

**PUBLIC RELATIONS ORIENTATION
HOW PUBLIC RELATIONS
CONSULTANCIES CAN “GROW UP”**

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Abstract

The concept of public relations orientation (PRO) is advanced as a way of conceptualising public relations practice and transforming consultant approaches to client problems. Public relations orientation is defined as the possible philosophical stances organisations adopt when relating with publics. Public relations orientation, therefore, embraces the range of public relations goals, behaviours and transactions pursued by organisations. The three aspects of PRO were elaborated through analysis of interviews conducted with managers of a range of large Australian companies. Sub-dimensions for each category were identified and linked to the literature. The article concludes by discussing how consultants can transform the client-consultant transaction model from an adult-child ego state to an adult-adult ego state by using PRO to develop interventions with organisation-level outcomes, rather than the usual program-level outcomes.

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INTRODUCTION

Public relations consultancies are under threat from management consultancies, which are increasingly moving into services once provided exclusively by public relations people (White, 2001). White recommends PR consultancies learn from management consultancies by transforming their business bases and approaches to client problems. He suggests consultancies invest more in innovation, research and development [ibid]. However, changing approaches to client problems may require more than this. A difficulty for consultants is that public relations is often marginalised in the organisations they act for (Hon, 1997). Consequently, effectiveness of public relations is defined at the program level, rather than the organisation level, with public relations conceptualised as achieving discrete, program-level communication objectives, rather than strategic, organisation level objectives (ibid). This sobering reality suggests that public relations consultancies are unlikely to command either the fees or influence that management firms do until they can shift from activity-based consulting to results-based consulting and from the program level to the organisation level. In a results-oriented framework, interventions are linked to specific business needs in an environment prepared to support implementation (Phillips, 2000). If public relations is to offer services that will be valued as much as management consultancy services, consultants need to develop skills in diagnosing the level of support for public relations within a given environment, and develop organisation-level interventions that demonstrate value for their clients.

In this paper, we introduce the concept of public relations orientation as a way of transforming approaches to client problems. Using a grounded theory approach, we derive a model of the core dimensions describing an organisation's capacity to effectively use public relations for organizational goal attainment.

The public relations orientation construct offers a method of diagnosing the organisational environment for public relations and developing organisation-level interventions designed to unleash the ability of the public relations function to add value to organisations. The concept of public relations orientation enables public relations to be linked with organisationally valued outcomes such as reduced stakeholder conflict, the license to operate, and organisational reputation.

We define public relations orientation as the possible philosophical stances an organisation can adopt to facilitate organisationally valued outcomes through relating with its publics (internal and external). The stance taken is manifested by the way that the organisation manages the process of aligning its relationships with publics. We begin by scoping the challenge facing public relations consultancies in moving from program-level service to organisation-level service. We follow with a theoretically derived definition of the concept of public relations orientation. Next, we present findings from interviews of managers from a range of Australian industries to refine and ground the PRO construct. We conclude with propositions identifying how consultants can use the PRO construct to develop value added consulting interventions.

THE PROBLEM WITH PR CONSULTANCIES

Consultants are in the business of solving organisational problems. However, the sad reality is that CEOs rarely want public relations consultants to play a role in strategy, do not value their contribution to corporate strategy, and do not want them to manage organisational responses to issues (Steiner & Black, 2000). Instead, PR consultants are expected to communicate with stakeholders according to strategies set elsewhere in the organisation, play a media relations advisory role, and persuade publics that organisations are right (ibid). In short, PR consultants generally service organisations at the program or tactical level by providing "short-duration, adaptive, action-interaction realignments ... to accomplish limited goals" (Mintzberg & Quinn, 1998, p. 4).

This relatively-low level role that PR consultants are likely to play may be exacerbated or entrenched by client-consultant conflict based on the one hand, by client perceptions that consultants lack knowledge of the client's business and lack sufficient research, and, on the other hand, by consultant perceptions that clients do not facilitate information flows, are unwilling to provide time, and lack PR knowledge (Bourland, 1993).

