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7

RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS – ANALYZING THE ENVIRONMENT, THE ORGANIZATION, THE STAKEHOLDER

Unit Structure

7.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to understand:

- Meaning of Research and Analysis
- Understanding the environment, the organization, the stakeholder
- Understanding the context with respect to Public Relations Campaigns

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Research expects one to be curious. There have been plenty of research that has been done in the field of public relations. Papers can be found in media and public relations journals worldwide on various functions of public relations and public relations campaigns. These could be publicity, media relations, crisis communication, audience research, campaigns in public relations etc. Once the researcher has decided the research problem, research question and or hypothesis it becomes easier to put together a literature review for the body of the research to begin. The process of doing the next phase of research will involve putting a research methodology together before starting data collection for the said research question and or hypothesis. Analysis is the next big step where the researcher does the work manually or uses analysis software. This step is where the findings emerge after all the work done in the research process so far.

Public relations research can be well explained by the following definition "Research gives the hard data necessary to provide value to the organization, and helps provide information to make decisions that have real impact" - Gronstedt (1997). If not for research it will be difficult for organisations to really know where they are headed in terms of communicating with their audiences. Research helps discover the various areas of concern which can help organisations help into building relationships, making effective programmes and take on time needed actions that will stop issues from not being blown out of proportions and later becoming huge issues. -(Broom & Dozier, 1990; Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2000). Research helps discover the various areas of concern which can help organisations help into building relationships, making effective programmes and take on time needed actions that will stop issues from not being blown out of proportions and later becoming huge issues. -(Broom & Dozier, 1990; Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2000).

SPSS and SAS are more commonly used for analysing data through software. Microsoft Excel 2000 (version 9) provides a set of data analysis tools called the Analysis Tool Pak. This can help develop complex statistical analysis. As you input the data and parameters for each analysis; the tool presents results based on the specific statistical macro functions. Even charts and can be generated other than output tables to display results. R analytics is data analytics programming using R programming language which is an open-source language used for statistical computing or graphics. It is now also being used in statistical analysis and data mining.

7.3 Defining and analysing the environment, the organization, the stakeholder

The terms environment, organisation, and the stakeholder here in context is with public relations and the campaigns that are created by public relations practitioners. Before we define these terms lets first have a glimpse on what is public relations (PR) and how have experts and researchers defined this field of communication.

Some definitions: -

"All business begins with the public permission and exists by public approval." In 1939 at a Public Relations conference, he said "Public relations, is not publicity only, not management only; it is what everybody in the business from top to bottom says and does when in contact with the public." - Arthur W. Page, Former AT&T Vice President, Public Relations

Public Relations Society of America PRSA agreed upon a definition after a few thousand submissions: "Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics."

Public Relations has been an evolving practice, its origin and growth has traversed many years across the world. Sriramesh quotes James Grunig's definition of public relations that it is "the management of communication between an organization and its publics (Sriramesh & White, 1992). Public relations serve the functions of information, communication, persuasion, image building, continuous building of trust, management of conflicts, and the generation of consensus" (Sriramesh K. , 2003). PR is in the business of persuasion. You are always trying to persuade somebody or the other.

The Princeton Review notes that: "A public relations specialist is an image shaper. Their job is to generate positive publicity for their client and enhance their reputation … They keep the public informed about the activity of government agencies, explain policy, and manage political campaigns. Public relations people working for a company may handle consumer relations, or the relationship between parts of the company such as the managers and employees, or different branch offices." In PR it is said that there is no such thing as the public - there are in fact different groups of people - not just consumers, but suppliers, employees, trustees, members, local and national trade and political bodies, residents, among many others. Thus, Public Relations is a profession which practitioners of it will have to look very seriously into the relationship of an organisation with its stakeholders and always try to improvise upon its communications and activities to maintain it.

Environment:

Environment of an organisation is comprised of various external and internal forces that have an impact on it. These forces either do good or may become obstacles to the growth of an organisation. These can be both opportunities and threats to the well-being of an organisation. But the challenge is also that sometimes these resources cannot be easily available (Riggio, 2018). There are far more complex entities that can influence the organisations such as competitors that can encroach upon your marketing territories, modern ever changing technologies, and price increase of raw materials. These can pose a challenge to an organization's position vis a vis competition (Truxillo, Bauer & Erdogan, 2016).

It is natural then that organisations will then try to control these vital forces impacting them. If they have to stay in the market and sustain themselves in the eyes of the customer or any other immediate beneficiary then they have to manage two important levels of organisational environments : a general one and a specific one (also called the *organizational domain*).

- The general environment is comprised of the political-legal, economic and socio-cultural backdrop in which it operates. This has expanded globally due to modern technology and the Internet which brings the world together like a global village. Various transactions and exchanges bind the organisations and their audiences. The main goal is that their specific environment or their domain is protected and their position safe.

- The specific environment or *organizational domain* consists of the various goods and services that an organisation produces for their stakeholders including customers. This can only happen if a value proposition is created for especially customers, employees, and all other stakeholders in terms of the goods and services that they create. The organisation can only maintain its important position in the eyes of the audience if it continues to prove its usefulness to the audience in all aspects, failing which it will lose its specific environment with the advent of new competition which is doing better than what it set out to do.

One thing is very clear from the above explanation that there is constant maintenance and management that needs to be done by the organisation all the time so that don't lose position and thus the stakeholders that make it what it is. The public relations function is akin to that of the boundary spanner where any impending danger is caught by monitoring eyes. The environments in which organisations operate in are always dynamic. The current times are perfect examples where we can see that a pandemic and a war between two countries can completely upset a lot of other connected entities that affect business of organisations across the world. It is the function of a public relations manager to respond to crisis situations by clear communication and active response to questions raised by stakeholders.

Organisation:

"A group of people who work together in an organized way for a shared purpose."- Cambridge Dictionary

E.g., the World Health Organization, Bennett and Coleman Co. Ltd, Unilever to name a few.

"An organisation can be defined as an entity or a social unit that comprises several people who work together to achieve a common goal. It is a structured unit where the role, responsibilities, and authorities of each member are clearly defined, and relationships between all the members of the organisation are established". - *marketing91.com*

For e.g., A college is an example of a formal organisation. The goal of a college is to provide quality education to all the students who take admission in this organisation. There can be different types of organisations they could be doing voluntary work, temporary work. E.g., distribution of food and clothing for homeless, ones fighting for rights of women and children etc. or it could be an organisation doing continuous work and long term. Also organisations can be put into various categories such as government, non-government, corporations, international, political, non-profit, charities, armed forces, educational institutes, cooperatives, and partnerships, etc. Organisational structures can be further classified into ecologies, committees and juries, pyramid or hierarchical and finally matrix.

From the above text it is clear that organisations are built to serve the public and do business. The environment under which they operate and the stakeholders that they cater to are very crucial for the sustenance of these organisations. From a public relations perspective engagement with the stakeholders is important for these organisations. They engage to build an image; they engage to sell. These two primary functions is what public relations essentially caters to. By using various promotional tactics including the most important media relations the organisations continues to create and sustain images both during happy and crisis times. Public Relations function in organisation can be a small or a large one depending on the structure and size of an organisation. As the author has observed that in organisation the image building and media relations function can be under the corporate communication team. The corporate communications manager here directly reports to the CEO, while in some the public relations function is part of the marketing communication function. The public relations agencies are outsourced various media coverage works along with the internal corporate communications team. With the advent of the digital communication of various kinds it has become imperative of the public relations and the corporate communications functions to look into the image building, reputation management and crisis management 24/7, 365 days a year on all digital platforms that they can span. The boundary spanner which is the function of a public relations practitioner, is keeping his eyes and ears open to any crisis signal which can become very crucial in current times.

Stakeholder:

"A *stakeholder* is a party with an interest in an enterprise; *stakeholders* in a corporation include investors, employees, customers, and suppliers. However, with the increasing attention on corporate social responsibility, the concept has been extended to include communities, governments, and trade associations.". -*Investopedia.com*

By the above definition it is clear that organisations have internal and external stakeholders. Both are the equally important. From a public relations function perspective it means that when an image of an organisation is built keeping in mind how each stakeholder would perceive the organisation is crucial, after all reputations in the long run are formed like that. So working on strategies and doing activities pertaining to them is important.

7.4 UNDERSTANDING RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS: ENVIRONMENT, THE ORGANIZATION, THE STAKEHOLDER, AND PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGNS

Research, analysis involves a constant monitoring of the environment under which an organisation operates is very important as can be seen from the data above. Evaluation done during campaigns revel what more needs to be done for amicable and mutual beneficial relationships with stakeholders. PR campaigns are indeed useful when image of a company is hampered during a crisis like an accident, product failure, pandemic, depression etc. In all these situations it becomes imperative to organize communication activities to keep the stakeholders well apprised of the situation and to resolve their grievances. The pandemic was one situation where the company's communication task force was in action. We could see that in so many forms of communication they did. Whether it was Swiggy informing about their food delivery changes during pandemic and the precautions taken, Club Mahindra resorts keeping their customers aware of the resorts available when it was possible, and all the precautions taken in pandemic times. These are two examples out of many we saw how companies handled their communication in terms of selling and keeping up their image and continued business when they could. So, what are campaigns and how does PR campaigns help to keep the connection between the environment, the organization, the stakeholder?

"Campaigns are coordinated, purposeful, extended efforts designed to achieve a specific goal or a set of interrelated goals that will move the organisation towards a longer-range objective expressed as its mission statement"- Doug Newsom, Judy VanSlyke and Dean Kruckberg's "This is PR. The realities of Public Relations

In context of public relations, it is basically strategizing and creating publicity or media coverage for a brand. Doing activities which will ensure the above. It is also called a public relations plan or a PR plan. Whenever a PR plan is put into place it is always dynamic in nature. There is constant evaluation and is updated as per the change in environment, any stakeholder update etc.

So what are this campaigns or plans used for? They are designed keeping in mind to address an issue, to resolve a problem at hand, or to improvise what one is already doing in an organisation. The research and monitoring always reveal the data of the position of the company, thanks to ever changing modern technology. An organisation can then use this data for e.g., "by changing a behaviour; by modifying a law or opinion; or by retaining a desirable behaviour, law or opinion that is challenged". Even health emergencies like the pandemic put organisations into action into resolving the issues that arose due to the crisis. E.g., since the pandemic began the government has run heath campaigns creating awareness on how to protect oneself from the COVID-19 virus. The education, reinforcement, and finally inducing behaviour change in the publics were the key parameters of the campaign. Some of the key points were wearing masks, washing hands frequently, taking the vaccine etc. Many companies took to promoting their products like Dettol, Lifebuoy of their disinfectant soap liquids to encourage people to wash their hands to protect themselves from the COVID-19 virus. These PR plans not only benefit the stakeholders of an organisation but also create a positive image of the government of the efforts taken in a crisis like the pandemic.

According to Patrick Jackson's models, as quoted in Doug Newsom, Judy VanSlyke and Dean Kruckberg's "This is PR. The realities of Public

Relations". And an analysis done of each campaign type's characteristics by the above authors, following Patrick Jackson's types of PR campaigns one can understand the kinds of public relations campaigns as quoted below:

"There are a number of public relations campaigns, in fact about six. First we have the skills to put on a public awareness campaign, to make people aware of something. School is starting again so please don't run over first graders on their way. *Simple awareness*.

