

Trípodos, número 24, Barcelona, 2009

The Excellence Study in Internal Public Relations, An International Paradigm

Enric Ordeix

Enric Ordeix
Facultat de Comunicació
Blanquerna-URL.

L'article mostra com els indicadors de l'estudi d'Excel·lència són necessaris per tal de desenvolupar els elements clau de les relacions públiques internes i per ajudar a establir una identitat i una cultura d'organització a través d'uns valors corresponents. La implicació de l'empleat es basa principalment en la correcta administració del compromís per part de la coalició dominant amb els seus públics interns. L'organització que funciona amb un sistema obert fa servir el diàleg amb els líders d'opinió interns per legitimar les seves polítiques i activitats. De fet, la confiança interna i la legitimitació per part dels públics interns donen a les institucions i companyies una millor dimensió social. L'estudi d'Excel·lència proporciona un marc als acadèmics per poder explicar l'aspecte estratègic de la pràctica de les relacions públiques a l'hora de treballar amb els públics interns. De fet, això representa una nova tendència i un desafiament perquè les empreses millorin la qualitat de la seva comunicació interna.

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KEY WORDS: Corporate Culture, Internal Public Relations, Internal Communication, Managing Change, Managing Commitment, Symmetry, Excellence.

PARAULES CLAU: cultura corporativa, relacions públiques internes, comunicació interna, gestió de canvi, gestió de compromís, simetria, Excel·lència.

INTRODUCTION: THE MARKET BACKGROUND

Researchers and analysts have seen important social, technological and thus, professional changes take place in the last few years in Europe. As main points worth underlining we see important trends in the European market¹ concerning new social demands, the effects of globalization and the growing importance of strategic corporate communication. We settled them in organizational and company trends, globalization effects and evolution of strategic corporate communication.²

1. Main companies are dealing with Corporate Social Responsibility in order to settle main organizational, social and market commitments to keep its quality standards.
2. Concerning the dichotomy globalization *versus* localization, the emerging global values can lead to a global code of ethics. Such a code can help global companies address multicultural issues.
3. Corporate Communication Standards should be enforced by companies and organizations in order to protect their own interests and values and to foster global citizenship.

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This apparent good environment trend could be considered as opportunities by many businessmen. Nevertheless we can find some breaks in its development when companies want to implement a common and effective culture within a value consensus. Price and knowledge of the local publics count too much.

OPPORTUNITIES AND TRENDS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

We think PR practice can face so many opportunities rise depending on this market and main tendencies. We can divide it into innovation, globalization and quality standards/organizational culture.

¹ See *Trends in Public Relations for International Firms*. 1st Symposium on Corporate Global PR and Communication Management. June, 2004. (Barcelona-Spain).

² ORDEIX, E. "Dealing with Corporate Values: A New Multicultural Company Trend". *Procedures del II International Symposium in Global Corporate Communication*. Setting Corporate Standards Across Cultural Borders. Gorizia (Italy), 27-28 de juny de 2005.

Innovation

In Public Relations innovative work requires credible and persuasive information and, besides, verifiable facts to support social and market claims. In other words, we believe PR innovation means investment in relationship techniques, effectiveness and social participation.³ The company should play a strategic role together with public relations professionals to define and adapt these values to the social demands. In this way it should be obvious that observing the alignment of the corporate identity with the social climate is a basic task of the PR policy and practice.

In short, innovative PR activity should consider:⁴

- Settling personal and public company commitments, due to the fact that we are dealing with organizations and publics.
- Avoiding over promises in order to generate the right expectations.
- Recognizing the importance of the opinion leader and solicit its help when necessary in front of public opinion.
- Managing the assessment in cultural analysis either internally or externally.
- Informing strategic stakeholders about the excellence management procedures put forth by the company in terms of production, quality, social commitment and sustainability.⁵

Globalization

To face globalization, public relations should carefully guide the local implementation of companies and help deal with the complexity of interests: social, cultural, economical and political.

