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ROUTLEDGE

The Practice of Government Public Relations

SECOND EDITION

Edited by Mordecai Lee, Grant Neeley, and Kendra Stewart

The Practice of Government Public Relations

Along with such traditional management tools as budgeting, HR, planning, and leadership, *The Practice of Government Public Relations*, *Second Edition* demonstrates that the 21st-century government administrator needs new tools to address the changing context of government communication. It provides public managers with an understanding of the uses of public relations as tools to advance the goals of public agencies, including media relations, an informed public, public branding, listening to the citizenry, and crisis management. While no manager can be an expert in all aspects of public administration, this book will help managers know what external communications tools are available to them for advancing the mission and results of their agencies.

The authors argue that government public relations activities can serve three broad purposes: mandatory activities, which support governance; optional activities, which offer a pragmatic means of improving policy outcomes, inputs, and impacts; and dangerous but powerful activities, which may serve political interests. The book focuses on practitioners throughout the public sector, including the U.S. federal government, state and local governments, and public administrators outside of the U.S. Several new chapters address the use of digital communications as social media and the resultant rapid diffusion of information has transformed the responsibility, accessibility, and vulnerability of government communications. In addition, two new chapters examine the topic of branding, its growing influence in the public sector, and how it can be used to connect with citizens and increase public engagement.

The Practice of Government Public Relations, *Second Edition* is designed to help government managers at various levels of administration looking to specialize in public relations, those assigned to communications offices, and program managers seeking innovative and cost-effective ways to implement their programmatic missions. It will also be of interest to students of public administration who will become the government workers of the future.

Mordecai Lee is Professor Emeritus at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, USA. He has written extensively on public relations in public administration. He is the author of several books on the subject, including *See America: The Politics and Administration of Federal Tourism Promotion, 1937–1973* (2020). His articles on government PR have appeared in many journals, including *Public Relations Review*, *Public Administration Review*, *Federal History*, and *Journal of Public Affairs*. Mordecai occasionally provides the media with non-partisan analysis of political developments in Wisconsin. He has appeared on the NBC Nightly News, National Public Radio, MSNBC, and Fox News Channel. In the print media, he has been quoted by the *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, and by Bloomberg and Reuters news services.

Grant Neeley is Chair of the Department of Political Science at the University of Dayton, USA, where he teaches and conducts research in public policy, public administration, and political science. His publications have appeared in print across a wide range of journals including *American Journal of Public Health*, *Policy Studies Journal*, *Political Research Quarterly*, *Policy Studies Review*, *Social Science Quarterly*, *Evaluation Review*, *Public Performance & Management Review*, *State and Local Government Review*, *State Politics and Policy Quarterly*, *Social Science Journal*, *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, and *Criminal Justice Studies*. Grant also serves as a Navy Reserve Public Affairs Officer. In 2010, he deployed to Iraq where he developed strategic messaging for U.S. Forces-Iraq at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. In 2018, he deployed to Afghanistan where he served as press desk chief and spokesperson for both the U.S. Forces – Afghanistan and the NATO Resolute Support Mission.

Kendra Stewart is Professor of Political Science and Public Administration and Director of the Joseph P. Riley, Jr. Center for Livable Communities at the College of Charleston, USA. Her research interests include government public relations, nonprofit management, state and local government, food policy, and women and politics. The articles she has authored have appeared in a variety of journals including *Urban Affairs Review*, *Public Finance and Management*, *Perspective in Politics*, *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, *Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition*, as well as in various scholarly books. Kendra is a fellow of the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA), and she served as President of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) for 2020–2021. Kendra regularly provides expertise to the press and has conducted political analysis for a variety of print, radio, and television media, including Good Morning America, Fox News Channel, The Associated Press, *The New Yorker*, and National Public Radio.

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Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
NEW YORK AND LONDON

ASPA
American Society for Public Administration
ADVANCING EXCELLENCE IN PUBLIC SERVICE

American Society for Public Administration
Series in Public Administration and Public Policy

Second edition published 2022
by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

and by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

First edition published by Routledge 2012

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record has been requested for this book

ISBN: 978-1-032-01192-9 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-032-01198-1 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-003-17765-4 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

Mordecai Lee
For my wonderful daughter-in-law Candice née Sun, who truly radiates love and warmth into the lives of my son and grandson.

Grant Neeley
For Sabrina and Jordan, the team that keeps me going.

Kendra Stewart
For my husband Harry, who provides me endless support, love, and laughter.

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Editor Biographies

Mordecai Lee is a Professor Emeritus at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, USA. He has written extensively on public relations in public administration. His books on that subject include *See America: The Politics and Administration of Federal Tourism Promotion, 1937–1973* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2020); *Promoting the War Effort: Robert Horton and Federal Propaganda, 1938–1946* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012); and *Congress vs. the Bureaucracy: Muzzling Agency Public Relations* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011). His articles on government PR have appeared in many journals, including *Public Relations Review*, *Public Administration Review*, *Federal History*, and *Journal of Public Affairs*. He also contributed chapters to *North American Perspectives on the Development of Public Relations* (2017), *SAGE Handbook of International Corporate and Public Affairs* (2017), *E-Government and Websites* (2015), *Pathways to Public Relations: Histories of Practice and Profession* (2014), *and Propaganda and American Democracy* (2014). Before joining the academy, he served as legislative assistant to a Member of Congress, was elected to three terms in the Wisconsin State Legislature's State Assembly and two terms to the State Senate, and then headed a faith-based nonprofit engaged in social justice advocacy. Mordecai occasionally provides the media with non-partisan analysis of political developments in Wisconsin. He has appeared on the NBC Nightly News, National Public Radio, MSNBC, and Fox News Channel. In the print media, he has been quoted by the *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, and by Bloomberg and Reuters news services.

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Review, *Public Performance & Management Review*, *State and Local Government Review*, *State Politics and Policy Quarterly*, *Social Science Journal*, *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, and *Criminal Justice Studies*. Grant also serves as a Navy Reserve Public Affairs Officer. In 2010, he deployed to Iraq where he developed strategic messaging for U.S. Forces-Iraq at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. In 2018, he deployed to Afghanistan where he served as press desk chief and spokesperson for both the U.S. Forces – Afghanistan and the NATO Resolute Support Mission. Prior to his current position, Grant was a research analyst at the University of Tennessee and the University of Cincinnati and on the faculty at Texas Tech University and Ball State University.

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Preface

An understanding of the practice of government public relations helps contemporary public sector managers *do their jobs*. Along with such traditional management tools as budgeting, HR, planning, and leadership, this volume is intended to make the case that the 21st-century government administrator needs new tools to address the changing context of government communication.

First, civic life in modern times is now much more dominated by the social media, print, and broadcast news and other electronic media. Public administration practitioners, as well as students studying to become public administrators, need to understand the importance of media relations as part of their profession. Second, public administration itself is increasingly an act of public communication. Government public relations is a vital tool that can help all public sector agencies implement their missions and increase accountability. For example, public relations can be used to *educate* the citizenry (#WearAMask) and is cheaper than regulation; *inform* the public of new programs and services they may be eligible for; and *persuade* the public to serve as the eyes and ears of the agency (such as reporting potholes through a city app). External communications is especially important during times of crisis and emergencies as was witnessed with the outbreak and spread of COVID-19 across the globe.

Third, the public context of public administration is what differentiates it from business administration (and nonprofit management). External communications techniques can be used to help fulfill the obligation of government managers to the public: to *report* to the citizenry on the accomplishments and stewardship of the agency; to be held *accountable*; and to contribute to an *informed public*, the basis of democracy. Fourth, mass communications technologies continue to evolve and change. Social media, a form of communication that didn't even exist at the turn of the century, are now powerful – even dominant – methods of interaction. Managers who want to succeed need to understand the potential of these new venues for communicating in *both* directions with the citizenry.

These are some of the reasons that public relations has recently been emerging from public administration's closet. More and more training programs are recognizing the importance of external communications and are adding the subject to their curricula. In addition, the growing expectations of citizens to have greater access to information and opportunities for new outlets for them to engage in government decision-making has created an increase in positions at all levels of government who are dedicated to organizational public relations. It has been this continued rise in interest and changes in technologies and practice that contributed to the creating of a second edition of this volume. The book presents an up-to-date examination of the specifics of government public relations and how it can help practitioners achieve their organizational mission. It seeks to provide an understanding of the uses of public relations as tools to advance the goals of public agencies, including media relations, contributing to an informed public, public branding, listening to the citizenry, and crisis management. While no manager can be an expert in all aspects of public administration, this book will help managers know what external communications tools are available to them for advancing the mission and results of their agencies.

Who Is This Book For?

The book is intended to be helpful to both public administration practitioners as well as students, who are practitioners in training. We want to demonstrate in tangible ways how public relations can help government managers at various levels of administration do their work. This includes practitioners seeking to specialize by developing skills in public relations; those assigned to communications offices wanting to explore new ways to fulfill their responsibilities; and program managers who are seeking innovative and inexpensive ways to implement their programmatic missions. Also, this book is intended to help general managers who are at the middle and senior ranks. The latter work at a level where they could enhance organizational performance by understanding how public relations can help do that. For example, when civil servants who have policy area expertise (aging, health care, public works, etc.) move up the hierarchy, they find themselves overseeing public information offices and public communication channels, but not quite sure how those offices can help them accomplish their programmatic goals or democratic responsibilities.

The book focuses on practitioners throughout the public sector, including the U.S. federal government, state and local governments, and public administrators outside of the U.S. Given the size and scope of the American federal government, some illustrative descriptions and cases frequently come from it. However, they are presented here in a way that would be useful to public administrators at other levels of government or in other countries. The main focus is on government managers who are *implementing* policies already adopted by elected officials/politicians/political appointees. Certainly, in the real world, all public administrators are involved to some degree in policy-making. Still, the main audience for this book is less for political appointees (serving at the pleasure of an elected chief executive) and more on the daily work of permanent career civil servants, whether senior or junior.

Acknowledgments

Our heartfelt appreciation to Professor David Rosenbloom, the Editor of the ASPA Series in Public Administration and Public Policy, and to all the professionals at Taylor & Francis who brought this book into fruition. We would like to thank Professor Evan Berman who assisted us with the first edition of this book and for connecting the three of us and encouraged our collaboration on the initial project. It turned out to be a fortuitous match, as each of us had strengths (and weaknesses) and expertise that jibed well with the skills and interests of the other two. Truly, if two are better than one, then three are even better. We have enjoyed working with each other for over a decade now and are grateful to have had an opportunity to collaborate on a subject that we have felt is of importance to public administration practitioners.

Our thanks to all the authors who agreed to submit either updated or new chapters reflecting their areas of specialization. They cheerfully dealt with our seemingly endless questions and requests for minor revisions and strengthened the usefulness of the book. Mordecai also wishes to thank Andrea Zweifel, the Program Associate at his School who carefully proofed his contributions. Grant thanks the alumni, community leaders and, most importantly, his students for their enthusiasm and questions about the need, importance, and practice of government public relations. Kendra thanks the many South Carolina local government managers, administrators, and staff who are always generous with their advice, lessons, and stories.

We hope readers will find the book helpful and we welcome feedback and suggestions from practitioners and instructors. Please address comments through the corresponding co-editor, Grant Neeley, grant.neeley@udayton.edu.

Mordecai Lee
Grant Neeley
Kendra Stewart

1 Introduction

Grant Neeley and Kendra Stewart

Although social media, the news, and technological advances play significant roles in the lives of most Americans today, the field of public administration has virtually ignored the topic of public affairs in government. However, effective communications strategies not only advance the mission of a public agency, but provide an important and required public service. Public information is one of the key aspects to government accountability. Today's practitioners (and students training to be practitioners) have witnessed the crucial role that social media and the news play in public life, and will benefit greatly in understanding how to deal with these outlets and, more generally, how external communications efforts can be used to advance the work of public agencies. Public relations is an important tool of governance just like other tools we teach in public administration programs or offer training for in government agencies.

Some of the uses of public relations in government are pragmatic, intended to advance the mission of the agency, but in unorthodox ways that reduce costs. For example, public service campaigns are ways to influence public behavior in a way that is less expensive than policing. Similarly, advertising the availability of new programs and services is a way to reach potential clients and customers through a wholesale approach, rather than the more expensive retail one-by-one outreach effort. Besides these pragmatic uses of public relations, external communications can also be used to advance the goals of a democratic society. These would be situations of "information for information sake" rather than to accomplish a more tangible management goal. Examples of this aspect of government public relations include tweeting out street closures, posting reports online on agency activities as a way of contributing to an informed public, disseminating information as a prelude to citizen participation in agency decision-making, and conducting charettes (in person or via zoom) to receive public input on an issue.

Purpose of this Book

Governmental organizations have the ability to shape how they will pursue government public relations, especially when headed by a strong executive. For example, the change of administrations from the Obama presidency to the Trump presidency in the U.S. executive branch saw great variation in how the executive branch dealt with issues of public information, transparency in government, and government/press relations. Each administration establishes new policies and practices as to how they communicate with the public and what information is easily accessible and available to the press and the public. In addition, continuously evolving technology and its subsequent influence on public communication creates a challenge for governments to invest in and develop expertise to remain current in this area. There also exists a growing number of ways in which government needs to communicate information to the public based on how citizens from different generations or with different capabilities consume information. For example, if a local government wants to inform citizens of its new comprehensive planning process and that it is seeking citizen input, it will need to distribute press releases for the print and broadcast media, post detailed information on its website, mail out flyers, and tailor specific messages for its Facebook page, Instagram story, and Twitter account. Citizens and constituents of all ages have learned to use interactive tools when searching for information, utilize technology for communications, and now expect government information and services to exist in the same information space as private entities. This book is an effort by leading experts in the field to assist public managers in understanding: the nuances of the rules and regulations governing public information; innovative ways to use new technology; how to respond in a crisis; and how to think strategically in crafting a public brand. The very practical and applied treatment of these topics should generate the interest of practitioners and policy-makers due to the lack of available information on issues of public relations in the public sector. Several chapters contain suggested best practices that can be used to implement the strategies outlined in the book.

This book is intended to serve as a single source of information for all aspects of governmental public relations. As governments in the U.S. and abroad continue to grapple with citizen expectations of instant and greater access to public information, public administrators need a book with practical guidelines and applicable tools to assist in this new era of government public communication. In addition, the continuing decline on the reliance of traditional journalism for news and information and the rise of new social media channels are moving targets which continue to evolve and require renewed and sustained attention for public administrators to the public relations function. This book addresses some of the common issues and approaches to consider when dealing with this rapidly changing communications environment.

This book is aimed at providing a very practical, hands on approach for the planning, implementation, and evaluation of various aspects of government public relations. The original conception of the book is to serve as a practitioner counterpart to the academically oriented *Government Public Relations: A Reader* which was published by Taylor & Francis in 2008 to serve as a textbook in university-level courses. The chapter authors include the leading academic researchers in these areas as well as, current or past practitioners of government public relations crossing all the levels of government, extending outside the U.S. and in other areas of public service as well (such as Nonprofit and Non-Governmental Organizations). While their writings are informed by the latest research, their interests and orientation are to improving practice. Each chapter is intended to be useful to someone practicing in the field and looking for guidance, resources, practical advice, and best practices.

Overview of this Book

The following chapters cover the most significant aspects of government public relations from the public and nonprofit perspective. Chapter 2 provides an introduction to the scope, purpose, and practices in the field of government public relations by one of the foremost leaders in the field. In this chapter Lee focuses on how public relations can help public administrators do a better job at implementing policy, accomplish an agency's mission, and promote democratic accountability.

In Chapter 3 Scott Talan and Christie Parell focus on media relations, examining how a public organization – from the White House and Capitol Hill to State Houses and city halls across the U.S. and beyond – engages the news media to set public agendas, promote ideas, issues and services, and frame policy choices that are at the heart of American society.

They explore the importance of practical media relations strategies, effective story pitching and relationship-building with journalists, and best practices for responding to inquiries and controlling messages. Talan and Parell also highlight the many traditional and innovative media relations tactics employed by communicators, including written materials, media interviews, speeches and statements, press events, and social media outreach, among others.

Jenifer Kopfman and Amanda Ruth-McSwain cover the use of public information campaigns in Chapter 4. Saying no to drugs, buckling up, preventing forest fires and water conservation: public information messages are prevalent in our daily consumption of information and in governmental public relations. Although public information campaigns are used by non-government entities, they are classically government-sponsored campaigns developed to address various social problems and communicate information to a large number of citizens to achieve positive societal results. A well-crafted public information campaign can raise awareness, change attitudes, motivate behaviors, and even impact public policy by providing crucial information to a defined target audience. This chapter presents multidisciplinary insights and theoretical perspectives as well as the experiences of the authors to provide a practitioner guide for planning, implementing, and evaluating public information campaigns. Historical and contemporary public information campaigns provide a background for reviewing campaign development stages and analyzing successful communication strategies of public-centered messages across local, state, and federal government agencies.

Crisis communications, the subject of Chapter 5, is a major challenge for many governments and nonprofit organizations and has risen in importance with the 24-hour news cycle and increased presence of social media. J. Suzanne Horsley and Matthew VanDyke focus on this important crucial function for government public relations practitioners through the examination of several mini cases of crises that have occurred at different levels of government agencies. Through these cases they analyze the communication responses and offer solutions for managing similar issues in other organizations. The authors describe models of crisis communication that are particularly relevant for communicators and summarize crisis communication resources that are designed just for public and nonprofit entities.

In Chapter 6, "Strategic Communication Planning in the Digital Age" by Diana Knott Martinelli, the focus is on a frequently oft-neglected area of government public relations. Many government organizations are so busy with the things they "must" do, they don't take the time to strategically think through and plan their public relations activities, except perhaps in the case of special campaigns, where outside counsel is often secured. Diana Martinelli argues for the need of every organization to develop an annual strategic communication plan that will identify priorities and allow for efficient use of valuable resources. This chapter outlines a step-by-step process to help ensure communication objectives are prioritized to better fulfill organizational missions more effectively and efficiently. It describes how government communicators at all levels can incorporate the three major government public relations purposes: the mandatory (media relations, public reporting, and citizen responsiveness), the pragmatic (customer and client responsiveness and outreach activities), and the political (increasing public support), as desired, into one master document. In doing so, a strategic communications plan keeps productive communications work on track and underscores its importance to administrators in achieving the organization's mission.

Social networks have changed the communications' landscape in public administration. More recently, government and nonprofit agencies and elected officials are using social media channels to engage citizens and gain support on various issues. As demonstrated most recently by 2020 presidential campaigns, social networking encouraged millions to participate in the political process. Until recently, citizens had very little interaction with government, and therefore fewer mechanisms for information sharing. In Chapter 7 Kara Alaimo discusses how government public relations practitioners can most effectively use social media by explaining how to proactively communicate policies, build a social media following and respond to questions and criticism in an era in which citizens actively talk back. This chapter also addresses the importance of responding to crises in the "golden hour" and building, maintaining, and restoring trust on social media by making and vocally fulfilling promises. Alaimo poses new challenges that have emerged for government practitioners on social platforms in recent years, including fake news, "filter bubbles," high-level Twitter attacks, and the increased frequency with which corporations weigh in on policy issues.

Doing a quick Google News search reveals that public and nonprofit organizations are increasingly turning toward place branding strategies as a mechanism to differentiate themselves in often crowded markets (tourism, new businesses, new residents, etc.). The purpose of public branding, though, goes beyond only economic metrics to include engagement, participation, and emotional connections to a place. As we see practical examples of public branding nearly every day, scholarship in public administration, especially from a U.S. context, needs to catch up. The purpose of Chapter 8, Public Branding 101, by Staci Zavattaro, is to give an overview of public branding practices for public administration including; what is branding, what branding is not, how and why it is used, and implications for both theory and practice. Zavattaro weaves together scholarly developments that trace public branding scholarship through time, along with current examples of branding practices in various public sector agencies.

Chapter 9, "Digital Branding for Government Public Relations," by Aroon Manoharan and Hsin-Ching Wu, provides an overview of how government entities can brand themselves online through various digital channels. Governments are increasing using digital channels to communicate and manage their relations with internal and external stakeholders. These channels, including official websites, social media platforms, and mobile apps, also enable government entities to define and position themselves online. The increasing forces of globalization, greater mobility of people and resources, and the internationalization of media are spawning a global competition among nations and cities for skilled individuals, resources, and investments.

This chapter discusses the significance and potential of digital branding for government public relations, and examine strategies for the successful implementation of branding techniques, specifically by municipalities. Manoharan and Wu also provide recommendations for integrating the traditional face-to-face branding methods with digital branding techniques, and thereby developing a more sustainable model for public relations among governments.

Shannon A. Bowen and Alessandro Lovari in Chapter 10 explore the ethical challenges facing professional communicators in government public relations. Moral philosophy is introduced, and two forms of ethical analysis are offered, with emphasis on the most powerful, duty-based approach, deontology. Bowen and Lovari discuss applying deontology and identifying common ethical challenges arising in the modern digitized public sector – a situation which is characterized by a general distrust in institutions, and by the pervasive role of digital technologies, profoundly shaped by social media and platforms' algorithms. This new framework poses modern challenges and rearticulates traditional dilemmas for government organizations. For example, surveillance of digital publics, or data collection and manipulation in the production of communication represents a modern ethical challenge for public sector organizations and new threats for citizens. Using deontology to address these modern challenges, and traditional ethical dilemmas, is a necessity in modern government public relations.

As first mentioned in Lee's chapter, government public relations is fraught with the potential for misuse, abuse, and misunderstanding by lawmakers. In Chapter 11 Kevin Kosar focuses on practical guidance for government professionals to "Do Right and Avoid Wrong." Many modern democratic governments have laws or political norms that differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate public relations activities. Yet, the line between appropriately persuasive communications and odious propaganda often is far from clear. The practitioner of government public relations operates in a perilous realm. He or she is expected to produce accurate, honest, and apolitical communications. Yet, an attempt to inform or persuade the public can invite political, media, and popular retribution can go wrong if it violates legal and political contexts. The content of the message itself can be lost and the practitioner is stuck fending off questions about the propriety of the communication. Every governmental context is unique; however, the practitioner can increase his or her odds of avoiding consternation by thinking in terms of five institutional macro-contexts that demarcate the realm of acceptable government public relations activities. They are occupational, agency, legal, constitutional, and sacred. This chapter explicates these contexts, in order to help the practitioner learn how to think with an institutional mindset. Kosar illustrates how these contexts have manifested using examples past and recent from a specific context – the U.S. federal executive branch.

Measuring the impact of government public relations is the focus of Chapter 12 by Maureen Taylor. Engagement takes many forms but public sector organizations often blend traditional media with social media outreach to inform and serve citizens. Being able to evaluate the effectiveness of this communication engagement is crucial for government communicators. This chapter discusses best practices in creating easy-to-use, systematic, and useful monitoring and evaluation (M&E) indicators to measure the impact of traditional and social media engagement efforts. Monitoring is slowly becoming more popular in the public sector as leaders seek evidence to prove outcomes and impacts and justify resources spent on public relations. The chapter begins with a brief discussion of the philosophy behind M&E. It then moves to a concise and practical explanation of how public affairs professionals can measure engagement and communication outreach. Taylor provides examples of monitoring and evaluation of engagement activities and suggests some best practices for public sector communicators.

For the past 15 years, the public's trust in government has steadily declined with numbers hitting historic lows in 2019. Public trust is directly tied to an organization's reputation, as reputation rises and falls based on its actions and how these actions are received. An organization's reputation can be presumed to be its most valuable asset, therefore it is essential that government organizations take steps to enhance and manage its reputation within the perceptions of its constituents. Chapter 13, "Reputation Management," by Alan Abitbol and Judson Meeks, argues that through proper reputation management a government organization can legitimize its actions in the eyes of its constituents, which will lead to public support for the organization's mission and function. This chapter first defines reputation within the context of government organizations. Second, it discusses theoretical constructs – including relationship management, two-way communication, and transparency – that can provide government organizations guidance on best practices for proper reputation management. Finally, Abitbol and Meeks link theory to practice by highlighting examples in which government organizations took steps to manage their reputation among stakeholders which ultimately led to positive stakeholder outcomes.

Chapter 14 by Paul K. Dezendorf begins with the development and components of the "Lee GPR model" introduced in Chapter 2 and provides context and orientation for those applying the model in academic or professional settings and an analysis of the model's strengths and limitations. Practical applications for faculty and practitioners are described along with sample handouts based on teaching experiences with students in several countries. Shifting to an international discussion outlines the importance of practitioners understanding the media and regulatory environment unique to each country. This chapter also discusses the usefulness of the model as a tool for encouraging discussion rather than judging others. Further examples of the model include real-world application in Russia and Nagorno-Karabakh as well as a classroom application in the U.S., Russia, and Germany. Dezendorf closes with suggestions for exercises in applying the model.