Second, we have the skills to mount *public information campaigns*, to offer information along with awareness. Totally different than a simple awareness campaign.

Third, we have the skills to do a *public education campaign*; using the word education in the pedagogical way, meaning that a person has encompassed the material sufficiently, and is emotionally and attitudinally comfortable enough with it that he or she can actually apply it to daily behavior. We have the skills to run those campaigns. But there are other kinds of campaigns that we must also prepare.

Fourth, sometimes we must *reinforce* the attitudes and behavior of those who are in agreement with our position. All they may need is a reminder of shared values.

And sometimes, fifth, we have to *change or attempt to change the attitudes* of those who do not agree with our position. This requires creation of cognitive dissonance and is much tougher.

Sixth, and finally, we have the skills today to carry out *behavior modification* campaigns." (Newsom, VanSlyke Turk and Kruckeberg, 2000).

The general model from previous PR campaigns can be put together as below:-

1. **Problem:** This step puts the problem together to study the issue at hand. The entire campaign will rest on this problem statement.

2. **Research:** This step will analyse the current situation in context of the problem at hand.

3. **Planning:** In this stage a plan will need to be put into place for resolving the issue or reiterating what is already been said.

4. **Implementation:** This step constitutes the activities and action plan as they call it, so "strategies methods, techniques and instruments" would be used here to reach the objective set at the beginning of the plan.

5. **Evaluation:** This step will test the work done and an analysis with findings will reveal if the objectives were met or something new emerged.

It will be observed after analysing different types of campaigns, creating awareness appears to be the most easy as compared to changing a target audience's behaviour when plans are implemented and later evaluated. The reasons could be many such as the extent to which the target group is involved. In creating awareness stage, the involvement is not so much as compared to in the behaviour change campaign where there are more repetition involved and there are more stages when the target group receives a message, changes in attitudes thus induced and observed, and finally change in behaviour seen. Of course this kind of campaign will require far more strong messaging which gives information and is more persuasive if any behaviour change is expected from the target audience. Also most important the involvement of the target group is very crucial here, how strongly do they also feel and relate to the issue.

We can see that the environment under which an organisation operates, political-legal, economic and socio-cultural backdrop affects its operations. The stakeholders have an direct impact on the image and reputation of the organisation. The organisation may create various campaigns to either create a specific image of themselves with their stakeholders or sell their products of services to their target audiences. In any scenario a thorough research and analysis would be needed to know the current position of the organisation. Think in terms of all FMCG companies who sell their food and beverages, electronic items and daily day to day use items to you. Also think in terms of organisations who do activities to preserve the environment and thus create an image of themselves or who gave large donations during the pandemic to help the people. All such examples will point out that an organisation is constantly on its toes to keep up its image and position in the positive light and for that research and using technology to help in the same is paramount. Organisations both government and private and non-government will do various kinds of campaigns as per their goals and objectives defined in their mission and vision statements of their organisation. Thus research and analysis will form the basis of all PR campaigns for any kind of communication to reach out to the stakeholders of various kinds of organisations. Evaluation will be crucial at every step to seek insights to improve the relationship between and organisation and its publics.

Check your progress

1. What is research and analysis?
2. What is public relations research?
3. What is the environment, the organization, the stakeholder?
4. Explain research and analysis in context of the environment, organisation and the stakeholder in the purview of public relations campaigns.

7.5 LET'S SUM IT UP

- Research expects one to be curious. There have been plenty of research that has been done in the field of public relations. Papers can be found in media and public relations journals worldwide on various functions of public relations and public relations campaigns. These could be publicity, media relations, crisis communication, audience research, campaigns in public relations etc. Public Relations Society of America PRSA agreed upon a definition after a few thousand submissions: "Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics."

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- "Campaigns are coordinated, purposeful, extended efforts designed to achieve a specific goal or a set of interrelated goals that will move the organisation towards a longer-range objective expressed as its mission statement"- Doug Newsom, Judy VanSlyke and Dean Kruckberg's "This is PR. The realities of Public Relations". There are six types of of public relations campaigns: Simple awareness, public information campaigns, public education campaign, reinforcement campaign, attitude change and lastly the behaviour modification campaign.

- It will be observed after analysing different types of campaigns, creating awareness appears to be the most easy as compared to changing a target audience's behaviour when plans are implemented and later evaluated. Research and analysis will form the basis of all PR campaigns for any kind of communication to reach out to the stakeholders of various kinds of organisations. Evaluation will be crucial at every step to seek insights to improve the relationship between and organisation and its publics.

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PRIORITISING PUBLIC

Unit structure

Objectives:

- In this chapter, you will understand how to identify your priority public
- You will understand how to determine your key stakeholder
- This chapter will also help you understand how to customise a campaign to your priority public

INTRODUCTION

One of the most challenging things one has to do as a communications professional is to identify and prioritise the stakeholders and the chosen public. Each campaign and narrative will be tailored to suit a certain target audience and to serve a certain purpose, so it is absolutely crucial for one to identify and prioritise their stakeholders. This is an evolving process that changes along the way and there are many many factors that play into this. In public relations, there is a say that there is no such thing as the general public. Even though you might be communicating with a larger group of people, it is still not communicating with everybody. In this chapter, we will understand closely how to distinguish between the general public and your audience and the art of Prioritising them.

It is important to note that if you are unable to prioritise your stakeholders and public, your campaign just might not be as effective as it could have been. For optimum impact, it is absolutely necessary for you to organise your public into the order of priority. Just like any other form of media, there is no one size formula that will generate your ideal target audience in the process. It's involving an ongoing process of looking, observing, reimagining and constantly updating yourself to equip yourself to identify your priority public. In the current times that we are living through, one must also keep in mind the possibility of constant feedback. All communications professionals should keep an open mind to receiving feedback so that our processes can be sharpened.

Identifying and Prioritizing Stakeholders and publics:

As we discussed, in the world of public relations there is no general public. We are all hoping to and actively working towards communicating with a certain group of people that will be able to serve some of our purposes, be it selling, brand awareness, brand building or any other desired actions. Every organisation has its own set of principles and values and this helps us determine our priorities.

Experts and professionals from the public relations industry have often met with the same dilemma-how do we prioritise our public. Over time they have been able to come up with several methods that will help us determine that. And as a starting point we need to answer a key question How much attention to detail and effort would each of these stakeholders need? You will only be able to answer this question if you have a correct and clear view of who your audience is and what their interests and attitudes are.

It is absolutely impossible for all the stakeholders to have the same interest and requirements from the organisation and there is a possibility that you might be expected to manage stakeholders with potentially conflicting and contradicting interests. As you design a campaign, a big challenge could be to divide your attention in a justified manner since you might not have enough resources to give everybody the same amount of attention. While it might be tough at the beginning, there is a huge scope of success for the organisation if they are able to identify their priority stakeholders when a crisis arises.

Q. Why should you define your priority public? :

Defining Stakeholders:

Before we delve deeper into the subjective processes of prioritising, let’s understand who a stakeholder is. As per Edward Freeman(1984), a stakeholder is a group or individual who is affected by or can affect the success of an organization. This is only a surface-level analysis of who a stakeholder could be. In today’s world of global shareholders and new models of businesses, anybody can be a stakeholder in an organisation‘s perspective. For instance, an educational NGO that works in India can have several stakeholders-it could be its employees, direct beneficiaries such as children, parents and communities, could be the board members and donors, or it could simply be somebody who is interested in contributing to the educational sector in the future. Grunig and Repper differentiated the terms “stakeholder” and “public” as - ‘Organizations choose stakeholders by their marketing strategies, recruiting, and investment plans, but “publics arise on their own and choose the organization for attention.”Grunig and Repper (1992), This classification relied on John Dewey's definition of a public: "That it is a group of people who face a similar problem, recognize the problem, and organize themselves to do something about it". From this perspective, it's important for us to note that since these individuals are invested in the organisation, there might be an action that follows after we communicate and engage with them.

Defining stakeholders from an organisational perspective:

It's important for an organisation to define its stakeholders and that can be done by identifying their linkage with the organisation. One can understand and study all the attributes each of the stakeholders have and bucket them into classifications. In a popular model, Grunig and Hunt break this down and define stakeholders into four brackets based on what connection they have to the organisation-enabling, functional, diffused, and normative stakeholders (Grunig and Hunt (1984).

Enabling stakeholders have some control and authority over the organization, such as stockholders, board of directors, elected officials, governmental legislators and regulators, and so on. These stakeholders provide an organization with resources and necessary levels of autonomy to operate. When enabling relationships falter, the resources can be withdrawn and the autonomy of the organization limited, restricted or regulated.

Functional stakeholders are essential to the operations of the organization and are divided between input—providing labour and resources to create products or services (such as employees and suppliers)—and output—receiving the products or services (such as consumers and retailers).

Normative stakeholders are associations or groups with which the organization has a common interest. These stakeholders share similar values, goals, or problems and often include competitors that belong to industrial or professional associations.

Diffused stakeholders are the most difficult to identify because they include the publics who have infrequent interaction with the organization, and become involved based on the actions of the organization. These are the publics that often arise in times of a crisis; linkages include the media, the community, activists, and other special interest groups.

Understanding the linkage model should help an organisation and the communication professional identify all of its stakeholders. While the diffused linkage stakeholders could be really hard to define since it's different for each situation and is completely subjective, the other three are mostly concrete.

Q. What are the types of stakeholders?

The Situational Theory of publics:

Grunig created a situational theory that can potentially demonstrate why some public actively contribute while others are completely passive and often not contributing. Now that we have understood the stakeholder categories, buying looking at it from this perspective, one will be able to identify which publics will actively contribute towards your mission and who won't. This should help prioritise your stakeholders based on your purpose.

Those publics who do not face a problem are nonpublics, those who face the problem but do not recognize it as a problem are latent publics, those who recognize the problem are aware publics, and those who do something about the problem are active publics. He also recognised three variables that indicate why the certain public can act a certain way in certain situations. And the factors are- level of involvement, problem recognition, and constraint recognition.

If we want to look at our role as a communicator, and use these three factors to identify your priority public the process would look like this. The level of investment and involvement will take precedence as a factor. Is a certain group of audience actively involved in scenarios where the organisation is present? For instance, if you are supporting the campaign that sends out the message of environmental preservation, is your audience actively involved in climate crisis mitigation or even addressing the crisis? The second lens would be problem recognition. There would only be any kind of active participation from the audience if they are able to see the problem clearly and also understand the impact it could create on their lives instantly. If they are unable to see the problem, there is no motivation to actively contribute. Once again, if we take the same scenario as above, is your audience seeing the actual changes that are caused by the climate crisis around them? Are you able to do any work that will make them aware of it?

The last one is more of a psychological element. If a certain individual believes that there is nothing they can do to actually make a difference in the given scenario, there is less motivation for them to actively contribute. If somebody has high constrained recognition, they will be less active. But if an individual is able to see the role they could play in actually changing the scenario, there is more motivation for them to actively contribute. For instance, if your audience who is now aware of the issues that are happening around them, believes that they could play a key role in actually changing and mitigating the issue, there will be a big chance of them actively contributing towards it. If your audience believes that there is nothing they could do about it, they then stay passive. It's also important to note that past experiences social norms and changing realities would also play a very important role in determining who is active and who wouldn't contribute. If there is a history of active involvement in a certain something being oppressed it can work both positively and negatively.

