previous societies. In 1869, the British philosopher John Stuart Mill (1913) wrote that a free society is one in which all individuals can speak and exchange ideas in, what would later be called, a 'marketplace of ideas' (Martinelli, 2011: 34). Today's marketplace of ideas is a crowded place. In order to be heard amidst the cacophony of voices, public relations specialists use strategic communication to champion and promote the messages and images of their employers.

Public relations is a profession dedicated to the effective use of communication. And yet this definition is far too simple as public relations is so much more than communicating on behalf of corporations, institutions and other organisations. According to Grunig and Hunt (1984: 6) public relations is about 'the management of communication between an organisation and its publics'. Cutlip et al. (2000: 6) expands on this definition: 'public relations is the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the publics on whom its success or failure depends'. Similarly, Harlow (1976: 36) describes the profession as the 'management function' that maintains 'mutual lines of communication' between an organisation 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 organisations manage their relationships with a variety of stakeholders and broader publics (see Martinelli, 2011: 34).

In order to manage the public image and stakeholder relationships of companies and organisations, 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. Senior practitioners are responsible for planning the details of 'what, how and why their organisations communicate with strategic publics' (Mahoney, 2013: 2). As leaders of a communications team, senior practitioners are often part of an organisation 'dominant management coalition' (that is, its most senior managers) (Mahoney, 2013: 2). These senior practitioners are responsible for protecting the company's public reputation by identifying issues, and by using effective communication to align the interests of organisations with those of the significant publics in their operating environment (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier 2006: 55).

This chapter introduces the profession of public relations. Rather than providing merely a descriptive account of 'how to do PR', it offers a critical overview of the profession, including its history, strategies, tactics and ethical guidelines. This discussion will provide the reader with a smorgasbord of ideas that can inform 'best practice' within public relations roles. This chapter also provides several illustrative case studies designed to showcase the diverse activities that a public relations practitioner undertakes. This discussion begins by considering the historical development of public relations and its contemporary reach and influence.

Media releases: Media releases are written in an active voice and provide information for news stories. Good media releases conform to journalistic conventions, such as the 'inverted pyramid' of news writing, and answer the standard questions: who, what, when, where, why, and how.

Backgrounders: Unlike a media release, a backgrounder is written in chronological order or narrative fashion, and is used to provide important 'background information' to contextualise an event, person, or issue.

Fact sheets: As the name suggests, fact sheets are a public relations tactic used to provide a concise summary of relevant facts that a journalist might include in a news story, such as statistics or a timeline of key events.

Public relations: A short history

Public relations is commonly considered to be a 'young profession'—a type of communications byproduct of twentieth-century capitalism. However, the techniques of organised and persuasive communication are in fact as old as human societies. As Stephen Stockwell (2007: 139) argues, the songs of the shaman were used to unify tribal communities throughout history. Likewise, the ballads of ancient bards preserved the myths and legends that 'bound together nascent nations' (Stockwell, 2007: 139). Yet, perhaps the best historical example of professional communicators is found in ancient Greece, where the Sophists developed and taught the 'art of rhetoric'. According to the great philosopher Aristotle, rhetoric was an important dimension of public life and Athenian democracy as it allowed assemblies of citizens to debate and then decide what was in their best interests (Stockwell, 2007: 140). These rhetorical exchanges were the essence of their early form of deliberative democracy and are a communicative tradition that continues today in parliaments around the world.

Aristotle's writings on rhetoric are the first comprehensive studies of strategic communication and its impacts. While Aristotle recognised that the techniques of rhetoric may be used to manipulate, he believed the free play of communication in the rhetorical field produced a self-correcting mechanism conducive to the production of consensual understandings and truth:

[The exchange of rhetoric allows] a contest that brings forth the best among those who offer opposed positions on practical questions [so that] the audience is engaged in such a way that allows it to see more clearly and act more judiciously. (Aristotle cited in Stockwell, 2007: 140).

Some of Aristotle's ideas are still seen in the contemporary practices of political public relations and democratic politics. For instance, Aristotle argued that the elements of persuasive speech are '*ethos*', '*pathos*' and '*logos*' (Martinelli, 2011: 34). *Ethos* refers to the credibility and trustworthiness of the speaker. *Pathos* refers to rhetorical appeals to emotions and belief systems, and in its modern usage can include the use of stories, inspirational quotes or vivid language. Finally, *logos* refers to the quality of the logic and reasoning within an argument. All of these dimensions of rhetoric are still considered by contemporary public relations practitioners when they employ communication campaigns that seek to build support for a particular person or brand, or when using third-party spokespersons for an endorsement (Martinelli, 2011: 34).

While the distant roots of public relations lie in the art of rhetoric practiced by the ancient Greeks, other notable developments accompanied important political events throughout history. In mediaeval European society, both church and state sought to dominate public opinion and used preaching, painting, scripture, songs, rituals, events and public announcements as forms of communicative influence (Harrison, 2011: 41). Likewise, during the Counter-Reformation in seventeenth-century, the Roman Catholic Church developed the term 'propaganda' to refer to communication that sought to influence public opinion (Harrison, 2011: 42). Propaganda, often in the form of pamphlets, subsequently became a notable feature of major political or military events, from the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars to the promotion of British Empire and the colonisation of the 'new world'.

