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ABSTRACT

Noting that many public relations practitioners are increasingly recognizing the value and use of theory and theory building as a foundation for understanding, researching, and writing about organizations, this paper examines the marriage of theory and practice of writing public relations materials for a client. The paper begins with a discussion of the use of theory in public relations campaigns, general systems theory, and information processing as a predictor of attitudes of target audiences. The paper next explains social learning theory, social exchange theory, and symmetrical communication theory. The paper presents case studies for each theory. The paper also discusses the coorientation model and the elaboration-likelihood theory (including case studies) which explain how publics are correctly identified. The paper concludes with a series of considerations to be used in choosing the right medium for public relations messages. Contains 13 references. (RS)

The Union of Communication Theory and Public Relations Writing

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Abstract

The Union of Communication Theory and Public Relations Writing

Many public relations practitioners are concerned with the application of skills and techniques. Increasingly, though, practitioners are recognizing the value and to use theory and theory building as a foundation for understanding, researching, and writing about an organization and/or organizational problem. The focus of this paper is to examine the marriage of theory and practice of writing public relations materials for a client. Specific issues which will be addressed include the role of communication theory in research, appropriate message content and organization, audience analysis, and quality of message presentation (i.e., style format, mechanics, presentation).

The Union of Communication Theory and Public Relations Writing

The basic purpose of public relations writing is to persuade or inform. The primary objective is to create favorable public opinion about an organization, its policies, actions, goods and/or services. To be an effective public relations writer, however, you must understand public opinion, why people have opinions, and how to affect those opinions. For example, the opinion of university professors is based on an attitude concerned with dissemination of information and the importance of learning and its subsequent influence on the education of the reader or listener. A politician holds attitudes concerning the winning of an election. CEOs are concerned with bottom line figures and productivity. Whoever comprises the public, the public relations writer must design a message tailored to meet the needs of that public or publics. Using various communication theories will aid a writer in designing an effective, impact message for a specified public. This paper will address the use of communication theories in writing public relations materials and offer practical examples for application.

Using Theory in Public Relations Campaigns

Theory provides an important foundation for any type of public relations writing. It also provides a framework for turning ideas into plans and plans into campaigns. This framework encourages strategic and critical thinking within well-defined parameters. When dealing with any kind of public relations activities you as writer must identify and narrow the problem so that only one specific problem is addressed at any given time.

For example, let us say that **G & J Inc.** has been experiencing a high incidence of employee absenteeism. What exactly is the problem? Is it due to environmental conditions such as poor air circulation in the building? Is it due to the fact that the organization has hired people who tend to get sick easily? Or are the majority of the employees parents and they subsequently call in sick every time their children become ill? Or is there a problem of low employee morale in the organization? Is the issue due to ineffective management? Or a poor information dissemination system exists within the organization? Can the problem be identified? If not, the implications are staggering. The symptom/effect suggests, perhaps, a high rate of employee absenteeism. The problem could result from any of the above mentioned causes. Research needs to be conducted to define and narrow the problem to a manageable size, so that a proper solution can be implemented. This problem affects various factors within various departments in **G & J Inc.** To obtain successful elimination of one or all issues identified, an analysis of the internal and external situations requires an examination of all elements of the organization.

General Systems Theory Aids in the Development of a Public Relations Campaign

One of the most used theories in the area of social sciences-- which includes public relations-- is General Systems Theory (GST). Before looking at GTS we need to define two concepts: theory and system.

A theory is simply someone's conceptualization of an observed set of events. For example, when supervisors see a normally motivated and energetic employee become sluggish and uninterested in her work, they hypothesize about the reason "why" and eventually form a theory about the employee's behavior.

A system is defined as a set of objects or entities that interrelate with one another to form a whole. For example, the sluggish employee is one of several employees in the department. The work and the quality of the work performed by that employee affects the work or timeliness of the work of the other employees who in turn affect the work of the manager and the department as a whole. All parts of a system are interrelated and interdependent so that a change in one part causes a change in the other parts.