Active publics are likely to have high levels of involvement and problem recognition, and lower levels of constraint recognition. Aware publics will process information and might act, but are limited by lower levels of involvement and problem recognition, or higher levels of constraint recognition. The latent publics is not cognizant of how an issue involves them or doesn't see it as a problem. There's a potential for them to become aware at a later stage, however.

Grunig in his further research on the public recognised four different kinds of publics:

1. All-issue publics, which are active on all issues.
2. Apathetic publics, which are inattentive to all issues.
3. Single-issue publics, which are active on a small subset of the issue that only concerns them.
4. Hot-issue publics, which are active on a single issue that involves nearly everyone and which has received a lot of media attention.

To help you put this into perspective, all-issue publics will always get more relevance over the inactive public, especially if their urgency and environment are more significant. You can predict the possibility of your stakeholders becoming an active public by identifying if the problem actually involves them or if they are aware of it. It's crucial to note that active public does not necessarily mean positively responding respectful public. Given the situation and the nature of stakeholders, the active contribution should be both positive and negative.

Communication strategy for stakeholders:

While it would be absolutely wonderful to have the active public be your key stakeholder all the time, It's not always the reality. It's quite possible that your priority stakeholder is inactive or unaware. There are many many external factors that actually determine what your priority publics is going to be and not all of them are in your locus of control. So the organisational strategy should be designed in a way that will help you reach out to your priority public.

Based on our former discussion, we can divide our stakeholders into four- one would be the group that is actually active and supportive, one would be supportive but inactive, there will be a group that could be active and non-supportive and the last one should be inactive and non-supportive.

Category one should be your top priority given both you and they have something to achieve out of the set strategy. These are the people that you want advocating for you, and their involvement and engagement levels would be high. The second category is actually the ones where there is potential for us to inspire and inform them to actually become active. If you make them aware of their problems and show them how this certain issue impacts their lives, there is a chance of them turning into category one. The third category is tricky given that they are active but not supportive of the organisational strategy. There is a possibility that they will be defensive and actually negatively react to the communication that you have sent out. This is where the organisation need to come out with conflict resolution strategies and firefight. The last category is inactive and non-supportive which means the effort and investment that we will have to spend on them is much higher. This will almost never be a priority category. However, there always needs to be communication that is sent to them that makes them aware of the issues so that the door stays open for them to be around to be supportive.

Once you define your publics and priority group, there is one more step that you can utilise that optimises your prioritisation. According to Wilson(2005), there are three types of publics involved in communication strategies: key publics, intervening publics, and influentials. Key publics are individuals such as board members donors et cetera whose participation is absolutely important for you and your organisation to achieve its basic goals. Given a dependency on them they will always be the highest priority group. The intervening publics passes the information on to the priority public and acts as opinion leaders. A fine example would be media and media houses that disseminate information far and wide and can actually drive change. This might or might not become a priority segment depending on whether you want your information to be passed on to the general public. Other influentials can be important intervening publics, such as doctors who pass the information on to patients, and teachers who pass the information on to students. This is why word of mouth is often seen as a key metric for the success of a campaign. Influentials can either support an organization's efforts or work against them.

There is a possibility that some individuals from certain publics will turn into their trustworthy opinion leaders to either verify or disapprove a message coming from the organisation. If there is clear loyalty towards them, the campaign could only be successful if there is positive verification from their end.

What's the process once you define your publics:

Once you have learnt who your priority public is, it's important for you to go through the process of customising your communication strategy and narratives for them. It often means that, based on the filters that we have identified throughout this chapter, you are noq able to identify your active public that you want to target to reach out to. Let's take our familiar example - Let's imagine that you are working for an impact based organisation that is working towards mitigating the climate crisis. After going through each of these theories, you have identified your priority public to be people who volunteer or acted as activists during a movement that took place a few months ago. This audience is both active and supportive of the cause. You are a communication strategy for them should be straightforward and simple enough. They are already invested, they're already aware of the problem, and they have already shown us by participating in this movement that they do believe in their capacity to bring about a change. Since they are hitting all our checkboxes, our communication should be re-rooted in a call to action. It needs to be something simple enough for them to do. Something for them to show initiative and their solidarity with the cause. Your second priority which is your non-active but supportive audience. This is a group of people who have liked and subscribed to similar causes but haven't really come out and gotten mobilised under the banner of the cause. Your communication strategy for them should be to make them believe that they have the potential and ability to bring about the change they want to see in the world. They are aware of the problem, they are invested in the cause, what needs to be addressed right there is them not believing in their agency to take things into their hands. You can start off with simple actions that don't require much investment that they can do and then follow it up with a proof point of the impact that they were able to see it.

Another important aspect of prioritising your public is its timeliness. Depending on what stage of your project cycle you are in, you might be expected to communicate to different sets of audiences. Each time these filters should be equipping you to make your decisions about who your priority publics is in that particular scenario.

However, even if your campaign is extremely successful, you need to keep an open mind towards feedback. In the world of digital boom, in a space where there are no boundaries between broadcasting and interpersonal communication, and often where the worlds collide, it's absolutely important that one has an ear on the ground. For instance, if you have identified your priority publics and if you have started your communication with them, a couple of decades ago, there was practically no way to measure the impact you created with the said project. While it would have been exciting to see the press release or press note you sent out being published in the mainline newspaper, there wouldn't be many other metrics for you to track the impact you were able to create. In today's time, that is fully changed. You are constantly receiving feedback. Let's imagine that the communication has started. You may see that you have received an email response from a journalist expressing more interest. You might be able to connect with them and expand further on the story and get it published. Once the story is live the cycle of your communication is not really ending. Wherever the news stories published, you will be able to see how audiences are responding to them. For instance, all the big traditional media houses in the country including times of India, Hindustan Times, The Hindu, the Indian Express, and the Deccan Herald all have their own versions of the web. In most of the scenarios, anything that is picked up for print is also published in digital. On these digital platforms, you will be able to see and track each audience's sentiment and responses. If you see there is consistent engagement and positive response to it that is happening on that platform, you know your story is resonating with many many people. There is also a chance of your story not being received well by your audience. You will also be able to see and check it. The beauty of this is also that, you will be able to intricately understand what about said piece of communication is not resonating with people. For instance, if this is not tasteful or consciously done or mindfully crafted, the audience will be quick to point it out. If there are any misrepresentations or if the communication is not inclusive enough, the audience will be pointing it out. These can all be huge learning as well as reflection points for you, as a professional. So while you may have a couple of assumptions about your priority public, their attitudes and likes might change. We are living in a society where even social norms change over a couple of years. It's absolutely essential that you constantly follow and analyse your priority publics so that you can be agile enough to adopt any changes that happen to their mindset factors.

Q. Once you have identified your priority publics, what's your next step in designing a communication strategy?

LET'S SUM IT UP

Stakeholders that can become active publics and influence the success of the campaign or can appeal to a larger group of people and influentials like media or opinion leaders should take priority when you categorise stakeholders. It's also critical for us to keep in mind that influentials like media or groups may not be direct stakeholders of the organisation, but we need to inform inspire and invest in them to actively contribute towards it. Around your scope of work, anybody who can shape and form public perception should be considered a key stakeholder as well. Your priority public can be more than one. Your priority public can also be a mix of one. Depending on the communication strategy that you are weaving, at various points of the communication cycle, you may have a completely different priority public. Often at the beginning of a communication cycle, you may work closely with journalists and influencers depending on your target audience. Once it gathers momentum, your priority public might actually change to a certain group of the general audience. These processes are supposed to give you direction as to how to identify your priority groups and how to approach them. They are not definite, however, to make sense in the very complex world of broadcasting, this filter should empower you.

QUESTIONS:

1. What are priority public and how do you identify them?
2. How can you define stakeholders?
3. How can your priority public determine your communication strategy?

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8

CONSTRUCTING THE CONTENT, CRAFTING THE MESSAGE

Unit structure

OBJECTIVES:

- This chapter would help you understand what's messaging and the power it holds
- This chapter will provide insight into designing content
- It will also provide you with practical insights into actually managing a content campaign

INTRODUCTION

The most crucial part of establishing a strong communication narrative is crafting the message. While it's not easy to create one sure shot formula to craft the most effective message and as an extension content, there are guidelines you could follow to make that happen.

When you read an article or go through a campaign, the reason why you remember it is because of the effectiveness of the messaging. It in some way speaks to you and strikes a chord with you. It's a very sought after skill these days to tell stories impactfully.

There are several factors that play into one deciding the creative process behind crafting the message or the content. But also, one needs to keep in mind the changing space of media and the overwhelming information overload before they start creating their messaging. In this chapter, we will understand, how to effectively craft messaging and then translate that into content that is relatable.

What is messaging:

In communication studies, a message is described as an information conveyed by words (in speech or writing), and/or other signs and symbols.

A message (verbal or nonverbal, or both) is the content of this exchange process. The originator of the message in the communication process is the sender. The sender conveys the message to a receiver.

Communication demonstrates the process of sending and receiving messages, which can also be perceived as encoding and decoding messages. "However," in the words of Courtland L. Bovée, John V. Thill, and Barbara E. Schatzman, in "Business Communication Essentials," "communication is effective only when the message is understood and when it stimulates action or encourages the receiver to think in new ways."

Successful opinion leaders and influencers have been able to put forward messages to persuade a vast audience, by informing, inspiring and mobilising. Peter Obstler, in his essay "Working With the Media" published in "Fighting Toxics: A Manual for Protecting Your Family, Community, and Workplace," says: "A well-defined message has two key components. First, it is simple, direct, and concise. Second, it defines the issues on your own terms and in your own words."

One can take the example of the well-defined message in the slogan introduced and popularized by Ronald Reagan's presidential campaign in the United States in the 80s: "Are you better off today than you were four years ago?" While it may seem glaringly obvious and simple, it helped Regan take the reigns of the rhetoric and conversation in the 1980 presidential election debate at every turn, although the very social system at that point was extremely convoluted. Fuelled by this simple but powerful message, Reagan went on to win the presidency by defeating President Jimmy Carter, by a significant percentage. This shows the power of the messaging.

Q. What’s messaging and how does it influence a communication plan?

Factors to determine your messaging:

There are several elements that you could keep a note of before you start crafting the message. The first and foremost thing must be your brief. While it may seem simple enough, the cornerstone of your messaging should be your brief. As a communication professional, when you start breaking down a brief, it’s crucial that you look for elements that you can adopt in your messaging.

Some key questions can be:

1. Is the brief defining the output goals clearly?
2. Are we clear on the editorial tone and language?
3. Is it communicating the organisational values clearly?
4. Are we being sensitive and appropriate?
5. Will this hit the nail for our target audience?

These are all questions one should answer before they start crafting the narrative and messaging. Once you have these answers ready, you can start looking at other elements.

The first and foremost element that should determine your messaging is the purpose. What is the purpose that you are trying to serve with this particular piece of communication? Is it to convey an emotion? Is it to arouse a certain kind of reaction? Are you trying to get people to mobilise and do a certain action? Are we trying to break a stereotype? The purpose is what is going to define your messaging holistically. To give you an example, imagine that you are presented with a brief for which you are expected to create a campaign that talks about women empowerment. There are several routes you could take to establish this. But women empowerment is a broad theme. What is the purpose this particular campaign should serve for women empowerment? If you are able to define that well, you are already off to a good starting point. Let's say that the purpose is to ensure that more women return to the workplace after career breaks. What exactly do we want to change after this? This purpose is what is going to define you're messaging.