Public Relations should work on tightening strategic links with local opinion leaders⁶ that allow the company to settle in a very close and personal way, sometimes with a proper combination of formality and informality. The company should work either internally or externally. It should work internally when com-

³ HEATH, R.L. *Management of corporate communication. From interpersonal contacts to external affairs*. Hillsdale (New Jersey) and Hove (UK): Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1994.

⁴ MILLER, K. (Arizona State University). *Organizational communication. Approaches and Processes*. New York: Wadsworth publishing Company. A division of International Thomson Publishing, 1995.

⁵ See the Public Relations Model from the General Theory System designed by Long and Hazelton, 1987, 9.

⁶ TOTH, E.L.; HEATH, R.L. (eds.) *Rhetorical and critical approaches to public relations*. Hilldale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1992.

municating the employee's career, benefits, ethical values,⁷ among others, and externally when the company explains social, cultural, ethical and environmental policies within the Corporate Social Responsibility principals.

In that way Corporate Public Relations⁸ should work:

- To capitalize the links with social opinion leaders locally.
- To solve and prevent organization relationship problems.
- To improve corporate human and social sensitivity.
- To work on improving common participative processes between companies and their publics.
- To develop social and cultural participation.
- To help towards multicultural progress and involvement.

Quality standards and organizational culture management

To maintain its identity throughout the world, public relations practices should specifically help in dealing with defining corporate values and applying them in multinationals either locally and globally.

Lots of companies are working on applying these values when they are related to quality standards, prevention and environment management. There is a general tendency in Europe to apply corporate values when they involve general interests related to social, cultural, ethical and environmental subjects. Corporate Social Responsible is a good way to explain the excellence and quality standards of the company. The PR strategy should be aware of it when gaining and keeping the confidence and commitment with stakeholders.⁹ The quality standards communication is more than necessary when preserving the reputation in a very competitive stock exchange market. In fact the PR budget has increased progressively between 8 and 10% these last five years¹⁰ mainly due to this need.

In that way, Public Relations roles should:

- Analyze tendencies and social demands
- Negotiate and mediate local versus global disagreements.

7 ROBBINS, S. *Essentials of Organizational Behaviour*. Upper Saddle River (New Jersey): Prentice Hall, 1997

8 SHAH, D.V.; CHO, J.; EVELAND, W.P.; KWAK, N. "Information and Expression in a Digital Age. Modeling Internet Effects on Civic Participation". *Communication Research*. Vol. 32, n. 5, October 2005, p. 531-565.

9 GRUNIG, J. "Collectivism, Collaboration, and Societal Corporatism as Core Professional Values in Public Relations". *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 12 (1), 23-48. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 2000.

10 See different studies from *Echo- The Global Communication Research Group*.

- Analyze tendencies and social demands
- Develop self-criticism and objectivity
- Guide and supervise corporate communication standards and procedures.

In fact, as we desired from the beginning of this research, excellence in public relations would easily break some paradoxes in corporate culture managing. So many PR challenges become more strategic rather than tactical, and its practice is mainly focused on changing attitudes rather than on improving technique effectiveness.

These changes are making the profession a bit more difficult than before and a better and broader knowledge is required. As said, this means being permanent researchers with public characteristics, opinion leaders, messages, new media, and communication channels and techniques, among others. This gives predominance to what literature beginners in Public Relations said: “No Public Relations practice would be excellent without a wide use of the social sciences methodologies”.

Corporate Social Responsibility together with a growing number of companies that practice the symmetrical model¹²—thanks to using new technologies—¹³ lead us to apply participative communication models. When international firms work on redefining corporate values depending on the country’s people characteristics, then we get what Long Hazeltong defines as a good conjunction between individual cognition and social behavior. In fact, crossing cultural border with a real multicultural policy is more than a trend, it is a challenge if there is no commitment.