Many histories of public relations see the modern profession emerging in the United States in the 1800s and early 1900s. In the 1830s, a new type of communications professional emerged in the form of a 'press agent', as companies and promoters sought new ways of communicating with the public rather than paying for costly advertisements in newspapers (Harrison, 2011). The role of the press agent was to concoct news stories in order to gain the attention of journalists, thus receiving free publicity regarding an event such as a visiting circus; a product, such as the latest medical elixir; or a cause, such as the anti-slavery movement.

However, according to Kim Harrison's (2011) history of public relations, the press agent model of public relations was not without controversy. Indeed, from the late 1800s, labour movements and the broader public started to seek more accountability and transparency from big business and government.

The public began to recognize that unattributed editorial information was being supplied to newspapers in secret deals. ... When corporations came to understand that using secret press agents to spread news to newspapers led to even worse public opinion, many opted for greater openness and adopted a proactive stance. (Harrison, 2011: 49-50)

It was in the early twentieth-century that a demand for more ethical communication between companies and the mass media set the stage for the emergence of a new type of communications professional: the public relations specialist. In particular, two individuals, Ivy Lee and Edward Bernays, are often identified as the 'founding fathers' of modern public relations due their influence on shaping the principles and practices of the emerging profession (Martinelli, 2011: 36-38).

Ivy Lee (1877–1934) started his career as business journalist before entering political publicity as a press agent, starting his own firm in New York City in 1904. Lee was a new type of publicist in that he did not conceal that he was being paid to have stories of his clients published in the press. Indeed, Lee and his business partner George Parker coauthored an influential 'Declaration of Principles' that he sent to newspaper editors, and in which he pledged his firm to providing a new standard of professionalism: 'accurate information' about subjects of interest to the public.

This is not a secret press bureau. All our work is done in the open. We aim to supply news. This is not an advertising agency; if you think any of our matter ought properly to go to your business office, do not use it. Our matter is accurate. Further details on any subject treated will be supplied promptly, and any editor will be assisted most cheerfully in verifying directly any statement of fact. (Lee and Harper cited in Harrison, 2011: 49).

Lee also introduced several important communication tactics that supported his commitment to fair and transparent dealings. The first was the idea of a ‘press release’ ‘handout’ that detailed the client’s message and provided factual information for journalists in a manner that was transparent, accountable and useful (with the media release now being one of the most common tactics in the PR toolkit). His second innovation was the idea of openness and disclosure during a crisis. For instance, following a major rail accident that resulted in the deaths of 50 passengers, Lee convinced managers to provide information about the accident before rumour and speculation took hold of the news cycle. He also invited journalists to the scene and actively assisted with their enquires, rather than seeking to stonewall their investigations (Harrison, 2011: 53). This approach to crisis management was seen as more socially legitimate than previous attempts by companies to bury information and keep journalists at a distance. It also helped companies minimise damage to their public image by highlighting individual failures within a broader system that, despite facing a current crisis or issue, continued to have benefits for society (such as providing employment, services, tax revenue, etc.) (Coombs, 2006). While Lee died relatively young at the age of 57, his principled tactics had widespread appeal and a lasting impact on **media relations** and **crisis communication**—two important subspecialisations within the broader field of public relations (Harrison, 2011).

Media relations: Media relations is the aspect of public relations which involves dealing directly with media workers, such as journalists, editors, and producers. Media relations practitioners seek to use their conducts within the media industry to disseminate client messages within news items.

Crisis communication: Crisis communication is used by an organisation following a major crisis that threatens their image and financial performance. Crises can be internal or external in origin. For instance, an internal crisis might arise as the result of a major industrial relations dispute or product failure, while an external crisis might result from a natural disaster or macro-economic forces.

In contrast to Lee, Edward Bernays (1891–1995) is a more controversial figure in the history of public relations (Martinelli, 2011: 36–38). Bernays was the nephew of the famous psychologist Sigmund Freud, and introduced ideas from psychology and sociology into the practice of public relations. He began his career as a press agent in 1913, but coined the term ‘public relations counsel’ to describe his activities in 1921 (Harrison, 2011: 55). Bernays also wrote many influential books on public relations and public opinion and taught the first university course specifically entitled ‘public relations’ at New York University in 1923. Like Lee, Bernays viewed the role of the public relations practitioner as an advocate in the arena of public opinion, much as a lawyer is an advocate in the courtroom (Pfau & Wan, 2006: 101–102). Unlike Lee, Bernays viewed public relations as a form of strategic communication that practitioners should use to ‘engineer consent’ by creating messages that will resonate with the public (Pfau & Wan 2006: 101–102). Indeed, for Bernays persuasion was seen as an integral function of public relations and should be based on the scientific understanding of the audience and the formation of public opinion: ‘Persuasion ... is an inseparable part of a democratic way of life’ (Bernays cited in Pfau & Wan, 2006: 101–102).

Bernays introduced several enduring tactics into the public relations toolkit that are still used to persuade strategic publics to this day. One of these common tactics was the use of

‘third party endorsements’, by which Bernays used ‘opinion leaders’, such as scientists or other experts, to offer public support for activities or products. As Harrison (2011) notes, this tactic works on the psychological principle of ‘social proof’, by which people decide what is correct by finding out what others believe to be correct. Bernays famously employed this ‘third party’ technique for his client American Tobacco, using health experts to encourage the American public to smoke cigarettes as a way to lose weight (Harrison, 2011: 56).