The second element that you must be aware of as you start creating your messaging should be your audience. Like we have established before, there is no general public that you are communicating with. Even if you are speaking to a really broad group of people, there are still pockets of individuals that you hope would resonate with this particular piece of communication so that you are able to optimise your impact. Let's take the same example as before, you are now building the women empowerment campaign that is supposed to raise awareness around women returning to workplaces after career breaks. Who are you trying to communicate this with? Are you trying to make employers aware that there is a group of really talented individuals hoping for a second chance to return to their careers? Or are we trying to convey to women across the country that even if they have taken a career break they can still go back to their workplaces as they want? Defining your priority audience clearly sure will help you craft the message. If you are communicating with employers your messaging will have to be different and appealing to them. You might not be going with an emotional first approach, but while communicating with the actual beneficiaries will need a completely different approach.

The third and key element is the newsworthiness of said communication. While we may not have complete control of what makes news and what is not, overall awareness of news values and current realities should always be addressed when you craft a message. The same campaign about women empowerment might have a better chance of being picked up by other individuals if you do it around women's Day or in the month of March. There is also a chance of it being amplified by other publics, if there is already a parallel and relevant conversation going around about Women empowerment. Making messaging newsworthy helps you create more effective outputs.

Another element that one needs to keep in mind as they defined a messaging is available to capture what's unique about this. Since it is easier to explain this via an example, imagine that now you are in the last stage of designing your communication strategy for the women empowerment campaign. Are you able to, through your messaging, bring out the unique selling point of the story? Are you able to tell the most powerful and unique stories around this cause, will the audience or media be able to see its distinctive nature? Answering these questions will definitely help you develop something that will make you stand out.

Last but not least, an essential element that should help you determine the messaging is the emotion that you are trying to communicate. If you are able to zero down on any emotion that you want to evoke amongst your audience early on, your process of deciding the messaging should be much easier. Maybe you want to evoke empathy and love, or maybe you want to evoke disappointment and angst which then can inspire people to act on it. Your messaging will be heavily built around the emotions you want to generate in the people you are communicating with and the output will also be heavily reliant on it.

Best practices to identify your key messaging:

- Don't forget that everything you create has 2 tier process to go through. Your first priority is to get the Journalist to publish your content, while the larger goal stays the same as the general public engaging with it.
- Keep your messaging relevant
- Keep your messaging timely and appropriate
- Keep your message and focused on what's happening currently
- Keep your messaging simple and not overly complex
- Ensure that you are messaging can culminate into a clear action
- Ensure that your message is crafted in a way that resonates with your target audience
- Ensure that your messaging a sensitive appropriate and inclusive

Q. What are some best practices to keep in mind while finalising key messaging?

Constructing Content:

Now that we have established a process to identify your key messaging, let's talk about how to generate content. Content generation today is an economy in itself. With the penetration of the internet and smartphones, there is a tremendous growth that has happened in the number of people generating content and also the number of people consuming it. If you look around, everyone including you has a smartphone in which there are several apps, all built on content consumption and generation. While this is democratising the world of content generation to no end, this is also turning the digital space into a highly competitive And overloaded space. Every day people are bombarded with various forms of content around everything that is under the sun, and to be perfectly candid, they are spoilt for choice. This leads us to the biggest issue the communication world is facing right now-how will you stand out From the clutter?

While there is no formula to create effective content, there are some things you could keep in mind to ensure your content is relevant relatable and shareable. Here we discuss some of these filters you could keep in mind as you create content.

Your target: You will or only be able to create quality and meaningful content if you are able to identify your target group. A couple of decades ago, you could create one press note or feature story and reach out to practically everybody from every age group across all social classes. Today that is far from reality. The specialisation and customisation that happens between these groups are incredibly detailed. For instance, as a brand that directly communicates to young people like Spotify, your primary target group would be between 16 to 45. These are people who come from all walks of life. These could be college going students, this could be working professionals, this could be top executives, this could also be homemakers listening to music. Not all of them get their information from the same platform anymore, and nor do they have the same interests or attitudes. So defining your target audience very clearly is key in crafting your content. If you have more than one target group, define each of them individually and serve them separately.

Your medium: Now that you know what your target audiences are, you should be able to also identify what their key mediums are. Let me establish beforehand that each group of audiences now receive and consumes content across various platforms and they all have different preferences. Instagram is predominantly used by Millennials andGen Z while Facebook has been taken over by slightly older generations. News platforms like Inshot are preferred amongst the younger age group while magazines like Caravan are still read by top executives. There are also platforms like Snapchat, Reddit and Discord which all have a unique set of audiences. As a communication professional, you should be able to identify which are the key mediums that you are intending to communicate through. This is an easy process this day is given everybody wants an off-line and online process presence. However, determining your primary platforms of communication will definitely make the content generation processor easier. Each platform also has its own unique format that is popular. On Instagram, it is reels, on platforms like BuzzFeed it is Listicles. So choosing the platform also helps you choose the format.

Your format: Now that you have identified the medium and target audience, your next decision is around the format that you want to choose. You simply have to think about your messaging and strategically imagine what format of content would bring you maximum impact. You can either choose a popular format that has tremendous reach amongst your target audience or you can choose a format that is more niche but impactful.

Optimisation: The next factor that you need to keep in mind as you start generating content is optimisation. As we discussed earlier, the media space is heavily cluttered and unless you are able to come up with something that will help you stand out, there is very little chance that your content pieces will be noted. To optimise the impact of your content, there are several things you could do- you could potentially do a collaboration with an influencer, you could do a partnership with a like-minded organisation, you could hop on a viral trend that connects you with your key messaging. While you are generating content you also think about what will help you generate the maximum impact.

It's important to note that the news values are changing. From traditional news values such as proximity, timeliness and human interest, we have moved on to a new age world order where things like shareability are the key metric. As you create your content you need to keep constantly asking yourself is this a piece that is shareworthy? Does this have any element in it that makes it appealing to a group of people that's not directly invested in the work your organisation does?

How to measure your content's impact:

There are several metrics that you could use to basically measure the impact your content and messaging generate. Each digital platform comes with its own set of built-in digital – forces and key metrics. While measures like reach, engagement and impressions could be good factors that help you understand the impact of your content, another important factor unit takes note of is public feedback. At the current time, we are able to gather feedback from your audience especially your priority audience, directly in real-time on the piece of content you have generated. It's important for you to take note of feedback from there.

Q. How can you measure your content's impact?

Sustaining an effective content pipeline:

Now that you are familiar with the new model of crafting the messaging and constructing the content, let's look at some common real-life examples of maintaining an inflow of effective content in our everyday professional life.

1. Researching and planning your content in advance:

The only effective way of ensuring your content is working is to constantly research and update yourself. Before you start laying out your content strategy, you should research all aspects of your product/service, audience and brand to prepare yourself. Looking up to your peers and competition is encouraged. This should give you a basic understanding of where you are headed. Based on this you can start building your content. It's also a helpful practice to plan your content and messaging in advance.

Most communications professionals maintain a calendar that helps them keep a track of important days etc.

2. Clearly defining a target audience:

It would make sense for you to not only identify your audience but also define them as segments. In other words, based on the information that's available to you, it'd be helpful for you to start imagining audience personas that would help you imagine the predicted actions from them:

Most audience profiles would entail

- Basic demographics (age range, gender, income, education level, etc.)
- Media consumption
- Hobbies & interests
- Goals
- Barriers to reach

Once you have this persona in place, this will help you strategise your content as well as its placement better. A communication professional is well aware of the fact that the communication collaterals we create are not for the brand but for the audience. If we are unable to convince them that they need to be invested in some capacity, engagement would be low. So be it the messaging or the content itself, it needs to revolve around the audience.

3. Your brand:

Every brand would have a story, rather need a story. Irrespective of which organisation you are working with, your brand has a persona. And this persona is something you will have to develop and maintain. There's merit in imagining the brand as an individual. For instance, when you think of Apple, you probably imagine keywords like luxury, high-end, cutting-edge, and innovative. Just like a person, you might also think of some negative elements, such as expensive, repetitive and flashy. Another example would be the brand Amul - it's iconic, humorous and for everyone. It's personas like these that help you define and maintain your messaging and content. The persona should be reflected in everything we create and through only positive reinforcement you will be able to create positive recollection.

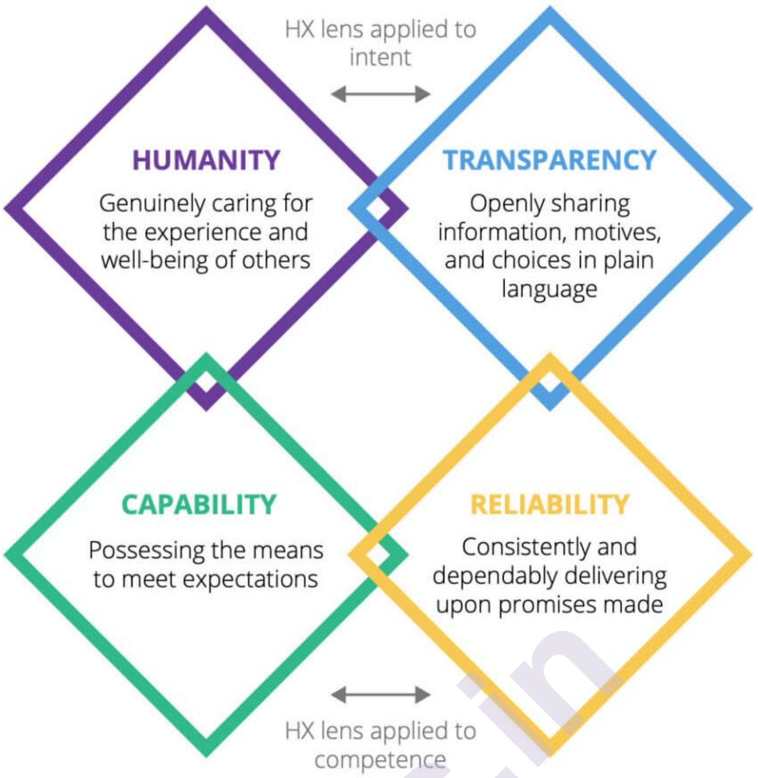

Figure by Deloitte HX TrustID™:

Deloitte, through their HX TrustID™ offering, explains that:

- **Humanity** is rated of higher importance for service industries like hotels and casinos
- **Transparency** is rated most important for transportation and logistics companies
- **Capability** is critical for travel brands like rental cars, cruises, and rideshare
- **Reliability** is top of the list for the automotive industry

The brand persona helps you represent yourself authentically, and uniquely and helps you build connections.

4. Creating a playbook:

Once you know your brand persona well enough along with your audience profiles, you can start imagining a content strategy playbook. This is basically a set of guidelines, templates and to-dos that would direct your messaging and content crafting process. This can be considered a long-time investment, given this can be used by generations coming in.

The most basic components are:

- Your mission statement
- Tagline and/or USP

- Value proposition

Speak to your customers and tell a story:

Speaking directly to your customer is a skill you need to master over time. You need to leave aside jargon and complex statements that would get lost in the process of communication. Sticking to simple language and universal terminologies can help.