Putting the concepts of theory and system together, we have the definition of GST. All biological, psychological and sociological systems are conceptualizations of the functioning of interrelated parts to form a whole. In other words, if you are going to conduct an evaluation of an organization you must look at departments, employees, managers and administrators and their relationships to one another and their communication among themselves in order to properly form an idea of the organization, its culture and its functions.

Characteristics of General Systems Theory

General Systems Theory maintains that all systems possess eight common characteristics or qualities: **wholeness, interdependence, hierarchy, self-regulation and control, interchange with the environment, balance, change and adaptability, and equifinality.** These qualities are not mutually exclusive. They overlap and help to define one another (Infante, Rancer, & Womack, 1990).

The first quality is WHOLENESS. A system by definition constitutes a whole. All parts of a system are interrelated and any change in one part affects the whole system.

A second characteristic of General Systems Theory is the concept of INTERDEPENDENCE. All parts of a system are intertwined and affect one another. Each part may be viewed apart from the system, but in combination a mutual interaction is present between them, the result of which is different from each part individually. To succeed the parts must exchange information and formulate solutions to problems.

HIERARCHY is the third-common characteristic of any system. The system creates levels of increasing complexity. The administrators of an organization are the decision-makers, but they depend on management to see that certain organizational functions are performed, managers, in turn, depend on subordinates to perform certain functions, and subordinates expect interns and part-time staff to assist in those duties. The system operates on a series of level which form the structure of the organization.

The various parts of an organization must behave in accordance with the rules and goals and still adapt to the environment based on the feedback received from concerned publics. This process forms the fourth general characteristic of SELF-REGULATION AND CONTROL.

This latter factor affects the environment and the environment affects the organization. This INTERCHANGE WITH THE ENVIRONMENT provides the basis for a successful or unsuccessful relationship with the community which, of course, could make or break an organization.

The sixth element of systems theory is termed BALANCE. This quality is related to self regulation and control. One of the primary tasks of many interacting subsystems is that of maintaining balance in the system. The system must be capable of sensing and adjusting to deviations from the "assigned" norm or standard.

Adjusting to meet changes leads to the seventh quality of CHANGE AND ADAPTABILITY. Every organization undergoes changes as a result of either internal or external environmental conditions. An example of an internal condition is when an employee abruptly leaves the organization. This creates a hole that needs to be filled until a new person is hired and trained. The organization may divide the extra work load among several employees, hire a temporary person until the position is filled, or conduct an internal re-organization and eliminate the position.

The final quality of all systems is EQUIFINALITY. Equifinality means that a particular final state may be accomplished in many ways and from many different starting points. The adaptable system, can achieve that final state in a variety of different environmental conditions. The system is capable of processing inputted data in different ways to produce its output (Infante, Rancer, & Womack, 1990). For example, an employee can publish a monthly newsletter by writing all the articles, assigning "reporters" from each department of the organization, or hire an outside firm to do the newsletter. The output is the same-- a newsletter is published monthly.

Overall, General Systems Theory postulates about concepts governing systems in general which the field of public relations has adapted to its activities and success.

Notice that the above eight elements do overlap in meaning, but all of these qualities are centered around information and information exchange.

Information Processing As a Predictor of Attitudes of Target Audiences

All public relations activities require the practitioner to have an understanding of the attitudes and beliefs of the targeted publics. These publics could include employees, consumers, stockholders, vendors, outside organizations, government officials, or a specified community. In order to properly prepare any type of public relations activities, the practitioner must understand how people perceive what is going on around them, how these publics conceptualize information and integrate it into their cognitive systems. When new information is processed, a person's cognitive system must change in order to accommodate the new understanding. New concepts may complement or contradict existing concepts or beliefs which will then alter the existing concepts. New information may also create new beliefs which in turn combine with other beliefs and attitudes to alter the existing belief structure. New information may contradict existing belief structures so seriously as to cause the entire cluster of related beliefs to collapse. This process of receiving additional information and adapting the cognitive system accordingly may lead to a change in attitude (i.e.,by persuasion). Once the public relations practitioner understands the cognitive change or the potential for cognitive reorganization on the part of the targeted publics, then public relations activities and materials can be packaged so that the publics understand and, hopefully, respond in a prescribed way (Infante, Rancer, Womack, 1990).