What is the relationship between government officials and broader publics when it comes to public engagement? What does it look like for public administrators to not only share important public information with citizens but also to engage them through democratic decision-making processes? Chapter 15, "Public Relations(hips) through Public Engagement:

Approaching Public Administration as Civic Professionals," by Timothy Shaffer, focuses on government agencies use of participatory and collaborative public engagement approaches and strategies to create conditions for greater transparency, accountability, and meaningful engagement. The chapter includes critical assessment of how public administrators create processes and engage citizens to ensure public engagement is more than a popular phrase and move beyond technocratic approaches to complex problems. Drawing on examples of municipalities and other government agencies, the chapter grounds these public engagement efforts as part of governmental public relations within the field of deliberative democracy, especially efforts to bridge government decision-making with informed citizen participation. A particular emphasis is placed on the role of public administrators acting as deliberative practitioners and civic professionals.

The topics covered in this text are intended to provide the government public relations' practitioner with the theoretical framework and practical tools for addressing current issues and demands in public communications. The reader is presented with a 360-degree approach to PR in government, looking at both the internal and external aspects from the planning and research phase through the start of a campaign or crises, to implementation and eventually evaluation. Each of the authors brings a unique perspective in their area of expertise based on professional experience and academic research. The intent of this book is to help change the perception that government public relations is a tool made up of propaganda used to manipulate public opinion, and to develop a better understanding of how proper public communications can lead to more efficient, effective, and accountable public organizations.

2 Government Public Relations

What is It Good For?

Mordecai Lee

Why is Government PR Such a Touchy Subject?

Elected officials consider themselves as the direct bosses of government agencies. (Of course, it's a bit more complicated than that.) A president who subscribes to the doctrine of a unitary presidency (instead of shared power with Congress) believes he/she can tell all federal agencies within the executive branch what to do and, just as important, what not to do. In parallel, U.S. Senators and Members of Congress usually view themselves as, at least, the governmental equivalent of a corporate board of directors. What they say, goes. The same construct applies to, respectively, governors and state legislatures, county executives and boards of county supervisors, and mayors and boards of alders.

In this relatively one-dimensional perspective, these politicians view the bureaucracy as the governmental equivalent of children in the Victorian age: seen but not heard. If an agency has decided to award a contract based on competitive bidding, then the chief elected executive and legislator from that district think it's *their* prerogative to make the announcement. Why? Because it makes them look good to the voters. Why is that important? Because it might help them get re-elected or elected to higher office. The same holds true for just about anything a government agency does that would be considered "good news."

Conversely, when a government agency is compelled to make a "bad news" announcement, politicians are nowhere to be seen. "What, who me?" they innocently react. They'd reflexively claim to be "shocked, shocked" by this development, that this is an example of bureaucracy gone amok, that there needs to be an investigation of this matter, and that the agency head should be hauled in at a legislative public hearing and treated like a guilty, irresponsible, and cold-hearted bureaucrat.

Now add the media to the mix. Reporters generally don't care about good news; in fact they rarely consider it news at all. A bureaucracy acting outrageously, now that's like honey to a bear. It's irresistible.

Pity the poor public administrator in such a thankless position. No wonder the practice of public relations in government is sometimes viewed as radioactive and a no-win proposition. The theme of this book is that external communication is an essential ingredient of effective public administration – when done right and carefully. It is a force multiplier, allowing an agency to perform its mission more effectively, more efficiently, and more successfully.

The Do's and Don'ts of Government PR

It's pretty easy to draw the red line between agency PR that is relatively noncontroversial and PR that isn't. Noncontroversial PR is what a politician would consider boring. Controversial PR is what an elected official could view as inherently political and as propaganda that puts the agency in a good light and the elected official in a bad one. Another way to put it is that controversial agency PR can be convincingly defended (if it comes to that) as falling strictly within the legal mission of the agency and/or within the general obligations imposed on any public sector agency in a democracy. On the other hand, if a particular PR activity looks like it explicitly is trying to influence and propagandize elected officials, it's out of bounds.

Now for the best part: let's say your agency has engaged in a vigorous outreach effort to locate citizens who might be eligible for a new program or service tasked to you by formal action of the elected executive and legislative branch. To make the point even more strongly, let's say your outreach campaign includes a message along the lines of "Does anyone in your family or who you know have the medical syndrome of XYZ? The ABC agency is now providing new in-home services for qualified residents. Please give them this easy-to-remember URL and toll-free number so that they can contact us to enroll." Would this kind of public service campaign reflect good public administration? Yes. At the same time, might it make the agency look good? Yes, too. But the latter benefit is incidental to the inherent purpose of the PR effort. A politician who views the agency with enmity and perceives this latent benefit may still feel free to criticize the agency for inappropriate PR that is tantamount to political propaganda. But such an accusation is unlikely to gain any significant traction with the media and other opinion leaders.

This scenario is not wholly fictional. It is roughly what happened when the federal Department of Health and Human Services opened enrollment for the new Affordable Care Act (ACA; aka Obama Care) in the mid-2010s. From the point of view of the bureaucracy, Congress had passed a law assigning it to run a new program of eligibility for lower-cost health insurance. The duty of a public administrator was to implement the law. How to do it? Lots of ways. One piece of the overall communications strategy was a public service campaign on TV, radio, social media, online sites, and billboards to reach citizens who might qualify for the new program. From the point of view of apolitical public administration, the more people who signed up, the better a job the agency was doing.

But, to the die-hard opponents of Obama Care (and there were plenty of them), the public service campaign was inappropriate because it inherently promoted a positive image of Obama Care (and, not coincidently, President Obama) and therefore it was more akin to political propaganda than good public administration. The criticism largely failed to get much attention and coverage beyond those who already were against it. Why? Because the ostensible political benefits were incidental to and inseparable from the good faith effort to maximize enrollment. Amusingly, the Trump administration then used ACA's outreach budget to make videos critical of the law (Carlsen & Park, 2017).

The generalization to keep in mind is that citizens in a democracy, might not like bureaucrats, but they expect a government agency to try to implement its legal mission with as much vigor and efficiency as possible.

A (Very Short) History Lesson

Admittedly, history can be pretty boring. But, boring or not, history often explains why a society generally holds a view about something, whether that it is a good thing or a bad thing or a little of both. This, in summary, is the history of government public relations.

In 1913, Congress passed a law prohibiting federal agencies from hiring "publicity experts." (That's why one rarely finds the terminology "public relations" used in government agencies. The commonly used euphemism is "public affairs.") In 1919, it *criminalized* agency lobbying of Congress – for or against funding levels, for or against programs and services. In 1940, it prohibited the Interior Department from converting its (boring) print annual report into a more popular version of an annual report as a radio entertainment program. In 1943, it banned a bureau of the U.S. Department of Agriculture from having regional information officers. In 1946, it imposed a spending cap on all information activities of Interior's Bureau of Reclamation. A plethora of new limitations were enacted in the 1950s, including banning "propaganda" (whatever that is, it's very hard to define) and prohibiting indirect lobbying of Congress by agencies urging citizens to contact their Senators and House members. In 2005, Congress banned agencies from issuing video press releases unless the video explicitly stated that it came from a federal agency. In the 2020s, almost every appropriations bill that Congress passes contained a prohibition on agencies engaging in propaganda or other like activities.

This very abridged history makes clear that the elected officials of the federal government dislike over-aggressive PR by executive branch agencies. In part, the anti-PR culture of politicians derives from the pre-modern days, when Senators and Members of Congress were the intermediaries between the public and the government. Direct communication from the bureaucracy undermined their monopoly. Of course, that old-fashioned role has long been superseded by the reality of 21st-century government, but the anti-PR reflex still simmers just below the surface.

This lesson from history? Government public relations is an essential part of doing public administration, but just remember to stay clear of any red lines that would trigger a political attack.

Public Relations as a Tool for Doing Public Administration Better

Given the potential hostility to public relations by politicians and the media, is it quixotic even to advocate doing it? The authors and editors of this book respond with a resounding, "NO!" We know that public relations is both inherent to public administration and a particular tool for helping an agency accomplish its mission. All of us will be making the argument in our respective chapters that there is much good that can come to a government agency from using public relations to do its job. If there's only one idea that I could to convey to you in this chapter, it is this: public relations can help a public administrator do a better job (1) by improving the implementation of the agency's central mission and (2) by fulfilling the democratic responsibilities inherent to government.

This chapter presents an overview of the different *purposes* of government public relations. It focuses on public administrators who are implementing policies already adopted by elected officials/politicians/political appointees. How can public relations help them do a better job? Many tools of public relations can help accomplish the agency's programmatic mission: delivery of services, customer relations, and so on. Also, public relations can help to promote the democratic accountability of a government agency to the citizenry, an activity unique to public administration in contrast with business administration and nonprofit management.

Taking them up in reverse order, I suggest that there are, first, some reasons why public administrators *have to* engage in public relations, whether they like it or not. These are the democratic requirements of government management, closely tied to the "public" in public administration. A second cluster of benefits from public relations are optional. They help an agency do its core mission more effectively and, sometime, less expensively. These are the pragmatic uses of public relations, focusing on the "administration" in public administration. Third, the most controversial category is the political use of public relations intended to advance the agency's autonomy and power.

Using that threefold typology, here's how the different purposes of government PR fit:

I. Mandatory: Democratic purposes of government public relations:

   1. Media relations
   2. Public reporting
   3a. Responsiveness to the public (as citizens)

II. Optional: Pragmatic purposes of government public relations:

3b. Responsiveness to the public (as customers and clients)
(4–7. Public outreach):
4. Increasing the utilization of services and products
5. Public education and public service campaigns
6. Seeking voluntary public compliance with laws and regulations
7. Using the public as the eyes and ears of an agency

III. Dangerous, but powerful: Political purposes of government public relations:

8. Increasing public support

In general, this approach to public relations based on *purposes* is slightly different from the traditional action-orientation of modern life. Yes, our culture seems to admire "action heroes" and "action movies," but that's not a helpful mind frame for getting the most out of public relations. In fact, usually the opposite. For example, during a lengthy discussion at a meeting, some eager beaver pipes in and says enthusiastically, "Let's hold a news conference!" This might be wholly inappropriate in relation to accomplishing a particular purpose, while perfectly on target for another. In other words, *the purpose of the effort needs to be identified before any plan of action can be constructed*. Having a Twitter account is only valuable if it has a specific purpose that this platform is uniquely positioned to accomplish (Winkie, 2020). When the supposedly staid Federal Reserve Bank wanted to reach children to educate them about financial literacy, it began issuing comic books (Sommer, 2019). What's your purpose?

The focus on the *purposes* of government public relations also is helpful because once that particular goal has been identified then the specific communications techniques to use will flow naturally from the purpose itself. For example, a news release might be useful for notifying the entire populace about a new regulation that affects the citizenry at large. However, if a new program targets, say, new immigrants from a specific country, then there are likely to be communication channels that are much more specialized to reach such a narrowly defined demographic.

Beginning with the next chapter, experts in their fields provide guidance on the practice of public relations: news releases, websites, social media, crisis communication, and so on. But first, it's important to identify *why* you're considering using news releases, social media, public information campaigns, and so on. What are you trying to accomplish? The various tools that are presented in subsequent chapters are methods to reach specific goals that most government agencies have. Public relations can help accomplish the eight specific purposes listed above. They are clustered around the stuff you gotta do, stuff that might be a good idea to do and, finally, powerful stuff if you're willing to risk a lot as well.

Mandatory for Public Administrators: The Democratic Purposes of Government Public Relations

First, public administrators need to recognize that some aspects of public relations are forced upon their agencies by dint of being in the public sector. Communication with the citizenry is a basic prerequisite for democracy. That means the communication obligations of a government manager include responding to inquiries from the media, reporting to the electorate on agency activities and, generally, being responsive to the public. These are not luxuries in the context of democratic governance. Rather, they are obligations that can't be ignored, even if and when a politician denounces them as self-serving and wasteful propaganda. The qualitative difference between public administration and business administration is the governmental context of agency management. In a democracy, public administrators must engage in certain activities that are expected as the sine qua non of government. For example, government managers must respond to inquiries from the news media, whether the particular issues would put the agency in a good light or bad one. Similarly, given the central role of public opinion in a democracy, public administrators have a duty to report to the citizenry on the work of the agency and its stewardship of taxpayer funds. Hence, when focusing on these purposes, public relations is integral to public administration, not ancillary to it. Even secret agencies feel compelled to engage in public relations (McCarthy, 2018)!

1. Media Relations

The link between public administration and media relations is practically a tautology. Government managers are public servants. They are accountable to the public, not quite like elected officials, but accountable nonetheless. One way that this accountability is operationalized is by the obligation of public administrators to work transparently, including the duty to respond to media questions, inquiries, and requests. "No comment" is not an acceptable answer from a civil servant whose salary is being paid by the taxpayers.

The First Amendment to the federal Constitution is chock full of rights that inure to each individual American citizen: speech, assembly, religion, petitioning government, and so on. Only one clause in the amendment grants a right to an *institution*: freedom of the press or, what we now call, the media. Why the selectivity? In the eyes of the Founders, journalism had to be independent of government so that citizens in a democracy could obtain information about what government and elected officials were doing from sources other than the government and the elected officials themselves. In that framework, the news media was to be an *instrument of democracy*, serving as the feedback loop of the democratic process. So, the tautology is that government agencies engage in media relations because government agencies in a democracy have the obligation to cooperate with the news media.

However, government–media relations tend to be stormy. Besides a built-in skepticism about "official sources" that is part of journalistic culture, there are several factors that specifically contribute to the difficulty of a public administrator having, consistently, good relations with the media. They include:

- the negative image of the bureaucrat in pop culture and public opinion
- the profit-making motives of the media
- the entertainment motives of the media
- the increasing competitiveness of old media versus new
- that government agencies tend to generate inherently non-visual and undramatic news, often unattractive to the media
- the built-in predisposition of reporters to archetypal stories that, by their very nature, put public administration in a bad light, such as a citizen being unfairly victimized by heartless bureaucrats, a government agency wasting money, or a government agency standing by idly (or incompetently) while a certain category of the population suffers
- the anti-government strain within American political culture

President Obama provided a trenchant critique of contemporary media coverage of government (encompassing both politics and public administration):

> Despite the big stories of our era, serious journalists find themselves all too often without a beat. Just as the news cycle has shrunk, so has the bottom line. We fill that void with instant commentary and celebrity gossip and the softer stories … rather than the hard news and investigative journalism … 'What happened today?' is replaced with 'Who won today?' The public debate cheapens. The public trust falters. We fail to understand our world or one another as well as we should – and that has real consequences in our own lives and in the life of our nation. We seem stuck with a choice between what cuts to our bottom line and what harms us as a society. Which price is higher to pay? Which cost is harder to bear?
>
> (Obama, 2013, p. 361)

Still, love 'em or hate 'em, the public administrator in a democracy *must* cooperate with the media. That's one price of working in the public sector.

2. Public Reporting

By cooperating with the news media, a public servant is being held accountable to the citizenry *indirectly* through news coverage. However, the democratic obligation of public accountability should also be operationalized by *directly* informing the public at large. This is called public reporting. It is a generalized duty to convey information to the public on the agency's stewardship of its mission and its use of taxpayer funds. This is generally a post-hoc activity, focusing on the past, "Here's what we did last year" kind of information. It is information for information sake, not really "doing" anything tangible, rather simply furthering the goal of an informed citizenry. Note that the concept of public reporting looks back. It's an over-the-shoulder retrospective review. This is not to be confused with a slightly, but distinctly, different public relations activity of responsiveness to the public *as citizens* (Purpose #3a, discussed below). The latter is prospective, by focusing on looking forward and preparing to make decisions in the future, a kind of "help us decide what to do *next*." Public reporting is an aspect of governmental accountability to the public in a democracy about the recent past.

In a sense, public reporting is like the stereotypical scene of a parent standing in front of a grade school class on career day: "Hi, I'm a dentist and want to explain what I do all day; why this is important; and what you have to do if you want to become a dentist." Public reporting is permutation of career day writ large for the public sector. "Hi, I work at the County Public Works Department. We build and maintain bridges, highways, and mass transit systems within the county, which is 400 square miles. We spent X million dollars last year. That's a lot of money. Here's what we did with it last year."

The classic manifestation of public reporting is an agency's annual report. This is often issued by the Chief Financial Officer (CFO), is crammed with incomprehensible accountant's jargon and statistics, and – as would be expected – is unreadable except, perhaps, as the cure for insomnia. But the origins of such drudgery came from the duty of every government department to report on its performance to the citizenry. Besides annual reports, some other traditional venues for public reporting have included open houses, exhibits, displays at shopping malls or state fairs, tours, and a speaker's bureau.

New media and technologies have revolutionized government-to-citizen e-government and e-democracy. Sometimes called popular reporting or e-reporting, agencies can post their reports on their websites, circulate them to distribution lists, etc. The reports can include pictures, video, and interactive features. Using plain language, they can efficiently help a citizen zero in on a particular topic of interest, rather than wade through everything the agency is involved in. The interactivity of these technologies can spur further communication between the citizen and the agency, such as feedback, surveys, and requests for information.

An example of how easily updated online e-gov communications has enhanced traditional public reporting is the posting of crime statistics. When a police department website includes information on "crimes in your neighborhood in the last 30 days" it is not only promoting public safety by providing information that helps citizens to engage in safe behavior, i.e. the central mission of the agency. The website and its contents also make the department accountable to the public for its past record of performance. The citizen can then make an informed judgment, "I'm pleased with the Police Department" or "I'm unhappy with the Police Department" or anything in between. The methods and venues for public reporting are unlimited. The key is that the public administrator recognizes and implements the duty to contribute to an informed citizenry in a democracy.

3a. Responsiveness to the Public as Citizens

Government is different. It must be responsive to the public. If, for example, a business or nonprofit decides not to answer a complaint, that's its legal prerogative. But government agencies can't because their external relationships are not one-dimensional, such as with narrowly defined categories, such "customers" or "clients," not even with "stakeholders." Rather, for a government agency everybody is a *citizen*. Even people who aren't being served by an agency have a claim on it. That's the difference between government and other sectors in the political economy. A PR textbook made that point by having a stand-alone chapter on government PR, in contradistinction to conventional private PR (Lim, 2021, chap. 14). Government is different; hence its PR is different, too.

A government agency cannot simply ignore criticisms. It is expected to be responsive to the public at large. Nobody can be "blown off." Everyone must be treated with respect that citizens have the right to expect from government. Similarly, people don't have a right to attend meetings or see documents of a business or a nonprofit. Yet, that is the presumption for government agencies. Transparency means open meetings (with certain justifiable exceptions) and freedom of information for documents (again, with certain justifiable exceptions). The *principle* is openness.

Therefore, one of the basic democratic purposes of PR in public administration is *listening* to the public on multiple levels. Active listening then leads to modified agency behavior so that it can do a better job and be more responsive to the citizenry. This is different from being responsive for pragmatic and essentially marketing purposes (see next section).

In some cases, responsiveness to the public means gauging public opinion. Oddly, few government agencies engage in formal survey research. That's probably because conducting a poll might be susceptible to charges by politicians of wasting tax funds. But that's a shame. Private corporations spend gobs of money on survey and market research to be sure that they understand the views of their publics. Some university-based polling institutes conduct research on “satisfaction rates” towards corporations and governments. These provide a real-time barometer of the standing that major government departments have with the public, such as the IRS, DMV, the Postal Service, or Medicare. Using public relations to improve the agency’s satisfaction score is not something to scorn, as we would for the meaning of “PR” as an epithet, of false and fake presentations that are divorced from reality and intend solely to manipulate impressions by superficial or even misleading actions. Rather, doing a better job of serving the citizenry is a laudable effort that often results in improved scores. Yes, images and stereotypes change slowly, but they can change, whether up or down. An agency that is focused on being responsive to the public at large will gradually improve its satisfaction scores.

Another aspect of responsiveness relates to citizen participation in agency decision-making. A reminder that the concept of public reporting (#2, discussed above) is focused on past performance, “Here’s what we *did*.” Citizen participation is based on building on the record of the past: “OK, given what we did up to now, what should we do in the *future*?” The various techniques of citizen participation in public administration are, essentially, a way for the citizenry to influence agency decision-making besides through their electoral choices. Citizen participation in public administration is a way to permit public opinion to influence decision-making from *below* rather than only from above by elected officials.

There are many mechanisms for citizen participation in decisions about an agency’s future path and programs. There are dozens of methods for an agency to avail itself of citizen input, including public hearings, advisory committees, drop-in centers, focus groups, surveys, facilitation, visioning, brainstorming, charettes (an architectural term for a workshop that involves active collaboration on design), fairs, newsletters, open houses, and booths. Readers interested in more details about citizen participation in public administration are directed to sources that focus solely on that subject.

Optional, but Useful, for Public Administrators: The <u>Pragmatic</u> Purposes of Government Public Relations

The preceding discussion focused on the elements of government PR that a public administrator has to do, like ’em or not. They are part of democracy, part of the complicated effort to mesh the inherently undemocratic process of agency management with the basic requirements of democracy. This subchapter focuses on how public relations can help an agency implement its goals better, faster, cheaper. This use of PR is, of course, optional. No one can make you do it. My argument is that the tools of public relations can help you do your job so much more effectively and efficiently. Unfortunately, the term “PR” has such a bad rap in modern society that over the last few decades public administration has tended to ignore what public relations has to offer. The key now is the revived recognition that public relations *is* public administration; that it helps "do" the central mission of the department.

The tools and techniques of public relations help reach potential customers and clients, notify the public of new laws and programs, public service campaigns that encourage (or discourage) certain behaviors, or increase public cooperation with the agency, such as through tip lines and websites. In all these examples, public relations is an inexpensive substitute for hiring more staff, increasing agency enforcement and regulation activities or expanding field offices. Through public relations, an agency can extend its reach without necessarily increasing its size and costs. For example, for the 2020 census, the Census Bureau relied heavily on mailings, public service announcements, and social media to encourage people to voluntarily fill out the census form online. For every person who did that, the Census Bureau had one less household it needed to send one of its enumerators to track down, such as physically going to the address and, if lucky, catching an adult at home. A very time-consuming and expensive process.

This orientation largely overlaps with marketing and branding. Yet, like public relations, the term marketing in public administration has a slight whiff of the inappropriate, that somehow government should engage neither in marketing nor PR. It should just *be*. Sometimes it seems that's the position many antediluvian politicians take. Nonetheless, it is central to the modern delivery of public sector goods and services. For example, one could argue that government doesn't need to market or advertise because it is a monopoly. There aren't different organizations competing with each other to offer food stamps. Only one local government agency is the portal to obtaining them. So, why advertise? Aha, now we're getting somewhere. In a capitalistic system, marketing and advertising are used by private corporations to make their product more attractive to the customer than a competitor's identical (or nearly) product: Pepsi or Coke? Bud or Miller? Nike or Adidas? But that's an awfully narrow conceptualization of what marketing is. Getting back to food stamps: How does a citizen know what food stamps even are? If he or she qualifies? How and where to obtain them? The answer is through marketing and advertising, even in the context of government as a monopoly.

Let's look at it from the perspective of evaluating how good a government manager is. Let's say the director of the food stamps agency in City A has a budget of $1 million a year, a full-time staff of 100, and a "market penetration" (i.e. reaching the eligible population) of 75%. His/her counterpart in City B, with similar population size and composition, has a budget of $750,000 a year, a staff of 75, and a market penetration of 50%. Who would we judge as the more admirable and effective public administrator? Setting partisan political ideology aside, our professional management-based evaluation would probably rank Manager A over B. Why? Because Manager A got closer to fulfilling the public policy goal of reducing hunger.

Given the constraints on public budgets, we want public administration to be cost-effective. Are there marketing and public relations techniques that are relatively inexpensive and that can give a bigger bang for the buck in terms of market penetration? For a simplified example, one could hire door-to-door canvassers to locate families eligible for food stamps. But it would be much cheaper to engage in public service advertising to reach many potential clients on a lower per capita cost and only use canvassers for the harder-to-reach cases. In other words, PR and marketing is less costly because it usually uses a *wholesale* rather than *retail* approach to reach the low-hanging fruit of any demographic category.

3b. Responsiveness to the Public as Customers and Clients

This activity is not a duplication of Purpose #3a. The subject of responsiveness to the *public* focused on the mandatory and democratic duty of a public administrator. The same purpose of responsiveness also belongs in the category of a PR tool that can improve the pursuit of the agency's policy mission, the "doing" of public administration. For example, some governmental units have an ombudsman or inspector general. This office investigates complaints from clients and customers and then seeks to correct authentic mistakes.

Another aspect of using public relations to improve the central work of the agency is by trying to "see" the organization through the eyes of an outsider. Sometimes it's called an experience audit. In the private sector, it's sometimes called "secret shopper." Is the organization's website easy to find in the first place? Once there, is it easy for a potential client or customer to find helpful information? To register or enroll? For in-person service delivery, is the facility easy to find? Is it near mass transit and have adequate parking? Is the signage clear, both outside and in? Are employees friendly, helpful and polite? Is the wait for service relatively short even at peak times? What is the average wait for clients using a call-in phone service? These kinds of prosaic and mundane details, when agglomerated with dozens of others like them, provide each individual customer or client with a good or bad experience when interacting with the agency. At times called clue management, it focuses on every detail that gives the customer a clue if the agency is trying to be customer-friendly or not.