BUILDING UP THE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE INTERNATIONALLY

We can emphasize three basic trends managing the organizational culture through internal communication when using the knowledge management principles:¹⁴

11 NEWSON, D.; VANSLYKE, J.; KRUCKEBERG, D. *This is PR. The realities of Public Relations*. USA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1999.

12 GRUNIG, J. *Excellence in Public Relations and Communications Management*. Hillsdale (New Jersey): Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1992.

13 SHELL, H. *Public Realitions on the Net*. New York: Amacom, 1999.

14 ORDEIX, E.; NAVÍO-GÁMEZ, C.R. *How internal communication makes competence management the way to strengthen the organizational culture*. International Academics of Business Disciplines (IABD), 2007.

- Dialogue. The importance of two-way communication is growing fast thanks to new technologies (Dozier and others, 1995)¹⁵ although it is known that communication between persons of different power status should not take place with the same conditions on both parts. This is what Grunig (2000) would call “mutual comprehension”.

- Compromise. There is no communication without compromise. Real communication doesn’t exist if there is no real mutual interest. When it is lacking, communication is technical rather than strategic, being effective in the short term, but not in the long term (Kreps, 1990).¹⁶ A transparent attitude, open to dialogue, has internal effects in the cohesion of organizational culture due to the effectiveness in the individual and collective contexts, as well as in the capacity to satisfy the expectations generated by these compromises and explicit attitudes.

- Knowledge. It is the tool that selects the information adapting it in the best possible manner to the receiver, depending on his department or working area, and personal interests. This way, the blending of collective and personal objectives happens to be in the same track with the needs, requirements and interests of both employees and the organization. Knowledge makes behavior. (Long, 1997)¹⁷.

- Leadership. By effectively communicating the need for universalizing the values of the organization throughout management and employees the company will successfully achieve an internal environment of understanding. This can be accomplished while having positive and focused personnel with the ability for open communication, discussion and conversation throughout the organization.

These trends are essential in the practice of adapting the messages of the organization to its cultural reality, its values, and its persons. Communication processes towards employees require a big amount of knowledge of the principles, characteristics, composition, and of the way to create a solid organizational culture (Daft, 1998).¹⁸ In the

15 DOZIER, D.; GRUNIG, L.; GRUNIG, J. *Manager’s Guide to Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1995.

16 LONG, L.W.; HAZLETON, V. “Public relations: a theoretical and practical response”. *Public Relations Review*, 13, 1997, p. 3-13.

17 *Ibidem*.

18 DAFT, R. *Organization Theory and Design*. Cincinnati (Ohio): South-Western College, 1998.

article “Furnishing the Edifice: Ongoing Research on Public Relations As a Strategic Management Function” (Grunig, 2006) illustrates, like he did in his previous publications, the correlation between communication, knowledge and organizational culture (Ordeix-Aranda 2008).¹⁹ Grunig states that communication makes available many benefits, since participative cultures enjoy a greater organization’s projection in terms of social image because its members are highly knowledgeable of the objectives, character and procedures of the organization. In fact, this happens when they have digitization by the company and the company is legitimated by society.

SOCIAL LEGITIMACY: THE MAIN PR AIM

Legitimacy and power are two main central indicators to understand the relation and the influence of the organization with publics (Mitchell, Agle, and Wood, 1997). In fact, as we said, this is the main purpose of many companies that try to align its corporate culture with society, internal and external publics. This gives a lot of potential to them. Specially when they get the social push to represent ideas that belong to the general interest.

Legitimacy is defined as “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Mitchell, Agle, and Wood, 1997; cf. Suchman, 1995).²⁰ Legitimacy and power can exist independently or can be combined to create authority. Working for the general interest is normally recognized as a valid way to develop moral authority. And this is why some corporations decide to work under the claim that they are satisfying a general social demand, complementing the public administration tasks, and not only a market demand. When doing this, it is fundamental that corporate values emerge as coherent with this social demand and they should be aligned with social values. The symbiosis between society’s values and corporate values is achieved when the balance of interest and expectations is successful. Big corporations use

19 ORDEIX, E.; ARNADA, H. *Knowledge Management, Strength in Corporate Culture Building*. International Academics of Business Disciplines, on pres.

