



The Basic Principles of Effective Public Relations Strategies by Sancar Maruflu, the Doyen of Turkish Communication Experts

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Abstract:

Sancar Maruflu started working in the field of public relations even before the concept was known to the public and founded Turkey's second company in this field. Considered the pioneer of the profession and a passionate practitioner for 50 years, Maruflu was a public relations expert who organized the largest number of state ceremonies in Turkey. He also achieved great success in the field of political communication with the election campaigns he prepared, and he worked as a public relations consultant for Turkey's most important politicians. Maruflu, who held a master's

degree in public relations, trained many young public relations experts and brought them to the sector. He continued working in the public relations field until the day he passed away; Maruflu brought a different interpretation to public relations, developed and implemented unique strategies, tried untried methods and succeeded, and became a brand and an expert in his profession. Maruflu, who advocated that a public relations expert should know the society in which he lives very well and should be intertwined with the public, also became a civil society leader and was nicknamed the Father of İzmir by the people of the city (İzmir) where he lived. This article includes Sancar Maruflu's achievements in the public relations profession and his advice to young people who want to be successful in this field. Maruflu's unique interpretations and practices brought to the profession will offer a new vision to public relations.

Keywords: *Communication, interpersonal communication, political communication, public relations, Sancar Maruflu.*

An Overview of the Concept of Public Relations

Public relations is a phenomenon rooted in the history of communication between people. In ancient civilizations, such as Babylonian, Greek, and Roman civilizations, art, literature, and speeches were used to convince people of the authority of the state and religion. Although these techniques were not yet referred to as "public relations" at that time, they can be considered activities that have similar characteristics to today's public relations in terms of their objectives and effects (Akdağ &

Erdem, 2009). Although some messages engraved on mudbrick walls about 3,000 years ago (during the period of the ancient Babylonians and Sumerians living in what is now Iraq) are considered to have pioneered this field, it is difficult to give a precise date for the emergence of public relations, considering that communication between people has a history much older than 3,000 years (Watson, 2012).

The Cambridge Dictionary defines public relations as the activity of establishing good relations between an organization and the general public (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023),



while the Collins Dictionary defines public relations as a part of an organization's efforts to gain public approval for its work (Collins Dictionary, 2023). According to the approach of Rex F. Harlow, one of the pioneers of the profession, public relations is a science that helps an organization to realize its social responsibility conscientiously and enables the public to approve the activities of that company (Göksel, 1990). Public relations is a management function that enables an organization to explain its actions by communicating with individuals and groups in the society, to gain the support of the society, and to make new arrangements with the reactions that may come from them (Ataol, 1991). According to Bernays, public relations covers methods related to situations and behaviors to meet social needs (Tortop, 1982). As displayed above, it is not possible to talk about a precise definition of public relations that is agreed upon and accepted by everyone. However, as a general and contemporary definition, public relations is a business function that helps to ensure and maintain mutual communication, understanding, acceptance, and cooperation between the organization and the target audience (Gürüz, 1993). In this context, public relations is accepted as a managerial effort that brings together the expectations of society and the actions of the organization, while at the same time, it refers to the establishment of mutual communication to ensure the support and trust of the public (Özdemir, 1994).

Public relations is a business of persuasion and brain management that builds reality through communication. Therefore, any individual who is interested in and engaged in public relations should know the history and development of public relations; the nature of public relations in terms of its purpose, causes, and consequences; and should see himself, his history, and society with his own eyes and at the same time understand how those who see with different eyes them (Erdoğan, 2014).

Public relations is a discipline and a field of practice required by every institution or organization that must communicate (Peltekoğlu, 2012). Just like the definition and field of activity of public relations, there are

different views on the role of public relations experts and there is no clear view that everyone fully agrees on. This diversity affects not only the approach to the concept of public relations from various perspectives but also the continuous updating of the profession and the expansion of its field of activity. Different definitions of public relations reveal this situation even more clearly (Kalender, 1999).