Bernays also showed how it was possible to package a public relations message within a broader social movement or trend. For example, in the late 1920s, there was a social taboo concerning women who smoked cigarettes in public. Bernays realised that if he could challenge and change this taboo he could expand the market reach of his client, American Tobacco (Coombs & Holladay, 2010: 149–151). To this end, he organised a pseudo-event, a public protest march, in which ten beautiful women walked down Fifth Avenue in New York during the Easter Day parade to demonstrate that smoking in public was a sign of the women’s liberation movement rather than a sign of dubious character (Harrison 2011: 57). At that time, Bernays did not disclose that he had organised the ‘Torches of Freedom’ stunt, or that his secretary was one of the participants; and thus the event drew a great deal of media interest (Coombs & Holladay, 2010: 150). Moreover, Bernays had demonstrated that the profession of public relations might possess some of the same covert tactics of its progenitor, the press agency.

While many histories of public relations focus on the role of Edward Bernays, Ivy Lee and specific developments within the publicity industry in the United States, recent research has shown that professional communication was also emerging in other parts of the world (Harrison, 2011). Europe, the United Kingdom, Australia and elsewhere all had their own histories in the early development and use of press agents, propaganda, and other forms of persuasive communication that helped prepare the way for the emergence of modern public relations, which was at least partially exported from the United States during the early stages of globalisation following the Second World War (see Botan & Hazleton, 2006).

In regards to the development of the public relations profession in Australia, a major catalyst for innovation and growth occurred during World War II. In 1943, the US General, Douglas MacArthur, arrived in Australia to coordinate the war effort against the Japanese as the Allied Commander in Chief in the Pacific. A charismatic leader and who understood the power of mass communication, MacArthur brought 35 public relations staff with him to Australia. As Harrison notes, MacArthur introduced the term public relations to Australia and New Zealand with the military hierarchies of these two nations establishing their own public relations staff that learned from the ‘news management’ techniques of the Americans (Burton, 2007: 2).

After the war public relations firms began to emerge in Sydney. In 1947 there were two ‘public relations counsellors’ listed in the telephone directory. One was George Fitzpatrick, who described himself as a ‘practitioner in public persuasion, propaganda, publicity’ (Burton, 2007: 2). The second was, Asher Joel, who had previously worked as a propagandist for the Royal Australian Navy during the war. In the years after the Second World War, Joel and Fitzpatrick became the founding figures of Australian public relations, proving that the wartime communication tactics of MacArthur’s military PR team could be used for commercial objectives. Within a few years, the industry began to grow. In late 1949 early adopters of the new communication profession established the Australian Institute of Public Relations, whose name was changed in 1960 to the Public Relations Institute of Australia

(PRIA) (Harrison, 2011: 66). By the early 1960s there were an estimated 500 practitioners employed in the new profession across the country (Burton, 2007: 3).

Today there are approximately 14,600 Australian practitioners of public relations (Chia & Synnott, 2012: 7). The Australian PR industry is supported by the activities and guidelines of the professional association, PRIA. Courses in public relations and strategic communication are offered at most Australian universities, including some of the nation's oldest and most prestigious tertiary education institutions. Australian public relations is a field in which women have excelled, with more than 70% of practitioners estimated to be women (Harrison, 2011: 72). Much like the principles of ethical communication first outlined by Ivy Lee, Australia's modern PR practitioners seek to provide useful news items to the news media. They also play valuable roles in internal communication within major corporations, and help government departments provide greater transparency regarding public policy initiatives (Young, 2007). Whether they are employed in in-house communications units or for private PR consultancies, Australian public relations practitioners are 'key activists' within society's public sphere (Hobbs, 2015), and they use the latest technologies to make sure their employer's perspectives are heard in the marketplace of ideas. In so doing, these communication professionals play a valuable commercial and social role in our society, providing both information and entertainment.

The modern public relations profession is not without its controversies. At times certain companies have been accused of using public relations tactics that manipulate and bury the truth, rather than informing or persuading through the effective use of evidence and honest argumentation. Indeed, the vignette that began this chapter provided an example of two PR tactics used by the mining industry that many would consider to be controversial given the role played by fossil fuels in anthropogenic climate change. For example, the PR tactic of inoculation seeks to bolster a company's public image in order to make it immune to potential regulatory changes that might be financially detrimental to a company's business model or operations (Pfau & Wan, 2006: 123-125). By conducting a 'charm offensive' and giving financial support to community organisations (see Pearse, McKnight & Burton, 2013), the mining industry effectively, and knowingly, cultivates goodwill within many electorates in which they operate. Thus these companies make it difficult for governments and politicians to pass legislation that might seek to limit or shrink their carbon producing operations, such as by introducing a tax on carbon polluting industries or an 'Emissions Trading Scheme' (two policies Australia has tried to introduce in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and prevent climate change—see McKnight & Hobbs, 2013). Likewise, the mining industry regularly uses the tactic of advocacy advertising as part of 'inoculation PR campaigns' in order to strengthen public attitudes consonant with the organisation's position on issues, and to attack policy reforms with which the industry disagrees, such as the Rudd government's introduction of a new mining tax in 2010 (McKnight & Hobbs, 2013).

While it is possible that public relations might be used for dubious ends, most PR practitioners and their campaigns are ethical, useful and socially responsible. As is discussed in the next section of this chapter, many of the most widely used PR campaigns employ informative tactics that seek to align the commercial interest of a company with the social and environmental interests of the broader community. Indeed, the dominant PR theories, backed by the research evidence, suggest that the most effective public relations teams are those that employ symmetrical methods of communication. That is, effective PR teams use two-way communication between a company and its publics, rather than asymmetric communication

intended to influence by overwhelming existing attitudes (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2006: 55).