In the case of high employee absenteeism, for example, if someone determines that the employees are dissatisfied at work because management never listens to their suggestions, then someone in the system could recommend that a special committee of employees and managers be established to review all employee suggestions and reward the employee who creates a plan that will save the company money, time or resources. If the employees see that their suggestions are being considered, acted upon and rewarded, then perhaps the rate absenteeism will decrease. The first step, however, is to understand how and why the employees think the way they do about the organization.

The Yale Attitude Approach (Hovland, Janis, Kelley, 1953) considers attitudes and behaviors to be products of beliefs about the world. If beliefs change, then so do attitudes and behaviors. The Yale theorists argued that persuasive messages are stimuli that provide incentives for desired responses. The connection between stimulus and response is cognitively mediated. Receivers think about messages. If they find them interesting, understandable and acceptable, they comply. If not, they resist. If management, for example, sends the message that employee suggestions are not valuable, then the employees resist and that resistance can be in the form of absenteeism.

The Yale theorists identified certain message variables that when used in communication may lead to change which may, then, lead to persuasion. The primary variables identified were those related to the Source, Message, Channel and Receiver.

A change in the channel variable depends on the level of distraction and medium. A person's comprehension may be disturbed by distractions, but attitude change has actually been observed to increase in the face of noise. In relation to the use of media, generally any combination of visual and auditory modes such as television is more effective than just print or radio alone. For a practitioner, however, the channel is dictated by the available resources. Can the organization afford to buy television, print, or radio space? What medium is available in the area? Many rural areas may not have access to cable, for example, so print or radio must be used.

Persuadability of the receiver is dictated by various personality factors. Age has generally been found to be negatively correlated with persuasion. That is, the older a person becomes the probability of persuading them to an alternate view point decreases. Gender is another factor in persuadability. For many years, researchers have stated that women are more persuadable than men, but more recently these findings have not been supported. There are studies that cite that men were more persuadable than women (Pohl, 1981). The degree of persuadability may depend upon the topic and the receiver's degree of involvement or interest in it. The more involved and interested a person is in a topic, the less there is a chance of persuading that person to change his/her view is available. In the case of **G & J Inc.**, the more convinced an employee is that the management is not interested in feedback, the more difficult it will be to convince that employee that management is willing to listen. The employee is so involved in this view point that any attempts to change that attitude will take much time and persuasion.

Before a practitioner begins to design any solutions to problems, s/he must have a complete understanding of how the targeted audiences process information. Knowing how information is processed will allow the practitioner to design messages and strategies that are tailored to the specific targeted audiences and perhaps be more successful in solving the problem.

Persuasive Strategies Used to Enhance and Design Public Relations Writing

Designing messages for specified target audiences and establishing effective communication systems are the types of persuasive strategies public relations practitioners use. Communicating with and among the targeted publics is vital to any campaign. Typically practitioners do not identify these theories by name, but the basic premise is used. The three theories are social learning theory, social exchange theory, and symmetrical communication. Each theory will be explained and then a practical example of the theory's use will follow.

Social Learning Theory

Learning is a social process. Infants learn by observing their parents. Children learn by imitating adults and peers. Adults observe and model their behavior after respected individuals. Organizations may model another organization's selling strategy or management style or employee incentive programs.

By definition, social learning is a series of sequential behaviors. We observe, admire, emulate, and integrate desired or respected behaviors into our repertoire of behaviors. We then integrate the behavior and related attitudes into our way of thinking and acting. If we receive positive feedback from our newly acquired behavior, then we form a positive attitude about the behavior (Smith, 1982).