Although public relations activities represent a process consisting of many intertwined stages, identifying and analyzing the target audience constitutes one of the most important links of these processes, which can be likened to a chain (Topsümer, Elden, & Yurdakul 2018). Public relations can be described as a management function that enables an organization to interact with society, explain its activities, receive support from society, and make new arrangements according to the reactions. In this process, the organization communicates with individuals and groups in society and tries to understand their expectations, thus creating a stronger relationship and mutual understanding. Public relations enables an organization to act in an open, transparent, and trustworthy manner and to interact with society. In this way, the reputation of the organization is enhanced and the support and trust of the community is gained. At the same time, by taking into account the reactions and feedback of the public, the organization makes the necessary arrangements and continuously improves itself (Ataol, 1987).

Public relations is an important management process that involves mutual communication to ensure public support and trust, and to align the organization's actions with the expectations of society. In this process, the organization tries to understand the general view of society and people's wishes and concerns. Thus, the organization's activities and communication are guided in line with the expectations of the community, and a stronger bond with the community is established. At the same time, the organization's pursuit of an open and transparent communication policy ensures public support and trust. The correct implementation of public relations in an organization enables that organization to enter

into effective communication with society and to be successful (Özdemir, 1994).

Public relations not only aims to provide information to the governed but also aims to improve the relationship between the administration and the public. In other words, public relations is not an effort to get the public to accept the decisions and actions of the ruler, but to realize the actions in communication with the ruled, that is, to obtain spontaneous approval of the administration (Kazancı, 1982). The direct and immediate receipt of feedback in mutual communication has a special place in terms of public relations, as it enables the control of communication (Savaş, 1972).

Development of Public Relations in the World

In Germany, the large industrial corporation Krupp established a news bureau in 1893. In the UK, the Marconi company sent out its first news bulletin in 1910. The first British public relations agency, "Editorial Services", was established in London in 1924 and the first public relations officer was appointed in 1925. However, in both countries, public relations and corporate communication did not develop until after the Second World War. In the US, although some pioneering names came to the forefront in the establishment of public relations, capital groups such as railroad transportation organizations and oil companies took the leading role (Watson, 2012).

Public relations was first used as a term in a message sent by Thomas Jefferson, President of the United States of America, to Congress in 1807. However, the first real application of public relations at the organizational level was seen in the 1896 American election campaign. In 1917, a journalist named Ivy Lee was appointed as a public relations specialist at Rockefeller's company and successfully managed the crisis caused by the workers' strike. Ivy Lee's work laid the foundations of basic public relations principles that are still valid today (Kazancı, 1982). Significant developments in the field of public relations took place in the period after the

Second World War. Especially in the United States and Europe, public relations was shaped as a profession and attracted great interest. In the US, many consulting companies carried out successful campaigns and demonstrated the impact of public relations in a concrete way (İnceoğlu, 2009).

Public Relations in Turkey

The history of public relations activities in Turkey dates back to the 1960s. At that time, public relations activities were carried out by units working under various names such as press bureau, press consultancy, broadcast representation branch, propaganda, publicity branch, and press, broadcasting, and public relations departments in different public institutions. In Turkey, the first public relations unit in the modern sense was established as the Publication and Representation Branch within the Coordination Department of the State Planning Organization, which worked to promote the idea of planning among the public. In the same period, the "Directorate of Publicity and Public Education", which was included in the organizational chart of the General Directorate of Population Planning in 1964, stands out as one of the institutions that pioneered public relations activities in public institutions (Gürüz, 1993).

Especially after 1969, large organizations such as Koç Holding, Sabancı Holding, Eczacıbaşı Holding, and Yaşar Holding gave importance to public relations and ensured that these activities were adopted by other private sector representatives. This importance given to public relations by the public and private sectors led to an increase in the number of public relations specialists and private organizations providing services in this field. As a matter of fact, in that period, public relations also found its place in higher school programs, and in the second half of the 1960s, it was taught for the first time as a course at Ankara University, Faculty of Political Sciences, School of Press and Publications (Göksel, 1990). Universities that provide public relations education have an important role in the systematization of public relations as a discipline.