4–7. Public Outreach

While the term "public relations" is usually viewed negatively by politicians, "outreach" has, inexplicably, been warmly embraced. Ibid for "public awareness." Elected officials *expect* government agencies to engage in outreach with their stakeholders and to make the public aware of important information. The acceptability of "outreach" as a politically safe euphemism can unintentionally obscure the important tangible meaning of the term. Government agencies can do a better job programmatically (as opposed to democratically) by reaching out to the publics that need to be communicated with. This is not only a good thing, but central to the *raison d'être* of the agency. Outreach *is* public administration.

However, it is important to ask, outreach for what purpose? There are four distinct purposes, even though all are generically outreach and relate to the pragmatic benefits of PR.

4. (Outreach:) Increasing the Utilization of Services and Products

A popular saying is "If a tree falls in a forest and no one hears it, did it make a sound?" Similarly, one could ask a public administrator, "If your agency offers a service, but no one knows about it, did you really *provide* that service?" Baldly put, a public servant managing a program is a failure if only a small percentage of eligible citizens utilize it. Part of public administration is to engage in outreach that informs potential customers and clients of services that they may be able to use. Unlocking your front door in the morning is not enough. One must engage in multiple communication activities that are likely to reach the demographic you are seeking. People must *know* about your program if you want them to use it. The U.S. Education Department was roundly criticized for keeping its student loan appeals process largely secret (Cowley, 2020). No PR, no appeals – that's bad public administration.

Again, there are many retail ways to reach these potential customers. But reaching one person at a time is expensive. Conversely, the multiplicity of techniques of PR, marketing and advertising are wholesale communication methods. They can help you target your message and reach your potential customers relatively inexpensively. Program managers need to be activists and initiators of informational efforts that maximize the utilization of governmental services intended to help segments of the public, such as suicide hotlines (Anderson, 2019).

5. (Outreach:) Public Education and Public Service Campaigns

By using paid and free media coverage, an agency can accomplish its mission and reduce its expenditures by encouraging *behavior* that has broad social approval and reflects widely held values. These are sometimes called public service campaigns. Whether it's about using seatbelts to save lives ("click it or ticket"), washing hands frequently during flu season, or reducing consumption of junk food, these government agencies are reaching out to the public to accomplish their public policy goals. In these instances, there are more service-intensive and expensive ways to pursue those objectives, such as more law enforcement officers focusing on seatbelt violations, more public health nurses to deal with the effects of flu, or more obesity-related health service projects. The most widely recognized example of a public education campaign is the effort by the U.S. Forest Service to reduce fires in national forests through the Smokey Bear campaign. By encouraging a change in public behavior, the Forest Service was able to reduce the demand on its much more expensive fire suppression infrastructure.

6. *(Outreach:) Seeking Voluntary Public Compliance with Laws and Regulations*

Agencies can reduce their regulatory costs by encouraging voluntary compliance with new laws, regulations, and programs they have been assigned to enforce. This is a cost-effective approach to the implementation phase of the policy process. A common example is the effort by the U.S. Postal Service to inform the public when there is an increase in postal rates. That reduces the need for postage-due enforcement. (Forever stamps eliminated that PR problem for first-class postage. Brilliant!) Another example was an effort by prosecutors to notify the public about a new policy of increasing criminal charges for crimes committed with guns. How can such a policy be a deterrent if people didn't know about it? During the Great Recession, the Treasury Department had a "name and shame" publicity effort to encourage greater compliance by banks with new federal programs to reduce mortgage foreclosures.

7. *(Outreach:) Using the Public as the Eyes and Ears of an Agency*

Government agencies can encourage citizens to serve as their eyes and ears, thus reducing the need for staffing. For example, when a person calls 911 in an emergency, he or she has been co-opted effectively by the police and fire departments to become part of its "informal" organization. This is sometimes referred to as co-production of government services. Incentives for participation can vary from self-interest to self-satisfaction to rewards. The key for success is that citizens know about their potential role as an extension of the agency, an awareness accomplished through PR. With mobile phones citizens can call in the location of a pothole. Agencies create tip lines and websites for anonymous citizens to report wrong-doing. (But woe onto the bureaucrat who does not get that pothole filled asap!) One sheriff said that he could not afford to put more deputies to patrol for drunk drivers all the time. Instead, he created a PR program called Mobile Eyes. It informed drivers that they could receive $100 for a call that resulted in a drunk driving arrest.

Dangerous, but Powerful, for Public Administrators: The Political Purpose of Government Public Relations

Generally speaking, government agencies desire autonomy. Then, they can operate more as they wish and with less political interference from legislators and the elected executive. In what is now a classic quote, political scientist Francis Rourke described the benefits of having a good image with the citizenry:

> Because public opinion is ultimately the only legitimate sovereign in a democratic society, an agency which seeks first a high standing with the public can reasonably expect to have all other things added unto it in the way of legislative and executive support. Power gives power, in administration as elsewhere, and once an agency has established a secure base with the public, it cannot easily be trifled with by political officials in either the legislative or executive branch.
>
> (Rourke, 1984, p. 50)

Therefore, good public relations can enhance the power of an agency and help it grow and thrive.

8. Increasing Public Support

One of the political red lines of government PR is that agencies cannot directly appeal to the public for help against the elected overseers of the agency. This is considered propaganda, a forbidden activity. For example, an agency might not like a bill that the legislative branch is about to pass, but it would be a cardinal sin to issue press releases, hold news conferences, and send out speakers to give public talks encouraging the public to tell lawmakers not to pass the bill. Politicians take great umbrage when agencies try such end-runs. They feel this interferes with their own institutional powers. In the eyes of elected officials, public administrators are supposed to implement passively whatever these elected institutions set for it. This so-called politics-administration dichotomy was a long-time premise of American public administration. In the fancier jargon of our times, this is a principal-agent view of how the executive branch is supposed to operate.

However, politicians are helpless in a slightly different scenario. An agency might have a high level of public support not because the agency overtly pursued this goal, but rather as a consequence of its bread-and-butter activities, including PR (purposes #1–7). If *as a result* of the Smokey Bear campaign, the public thinks well of the U.S. Forest Service, well the politician can't complain about it. Similarly, the politician would likely avoid a major public fight with the Forest Service. Elected officials want to be associated with popular agencies as much as they want to be viewed as critics of unpopular ones. If propaganda is in the eye of the beholder, then agencies have much more maneuvering room in their PR than may be initially apparent. Therefore, one implicit reason for public administrators to engage in PR is to help, *indirectly*, improve its popularity with the citizenry. Much good flows from such public support – just as long as it's not obvious this is what the agency is seeking in the first place. Benefiting from the political consequences of good public relations is not the same as actively pursuing it.

Summary and Conclusions

As a prelude to a detailed discussion of government PR for practitioners, this chapter summarized its *purposes* and general benefits. The rapid expansion of digital communications in the 21st century gives new potential for relationship management. PR is a useful, helpful, and important aspect of managing government agencies. Public servants can use public relations to (1) accomplish the democratic responsibilities associated with the public sector, (2) implement the central missions of their agencies on a cost-effective and efficient basis, and (3) contribute to public support for their agencies. Now that the *why* and *what* of government PR has been addressed, the remaining chapters are oriented to discussing in detail the *how-to* of doing it.

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3 Media Relations

Christie Parell and Scott Talan

Introduction

President John F. Kennedy famously said about the media, "even though we never like it, and even though we wish they didn't write it, and even though we disapprove, there isn't any doubt that we could not do the job at all in a free society without a very, very active press." In a democracy, every public office has a duty to proactively engage with the so-called Fourth Estate – the news media – and to inform the public about how government is using taxpayers' dollars to perform its mission. As we learned in Chapter 2, public relations is integral to public administration as it allows administrators to better implement the agency's programs and fulfill its democratic responsibilities, such as answering media inquiries, reporting to the electorate on agency activities, and being generally responsive to the public. In other words, it is the role of the government communicator to serve as conduit between a public office and its people. But, in today's digital age, how can this be done in a way that benefits the public, the press, and the government body involved?

Today, government public affairs work includes many functions such as messaging and speechwriting, strategic planning, event management, image sculpting, and of course crisis communication. But in most offices, media relations remains the number one activity performed by the communications team. It is imperative that those working in *any* public administration capacity have an understanding of the news media's ability to influence public perceptions, attitudes and behaviors, for better or worse. Media relations is also often an "all hands on deck" function that involves input and participation from various other offices within the organization. Consequently, it is important for all public administrators to learn the concepts behind effective media relations and relationship-building with journalists working in traditional and digital media spaces, while respecting the role the news media plays as an instrument of democracy.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine how public offices – from the White House and Capitol Hill to state legislatures, city halls, and local agencies across the U.S. and beyond – engage the news media to set public agendas, promote ideas, issues and services, and frame policy choices that are at the heart of American society. What follows is an exploration of practical media relations strategies and tactics, effective relationship-building and story-pitching with journalists, and best practices for responding to inquiries and controlling messages. We will also highlight the many traditional and innovative media relations tactics employed by communicators, including written materials, media interviews, press events, and social media outreach, among others. In addition, we will share several examples, insights, and practical tips from public affairs experts in the field.

Laying the Groundwork

Media relations has been defined as "the systematic, planned, purposeful and mutually beneficial relationship between a public relations practitioner and a mass media journalist" (Supa, 2014). It involves the juncture between two very different types of institutions with, at times, conflicting philosophical approaches and objectives. The mission of a government agency communicator is to explain and promote the organization's programs, activities and policy positions to various audiences, including the news media, bloggers/influencers, the business world, community and advocacy groups, charities, influential constituents, and the public at large. They must have the tools and talents necessary to shape the organization's image while managing fruitful relationships with the news media.

Government communications activities are essential to the well-being of a nation and are particularly necessary for informing the public about health and education, public safety, and how citizens can utilize government services. Generally speaking, the communicator's goal is to share positive, helpful, and accurate stories about the organization's use of taxpayers' dollars while protecting its reputation and those of its leaders. And of course, positive and consistent media coverage directly results in positive public perceptions and support from key stakeholders of an organization. Meanwhile, the traditional news media is a for-profit industry comprised outlets that are driven by ratings, subscribers and click-throughs. Journalists are taught to "uncover the truth," "get the scoop," and uphold First Amendment freedoms. Naturally, the tricky dynamics between these two types of organizations can result in mild tension at best and public wars of words at worst. Yet each is critical to the functioning of the other.

The mainstream media has tremendous influence over American public discourse, telling us not only *what* news events are important but even *how* we should think about them. Scholars have long studied the psychological effects of the mass media on attitudes, cognitions and behaviors, yielding two leading academic models – "agenda-setting" and "framing."

While this is not the place to wade into the vast world of communication theory, these two practical models are important for any public administrator or government communicator to retain.

Agenda-setting

Agenda-setting has traditionally referred to the mass media's ability to focus the public's attention on certain events, ideas, and people – while disregarding others – and ultimately setting the public agenda (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Notably, scholars have also expanded the definition of agenda-setting to include the influence of social media and other public figures such as politicians, government officials, thought leaders, satirists and even celebrities. By dedicating time or space to certain topics, those resources create public perception that the chosen topics are the most salient and important. For instance, we may notice that a broadcast news anchor spends their limited airtime primarily addressing one or a few public issues – and does not address other leading issues – despite the fact that there may have been few recent, newsworthy developments on the featured issues.

News outlets act as *gatekeepers*, determining which stories see the light of day. One need only look at a U.S. presidential race to witness agenda-setting at play: the news media decides which candidates to cover and which not to cover. As political scientist Bernard Cohen put it, "[The news media] may not be successful much of the time in telling people *what to think*, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers *what to think about*" (1963). It is the job of a government communicator to recognize the power of the mass media and work towards getting the agency's news past the gatekeepers and into the public agenda without the message becoming distorted.

Framing

The idea of framing goes one step beyond agenda-setting by telling us not just *what to think about* but also *how to think about it*. It refers to the practice of selecting, emphasizing, elaborating or omitting certain stories or aspects of stories in an effort to create an effect for the audience (Entman, 1993). The framing of a story about a government agency or leader can be critically important to their reputation and ability to achieve their objectives. Also worth noting is that the way the story is written can be evidence of "spin" or ideological bias, intentional or unintentional. For instance, when a new local or national political candidate emerges on the scene, competing media outlets may frame that person as a breath of fresh air with innovative ideas, or as inexperienced and naïve with little credibility. We must ask ourselves, is the news outlet accurately reflecting reality, or are they creating reality that reflects news values such as conflict, novelty, salaciousness and pack journalism? The media's use of photos and clips, sources and interviews, word choice, data, charts/graphs and so on can indeed have a powerful effect on audiences, even persuading them how to cast their vote.

This profession requires effective use of framing, message crafting, and storytelling to build trust with audiences. Americans' inherent resistance to persuasive appeals and behavior change is a challenge to building that trust. Government agencies must strive to overcome these barriers, understand the media dynamics at play, and ultimately win the hearts and minds of audience members through compelling and truthful persuasive efforts.

What is a Communications Office?

As described in Chapter 2, federal, state and municipal governments were historically among the first established organizations to create in-house public relations departments, tasked with disseminating information through publicity and advertising and maintaining communication with the citizens. Employing the euphemisms "public information," "public affairs," or "communication," – rather than the more suspect, business-spirited term, "public relations" – these offices have always been driven by the core function of media relations, with 80% of practitioners engaging in media relations each work week (Darnowski, et al. 2013; cited by Supa, 2014).

Job titles such as communications director, press secretary, public information officer (PIO), spokesperson, communication specialist, public affairs coordinator, and digital media manager, are most common. These positions are often responsible for serving as liaisons between the agency and the news media, releasing information and announcements directly to reporters and the public, drafting communication materials intended for public audiences (in multiple languages), providing on the record commentary through spoken, written and online channels, and fielding countless requests for information, access and interviews.

Media relations staff are often responsible for a portfolio of news outlets – divided by beat, region or medium – or by areas of policy expertise. In some cases, a designated group of reporters representing the leading outlets is embedded with the agency and serve as a formal on-site and traveling "press corps," as is the case at the White House, Department of Defense, State Department, Capitol Hill, Supreme Court, state houses, city halls, police departments, and so forth. In order to keep pace with the shrinking news cycle and widening media landscape, many government public information offices have also established robust online rapid-response operations and social media command centers to track the thoughts and sentiments of its stakeholders in cyberspace and to correct the record before inaccurate or biased information becomes conventional wisdom.

Close internal collaboration of the communications staff with top administrators, other departments, and especially the legal team is essential for good media relations. Government agency communicators must act as lighthouse keepers, consistently surveying for internal and external news, while earning the trust of the principal and other senior leaders in terms of the day-to-day dissemination of announcements and the process by which sensitive situations will be managed. A strong collaborative organizational culture that values internal relationship-building and proactive public relations is the best insurance policy against unanticipated problems. Agency communicators are often labeled "news junkies" and for good reason: they need to maintain awareness of the goings-on in all levels of government and in the public, to identify the optimal time to release agency news, anticipate problems, obstacles and sensitivities, or even leverage opportunities for news hooks.

Legal Matters Matter

Arguably the most important department to the agency's media relations team is the legal team, often known as the "counsel's office" in government. Good government communicators recognize that legal and regulatory disputes can devastate organizations, and the way to avoid or mitigate such problems is to incorporate the perspectives of experts in these areas. To effectively conduct media relations and navigate the challenges associated with the disclosure of information, practitioners must familiarize themselves with potential legal implications of their actions and rely heavily on the advice of in-house attorneys.

This dynamic involving legal considerations may not always be balanced. Lawyers will naturally want to make public as little information as possible, and they often command the ears of senior leaders. Communicators, in contrast, often strive for openness and transparency, the tenets of good public relations. Both perspectives have plenty of validity and may very well cause internal debate – even consternation – among those parties.

The key for communicators is to educate themselves, never speculate publicly, and foster those internal relationships with the legal experts. It is also important to acknowledge the extent to which government communicators must often handle sensitive or confidential information that can never see the light of day. Assessing what can or should be released is one of the most significant challenges facing those working in this arena, particularly when national security, diplomacy or intelligence matters are at play.

John Rizzo, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)'s former chief lawyer, served at the forefront of the intelligence community for over 30 years. Described by the *LA Times* as "the most influential career lawyer in CIA history," he shares this unique lesson:

> The imperative that government communicators coordinate closely with their in-house legal counterparts is especially critical in an intel agency that does most of its work in secret. I remember times when a well-meaning Public Affairs colleague would field a call from a reporter asking about a court case that the CIA's name had been dragged into. Instead of declining to comment, the communications person would respond with a few words that they considered innocuous. Trouble was, anything beyond "no comment" could, and on a few occasions did, undermine any CIA assertion of a "state secrets privilege" barring any discussion of the CIA in the court case. The privilege has been recognized and accepted for many years by the courts, but it can work only when everyone in the government strictly adheres to it.
>
> (Personal communication, June 2020)

This anecdote illustrates just how vital it is for government communicators to understand the inner workings of the agency they serve, consistently survey the terrain for potential landmines, and proactively engage other departments, especially the legal team, to ensure that the integrity and reputation of the organization is protected.

Media Relations 101: Building and Understanding Relationships with Journalists

The dynamics between a government office and the news media are complex – symbiotic but often adversarial. In other words, the relationship between communicators and journalists is based on mutual cooperation but also tension and friction. The government office strives to frame its public activities and leaders in a positive light while recognizing they need news coverage to amplify their messages and reach mainstream audiences. Meanwhile, the journalist strives to "break news," and give the public what it needs – and wants – to know. There is a fine line between news and entertainment, and government news can make for good entertainment. The conflict between the "flacks versus hacks" represents a long tradition.

Frustrations and Complaints from Both Sides

Ask any publicist, or "flack," as journalists may call them, and they will share a long list of complaints about the challenges of working with members of the news media. Reporters, particularly those who cover politics and public policy issues, have a reputation for practicing "ambush journalism," where they confront and question a key official unexpectedly in places such as hallways, sidewalks or even at their homes. It is also common for reporters to request an interview under false pretenses and then pursue a line of questioning with which the interviewee is not comfortable, or that they are not informed or authorized to speak on. Government communicators also complain that reporters often pursue sensationalized stories or "clickbait," which are inaccurate, biased, oversimplified or emphasize areas of conflict, simply to entice audiences. And all of these complaints about journalists are indisputable. Today, they often rely on social media algorithms to gauge the audience's appetite and interest for a particular topic before writing about it, so naturally the old industry adage, "if it bleeds it leads," has never been truer. As Becky Tymchuk, Board Chair of the Beaverton, Oregon School District, explained:

> As a public school district, we have always depended heavily on traditional media – particularly local media – to help us disseminate critical news, share our stories, and build social capital with our community members. However, as we navigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is no such thing as "overcommunicating" and we are increasingly transitioning to social media outreach to ensure that information is conveyed accurately, objectively, and continually. Journalistic ethics aren't what they once were, and we can't risk information getting twisted or further dividing our community.
>
> (Personal communication, October 2020)

Journalists also express their frustration, even disdain, about public relations, considering it a practice of covert deception. This theme is particularly striking in government and politics where journalists regularly complain about public relations "minders" forcing themselves into interviews with candidates, policymakers and other officials. While government communicators see it merely as a function of their job – to observe the interview, take notes, give advice, and yes, sometimes give the principal an "out" when the questioning goes south – journalists perceive this practice as manipulation of the press and a threat to the quality and credibility of news-gathering. As long-time White House Correspondent Peter Baker of the *New York Times* has said, "If you have a minder there, it sits in [a source's] brain that they're supposed to stay on message … Let's put it this way: It's not intended to increase candor" (Fahri, 2014).

It is also fair to say that government officials are notorious for appearing to be heartless, robotic bureaucrats who evade answers by repeating the same safe sound bites, full of jargon, acronyms and data. Furthermore, they are increasingly insistent upon conducting interviews "on background" rather than on the record, which requires the journalist to omit the interviewee's name and identify them simply as an official or spokesperson of the organization.

Some other journalistic complaints about "minders" include poorly written materials (includes too much hype, lacks hard news, and buries the main point or pitch); shotgun distribution (ignorance of a publication's format and content); blocking or lack of access (not being able to reach the organization directly); and not taking no for an answer (publicists are often too pushy) (Wilcox & Reber, 2015).

Journalists are unlikely to admit their dependence on "flacks" because of their cherished ideals and incentive to uncover news stories on their own. However, that doesn't mean that the two sides can't embrace that symbiosis and help each party achieve their objectives of spotlighting important news stories, increasing government transparency and accessibility, and enhancing each organization's reputation.

- ✔ **Know your media.** Learn as much as possible about the publications, broadcast media, bloggers and influencers that cover your organization and policy areas. Know their deadlines, news format, beats, audiences, and needs. It has been observed that 75% of journalists feel that less than 25% of the pitches they receive are relevant (Cision, 2019). If you contact reporters without first doing your homework, they will be irritated.
- ✔ **Limit how often you make contact.** Less is more when it comes to media outreach and pitching stories. The goal is to build a reputation as a knowledgeable, truthful professional who only brings relevant, timely news stories without "salesy" hype or jargon.
- ✔ **Customize and localize.** Don't send blast email pitches to multiple outlets simultaneously. Instead, draft individual, tailored messages that demonstrate your research of the outlet/reporter, and take the time to develop a local angle to the story. Identify who their target audiences are, what they are interested in, and what might grab their attention.
- ✔ **Prepare effective news materials.** Despite rumors, the press release is not dead! It continues to be the core document of any good PR campaign and journalists rely on them for their story. Include well-written, concise releases in your pitches, whenever possible. Other materials may include fact sheets, backgrounders, biographies, Q&As, photos with captions, etc.
- ✔ **Be available and get back to reporters.** As a government spokesperson, you are expected to be accessible at all times, even on the weekends or in the middle of the night. If you don't respond to them quickly, they will go elsewhere to find the answers and your organization's side will be left out of the story. Your relationship with that reporter will also suffer.
- ✔ **Establish the rules of engagement and protect exclusives.** Clarify in advance whether you are speaking "on the record" or "on background," where the source is not identified by name. Avoid speaking off the record in this day and age, and remember that you are always "on the record" unless it is specified otherwise. If you commit to give the reporter an exclusive story, keep your word.
- ✔ **Handle belligerent reporters with care.** Recognize that reporters are often under tremendous pressure from their editors in the race to break news, and that can make for heated exchanges with their sources. They know what it takes to push spokespeople into slipping up. Be extremely cautious, prepared, composed, and unflappable with your statements … without destroying the relationship.

Figure 3.1 A Checklist for Media Outreach

Source: Adapted from Wilcox & Reber (2015).

The public's low trust in the media and in government yields an opportunity for improved cooperation between them and an increased demand for PR practitioners to provide trustworthy, relevant and useful content. Figure 3.1 offers some general tips and priorities for government agencies when relationship-building and pitching stories to journalists.

The Nuts and Bolts: Strategic Planning and Media Relations Tactics

All good public relations campaigns begin with using thorough research to identify primary objectives, develop your strategic approach, and brainstorm the most effective tactics. As you will read about in Chapter 6, objectives are the specific, measurable goals you have set out to accomplish, and the strategy is a clear statement of how you will achieve the objectives; they, in turn, provide the foundation upon which your tactics, or specific activities, will be selected.

Imagine, for example, a public health agency might launch an informational campaign to raise awareness about heart health and offer free testing to women ages 35–54, a group that has seen an increase in the heart-attack rate. The strategy of such a campaign may be to engage women's news sources, and the planning process would involve considering a number of key questions. What do you want to accomplish as an organization and what are your key messages? What media relations tactics would be most effective at reaching the audience? Based on the topic, who is the most effective spokesperson – the head of your organization, a policy expert, or the communications director? What news channel(s) and format suit the spokesperson's strengths, style and preferences best – print, radio and/or TV? Should interviews be done in person or remotely? Should you offer an exclusive interview to just one news outlet or should you do a media tour? What are the journalists' potential angles, who else would they try to interview for their story, and how has the news been framing the topic lately? These are the types of questions that should be considered before selecting and executing tactics, and will be explored in greater detail during Chapter 4 on implementing public information campaigns.

It Pays to Know PESO

Campaign tactics are innumerable, but it is easiest to think of them in four broad categories that make up the "PESO" integrated marketing model. PESO stands for four types of media: Paid – advertising; Earned – free media coverage; Shared – social media; Owned – media produced by your organization such as the website, blog, studies, policy papers, etc. (Dietrich, 2014). When considering government media-relations tactics, our efforts are focused on obtaining earned media through no-cost publicity, which may result from owned and shared media assets such as an organization's posts on their website or social platform. These tactics require strong writing skills and creative, savvy thinking with a focus on the needs and interests of this target audience – journalists.