A complementary problem may be the transactional model typically pursued by PR consultancies. This issue can be illuminated using the three general consultant-client relationships that Lundberg (1994) derived from social-psychodynamics. One relationship, the doctor-patient model, refers to relationships where clients typically feel helpless and give themselves into the consultant's care. This model represents a parent-child ego state, with the consultant playing the parent role. The second model depicts the consultant as expert supplier and the client as purchaser, with ego states reversed – the consultant, who is in a child ego state, has less power than the client, who is in a parent ego state. The third model defines the consultant as facilitator and the client as participant where both parties adopt adult ego states to jointly define problems and seek resolution.

Broom and Smith's classic practitioner role models (1979) add to our understanding of the efficacy of these transactional models. Clients in Broom and Smith's study viewed the "problem solving process facilitator" role, that is, a relationship built on collaboration, as the most effective. In this role, the consultant guides the client through a rational problem-solving process, in which the long-run objective is to increase the client's problem-solving and problem-avoiding abilities, rather than to solve a particular problem (ibid, p.52-53). This role, viewed through Lundberg's framework, requires both client and consultant to adopt adult ego states. This adult ego state, in turn, frames the consultant as a manager, rather than as a technician, an essential requirement for helping organisations adapt to their environment (Dozier, 1992, p.342), and delivering organisation-level outcomes rather than program-level outcomes.

The "communication technician role" was the second most effective role from the client perspective, and is described by Terry (2001, p. 248) as "a provider in a traditional consumer transaction. The client literally buys a service or set of services that the practitioner can perform or deliver." This transactional model may be understood in terms of Lundberg's "expert supplier-purchaser" model with the consultant playing a child ego role to the client's adult ego role. The child ego state frames the consultant as a technician, able to deliver program level outcomes only as he or she is excluded from strategic decision-making.

The "expert prescriber" role, likened by Dozier (1992) and Broom and Smith (1979) to the doctor-patient relationship, was an even less effective role. Broom and Smith (1979) point out that the success of this role depends, in part, on the adequacy of the client's problem diagnosis and needs assessment. This reduction in the consultant's control over the quality of outcomes, and the client's lack of ownership of solutions to problems, or lack of adult ego role participation in problem solving, may contribute to ineffective outcomes. It is interesting to note that this less effective role was described as the "agency role" in a study of trends in public relations roles (Toth, Serini, Wright, & Emig, 1998), that is, the role most likely to be typically played by consultancy practitioners.

Consultants can move between roles (for example, Terry, 2001), especially in the larger full-service consultancies. However, we suggest that while CEOs see consultants as failing to contribute significantly to organisational performance (Steiner & Black, 2000), consultancies will be unable to compete with management consultancies for higher-fee work or organisationally valued work. To win this work, consultants need methods for delivering valued organisation-level outcomes, rather than program level outcomes. This requires consultants to adopt a transactional role model in which both parties assume an adult ego state (Lundberg, 1994) based on a collaborative approach to problem solving, and in which consultants can play a manager role, rather than a technician role (Dozier, 1992).

We suggest that using the concept of public relations orientation will enable PR consultants to change their role and the nature of their client transactions from the relatively powerless expert supplier-purchaser technician model in which consultants are "children", to a relatively more powerful facilitator-participant manager role in which consultants are "adults". In other words, consultants can "grow up" in the eyes of CEOs by using the PR orientation model as described in later sections of this paper. An adult role requires

wider organisational access and in turn allows consultants to develop interventions that will deliver value at the organisational or strategic level, rather than at the program or tactical level.