Public relations education in universities has increased the demand for public relations practitioners as a field requiring expertise in the sector. In this way, qualified public relations professionals have been trained and valuable contributions have been made to the communication sector (Solmaz, et al. 2012)

In 1974, Alaeddin Asna, who was educated in the United States and is considered the pioneer of public relations in Turkey, founded A&B Public Relations Company, Turkey's first public relations firm operating in the private sector (Akdağ & Erdem, 2009). Although Asna predicted that other public relations companies would be established, by the early 1980s, only Betül Mardin and Sancar Maruflu had established their own companies (İnceoğlu, 2009). In this context, Sancar Maruflu's company, which was first established in 1983 under the name HİDAŞ and later renamed HİSDAŞ, was the first public relations company established outside Istanbul (Peltekoğlu, 2012) and the second in Turkey (Şahin, 2015). On August 15, 2021, Maruflu, who died in hospital due to heart and respiratory failure (Hürriyet, 2021), became one of the first names that comes to mind when it comes to public relations, not only in Izmir but also in Turkey as a whole.

Exploring Public Relations

In his 50 years of professional life, Sancar Maruflu, who organized 2400 organizations, first met the concept of public relations when he was 14 years old. To contribute to his school expenses, Maruflu used to work at the visitor entrance gates of the International Izmir Fair organized every year in Izmir. The pavilions of foreign countries and companies participating in the fair attracted great interest from the public. One detail caught Maruflu's attention. Almost all foreign exhibitors had a public relations department. He learned that public relations specialists usually gave information to the visitors in the pavilions. Years later, he would discover that this was a profession. In those years, public relations was unknown in Turkey, as only international companies had departments operating in this field (Oral, 2022).

However, public relations, which he discovered and fell in love with as a curious 14-year-old boy, would become his way of life years later.

Abdi İpekçi, one of the unforgettable names of the Turkish Press, had a great influence on Maruflu's choice of public relations as a profession. Maruflu had drawn a different future for himself since he intended to become a sculptor and started to study at university in this field. In 1967, while studying at the Sculpture Department of the Istanbul State Academy of Fine Arts, he decided to work in order not to burden his family economically and to contribute to his school expenses. Thanks to the help of İsmail Sivri, the then President of the Izmir Journalists Association, he went to Milliyet Newspaper, met with the editor-in-chief Abdi İpekçi, and was accepted as a police news reporter. In a short time, he impressed İpekçi with his success and diligence, and after a while, he was assigned to work for Ümit Deniz, the famous tabloid writer of those years (Maruflu, 2009). While working as a reporter, Maruflu also carried out public relations activities for Milliyet Newspaper. Thanks to his work, he became close friends with many important businessmen and artists. One day, Abdi İpekçi called him to his office and gave him a very important assignment. İpekçi asked Maruflu to organize the 20th-anniversary event of the Journalists Association of Turkey, of which he was the second president. İpekçi sent Sancar to public relations expert, Alaeddin Asna. Maruflu applied the template and information given to him by Asna and organized an extraordinary event in the building that now houses the Press Museum (Şahin, 2015). This organization was her official entry into public relations. When he met Betül Mardin, one of the legendary names of public relations in Turkey, she was not yet doing public relations, but working at the BBC (Altıngözlü & Şeker, 2019). Abdi İpekçi called her to his room to congratulate him on his success. During the conversation, İpekçi said that public relations would be one of the most important professions in Turkey.

Turkey's 2nd Public Relations Company

When Maruflu started working at Milliyet Newspaper, he began to question his choice of profession as a sculptor. Influenced by İpekçi's speech and advice, he dropped out of the Academy of Fine Arts and transferred to Istanbul University to study journalism and public relations. However, when his family had to return to Izmir due to his father's illness, he continued his university education at Ege University School of Journalism and Public Relations. Afterwards, he graduated from Ankara University Faculty of Political Sciences, School of Press and Publications, became a public relations specialist, and received his master's degree in this field. He also attended training at the Institute of Turkish and Middle East Public Administration in Ankara and obtained the title of "Strategic Communication and Organization System Specialist".