Inoculation public relations: An inoculation strategy is designed to strengthen an organisation's reputation within a community making it 'immune' to external reputational attacks from adversaries. Inoculation PR can involve the cultivation of widespread feelings of goodwill in the operating environment.

Advocacy advertising: Corporations and organisations use advocacy advertising as part of PR strategy designed to influence views on a particular issue, so that pressure is applied on politicians and governments to make decisions that favour the aims and operations of the advertiser.

Strategies, campaigns and tactics

Perhaps the most famous scholar in the field of public relations research is James Grunig, with his work influencing research and theory in communication studies, as well as the professional standards and tactics of practitioners around the world. According to Grunig and Grunig (1992), there are four different models of public relations: (1) the press agency/publicity model; (2) the public information model; (3) the two-way asymmetric model; and (4) the two-way symmetric model. In the press agency/publicity model, public relations seeks to shape public opinion by maximising positive publicity and minimizing negative publicity, often through the use of tactics like pseudo-events, propaganda, and tactical persuasion (communication tactics sometimes labelled 'spin' or 'spin doctoring'). In contrast, in the public information model the purpose of public relations is to disseminate factual information, such as when an organisation or government agency produce informative websites or provide fact sheets, backgrounders and media releases that journalists can use in the production of the news. Both of these first two models in Grunig's typology presuppose one-way communication from an organisation to their publics, and there is only limited room, or indeed interest, in feedback from the public to management (Strömbäck and Kioussis, 2011: 19). The majority of PR activity can be classified within these one-way models of communication (Strömbäck and Kioussis, 2011: 19).

However, increasingly PR units seek to provide information about the public to the dominant management coalition within a given company, thus opening two-way channels of communication. In J. Grunig's typology the 'two-way asymmetric model' of public relations is used as a form of 'scientific persuasion', where practitioners use the tools of social science—focus groups, surveys, and theories—to persuade people to accept the organisation's point of view (Grunig & Hunt, 1984: 22). Feedback to the dominant coalition is important, but only inasmuch as it can be used to inform framing strategies within written and spoken tactics. In contrast, in Grunig's final model of 'two-way symmetric' communication, the purpose of public relations is to achieve mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics, so that management can avoid crises and conflicts, as well as maintain the company's social legitimacy. In the two-way symmetric model of public relations, the PR practitioner works to ensure a process of rational and fair argumentation, thus balancing communicative power between the organisation and the public (Strömbäck and Kioussis, 2011: 19).

James Grunig's research is also well known for his development of the 'excellence theory' of public relations (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2006). Expanding on his 1984 work on models

of public relations, Grunig and his collaborators undertook an extensive study of PR departments and their activities to identify those values and practices that led to excellent outcomes for organisations and their employees. While all four of Grunig's models of public relations were identified in his excellence study, his findings clearly suggested that those companies that practiced two-way symmetric communication and sought to align their interests with those of their publics reaped the greatest commercial rewards.

Public relations contributes to organizational effectiveness when it helps reconcile the organization's goals with the expectations of its strategic constituencies. This contribution has monetary value to the organization. Public relations contributes to effectiveness by building quality, long-term relations with strategic constituencies. (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2006: 34)

Grunig's excellence study demonstrated that PR could proactively manage challenges that corporations face in their operating environment, including litigation, regulation, legislation and negative publicity caused by poor relationships. His research also showed that internal symmetric communication between managers and employees was especially important for preventing internal crises, such as industrial relations disputes or unethical conduct, and helped to build a 'participative culture' that increased workplace productivity and morale (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2006: 55).

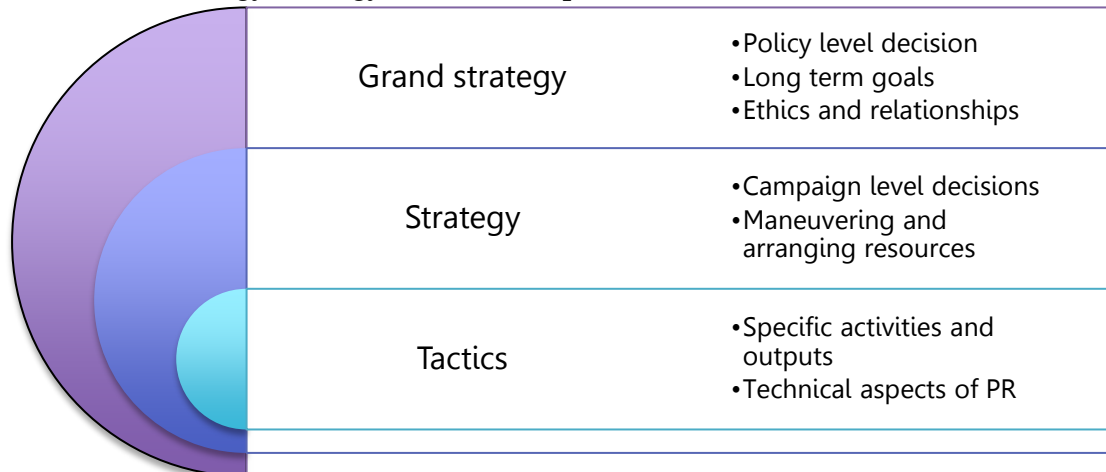
In deciding whether to adopt a one-way or two-way model of public relations, an organisation must consider the role of strategy and how it relates to specific goals, objectives and tactics. Carl Botan (2006) proposes that effective public relations requires three levels of strategic planning: grand strategy, strategy and tactics.