Social Learning Theory assumes that if people can be persuaded to temporarily adopt a specific behavior, and if rewarded for that behavior, they will assume that behavior as their own and integrate that knowledge and related attitudes into the way they act and think. If **G & J Inc.** could persuade employees to place cost-saving ideas into a suggestion box (even though they believe the gesture to be useless) and then reward the employee who provides the best idea, then the employee will become more involved in the organization, make more suggestions (in the hopes of a reward), and develop a positive attitude about employee involvement at **G & J**.

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Case Study 3.1

> **Potek is a securities manufacturing company that produces clothing security tags for retailers in the United States and Canada. In May 1992, both the United States and Canada experienced a severe economic recession. Buying indexes were down by 30% for the year. Retailers no longer needed the volume of security tags as they did the previous year. Layoffs at the factory were eminent.**

The factory was located in a small rural area of the United States and it was the leading employer in that region. Any layoffs would severely cripple the population of the area and cast Potek as a ruthless business rather than a community supporter, which could permanently damage the factory's reputation.

The public relations department of Potek followed these steps to solve this problem:

1.) Research found that the surrounding community believed Potek to be a community supporter. Employees enjoyed their jobs because they felt Potek dealt fairly with them. The community and employees firmly believed that if the economy became troubled, Potek would protect them.

2.) After a cost-profit analysis was conducted, Potek found that the company was losing approximately $30,000.00 a month in revenue due to lack of retail demand.

3.) In order for the company to survive, $500,000 in operating expenses needed to be cut.

4.) The public relations department recommended a 20% cut in all executive salaries, a 5% cut in all management salaries and a 10% cut in all employee salaries.

5.) The executives and management agreed to the salary cuts.

6.) After much discussion, employees finally agreed to the 10% salary cut with the contingency that salary increases would continue even after the company began realizing profits.

7.) In eight months, the company was solvent again and salaries across the board were increased by 3%. After two years, salaries were increased by 7% instead of 3%.

8.) The third year all employees realized a 4% salary increase.

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The success of this plan was the employees' modeling behavior. Even though no one likes a salary cut, Potek executives and managers were willing to sacrifice their salary for the good of the company, employees and community. The employees' behavior was rewarded when salaries were increased by 7% rather than 3% in two years.

Social Exchange Theory

The basic premise of Social Exchange Theory is that people do not like to be indebted to another person. Balance in relationships is based on the power of reciprocity. An organization strives for an eq itable exchange of resources between publics, employees and management. When an exchange of resources is inequitable, tensions among the relevant parties will increase until action to correct such an imbalance is taken. Corrective measures may be delayed because the publics and managers may decide to live with the problem for a while or may choose to ignore the inequity or the relevant parties may terminate the relationship. The assumption of this theory is that when the imbalancedness is perceived, a communication program among the parties is needed to correct the situation (McElreath, 1992).

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Case Study 3.2

WHJ Savings and Loan Bank is a midsize bank located in a large urban setting. Elementary school teachers were constantly requesting unusable checkbooks, savings books, and deposit slips from the bank.

These requests for unusable bank materials came often and from numerous organizations.

WHJ grew frustrated with these requests because it was costing the bank money and time and the bank received nothing in return. The public relations director was instructed to find a solution to this problem. These steps were taken:

1.) A survey was conducted to determine what the elementary school teachers were telling their students about banking services.

2.) A random selection of elementary school children were surveyed to identify the kids' favorite type of "character."

3.) Bank tellers at WHJ were surveyed to determine what information they felt the children needed to know about banking.

4.) Results from the survey of the teachers indicated that the children were taught how to save money, open a savings account and how to withdraw money.

5.) Survey results from the bank tellers indicated the children needed to know how to deposit money, how to fill out a deposit slip, how to watch their balance grow as they deposited more money, how to read a bank statement and how to fill out a withdrawal slip.