PUBLIC RELATIONS ORIENTATION

The term "orientation" is described by the Collins English Dictionary (Hanks, 1986, p.1085) as the act of "adjustment or alignment of oneself or one's ideas to surroundings or circumstances" or "positioning" in relation to a specific direction. Several aspects of the definition are worth highlighting. First, the concept of orientation involves a specific goal (direction). Second, orientation provides a description of the way one acts as a consequence of the goal. Third, orientation describes the response one adopts when dealing with things external to one's self. Thus, an orientation can be described in terms of the characteristics of the goal, the goal-directed behaviour, and the transactions with the environment and parties threatening or enabling the achievement of the goal (strategic constituencies). Public relations orientation, therefore, embraces the range of public relations goals, behaviours and transactions pursued by organizations. Like other organisational orientations, such as market orientation (Berthon, Hulbert, & Pitt, 1999), innovation orientation (Gatignon & Xuereb, 1997; Vazquez, Santos, & Alvarez, 2001) and learning orientation (Baker & Sinkula, 1999), a public relations orientation provides a map of strategic intent (Wheeler, Capobianco, Perkin, & Stanford, 2001) and reveals "the mechanisms that aim to maintain coherence between management's strategic intent and operational activities" (Atuahene-Gima & Ko, 2001). Therefore, public relations orientation has the potential to explain the pathway by which public relations delivers value to organisations.

METHOD

The principal aim of the study was to develop a definition of public relations orientation, which could then be operationalised to allow comparisons between public relations and other organisational variables. Because little information is available relating to the research question and the research aim was to build theory, an inductive, qualitative approach was taken (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 273). Specifically, we used in-depth, semi-structured interviews, lasting between 60-90 minutes, to ask respondents about public relations in their companies.

Respondents were recruited from large companies (employing more than 1,000 people) based in Melbourne, in primary industry (resources, mining), manufacturing (pharmaceuticals, machinery, chemicals, steel, consumer products), retail (food, clothing and household products) and services (telecommunications, postal services, health, travel). Large companies were selected, as they are more likely than mid-sized or small firms to have a discrete public relations function. The companies were not representative of all Australian business, although an effort was made to obtain a broad sample. Twenty companies were approached, resulting in 13 responses to achieve 18 interviews. Three responding firms were Australian subsidiaries of foreign owned companies, and ten were Australian companies, of which all but two had substantial foreign operations. Therefore, the majority of respondents had international, as well as domestic, stakeholders.

Two categories of manager were approached, described as "top communicator" (for example, corporate affairs, public affairs, corporate citizenship, external affairs and community relations managers), and "top manager" (for example, chief executive officers, marketing, human resources and sustainable development managers). The rationale for the top manager category was that these managers are often integrally involved with the oversight or discharge of a corporation's public relations activities. For example, a recent study showed that 60% of senior public relations staff in Australia reported directly to a CEO, managing director, or chairman, and of those departments working to formal strategies (70%), 73% had their strategy reviewed by the CEO or managing director, 21% reviewed by the board, and 11% reviewed by other senior executives (general manager or marketing director) (Singh & Smyth, 2000). Eleven of the interviews were with top communicators and seven were with other top managers.

Table I. Description of interview participants.

Top Manager - TM	Industry sector	No. of respondents
	Pharmaceutical	2
	Manufacturing	4
	Mining	1
Top communicator - TC		
	Health care	1
	Mining	2
	Telecommunications	1
	Manufacturing	1
	Retail	1
	Pharmaceutical	1
	Petroleum	1
	Postal services	1
	Travel	1
	Chemicals	1

Literature on the development of the marketing orientation construct provided a template for probing areas (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990), which were: what is a public relations orientation, what are the organisational factors that might encourage or discourage public relations orientation, and finally, what are the consequences of public relations orientation. The interviews were tape-recorded and verbatim transcripts prepared for detailed analysis. Data was then sorted into recurring themes and links identified between themes, and between themes and public relations theory. A degree of triangulation was achieved by interviewing multiple informants from different areas in three companies.

A key limitation of the research is that organisations with very ineffective public relations orientation were reluctant to participate in a study about public relations. Consequently, the array of ineffective PROs in business may be broader than that presented here.

RESULTS

Transcripts were thematically analysed with respect to the theoretical definition of public relations orientation. That is, dimensions were identified which related to (a) the characteristics of the public relations goal, (b) the goal-directed behaviour, and (c) the transactions with the environment and parties that threaten or enable goal achievement. In this section, the dimensions for each of the three categories are described and related to aspects of public relations literature.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PUBLIC RELATIONS GOAL

It was expected that the goal-related dimension of PRO would vary along two facets: from a mass communication philosophy to a relational philosophy. The latter refers to the view that the core purpose of public relations is ensuring positive relationships between organisations and their publics (cf. Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Hutton, 1999), as opposed to public relations' roots in impression management through media.