20 MITCHELL, R., AGLE, B.; WOOD, D. “Toward a Theory of Stakeholder Identification and Salience: Defining the Principle of Who and What Really Counts”. *Academy of Management Review* (1997), 22(4): 853-886.

this as a way to distinguish themselves from others. Therefore there is no sense in dealing with values and corporate commitment separately from social demands and expectations (Ordeix and Duarte, 2008).²¹

Following the previous statement we should not forget that any internal activity and communication is always related to the external activity when the companies or organizations consider the employees' claims. In fact, this is a way to align the organization with publics and society. Knowledge management is a good way to know about internal concerns and work forward to satisfy them by participative communication tools. As more people support our corporate organizational philosophy internally, more people will support the company externally. In fact, internal publics will act as opinion leaders all over the organization. This would lead us to the emotional security depending on the capability of organizations to be working with the employees' commitment (Daft, 1998).

We can therefore say that real progress is only established when the company is respectful of its basic social environment and balances its business activity with a certain amount of social commitment (Ordeix-Rigo, 2005). The contribution of sincere communication as a form of commitment is therefore of paramount importance.

COMMITMENT

A company's commitment is linked to its level of responsibility. The first level of commitment is linked to basic company management, while the second is linked to citizens.

Expressed from James Grunig's (1995) point of view,²³ public responsibility is understood to be the commitment which derives from the basic management of the organization; social responsibility, on the other hand, comprises that which derives from the ability of the organization to develop roles and therefore influence the society around it. Despite the fact that, on a basic level, the organization has to follow established norms and

21 ORDEIX, E., DUARTE, J. *From Public Diplomacy to Corporate Diplomacy: corporations legitimacy and influence*, *American Behavioural Scientist*, in press.

22 ORDEIX, E. "Compromise Management as a Challenge for Corporate Communication". *Comunicação Pública. Revista Multidisciplinar de Comunicação*. 3, (5), 2008, 171-183.

23 DOZIER, D.; GRUNIG, L.; GRUNIG, J. *Manager's Guide to Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*.

comply with the labor and economic commitments which derive from its own management, on a second level, responsibility is developed by influencing a broader social environment and becoming involved in areas of general interest which transcend the organization's reason to exist.²⁴

We do not understand an organization to have established social commitments without it beforehand having the attitude to fulfill internal commitments with its employees. It would be improbable to think that a company expresses an attitude differently outside than inside. What is more, it would be counterproductive to think that an organization uses a language or acts or reacts differently towards its main body of opinion (its employees), those who generate messages to the outside and who, at the same time, enjoy great credibility.

The role of internal relationships is therefore fundamental in bearing testimony to an organization's public responsibility and as a step towards solid and coherent social responsibility. In this respect, if we do not align individual and group interests, those which affect the closer environment and the broader one, it is difficult to group concerns and satisfy expectations as an organization.²⁵ It is clear that internal relationships present themselves as a weapon to combat discrepancies and promote consensus between groups within an organization.²⁶

Professional management of internal relationships²⁷ is a field of unquestionable value for organizations wanting to bring cohesion to their organizational culture so as to better develop its

24 Grunig describes a succession of elements which we can consider basic for a company to cross the threshold of public responsibility and become socially committed: the economic effects of the social activity on the receiving group; the quality of the activity on terms of management and the capacity to fulfil the expectations which are generated; the social effects of actions and the correlation and coherence of this activity with the attitudes the company wishes to promote; and the financial load it represents for the social investor. Percentage of the social balance compared to the accountable balance linked strictly to the company's business.

25 ORDEIX, E. (coord.). *Las funciones del lenguaje en las memorias de responsabilidad social corporativa*. Presented within the framework of the 2nd International Congress of Public Relations researchers. Universidad de Sevilla (2005).