In 1971, Maruflu was assigned to the organizing committee of the Mediterranean Olympics. He gained important knowledge and experience at Turkey's first international sporting event, where 2,600 athletes from 19 countries took part. 11 months later, he started working at the Izmir International Fair and had the opportunity to contribute to the organization of the International Union of Fairs Congress twice. In 1975, with the support of İhsan Alyanak, the Mayor of Izmir at the time, he received a 3.5-month training as an organizer of EXPO Fairs at the Institute of Fair Organization in Milan. He worked as a manager in the organization of 28 international fairs at the Izmir International Fair. During this period, he took responsibility for 14 international festivals and events. In addition to his work at the fair, he also undertook the public relations of the municipality and the Governorship for two and a half years (Ertem, 2018). In 1983, while working as the Deputy Mayor for Public Relations and Publicity at Izmir Municipality, he voluntarily resigned from his position and founded HİSDAŞ, Turkey's second public relations firm (Şahin, 2012). He had established his public relations company under great economic difficulties. Since he did not have

enough financial power, he first had two other partners. But when the partnership relationship did not go well and disagreements arose, he bought the shares of his other two partners, changed the name of the company to HİSDAŞ, and decided to continue on his way alone (Oral, 2022).

When Maruflu chose public relations as a profession, Turkey was just getting acquainted with the concept of public relations. A Public Relations Association had been established in Turkey, but despite this, no one knew exactly what public relations did (www.halklailiskiler.com). Even his wife, with whom he shared the decision to establish a company, did not have any information about what Maruflu would do (Oral, 2022). In those days, only foreign companies had public relations departments. However, there were public relations departments in the structures of large hotels and some international companies with foreign capital. According to Maruflu, oil companies operating in Turkey pioneered the establishment of public relations in Turkey (Hızal, Özdemir, & Ymanoğlu 2014).

A Master of Political Communication

Political communication was one of the areas in which Sancar Maruflu worked extensively as a public relations specialist. He organized many election campaigns. He worked with very famous politicians who put their signatures on an important period in Turkey (Şahin, 2012). Maruflu, who entered into the right collaborations with the right people at the right time, became the public relations expert with the most experience in state and ceremonial organizations in Turkey (Ertem, 2018). He opened representative offices of his company in Istanbul and Ankara. He was one of the most prominent names in the field of fair organization. He pioneered the establishment of public relations departments in municipalities.

Maruflu also implemented many other practices that were tried for the first time. Maruflu was the first public relations expert in Turkey to use election buses in political campaigns (Yeni Gün

TV, 2014). When he was still a student doing his master's degree, he also worked in the youth branches of the Republican People's Party (CHP). Bülent Ecevit was the party's chairman. Turks living in Germany were proud of Ecevit's achievements in Cyprus and donated a bus to the party. In a foreign magazine, Maruflu saw a photograph of US President Jimmy Carter making a propaganda speech to the people on the bus. Such a practice did not yet exist in Turkey. If he could transform the bus given to the CHP to reflect Jimmy Carter's campaign bus, he could make a great contribution to the party's propaganda efforts. The next day, he met with the party's chairman and said, "Let's do the same" and managed to convince him. He learned that there was a master craftsman in Bursa who could do this job. He immediately went to Bursa, explained the project, and 15 days later, he had the same election bus as Carter's. When the rented sound system was added, Turkey's first election bus was born. Later on, other leaders started to hold rallies on election buses, but Maruflu was the owner and the first implementer of the idea (Sevinç, 2016).

Grunig and Hunt's public relations model focuses on explaining the way organizations and the public communicate with each other. It is a model based on changing or organizing the structure and activities of the organization according to the views of the target audience and represents the contemporary public relations approach of the 21st century. In this model, the public relations specialist is an intermediary between the organization and the target audience, representing the target audience against the organization and the organization against the target audience (Okay & Okay, 2002). Maruflu also applies this model from time to time in her profession. For example, Maruflu played an important role in the success of the Motherland Party (ANAP) by persuading the masses with a campaign he organized. Maruflu had a large team of pollsters composed of university students. Using this team in his election campaign, Maruflu would find out the problems of the people in each district where ANAP's leader Turgut Özal held a rally and reported those problems to him. The fact that

Özal was so familiar with the problems of their districts had a great impact on voters. When this strategy led to a significant increase in the party's votes in the Aegean Region, the propaganda model developed by Maruflu was applied all over Turkey.