Symbolic-Behavioural Relationship Goal Focus

Public relations fails to deliver value to organisations when symbolic, image-making activity is disconnected from behavioural, relationship-making activity (Grunig, 1993). The goal of public relations can therefore be understood as occurring along a two-dimensional continuum with the quest for positive images (symbolic

understood as occurring along a two-dimensional continuum with the quest for positive images (symbolic relationships) forming one axis, and the quest for substantive behavioural relationships between organisations and publics comprising the other axis. In organisations with low public relations orientation, symbolic relationships are disconnected from behavioural relationships. In organisations with high public relations orientation, symbolic image making activity serves relational goals, that is, they are "intertwined like the strands of a rope" (ibid). Evidence for the symbolic-behavioural relationship dimension of public relations orientation emerged strongly in this study.

The symbolic relationship axis was described as "managing the corporation's image in a positive way ... (or) whether a company is focused on its public image" (TC, services sector) and "how many people out there are aware of who we are, what we do and what we stand for ... and selling image or perception onto the community" (TM, manufacturing sector).

However, symbolic and behavioural relationships could be blended. For example, a high public profile in which the corporation "floods" the community with information was part and parcel of the corporation's "capacity to behave in a way which is in step with society's expectation" (TC, petroleum sector).

Respondents identifying a behavioural relationship axis for public relations orientation said PRO would "be about strengthening stakeholder relations ... helping the business to do that" (TC, travel sector). "At the very basic level, (*public relations orientation*) is the relationship (*our company*) has with its various audiences" (TC, telecommunications sector), the application of "advanced thinking to the way we manage our strategic relationships with the social environment" and identification of which groups the company should be forming long term strategic relationships with (TC, mining sector).

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ORGANISATION'S GOAL-DIRECTED BEHAVIOUR

Three categories of goal-directed behaviour were described by respondents as dimensions along which PRO varies. They are the degree of responsiveness towards stakeholder concerns, the integration of public relations with other organisational functions, and the utilisation of public relations as a strategic function. These dimensions are discussed next.

Responsiveness

Respondents described two aspects of responsiveness: the intensity of activity, and the nature of the activity. Intensity of activity ranged from doing little to doing much, and the nature of activity ranged from adversarial to collaborative. This conceptualisation of responsiveness echoes Clarkson's (1995) "RDAP scale" of responsiveness, i.e., reactive, defensive, accommodative and proactive.

Respondents described proactive public relations as taking the initiative in issues management and public education or disclosure, reflecting high intensity of activity. "Trying to anticipate and condition groups of stakeholders to decisions that (our company) may be about to undertake or work on regulatory issues" (TC, telecommunications sector), being "tuned into the aspirations of our community" (TM, pharmaceutical sector) and a company-wide "genuine desire to respond ... to what stakeholders out there are actually saying" (TM, mining sector) reflected a collaborative approach as well as a high level of activity.

Rapid crisis response in particular emerged as a sign of effective public relations orientation. When a petroleum company had an oil spill, "We responded not in an hour or two or the next day, we responded by the second ... we had trained communicators, government and public and the community, to respond to the pressures that we were under, instantly" (TC, petroleum sector). Formal mechanisms for rapid and appropriate responses were equated with effective public relations orientation: "You have to have your processes in place. And, if you don't get that right and you don't devote management thinking to how you would respond under ... pressures ... you don't deserve to be in business. The community will put you out of business" (TC, petroleum sector).

A high public relations orientation within the responsiveness sub-dimension, combining high activity and a collaborative approach, was thus equated with a specific outcome: a company's license to operate.

Accommodative public relations was described by respondents as "educating the public about what the company does *or at least providing the opportunity for that to happen*" (TM, mining sector), again reflecting a collaborative approach, but combined with a lower level of activity.