Grand Strategy is the policy-level decisions an organisation makes about goals, alignments, ethics, and relations with publics and other forces in its environment.

Strategy is the campaign-level decision making involving maneuvering and arranging resources and arguments to carry out the organisational grand strategies.

Tactics are the specific activities and outputs through which strategies are implemented—the doing or technical aspects of public relations. (Botan, 2006: 225-226)

Botan (2006) argues that a company's strategy and tactics must be consistent with the overarching grand strategy of the organisation, so that stable and positive relationships are built with strategic publics during public relations campaigns. It is to the topic of campaigns and tactics that we now turn.

Figure 1: Grand strategy, strategy and tactics in public relations

Source: Adapted from the research of Botan (2006)

Public relations campaigns

Campaigns are critical to influencing public or organisational policy, modifying social norms and changing behaviour. Fundamentally, they raise awareness of issues by facilitating the goal of effective public relations to generate ‘stimulating conversations about reality and letting those shape perceptions’ (Turnbull, 2013). A more technical, process-oriented definition of the campaign is ‘a systematic set of communication activities, each with a specific defined purpose, continued over a set period of time and dealing with objectives relating to a particular issue’ (Harrison cited in Sheehan & Xavier, 2006: 2).

A campaign planning process will generally include the following steps:

Identification of issue and problem statement

1. *Research and design of key messages*
2. *Identification of target publics*
3. *Setting of goals and objectives*
4. *Design and implementation of strategies and tactics*
5. *Evaluation*

See Figure 2 for a visual overview of this process.

A primary objective of any public relations campaign is effective issues management: ‘the identification or creation of issues and the application of systematic procedures designed to influence the issue’s resolution in a manner favourable to the issues manager’ (Coombs & Holladay, 2007: 82). This puts the onus on campaign leaders to detect and respond to emerging socio-political trends through constant environmental scanning and to establish legitimacy in two ways. Firstly, they must attain recognition of the issue to be managed as a public concern. Secondly, they must establish the legitimacy of their client to speak or represent on the issue, establishing a connection that responds to those who question, ‘what right do you have to speak for this issue?’ (Coombs, 1992).

Campaign planning requires thorough research to inform messaging strategies, and the segmentation of the general audience into target publics for whom specific messages are tailored. Carefully crafted and effectively framed key messages are an integral element of

campaigns and are particularly relevant in media relations and crisis communication when the informational environment is congested. Techniques of framing, whereby practitioners work to construct a particular version of reality in the minds of target audiences and publics, are vital to key message development processes (Hallahan, 1999; Ihlen & Nitz, 2008). Perceptions of credibility originate in processes of the co-construction of meaning between public relations professionals and target publics, and are a result of all factors involved in the design, delivery and reception of key messages (James, 2011).

Figure 2: Four phases of strategic planning for a campaign



Source: Adapted from Smith (2013: 14)

This strategic focus on communication with key publics is far more likely to succeed than a list of tactics applied to a general audience in an ad hoc manner. While public relations practitioners of the past relied on getting the attention of news gatekeepers, such as journalists and editors, via the common tactic of media releases, the digital age requires that all information be designed for online use and visual consumption. Engaging, rich media content including audio, video, images and links that tell a vivid story is more likely to be shared across social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Vine, Snapchat, Instagram and Pinterest, thereby allowing organisations to speak directly with their strategic publics without needing to go through the mainstream mass media. Public relations blogging is also providing actors with voices in new virtual public spheres.

Social media tactics increasingly blur the boundaries between public relations, marketing and advertising. Some constants remain, however. Timeliness is vital in attaining viral distribution through an increasingly rapid news cycle, and while use of SEO (search engine optimisation) keywords that move content up the Google hierarchy is now a standard public relations practice, many successful campaigns still pivot on an effective, credible spokesperson who, if consistently ‘on message’, can reduce distrust and cynicism in

audiences. Media training is recommended to assist spokespeople in maintaining the integrity of message frames. Third party or independent advocates lend further legitimacy to campaigns.

Evaluation is a vitally important, yet much neglected, stage in the campaign process. It includes data collection and recommendations for improvements to be made to the campaign in the future. One reason why good evaluation is rarely carried out is that the reception and interpretation of key messages is little understood and neglected in public relations research. Whether or not the audience exposed to the strategically framed message produces the desired effects remains a challenge for those who evaluate the success or otherwise of public relations campaigns (Olson, 2011).

Media evaluation in the form of outputs, rather than outcomes in terms of behaviour change, remains the primary method of evaluating public relations campaigns. Whether or not media report key messages is the main indicator of success, in Australia at least (James, 2011). It is 'a fallacy' to consider a campaign a success 'if one gets lots of overall pick-up, and even "key-message" pick-up, without checking that the messages delivered were accurate and resonated well with the targeted audience' (Jeffrey et al., 2006: 10). Social media monitoring tools including Hootsuite, TweetReach, TweetDeck and SocialMention can help campaign managers in the difficult task of measuring and tracking influence.