6.) Survey results indicated that the children's favorite character was a teddy bear.

7.) A banking school program was then designed. A trained bank employee visited the schools to teach the children about elementary banking techniques.

8.) A mascot, "Teddy Bankster," accompanied the bank representative. At the end of the program, each child received a certificate of completion and a savings bank identification card (hand printed) pawed by "Teddy Bankster."

9.) WHJ opened a savings account for each child. The children could deposit any amount of money they chose. Their identification cards included their names and savings account numbers, which were to be presented to the teller at the time of withdrawal.

10.) The teachers in the elementary school began talking about WHJ's wonderful banking program to the whole community.

11.) The media were notified and Teddy Bankster was introduced to the community at the first elementary school which requested the banking program to be presented.

12.) Newspaper articles, television newscasts and local talk shows featured the banking program.

13.) Parents of the elementary school children opened accounts at WHJ.

14.) WHJ received much publicity and increased its customers.

15.) The cooperation among the bank, its employees, the teacher, and elementary schools provided the necessary instruction to the children.

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An equitable situation was created when the schools and the bank exchanged resources. The teachers received training for the children and the bank received publicity and an increase in customers.

Symmetrical Communication

Communication deals with symmetrical interactions. When two communicators share control of the communication, the relationships are said to be symmetrical. Bernays (1994, p. 287) wrote that asymmetrical interactions occur when one communicator assumes control of the communication exchange. In an organization, symmetrical communication relationships are essential (Grunig, 1993). Both internal and external organizational publics need to exchange information and feedback in order for the organization to maintain a positive image.

Systems theory states that an organization must interchange with the environment in order for the organization to be balanced. The concept of symmetry is yet another means of maintaining organizational balance.

Two or more publics struggling for power, each one trying to assert control over the other, is referred to as competitive symmetry. This is also an example of how an organization becomes imbalanced. The power struggle changes the way the various publics relate to one another. The system must adapt to this change through communication until balance can be reached.

The following case study illustrates a public relations strategy that helps the organization maintain balance and symmetry. It also keeps the publics happy.

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Case Study 3.3

Vivian's Dining Emporium and Country Club is a family owned operation. Vivian's first opened its doors in 1926. The country club features a renowned golf course, 15 tennis courts, and olympic-size swimming pool. Services offered at the club include free towel service, free use of golf carts, massage therapists, hair stylists, jacuzzis, child-care, nutritionist, and golf, tennis, and swimming instructors. The restaurant is open to the public, but only club members may reserve the open-air ballroom or the orchestral ballroom for special occasions.

Vivian's is located in a remote region just

outside a large metropolitan area. The club did not want to advertise, but desired to slowly increase its membership and remain a good service provider to its current members.

An outside public relations firm was hired to design a campaign to meet the above mentioned goal. The campaign implemented the following actions.

1.) Background research indicated the club had 350 active members and could conveniently and fully service at least 500 members at any one time.

2.) The restaurant served 150 non-members per month.

3.) The public relations firm suggested a goal to increase club membership by 75 members in two years and another 75 members in three years.

4.) A survey sketched a profile of country club members to determine exactly what the current club members were like and their dislikes about the club.

5.) Restaurant customers completed a short ten-question survey about the quality of service, food and atmosphere in the dining room.

6.) Restaurant customers who completed the survey received a certificate for a complimentary lunch.

7.) Restaurant customers who shared complaints about the service, food, and/or atmosphere were contacted by telephone and extended a free dinner invitation received a personal apology from the restaurant manager.

8.) Surveys were mailed to all current club members and prior members who did not renew their membership.

9.) Survey results indicated club members were:
   a.) upper middle class,
   b.) health and fitness conscious
   c.) college and/or postgraduates
   d.) worked hard and hard play

10.) Members who responded negatively to any of the survey questions were telephoned.

11.) Members' concerns were addressed as quickly as possible and reasonable accommodations were made to correct concerns.