The Press Release is (Still) Alive

For more than a century, the press release (aka news release) has been the gold standard tactic for announcing news and information to members of the media. Its importance has not diminished; press releases remain the anchor document for a PR campaign – the primary place where one can find the essential information – and journalists of all mediums certainly still recognize them as an important tool for writing their stories and producing their segments. According to Cision's Global State of the Media Report, 71% of surveyed journalists said press releases and news announcements were the leading type of content they want to receive from brands (2019).

The press release, by definition, must contain newsworthy content. Editors and reporters at the news outlet are always on the lookout for announcements that will be relevant to their specific audiences. So do your homework first to ensure that the information fits the scope of interest, and only submit releases that are complete, accurate, and correctly formatted in the inverted pyramid formula. This format mirrors the structure of a news feature and helps the reader determine the announcement's relevance to the outlet.

The inverted pyramid is precisely what it sounds like – the most important elements of your news appear in the first paragraph, also known as the "lede" paragraph. The following paragraphs contain diminishingly less important facts and background information, as well as a quote(s) by the organization's leadership. And it should conclude with a brief "boilerplate" paragraph, or description of the organization itself, and various other key details, such as the website URL, social media links, and the spokesperson's contact information. Multimedia press releases may also include additional embedded URL links to related materials, including videos, social media sites, and visual elements such as JPEGs of photos, posters and logos.

Press releases are primarily distributed via email to a curated list of media contacts, which can be compiled using good old-fashioned, time-consuming Internet research or (often costly) media contacts databases such as Meltwater, Cision, Muck Rack and Propel PRM. A press release email should contain an attention-grabbing subject line that clearly and succinctly describes the news item, and the press release should appear in the body of the email rather than attached as a document to the message. The email should also be tailored for the journalist or news outlet with a personalized message that briefly describes the release's relevance to their work.

When larger campaigns are launched, government public relations offices often develop a *media kit* that – in addition to the press release – includes items such as a *media advisory* announcing a news event, *fact sheets* that list more in-depth details about the announcement, *backgrounders* that tell the story behind the story, *biographies* on key leaders, a *Frequently Asked Questions* (FAQ) document that answers the most common questions, and a *news feature*, which reads like a soft news story and gives a behind-the-scenes perspective from the organization.

The Op-ed

The *op-ed* is another commonly used tactic among government communicators. Originally developed by the *New York Times* in 1970, this form of writing was labeled "op-ed" because these opinion pieces appeared opposite from the editorial page. Today, most major print and online newspapers have an op-ed section, which features submissions from thought leaders (government officials, politicians, CEOs, academics, activists, etc.). The op-ed section typically addresses the most pressing policy issues and news events of that community. It is among the best read sections of the newspaper, and it is a particularly effective tactic for reaching other thought leaders and legislators and lending credibility to your organization and its leadership. A study published in the *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* concluded that op-ed pieces had large and long-lasting effects on changing people's minds – both among policy experts and the general public – regardless of political affiliation (Coppock, Ekins, & Kirby, 2018).

Typically, the op-ed is "ghost-written" by the communications team and is published under the name of the head of the organization. As with other forms of media outreach, it is important to first do research on the newspaper, build a relationship with the opinion editor, and only submit for consideration the highest quality, most relevant op-eds, while carefully observing editorial guidelines about formats and word counts (typically 500–800 words). Also recognize that op-eds are exclusively offered to one news outlet at a time and should not be posted online. It is appropriate in your pitch to designate a deadline by which you plan to move on to other newspapers, as some opinion editors may not even respond due to the volume of submissions they receive. In fact, the largest U.S. newspapers may receive hundreds of submissions each week and only publish a handful.

Press Events

Even in this age of digital communication and social distancing, public offices and candidates continue to rely on special events to generate news coverage, share information with constituents, and showcase a leader's strengths, particularly during an emergency or crisis. There are a variety of modalities by which press events can be effective.

Click on your television at any moment and you will see public events being held by federal, state and local leaders. Some are highly informative and timely, like the opening of a new school, while others have less practical objectives. American historian Daniel J. Boorstin, in his provocative 1961 book *The Image*, coined the term "pseudoevent" to describe a publicity stunt manufactured primarily to make headlines and provide people with an opportunity to indulge extravagant expectations. These types of events are hallmarks of modern-day government and political communication, though they would never be labeled a "pseudoevent" or "stunt." But that is exactly what they are: a carefully crafted illusion that contributes to the sculpting of a leader's image in the minds of constituents. Teddy Roosevelt understood the power of this tactic and was known for stunts such as traveling on a submarine to the bottom of the Long Island Sound to show support for the new vessels (Greenberg, 2016). Of course, publicity events can also backfire, as was the case in 1988 when Michael Dukakis took his infamous ride in a tank, and in 2020 when Donald Trump decided to pose with a Bible in front of St. John's Church across from the White House.

Equally prevalent are news conferences, or smaller "gaggles," as they are often called in government, which remain the fastest and most effective channel for leaders to share major announcements to wide audiences. Increasingly, they are being held via webcast or teleconference, which allows for greater attendance, convenience, and cost-savings. Government communicators serving high-profile bosses are typically accustomed to planning news conferences on very short notice, while carefully considering the nature of the announcement when selecting the format, location, and time of day (being mindful of news deadlines), and establishing clear ground rules for participants. Walk through the Senate Press Gallery in the U.S. Capitol on any given day in session, and you will see Members of Congress and their staffers giving impromptu interviews or being swarmed by gaggles of reporters hungry for a sound bite.

Media tours can also be a highly effective and efficient tool for generating news coverage in select geographic regions. In-person or remote, one-on-one interviews are booked with local television, radio and print/digital outlets in an effort to reach target audiences with messages tailored for a specific community. Media tours can also be intended to build relationships with editors and journalists who cover news beats or public policy areas relevant to that agency, such as healthcare, environment, energy, transportation, labor issues, etc. In addition, government communicators may request editorial board meetings at major newspapers as a way to foster goodwill. Such meetings are particularly effective when the newspaper has been printing unfavorable editorials about your agency, you have sensitive information to share, or you have a new leader to introduce.

Furthermore, blogs and bloggers should not be underestimated or underappreciated. They are often well-respected thought leaders within a specific community, such as educators or military service members, who take the time to write and cover public entities, often for little or no pay. They may cover niche issues the traditional press does not deem important but that their own readers are directly impacted by. They may even break stories if they are in the public interest. Treat bloggers with the same caution and friendliness as you would a reporter. They present an avenue for you to reach target audiences with your message. Monitor and engage with them as best fits your time and needs, but don't ignore them.

How does a government public relations staff consider different media engagement strategies to pursue? Table 3.1 presents how one might weigh the relative risks and gains associated with press conferences, embedded reporters, various types of media interviews, and written materials may help government communicators evaluate those strategies by placing considering the known costs vis-à-vis potential outcomes.

Conducting the Interview

Conducting a media interview – and preparing your bosses for their interviews – is a regular part of a PIO's job. Practitioners who are good at this skill are likely to have successful careers, but it is a skill that requires tremendous patience and practice.

When participating in a media interview, particularly on behalf of a government agency, the most important thing to remember is *never* to speak to a reporter – even if you have a friendly relationship with them – before you are fully informed about the situation and are as prepared as possible to answer the reporter's questions. Having a deep understanding of the details and strong message points will make or break an interview, especially in a high-pressure situation. If an issue surfaces out of the blue, be sure to buy yourself some time and get back to the reporter as soon as possible because once a story runs with your name in it, there is no reeling it back in.

As mentioned earlier, it is important to fully understand the terms a journalist uses when conducting an interview. "On the record" means that everything you say can be used in their story and attributed to you by name. "On background" means they can't use your name but can attribute their information to a company spokesperson, government official, etc. "On deep background" means it can only be attributed to a generic source or insider. And "off the record" means that the information you share cannot be written about – period. The spokesperson or media relations profession must establish these ground rules – otherwise every word you say is considered on the record. That being said, the practice of going

Table 3.1 Risk-Gain Considerations for Media Engagements

Risk	*High*	**Press Conference** **High Risk, Low Gain** Press conferences can become theater. Frustrated journalists feed off of each other and perform for cameras. Presenters may stick to talking points as a safety mechanism; they may become frustrated or testy when pressed for information. *Cost: leader's preparation time, coordination with other entities.*	**Embedded Reporters:** **High Risk, Medium Gain.** Who knows what the reporters will see or hear when they're in the field? Who knows what your personnel will say? May result in a story or two, but what good comes out compared to the resources we put in? *Cost: logistics & planning; opportunity costs.*	**Op-eds** **High Risk, High Gain** There is significant chance that your op-ed will run with the risk of one word, phrase, or message backfiring. However, op-eds can be an effective channel for reaching other thought leaders, particularly in government. May lead to other coverage. *Cost: significant staff time due to many drafts and input from leaders.*
	Medium	**Blogger/Influencer Session on Narrow Topic** **Medium Risk, Low Gain** Blogger/influencer interviews can be hit or miss. Audience reach may be low. Or they can lead large mainstream news outlets to cover your story, which can be good or bad. Some may not play by the same rules as journalists so don't share off-the-record information. *Cost: leader's preparation time is the same as mainstream interviews.*	**Blended Interview** **(Off the Record / On the Record)** **Medium Risk, Medium Gain** Good option when sharing sensitive information. May result in greater depth and accuracy. But revealing off-the-record details can be risky. *Cost: requires additional time to prepare due to information releases; leaders may be uncomfortable with approach.*	**Small Group Interviews** **Medium Risk, High Gain** A more intimate setting than a press conference, though you engage only a few outlets. Results in greater reach but less opportunity for in-depth responses. You choose the reporters who participate. But they will always prefer a one-on-one interview. *Cost: still requires preparation time; may sour relationships with excluded reporters.*
	Low	**Press Release** **Low Risk, Low Gain.** Journalists usually won't read it. If they do, they may use for background purposes or reprint a canned quote. This is a one-way communication method where no opportunity for questions. But there's a chance it may lead to an interview request. *Cost: may involve review approval by several leaders and not be timely.*	**Off-the-Record Interview** **Low Risk, Medium Gain.** Use this on rare occasions when sensitive issues need certain clarity, but don't use this as a hiding spot. Carefully choose reputable reporters. They will likely still press you to publish the information after the interview. *Cost: payoff is uncertain.*	**One-on-One, On the Record Interview** **Low Risk, High Gain** This method gives you a chance to build context and background with a journalist who is focused on your topic. It is a conversation; there is intimacy and understanding and you will likely be represented in the final news piece. *Cost: significant time to prepare and research reporter's background.*
		Low	*Medium*	*High*
			Gain	

Source: Developed by Grant Neeley (2020) during deployment in Afghanistan with U.S. and NATO forces as a military public affairs officer.

off the record or on background with a reporter is becoming increasingly risky, for obvious reasons, so the safest bet is to assume that every word you say to a reporter is on the record. And remember never to lie, evade or use "no comment," which will provoke the reporter to dig further.

Government communicators also recognize that consistent media training and practice are crucial when preparing to speak on the record. Message discipline is much harder than it looks; it takes tremendous concentration to stay focused on delivering the right messages and reinforcing them with accurate, relevant details. At the same time, it is also necessary to avoid the pitfalls of sharing off-topic information or answering negative or hypothetical questions, which can easily lead to big problems for the organization and can potentially create yet another unintended, negative story. Good spokespeople are able to skillfully deflect the question and bridge back to their key talking points. Many say the most challenging aspect of the interview is simply overcoming distractions and nervousness while trying to formulate thoughtful answers, process information, and respond quickly without hesitation. Doing a remote interview carries its own challenges as well since the spokesperson must mitigate the anxieties that come from staring at a dark camera lens or, in the case of a video chat, seeing oneself on-screen. The good news, however, is that interviewing gets easier with practice, which you should do, with honest feedback on what went right and what went wrong. Interview formats have some important nuances to understand when you are preparing for the interview as highlighted in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Interview Considerations Based on Format

In person or on camera	**Over the phone**
• In-person interviews include everything from a quick verbal response for a print reporter's story, to an audio recording for radio, to an in-depth conversation on camera. • While each type of interview comes with its own set of challenges, it's particularly important to remember during on camera appearances to additional attributes which may affect your message – appearance, body language, tone, and intonation. • Preparation helps ensure those elements don't overshadow your words.	• Speaking on the phone generally does not carry the same risks that come with an on-camera interview. • After all, you have the benefit of having access to notes and reference materials. • But this isn't to say that you should take the preparation process lightly. • You still should have full mastery of your message points and key arguments so the interview goes where you want it to go. • Reporters will often record phone interviews to ensure accuracy, so assume you are "on the record" from the moment the conversation begins.

(*Continued*)

Table 3.2 (Continued)

Via email	**Through online video tools (Skype, Zoom, etc.)**
• Usually the least stressful of all interviews, emailing responses allows something that no other method does – complete control of your message. • You can be more concise, more direct, and more complete in your answers. • There is generally little risk since you have the ability to review and revise before submitting. • For those reasons, it's often a method that reporters tend not to prefer.	• This method has quickly become a commonly used medium given the many constraints during the COVID-19 pandemic. • Functions as a hybrid between a full on-camera interview and one conducted over the phone. • It is permissible to have your notes handy, but be mindful of your on-camera delivery and background environment.

Case Study: Media Query – Workplace Harassment

Now that you have learned about conducting interviews, take a moment to consider the following scenario.

You are the PIO of a Transportation Department in a major city, and you receive a call from an investigative reporter saying there are allegations of rampant workplace harassment among your drivers and staff. This information purportedly comes from an internal whistle-blower source. The reporter is requesting to shoot footage inside of the transportation department offices and the city garage where the vehicles are maintained and parked. They also want to interview other department staff members.

1. Do you agree to the interview? Who should be the primary spokesperson and why?
2. What questions or issues should you prepare the spokesperson for?
3. Do you allow them to shoot footage and interview staff within the transportation department?
4. Who are the various audiences that must be considered in your responses? What messages do you want them to take away from your responses?

This example illustrates the types of considerations that government communicators must weigh on a daily basis, and it can provide a framework for establishing media relations protocols.

Whistleblowers and Authorized Leaks

Leaks are common in government offices, as much as we may not want to admit it. They may come from whistleblowers or disgruntled employees. Or they may be intentional, strategic leaks by the office with specific, well-thought-out objectives, such as gauging the public's reaction to a new policy idea (i.e. sending a "test balloon").

If the leaking is unintentional and coming from disgruntled employees, you've got a problem. It may be an indication of a poor organizational culture in which employees do not feel valued and honest, open communication is not prioritized. Employees who are overburdened and underappreciated can cause a media relations catastrophe for any organization, and it is crucial to remedy the situation immediately through internal listening research, community outreach and stronger communication efforts.

Social Media Integration and Outreach

Without question, one of the most important changes to governmental and political communication in recent years has been the rise of digital resources as publicity and media relations tools. New media and technologies have revolutionized the ways agencies interact with both citizens and journalists, allowing for exponentially greater transparency, accountability, responsiveness, and perhaps even trust in government. Simply having a static organizational website where information is communicated in one direction like a bulletin board is no longer sufficient. Government agencies have developed guidelines and complex policies to structure their websites and digital communications, albeit at different levels. National cabinet-level agencies dedicate an office at the Assistant Secretary level that is tasked with ensuring its organization has social media content, tools, and policies, which helps advance their mission, see Figure 3.2.

Social media has transformed the public relations industry, as it has transformed our way of life. Highly effective and free of cost, social media enables government organizations to communicate messages directly to audiences without being filtered and framed by the mass media. However, as has been discussed, the media still plays a key role in public policy discourse and must be *incorporated* into an agency's social media strategies rather than circumvented. Following the PESO model, social media would technically constitute the shared media category, but when platforms are being used to engage in media outreach, one could argue it straddles the earned media category as well. Engaging journalists through social media, particularly Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn, is a critical form of media relations. Social media presence is now a required part of almost every reporter's job. They use it to increase their public profile, and to promote their own stories and those of their news organization. They also use social media to find story ideas or information by tracking an agency's posts and following online dialogues among third parties, such as advocacy groups, industry associations, community nonprofit organizations, and public policy thought leaders and influencers. In fact, today, reporter's often take quotes directly from social media content created by such sources.

At the same time, government agencies are also increasingly using social media platforms to learn about their constituencies' concerns and priorities, while promoting positive news and feel-good stories about the

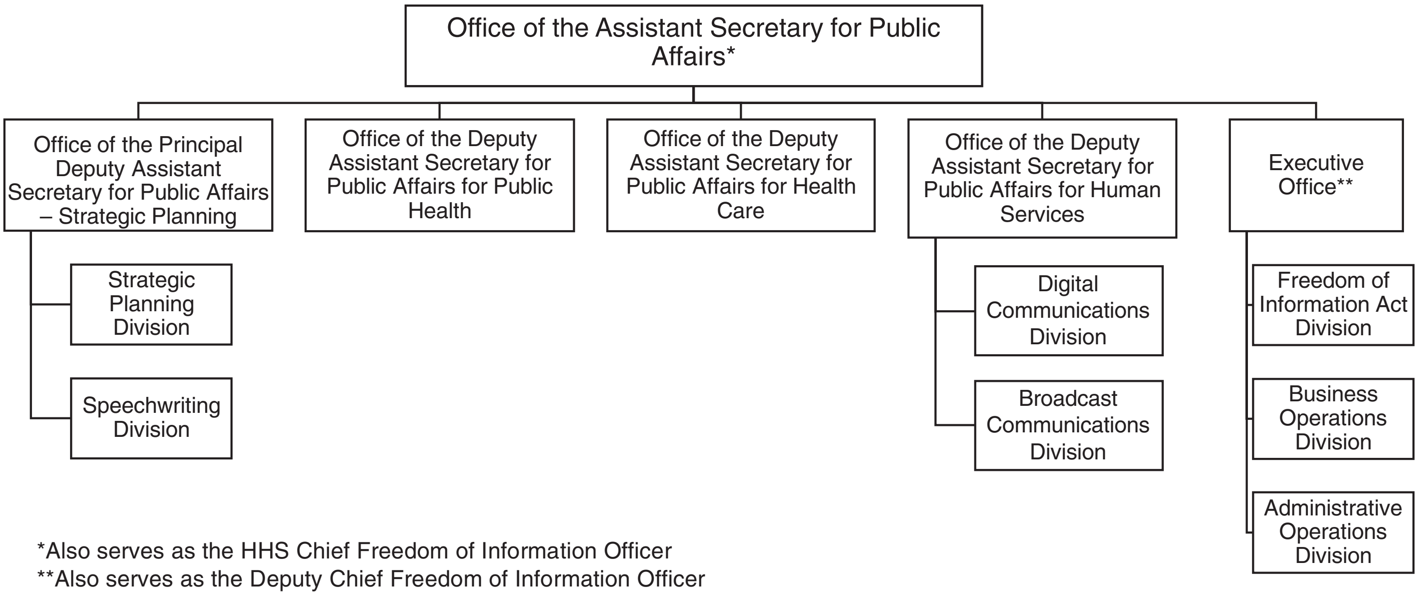

Figure 3.2 Office of the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs Organizational Chart

work of the agency and its principals. For many agencies, the COVID-19 pandemic caused their public affairs team to kick their social media outreach into high gear. While not traditionally known for their creativity and innovation, many agencies seized the opportunity to enhance their online content in ways that would drive engagement, increase followers, and address the public's priorities. For example, in reaction to public concerns over the pandemic's impact on the food supply chain, the U.S. Department of Agriculture developed a strategy to put their department head on center stage. Secretary Sonny Perdue launched an online discussion series, or podcast, called "The Sonnyside of the Farm" (www.usda.gov/sonnyside) to demonstrate the USDA's safety measures, interview agriculturalists on the front lines, and answer questions from constituents.

Social media platforms have become an essential tool for media relations in today's government communications. As part of the shared media category, these platforms allow governments to develop and curate their own content when they need to reach the public directly or when they are struggling with reputation management issues, which you will read more about in Chapter 13. As an example, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs – after experiencing several years of bad press and reputational damage – decided to dedicate significant resources to enhancing their digital communication assets. They recognized that their most valuable persuasive appeal was in their storytelling, and they developed a new strategy to share veterans stories through all available online channels, including their "Vantage Point" blog site, successful hashtag campaigns such as #VeteranOfTheDay, a podcast series called "Borne the Battle" that features interviews with veterans, and even a YouTube video chat series called #LiveWhole Health that discusses mental health issues in the community and provides helpful resources (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2020a). In fact, these efforts – along with improved VA services – appear to be paying off, as survey results from the agency showed veteran trust in VA health care services reached an all-time high (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2020b).

What should *your* organization be doing? The days of avoiding social media engagement are gone, and all government offices must now commit time and resources to this essential communication channel. At a minimum, an agency should have dedicated staff to monitor the posts of influencers who cover them and their policy areas. Public affairs specialists can also engage in relationship-building via social media, correct details that are inaccurate, or even contact reporters to suggest a story idea or offer an on-the-record comment.

When developing social media strategies, here are some questions your team should be asking:

- Are you using the best mix of sites for the audiences you need to reach? You may want to stop using one channel, for example, or add a new one.

- Should you be engaging in more direct dialogue with those you represent to get ideas and feedback?
- Does it make sense for you, your principal, and team members to utilize your personal online profiles to promote your work and organization?
- What are the policies or rules for engaging with complaints or negative comments made on social media?
- Which components of the organization can have social media accounts? If you are a city government, for example, should departments within your government have their own PIOs or do they need to have posts approved by the city public information officer?

Sarah Cronin, a communications director and digital media specialist in the U.S. House of Representatives, offers the following advice:

> Understanding those you're communicating with via social media is critical to crafting an effective message. Meet people where they are … Social media audiences respond well to variety. Be creative by making use of videos, graphics, articles, and more to keep your social media presence fresh and learn what your audience likes. Some Members of Congress livestream their podcasts, others post photos with constituents, many post article links with a short, thoughtful analysis of an important news story. Branch out and see what people respond to best! (Personal communication, October 2020)

Note: Gov Loop is a social network for people working in government, and it offers learning tools and information on many topics including social media. This may be a handy resource for you: www.govloop.com/social-media.

Looking Ahead

As we look ahead, we can clearly see new trends and challenges for government communicators on the horizon. Certainly the landscape continues to evolve with issues relating to fake news, misinformation campaigns, news polarization, and low trust in government on the forefront. These significant societal issues complicate audiences' perceptions and our ability to reach them. Enhanced authenticity, credibility and data will be increasingly critical to countering public skepticism. Also, without question, the growth in digital media is having a tremendous impact on the way traditional public relations is performed.

Social media's influence shows no signs of diminishing, with two-thirds of American adults (68%) getting some or all of their news through social media sources, according to Pew Research's annual Social Media Usage report (Shearer & Matsa, 2018). Inevitably, new social media platforms and other emerging technologies will continue to influence traditional mainstream media and the ways government offices communicate with their various target audiences.

As fewer people get their news from traditional newspapers and broadcast outlets, practitioners need to develop skills to meet these new challenges in the evolving landscape. Meanwhile, we must never lose sight of government's obligation to work in cooperation with journalists, as they provide the feedback loop of the democratic process. It is the responsibility of today's government communicators to respect this dynamic, think critically about new media, and ultimately adapt public relations practices for the good of the people.

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4 Public Information Campaigns

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Introduction

> "Click it or ticket." "Only YOU can prevent forest fires."
> "Friends don't let friends drive drunk."

For decades, governments have informed, persuaded, and motivated the public to buckle their seat belts, practice safe sex, prevent forest fires, get vaccinated, and designate a sober driver. These ubiquitous messages have resulted in some of the most familiar and successful communication efforts in recent history, with taglines that many of us remember well. Now it may be your turn to produce a memorable public information campaign, but you may not know how to get started. This chapter will provide a guide to developing and evaluating your public information campaign.

The Public Information Campaign

Utilized by both government and nonprofit organizations to create social change, public information campaigns are designed to reach a widely varied audience with the purpose of benefiting society by disseminating information intended to enhance the well-being of the audience. From the early 18th century to the present day, public information campaigns have provided many societal benefits and facilitated social change to support the reform goals of various publics and policy makers. With the purpose to inform, persuade, or motivate behavior change, public information campaigns have ranged in focus from personal issues (e.g., heart disease) to societal issues (e.g., global warming), with some, like the 2020 global coronavirus pandemic, emphasizing both personal and societal aspects. These information dissemination efforts have been used by the federal government, government agencies, nonprofit associations, foundations, mass media, and corporations alike.

Although direct involvement of government agencies in public information campaigns was once atypical, the government's current use of public information campaigns to cultivate awareness for social issues and secure participation in federal programs is prolific for several reasons. First, an increase in information resources available with today's technology has provided individuals with a personal fountain of knowledge. These increased information resources also have given communicators additional communication tools to reach publics with valuable information. Second, as a result of increased access to information, individuals are more educated and engaged in public decision-making, causing a heightened demand for information as well as an expectation for government information and transparency. This increased participation has prompted government agencies and organizations to communicate information that informs the public decision-making process. Elite decisions can no longer solve societal issues, but rather public support and participation is now required for effective change, and this public support and participation can only be acquired through an open flow of communication and dialogue, providing the rationale for the use of a public information campaign. Third, the increased sophistication and effectiveness of contemporary communication campaigns have revealed that the use of a public information campaign is not only efficient but valuable in achieving government goals.