From media releases to shareable online content

Traditionally, *routine publicity* and *staged events* were the two ways public relations practitioners sought media coverage for their clients. The former relied on news releases and editorials based on public statements, press conferences and interviews. Media releases remain one of several written tactics that are an integral element of traditional public relations campaigns. They incorporate the key messages that the organisation wants the public to know. However, the media landscape is radically altering with the 'proliferation of platforms, fusion of formats, and blurring of lines between traditional and social media' (Ogilvy Director of Media cited in Lipschultz, 2015: 85). What has persisted is the potency of media exposure. How this exposure is obtained is more challenging.

In the digital media era the emphasis is moving from the traditional one-page press release to rich and shareable online content that can be directed at individuals through social media networks and other content sharing platforms. This requires public relations practitioners to be increasingly adept at managing content that is timely and contextual while maintaining a customer focus and a clear content strategy. The blending of 'paid amplification' through social media along with the convergence of public relations, advertising and marketing functions has led industry leaders such as Edelman PR to classify new archetypes including curated, co-created, original, consumer-generated and sponsored content (Amano, 2013).

In this complex new media environment, business is increasingly turning to public relations agencies for advice and assistance with brand building and reputation management. Edelman's Creative Newsroom provides clients 'with an agile and integrated platform for storytelling, for both planned and real-time marketing' while GolinHarris's holistic engagement network, The Bridge, 'pairs mainstream and digital experts with creative specialists like copywriters, digital designers and video producers to uncover storytelling opportunities in real time, deliver critical business insights, engage influencers and customers and create the content that shapes news and conversations' (cited in Lipschultz, 2015: 79).

From the individual practitioner's perspective it is clear that the basic skills of traditional public relations practice—such as writing media releases, compiling backgrounders, and organising news conference—are becoming less relevant in the digital media age. According to Jim Macnamara (2010) practitioners require new skills such as 'how to enter conversations online to represent their organisations, correct inaccurate information, and defend against criticisms':

This requires new ways of talking and new ways of listening. They need to learn to write all over again in a new style that is very different from news releases, brochures, annual reports, speeches and journalism. They also need to re-learn media relations, as traditional media databases no longer provide the contacts needed, and bloggers and other social media authors usually do not accept news releases and rarely attend interviews or news conferences. (Macnamara, 2010: 8)

It should also be noted that journalists and other content producers are increasingly turning to websites to collect information. A well organised, easy to navigate website with up-to-date, accurate information including news releases and backgrounders on organisational history, mission statements and other practical information is essential. Ease of interface and dialogic loops that enable visitors to ask questions, and organisations to respond, generates return visits, creating the sought after 'website stickiness'.

The digital media landscape is, arguably, starting to level the playing field for non-profit organisations that rely on small budgets for their public relations activities. A further advantage for social justice organisations is provided by progressive initiatives such as the SPIN Project by the Independent Media Institute (IMI), which is dedicated to 'strengthening and supporting independent journalism and to improving the public's access to information sources' (IMI, 2015). By providing clients with training in media relations and building peer networks IMI, along with sector-specific set-ups like the Green Media Toolshed, is merging progressive activism with alternative media, and arguably revitalising citizen engagement in the public sphere.

Social media and the breakdown of the 'control paradigm'

What Mark Poster (1995) termed the Second Media Age began with the internet, followed by interactive social media enabled by Web 2.0 and the emergent Web 3.0. Some scholars propose that these innovations are putting 'the public back into public relations' (Breakenridge cited in Macnamara, 2010: 3) based on the potential of interactive applications to realise the two-way symmetrical model of communication lauded by fans of the excellence theory (Grunig & Grunig, 1992) and also Kent and Taylor's (2002) dialogic model.

Political interest and activist groups including GetUp! appear to use the new interactive media more effectively than the majority of formal, corporate organisations and politicians. This is due to barriers the latter face including public service regulations, bureaucratic approval processes, tight restrictions on what is acceptable language and content, and meagre investment in resources to manage consultation platforms (Macnamara, 2010). These 'control paradigm practices' are being eclipsed by 'alternative interactive public relations strategies' (Macnamara, 2009: 11) that exploit the affordances of Web 2.0:

Social media makes it possible for organisations to fully engage in dialogic communication with stakeholders...the word dialogue indicates open-minded, specific

message content and a sincere listening attitude.... When politicians actively share their candid opinions through the open public sphere of Twitter this can cultivate an open-minded image that leads members of the public to perceive politician users as sincere and reliable. (cited in Lipschultz, 2015: 75)

Many corporates have much to learn from activists who are practicing public relations by increasing engagement in fluid collaborations, integrative campaigning and the use of alternative media platforms to create 'new spaces of social movement activism' (Olesen, 2005: 419). The internet has provided social movements with new tools that facilitate and support traditional offline action by enhancing organisation, mobilisation and transnationalisation, and also offers more creative online modes, including email petitions and 'bombs', virtual sit-ins and hacking. These internet-supported modes of collective action enable social movements to transnationalise and challenge the more extravagantly funded public relations campaigns of global corporations (Mann, 2014).

Media events

The internet provides public relations practitioners with opportunities to bypass the mainstream media and is especially helpful in disseminating image events—the primary mode of public discourse for politics in the 'televisual electronic public sphere' (DeLuca & Peeples, 2002). Everyone is familiar with the NGO Greenpeace's 'media mind bombs' which effectively raised the profile of environmental issues through shocking media images such as activists climbing smokestacks to hang banners and blocking whaling ships in tiny rubber boats. Arguably the first citizen's group to recognise the power of the moving image, Greenpeace's stunts continue to challenge the view that (written) content is king.