Defensive public relations, or in Clarkson's (1995) terms, a "do only what is required" stance, was described by respondents as an outdated or ineffective form of responsiveness. "We've been under a lot of pressure over a number of years to, I suppose, get out of those (unpopular) businesses or justify them if you like. And, (*our*) response in the past has always been to justify what we're doing in terms of the legal okay to do it or the government okay to do it" (TC, mining sector). In this case, the company was adversarial in its approach, and did or said little unless forced to.

A reactive stance was also described by respondents as ineffective. "Previously, as a company, if we were accused of doing something (*bad*), we would have responded quite vigorously in the press to assert our rights to do so and all the rest of it. We have gone right away from that now to try and not to be inflammatory. We try and withdraw from public debate but make ourselves available" (TM, mining company). Thus, the company had moved away from a reactive and adversarial form of responsiveness to an accommodative style, with a lower intensity of activity but a more collaborative approach.

Interfunctional Co-ordination

The interconnectedness of public relations with other organisational functions has been correlated in empirical studies with public relations excellence (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995) and influence on management decisions and social performance (Bhambri & Sonnenfeld, 1988). Respondents in this study agreed on the need for public relations staff to be positioned so that influence and control could be exerted in relationship management. For example, one respondent said:

You do need people who are on-site, who are connected to the community ... It is like having time to go to the AGM of the Surf Life Saving Association and sitting there while they hand out 150 awards (TM, manufacturing sector).

For respondents, integration of public relations meant organisational recognition of the public relations aspects of every facet of the business. "If you think about it, it's everything that we're doing, every part of our business if you like is involved in a PR function" (TC, mining sector). Recognition of public relations aspects of business resulted in close co-ordination between the public relations function and operations. "Rather than become a 'silo-ed' department, we are truly cross-functional ... with communications advisors working with the managers of (operational) divisions" (TC, travel sector). Integration was thus taken to mean the presence of co-ordination mechanisms and interaction between functional areas of public relations (Cornelissen, 2000) and the ability to disseminate public relations intelligence throughout the organisation. As one respondent put it: "We're not an adjunct activity to the business, we're actually a key part" (TC, services sector).

Therefore, following the literature on market orientation (Maltz & Kholi, 1996; Wrenn, 1997), interfunctional co-ordination for public relations can be described as the integration of efforts by all parts of the organisation to achieve the PR goal (high, intertwined symbolic and behavioural relationships) through the systematic generation, analysis and dissemination of intelligence across functional boundaries about relationships with strategic constituencies (publics or stakeholders).

A Strategic Role for Public Relations

The largest-to-date study of public relations, the IABC-sponsored Excellence Study (Dozier et al., 1995), identified the ability to manage strategically as a requirement of "excellent" public relations. Managers in this study suggested PR would be used as a management function when the PR manager is part of the top

management team or had input into the organisation's strategic planning process, when PR goals support the business strategy and when PR has adequate resources to meet its goals.

PR Manager is Part of the Top Management Team

A separate, high-ranking role for public relations was seen as conducive to an effective public relations orientation. "To encourage it (public relations orientation), I think it's a role that ought to report to the chief executive or a very senior office ... rather than as a subset of marketing" (TM, pharmaceutical sector). "You have to have the support of the CEO and you have to have the support of the people who report to the CEO if you are going to make real headway in this area and not face a lot of road blocks" (TC, mining sector). This assertion supports the proposition of L. Grunig and others (Grunig, Grunig, & Ehling, 1992) that "public relations is most likely to contribute to effectiveness when the senior public relations manager is a member of the dominant coalition where he or she is able to shape the organisation's goals...". Such access to top management by a high ranking public relations executive should lead to a shared understanding between public relations and senior management on the role and value of public relations within an organisation, an aspect identified by Dozier, Grunig and Grunig (1995) as an element of public relations excellence.

PR Goals Support the Business Strategy

A second facet of the PR management function is the ability to understand organisational strategy and develop public relations goals to support that strategy. Effective public relations orientation occurred when public relations was strongly aligned to the company's goals and strategic direction and "not just focused on how many column centimetres they meet each day" (TC, mining sector). When public relations strongly supports company goals, it can take a leading role in strategy development: "We lead policy because of the way we operate, because we are looking at everything corporately all the time" (TC services sector).