From generating vaccine awareness to eradicating crime, public information campaigns have impacted public policy as well as societal reform through the improved accuracy and influence of targeted communication efforts. Commonly referred to as public information campaigns, this label does not accurately reflect the varying approaches to communication efforts today. In fact, much of the contemporary literature makes a distinction between information campaigns and communication campaigns. The information campaign resembles early efforts to inform various publics and is unidirectional in nature, providing information rather than expecting there to be a two-way communication effort. On the other hand, the communication campaign is more participative and interactional in nature, establishing a dialogue between the sender and receiver of the information. It is important to note that the communication campaign closely resembles the model of dialogic communication that is ideal for most public relations efforts today. However, regardless of the campaign approach – information or communication – all campaign efforts should include specific elements to ensure successful outcomes. For the ease of discussion throughout this chapter, we will consider the public information campaign and communication campaign as one and the same when planning campaign efforts.

Often communicators are overwhelmed with the campaign process, resulting in the question, "Where do I start?" We believe that the success of a campaign fundamentally relies on the communicator's knowledge of the campaign process as well as campaign principles; therefore, providing a simple, usable summary of these processes and principles is the focus and foundation for this chapter.

Building the Campaign Foundation

Before embarking on the development of messages, it's important to take a step back and establish the foundation for the communication project. Generally, three stages of a public information campaign help an organization facilitate the accomplishment of desirable outcomes. Those three stages are: planning, implementation, and evaluation.

The campaign planning stage is the phase of the campaign that includes the strategic development of campaign efforts. We view this phase as developing the blueprint for the campaign, which includes conducting formative research, setting campaign goals and objectives, identifying target audiences, developing strategy and tactics, and establishing the campaign timeline and budget. This stage lays a strong foundation for the creation of an effective campaign effort.

The implementation stage of the campaign process includes making a decision on how and when to execute the campaign. We consider this phase of the campaign process to involve expanding the blueprint to include elements like the use of specific communication sources and media, message appeals, frequency and timing of message dissemination, and considerations for increased campaign credibility. This stage includes the campaign elements that most people cite when referring to this process – message development and presentation – but also includes several other steps that many forget. We won't let you forget those in your campaign.

Evaluating the campaign, the final stage of the process, is often overlooked yet increasingly important in today's economic environment. Sitting back and enjoying your perceived success can be satisfying and liberating; however, without research-based methods to measure the performance of your campaign efforts, you will never realize the extent of your accomplishments and the true impact of your campaign. Have you constructed an effective campaign from your blueprint? Have you been successful in reaching the desired publics with your message? Have you created the desired social change? Determining if the campaign has been successful should include the use of systematic evaluation methods and a focus on collecting data specific to the achievement of campaign goals and objectives. This is not a step to be overlooked; this is where you prove to yourself (and the powers that be) that the campaign worked.

It is through these three stages that a communicator lays the groundwork for successful public communication efforts. To help illustrate this process, we will examine the stages of planning, implementation, and evaluation of a government public communication campaign that received national recognition. The Irvine Ranch Water District Water Efficiency Campaign developed by the Irvine Ranch Water District (IRWD), in partnership with Denver-based firm Sukle Advertising and Design, was recognized as a 2019 Silver Anvil Award recipient by the Public Relations Society of America for outstanding work in Community Relations for Associations, Government, and Nonprofits. From developing the campaign plan, to executing the campaign initiatives, and evaluating the campaign results, the campaign has achieved remarkable results as well as created behavior awareness and change within the target audience. This campaign will be used throughout the chapter to provide an example of each stage of the campaign planning process. A brief summary of this public communication campaign will provide background for our review.

The IRWD water efficiency campaign was designed to reach an audience suffering from years of "drought fatigue." When California lifted mandatory water restrictions in 2017 following the end of a historic drought, water agencies throughout the state were challenged to find the right message to encourage customers to keep saving water, even when it was no longer mandated to do so. The IRWD chose to use a pathos appeal – humor – thinking that if they could make people laugh about their wasteful ways, then people would be more likely to continue to embrace conservation. They developed a campaign grounded in social science asking people to "See It From Your Lawn's perspective" as part of a multiyear effort to encourage voluntary water conservation. The campaign used multimedia platforms including video, digital, social media, cable TV, and print, as well as advertising in multiple languages. The website for this campaign (www.rightscapenow.com/watering-guide) and the videos (https://vimeo.com/237654800 and https://vimeo.com/237654774) are available for review. The process used to develop each of the three stages of this campaign will be discussed throughout the rest of this chapter.

Developing a Campaign Plan

Although communication campaign literature provides several different and valuable procedures for developing communication campaigns depending on the purpose of the campaign, we consider the RACE model to be a simple, practical way to remember the critical components for designing and implementing a successful public communication effort. RACE, a four-step model developed by John Marston (1963), outlines a public relations management process commonly used by public relations practitioners to provide straightforward guidance for campaign planning. RACE stands for the following elements in the campaign planning process:

R = Research
A = Action
C = Communication
E = Evaluation

Following this model, the starting point for the communication professional should be research, or evaluating the situation using several forms of formative research methods. Using both primary and secondary research methods to fully investigate the organization's situation and/or social issue will provide important insights to inform subsequent steps in the campaign planning process. Following a thorough analysis of the situation, the communicator is ready for action, or formulating a practical strategic plan to guide campaign efforts. This phase requires the communication professional to make several essential decisions regarding campaign goals, target audience(s), messages, communication channels, resource allocation, and timing for message delivery. Next, the communication phase primarily focuses on the execution and placement of messages based on existing communication theories, principles, and best practices. Finally, the last phase of the campaign process includes the evaluation of campaign efforts; conducting outcome research will help answer questions about the campaign's effectiveness in addition to goal attainment. The evaluation phase can answer questions like was the campaign adequately planned, were the communication messages received and understood, did efforts remain within the proposed budget, and how can future campaign efforts be improved? As mentioned, the evaluation phase of the campaign process has become increasingly sophisticated in systematically evaluating campaign efforts that demonstrate impact.

The remainder of the chapter will provide detailed explanations of each phase of the campaign planning process, RACE, as well as important considerations for achieving campaign success.

Research: Assessing the Campaign Situation

Most professional communicators recognize the need for a campaign without conducting extensive research; however, to truly understand the present issues, organizational involvement, as well as the relevant publics, the first step in the planning process is to conduct an analysis of the situation using various forms of assessment. It is important to stress that while research should be conducted throughout the entire campaign process, it should undoubtedly mark the start and end points of the campaign process. Marking the start of the campaign process, formative research should be conducted to create a thorough understanding of the situation; this research process results in what is often referred to as the situation analysis.

The formative research conducted to analyze the campaign situation can include many different methods of research; however, it is important that the communication professional identify the most appropriate research methods to answer questions that will provide context for the development of campaign goals and objectives as well as inform campaign strategy and tactics. For example, the formative research phase for the IRWD water efficiency campaign helped the District identify homeowners and renters of single-family dwellings as the sources of the most wasted water, and this insight prompted the need for a public communication campaign and provided direction for additional research efforts. The District knew that they would not be able to create an effective campaign based on few statistical facts and logical appeals surrounding water conservation. Rather, they needed to first fully analyze the situation before developing a plan to address the high levels of water waste. In order to move forward in the campaign planning process, the situation analysis needed to answer questions like the following: What is water conservation, as seen through the eyes of the target audience? Why is water conservation still needed even though usage restrictions have been lifted? How do residents perceive the current water situation? What are their current outdoor water use behaviors? How have other organizations handled similar situations? And, how can encouraging a continued water conservation mindset best be accomplished in a population that struggles with "drought fatigue?"

Considered an integral step in eventually realizing campaign success, the IRWD team conducted both primary and secondary research to answer the aforesaid questions as well as describe the current situation. The team first conducted extensive secondary research (or investigation of existing information) through these three efforts:

- The examination of water usage statistics and customer data identified individuals that regularly exceeded their monthly allocation of water. As stated, the group identified as the source for most of the District's wasted water was homeowners and renters of single-family dwellings, and as a result, this group became the target audience for the campaign.
- An analysis of demographic data for the selected target audience indicated, among other facts, that campaign materials would be needed in four different languages – English, Spanish, Chinese, and Korean.
- An investigation of potential media platforms, including print, digital, mobile, and others, shared suggestions for effective advertising and message distribution opportunities.

Using the findings of the secondary research, the District's team conducted primary research (involving active data collection) to establish benchmarks and campaign goals as well as determine the messages and concepts that would resonate with the target audience. The primary research consisted of pre-campaign surveys and customer focus groups to establish measurable benchmark attitudes and knowledge about local outdoor water use. The primary research methods resulted in several valuable insights for campaign planning, including the insight that much of the outdoor water usage was used for lawn irrigation. They also learned that most customers did not understand the amount of water a lawn needs to stay healthy during different weather seasons. Finally, results also revealed that the target audience would not respond well to strict or heavy-handed campaign messages similar to those used during the mandatory water restrictions; in fact, evidence suggested that customers preferred humorous appeals when receiving communication about voluntary water conservation.

Gathering valuable secondary and primary information helped the IRWD avoid several potential mistakes. For example, secondary research allowed the team to focus on behavior change within a specific target audience, in this case – homeowners and renters, as well as recognize the need to distribute campaign messages in the several languages spoken by members of the target audience. Primary research motivated the District to use humor for increased message acceptance and compliance. This data, gathered from both the primary and secondary research, was used to formulate campaign strategy and identify the most effective tactics to achieve the campaign goals and objectives.

Although the formative research phase of the campaign process can be costly, in both time and resources, the benefits of this phase of the process far outweigh the costs. Research provides the credibility, accountability, insight, and most importantly, the foundation for campaign planning. We strongly suggest that every communication professional utilize the most appropriate and accessible research methods available to them as the first step in their campaign planning endeavors whether it is through the review of existing literature or the collection of primary data.

Research Part Two: Linking Research to Practice

Complementary to the formative research phase and often missing in the communication professional's toolbox is the understanding and use of theory as an additional source of information to support campaign development. Once a sound understanding of the situation is acquired, identifying a theoretical foundation to guide campaign efforts can be extremely beneficial. In fact, linking relevant theory to the communication situation before jumping into the brainstorming of campaign ideas can equip the professional communicator with a valuable framework for understanding audiences, developing messages, and choosing appropriate media for message dissemination. The use of communication theory as well as proven campaign principles can be the difference between a successful campaign and one that fails to accomplish desired outcomes.

Although there are numerous communication theories that inform both the input and output processes of communication, the campaign planning stage primarily uses input processes of communication (how messages are constructed and how messages are communicated) to inform campaign efforts. The input process of campaign development involve (1) the source of the message, (2) the communication of the message, (3) the channel that delivers the message, and (4) the receiver of the message. Each element of the process helps to determine the success of the communication effort. For example, the sender and receiver play an important role in delivery and receipt of the message, while the message and channel determine what information is communicated and how it is communicated.

Communication theory can provide a deeper understanding of one or all of these input variables to campaign development. For example, one model frequently utilized in reliable social science research as a basis for strategic campaign efforts is Prochaska and DiClemente's (1983) Transtheoretical Model (sometimes called the Stages of Change Theory). This framework can provide a roadmap for campaign development by offering a possible explanation for how message receivers may process a campaign message. Predominantly used for communication efforts when a health behavior change is desired, the Transtheoretical Model (TTM) describes how individuals transform a health problem or adopt a positive health behavior. In the case of the IRWD campaign, the desired behavior of reducing water consumption was not a personal health behavior but rather a behavior that contributed to community well-being. Whether your campaign targets personal health or community health, it can be useful to examine the five stages of behavior change outlined by the TTM: (1) precontemplation, (2) contemplation, (3) preparation, (4) action, and (5) maintenance. While these stages did not necessarily provide the IRWD campaign with a framework for gradual behavior change, the stages of TTM are briefly described below given the theory's relevance to the campaign situation:

- Stage 1, Precontemplation: The individual is not aware or is under aware that a problem exists and there is no intention to change current behavior in the immediate future.
- Stage 2, Contemplation: The individual thinks about making a change and considers the pros and cons of changing his or her behavior.
- Stage 3, Preparation: The individual trials the desired behavior to answer the "how to" question and better understands what it feels like or looks like to adopt a new behavior.
- Stage 4, Action: The individual commits to the desired behavior and develops a plan for action.
- Stage 5, Maintenance: The individual continues the desired behavior while anticipating and planning for relapse.

In terms of the IRWD campaign, while it was hoped that most residents were still in stage 5 (maintenance) after so many years of mandated water restrictions, primary and secondary research indicated that many customers in the target audience had reverted back to stage 2 (contemplation) or even stage 1 (precontemplation) regarding their water use behaviors. The challenge for the IRWD campaign was to encourage residents to return to stage 4 (action).

Although the TTM has provided a strong theoretical framework for the development of many public information campaign efforts, it certainly is not suitable for all campaigns. Additional theoretical frameworks common to public information campaign development include the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Cacioppo & Petty, 1979; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), Diffusion Theory (Rogers, 1976), Expectancy Value Theory (Fishbein, 1967), Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1957), Source Credibility (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953), Attribution Theory (Heider, 1958), Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974), and the Health Belief Model (Hochbaum, 1958). Additionally, if the use of a fear appeal (a message that scares the recipient into changing his or her behavior) is being considered, the Extended Parallel Process Model (Witte, 1992) should be considered. An understanding of these and other communication theories can facilitate the analysis of the situation as well as provide guidance for the development of the campaign blueprint.

Armed with ample knowledge and research, as well as the selection of a relevant theoretical foundation, it is time to begin the next phase of the campaign planning process – action.

Action: Developing the Campaign Plan

Following the research phase of campaign development, the action phase of the campaign process includes the strategic development of campaign components; as previously mentioned, we consider this the phase as the development of the campaign blueprint. This phase of campaign management includes six components: (1) setting of campaign goals and objectives, (2) creation of the audience profile, (3) formation of campaign strategy, (4) development of campaign tactics, (5) coordination of the campaign timeline, and (6) compilation of the campaign budget. Each of these components is described below.

Campaign Goals and Objectives

A first and very critical step in creating the blueprint for the campaign is to establish campaign goals and objectives. Many communication professionals consider the two synonymous; however, there are marked differences between goals and objectives, and both are important elements of the campaign. Campaign goals articulate the broad intentions for the campaign; goals are intangible and abstract, and most times cannot be measured. Objectives differ from goals in that they are narrow, precise, tangible, and as such, can be measured through evaluation efforts. For example, a common goal of a public information campaign is to educate individuals on the consequences of not performing a particular behavior, such as what happens when not wearing seatbelts or not wearing masks during the COVID-19 pandemic. The campaign objective is to increase the number of individuals participating in the desired behavior through education efforts within a desired time frame, thus increasing the actual number of people fastening seatbelts and wearing face masks.

It is critical to develop strong objectives; a strong objective is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-stamped (SMART). Most importantly, SMART objectives, an acronym coined by George Doran in 1981, provide the means by which to evaluate the success of the campaign. SMART objectives are the standard for monitoring campaign progress, providing campaign targets for accountability, and evaluating campaign effectiveness.

Demonstrating the relationship between goals and objectives, the IRWD crafted goals and objectives that provided direction, accountability, and valuation for their campaign efforts. For example, the goals of the See It from Your Lawn's Perspective: Water Use Efficiency Campaign included the following: to raise awareness and change behavior associated with outdoor water use. The specific objectives were twofold: (1) identify benchmark numbers regarding attitudes and water consumption for use in analyzing the effectiveness of future campaigns; (2) create messaging that will raise awareness and promote outdoor water conservation" during summer/fall 2017 and winter/spring 2018. While these objectives could be improved with detailed measurement criteria, they provided specific, achievable, relevant and time-stamped direction for campaign strategy and tactics.

Setting SMART objectives early in the process allows for a more thorough evaluation of the campaign later in the process. Be sure your campaign objectives are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-stamped!

Audience Profile

With most public communication efforts, understanding the target audience is one of the most important components of the planning process. Since the purpose of the public information campaign is to provide valuable information that benefits a segment of society, it is the professional communicator's responsibility to understand the cognitive and behavioral attributes of the target audience in order to best communicate the beneficial information. Research can help reveal audience demographic and psychographic characteristics like age, gender, education level, socioeconomic status, attitudes, opinions, and experiences. Various campaign decisions are based on this information; effective message appeals, source choices, and the type of mediums employed are all critical decisions for which a thorough audience analysis can provide direction.

Simply, an audience analysis includes assessing the characteristics and interests of the audience and then tailoring the campaign strategy and tactics to match audience characteristics. An analysis of the campaign's primary audience is essential; however, the campaign may have more than one audience, meaning there is a secondary audience – and sometimes even a tertiary audience – that also requires thorough analysis. The primary audience of a campaign is the audience segment that is deemed the primary user of campaign information, more specifically, the audience that will be directly impacted by the information. The secondary audience is the audience segment that might be affected by the campaign information and the decisions or actions made by the primary audience following campaign exposure. For example, the IRWD's water conservation campaign targeted both a primary and secondary audience. The primary audience included IRWD customers who are homeowners and renters, and the secondary audiences included the general community, local businesses, and social media followers.

From the audience analysis, a thorough audience profile can be developed. Sometimes both primary and secondary research is required in order to develop the audience profile. Reviewing academic and trade publications, organizational archives, census data, public records, and national polls and surveys sponsored by market research companies like Gallup, Nielson, and Pew can provide sufficient information for understanding the campaign audience(s). However, there are times when descriptive information does not exist for audience members. Therefore, primary research is helpful in gathering audience-specific information. Through surveys, focus groups, interviews, and even observation, informative information can be collected regarding audience demographics and psychographics.

The following types of information should be included in your audience profile:

- Demographic Characteristics: Including, but not limited to, age range of target audience, average income levels, marital and parental status, race/ethnicity, education, preferred language, and if relevant, religious preference.
- Value Systems: Factors that motivate or are valuable to this target audience and the criteria used for making important decisions.
- Knowledge: The level of understanding on the topic or issue. The level of education that the audience has on the topic or issue.
- Barriers to Adoption: The obstacles or challenges that might prevent people from engaging in the desired behavior.

- Preferred Media Channels/Media Use: The communication channels and locations that receive the most attention from the target audience. The media that the target audience prefers or regularly engages.
- Credible Sources: The individuals or organizations that are most likely to influence the target audience.
- Behavioral Determinants of Desired Behaviors: The factors that motivate the target audience to act. The tangible or intangible items that would be gained or lost by adopting the desired behavior.

Campaign Strategy

Once the goals and objectives of the campaign are developed and a thorough audience analysis has been conducted, it is time for the communicator to brainstorm campaign elements. Although commonly confused with tactics, campaign strategy establishes the campaign's direction and thematic application. In short, the campaign strategy needs to first and foremost answer how the campaign objectives are to be achieved; strategy provides the big idea (themes, emotions, experiences, engagement, etc.) that will carry the campaign to success.

Strategy statements can include action strategies like a focus on audience participation, sponsorships, partnerships, or organizational performance; communication strategies like media endorsement, paid placement (advertising), or transparent communication; message strategies like emotional appeals, slogans, taglines, and power words; or distribution strategies like repetition, use of multiple channels, and message distribution associated with calendar year.

The IRWD's See It From Your Lawn's Perspective Campaign included many different strategic initiatives including the use of humor appeals and a focus on reinforcing long-term behaviors with messages that grab attention and resonate with audience; the development of articulate and simple messages (i.e. tagline) that communicate water is valuable; the creation of a multi-platform approach using several different channels of communication and varied levels of influence; the use of traditional media, digital media, and social media to reach the target audience; and the reinforcement of a conservation mindset. The IRWD campaign strategy clearly materialized from the formative research results as well as considerations borrowed from social science theory. This example demonstrates that thorough research leads to well-developed campaign strategy, which in turn will provide the direction for campaign tactics.

Again, the difference between campaign strategy and tactics can be somewhat confusing for novice communication professionals. However, it might help to think of strategy as providing the big picture for the campaign, and the campaign tactics as the objects, people, and scenery in the picture. It is important to establish strategy before developing the specific tactics to carry out that strategy.

Campaign Tactics

Campaign tactics are the nuts and bolts of the campaign that facilitate the execution of campaign strategy. Example tactics are websites, billboards, town hall meetings, media kits, online contests, brochures, television and radio public service announcements (PSAs), social media posts, videos, and special events. It is vital that the tactics chosen to execute campaign strategy relate to the campaign's big picture. For example, if campaign strategy was to create an interactive opportunity for the target audience to experience the campaign message, then a tactic that allows for two-way communication or a participative interface is necessary (examples could be a Twitter chat, special event, or message board hosted on the organization's website).

The IRWD campaign employed several tactics to enact strategy, including:

- Cable TV: Three 15-second spots ran in six zones and 25 networks, airing 8,350 times including a prime spot leading up to the Super Bowl.
- Digital Media: Messaging in English, Spanish, Chinese, and Korean targeted demographics.
- Social Media: Engagement on multiple platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.
- Cinema Placement: Cross-platform tactic in 11 theaters that delivered "day after" mobile ads to movie-goers.
- Out-of-home Advertising: Six wrapped buses on eight routes, and 60 bus shelters districtwide.
- Print Media: Three print executions in multiple languages were used in out-of-home transit and bus shelters, community and ethnic newspapers and publications, print banners for public display, and digital banners for online targeting.
- Video Spots: Two 15-second video spots that visually presented the campaign tagline in unexpected and humorous ways and delivered the "Just enough is enough" message.
- Campaign Website: Called the "watering guide," the campaign website shared facts and instructions related to outdoor water use translated in four different languages.

By reviewing the tactics from the IRWD campaign, the connection between the objectives, audience, strategy, and tactics is apparent; it is important to note that each component of the campaign should build on the previous component. In other words, campaign tactics were developed to achieve the strategy based on ideas that were identified as effective in reaching the target audience that was deemed important to accomplishing the campaign goals and objectives informed by the formative research phase.

Timeline

Although seemingly simple, the campaign timeline is an important, and potentially complex, element to campaign success. The timeline consists of scheduling campaign tactics, and in doing so, considering how tactics relate to or influence one another. There are several different approaches to determining scheduling patterns and message frequency. For example, the campaign may be best implemented using a seasonality approach, meaning that campaign tactics should be implemented in association with the calendar year or seasonal trends. Another approach to scheduling may be pulsing, which means that there is limited communication with the target audience on a year-round basis except for determined peak periods when the communication efforts should be at an all-time high. Some communicators may even be interested in roadblocking to ensure audience exposure to the campaign message at a predetermined point in time. Roadblocking is the placement of campaign messages in all major television networks, radio stations, or print publications at the same time; therefore, regardless of media choice, the target audience has a high likelihood of exposure to the campaign message. It is also important to note that scheduling patterns do not have to operate in isolation; often campaigns use a combination of scheduling patterns. For example, to address an increase in property crime during the holiday season, a local public safety office implemented a campaign with scheduled tactics to run over an eight-week holiday season (November 1 through January 1). Campaign messaging was distributed through television PSA spots during all local newscasts as well as radio PSAs during rush hour on several local stations, and finally, outdoor signage along all major roadways throughout town. The combination of seasonality and roadblocking strategies proved successful in accomplishing campaign goals. In summary, careful planning and thoughtful consideration need to be given to the scheduling of campaign tactics.

The campaign timeline is commonly organized using a Gantt chart. The Gantt chart, developed by Henry Gantt (1903), uses a common bar chart format to illustrate important dates and deadlines through project completion. Common to project management, the Gantt chart can be organized by day, week, month, or any other time frame that is relevant to the campaign. Table 4.1 provides a sample Gantt chart.

Budget

Equally important to the campaign timeline, the campaign budget details the financial resources required to implement tactics and achieve campaign objectives. There are typically five categories to a campaign budget: (1) personnel costs, (2) materials costs, (3) media costs, (4) equipment and facility costs, and (5) administrative costs. While all categories may be relevant to the campaign budget, it is essential that the budget accurately

Table 4.1 Sample Gantt Chart

Planned campaign dates										
Tactical Activity	*Month 1*	*Month 2*	*Month 3*	*Month 4*	*Month 5*	*Month 6*	*Month 7*	*Month 8*	*Month 9*	*Month 10*
Pilot Phase										
Launch Website										
Social Media										
Banner Ads										
Billboards										
Ads/Posters										
Radio/TV										
Movie PSAs										
Propagation Phase										
Road Shows										
Program Toolkit										
Password Portal										
Campaign Promotions										
Interactive Web Game										

reflects the resources needed to implement the campaign or the success of the campaign may be compromised. For example, the accuracy of the budget for government communication efforts can be especially important because of the way in which fiscal resources are allocated. If the campaign budget reveals a proposed campaign cost of $750,000, often that is the exact amount of financial resources allocated or granted to the campaign effort, not a penny less or a penny more.