But, when organisations rely on the politics of spectacle they frequently draw a hostile response from mass media in coverage that depicts their behaviour as 'the social construction of deviance' (McLeod & Hertog, 1999). Protesters are often framed negatively, as anti-authoritarian and destabilising, as initially claimed by Todd Gitlin (1980) in his study of *The New York Times*' coverage of the Students for a Democratic Society movement. Hank Johnston and John Noakes (2005:19) refer to the 'protest paradigm' as a 'ready-made frame template that the media apply to social movement activity that, among other things, trivialises and demonises social movement activities and beliefs'.

The alter-globalisation protests at the WTO Ministerial Conference in Seattle in 1999, a prime-time media event framed by newsmakers as the 'Battle for Seattle', attracted this type of delegitimising framing in mainstream media characterising activists in one case as 'disorganised anarchists on a demo-holiday' (Rogers, 2004: 107). The desire to control and communicate alternative frames resulted in the creation of the independent media centre (IMC), Indymedia, the first of a world-wide network of platforms for the circulation of alternative news and information (Juris, 2007).

CASE STUDY: LOCK THE GATE ALLIANCE

Community activism is becoming a prominent testing ground for public relations campaigns as people are losing trust in governments to effectively represent their interests against those of private corporations. In Australia, community opposition to coal seam gas (CGS) and large-scale coal mining has led to the rise of a 'new face of resistance to environmental vandalism' (Hutton, 2012) in the form of the Lock the

Gate Alliance (LTGA). Characterised by a network centric approach that includes tactics such as grassroots lobbying, attending rallies, signing petitions and contacting political representatives, LTGA is becoming increasingly influential in winning support for its campaign to drive extractive industries off productive agricultural land and sacred Aboriginal sites, and aims to change government policy to prevent future developments in vulnerable areas.

As a broad-based alliance of people from all backgrounds and ideological leanings, LTGA demonstrates a new way of doing politics that defies traditional classifications. Its success has been attributed to pragmatic approaches to coalition building that accommodate unusual alliances between farmers, conservationists, urban activists and traditional custodians of the land; face-to-face community building to establish ownership of campaigns; training of participants in strategic nonviolent direct action such as 'blockades'; and powerful storytelling supported through professionally created and easily shareable videography. The 'locked gate' itself telegraphs powerful values and beliefs that include defense of country and rural livelihoods:

A locked gate in the bush is a powerful symbol. It means you can't come in and it expresses the determination of landowners to refuse entry to resource companies even though the law might say they have no choice. (Hutton, 2012: 17)

LTGA provides insight into the relationship between the online and offline worlds of protest. Through networked media platforms its members challenge state-sanctioned framings of productive resources such as land in terms of economic worth alone, using Facebook and Twitter to mobilise protestors and contest the role of CSG in Australia's energy policy. Tweet frequency, based on hashtags including #fracking #CSG, #lockthegate and #gasland, has been identified as a proxy for more traditional offline protest events at physical project sites and centres of power such as Parliament House (Kuch & Titus, 2014). Photos and information about events, including towns declaring themselves CSG-free, 'human' signs spelling out 'Stop CSG!' and abseilers dropping banners off cliffs, is carefully selected and uploaded to social media platforms. This is an active process of audiencing material from protests that is then amplified by mainstream journalists and even politicians to the wider public.

As a radical activist organisation, rather than reformist, LTGA does not promote negotiation as a preferred outcome of its activities, leading to some criticism of its approach. Policies of non-cooperation deny the opportunity for compromise. As Tony Jaques and Chris Galloway (2012: 43) note 'politics is often described as the art of compromise, and the CSG issue is fundamentally a political issue'. By marginalising itself LTGA may discount itself as an actor in future negotiations, therefore limiting its ability to achieve its objectives. Yet no one can deny its remarkable success in capturing the zeitgeist in rural Australia.

Advocacy in a marketplace of ideas

Ethical decision-making in public communication is always complex but perhaps more so for the public relations practitioner who serves, to various degrees, as an advocate, an educator and a persuader. Individuals have to consider their own personal ethics along with those of the institution they represent. Ethical responsibilities extend to at least the following publics: news media, clients, government agencies, educational institutions, consumers, stockholders and analysts, community, competitors, critics and other practitioners.

Corporate public relations, with its overt concern for reputation management, is frequently thought of as self-advantaging. For those working in this sector professional public relations associations provide useful codes of ethics. The Code of Ethics of the Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA) 'requires members to adhere to the highest standards of ethical practice and professional competence' and holds all 'duty-bound to act responsibly and to be accountable for their actions' (PRIA, 2009). Fair and honest dealing, declaration of conflicting interest and a commitment to accuracy are basic standards. These codes of conduct, mission and values statements, while voluntary, provide a basis of information for public relations practitioners to use to guide their practice.

Changes in the media landscape, and especially the decline in investigative journalism caused by the collapse of the print news industry's advertising revenue model, raise particular issues for public relations practitioners as content providers. Author of *Flat Earth News* (2008), Nick Davies, despairs of a news environment where journalists are increasingly reliant on public relations output as they have insufficient time to develop good leads and contacts, check facts and interview sufficient people to get to the truth. In describing as 'life in a news factory' as 'churnalism' he draws on a scathing assessment of the media by *Times* journalist Nigel Hawkes.

we are churning out stories today, not writing them. Almost everything is recycled from another source...the work is done by agencies and/or writers of press releases. ...the work has been deskilled (cited in Davies, 2008: 59)

The questions this raises for journalism as a profession are the topic for another chapter. For public relations practitioners, however, this is an opportunity to renovate the image of their profession by making a genuine contribution to the public interest through demonstrating technical competence and ethically justifiable behavior.