Various factors played a role in Maruflu becoming one of Turkey's leading names in the field of public relations and reaching the top of his profession. Undoubtedly, the most important of these was his great love for his profession. He believed that even the smallest activity returned to society like a starfish on the beach. (Maruflu, 2021). The attention he paid to his work also played an important role in Maruflu's success. One day, many years ago, Maruflu was organizing a ceremony for a major Turkish textile company. His team had gone to the venue in advance and completed the preparations. The ceremony was to take place in the evening. In the morning, while making the final checks, since he did not like the stage layout, he and his team worked for hours, sweating, to rebuild the stands and get them ready for the opening. A well-known industrialist, who was aware of Sancar's last-minute intervention, thanked him after the ceremony and said, "Now I understand better why everyone recommended that I work with you" (Oral, 2022). Maruflu's meticulousness and care for his profession were evident in every event he organized. For example, he would taste everything that would be served to the guests at the cocktails he organized. If he did not like something, he would have another product served instead. In every organization, he showed the same sensitivity as if he were hosting the guests in his own home. (Maruflu, 2021). The trust and love of his team had a special place in Maruflu's success. University students who worked part-time in the organizations he organized had the opportunity to pay for their school expenses. Maruflu protected the young people working for him like a father, paid their salaries without fail, gave gifts to motivate successful team members, and would always go with his team when going somewhere to eat. His team was like his second family.

Being Intertwined with the Public

Maruflu, as in the definition made by public relations theorist John E. Morston, argued that public relations aims to influence the public, which is a much broader segment than certain groups (Kürekçi, 1995). That's why he claimed that being a good public relations expert means knowing the public very well. Maruflu believed that the public relations profession had a special responsibility to know the people using culture and knowledge, be among the people, and know the agenda of not only Turkey but also the whole world. He stated that, years ago, public relations experts were perceived as people who always appeared at cocktail parties with a glass in their hand and that this was wrong and that he regretted that the same perception returned today and that the profession could never accept an understanding that was disconnected and distant from the public (www.kentyasam.com, 2011). His sensitivity to interacting with the public made him a civil society leader in his later years. Maruflu, who was chosen as the most successful communicator of the last 10 years in 2001 and the most successful civil society leader of the last 10 years in 2003, was nicknamed the "Father of the İzmir" by the people living in İzmir, the city where he lived (Oral, 2022). This shows that Maruflu transformed public relations into not only a profession but also a way of life. As a public relations specialist, one of the promotional activities that Maruflu attached special importance to was fair organizing. Maruflu, who had extensive research in this field, made very devoted efforts for the development of the İzmir International Fair, which he considered Turkey's pride. (Kurt, 2019).

Maruflu pointed out that, in the past, there were people who operated in this field without having received any public relations education at school, and who only had experience in the sector. Although he argued that this situation could be acceptable considering the conditions of that day and the insufficient knowledge of public relations, he also believed, that to be successful in modern times, one needed to receive an education in this field because theory constituted the essence of the profession and public relations could not be done only with practice.

Maruflu, perhaps one of the most successful public relations experts in Turkey (Maruflu, 2023), argued that communication had changed and that the public relations profession needed entrepreneurship and an innovative approach. On November 30, 1994, in his speech at the Second Turkish Public Relations Congress held in Istanbul, he stated that public relations activities in a healthy organization should be as follows: 1) A public relations unit can be established in an organization; 2) Professional public relations consultants can be used; and 3) Public relations work can be left entirely to a consultancy firm or PR agency (Çöklü, 1995). As can be understood from this conclusion, Maruflu criticized the fact that untrained people introduce themselves as public relations experts and that companies appoint people who are not related to the profession as public relations experts.

Professional Advice from the Master to Young Students

Maruflu was constantly invited to conferences and television programs due to his versatile personality and his management of non-governmental organizations' activities in different fields. The events he most enjoyed attending as a speaker and panelist were the meetings where he explained his ideas on public relations (Oral, 2022). While chatting with young people studying this profession, especially at university, Maruflu stated that those who do not have the knowledge and cultural background cannot be successful in public relations, and stated that this profession is not like other professions and that public relations have become a part of the lives of those working in this field. Speaking at the interview titled, "The Future of Public Relations", held at Yaşar University Vocational School on December 24, 2015, Maruflu advised students studying in this field to be good archivists, to collect everything related to their profession, to develop their intuition and observation skills, and to always be trustworthy in relationships. He advised them to treat everyone with respect, no matter how they communicate. (Yaprak, 2016).