Although campaign expenditures are not publicly available for IRWD's See It From Your Lawn's Perspective Campaign, it can be assumed that significant resources were needed to implement the successful public information campaign effort. It is important to note, however, that very effective public information campaigns can be executed on a limited budget, especially if they are local in their focus or take advantage of earned or shared media tactics.

Communication: Implementing the Campaign

After much planning, it is finally time to develop campaign messages. The main goal in this stage of the process is to develop a message that resonates with the audience. There are many factors to consider when designing effective messages. Not all of them can be reviewed in one short chapter, so we'll point out some of the important considerations that need to be addressed, but please be aware that this is not a complete list of all the communication variables that may affect message design.

Message Goal

The first decision needs to be the desired response from the target audience(s). Is the goal of the public information campaign awareness, instruction, or persuasion? In other words, is the goal simply to make the audience aware of the issue/information so they seek out additional information (awareness), or is the goal to educate the audience so they have knowledge about what to do and how to do it (instruction), or is the goal to change the attitudes or behavior of the audience by convincing them of the validity of the argument (persuasion)? The goal of the communication professional is to understand what messages will be most effective given the goals and the methods and tactics chosen to distribute them.

The goal of the IRWD campaign was twofold. Some of the materials, such as digital and social media messages, were designed simply to reinforce the existing conservation mindset and to motivate information-seeking actions by providing a web address. Other aspects of the campaign, including cable TV ads and video spots, were designed to persuade. Providing more information in these formats allowed the IRWD to convince the target audience that they needed to change their water usage behaviors by helping them "see irrigation from their lawn's perspective."

Credibility

Campaign messages need to be perceived as credible by the target audience(s). Credibility is usually determined through an evaluation of the message source. In fact, research suggests that there are three dimensions to credibility: the first is that the source of the message needs to be competent or show expertise, the second is that the source of the message needs to be perceived as trustworthy, and the third is that the message needs to demonstrate goodwill rather than self-interest. Credibility is akin to beauty in that it most certainly is in the eyes of the beholder. Just because a communication professional believes a message is credible does not mean that the target audience(s) will see it the same way; therefore, we strongly suggest using audience research to determine what or who will be perceived as credible by the target audience(s).

The communication team for IRWD did not use a spokesperson to deliver campaign messaging. Instead, commercials humorously portrayed individuals playing the role of a blade of grass being overwatered by an intense sprinkler. The use of a "person like you" encouraged customers to place themselves in the visual and think about irrigation from their lawn's perspective. So, while the credibility of a "spokesperson" was not relevant, the credibility of the organization was relevant. Credibility, in this case, was established through the expertise shared on the website and social media channels as well as the demonstration of goodwill through social good messaging.

Attractiveness and Relevance

Campaign messages should be engaging, attractive, and relevant to the target audience(s). This is true for the visual and image-based aspects of the message – what the audience sees – as well as the language and text-based aspects of the message – what the audience reads. Attractiveness commonly refers to the visual images used in the message as well as the interesting or pleasant language used to convey desired information. Relevance suggests that the audience should be able to see how the message can be applied to their own lives, establishing a personal connection to the message or ego-involvement. Just as we suggested with credibility, it is important that communication professionals use audience research obtained in the previous steps of this planning process to identify the images and phrases that will be perceived as attractive and relevant to the members of the intended audience.

The reason that both the images and the text of campaign messages must be viewed as attractive and relevant is that the members of the target audience(s) are going to pay attention to different aspects of the message. Some people are going to pay attention to the words of the message; communications scholars call this central or systematic processing, and people who do this are likely not only to read the information in a message but also to do some "issue-relevant thinking" in which they compare and relate the new information to similar information they already know. This type of processing is very persuasive, and usually results in long-lasting behavior change.

Although some people will process messages centrally, other individuals are likely to ignore words but pay attention to the visual images that complement the message. When this happens, individuals are doing what scholars call peripheral or heuristic processing. This means that they are not likely to be thinking about the message content, but instead they are likely to be using simple decision rules to make choices related to the message. These individuals may be influenced by the attractive woman in the skimpy bikini, or the muscular man wearing no shirt, or the beautiful rolling countryside, or the scary looking monster. Peripheral factors can be somewhat persuasive, but the persuasive effects are likely to be short-lived. So, to be most effective, communication professionals want messages that appeal to audience members using both types of processing. It is important to note that with repeat exposure, simple decision rules can lead to the issues-relevant thinking that is needed for long-lasting persuasion. Pay close attention to both the visual appeal and the verbal appeal of the messages being designed in order to ensure both central and peripheral processing options.

Attractiveness and relevance were also important to consider in the IRWD's water conservation campaign. The District wanted relatable actors and models in their ads that were attractive, but not overly attractive, since the goal was to encourage a "personal like me" reaction from the target audience. To be sure that they chose appropriate actors and models, the planning team used focus groups to test visual and textual aspects of their messaging. The participants said they found the people in the messages to be both relevant and real, and that the featured communication channels were effectively delivering the campaign's messages. Similarly, at the same time the ads were being developed, the District also created a website containing both textual information and visual images. Once again, attractiveness and relevance were key components in designing the website, resulting in an interactive site that was both visually pleasing and full of important, applicable information.

Emotional Appeals

A common strategy in public information campaigns is to motivate behavior change by presenting a message that causes an emotional response from the audience. Two of the most common emotional appeals are fear appeals and humor appeals. Both can be used effectively, but also need to be developed carefully.

A fear appeal involves threatening the audience with unpleasant outcomes that could occur if they do not comply with the message recommendations. The "Click It or Ticket" campaign was an excellent example of a fear appeal, because it clearly informed the audience that if they were caught driving without wearing a seat belt, they could face unpleasant consequences like a hefty fine. However, it also offered a clear method for avoiding these consequences – to avoid a traffic ticket and the associated fine, all one needed to do is wear a seat belt when driving. As a result, the campaign was quite effective at increasing seat belt usage.

While fear appeals can be very effective in persuading audiences, not all campaigns should use fear appeal messages. Communication professionals should consult the results from their audience analysis and carefully weigh the pros and cons of scaring individuals into complying with message recommendations. If it is decided that a fear appeal is appropriate, there are four steps that must be followed to develop an effective fear appeal. First, the message must contain a clear threat, such that the consequences of not following the message recommendations must be obvious and fearful. In the "Click It or Ticket" seat belt campaign, the threat in the message is that people who don't wear seat belts will receive a ticket, and as a result, pay a fine. Second, in addition to being scared by the threat, audience members must perceive themselves as vulnerable to the threat. If they see that something bad might happen, but they don't think it could happen to them, they will not be persuaded by the message. Showing the likelihood of a negative outcome, or showing its immediacy rather than distance, can increase a sense of vulnerability. Third, the message must show the audience that there is an action they can take to prevent the negative consequence from happening. Obviously, this step is the goal of the campaign, and shows the desired behavior the communication professionals are trying to produce. Fourth and finally, the audience must believe they can perform the desired behavior. Even if they know it can prevent the negative consequence, if they feel they cannot act on the desired behavior or message recommendation, then they will simply experience fear and not be able to take steps to prevent the negative outcome from happening. Thus, if people felt like they were incapable of fastening a seat belt when driving, they might constantly be fearful of getting caught and having to pay a fine. Including these four elements in any fear appeal should help produce the desired response.

Just the opposite of scaring the audience, humor appeals work by inducing a feeling of mirth or amusement, by causing the audience to chuckle or laugh. This typically happens when situations are perceived as being incongruous, unusual, or out of place. Research shows that the value of humor appeals is in the ability to attract attention, and the more attention an audience pays to a message, the more likely it is that the message will influence the desired outcome. Humorous portrayals of social issues have been shown to be particularly effective with young adults.

One explanation for the effectiveness of humor appeals suggests that processing humor is a cognitively taxing activity, so making sense of the humor means fewer cognitive resources are available for other tasks like paying attention to the content of the message. This means that the target audience(s) is less likely to engage in central or systematic processing (discussed earlier) to critically evaluate the contents of the message, and they are more likely to rely on simple decision-making cues, or heuristics, when making sense of the message.

The See It From Your Lawn's Perspective Campaign clearly incorporated an effective humor appeal. Residents of California had years of experience with mandated water restrictions. They did not need be educated or engage in critical thinking on the topic of outdoor water use because they were already familiar with the importance of conserving water. By providing a message that showed a person being watered like a blade of grass, the District made the audience laugh but also triggered a mental shortcut, or heuristic cue, which reminded customers that water conservation remains important. They reinforced existing attitudes and created top-of-mind awareness to instigate behaviors that were previously mandated. While the commercials made people laugh, the IRWD website provided information to answer the why behind the campaign message. The commercials and videos triggered a heuristic cue while the website engaged critical processing of detailed information, addressing different types of persuasive appeals.

One-Sided or Two-Sided Messages

A decision that the communication professional must make is whether to use a one-sided message or a two-sided message. A one-sided message presents only the case favoring the desired behavior, without mentioning the opposing side or drawbacks associated with the desired behavior. A two-sided message strategically raises the opposing side's arguments and then refutes these arguments, showing why the desired behavior is preferred. Most of the research evidence suggests that two-sided messages are more persuasive and perceived as more credible than one-sided messages. In other words, it usually is best to address the "other side" rather than ignore it. The only exception is when formative research results suggest that the target audience(s) is already favorable toward the desired behavior; only in this case should a one-sided message be used.

In the case of the IRWD campaign, it was not necessary to create a two-sided message because their residents were quite familiar with, and favorable toward, conservation. They wisely chose to have a little fun with something that had been a burden for so long. We reiterate that it is critically important to use research to determine whether the target audience is favorable toward the desired behavior. If they are, then a one-sided message will work well. If, however, a large portion of the audience is opposed to this behavior, a two-sided message will be needed and should explain the opposing arguments while demonstrating why the desired behavior is a better option.

Summary

Considering each of the principles and practices listed previously should provide a solid foundation for message design, we also realize that each campaign is going to find each of the principles important at different times, so we cannot provide specific recommendations that will be the “right” answer for all campaign. Instead, we share these suggestions for communication professionals as a reference throughout the message design process.

A final thought regarding the communication phase: Although it helps to have a communication expert in house when designing campaign messages, it is not necessary. Many campaigns that have been produced by governmental agencies were created by individuals who were biology, history, or social work majors when they were in college. However, if some expertise is desired, but the budget does not allow for hiring such a person, we have a suggestion: Recruit a communication intern from your local university or college! Depending on current needs, it may be worthwhile to consider a student majoring in communication, marketing, advertising, visual design, or any number of communication-related disciplines. Since the authors of this chapter are communication professors, we can attest that our students learn how to design messages for various audiences using communication strategies grounded in best practice, but we are certain that students in other relevant majors may provide helpful expertise as well.

Evaluation: Measuring Campaign Effectiveness

Once the campaign has been implemented and the target audience has been exposed to the message, it could be very easy to sit back and enjoy the “success” of your efforts. But work on the campaign is not yet finished! Evaluation is a critical component of the campaign planning process. Evaluation involves the use of research procedures to determine whether the campaign was effective, how it did and did not achieve its objectives, and the efficiency with which it achieved them. In other words, the campaign’s “success” cannot be concluded until evaluation research has shared evidence of that success.

Three main questions should be answered through the evaluation:

- To what degree did the campaign reach its objective(s)?
- How or why did the campaign work?
- What lessons can be learned for future public information campaigns?

Two different types of research help examine the effectiveness of the campaign: process research and outcome research. Process research usually involves collecting data on when, where, and for how long the campaign is active. For example, the evaluator might want to watch television at pre-specified times to verify that the ad was played the number of times it was supposed to be played. Outcome research is conducted by collecting data to measure the program's impact. This data collection could be done using quantitative measures such as surveys, or qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups, but no matter which method is selected, it is important to include both people who have been exposed to the campaign and those who have not been exposed to the campaign in the evaluation research. This control group provides a comparison and allows the evaluator to determine just how effective the campaign has been.

Some of the critical variables that should be assessed during the evaluation phase include the following:

- Campaign Exposure. This is the extent to which the target audience(s) has seen, can recall, and/or can recognize the campaign materials. Process evaluation can help determine the level of exposure to the campaign message, but only outcome research can provide information about whether members of the target audience(s) recognize or recall the campaign message or specific components of the campaign.
- Interpersonal Communication. Public communication campaigns can be effective at stimulating interpersonal communication. If a target audience member sees one of the campaign tactics, it may or may not change his or her behavior. But frequently this target audience member is likely to mention aspects of the campaign to a friend, coworker, or family member. When these friends, coworkers, and family members are then directly exposed to the campaign message, research suggests they are more likely to pay attention because they have been primed to the information. Outcome research can help the evaluator determine if interpersonal communication played a role in the campaign's effectiveness, and if so, how.
- Campaign Impact. Clearly, the goals of a campaign are to change audience knowledge, attitudes, and/or behaviors, so it is critical to measure changes in these variables.

A good way to approach evaluation is to consider each objective separately. The See It From Your Lawn's Perspective Campaign used this approach in the evaluation. Their first objective was to raise awareness of the continued need for water conservation. Process research provided the campaign evaluators with initial information; for example, it was noted that the digital content of the campaign was accessed 9.54 million times, and the cable TV ads were viewed by 2.7 million people. The new online watering guide posted on the website received more than 33,000 clicks. A total of 53 million impressions occurred across all platforms, and because of all their initiatives, the messages reached more than 96% of the target audience.

The second objective of the campaign was to reduce water usage. Outcome research indicated that water use for the period following the launch of the campaign was reduced by 5.51% compared to the prior year. To be sure that this reduction was due to the campaign, post-campaign surveys were conducted measuring residents' awareness of the campaign, their ability to recall campaign messages, and their current attitudes and behaviors toward water conservation. Only by using several different methods of evaluation, both process and outcome resulting in both quantitative and qualitative data, could the IRWD reach the conclusion that the See It From Your Lawn's Perspective Campaign had met both of the specified objectives, and therefore, was successful. Evaluation research also allows communication professionals to revisit the theory selected at the beginning of the campaign process to determine if progress had been made. Based on the information obtained, results suggest that the majority of the target audience moved back into the action or maintenances stage of the TTM. Revisiting theory is another important component of the evaluation process that allows the campaign planners to assess their success.

When evaluation shows that campaigns have been successful in achieving their objectives, everyone involved is pleased. But what happens when evaluation does not demonstrate success? Most importantly, if this happens, remember not to panic. This outcome should be used as a learning opportunity to discern which parts of the campaign process need more attention the next time. Questions to be asked include: Was more research needed to gain more comprehensive insights before moving to the action phase? Was the theory selected appropriate for guiding campaign development or might a different theory be better? Were the goals and objectives reasonable and achievable? Did we have enough information about the target audience? Were the strategies and tactics effective in achieving campaign goals? Were the time and budget allocations sufficient for what we were trying to accomplish? Was the right message used to reach the target audience(s)? Did our evaluation assess all important aspects of the campaign? Answers to these questions will allow communication professionals to be better prepared for the next adventure in public information campaigns.

Chapter Summary

Public information campaigns involve detailed planning, creative execution, and careful evaluation. Following the RACE model for campaign planning will result in campaigns that effectively deliver the desired message to the appropriate target audience(s). Always begin with research that describes the situation and the target audience(s) and select a theory that will help guide your campaign planning. Take action by setting clear goals and objectives, creating an audience profile, developing specific strategies and tactics, and constructing guidelines for a timeline and budget. Develop communication that is appropriate for the target audience and clearly expresses the messages of the campaign. Finally, conduct a thorough evaluation to determine the success of the campaign. Following these steps, your campaign may produce the next memorable slogan to get stuck in people's heads or create desirable behavior changes that benefit your communities. Please allow us to conclude this chapter with our best wishes for success in your next public information campaign.

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5 Crisis Communication Challenges in the Public Sector

J. Suzanne Horsley and Matthew S. VanDyke

Introduction

Government communicators are familiar with the daily crises that arise at public sector organizations, but managing those crises at the various levels of government can be more challenging for them than their peers in the corporate world. Anyone who has worked or consulted in government public affairs knows that managing a crisis can be complicated by taxpayers' opinions, elected officials' agendas, appointed officials' objectives, and laws particular to the public sector – and these are just the domestic concerns. When crises encompass foreign issues, they add a whole new dimension to this complex environment.

Practitioners' gut instincts about the communication challenges of the public sector have been confirmed by research. While studies have defined the unique obstacles and opportunities found in the public sector (Horsley, Liu, & Levenshus, 2010; Liu, Horsley, & Yang, 2012), what can communicators do to be more prepared to meet those challenges and succeed in their objectives?

This chapter examines four crises that occurred at different levels of government, discusses the subsequent communication responses, and offers solutions for managing similar issues in the future. The unique environment of the government sector is explained in models developed specifically for government communication. Finally, this chapter summarizes crisis communication resources that are designed just for government communicators.

Modeling Government Communication

Crises have been a primary impetus for the growth of U.S. government public relations throughout modern history. World Wars I and II and the Great Depression all led to creation of committees, departments, and the predecessor of the U.S. Information Agency that used communication to combat negative public opinion and to generate support for the expansion of the federal government. Elected officials needed public relations to promote their plans for recovering from these economic and social crises (Cutlip, 1994). Writing in the wake of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl, McCamy noted that the objectives of government publicity included improving morale during financial crises, promoting the work of agencies that were put in place to improve the economy, and responding to criticism of these agencies and programs (1939). The bottom line for the development of government public relations was that public sector officials recognized the value of open communication with all publics during turbulent times, regardless of the objective.

While the practice of government communication is very similar to the private and nonprofit sectors, the differences are apparent when examining the underlying operating environment. Tactically speaking, government communication encompasses media relations, public communication, responses to public inquiries, various educational outreach efforts, and campaigns for public support of government initiatives (Lee, 2008). These practices translate easily to other sectors and use the same delivery channels. However, when you overlay politics, legal considerations, budgetary concerns, and general professional development opportunities for communicators in the public sector, the differences become more apparent.

Liu and Horsley (2007) first developed the Government Communication Decision Wheel (GCDW) to define and establish the unique obstacles and opportunities that are inherent to the public sector. The initial study presented the four unique micro-environments (intragovernmental, intergovernmental, multilevel, and external) to explain how government communication is seldom done within the boundaries of a single office or agency. Intragovernmental applies to a single agency, intergovernmental applies to multiple agencies at the same level of government, multilevel concerns government organizations at a combination of local, state, or federal levels, and external pertains to a public sector organization working with an entity from the private, nonprofit, or foreign sectors. The model also explains how the communicator chooses channels of communication on a spectrum of direct to mediated (i.e., owned or earned media) within each micro-environment. This initial look at the operating environment revealed that the communicator was already working in a complex environment.

Subsequent surveys of communicators built upon the GCDW's model by examining the juxtaposition of corporate and public sector communication (Liu, Horsley, & Levenshus, 2010), and by adding layers of complications from different levels of government (Horsley, Liu, & Levenshus, 2010), elected officials (Liu, Levenshus, & Horsley, 2012), and the efficacy of media relations activities in overcoming negative news coverage (Liu, Horsley, & Yang, 2012). This final study is of particular relevance to this chapter. See Figure 5.1 for an illustration of how the GCDW works in communication decision-making.

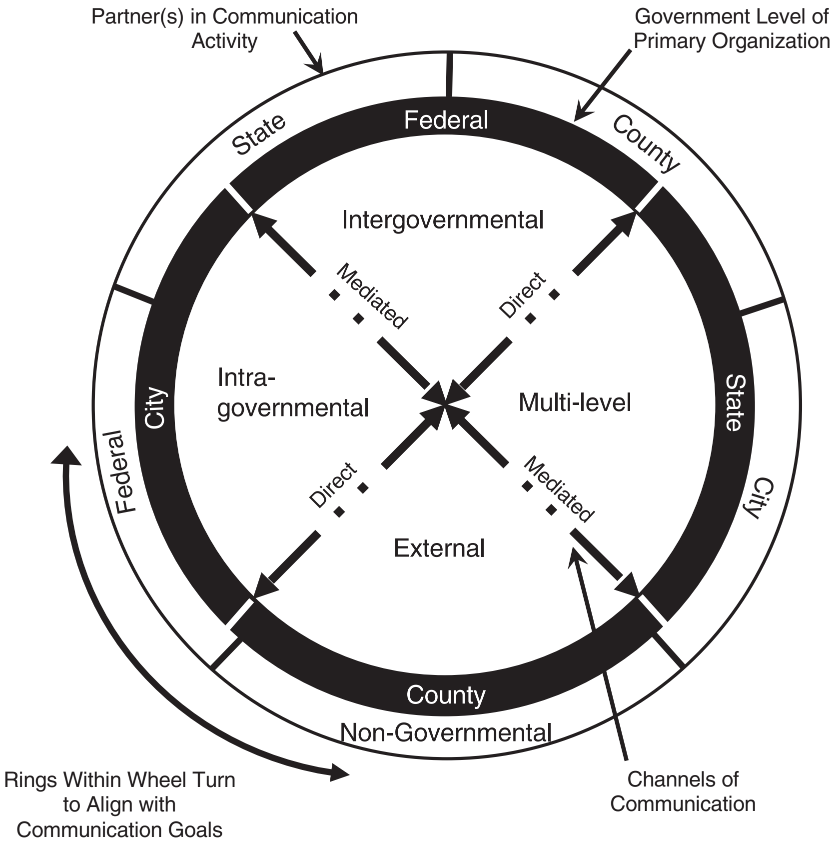

Figure 5.1 Government Communication Decision Wheel

Source: Adapted from Horsley, Liu, & Levenshus, 2010.

A conflict emerges between the duty of open public communication and issues that are internally facing, such as budget needs, politicians' approval, impact of public opinion, Congressional actions, and political agendas. When the media coverage turns negative, it can be more challenging to regain credibility and public trust. The survey of 2,525 U.S. communicators working for government and business employers revealed some important connections between their work and the sentiment of media coverage. Media relations activities were found to be more important for government communicators than their corporate peers; a wide array of tactics from news releases to media pitches were found to have a positive result on image of the government entity. This suggested that proactively working with media can positively support government initiatives (Liu, Horsley, & Yang, 2012).

In contrast, the same survey found that communication planning and research activities, including crisis communication plans, had a negative correlation with positive news coverage. The study suggested that government communicators may be having more reactive than proactive interactions with media, especially in times of crisis, and simply don't have the time and resources to put into planning. Another explanation is that the planning occurs after a crisis already has emerged, which suggests that government communicators are not taking advantage of the benefits of advanced planning, environmental scanning, and crisis management strategies (Liu, Horsley, & Yang, 2012). In other words, crisis management is only happening after the news has already turned negative.

So, the question remains: how can our understanding of the unique obstacles, constraints, and opportunities that exist in the public sector inform crisis communication practices? First, we must examine a critical factor in public opinion: trust and conflict in government.

Trust and Conflict in the Public Sector

Conflict manifests in many forms. In government and politics, conflict may occur, for example, in the form of disagreements between political parties as to how Congress should appropriate taxpayer monies, in tensions between groups advocating for particular legislation, and between countries who decide to engage in war. Conflict happens when "groups direct their efforts against each other, devising actions and communication that directly or verbally attack the other group" (Wilcox, Cameron, & Reber, 2015, pp. 249–250). Regardless of how conflict manifests, conflict management is a key component of contemporary public relations practice. Use of public relations during the course of a conflict can reduce reputational or relational damages an organization may experience (Wilcox, Cameron, & Reber, 2015).

Conflict management works to address issues, risks, and crises facing an organization. Although the focus of this chapter is on *crisis*, here we define *issue* and *risk* as well in order to distinguish these related concepts and to illustrate how any situation or event labeled a "crisis" may evolve or devolve into an issue or risk (or develop into other issues or risks); similarly, issues and risks may easily intensify into a crisis. An issue is a contestable matter of fact, value, or policy, the resolution of which has implications for how an organization conducts business (Heath & Palenchar, 2009). An issue occurs when people perceive a problem (e.g., lack of government oversight), they attach importance to that problem, and they want action to be taken to resolve it (Botan & Taylor, 2004; Crable & Vibbert, 1985). A risk is defined as a potential danger to people or to the things people value (McComas, 2006). A crisis is the manifestation of a risk (Heath & Palenchar, 2009). As these definitions suggest, crises may emerge due to real or perceived dangers or problems that a group of people want to be solved or resolved. Indeed conflict and crisis can take many forms – internal (e.g., disagreements between policy advisors) and external (e.g., advocacy for specific legislation), between governments (e.g., countries negotiating trade policies) and within governments (e.g., Congressional oversight of the executive branch) – and governments and their employees often find themselves managing crisis.