As evidenced through the Lock the Gate case study, a corporate centric view of public relations is short-sighted and marginalises the contribution of activists in the field, as well as potentially limiting what we consider to be public relations and how we understand public relations practice. Pressure groups, grassroots organisations, social movements and special groups 'exerting pressure on an organisation on behalf of a cause' (Grunig, 1992: 504) are part of a healthy democracy and contribute to the public sphere through representing the public interest. Public relations practitioners possess great potential, and a responsibility, to give a voice to the marginalised.

While advocacy separates activist and corporate public relations, constructive engagement between these two groups can enable the latter to be valuable resources for political and organisational change. To be effective, processes of collaboration must be conducted according to mutually agreed goals of engagement that prevent corporations from exercising cooption tactics and enable activists to maintain their identity or 'edge'. If activists

are able to challenge the status quo they can prove valuable to an organisation by identifying problems it needs to address.

PRIA Code of Ethics

1. Members shall deal fairly and honestly with their employers, clients and prospective clients, with their fellow workers including superiors and subordinates, with public officials, the communication media, the general public and with fellow members of PRIA.
2. Members shall avoid conduct or practices likely to bring discredit upon themselves, the Institute, their employers or clients.
3. Members shall not knowingly disseminate false or misleading information and shall take care to avoid doing so inadvertently.
4. With the exception of the requirements of Clause 9 members shall safeguard the confidences of both present and former employers and clients, including confidential information about employers' or clients' business affairs, technical methods or processes, except upon the order of a court of competent jurisdiction.
5. No member shall represent conflicting interests nor, without the consent of the parties concerned, represent competing interests.
6. Members shall refrain from proposing or agreeing that their consultancy fees or other remuneration be contingent entirely on the achievement of specified results.
7. Members shall inform their employers or clients if circumstances arise in which their judgment or the disinterested character of their services may be questioned by reason of personal relationships or business or financial interests.
8. Members practising as consultants shall seek payment only for services specifically commissioned.
9. Members shall be prepared to identify the source of funding of any public communication they initiate or for which they act as a conduit.
10. Members shall, in advertising and marketing their skills and services and in soliciting professional assignments, avoid false, misleading or exaggerated claims and shall refrain from comment or action that may injure the professional reputation, practice or services of a fellow member.
11. Members shall inform the Board of the Institute and/or the relevant State/Territory Council(s) of the Institute of evidence purporting to show that a member has been guilty of, or could be charged with, conduct constituting a breach of this Code.
12. No member shall intentionally injure the professional reputation or practice of another member.

13. Members shall help to improve the general body of knowledge of the profession by exchanging information and experience with fellow members.
 14. Members shall act in accord with the aims of the Institute, its regulations and policies.
 15. Members shall not misrepresent their status through misuse of title, grading, or the designation FPRIA (Fellow of PRIA), MPRIA (Member of PRIA) or APRIA (Associate member of PRIA).
- (Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA), 2009)

Conclusion

Public relations is an exciting profession. As this chapter has shown, public relations practitioners use a range of strategies and tactics in the service of commercial, non-profit, and governmental organisations. The goal of public relations is to provide useful news items to journalists that are factual and which conform to the 'public interest'. Public relations also aims to meet the needs of organisations by using digital media technologies to engage in two-way conversations with various publics. When public relations is done well it can work to align commercial and social interests, and prevent conflicts between companies and publics within their operating environment. While it is possible for organisations to use certain covert public relations tactics to manipulate people rather than build mutual understanding, most public relations activities are ethical and transparent forms of communication between interested parties. We contend that public relations practitioners are 'key communication activists' within the marketplace of ideas, who are a positive force when acting as vehicles for information and fair debate, and an negative force when using covert tactics and spin to restrain discourse and manipulate attitudes and behaviours (Hobbs, 2013: 15; Stockwell, 2007: 141).

Summary

This chapter has provided a detailed overview of contemporary public relations. It has noted that:

- Public relations practitioners are communication workers who seek to have their clients heard in the marketplace of ideas.
- Persuasive communication goes back to ancient Greece many thousands of years ago.
- The modern profession of public relations developed out of the publicity and press agent activities of the 1800s.
- Digital media technologies are playing an important role in allowing for two-way communication between publics and organisations
- Good public relations uses ethical communication to build mutual understanding between corporations and their strategic publics.

Revision questions

1. Why does public relations have an image problem?
2. Is PRIA's Code of Ethics sufficient for ensuring ethical communication within the Australian public relations industry?

3. Aristotle argued that the elements of persuasive speech are ‘*ethos*’, ‘*pathos*’ and ‘*logos*’. Are these concepts still relevant? Think of real world examples to illustrate your points.
4. What are the arguments for and against the use of persuasion in corporate public relations?
5. How is social media changing public relations?
6. Journalists and public relations practitioners have a professional rivalry because both are dependent on each other: one as a source of subsidised information and the other as a channel to communicate with the public. Who has more power in this relationship, the journalist or the PR practitioner?

Further reading

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Weblinks

Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA): <http://www.pria.com.au>

Minerals Council of Australia’s advocacy advertisement ‘Coal: It’s Amazing What it Can Do’: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKp8W1jBuHw#action=share>

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