A fine example of simple enough communication would be FMCG brands. Brands like Colgate, and Sunlight have all been using very simple, direct, non-cryptic messaging to convey to the customers what's best for them. They don't go around and talk about all the aspects of the product, they will stick to the basic aspect - like affordable prices, fast results or its iconic status.

Irrespective of your approach, your goal should be to tell a powerful story that can be woven into your strategy seamlessly. A good story will speak directly to the audience's hearts than a very well researched case study or graphics.

Consistently test and refine:

Crafting the content or messaging isn't a linear process. It's a full circle. Once you know what content to put out with what messaging and where you should be able to do some kind of trial and error and testing to ensure it's effective. Once your content is out in the public, your work doesn't end there - you will then be on the receiving end of feedback from both platforms as well as the audience.

By doing sentiment analysis, and gathering inputs from all around you will be able to understand what's working and what's not. It's recommended that you document this part heavily so that it provides you with insights for the future. These can even go on to become case studies for others. You can then use these analytics and insights to report back to the relevant authorities.

It's only through constant testing, refining and fine-tuning that you will be able to get to a point where you understand the right mix of strategic inputs and effective emotions.

Q. What are some practices that will help us sustain powerful content inflow?

To Sum it up:

We are a part of a world where consumers and audiences are flooded with hundreds of messages each day and, as a result, have become extremely selective about what they'll listen to. This presents us with both a challenge and an opportunity.

One must not underestimate the power of effective messaging. You could be communicating and advocating for something that isn't inherently phenomenal, but if you manage to get creative with your messaging, there's a better chance that you will do well in your career. Evolution has turned our brains into an organ that relates better with stories and emotions over just plain hard-hitting facts. Climate campaigners have been talking about the looming threat of complete destruction for decades with little to no avail. Incorporating the right story and delivering it via the right medium can make all the difference.

Messaging and content crafting are interconnected. One depends on the other. Crafting powerful messaging can only happen when you have a deep understanding of all the aspects of your target audience, your brand persona, your medium and your strategy. Similarly, constructing content is dependent on understanding the news values, formats and optimisation plans along with a deep understanding of your platforms. Having a solid messaging strategy helps to strengthen your brand and allows you to stand out in your target market.

QUESTIONS:

1. What's messaging?
2. What's the connection between messaging and content?
3. What are some lenses that will help you identify your messaging?
4. What are some best practices to follow to maintain a successful content inflow?

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9

STRATEGY AND TACTIC – DIFFERENT STROKES FOR DIFFERENT FOLKS

Unit Structure:

OBJECTIVES

- After going through this chapter you will have an understanding of the difference between tactics and strategy
- Awareness about a few PR strategies and tactics you can adapt to your career
- You will be able to identify PR tactics and strategies implemented by other professionals by observing

What are tactics and what are strategies?

About 2,500 years ago, Sun Tzu, a military strategist from China wrote "The Art of War" and said, **"Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy are the noise before defeat."** Although we tend to often interchangeably use what's strategy and tactics, they are in fact two different things. They actually accentuate each other and act as a catalyst. You may observe many many real-life examples, but holistically you can define tactical vs. strategic like this.

- ***Strategy*** defines your long-term goals and how you're planning to achieve them. In other words, your strategy gives you the path you need toward achieving your organization's mission. If you want to reach a certain audience in 3 years, your strategy is your overarching 'how to' guidelines.
- ***Tactics*** are short-term actions with immediate gratification executed perfectly. They involve best practices, specific plans, resources, etc. They're also called "initiatives."

What makes a good strategy?:

Everyone at an organisation needs to be aligned with its strategy. It in some capacity should be reflective of the organisational values and principles. As a communication professional, you can often be responsible for building strategies for brands, organisations or just for self-advancement. You will be expected to take inputs from all key stakeholders, identify priorities and their orders and create actionable items to support that growth.

If you are responsible for the communication strategy of a tech giant, for instance, a good strategy would address the end result aka outcome. Does the organisation want to communicate with businesses or the general public? Are they hoping to generate leads or build awareness? What are timelines and key milestones to keep a note of? These will all be the fundamental questions, you will have to answer. You then create the strategy for the desired outcome, with the right modes of communication within the time frame required. You will also be expected to do all this within the organisation's framework. It can't be contradictory to what you claim to be your brand's voice tonality or values.

What makes a good tactic?:

A tactic will serve a definite purpose that will act as a catalyst for a strategy and outcomes. It's often an activity or a few of them within a short span of time to achieve the desired outcome. A good tactic is one that can create a measurable impact.

Let's imagine that you are responsible for the PR tactics for the same tech giant. The proposed purpose is to inform the audience that a new product is launched. An innovative tactic would be a social experiment that captures the spirit of the product in a very public place that's then broadcasted to a wider audience. While you are not directly plugging the product, you are building on the purpose of the product and are doing a quick actionable thing that will bring results. This tactic can be a part of your long-term strategy.

Overall words to live by are - "Think strategically, act tactically."

While you may not be expected to go differentiate between tactics and strategies, it's good for you to know how to so that when it's your responsibility to design one of these, you will be able to come up with a structure that includes all.

1. **Strategy is based on extensive research, planning, and internal reflection.** It's the organisation's long-term goal, whereas tactics are short-term actions with short term outputs. For example, if your marketing strategy is to improve your influence and performance on social media, then your tactics might be to determine the best channels for your business and the most effective messages for your audiences.

2. **Strategies CAN change** since organisations can also pivot to a different world to suit more emerging needs etc. however, this will

have to be decided collectively as a group and adjusted accordingly. Tactics on the other hand can be changed pretty effortlessly. It doesn't have the same deep impact strategy shift has.

3. **Strategy and tactics work together as means to an end.** They aren't mutually exclusive, they have to collide at a common interest point for you to be able to achieve a certain goal.

4. **The best strategy and tactics won't answer all the questions.**

Different strokes for different people:

Now that we have a decent understanding of what's a good tactic and a good strategy, let's talk about customisation. The same strategy or tactic doesn't work or even produces similar results with two different sets of audiences. A campaign that might have been a soaring success for a certain group of people might be considered a weak or even inappropriate one at some other place. It should also be pointed out that different times could also mean different strokes.

While we have a wide array of tools available at our disposal to disseminate our narrative, we need to identify what to communicate with whom before we go ahead with executing our strategy.

How to choose a stroke:

- **What do I want from this stakeholder**: in a communication project, paths are always mutual. While the communicator wants something from the audience, the audience also wants something in turn. The newspaper serves you news, but you also want to know the world's happenings. A key lever that will help you determine what stroke to use is what you want from them. Is it that you want them to listen? Do research? Get mobilised and launch into action? Knowing this will help you determine what strategy you need to use.

- **What are the mediums and their impact:** a factor that would determine your strategy would be the choice of mediums and their accessibility. If your target audience is farmers of India, a website that takes a long to load or an English news mention might not be the way to go. Knowing the mediums your audience utilises helps you create a strategy that's powerful.

- **What's the role of influence they play:** each stakeholder plays a different role. Except for the rare occurrence like a B2B(Business to Business) magazine, most of the pieces of communication you put out will be seen by many people and not necessarily, will all of them come from the same walk of life. For instance, an article about a case study that's a proof point for your organisation's work will first have to be pitched to a journalist. What would be the most effective communication method there? Is it cold calling and emailing? Or is it focused on sending them a sort of note and building an interest? Beyond that, once the article is published, what output do you want?

Do you people to sign a petition or do you want them to tweet to a government official? What level of influence do they hold in your strategy power mapping is s determining factor.

- **Addressing the current reality:** Your tactics and strategies should both reflect the reality. An extremely aggressive posting campaign wouldn't have been effective at all, at the beginning of the pandemic. Instead, tailoring your collaterals to suit the reality actuality would make a difference.

- **Changing social values:** the social fabric of society is always changing. Your strategy and tactic should acknowledge that. The younger generation is a lot more invested in causes like mental health, work-life balance, identity, freedom to express etc. How do you customise a strategy or tactic to suit them? Would they rather listen to a bold advertisement that just talks about the product or a meaningful discussion that also mentions your product?

- **Who are they:** Last but not the least, who these people are. Are they journalists? Your outreach can start with a respectful email. Is it a potential partnership? You may start by researching their brand and finding synergy. Is it for the mass public? You may lead with a popular meme and segway into your messaging. Basically who your target audience is and what their consumption patterns are should define your strategy. A video might be more effective with a middle-aged homemaker while a meme is more interesting for a college-goer.

Q. How can one choose a stroke for a certain audience?

Here are some PR tools:

- Press release
- Press note
- Op-eds and a guest editorial
- Feature pieces
- Interviews
- Media bytes and panels
- Quotes
- Listicles

Press release:it's a detailed note that fleshes out all the 5 Ws and 1 H of the situation. It is often shared with the wide network of media or selectively shared with few. There is no one final format or structure for a press release. It differs from person to person and organisation to organisation. However, there are some fundamental elements that should be a part of a press release. The first one is a catchy headline. Here is where you can exhibit your different strokes. If you are trying to pitch this to a human interest journalist, you will have to customise your title to suit their beat. The first one or two paragraphs of the press release should be able to convey maximum information to the journalist. Please keep note of the fact that this press release may be published as it is or people might use it as a source of information to then further build a story. It's your responsibility to comprise and arrange the information in a way where both these functions are done easily with the press release. If your public relations purpose is to inform and spread awareness, a press release might actually be the right stroke. Another important part of a press release will be a potboiler. This basically represents a small and concise write up about the organisation or multiple organisations that are coming together with the press release. This helps the journalist make an informed decision about whether they want to publicise the story based on their investment. The press release may also contain contact details of the respective individuals so that in case they need more clarification they are able to get in touch with you.

While a press release is quite the norm In the PR world, it would be interesting for you to adopt a different approach and maybe cater directly to the journalist's needs. They might be more interested to read a story or a case study or a press release. You can always substitute and accentuate these tools with tactics that will yield maximum output.

Press note:a press note is a much shorter write up that you can send to various journalists. This is different from a press release simply because this only provides limited information around an instance. While a press release might contain multiple quotes from the key stakeholders of the event, a press note provides adequate information and opens up an opportunity for conversation from the journalist's end.

Op-Ed : An Op-Ed or a guest article is one of the highest forms of engagement in PR. This is set up in a way wherein a publication, who have a keen interest to engage with the key stakeholders of the organisation or brand that you work with, invites you to come and actively contribute to an editorial piece on the publication. This is a very effective form of PR especially because this is being written in the authentic voice of your spokesperson. The story can be created based on your narrative and messaging. And you don't have any of the same constraints as the journalist has. This usually comes into being when there is a very relevant conversation happening around a certain theme and the publication identifies your spokespeople to be the best people to share our expert thoughts on it. For example, if you work with an Ed-Tech startup, when the school closures started, it would have been an excellent opportunity for you as a PR person to reach out to education journalists across the country and asked them if they would like an expert opinion on how Ed-Tech can bridge the gap between school closures and learning. While this is a much bigger investment from both your as well as the end of the publication, you will have to approach the team strategically. It starts with identifying the right time to reach out to the publication with the right peg. But if it materialises, it's one of the highest forms of PR output.