12.) After two years, the club's membership increased by 150 members.

13.) The restaurant realized an increase of 100 non member customers per month in one year.

14.) In three years, the club expanded its facilities to accommodate 100 more new customers.

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Vivian's employed a two-way symmetrical strategy to increase its membership and provide specialized service to its current members. This is also yet another example of a system interchanging with its environment to achieve its goal.

Results of the survey allowed the club to sketch a profile of its members. The information received described the values, attitudes and lifestyles of the members which is referred to as psychographic research--- as opposed to gathering information about the members' sex, age, and religion, which is demographic research.

Defining Publics in a Public Relations Campaign

Much of our discussion so far has revolved around the relevant organizational publics. Learning and understanding how the targeted publics process information and persuading those publics to take a specified action, and ultimately, achieving the goal of the campaign is all dependent on the targeted publics. The coorientation model and the elaboration-likelihood theory will be used to explain how publics are correctly identified.

Coorientation Model

The coorientation model addresses the issue of awareness. A public is a group of people who are aware of shared interests such as stockholders, consumers, or employees. The task of the public relations practitioner is to make the publics more aware of their common interests so that they will become an informed and active public. The two most important elements in the publics' awareness are its degree of self awareness and orientation toward shared interests. A public who is aware and oriented toward these shared interests are much easier to communicate with than an uninformed and unaware public (Littlejohn, 1992). For example, it is easier to communicate with the employees of **G & J Inc.** than it is to communicate with the company's vendors. The employees share common interests and are aware of the organizational culture and climate. These shared interests and awareness form a communication foundation that can be built upon. The company's vendors may not be aware of other vendors or the climate of the organization, so there is only a weak informational foundation from which to communicate.

For publics to be aware, they must be able to exchange information. With this information, communication is unnecessary. The publics and the organization need to perceive an agreement between what they think and what they believe the opposition thinks. The higher the degree of perceived agreement between the publics and the organization, the easier the communication between them. (McElreath, 1992).

The key to this model is communication between the employees and management. The more these two groups talk, the more each learns about the other's perceptions. These two groups may not necessarily agree about the reasons why absenteeism has increased, but each comes to a more accurate understanding of the other's perceptions. The communication may not result in an agreement of opinion, but it will result in a greater understanding of each other.

The communication which occurs as a result of this model is also very helpful in describing relationships and perceptions among various publics. It is very important for the public relationship practitioner to be a communication facilitator. Communication must flow between and among the various targeted publics. Campaigns are tailored to the perceptions of the publics. It is for this reason that G & J set up a suggestion box for all employees and weekly reports concerning the suggestions addressed in departmental staff meetings. The employees felt like they were being heard.

Elaboration-Likelihood Model

This theory states that people are persuaded not by the message alone, but from thinking about the message and then expanding or elaborating on it themselves. The employees of G & J were asked to offer suggestions for organizational improvements. The more the employees thought about the organization and the areas needing improvement, the more interested they became in the organization. As their interest levels increased, the rate of absenteeism decreased, because they began to feel like they belonged in the organization and they learned of the interests they shared with the management (McElreath, 1993).

An additional assumption of the elaboration-likelihood model is that different people have varying levels of knowledge on any given subject. The amount of information a person has on a topic is dictated by interest levels, personal or professional involvement, and/or formal education. Once new or additional information is given to a person, the individual's information processing system takes control.

A person, for example, who has direct experience with the topic will process additional information differently than an individual who is hearing the information for the first time. Each individual elaborates on a message in a different way. Consequently, a practitioner needs to become fully aware of the audience and how that particular audience processes information so that messages can be tailored to meet the needs of the various publics. This may indicate that more than one message will be needed.

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Case Study 3.4

Clorise's Respiratory Association is a non profit organization that promotes the dissemination of information about respiratory diseases. The two main goals of the organization are to educate society about these diseases and what individuals can do to help and offer support to emphysema patients and their families.