Effective public relations orientation was equated with "how we're going to meet the strategic objectives of the company" (TC, mining sector). The ability to manage strategically is closely related to the ability to conduct scanning and evaluation research (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig, 1995). This notion was reflected by the manager who said public relations needed to be strategic if it was going to help senior management "understand" and "lead" in solutions "to that very dark and misty area called the social and political environment" (TC, mining sector).

You've got to have a fairly metrical approach to leading it, what are your objectives, what are the key programs, how do they link in with the rest of the organisation, how do we know if we've succeeded, what sort of measures do we put in place? How can this be part of our business and not a separate part of life? And, it's not something that corporate affairs takes away and does in isolation. It has to be done very much in line with the organisation's natural processes (TC, mining sector).

By contrast, companies with ineffective public relations orientation were those "which are in a sense deaf to what's going on in the market place" (TC, petroleum sector), that is, they do not practice environmental scanning techniques or develop stakeholder relationship management strategies. Therefore, public relations' involvement in strategic planning to meet organisational goals was associated by respondents with effective public relations orientation, and public relations for tactical or technical purposes only was associated with ineffective public relations orientation.

Adequate Resources

Closely related to integration and PR support for business goals was the need to have control over adequate resources to meet PR goals. The presence of a budget specifically devoted to public relations was also viewed by respondents as an indication of an organisation's commitment to a public relations orientation. "If we had a budget specifically allocated for the management of public relations, that would certainly be an indication (*of an effective public relations orientation*)" (TM, manufacturing sector). The adequacy of that budget also emerged as an important factor:

Have we thrown our weight behind that aspect of the company's activities, or does it have low priority in terms of the overall running of the company ... if the company was prepared to provide the tools and resources to support that area, that function, then I'd say that the company has a high level of commitment (*to public relations orientation*) (TC, pharmaceutical sector).

CHARACTERISTICS OF TRANSACTIONS WITH THE ENVIRONMENT AND STAKEHOLDERS

Transactions with the environment and with stakeholders varied along three sub-dimensions: the extent to which publics or stakeholder groups are at the centre of organisational thinking about strategy; a dialogic approach in which two way symmetrical communications processes are used; and openness about organisational goals, processes and performance, as demonstrated, for example, by sharing information through public reporting initiatives.

Centrality of Stakeholder Focus

An organisation with a stakeholder focus considers stakeholders in its strategic planning and takes into consideration the differing needs of stakeholders. Such an organisation understands the saliency of stakeholders to the achievement of corporate goals (Agle, Mitchell, & Sonnenfeld, 1999) and attempts to balance competing stakeholder needs for the best long term results (Doyle, 1992). As described by one manager:

(A company with effective public relations orientation) understands where key stakeholders stand on issues and what the key influences to those are and (*is*) adapting and accommodating, negotiating and building win/win solutions across all those groups, which takes more research than we currently do, more effort into meaningful, long-term give and take relationships, which means that we have to choose to apply resources, talent and thinking to that aspect (TC, mining sector).

For this respondent, building relationships with key stakeholders was based on strategic processes of environmental scanning, a structure in which resources are applied to public relations problems, and a proactive and symmetrical approach. As J. Grunig has argued,

Symmetrical public relations professionals lift organisations above the wrangle in the marketplace to help them understand that they will further their self-interest more by tempering advocacy with collaboration. Not only will organisations accomplish their goals more often when they collaborate, but they also will develop reputations of being moral and socially responsible organisations (Grunig, 1999).

Dialogic Approach

Respondents described dialogue as "the capacity to listen and having some sense of empathy for what might be going on with our customers" (TM, pharmaceutical sector). Listening to stakeholders and taking their views into consideration were integral, because:

That behaviour just gets marked. People will remember. Everybody has their own scorecard in their head about how happy they are about being treated that way, and ultimately they will vote with their feet. They will walk or they will lead us, whether it's an employee or a customer (TM, pharmaceutical sector).

This pragmatic rationale for a dialogic approach highlights the role of dialogue in creating conditions for "legitimate corporate conduct that affects the public of that organisation" (Pearson, 1989, p. 128). Thus, a high public relations orientation characterised by a dialogic approach is also an ethical orientation for business conduct.