Practicing crisis management, and public relations more broadly, in the public sector is often challenging due to current levels of distrust in government. According to Edelman's Trust Barometer 2020 (Edelman, 2020), only 42% of people globally have confidence that their government leaders can successfully address their country's challenges; moreover, government largely is viewed as incompetent, unethical, and unfair. However, the report's findings also indicated that in most countries, local government is more trusted than federal government. According to Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism's 2020 Digital News Report (Newman et al., 2020), which surveyed participants in the U.S., United Kingdom, Germany, Spain, Argentina, and South Korea, a majority of people (59%) trust their national government's information about the coronavirus pandemic, while only 35% trust information about the pandemic from individual politicians.

Challenges and opportunities for trust in government are more pronounced in the United States specifically. The Pew Research Center (2019) reports that Americans' trust in government is at a historic low, with only 17% of Americans saying they trust Washington to do what is right. A majority of Americans believe that their fellow citizens' trust in the federal government has been shrinking and that Americans' low trust in the federal government makes it more difficult to solve problems facing the U.S. (Rainie & Perrin, 2019). These findings may be particularly troubling as organizations with favorable pre-crisis reputations may suffer less reputational loss, less negative publicity, and fewer external allegations from crises than organizations with unfavorable pre-crisis reputations (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2015).

However, eight-in-ten Americans believe that confidence in government can be restored, in part, through increased transparency (i.e., disclosure of what government is doing) and regulation (e.g., term limits for politicians). Research demonstrates that transparency can restore trust and lessen risks or damages to an organization's reputation (Auger, 2014). Interestingly though, a majority of Americans holds primarily favorable views of many federal agencies, including the U.S. Postal Service, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Census Bureau, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Reserve, the Internal Revenue Service, Veterans Affairs, and the Department of Justice (Pew Research Center, 2020, April 9). Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Department of Justice were the only two agencies reported in which Republicans held primarily favorable opinions compared to Democrats, who held primarily unfavorable opinions of the agencies (Pew Research Center, 2020, April 9).

Making crisis management and public relations more of a unique challenge in the U.S. public sector is the fact that by law the U.S. government is limited in how it can practice public relations due to the Gillett Amendment (Gelders & Ihlen, 2010). The Gillett Amendment, passed in 1913, mandated that the U.S. government cannot appropriate funds for publicity purposes unless specifically authorized by Congress. The legislation was extended in 1973 with law that "prohibited government spending on 'publicity or propaganda purposes designed to support or defeat legislation pending before the Congress'" (Broom & Sha, 2013, p. 11). Scholars have called for repeal of the Gillett Amendment, given society's distrust in government, particularly because it delegitimizes the value of modern public relations practice, which is governed by ethical codes of conduct, evidence-based theory, and professional associations (Taylor & Kent, 2016). Such regulation may limit the government public communication necessary for relationship-building in modern American democracy. Research has examined how governmental and quasi-governmental agencies work to practice public relations, build trust, and engage publics – particularly in risk and crisis contexts (Avery, 2017; Avery & Kim, 2009; Jin et al., 2019; Kauffman, 1997; Kauffman, 2001; Kauffman, 2005; Lee & VanDyke, 2015; Lee, VanDyke, & Cummins, 2018; Liu et al., 2020; Liu, Lai, & Xu, 2018; VanDyke & King, 2018; VanDyke & King, 2020). Previous research demonstrates governments should work to build publics' *trust* in order to maintain mutually beneficial relationships and favorable reputations, and there seem to be opportunities to do so.

Indeed, leadership, communication strategies, and crisis characteristics have demonstrably affected trust and related outcomes in crisis contexts as past research demonstrates. In the context of local governmental crises, research findings reveal that people intend to follow local government advice even when the local government is held accountable for a crisis; however, crisis accountability tended to negatively impact people's relationship with the local government and their perceived collective efficacy (Bakker et al., 2018). Moreover, demonstrating empathic concern in crisis information enhanced levels of collective efficacy, but did not repair the government-citizen relationship. Organizations facing preventable crises tend to yield low levels of trust among stakeholders, perhaps because the organization is viewed as responsible, which results in lower organizational reputation (Kim, 2019).

Perceptions of governmental expert efficacy have been shown to increase trust and decrease perceived governmental responsibility (with benefits for governmental reputation) during times of heightened risk (Crijns, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). Related, transformational (e.g., charismatic and visionary) leaders and transparent communication have been demonstrated to foster trust, which may lead to favorable attitudes, openness, and support (Yue, Men, & Ferguson, 2019). Research findings examining government public relationships demonstrate that successful experiences with governmental informational online services and social media are associated with greater trust in government, though unsuccessful online experiences may decrease trust (Hong, 2013). Perceptions of government efforts to engage in dialogic communication during crisis may mitigate distrust in government and perceived situational uncertainty (Kang, Kim, & Cha, 2018); however, perceptions of low dialogic communication by government may lead to high distrust, cynicism, anger, anxiety, and situational uncertainty among citizens, and consequently, intentions to take actions against the government. Indeed, research demonstrates that distrust (compared to trust) is a motivating factor for stakeholder behaviors, such as information-seeking and mobilization (Cheng & Shen, 2020).

As previous work reveals, although conflict and crisis may occur in government, building and maintaining trust with stakeholders is key to navigating such challenges. In the sections that follow, we rely on four cases – Sharpiegate, the U.S. government response to the novel coronavirus pandemic, the shutdown of the U.S. National Park Service, and U.S. officials' non-traditional use of media to engage stakeholders – to illustrate how recent crises have tested relationships between local, state, and federal governments and the publics they serve. These cases demonstrate the complexities of crisis communication challenges in the public sector, identify issues of conflict and trust in the public sector at various levels, and highlight lessons to be learned moving forward.

Case Studies in Public Sector Crises

Four recent government crises illustrate the particular challenges of managing a crisis in the public sector. Each case is summarized, analyzed within the context of the GCDW and concepts of trust and conflict, and concluded with advice for best practices.

Hurricane Dorian – Alabama Controversy: Sharpiegate

Hurricane Dorian formed in the Atlantic Ocean on August 24, 2019, and had weakened to a post-tropical cyclone by September 7, 2019. During this timeframe, Hurricane Dorian was recorded as one of the most powerful hurricanes to form in the Atlantic Ocean, as it claimed 84 lives and more than $4 billion worth of damage in the Bahamas and along the eastern coast of the United States and Canada (Avila et al., 2020; United Press International, 2020).

The Sharpiegate crisis arose from controversy between President Donald Trump and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) regarding the forecasted states Hurricane Dorian would likely impact as it approached the United States. On September 1, 2019, President Trump tweeted about Hurricane Dorian's approach, and incorrectly included Alabama while mentioning states that would likely be impacted by the hurricane; later in the day, he relayed this information to reporters (Ramos & Edelman, 2019). In contrast to this information, by September 1, forecasters did not predict that Hurricane Dorian would impact the state of Alabama. Approximately 20 minutes after Trump's September 1 tweet, the National Weather Service's Birmingham Weather Forecast Office tweeted information contradicting President Trump's earlier tweet, stating "Alabama will NOT see any impacts from #Dorian. We repeat, no impacts from Hurricane #Dorian will be felt across Alabama. The system will remain too far east" (Cook, 2019; Wu, 2019). The Birmingham office reportedly was unaware of President Trump's tweet at the time and claimed to have tweeted the contradictory information upon a heavy influx of social media and phone activity following the president's tweet (Klar, 2019).

In response, President Trump doubled down on his claim through a series of tweets arguing he was right (Lewis, 2019). From the Oval Office on September 4, President Trump displayed the National Hurricane Center's August 29 map predicting Hurricane Dorian's trajectory; the diagram, shown in Figure 5.2, appeared to be altered with a black marker extending the displayed cone of uncertainty of the hurricane's potential track into southern Alabama (Cook, 2019; Pengelly, 2019). President Trump claimed to not know how the map became altered, and the event led to #SharpieGate trending on Twitter with users posting photos in parody, which they modified with black marker (Panetta, 2019; Pengelly, 2019).

In response to the incidents on September 1 and September 4, National Weather Service employees were told to only provide information from

Figure 5.2 Sharpiegate Photo

official National Hurricane Center forecasts, and not to provide any opinions about Hurricane Dorian (Freedman, Itkowitz, & Samenow, 2019). On September 6, NOAA released an unsigned statement supporting President Trump's claim about the hurricane's potential impact on Alabama and stated the National Weather Service-Birmingham office was incorrect in its "absolute" description that the hurricane would not affect Alabama (Feldscher, 2019). The September 6 statement prompted backlash from meteorologists, the National Weather Service Employees Organization, and former NOAA officials (Carlisle, 2020; Feldscher, 2019), as well as a series of investigations. Hurricane Dorian did not impact Alabama, but instead tracked up the eastern U.S. coastline as forecasted.

The Sharpiegate controversy yielded at least two notable issues of conflict and trust that we elaborate here: the public crisis – or the illusion of uncertainty among authorities and the discrediting of scientific expertise – and the internal crisis – illustrated by conflict between the executive branch and representatives at various levels of NOAA's organizational hierarchy. Applying the micro-environments in the GCDW model, this was both an intergovernmental and external crisis; there was conflict among federal entities that overflowed to the media, meteorologists, and the public that may or may not be in the path of a destructive storm. In an uncertain time, such as an impending hurricane, the public needs clear and accurate information to make informed decisions.

The public crisis was related primarily to the illusion of uncertainty among experts and authorities, which was seemingly an unhelpful and unnecessary diversion (and crisis) with serious implications for public safety. President Trump seemingly relied on outdated information in a context where forecasters constantly update and refine their projections; for example, Miami-based hurricane forecasters issue regularly scheduled hurricane reports at least four times per day (Cook, 2019).

In addition to the public crisis, an internal crisis also ensued. More than 1,000 emails released in response to a Freedom of Information Act request from Buzzfeed News revealed NOAA officials' frustration, confusion, and anger at President Trump's repeated claim that Hurricane Dorian might affect Alabama despite scientists' judgments to the contrary (Carlisle, 2020). Indeed, two-way symmetrical communication and transparency have been demonstrated as robust predictors of employee communication behaviors (Kim, 2018); arguably a perceived lack of support, dialogue, and transparency from leadership could have negative consequences for employee engagement, morale, and future behaviors and trust in their employer. As this case demonstrates, initial crises (e.g., seemingly public controversy) can potentially lead to additional issues, risks, or crises (e.g., affecting internal organizational processes and employees) that may lead to additional issues of conflict and trust.

The Commerce Department inspector general's report concluded that the White House pressured NOAA to issue the political statement that rebuked the NWS-Birmingham office (Freedman & Samenow, 2020); specifically, the president's then-acting chief of staff instructed the Commerce Secretary on September 5, 2020 to correct the public record in favor of Trump – both officials were involved in the approval process of NOAA's unsigned statement. The inspector general found that the statement "damaged NOAA's reputation for issuing apolitical guidance and eroded public trust in an agency tasked with protecting life and property" (Freedman & Samenow, 2020, para. 3). The report also made note of the perhaps longer-term consequences of NOAA's rebuke of the NWS-Birmingham office, including potential effects on forecasters' future public safety messaging behaviors, and the effects on public trust of future NWS forecasts.

Related research suggests that the illusion of uncertainty where, according to evidence, none should exist might have negative implications for the public. For example, research findings suggest that providing false equivalence in news coverage (i.e., providing equal representation of contrasting viewpoints) where scientific consensus exists may heighten public uncertainty about such issues, whereas accurately portraying scientific consensus when it exists may decrease public perceptions of uncertainty (Clark, Dixon et al., 2015; Clarke, McKeever et al., 2015; Dixon et al., 2015; Kohl et al., 2016). For government communicators, the lesson is to reduce uncertainty as much as possible, and to avoid even the appearance of partisan politics when lives and property are in peril.

The U.S. Response to COVID-19

On December 31, 2019, government officials in Wuhan, China, reported that health authorities had been treating multiple cases of what appeared to be pneumonia of an unknown cause. On January 20, 2020, confirmed cases of the virus were reported in Japan, South Korea, and Thailand – with the first confirmed case in the U.S. reported in Washington state the next day. On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared the virus a global health emergency, and on January 31, the U.S. began enforcing travel restrictions into the U.S. for any foreign nationals who traveled to China within the past 14 days excluding permanent residents and immediate family members of American citizens (Taylor, 2020).

On February 11, 2020, the WHO officially named the virus COVID-19, which stands for coronavirus disease 2019 (Taylor, 2020). The first reported COVID-19 death in the U.S. occurred in February 2020, and by March 26, the U.S. led the world in confirmed cases, reporting more than 80,000 cases and more than 1,000 deaths. From the virus's inception in the U.S. until now, the U.S. crisis response has revealed a complex situation with multiple conflicts and trust issues between the U.S. executive branch and non-governmental organizations such as WHO, federal agencies including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), leading public health experts, and state and local governments – all with conflicting opinions and approaches to managing the public health crisis. At the time of this writing, the pandemic is ongoing. As of August 2020, more than 14.7 million people have contracted COVID-19 globally, and more than 610,000 have died from the disease (Taylor, 2020); according to the CDC COVID Data Tracker, there have been more than 5.8 million cases and more than 180,000 deaths in the U.S. alone (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020).

Although the federal government provided economic relief to Americans in the form of a one-time stimulus check for those who met tax and financial requirements (Villarreal, 2020), and provided financial relief to American businesses and workers (Tankersley et al., 2020), the federal government has largely left the onus for the public health crisis response on states and local authorities (Achenbach et al., 2020). For example, on March 30, individual states began issuing stay-at-home orders, and by April 2, nearly 10 million Americans were out of work (Taylor, 2020). Amid rising concerns about job loss and the perhaps more immediate risk of economic insecurity, some states, such as Texas, initially eased restrictions in an effort to restart the economy all while numbers of coronavirus cases and hospitalizations continued to increase. Still, other states' governors, such as Florida's, resisted mask and distancing mandates for weeks, while Georgia's governor voided all local mask mandates in the state (Achenbach et al., 2020). Some states like New York were more cautious with re-opening their economies, were stricter with restrictions, and largely saw coronavirus cases decrease over time. Now states and local authorities around the U.S. continue to monitor the number of COVID-19 cases in their jurisdictions and adopt and adjust guidelines and mandates to address their current realities (Soucheray, 2020).

Amid the lack of a clear, consistent national response strategy to the outbreak from the executive branch (Achenbach et al., 2020), President Trump has often disagreed publicly with recommendations from his own administration, including public health experts. For example, he downplayed the importance of testing in controlling the spread of coronavirus, and repeatedly stated that more testing will reveal more coronavirus cases (Hellmann, 2020). Although the CDC recommended as early as April that citizens wear a face mask in public, President Trump announced in a daily White House coronavirus briefing that month that he probably wouldn't follow the guidelines (The Associated Press, 2020), and in the same month, he encouraged via Twitter protests of social distancing orders in some states (Taylor, 2020).

President Trump shared content flagged as misinformation on Facebook and Twitter that advocated for hydroxychloroquine as an effective COVID-19 treatment (of which there was then no evidence to support its efficacy as a potential treatment) and stated that face coverings and shutdowns were ineffective solutions to combating the disease (BBC News, 2020a). Moreover, some citizens across the U.S. have protested what they view as mandates that violate their individual rights, and consequently, have refused to wear masks or engage in protective measures, such as social distancing (Achenbach et al., 2020). Over time, Republican officials and members of the Trump administration began wearing face coverings in public (Murphy & Siemaszko, 2020), and in July, President Trump publicly wore a mask for the first time, following repeated recommendations from Trump aides that his wearing a mask was a much-needed message for Americans still showing resistance to adhering to face-covering guidelines (Taylor, 2020).

The executive branch often has undermined expert guidelines during the pandemic. For example, in July 2020, President Trump tweeted that the CDC's guidelines for re-opening schools in the fall were too expensive and burdensome and that they needed to be revised; he also threatened to cut funding for public schools that did not fully open in the fall (Soucheray, 2020). Similarly, President Trump and his administration have cast doubt on leading public health advisors' credibility and recommendations, including Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the NIAID, who defended his character and his recommendations amid the scrutiny (Lovelace, 2020). In response to Fauci's suggestion that high coronavirus infection rates stemmed from a non-aggressive response from the U.S. in areas such as stay-at-home orders and other shutdowns, the president said he was "Wrong!" (Helmore, 2020).

Due to the tentativeness of scientific evidence and a lack of evidence to support confident conclusions about the efficacy of public health recommendations during the early stages of the pandemic, public messaging about protocols for mitigating the spread of coronavirus (e.g., wearing masks, washing hands, and social distancing) have been ever changing and strengthened over time as updated evidence was reported (Achenbach et al., 2020). Although updates to information are necessary as it becomes available, contradictory messages and a lack of transparency in some messaging have perhaps affected trust in the government's response to COVID-19. For example, the Trump administration relieved the CDC's control over collecting coronavirus data and instead ordered U.S. hospitals to send all relevant COVID-19 patient information to a central database in Washington, D.C., controlled by the CDC's parent agency, the Department of Health and Human Services. Although officials suggested the change was made so that the White House's coronavirus task force could more quickly make decisions and allocate resources to those in need, the database would no longer be public, which would affect the work of researchers, modelers, and public health officials who rely on CDC data for decision-making and projections (Stolberg, 2020).

Further, experts worried that centralizing public health data under a seemingly political apparatus would lead to distrust. Even as evidence-based mandates for wearing face coverings and physical distancing became relatively commonplace, the CDC revised its guidance in mid-August 2020 to suggest that individuals who had been exposed to COVID-19 do not necessarily need to be tested for the disease if they do not have symptoms. This new guidance prompted backlash from public health experts who noted that many individuals with COVID-19 are asymptomatic but may still transmit the virus to others who are more vulnerable; critics noted that such revised guidance threatens contact tracing efforts aimed at curbing coronavirus transmission (Hellmann, 2020).

Issues of conflict extended to relationships between the U.S. and broader non-governmental organizations. On July 7, 2020, the Trump administration notified the United Nations that it would withdraw the United States from the WHO (Taylor, 2020). The Trump administration accused the WHO of mismanaging the pandemic and withholding important information about the virus that hindered its response (BBC News, 2020b). And although the WHO continues to lead the global response to COVID-19, the scientific community has raised criticisms and concerns that the organization's recommendations at times lag behind the expanding scientific evidence (Mandavilli, 2020). Still, the United States has increasingly found itself isolated by its COVID-19 response as the rest of the world has partially or fully reopened and has largely exercised control over the spread of COVID-19. For example, by the end of June 2020, the European Union had lifted travel restrictions for 15 countries, but not the U.S. due to its failure to control the virus (Murphy & Siemaszko, 2020).

Recent public opinion data may shed light on how these events may have affected Americans' confidence and trust during the crisis. According to Pew data, most Americans feel that state governments lifted coronavirus restrictions too quickly, and although positive evaluations of the performance of public health and state and local government officials have declined since March, most Americans reported feeling that their local hospitals, public health officials, and state and local governments are doing at least a good job in responding to COVID-19 (Pew Research Center, 2020, August 6). In contrast, President Trump's ratings related to the coronavirus outbreak response and his overall job approval both have declined since March. However, some reported evaluations broke along partisan lines with Democrats (72%; compared to Republicans at 53%) reported as more likely to say that public health officials' response has been good; Democrats were also more likely to offer positive evaluations of state and local governments' response to the outbreak (Pew Research Center, 2020, Aug. 6). In contrast, a majority of Republicans (73%) reported positive ratings related to Trump's coronavirus response, whereas only 6% of Democrats felt positively about it (Pew Research Center, 2020, Aug. 6).

As this case demonstrates, crisis communication challenges, such as those revealed through the COVID-19 pandemic, are often multi-faceted (e.g., tensions associated with parallel crises related to public health and economic concerns and points of controversy between multiple agencies). The U.S. government response has demonstrated a lack of consistent, strategic leadership, challenges due to the politicization of public health, a lack of essential funding for public health crises, and socioeconomic and racial disparities and inequities leaving many citizens susceptible to the disease and its consequences (Achenbach et al., 2020). Mixed messaging from national, state, and local authorities, public health experts, and other information sources only adds to affected publics' heightened uncertainty and susceptibility to potential harm. This crisis demonstrates that perhaps a lack of clear national crisis communication strategy, and worse, the transmission of mixed messages and conflicting advice from officials, agencies, and public health authorities may likely fuel politicization of public health crises and may deteriorate relationships between agencies, officials, and the public. Related, the prevalence of mixed messages, lack of transparent data, and lack of transparent decision-making (e.g., justification for changes in guidelines) may only further lead to distrust; nonetheless, a clear lack of adherence to and enforcement of recommended guidelines between cities, states, and nationally only make managing crisis – particularly a pandemic, which is impervious to geographic boundaries – much more difficult.

This ongoing crisis encompasses every micro-environment of the GCDW: intragovernmental, intergovernmental, multilevel and external. It also demonstrated conflict with government's primary objective to serve the public good. The most significant issues emerged when individuals or entities that were not an expert in the topic at hand attempted to insert uninformed opinions or recommendations contrary to scientific evidence. The conflicts within the U.S. public sector had a direct impact on the public's trust. The lesson for government communicators and their agency leaders is to stay within their own scope of expertise and to show deference to those who have the responsibilities and knowledge of the subject matter at hand. In this case, the coronavirus response guidelines should be developed collaboratively by the scientists and medical professionals and amplified by every level of government. Speaking the same language with one voice would prevent confusion and resulting uncertainty by the American public.

The Impact of a Government Shutdown on the National Park Service

In October 2013, the National Park Service (NPS) became the face of a national crisis that was out of its control: a shutdown of the federal government (Franke-Ruta, 2013; Shear, 2013). The shutdown was caused by Congress's failure to pass a budget for the upcoming fiscal year by the September 30 deadline (Weisman & Peters, 2013). In the absence of funding, federal agencies such as the NPS were required by law to furlough all non-essential employees (Cohen, A., 2013). As a result, the NPS closed all national parks and monuments because of inadequate personnel to secure and maintain them (Condon, 2013).

The closure of the NPS assets had nothing to do with parks and monuments, of course. The shutdown resulted from partisan disagreement over funding for President Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act (Cohen, T., 2013). The Affordable Care Act became law in March 2010, but after Republicans regained control of the House of Representatives in the midterm elections, they attempted to follow through on their campaign promises to repeal Obamacare (CNN Staff, 2010). As the September 30 deadline for the federal budget approached, both sides of Congress refused to compromise (Weisman & Peters, 2013). On October 1, the federal government shut down for the first time since the mid-1990s (Matthews, 2013).

The shutdown lasted for 16 days, but the visual evidence of the effect on the nation's public parks would be hard to forget. The ropes, chains, and other barriers that went up around many monuments, such as the Lincoln Memorial, struck many as an extreme maneuver, and the situation attracted the intense and prolonged scrutiny of the national news media (Goode, 2013).

The media broadcast powerful videos of elderly World War II veterans storming barricades erected around the memorial on the National Mall that was dedicated to them and their fallen comrades (Ruane & Wilgoren, 2013). Photos of overflowing trashcans and private citizens mowing lawns around national monuments angered Americans who accused the NPS of neglecting these public treasures (Appleton & Stracqualursi, 2014).

Even though the parks and monuments were closed, with 87% of NPS employees on furlough, communicators continued their work because the NPS contingency plan stated "communication with employees and the public" was an essential function (Jarvis, 2013, p. 3). As a result, tasks such as the posting of signage announcing closures at all NPS locations, website updates, and responses to the media continued throughout the shutdown. However, even though communication continued, the efforts of the NPS public relations staff were impeded by several obstacles and challenges that are identified in the GCDW.

The NPS case demonstrated the complexity of the public sector operating environment, with three of the four GCDW micro-environments in play simultaneously during this crisis: intergovernmental, multilevel, and external (Graffeo & Horsley, 2019).

Intergovernmental

Because the crisis at hand originated with a partisan dispute in Congress, many voices at the federal level were communicating about this issue. In a speech, President Obama attempted to persuade Congress to reach an agreement by underscoring the pain that would be caused by a closure of NPS facilities. Sally Jewell, secretary of the Department of the Interior, which oversees the NPS, communicated directly to NPS employees to help them understand the contingency plan during the shutdown and which essential functions would continue. Members of Congress shared their opinions with the media in relation to the NPS closures as they worked to gain support for their plans. And, of course, NPS spokespeople were attempting to protect their reputation by explaining to the media and public why they had to close parks and not allow the public to approach monuments that seemingly didn't require any resources to keep them accessible. Several federal-level entities had a stake in the NPS closures, and each was communicating to gain support for their perspective.

Multilevel

The ripple effect of the government shutdown extended to states that relied on tourism at national parks located within their borders. States such as Utah, South Dakota, Colorado, and Arizona had nothing to do with the budget impasse in the nation's capital, but they were now going to lose income from tourists visiting NPS sites within their states. Governors made their case to take over administration of parks so they could be reopened and restore their states' tourism economy. These moves also reinforced a basic tenet of government – to serve the public good – and elevated their reputations among Americans who were angry at Washington.