Feature covers: One of the main tools PR professionals have at their disposal is the senior leadership team at their organisation. It's mostly an untapped space, especially if you have a noteworthy leadership team. As a tactic that can build your brand image further, you also need to build the brand of your key spokespeople. This is usually the CEO or someone in a similar capacity in your organisation who represents the brand value explicitly. It could be interesting for their journey to be covered in a feature for the world to read. This not only humanises the leader but also indirectly speaks about the brand or organisation they have built thus bringing the attention back to us. When you choose the spokesperson for your organisation, it's extremely essential that you choose someone who is compassionate, consistent, comfortable and confident.

Interviews: There are two ways you can get interviews. One is very similar to what we established in our previous point, by bringing up your leader as a spokesperson for your organisation. If you are able to garner enough interest in their life and journey, you might be able to place them in an interview. Sometimes interviews are not exclusive. There might be other panels that are ongoing around a certain theme. And your leader might be actually a good fit for expert set panellists. That's also an excellent opportunity for PR for you and your organisation. If there is a very powerful impact story that you would like to capture in an interview, it might be interesting for you to actually create interesting collateral around said case study. You can use this as an anchor and start conversations with various journalists. As you start these conversations, you also have to keep in mind whether this is a beat that is relevant to them. And also that if this is a theme that is timely and relevant. If all of those things are aligned, there is merit in exploring the possibility of getting an interview out there.

It's important for you to note that the lines between Pr and digital media communications are blurring. Sometimes outputs from PR translate themselves into social media and vice versa. While it can get a little bit more challenging and complex in terms of processes, it would actually be very interesting for PR professionals to start using their digital media platforms as tools to gather interest around a certain story.

Media bytes: Sometimes when the media does a story that is very relevant and prevalent in the nature of work you do and if you have the image of an expert in the industry, they might reach out to you for features. These will be in the form of short interview bytes. While you will be expected to provide your insights on a certain theme that is already predetermined, it is still an excellent opportunity for you to showcase your brand.

Quotes : Similar to media bytes and interviews, journalists often seek quotes from experts. This could be for a story that they are already doing. While you may have very little decision-making ability around the narrative and the messaging of the whole story, you will still have an opportunity to present yourself as a representative of the date.

Listicles- These are simply another format of storytelling that has become really popular in the last decade. Instead of presenting information in a long feature, long-form piece, listicles simply capture to the point concise information as pointers. The whole listicle might not talk about your product/service. But it will be tactfully placed there. This is often done by lifestyle or gen Z platforms.

Press meet: In really key milestones for the organisations, like a new product launch, it might be important for you to hold space for media to interact with your organisational spokespeople. When you do a press meeting, because there are so many of them happening, you must find a way to incentivise your press meet over every other. PR people often onboard a celebrity or influencer partner to ensure the media has a vested interest to show up to their press meet. These are also extremely effective if you are addressing a crisis.

Media junkets: If you have a really powerful case study that you want to capture what should you do to get the journalist to learn more about it? The answer is to take them there. Press junkets are an opportunity for an organisation or a brand to take the journalist to a certain location that is actually reflective of the story that you are trying to propose. For instance, if you work with an organisation that advocates for rural development, a press junket to a really small village outside the city that's actually facing a lot of infrastructural challenges could be an interesting tactic. This helps you show them the breadth of the issue. While it's a human interest story for them, it's a story that brings out your purpose for you and your organisation. While it must be hard for certain products and brands to get an opportunity to make that happen, for a public relations professional who works in the social as well as the development sector, this is an excellent platform to actually show the impact stories. It's not just a problem that you will be able to capture in the press junket. If you have been working with a certain location for a long while, a press visit in the location could actually help you exhibit the impact you have been able to create in that region. This is a very direct way of capturing your brand's mission and vision.

While these are all very effective PR tools, none of them actually substitute a strong strategy or tactic. These are all apparatuses you need to utilise along your journey to ensure that you are able to deliver on your PR strategy. The beauty of these PR tools is that they can all be customised and tweaked as per our requirements. For instance, the same press release can be tweaked and rewritten to be sent to a B2B journalist, assume an interested reporter, millennial Web publication, or a traditional journalist. Once you have identified what your PR strategy is, you can then go on and determine what PR tools you are gonna implement tactfully to make your strategy a reality. While these are all very helpful tools, there is also merit in being innovative when it comes to using these. As we have mentioned earlier the lines between public relations and digital content are blurring. While that might make it harder for processes to be efficient or for division of labour to be clearer, it still presents you with enormous potential to experiment. For instance, now PR professionals don't have to wait for a journalist or a newspaper to pick up their story for weeks. They can use their own digital media platforms as an avenue to self publish. It often happens that you have self-published something and that sparks interest in a journalist or a media house, and then they want to publish more about the story. Taking things to the general public is not as challenging as it was a couple of years before.

This also means that your PR tactics can be multifaceted. Earlier if you wanted to communicate a really heartwarming story, you had to write a very powerful piece and mail it to your network of journalists and wait for someone to respond back to you. You may also have to do a couple of follow-ups since they are bombarded with these kinds of emails every single day. Today you have the liberty of creating a 30 second or one-minute clipping of the story and publishing it on a suitable digital channel. This can then result in it receiving public attention and the story can then come to the limelight.

Q. What are some tools you can use to advance your PR strategy?

TO SUM IT UP

To sum it up, in the world of PR, a powerful strategy and tactics that can actually facilitate storytelling can be quite powerful. There are several metrics and filters that you can use to identify what/to use for who. There are also several tools available to PR professionals that they can implement to effectively achieve their PR goals. The success really lies within identifying what approach to adapt for who and choosing a tactic or tool that will effectively help you realise that. While there is no rigid formula for you to make this happen or understand this, this is an evolving skill that might come to you with experience. One also needs to stay on top of trends and technology that can shift what's happening in the world of communication for you to effectively be able to do this. Now with interpersonal communication and mass broadcast transcending their boundaries, it's crucial for PR professionals to stay aware of the trends so that they are able to identify what to connect with their strategy. In a nutshell different strokes for different people simply means knowing what the audience or the journalist might want and delivering it in your capacity exactly.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why should you have different strokes for different people?
2. What are some tools you can use to tactically advance your strategy?
3. What's the difference between a tactic and a strategy
4. What makes a good strategy?

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10

WHAT IS RISK IN PR?

Unit Structure

OBJECTIVES

- This chapter would help you understand some potential risks faced by public relations professionals
- It will help you prepare and mitigate in case of crisis arises
- I will make you aware of the process you need to follow if a situation like that images
- This also helps to prevent any mishap from the communication professionals' end

INTRODUCTION

Everything we do in the sector of communication is extremely public-facing. While this is a very rewarding career choice, it's also equally important to know that there is very little room for error. You need to be all the more careful with a domain like public relations because, it is assumed that if you have communicated it via a tool of public relations like a press release, press note, media announcement or interview it is possibly the organisation's official communication. While attention to detail and double-checking can save you a lot of trouble, there are still many many risks that the PR industry has that we can't control. This chapter discusses in detail what are some potential risks like this and addresses how you can tackle the challenges.

Risks of business:

Before we learn more about the risks that the PR industry presents you with, let's briefly go over what general business risks look like. These are potential threats faced by pretty much any business setup.

- *Strategic risks* in the business and political environment
- *Compliance risks* – complying with rules and regulations
- *Operating risks* – events that severely disrupt operations, such as natural disasters, power supply, management complaisance or incompetence, cyber security attack, etc
- *Financial risks* – relating to the money flowing in and out of the business
- *Reputational risks* – a ‘flexible’ term, but with major business implications

While not all of them may seem relevant to our scope of work right now, if you think about it, you will realise that any of these risks can translate into a PR risk. Since your responsibility would be to communicate to a larger audience about the happenings at your organisation, any of these risks could extend themselves to that. For instance, a strategic decision that is taken by an organisation could go wrong and can turn into a PR crisis. Even if it doesn’t turn into an instant PR crisis, if your organisation is responsible and transparent enough, it will be expected out of you to communicate that failure to the audience. It is also possible that the strategic decision was a big success, however, in the process, you have said/communicated some insensitive things that do not adhere to your brand values otherwise. So addressing that will also be a part of managing the PR risk. A new age example would be the ‘Don’t Say Gay’ policy by Disney. Despite the whole United States having pretty liberal policies and conversations around queer rights, Disney took a drastic step and that has caused them quite a bit of reputational damage.

Potential threats to good PR

Now that you have understood how easily a PR crisis can arise, let’s quickly talk about what are some general potential U-turns PR could take. One very common PR risk that most people don’t talk about is creating strategies that are not effective and communicating ineffectively. This might not necessarily mean that your message is not being received by anybody or is not disseminated far enough. It simply means that the messaging with which you are going to your audience is not resonating with them, you are not receiving any positive responses from them, or even worse, you are coming across as a brand that does direct brand plug-in and a little bit bragging. When you are creating communication strategies and PR campaigns for just your products. It is completely possible that some of the material will turn into pieces that are exclusively just about the work the organisation does. One needs to remind themselves that unless there is an incentive that comes out of that piece of communication or engagement for the audience- it could be the journalist you are pitching it to or the public who will be reading it, it won’t be as effective.

Another simple PR risk that doesn't get spoken about enough is choosing the wrong target audience. While it may simple enough, it's possible that the organisation has wrongly formulated the target audience. It's also possible that the audience was defined at a very early point of the organisation's set up and now the dynamics have changed drastically. An excellent example would be makeup and skincare. There was a time when the communication of these brands was exclusively only targeted to women and only women of certain age groups. Today, makeup is enjoyed by people of all genders and ages. The target market and audience have shifted tremendously. Relooking at your target audience every once in a while is key. It may change every few years.

Another big PR mistake could be choosing the wrong narrative. This might not be a conscious choice. You might have chosen a very popular format of messaging for your brand that you have seen competitors use, however, there's a risk in running any narrative since there's no guarantee that this will be a success. If you have the wrong target group, that would naturally land you in the wrong narrative. But something that would be even more damaging would be sending out a narrative that doesn't reflect the brand values. If the narrative isn't inclusive, that could trigger a backlash. If you have chosen stereotypes or tokenism, it could do the brand more harm than good.

Another straightforward task in PR, if done well can be really effective, or if not done well can be really damaging for the brand, is choosing the right spokesperson for your brand. You can't overstate the importance of choosing the right spokesperson for your brand. Your spokesperson simply represents your brand and its values to the general public. For example, Elon Musk, the Founder and CEO of Tesla is their spokesperson as well. He represents everything the brand stands for. He expresses himself as somebody who is innovative cutting-edge, quirky, future-oriented and someone who is self-made. If you observe closely that's also to who Tesla wants to sell their products to. They want customers who are self-made upper-middle-class, People who believe in alternative energy sources and electric cars, people who don't look at cars as just a mode of transport but those who want innovation and creativity from their products. It's also interesting to note that these are all values Tesla proposes internally and externally. He's done an excellent job advocating for Tesla and its potential target groups. Based on this example, when you pick the spokesperson for your brand you need to keep in mind a couple of things. They need to be a key stakeholder of the organisation who actually has decision-making as well as influential capacity. It wouldn't be wise to put somebody from middle-level management to be your spokesperson because simply if they are thrown into a situation where they are asked about something that and decided within the organisation, it might throw them off. Your spokesperson also needs to be somebody who is articulate and confident in communication. While it may seem biased, for four public relations purposes, you cannot have a spokesperson who has just good ideas. You need somebody who can also articulate these good ideas. Since it's completely possible to misquote somebody out of context, you need somebody who understands the craft of framing answers. We also need someone who is relatable and has a story. This simply means that, when this particular leader is put in the limelight, the story should be catchy enough for it to evoke some emotions within the audience. A solid human interest story can do magic for your brand reputation.