Openness

The concept of openness has a critical role in the theory of public relations ethics (Grunig & Huang, 2000) and has emerged as a key dimension in empirical studies of organisation-public relationships (Ledingham, Bruning, & Wilson, 1999). Disclosure is also a key relationship maintenance strategy and is likely to predict a positive outcome in organisation-public relationships (Grunig & Huang, 2000). Openness was also an aspect of public relations orientation described by managers in this study.

Openness was described as "openly acknowledging and engaging our stakeholders" (TC, services sector) and being willing to disclose negative information to external publics even when this is difficult.

The discovery that the company was the biggest source of dioxins in its state was a difficult disclosure to make for the management team in one respondent's company. "The scientific advice was that we wouldn't kill anybody, but it was a big emotional thing, Jesus, should we tell anyone or shouldn't we tell anyone" (TM, manufacturing sector).

The decision was to accept the pain associated with openness in order to avert more serious negative outcomes in the future.

A formal process of disclosure through public reporting was also used as a strategy to focus internal management on the "rules" stakeholders expect companies to abide by (TC, mining sector). Openness was expected to build stakeholder trust, which would in turn have an economic impact on the company:

If the community perceives that (we) are an open company doing its very best ... if the community perception is that we are to be trusted, we are solid citizens, we are good corporate citizens, then yes, they're more inclined to buy shares or stick with them (TC, manufacturing sector).

DISCUSSION

In this paper, we introduced the construct of public relations orientation, which can be described by the goals, goal-directed behaviour, and transactions of public relations in a given organisation. Findings from interviews with Australian managers in large firms provided support for the construct and detail about the range of PROs used by business. Sub-dimensions of each of the three dimensions of PRO were identified according to their ability to differentiate between public relations that contributes to organisational goals and public relations that fails to do so. An effective PRO was characterised as the organisation-wide capacity to proactively develop and maintain a positive symbolic and behavioural relationship with strategic constituencies in the organisational environment through a culture that places publics or stakeholder groups at the centre of organisational thinking about strategy.

Conceptualising public relations in this manner provides the opportunity for higher level consulting interventions than are typically carried out in most consulting assignments. In this section, we discuss how the concept of PRO can be used to make PR consulting practices more valued in organisational planning and decision-making.

Table II: Public Relations Orientation as a Consulting Template

Category of PRO	Dimension of PRO	How to diagnose	Possible interventions	Value-add outcomes
Goal	Goal of PR	Is the key task of public relations understood as primarily symbolic or primarily behavioural relationship management?	Cross functional management team workshops to identify organisation-level PR needs.	PR goals aligned with organisational goals.
Behaviour	Responsiveness	Assess manager attitudes to meeting stakeholder needs.	Measure organisation-public relationships. Select or design stakeholder relationship maintenance strategies.	Improved stakeholder relationships. Increased effectiveness of issues management function.
Behaviour	Interfunctional co-ordination	Assess frequency, accuracy, clarity, relevance, timeliness and usefulness of internal PR communications. Identify weaknesses.	Benchmark interfunctional communication and develop internal communications plan	More effective use of PR intelligence to solve organisational problems.
Behaviour	PR as a strategic function	Assess strategic role of PR, use of research and adequacy of budget.	Develop monitoring and evaluation strategies.	Ability to assess organisation-level impacts of PR, correlate with soft and hard performance data.
Transactions	Stakeholder focus	Probe managerial understanding of relevance of stakeholder groups to business success.	Workshops to identify stakeholder salience and predict possible stakeholder activity.	Stakeholder conflict reduced.
Transactions	Dialogic focus	Assess structural aspects of stakeholder communication.	Audit stakeholder needs and values. Develop stakeholder consultation mechanisms.	License to operate benefits.
Transactions	Openness	Assess willingness of organisation to make relevant disclosures	Develop stakeholder reporting format to suit shared organisation-stakeholder needs	Reputation benefits.