Deaths due to respiratory diseases are increasing annually. Medical research discovered that many respiratory problems stem from smoking and inhaling second-hand smoke. Clorise's Respiratory Association wants to launch a campaign to stop people from smoking or at least to decrease the number of smokers in society and decrease the amount people smoke.

The Public Relations Director designed the following campaign after identifying these findings:

1.) Research indicated that society, as a whole, is concerned with health care. The general public wants to live as long as possible and as fruitfully as possible.

2.) Health and fitness seem to be the "buzz" words of today's society.

3.) Organizations are instituting a no smoking policy inside the buildings.

4.) Restaurants and shopping malls are becoming smoke-free environments.

5.) Smoking mothers are giving birth to infants with physical and mental defects and aural and respiratory complications.

6.) Research shows that children who see their parents smoke are more likely to smoke themselves. These children also begin smoking at a very young age and often retard their growth and develop respiratory conditions as a result.

The Campaign offered these options:

1) The campaign targeted two audiences: the general public and the children.

4.) Media kits containing brochures on all the various types of respiratory diseases, pamphlets citing statistics about death due to respiratory disease, articles about Clorise's Respiratory Association, features on terminally ill patients families were prepared and distributed to all the media.

5.) A Walk-A-Thon was held to increase the public's awareness of respiratory problems.

6.) Many large corporations allowed inserts to be placed in employees' paychecks that discussed respiratory problems and services available to patients.

11.) 60 seconds of television air and production time was donated and a video news release was produced.

12.) Local governments declared the third week in June as Respiratory Health Week.

13.) An educational program was developed and taken into elementary and secondary schools. A mascot, Weezing Willy the Dinosaur accompanied the respiratory representative and told the children how bad they could feel if they developed respiratory problems and how to prevent these problems.

14.) Contests for the school children were designed to increase the interest and involvement of the children and their parents.

15.) The media was invited to all special events such as the school training programs and walk-a-thon. Weezing Willy the Dinosaur attended all media events.

16.) Talk shows were approached and asked if a representative from Clorise could be interviewed during the Respiratory Health Week.

17.) One year evaluation results of this campaign showed a 70% increase in media coverage, a 15% decline in cigarette, cigar and tobacco sales, and a 85% increase in children's (ages 6-14) awareness of respiratory problems.

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This case study illustrates the concepts of the coorientation model and the elaboration-likelihood model. The two targeted publics and their shared interests were identified (illustrates the use of the coorientation model). Both groups cared about proper health care. Two different messages were designed for the publics (example of the use of the elaboration-likelihood theory). The general public was flooded with information from the media, doctors, respiratory care workers and their children. Elementary and secondary school children were instructed about respiratory problems and what causes them.

The Union of Theory and Writing in Public Relations

Thus far, we have discussed how public relations operates within an organization and is a part of a whole system. Information processing theories and persuasion theories were used to encourage targeted publics to take a prescribed action. The coorientation model and the elaboration likelihood theory were used to define publics. These theories now need to be applied directly to writing public relations materials.

The Challenge to the Public Relations Writer

Theory has its place in the planning and writing process. Without the theory we have no avenue to travel, no map to follow, no city to locate, no street to identify, no company or public to inform, educate or challenge to think differently.

As Bivens (1993) wrote, "Employers want people who can write and communicate ideas--who can pull complex or fragmented ideas together into coherent messages....This requires not only technical skill, but also intelligence."

The writer today must possess a love of writing. Students often complain of the mundane writing exercises, the challenges which often elude their individual wisdom. They fail to see the craft of writing, when they could challenge themselves to see how to make a dull subject become brighter with the polish of the artist.

The differences facing the public relations writer is more than an ability to identify words, to construct sentences, to compile data. The challenge is to understand the differences which are related primarily to intent, style, format and medium.

We produce a public relations piece for two reasons: information and persuasion. We have discussed the implications of those two reasons in the earlier portions of this text. You can fill in the background as you recall their purpose. We persuade to change people's minds or their perception--their image of us may be tarnished. We inform to educate the audience about issues, circumstances, values and purposes.