Q. What are some risks PR professionals should prepare for?

PR Risks and how to tackle them

Miscommunication: one of the many PR risks that exist in today's world is miscommunication. There might be a couple of reasons how this can happen-it could be that somebody misquoted or pulled something out of context from a piece of communication that you generated, it could be because an individual who is associated with your organisation has gone out and said something in his own personal capacity which is against the brand's personal philosophy, it could also be because somebody missed spoke or used words that actually don't reflect the brand's voice. As much as you prepare, some of these are human errors and you can't control them. Once one of them arises, you can however address it. It has happened several times in the last couple of years, that a participant has said something in the context of a particular question and media or other people have picked it up completely out of context and used that as the hook for the story. Now since the internet is so quick to judge, it's absolutely possible that if you are misquoted, before you are able to acknowledge the fact that this was a miscommunication, you would have lost some of your brand reputations. News around things like the spread like wildfire. Especially if it involves a leader figure, you can see real damage to the brand image.

Inaccuracy:while miscommunication might be a mishap, inaccuracy in communication collaterals is less forgiving. Especially if you are an organisation or brand that builds your communication base or your proof points or impact stories, and if they are based on quantitative numbers and inaccuracy could cost you a lot. It could make your organisation look like you are manipulating numbers to create a different narrative which might not be the reality. Attention to detail can go a long way on this. However,r complete transparency is a crucial part of excellent communication strategies. So if inaccuracy has occurred, it is a communication professional's duty to acknowledge it and clear it. Most organisations publish annual reports and audit reports so that their financials and other activities are completely transparent. It's actually an industry best practice to not only keep these records transparent and accessible for all but also to inform people that we are a transparent organisation.

Personal conflicts: in today's age and time, there is nobody who is free of a digital footprint. While it may seem harmless on the surface when one needs to be aware of the fact that there are ways to connect you with your hometown, your workplace, your educational institutions and more on the internet. For instance, if an individual in your organisation who is in a key position says a certain insensitive something, that is very much within their personal capacity outside of work, there is an opportunity for outsiders to simply research with said person‘s name and find out what they work or what they do. This can blow into a big PR risk in no time. While depending on your organisation's philosophy, the said person could have consequences, however, this could instantly or even in midterm damage your company‘s reputation. An excellent example would be, the happenings around the ‘Black Lives Matters’ movement in America. There were several instances where the two sides clashed and cost each other’s careers. One particularly noteworthy one was a couple who stood outside their house with arms in their hand while a peaceful protest went around. The image went viral, they were identified in no time. People tracked their workplaces down and flagged it with them.

Controversies: Another risk that deserves a mention is risks related to controversies within your organisation. There is a possibility that a team and individual or even campaign that you did is the centre of a controversy. It’s also important to note that a major risk in PR is simply coming across as braggy or completely self-centred. Unless you are incentivising your audience to engage with you there is a fair chance that your strategy won’t be effective at all.

HOW TO ADDRESS A PR CRISIS

Now that we have understood some ways PR risks can emerge, let’s talk about how should one acknowledge and address them.

The first step in managing a PR crisis is to orient yourself and your team towards the purpose of why you are doing what you are doing. It’s important that you take a step back, observe the situation intently come up with your observations before you actually start acting.

It’s also crucial that you document the process of said crisis because of two reasons-this will help your team members or other teams to understand the process that needs to be followed and this can become a part of a checklist as you build your communication future strategies. Once you have your observations, it’s time to involve all the key stakeholders. You can choose which stakeholders you want to involve based on the magnitude of the risk. If it is minor and doesn’t affect the brand holistically, you can keep the communication Limited within the communications team. But if it’s going to have longer repercussions, it’s important that you involve everyone it affects.

It’s important that you communicate the happening to the relevant stakeholders. This may vary from vertical heads to CEO Or even board members depending on the magnitude of the issue.

The third step is to come up with a crisis management strategy. Depending on the issue, it could be different. You may want to issue a statement that talks about your organisation's stance on the said crisis. Your strategy could also be that you do a media briefing with key personnel who can answer any questions the media have about the crisis. You may also need to prepare a press release which addresses the issue. But to do all of this, it is absolutely important for you and your organisation to align on what the narrative would be. There needs to be 100% synchronisation between every piece of communication collateral that goes out.

The next step would be identifying your key target media/platforms. Depending on the nature of the issue, you may want to selectively publicise and disseminate the information. It might actually be more effective to do it in a selective manner than simply sending it out to the vast breadth of your network. This collateral needs to address the issue, make the organisation's stance on it clear, and also explain how and what actions will be taken on this front.

Depending on the nature of the issue, you may also be expected to communicate internally within the organisation about the issue. This might also be helpful to ensure all stakeholders are aligned on what we are communicating. It's also important for one to send out a follow up on this coming to an end so that the organisation is aware that you are monitoring and tracking the issue. There might be some curiosity amongst immediate stakeholders, so holding spaces and avenues for them to come forth and ask any questions and seek clarification is very important. This is an important part of creating a healthy work culture as well - giving your direct stakeholders a space to ask questions and seek explanations. This will avoid any ambiguity and unclear chats.

In a nutshell, whoever is responsible for risk management is meant to answer three questions:

1. What can go wrong? Or what has gone wrong?
2. What is the likelihood and impact of something going wrong? Depending on, atwhat stage of the crisis you are in, you can answer either.
3. What can we do about it? What's the right way to go about it.

To simplify the process, each PR risk can be addressed with the following steps:

1. Establish the context
2. Identify the risks
3. Analyze the risks
4. Evaluate the risks
5. Establish a risk register
6. Treat the risks
7. Monitor and review
8. Communicate and consult.

Q. How can one evaluate the PR risk and what should be the immediate next steps?

How Does PR help in Crisis Management?

While it may seem simple enough on the surface that a PR crisis has emerged and it is being addressed at a slow pace, it's important to note that a PR crisis has an impact on the business side of things beyond communication. The main responsibility of public relations is to ensure there is trust and positive brand perception, a PR crisis not only negatively affects it, but it may also make it harder for our future campaigns to be effective.

Addressing a PR crisis, beyond mitigating the issue at hand, also represents the brand and the organisation in a positive light. Especially if the issue touches upon any aspects of discrimination or insensitivity, taking ownership and providing consequences make the brand appear as a responsible one. In today's agile world, it is almost expected that the brand will address the issues. With almost every organisation being present on digital media, it's also incredibly easy for the public to demand explanations. Not acknowledging or addressing the issue at hand makes the organisation look like they don't really care about the image which may lead to rejection from the audience.

The three Cs of credibility:

An important aspect of an effective PR crisis management strategy is an effective spokesperson. This individual will have to be a key influencer within the organisation beyond them being just articulate. This person, for that very short period of time, becomes the brand's face. A key responsibility of PR professionals would be to prepare the said person to engage with an audience. You can use a 3C method to ensure they are able to do it successfully

1. **Compassionate:** As you will be in the limelight, appearing compassionate and sharing only explanations that are empathetic is crucial. You need to choose somebody compassionate and aware of the surroundings

2. **Competent:** This person needs to have the personality of a competent employee and of a competent citizen. Their image gets associated with the brand image. It's crucial that you choose someone with a positive track record

3. **Confident:** You might be met with some challenging conversations and questions. You need someone who won't be phased by challenges. This individual needs to be confident and comfortable within this space.

Q. What's the role of a spokesperson in addressing a PR crisis and avoiding further risks?

How to handle a PR crisis:

We briefly touched upon the steps of PR crisis management. Here, we will in detail, discuss the most efficient way to mitigate a PR crisis.

1. Appoint a team:

Select a group of people who would be equipped to take on the challenge that is the PR crisis. There should be a mix of strategic people with a deep understanding of the business and also a few people who have the potential to be the spokesperson. Depending on the magnitude of the issue, this team should be capable of making decisions around narrative and messaging.

2. Design a strategy and brief your team:

Often the crisis management strategy will be determined by the senior leadership team depending on the magnitude of the issue. It's important for the team to be briefed on the strategy and why we have chosen that path. This helps people create narratives that are more effective and offers them more context.

3. Craft your message:

Once you have adequate context observations and approval from the leadership team, you can start drafting a message in alignment with the strategy that you have decided on. It needs to be concise, short and to the point. It needs to answer any questions that may come. It also needs to mention the contact details of personnel in case they need more clarity.

4. Identify and address the affected parties:

Depending on the issue, it might be an expectation that you identify and address the affected parties. Sometimes it might be your internal community while in some other situations it could be the external community. Either way, being empathetic towards them or addressing those issues will be crucial. It's also important as we discussed to open up conversations with all immediate stakeholders to give them an opportunity to share their concerns.

5. Monitor the situation:

Right after you have launched the action plan of your PR strategy, it's also important for you to monitor the situation. That means you observe closely what the audience sentimentality is towards your brand and whether it is fluctuating after the strategy was implemented. Setting up some alerts would be wise.

6. Review and learn from the situation:

One should also try to look at these crises as a great learning opportunity and try to use those learnings as a prevention method for the future.

WHAT NOT TO DO DURING A PR CRISIS

Just as we have understood what to do during a PR crisis, it's also important for us to understand what not to do during a PR crisis.

Being defensive: There are several normal human reactions towards any accusation and it's often being defensive. That wouldn't be an ideal case scenario during a PR crisis - one must not be defensive or lash out.

Staying silent: Some brands also tend to offer no comment on issues. While for some minor cases this might be an acceptable response, in most situations not offering a comment or acknowledging the issue is actually going to make the brand look irresponsible.

Responding way too quickly you are way too slowly- This is an easy mistake to make. One should always take the time to understand and observe all aspects of the crisis before they respond. If you respond too quickly, there is a chance of you are missing out on some elements of the crisis. It wouldn't actually be fully effective if you respond to a crisis before it is actually in its completion and you can take the wrong direction. At the same time, if you respond way too slowly, it might actually not be as relevant anymore.

LET'S SUM IT UP:

There are several PR risks in the world of communication. While we can't fully avoid all of it, you can prepare for them. Any business risk can translate itself into a PR risk and with a good communication strategy and team in place, many of these risks can be addressed.

QUESTIONS

1. What are some business risks?
2. What factors contribute to a PR risk and eventually a PR crisis?
3. How can one address a PR crisis?
4. What are some absolute not-dos amidst a PR crisis?

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15

EVALUATION TECHNIQUES

Unit Structure

15.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to understand:

- Meaning of evaluation techniques
- Use of evaluation techniques
- Relevance in Public Relations campaigns and activities

15.1 INTRODUCTION

Public Relations Society of America PRSA agreed upon a definition after a few thousand submissions: "Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics."

Public Relations has been an evolving practice, its origin and growth has traversed many years across the world. Sriramesh quotes James Grunig's definition of public relations that it is "the management of communication between an organization and its publics (Sriramesh & White, 1992). Public relations serve the functions of information, communication, persuasion, image building, continuous building of trust, management of conflicts, and the generation of consensus" (Sriramesh K. , 2003). PR is in the business of persuasion. You are always trying to persuade somebody or the other.