Most consulting interventions begin with a situation analysis of the client's "problem". This would typically be carried out via desk research and an interview, or several interviews, which sort information about the client into strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Next, we demonstrate how an analysis of the client's goals, goal directed behaviour, and goal-directed transactions with stakeholders can reveal new consulting opportunities that deliver organisation-level value rather than program-level value.

Goals

A key consideration of PR consultants should be the managerial understanding of the goals of public relations. Is public relations seen primarily as image manipulation or as relationship building? Cross-functional facilitated management team workshops are one way of bringing management to a deeper understanding of PR to identify organisation-level PR needs and develop PR goals that will support organisational goals. This intervention also helps identify and remove the "constraint on public relations mission" identified by Ryan (1987) as a barrier to effective, responsible action. This type of intervention places consultants firmly in the "problem-solving process facilitator" role, and, by allowing both client and consultant to transact with one another in adult ego roles, is likely to lead to more satisfaction by both parties with the outcomes (Schein, 1969). For the client, that places equally high emphasis on developing both good relationships and a good image, measurable improvements in the client's reputation are most likely to follow.

Behaviour

The three sub-dimensions of responsiveness, interfunctional co-ordination and PR as a strategic function need to be assessed. What are management attitudes to meeting stakeholder needs? How active is management willing to be and are they primarily adversarial or collaborative in their approach? Measurement of organisation-public relationships and development of appropriate relationship maintenance strategies are consulting interventions that can provide a baseline for measuring subsequent improvements in relationships and identifying expectational gaps for improved issues management. Secondly, interfunctional co-ordination can be closely scrutinised. Constraints on information collection and dissemination limit the ability of practitioners to do their jobs well (Ryan, 1987). The consultant should assess the frequency, accuracy, clarity, relevance, timeliness and usefulness of internal PR communications through an internal communications audit and address gaps through development of an internal communications strategy. Empowering the public relations department in this manner will lead to more effective use of PR intelligence about the stakeholder environment to solve organisational problems, and once again, places both client and consultant in adult ego role transactions.

Thirdly, the strategic role of public relations should be analysed. What sort of research is being undertaken by the PR department and how useful is it? Is the PR budget suited to the goal requirements? Does the top PR manager have appropriate access to top management? The consultant can work with the internal PR manager to develop monitoring and evaluation strategies that allow correlation of PR impacts with organisation-level performance data, as well as with effects on publics.

Transactions

Transactions of the organisation with its stakeholder environment are the third key area for analysis. Consultants should probe managerial understanding of the relevance of stakeholder groups to business success and help managers understand the differing needs of stakeholder groups. Workshops to identify stakeholder salience and predict possible stakeholder activity will help managers digest the potential impacts of stakeholders on business and lead to strategies for reducing stakeholder conflict. Communication with stakeholders can also be assessed, especially in terms of its respectfulness, structural aspects and mutual satisfaction with the rules of communication. Stakeholder needs and values audits can facilitate the development of formal mechanisms for ongoing stakeholder dialogue, which strengthen the client's license to operate. Consultants should also assess the willingness of the organisation to make relevant disclosures to stakeholders and develop a stakeholder reporting format to suit shared organisation-stakeholder needs. Reputation benefits for clients should follow. Once again, the consultant's "problem-solving process

facilitator" adult ego role is apparent, however, opportunities for program level interventions that employ technical or junior staff to deliver stakeholder relationship management goals are also apparent.

CONCLUSION

Public relations orientation can be used by consultancies to improve the value of their services to client organisations. Public relations orientation provides a method for understanding both the internal and external environments in which clients' public relations functions operate. It identifies constraints to effective public relations practice and allows identification of a range of consulting interventions designed to empower public relations to deliver organisation-level outcomes. Utilisation of the public relations orientation concept enables this expanded role for consultants by allowing consultants to change the nature of their transactions with clients through application of a facilitator-participant model in which both parties enact an adult ego role. It thereby contributes to the discussion about transformation of consultancy practice to meet new market place challenges posed by management consultancies. The potential for in-house public relations managers to use PR orientation as a diagnostic tool should not be overlooked. An important task for researchers now is to operationalise this concept as a measurement tool for consultant and managerial use.

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