In 2011, on the occasion of another event, Maruflu met with students studying public relations and asked them to get to know themselves and the city they live in. Maruflu, who advised young people to improve themselves first, said that the public relations profession is not what it seems from the outside and that it requires great seriousness, care, and dedication. Stating that public relations experts who are determined, investigative, and act like real leaders achieve great success in the profession, Maruflu emphasized the importance of knowing a foreign language, especially English (Kent Yaşam, 2011).

According to Fügen Töksü, one of the previous presidents of the Turkish Public Relations Association (TÜHİD), Maruflu was a public relations expert who achieved great success in national and international projects and was always very instructive for young people studying in the field of communication (Milliyet 2021). Maruflu was an important name who made great contributions to the sector and TÜHİD and pioneered the development of the public relations profession in the Aegean and Mediterranean Regions and the encouragement of young people to the profession (TÜHİD, 2021).

As claimed by Maruflu, the real purpose of public relations and the main idea on which it is based are not clearly understood. Maruflu said that the presence of a public relations department within a company does not mean that only that department undertakes the responsibility for all public relations activities of that company, as is the case in some wrong examples exhibited in the world and Turkey. Maruflu argued that the path to success in public relations is possible through coordination, that is, sharing responsibility and collective work are the basis of success (Özgen, 1995).

The Importance of Image-Making

Public relations theorists Merten and Westerbarkey have argued that image-making is the main task of public relations (Okay & Okay 2002). The goal of image-making also plays a

very important role in Maruflu's public relations vision. As a matter of fact, in the brochure he prepared for the promotion of his company while presenting the mission of HİSDAŞ, he included the statement, "We believe that creating and maintaining an image is gain and profit". Acting with this in mind, Maruflu first and foremost aimed for his company to have a correct and admirable image. It is possible to see that even the clothes worn by the host and hostesses in their organizations reflect the image of HİSDAŞ (Oral, 2022). He even managed to create an image of Sancar Maruflu in people's minds with his extraordinary appearance and the way he dressed.

In the early 20th century, the public information model pioneered by Ivy Lee came to the fore. In this theory, which can be explained as a person or organization informing its target audience about itself and its activities (Okay & Okay 2002), Lee believed that communication with the public and the press should be honest, open, and transparent and that the public should be given accurate information about the functioning and objectives of organizations. In Maruflu's public relations model, having good relations with the press has a very important place. The fact that Maruflu himself was a journalist for a period (Maruflu, 2009), in other words, his connection with the press sector is important in this context. As a matter of fact, in his public relations activities, he provided the press with all the materials they would need and ensured that the reporters covering the events worked under the best conditions. As a result, news about the products and activities of the companies he consulted were always widely published in the press.

Conclusion

While it was not even known what public relations was or was not in Turkey, Maruflu played a pioneering role by working in this field and contributed to the development of the profession and the training of many new public relations experts in Turkey. With his innovative and courageous approaches, Maruflu put his signature under many practices that are

considered to be firsts in this field in Turkey. Maruflu, who founded Turkey's second public relations company and is considered one of the doyens of the profession, never broke away from public relations until the day he passed away and continued to explain public relations to both the public and students studying in this field with seminars and conferences.

As of today, public relations in Turkey is a favorite profession for young people, and at the same time, it is one of the elements that organizations that want to grow and gain a reputation are looking for. 30-35 years ago, having a public relations unit in an organization or outsourcing consultancy services in this field would have been considered a "fantasy", but now it is one of the indispensable sectors of working life (Toksü, 2006).

Undoubtedly, those who worked selflessly in this field in the years when the profession of public relations was not yet known in Turkey have played a very important role as pioneers of the profession. In this context, Sancar Maruflu, a public relations expert who passed away in 2011 at the age of 71, is rightly recognized as one of the doyens of the profession in Turkey. Maruflu's strategies, which brought him to the top of his profession, continue to inspire and inform many public relations professionals today.

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