In PR it is said that there is no such thing as the public - there are in fact different groups of people - not just consumers, but suppliers, employees, trustees, members, local and national trade and political bodies, residents, among many others.

Research, analysis involves a constant monitoring of the environment under which an organisation operates is very important as can be seen from the data above. Evaluation done during campaigns revel what more needs to be done for amicable and mutual beneficial relationships with stakeholders. PR campaigns are indeed useful when image of a company is hampered during a crisis like an accident, product failure, pandemic, depression etc. In all these situations it becomes imperative to organize communication activities to keep the stakeholders well apprised of the situation and to resolve their grievances.

“Campaigns are coordinated, purposeful, extended efforts designed to achieve a specific goal or a set of interrelated goals that will move the organisation towards a longer-range objective expressed as its mission statement”- Doug Newsom, Judy VanSlyke and Dean Kruckberg's “This is PR. The realities of Public Relations”. In context of public relations, it is basically strategizing and creating publicity or media coverage for a brand. Doing activities which will ensure the above. It is also called a public relations plan or a PR plan. Whenever a PR plan is put into place it is always dynamic in nature. There is constant evaluation and is updated as per the change in environment, any stakeholder update etc.

Campaigns are designed keeping in mind to address an issue, to resolve a problem at hand, or to improvise what one is already doing in an organisation. The research and monitoring always reveal the data of the position of the company, thanks to ever changing modern technology. An organisation can then use this data for e.g., “by changing a behaviour; by modifying a law or opinion; or by retaining a desirable behaviour, law or opinion that is challenged”.

Anderson (1991) explained that "we need to emulate our friends in advertising and marketing . . . if we are to become able practitioners of precision public relations" (p. 31). PR practitioners need to have the knowledge of social science research techniques to maintain public relations professionalism.

Public Relations research may not always be available in the public domain due to confidentiality issues of clients. Sometimes evaluation and research are not considered so important than creativity at work in public relations scenarios, this can hamper work if research is only looked up as some very formal and quantitative process giving less importance to the work that is put together by the PR practitioner. This will in turn become an obstacle while creating campaigns and evaluating them. Even more it becomes important that public relations practitioners be encouraged to undertake formal research training if not already undertaken. A semblance needs to be there for the connection to happen between industry practice and research language as rightly put "educators may need to stress the importance of social science research for all students" (Judd, 1990, p. 25).

15.2 EVALUATION TECHNIQUES IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

Objectives are crucial to plan any PR campaign. It even becomes easier then to evaluate the process under implementation. Objectives help ensure success to any given activities thus designed. Research of various kinds are useful to study any campaign or previous works done by an organisation. Pavlik (1987) defined three major types of Public Relations research: -

Applied Research:

This kind of research examines issues at work and helps in solving problems. It is further sub divided into Strategic research and Evaluation research.

- **Strategic Research:** Broom and Dozier (1990), define strategic research as "deciding where you want to be in the future and how to get there"
- **Evaluation Research:** This is done to the effectiveness of a PR plan/campaign/program
  - Implementation checking
  - In-progress monitoring
  - Outcome Evaluation

Basic Research:

This helps in knowledge production which can be useful in any kind of a Public Relations situation. It specifically investigates the processes in place and theorizing the process itself.

Introspective Research:

As the names suggests it is self-analytical in nature and looks deeper into the practice and the practitioner of Public Relations. It will be interesting to note here that evaluation need not be restricted only to the study of the process of campaigns.

(Cultip, Center & Broom ,1994) prescribe a four-step model of Public Relations Research:

a) Define Public Relations Problems

b) Plan Public Relations Programmes

c) Implement Public Relations programs through actions and communications

d) Evaluate the program

So from the above we can see that evaluation forms and important part of public relations activities and campaigns. Evaluation need not be at the end it can part of any step wherever needed.

Evaluation techniques:

It all begins at the proposal stage. The objectives of a program will define the results expected. The kind of techniques one will used will depend on the objectives set. So if behaviour change is an objective then the assessment will be of that parameter.

There are three main types of measures used:

Quality measures: This consists of basic qualitative reviews of production/projects, any scope for betterment, and the total quality of the production. Used most often by communication departments of companies for their internal communication and this can be also used for any upcoming plan etc. This could be seen in intranet, website communications, employee communications, emails etc. There can communication various languages too with companies now looking into this issue, so the quality of the language in writing as well in verbal communication needs to be carefully addressed in terms of quality.

Output measures: This measure quantifies the communication activities in terms of distribution, press coverage or publicity (circulation or number of exposures), impressions (the actual number of people who read/saw the message). Output measures are obtained from audience data which is part of public media and research agencies (media monitoring agency, rating entity etc.). So, a company can observe the kind of press releases/articles written, the media used for distribution, in current times use of digital communication can add on the way one reaches to the audiences. Engaging with the audience further changes the way evaluation can be done. As one PR practitioner had once observed that PR is 24/7 365 days job was right as with the Internet, feedback from the audience and grievances resolution is always what keeps the PR practitioner on his/her toes.

Impact measures: This kind of evaluation uses surveys as a method to observe for change in awareness levels (knowledge), attitudes (opinion), action of the respondent (behaviour). One can also measure for e.g., buying, investing, voting behaviour of the audience at large. One can relate this to the campaign plan to know how effective the plan was. PR efforts always take a while before the result start showing. Health campaigns are perfect examples. In case of the pandemic, it really took a while for government to convince their publics to engage in health safety measures such as wearing masks, sanitization and of course taking the vaccine dose. It is still an ongoing process with the pandemic virus changing after every few months. The other places where impacts can be measured are image building and selling a product. Public Relations campaigns are used a lot for both these functions. Like earlier said image of an organisation always takes a while before it can take shape in the minds of the people and that is why companies must carefully choose what to say and do in the eyes of the publics. Selling is yet another function which public relations does by educating their publics to buy or adopt to a new scenario. Continuous writing, implementation, testimonials from current users can be very useful in selling a product.

Some other forms of techniques for monitoring a PR campaign are as follows: Gatekeeping research and Output analysis.

Under gatekeeping research, characteristics of press releases and video releases are analyzed that let them "pass through the gate" to get published in various media. The content and style are examined in these types of vehicles.

Under output analysis, Lindemann (1997) defines “outputs as the short-term or immediate results of a particular public relations programme or activity”. It measures how effectively an organisation portrays itself to the publics, it also observes the amount of exposure or attention an organisation gets.

There can be some typical points to be kept in mind that should be handy while planning a campaign which can help in designing a campaign, which can help in evaluation.

1. The source of information of the audience.
2. Media chosen by audience to make decisions about important things and the behaviour of the audience.
3. The channels that allows for two-way communication that gives feedback to the organisation.
4. The most effective media for communication.
5. The media most suited to put across the communication in all respects, especially the story telling perspective.
6. Most cost-effective media.

In his article on “Communicating Public Relations Research”, Gael F. Walker, University of Technology, Sydney makes the following observation as some of the *limitations* in public relations evaluation of campaigns and works that can hinder the overall working of the practice:-

There can be limitations to doing evaluations. In different areas of public relations, this limitation can be observed. As rightly explained by this statement "measure of the amount of media placements indicates program impact on publics" (Broom & Dozier, 1983 , p. 6). If one has not related this to actual benefit to the client then merely studying media coverage numerically will not really give any clear result. The good news is that PR practitioners are becoming aware of this limitation. Though one says that media coverage is one tangible way to show the client the work done. So for PR effects to take place it takes a while and is a long drawn process. Till then the PR practitioner will produce this as deliverables.

Again not all the time publicity using media is used, there can be other ways to generate visibility and the client may not be aware of the efforts taken to put out the press release to the media and the actual publishing of the same. Clients simply look at the monetary equivalent of the activity, again a limitation but again the column inch of press clippings is largely used as critiqued by Heath (1991).

Another major limitation to evaluation being given preference is the budget allocated to the same as explained by PR practitioners "because few clients have the budget for formal market research or recognize its importance . . . [we] have to gather information from a variety of sources" and "they think formal market research is expensive and don't want to pay for it but they think informal research is OK and feel better if you tell them you are doing something to clarify your understanding of their position.". Some more responses indicate the challenges: "I'd like my clients to be more willing to participate in research," and it was suggested that "clients generally don't know anything about research. They are not aware or else are only dimly aware that it exists and, therefore, they do not request that it be conducted." Clients many a time are unable to provide previous data for the current project/campaign for a better planning for the PR plan. This results in the campaigns being more general in nature so this leads to not really reaching out the actual audiences completely, or the messaging not being really a winner, sometimes the product usefulness limitation can also not let the future plans be more effective for current products as no real past data was provided. PR activities evaluation can also be challenging when the client takes it for granted that the press already knows about the client organisation in the industry. This may not always be the case and proper information from the client is necessary for the PR agency to write better press releases, or design better campaigns. Sometimes PR is just considered a part of the marketing mix and so doesn't gets its deserved value, "clients do not think PR is important and it is often only tacked onto the portfolio of usual activities." Comments made included "marketing managers and advertising agencies think PR is only peripheral" and "these people don't think PR is serious." To continue the limitation, the practitioner says that they "have to fight for their client's attention in amongst the marketing advisers and ad agency representatives who quite often misunderstand or denigrate PR's contribution to the achievement of the client's communication objectives."

It is observed that the environment under which an organisation operates are factors affected by political-legal, economic and socio-cultural parameters. The stakeholders have an direct impact on the image and reputation of the organisation. The organisation may create various campaigns to either create a specific image of themselves with their stakeholders or sell their products of services to their target audiences. In any scenario a thorough evaluation is needed at each step of the campaign planning to know the current position of the organisation.

Check your progress

1. What is your understanding of public relations evaluation?
2. What are the various forms of evaluation techniques?
3. What are limitations of doing evaluation in public relations?
4. What are points to be kept in mind while creating a PR campaign?

15.3 LET'S SUM IT UP

Public Relations Society of America PRSA agreed upon a definition after a few thousand submissions: "Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics."

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Objectives are crucial to plan any PR campaign. It even becomes easier then to evaluate the process under implementation. Objectives help ensure success to any given activities thus designed. Research of various kinds are useful to study any campaign or previous works done by an organisation.

Pavlik (1987) defined three major types of Public Relations research: Applied research, basic research and introspective research. (Cultip, Center & Broom ,1994) prescribe a four-step model of Public Relations Research:

a) Define Public Relations Problems

b) Plan Public Relations Programmes

c) Implement Public Relations programs through actions and communications

d) Evaluate the program

Evaluation techniques choices can begin at the proposal stage. The objectives of a program will define the results expected. The kind of techniques one will used will depend on the objectives set. So if behaviour change is an objective then the assessment will be of that parameter. There are three broadly classified ways: Quality, Output and Impact measures.

There can be limitations to doing evaluations. In different areas of public relations, this limitation can be observed as explained above. It is observed that the environment under which a organisation operates are factors affected by political-legal, economic and socio-cultural parameters. The organisation may create various campaigns to either create a specific image of themselves with their stakeholders or sell their products of services to their target audiences. In any scenario a thorough evaluation is needed at each step of the campaign planning to know the current position of the organisation.

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William P. Ehling Syracuse University in Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management

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