Format involves understanding the complexities of the medium and what is the best method for preparing material for that medium. The journalistic aspects of writing occur for the magazine article, the profile of the management personnel, the successful achievement of an employer, while tighter writing influences what is prepared for the electronic media. "Selecting the right medium or media is a decision that should be based on sound knowledge of a number of factors," Bevins writes.

Public relations educators Doug Newsom, Alan Scott and Judy VanSlyke Turk, in their book, *This is PR: The Realities of Public Relations*, hav suggested a series of important considerations to be used in choosing the right medium for your message:

What audience are you trying to reach and what do you know about its media usage patterns and the credibility ratings for each medium? Research has taught us that fewer people watch television or listen to the radio. Many more don't read newspapers regularly or subscribe to magazines. Today we must ask ourselves, "Do we know whether our intended audience will see or hear our message if presented in a medium seldom used by the specific public we consider important?" For example, business people cite newspapers as a more credible source for news and information than television; however, for many people, television is far more credible.

When do you need to reach this audience in order for your message to be effective? If time is a factor in reaching an audience, then the magazine and its deadlines may not suit your specific purpose. Corporate decisions require different approaches. Management argues from one perspective; writers see the issue from other vantage points. Personal decisions aside, the audience becomes the important ingredient in the process.

How much do you need to spend to reach your intended audience, and how much can you actually afford? We are never far from budget considerations but in the larger picture we must also consider the objectives of our effort for these too influence the final decision.

Which medium (of those you've listed in response to your first three questions) reaches the broadest segment of your target audience at the lowest cost? The answer to this question will give you the "bottom-line" choice since cost must always remain uppermost in the decision process. Besides that consideration, coming in under budget always enhances others' perception of our work.

Which medium has the highest credibility and what does it cost? The concern relates to the audience's perception of our effort. Credibility is a factor in the discriminating mind. That audience further expands our coverage area because if we fail to consider this issue, we add danger to our success. Cost and credibility are related, perhaps more than we often consider in our planning.

Which medium will deliver your message within the time constraints necessary for it to be effective? A memo will work quickly and efficiently in one instance, a phone call may aid in our one-to-one effort, or a letter distributed in-house may be more effective because its is more timely in another instance. Comparisons of medium and purpose are related and comprise necessary evaluation of our goal.

Should a single medium be used or a combination of complementary media (media mix)? All elements in the communication process must be considered if our message is to be effective and influence the audience for whom the message was intended. Audiences are complex organisms. Unique individuals comprise the public and all don't receive messages in the same manner. How well we understand that process will influence the success of our venture and enable us to withstand evaluation of our efforts.

We can summarize this venture in the marriage of communication theory and public relations writing by sharing one final example. We have taken a video tape of an instructional message that encourages women to go to a breast clinic for examinations. We can work theory into the practice efforts by asking students to work backward to create theory or to move forward to support theory by developing different messages for different mediums. The practice and purpose enables them to fill gaps in their understanding by relating theory to practice. The latter without a theoretical basis becomes so much wasted effort. If students learn the importance of the bottom line and the importance of an effective evaluation of their efforts, they can then micro-manage their activities toward a more purposeful achievement.

Terry (1989, p. 282) writes there are important characteristics and functions of theory:

1. Theory presents a systematic view of the observe phenomena.
2. A theory specifies relations among variables.
3. A theory specifies how variables are related.
4. A theory explains past and/or present behavior.
5. A reliable theory predicts, with a high degree of probability, future behavior.

Terry states "the last function may be the most important because it encompasses the previous four. For the proposed theory to predict reliably there is at least some understanding of how the 'pieces' (identification of variables and relations) make up the whole (explanation and prediction). "If by using theory we are able to predict successfully, then the theory is confirmed" (Kerlinger, 1973, p. 10).

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