26 *International Association Business Communicators. General Conference*. Washington, June 1999.

27 *Internal relations vs. internal communication*. Although we understand internal communication as the information which is transmitted and maintained between the different areas, departments or people comprising a company or organization, internal relations are awarded a broader meaning, including as they do interrelations which are not based on any informative act. These two terms have often been used synonymously, both working basically on internal flows of communication which are

attributes or differences. The growing importance of this field within the organization is mainly due to its ability to adapt messages to cultural reality, its values and people. It is for this reason that communication processes aimed at employees require significant amounts of knowledge of the principles, characteristics, composition and processes for creating a solid organizational culture,²⁸ often supported on the pillars of social responsibility.

The new models of participation allowed by new information technologies require greater transparency and commitment, promote greater symbiosis between organizations and their environment, and establish a *two way* effect to bring consensus. When this happens, the target audience is also the transmitter and improved two-way information is established. In fact, we know that successful internal relationship processes are those which allow communicative symmetry, because they manage to achieve areas of common interest. Cultural cohesion and consensus contribute to the balance and symbiosis of interest within the organization and its public members.

CONCLUSION; INDICATORS FOR THE EXCELLENCE PRACTICE OF INTERNAL PUBLIC RELATIONS

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Cross-checking this information and adapting it to the Excellence study framework we should settle on five main indicators to guide you to an excellence practice for internal public relations:

1. The people: excellent organizations strengthen people's influence, by giving employees more decision-making responsibilities. At the same time, they strengthen their growth by widening their work quality due to two factors: interdependency among colleagues and improvement in process management. Therefore, individual work and teamwork are valued equally. The proper development of an institution depends more on the employees' capability of integration, rather than on individual task segmentation.
2. Organic structure: Employees at government organizations or publically owned organizations become more efficient if they can eli-

established between the people and the organization itself, and at the same time on the communication processes, channels and tools which are used to generate a climate of confidence between the integral members of an organization.

²⁸ KOTTER, P. *Power and Influence. Beyond Formal Authority*. New York: Free Press, 1985.

minate bureaucratic, hierarchical and unidirectional processes, by turning them holistic, dynamic, and bidirectional. This type of permeable structures to the surroundings allow for better understanding of the project, better commitment, and to strengthen abilities and collaboration, leading to the rising of natural and spontaneous leadership figures that help create a more cohesive and positive work culture.

3. Entrepreneurial spirit: Innovation is a basic characteristic of excellent organizations. An innovative spirit and a constant improvement of processes widen the complicity level among co-workers, as well as individual development. An organizational spirit respectful of new ideas that break inconformity leads to a culture with solid organizational principles, ranging from the attitudinal standpoint to the management of daily problem-solving skills.

4. Symmetry: symmetry leads to a better dialogue and to the rising of common interest topics. Obviously, a mutual understanding among the members of the organization involves empathy towards -and with- the opinion leaders of each public. Simply establishing a fluid communication channel you can achieve a solid functional/professional tie, shared with and led by both participating parts. This tendentious symmetry or bidirectionality for dialogue, transmits an emotional proximity.

In order of importance, this indicator of analysis will expand according to the following contents:

- Communication channels
- The web of interrelations
- The communication flux and structure (vertical and horizontal)
- The communicative climate
- The comprehension and intentionality of messages
- The language

Depending on the results, it will also be valuable to analyze content through its topics, and the way they are being held, taking into account the adjectivation and space that take place in the given communication supports.

5. Leadership: A real leadership is the one that takes into account the surroundings. The legitimacy of representing someone or something only exists by reducing the formal power strengthening the power of third persons.

This is the basis of a future study in internal relations and its effectiveness when dealing with a European context and in open organizations that settled their principals according to the excellence parameters. A lot to do yet to reach this ideal situation, but no doubt valuable for the organization, both economically and socially.