External

The external micro-environment is composed of a government entity working in cooperation with a non-governmental organization, such as a private company or a nonprofit. In this case, nonprofits were called to testify before Congress on the punitive and extreme nature of the NPS shutdowns. Members of Congress were relying on nonprofit partners to help justify why an agreement on the budget needed to be reached quickly before more harm was done to the NPS and the citizens that benefited from them (Graffeo and Horsley, 2019).

The conflict created by the budget crisis touched the lives of everyday Americans and caused them to lose faith and trust in federal programs. If it is true that most people don't care about politics until it affects them personally, then canceling vacations to national parks, seeing images of filthy park restrooms and piles of trash, and being prevented from visiting memorial sites laid a blow to American sensibilities and values. There were certainly more issues besides the NPS created by the shut down as government offices and programs across the country were temporarily closed or suspended and government employees missed paychecks, but the highly visual framing of the issue around the NPS assets created a public relations crisis that the park service had to respond to in order to regain the confidence of the public.

In a crisis, the organization at the center of it all cannot come out unscathed if it cannot manage the conversation. The NPS case clearly demonstrated how difficult this can be for a government entity to maintain control of the messaging in the midst of a much larger, albeit unrelated, public predicament. There are several lessons to be learned from this case. Government communicators need to prepare crisis and contingency plans that can be adapted to the crisis du jour. Communicators need to be able to explain complex situations, like why the World War II Memorial was roped off from visiting veterans, and work to keep their agency's point of view in the conversation when other voices are trying to dominate. And, when the organization's reputation is at stake, communicators should partner with private and nonprofit organizations that can support their cause. Losing control of that message can lead to a crisis of public opinion about your organization, even if the crisis originated elsewhere.

Social Media Accounts as Official Communications

Barack Obama was the first U.S. president to use Twitter, albeit hesitantly. On May 18, 2015, he tweeted, "Hello, Twitter! It's Barack. Really! Six years in, they're finally giving me my own account" from @POTUS44. Obama tweeted about his travels, people he met, his favorite sports, messages of support after disasters or tragedies, political endorsements, and, of course, legislative or administrative actions that he supported. While his tweets are archived by the National Archives and Records Administration, they were not his primary means of communicating about official matters. He and his administration still relied on traditional communication channels such as memos, press conferences, websites, and media relations.

Since Obama's venture into social media, Twitter has become a platform for official communication for all levels of government, from mayors to governors to the current president and all bureaucrats in between. Today's government communicators rely on social media channels to instantly reach the public in good times and bad. While this has made government information more accessible and timely and has presented previously unreachable mechanisms for two-way communication, the move to social media has also created complex issues when it comes to criticism from citizen followers and the account owner's perceived right to protect their personal accounts.

President Donald Trump, who is known for his prolific tweets that often stir up controversy, blocks accounts that post disapproval of his actions. The Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University sued Trump on behalf of people whom the @realDonaldTrump account blocked after they posted tweets that criticized the president. Once they were blocked, they no longer had access to the president's tweets, which the plaintiff's argument stated was an infringement on their First Amendment rights. Attorneys for Trump argued that the account, @realDonaldTrump, was private, and therefore Trump could use the platform just like any other user (Romo, 2019). Trump had the Twitter account before he became president, and he believed he had private ownership of that account that allowed him to use all the features of this platform, including blocking others from seeing his posts.

When the case reached the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, the judges unanimously upheld the lower court's opinion that Trump had violated the First Amendment by blocking individuals from seeing his tweets. The court ruled that Trump was using his account as an official channel of communication and, therefore, the public had a right to have access to his tweets. Even former Press Secretary Sean Spicer had stated that Trump's tweets were part of the official White House record (Romo, 2019). As of August 2020, Trump had filed his appeal to the Supreme Court of the United States and was awaiting a decision (Wolf, 2020). There also are questions of the legality of Trump deleting tweets, which he has done on numerous occasions. White House officials have claimed they are following the National Archives and Records Administration mandate to record all tweets, including those that are deleted, for the presidential archives (Samuelsohn, 2017).

Other government officials have also been sued for blocking people on social media from participating in the constitutional right to public discourse and access to information. In 2019, a Virginia court ruled that a local public official could not block citizens from a Facebook page. That same year, Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez settled a lawsuit after she blocked someone from her Twitter account (Gross, 2020). Alabama's Secretary of State, John Merrill, was sued in 2018 by the ACLU of Alabama for also blocking people from seeing his Twitter account. Once again, the plaintiffs claimed he used it to post information related to his elected position. Similar to the other cases, the plaintiffs stated that by blocking those who were critical of him, Merrill was limiting free speech by preventing access to public information and thwarting public debate. Merrill claimed it was a personal account and that the public could call his cell phone instead ("Judge," 2020). However, calling the secretary on a cell phone would not have the same reach as posting questions or replies on a publicly accessible social media platform. As of this writing, a decision on the Merrill case had not been issued in federal court.

Missouri Gov. Eric Greitens used his personal Facebook account to hold town halls using the platform's live streaming features. He took questions from followers and made policy announcements during his efforts to increase transparency with his constituents. Because he was using a social media account, the question was raised as to whether his posts and direct messages on that account were subject to the state's sunshine laws. Despite Missouri records retention guidelines advising that public employees not use personal accounts to conduct official business, Greitens continued to use his personal accounts to hold town halls, and he blocked many followers from having access to his communications. The state's attorney general sided with the governor stating that his personal account was not subject to open records laws. After declining an open records request from the media, Greitens and his administration created official social accounts, but the governor continued to stream the town halls from his personal account. His stance that the Facebook Live town halls improved transparency contradicted the fact that many of his constituents were not able to participate after being blocked. This issue has yet to be decided by the courts (Weinberg, 2018). Meanwhile, the outcome may be moot as Greitens announced his resignation just months later in May 2018 in the wake of multiple criminal and ethics charges (Smith & Bosman, 2018).

These social media cases illustrate the basic principles that government communication should be open, transparent, and accessible by all citizens. The GCDW includes legal issues as both a challenge and an opportunity for public sector communicators, but the fundamental availability of public information is a critical component of this model (Liu & Horsley, 2007). The First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States guarantees the right to freedom of speech and the right to petition government for redress of grievances. When government officials routinely use social media accounts to post official information or to respond to citizen inquiries, they cannot limit access to their posts under the justification that the accounts are private.

The conflict that results from the limitation of First Amendment rights creates a crisis of trust and credibility. As we noted above, Americans' trust in government is at an historic low. Auger (2014) found that increased transparency can restore trust and reduce reputational damages. However, as government officials and bureaucrats rely more on the ease and speed of social media to get out their messages, imposing limitations on those platforms will impede transparency and threaten trust. Claims that the public can get the information elsewhere, such as by visiting a website or calling a phone number, do not justify limiting public access to another source. The legal environment of American government protects these rights and guides the day-to-day activities of government organizations at all levels.

Barack Obama may not have foreseen the legal implications of using social media when he announced his arrival to Twitter in 2015, but today's government communicators understand its value for public discourse. These legal challenges have made it clear that social media are not just a diversion, but they are platforms for open, transparent, and constitutionally protected speech. Best practices that have emerged from these legal challenges include:

- Don't initiate official communications on a social media account unless you plan to continue using that same account for official government business.
- Social media posts made on behalf of a public official or a government entity are subject to the same legal standards as any other government records.
- Do not delete social media posts; issue corrections or addenda if needed. All social media communication should be recorded and archived.
- Just as a private enterprise has rules for what is or isn't posted on its social accounts, so should government entities. Government communicators should establish social media policies and procedures that follow all legal and regulatory guidelines.
- Build trust and credibility with constituents by providing timely, accurate, and truthful information on social media accounts. Not only will this help in the event of a crisis, but it will help *prevent* a crisis of public confidence.

Conclusion

These four cases illustrated the complex issues of conflict and trust in light of the particular environmental concerns of public sector organizations. An understanding of the unique obstacles and opportunities inherent to government communication as modeled by the GCDW, overlaid with the concepts of conflict and trust, can help public relations professionals navigate the challenging, yet rewarding, landscape of government crisis communication.

Additional resources for transparent and ethical crisis communication practices in the public sector are available from the National Association of Government Communicators (nagc.com), the Public Relations Society of America (prsa.org), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (cdc.gov).

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6 Strategic Communication Planning in the Digital Age

Diana Martinelli

Government Communications Evolves

Strategic communications have been an integral part of formal government communication campaigns for more than a century. Well-known examples include the Committee on Public Information's efforts in World War I and the Office of War Information's activities in World War II. Lesser-known examples include Gifford Pinchot's promotion of the fledgling U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Children's Bureau's efforts to reduce maternal and infant mortality in the early 20th century. Our federal government originated the title of "public affairs" to differentiate it from the self-serving publicity prohibited by the 1913 Gillett Amendment, and today our federal government may have the world's largest cadre of public information and public affairs employees in the world.[1,2] After all, a government "of the people, by the people and for the people" – and funded through their taxes – has much about which to communicate in order to *serve* the people.[3]

Despite this vast scope of federal – not to mention state and local – government communicators, concentrated strategic communication efforts may remain relatively rare. While general strategic planning is an accepted part of doing business in government agencies, annual strategic communication planning may not be as common. This notion lies in stark contrast to the private sector's use of strategic communications in its public affairs, defined as: "the public relations practice that addresses public policy and the publics who influence such policy."[4] In fact, corporate public affairs has been recognized as a professional area of concentration since at least 1954, when the Public Affairs Council, a professional association of corporate public affairs officers, was developed.[5] Only recently, the Advocacy Association was launched to create a supportive network of advocacy professionals who seek to be leaders in affecting policy and government affairs.[6]

Government-employed public affairs employees likewise have a professional group: the National Association of Government Communicators. Although its roots stem from the same era as the Public Affairs Council's, theirs was not a proactive formation, but a defensive one concerned with trying to save their jobs after a revival of Gillett Amendment sentiment in Congress and a cry to reduce government employees after World War II.[7] Perhaps this tense history is one reason why government communicators may remain more comfortable working primarily on communication tasks as they arise and less through more research-based, strategic approaches, such as they might for a focused public information campaign, as described in Chapter 4.

In fact, annual strategic communication planning mirrors that of specific campaigns, but while one might think of a public information campaign as educational to better public life, a strategic communication plan is intended to help the organization improve. To do so, its strategic plan may well include both internal audiences, or employees, as well as external constituents. With either group, building and sustaining relationships is critical.

While there are lots of definitions for public relations, the Public Relations Society of America defines the practice as "a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics."[8] Typically, there are three major government public relations purposes: the mandatory/expected (media relations, public reporting), the pragmatic (customer and client responsiveness and outreach), and the political (increasing public awareness and support). Lee's Chapter 2 has a more in-depth discussion of these purposes.

Of course, building true relationships requires listening and dialogue and not just the dissemination of information. Contemporary public relations scholars have embraced this idea by exploring "co-creation of meaning." Whereas a functionalist approach to public relations focuses on communication techniques solely to achieve organizational ends, co-creation occurs when publics' needs and desires are expressed and heard by practitioners, who use that information to help their organizations create better value and societal good.[9]

Such authentic communications seem warranted now more than ever: the latest edition of the Edelman Trust Barometer found that government and media were both deemed largely incompetent and unethical, with trust in the government faring slightly worse. Therefore, the traditional means of reaching publics – traditional media – are not only splintered in terms of their audiences, but they also lack credibility with them.[10] However, today's proliferation of social media allows mediated dialogue, "listening" and responses in real time.[11]

As you will read in Chapter 7, the growth of social media applications influence not only elected government officials but also the increasingly information-hungry public, who expect their local, state, and federal governments to use these technologies to more effectively listen and serve. In fact, social media are used by all parties interested in public sector decision-making, including developers, applicants, advocates, nonprofit organizations, as well as government entities themselves.[12] Such real-time information is critical if entities are to be more responsive and useful to constituents and if they are to proactively practice "issues management."

By its nature, issues management is a strategic planning process that should be continuously practiced as part of any unit's strategic communications plan. Far different from issue communications, it involves active environmental scanning; that is, media monitoring; legislative monitoring; and active, authentic listening and responding across constituent groups. According to the Issue Management Council, a professional membership organization, issue management is "the systematic process used to align organizational activities and stakeholder expectation, creating the capacity to act quickly in order to seize opportunity or to avert risk before impacts or implications become relevant to business operations and/or reputation."[13]

The man credited with first defining and proposing issues management, Howard Chase, recognized the applicability in both corporate and public realms. He said it was a "procedure for more effective participation in the corporate and public policy process … and can be seen as a vital tool in the total executive management decision making process."[14]

In addition to active issues management, government communicators may want to apply marketing principles to their communication efforts to engage more citizens in new or existing government services. Marketing today has a more relationship-centered focus, which aligns it closely with public relations functions. Modern marketers go beyond the traditional "four Ps" of product, price, placement/distribution, and promotion to center customers instead of products in their work. That is, modern marketers want to understand customers' needs and wants; they know that "price" is different from "costs," which include human and environmental capital – or costs to society; they want to offer convenient options for accessing products or services in multiple ways; and they want to engage in two-way communication (not just one-way publicity) to develop relationships with customers, who then develop loyalties to and provide feedback to enhance their brands.

Over the past couple of decades, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of modern marketing and public relations functions within government agencies. Marketing specialist John Cagle was a thought leader in 1999, when he wrote: "It is obvious that the success of [the Federal Highway Administration] in meeting its vision hinges on the agency's ability to 'create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational objectives.' That means FHWA must know and meet the needs of its customers (including the general public) and its partners."[15]

While the author writes this chapter, public health departments are simultaneously seeking citizen engagement for contact tracing, while educating and leading government officials in decisions related to local COVID-19 policies and practices – all while also listening to and taking leads from the Centers for Disease Control. Indeed, government communications around an issue has never been as pervasive as it is right now, dwarfing the typically pervasive national decennial census campaign. Still, the latter's final formal communications plan, approved in March 2020, details its research, audiences, strategies, tactics, and evaluation criteria. Wisely, a crisis plan is included as well.[16]

Modern audiences expect to have the ability to choose what they read, and many believe they should be able to contribute content and opinions, too. Thus, the above campaign includes not only an official website, but a Facebook page and Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Instagram accounts. This shift, sometimes called the social media revolution, emphasizes the key factors of journalism: transparency, honesty, and giving a voice to those without formal power or expertise.[17] However, intentional disinformation has been shown to be a real threat by political extremists, foreign governments and conspiracy theorists as well. Therefore, stating clearly one's organizational values around communications is another reasoned action for government entities to consider, if they've not yet done so. By making public one's guiding principles, such as the CDC has done, it helps center expectations both externally and internally and focuses an organization's communications around serving the public good.[18]

But before crafting strategic communication plans, one must realistically identify the unit's resources and administrators' expectations. There is wide variance in the relationships between communications staff and top-level administrators. Just as effective public relations must stem from the top – often called the "dominant coalition" in public relations literature – for any organization's communicators to be truly effective, they must have the buy-in and support of management. If not, the communications planning process and efforts are likely to fail. A unit inside a large Midwest state's Department of Transportation provides an example of this necessity.

After working with this author to develop a strategic plan, the unit became a national model for other states, and made good progress for two years toward its goals. Agency administrators were regularly updated of the unit's progress and pleased with the results. However, when a new administration took over, the leadership did not buy into the plan, likely because it developed under prior leadership. The new administrators also did not see the value of public relations beyond its traditional media relations (promotional) function. They did not understand the strategic, long-term benefits of developing and sustaining positive relationships with its constituents. As a result, the communications personnel were frustrated, and although their strategic planning process remained, their plans became far more limited and short-sighted.

Creating a Strategic Communication Plan

So how does one begin the strategic planning process? First, the communicator should discuss how strategic planning helps the larger unit achieve administrators' goals to get their support for the process. Then the communicator or communications team needs to revisit the larger unit's vision, mission, and how communications contributes to and supports them. Depending on the size and culture of your agency or unit, you may or may not be familiar with this larger vision.

Often, visions – what the organization aspires to become – are disseminated only internally, if they are articulated at all. Even if a vision has not been crafted for your agency or organization, it behooves you to have the conversation about vision with your top administrators. Their vision for the agency is important to understand and disseminate, for all supporting actions should be consistent with this long-term aspiration.

When administrators understand that their unit will help contribute to the agency's overall vision, mission, and specific goals in a systematic and measurable way, the planning process and its activities become far more valued. When employees understand an agency's vision and goals and how they contribute to them to better serve the public, they too become more invested in the process and can be your most visible and important ambassadors.

Setting Goals

Once the specifics of the unit's vision and mission are on paper, the plan should identify the larger agency's overall goals for the upcoming year and any specific public relations problems or opportunities relevant to those goals. Often, it's helpful to think about overarching organizational goals as involving one of these three main aims:

- Reputation management
- Relationship management
- Task management

Reputation is just that – enhancing or repairing an agency's perceived character with its publics. It may mean being seen as more responsive, more modern, more efficient, or more trustworthy. Relationship management goals might include fostering more dialogue with constituents more actively supporting the unit's diversity, equity and inclusion efforts; or building more buy-in from employees for new processes or procedures. Task management goals involve very specific actions, such as increasing the number of voters or public meeting attendees, greater constituent compliance with regulations or safety programs. When thinking about your agency or department's goals for the coming year, thinking through each of these management categories can be useful.

Conducting Research

Research to define the unit's current situation should be conducted at the outset. The basic questions of who, what, when, where, how, and why will help you better understand the problems, opportunities, or goals of your government agency or department. For example, who will be affected by this goal? What is the essence of the problem, opportunity, or goal?

Your research should include a *situation analysis* of the unit's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats or challenges (SWOT/Cs) that are relevant to the organization's goals. It also can be helpful to think about the current political, economic, societal, and technological environments (PEST) in which your organization is operating.

Understanding Constituents

Identifying the affected or desired audiences needed to help the organization meet its internal goals is essential as well. Each affected or targeted audience should be as fully defined as possible to better understand their wants, needs, contributions, and beliefs relative to your organization. For example, who they are demographically in terms of age, income, educational level, and size/makeup of household? Who are they psychographically, meaning what kinds of lifestyles, interests, and values do they share? Where are they geographically? What do they currently know and think about your organization or unit? Are they participating in your programs, services, and meetings? Are they offering feedback, praise, or criticisms? Who and where are the people who might best reach and influence them? For example, are they trusting of employee peers, local officials, social service workers, educators, experts, or social media influencers? Identifying such "influentials" can be helpful when you plan organizational or community meetings, use spokespersons, or profile certain employees or service users for promotional purposes.

It may help you to create a persona for each audience group to better visualize your various audience member "types." The insights gleaned from your audience personas can be used to tailor your communication strategies and messages, whether through owned (like your website), earned (through traditional media outlets), paid (through ads or public service announcements), or shared (through social) media outlets. (Refer to Chapter 6 for details regarding the latter.) Audience personas can help you inform content creation, education campaigns, and media selection to ensure progress toward your unit's goals.[19]

Although most government entities don't have the resources to conduct regular public opinion polls, units can survey employees (ensuring their anonymity, of course) and can often obtain informal, anecdotal information from meetings, social media monitoring, website analytics, email feedback, and even traditional media coverage about your organization and its services. We know from academic agenda-setting and framing studies that the amount of attention and media coverage given to specific issues influences the importance people assign to those issues, and how they come to think of them. Therefore, tracking communication and media coverage about particular issues, reviewing any feedback from correspondence you've received, and documenting social media opinion patterns can provide much intelligence for your agency.

In addition, you may want to seek out opinion polls conducted by others, such as news networks, nonprofit groups or research organizations like the Pew Research Center to gain insights into sentiment about various issues, from politics to the economy, the environment, wellness practices, and health care. And, of course, don't forget the U.S. government's myriad free databases as well, such as the Bureau of Economic Analysis, Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance, Housing and Urban Development, Substance Abuse and Mental Health, STAT-USA, and many others. You might even contact a local reference librarian to help you find information about specific topics/issues of interest.

If you have the funds and an urgent problem (such as a controversy) or constituent service opportunity (through new tax bases, for example), you may want to solicit help from your local college or pay a local research or PR firm to conduct a formal opinion poll. However, for less critical information, you may also gain information through informal and inexpensive means, such as service user surveys, focus groups, or interviews. For most government entities, much information is already available and can be tracked through your agency or unit, such as numbers and types of calls received, services provided and to whom, web usage/analytics, media coverage, emails, social media followers and comment tone, to help get a sense of any problem issues and to help identify meaningful objectives to work toward in the coming year.

Also, as noted in Chapter 7, remember to monitor social media to understand the larger voice of your audiences as well. Whether your communications staff follows the local city council, related nonprofit or advocacy organizations, and/or various political groups relevant to your unit's goals and work, social media platforms can help provide a snapshot of how the community views a topic or situation. Such work allows for real-time insights into the information your audiences are interested in and where/on what platforms they are consuming that information.[20]

Specifying Objectives

Once you have some understanding of what your key audiences already likely know, think, and are doing, you can set realistic, measurable, and deadline-oriented objectives that specify what you want these audiences to know, feel, or do as a result of your communication activities. An example of internal performance objectives set by a federal national laboratory includes the following:

> *Enhance the responsiveness of Laboratory communications with internal and external stakeholders.* Specific activities to be measured could include inquiry and response documentation through a

database to allow tracking of internal and external concerns and the development and posting of official agency FAQs on issues.

Create opportunities for stakeholder involvement and participation in Laboratory decision-making processes. Specific activities could include the development of a Community Advisory Council.

Achieve a better understanding of internal and external stakeholders. Specific measurement activities could include bi-annual surveys that could be tracked over time and the development of a community speakers' bureau to interact with the community.

Note that each of the objectives above could easily include social media-related activities; each also should have a deadline, which might be a specific month or quarter by which each activity is completed. Common goals and objectives supported by social media that you might consider in your strategic communication plans include the following:

- Develop awareness about an issue or entity
  Increase reach, mentions and/or impressions by x% by [date].
- Strengthen engagement
  Increase interactions of the target audience (likes, comments and/or shares by % by [date])
- Monitor feedback
  Note the occurrence of and correct inaccurate information within 12 hours
  Report the prevalence of positive, negative, and neutral comments/responses monthly
- Gain followers
  Increase social media followers by x% by [date]

Each of your communication plan objectives – whether social media oriented or not – should be:

Specific as to action
Measurable to assess progress
Attainable/realistic to achieve
Relevant to the goal being pursued
Time-bound/deadline-oriented

The list above refers to the framework of "SMART" objectives, which help focus your actions to lead to meaningful unit results.[21]

Crafting Key Messages

After preliminary information is gathered regarding goals, audiences, and objectives, key messages are crafted. These messages should help the unit reinforce its "brand" and value and achieve its mandatory (public reporting), pragmatic (unit responsiveness) and political (goodwill) communications through objectives that consider audience knowledge and reputation, attitude and relationship, and behavior and task management.

To be received and remembered, the messages must appeal to the audience's self-interest. In other words, what is the benefit to the audience of paying attention to this message? In marketing terms, we often call this the unique selling proposition (USP). Highlight the benefit or USP in the key messages to your identified audiences and repeat those messages regularly through multiple platforms.

If your agency or department doesn't already have a slogan or tagline that emphasizes its mission/value – or if a new educational campaign is being launched – consider developing and integrating one to use on the website, on letterhead, in presentations, in public service announcements, as an ongoing hashtag in social media.

Regular, repetitive messaging is the key to breaking through our cultural cacophony to create awareness, influence attitudes and ultimately spur behavior. Key messages create focus both internally and in the minds of your audiences.[22] Message development should be based on what you've learned and know about your audiences and should help fill the gaps between their current knowledge and perceptions and those desired to reach your goals.

When creating your messages, be careful of internal "group think." Communicators and managers often believe they have a good grasp of what their colleagues and audiences know, think and do; however, research often proves otherwise. Therefore, don't skip the initial research steps; then test your messages before they are incorporated into your plan. Such testing needn't be a resource-intensive process.[23]

Today, through such approaches as social media A/B testing, you can obtain audience insights quickly.[24] However, you must always keep in mind the audiences you desire to reach. For example, if you want to reach a rural, senior citizen demographic, social media testing likely will not represent their views. Instead, you might have your communications team or other employees informally ask seniors they know to react/respond to the key messages you're planning.

They might ask what springs to mind when they hear them? Do the messages make sense? Do they recall how to respond to them? Keep in mind that such informal testing focuses people's minds on the messages, whereas in the real marketplace of ideas, these messages are among hundreds and thousands of others. Therefore, if people struggle with remembering or understanding your messages in these situations, you know you need to further hone – and further test – them.

Employing Multiple Strategies

Communication strategies help you more effectively tell your story, develop relationships, enhance reputation, and persuade people to act.

As noted in previous chapters, they can range from in-person communication opportunities to enhancing your website's search engine optimization to ensure it displays prominently when people seek information and services on their own.[25] Not surprisingly, in-person (interpersonal) communication is known to be the most effective way to meaningfully connect with others, and it can be employed through such activities as meetings; trainings; customer service; speeches; or presentations to internal or external audiences.

Of course, as discussed in other chapters, electronic and digital engagement is the most common way communicators today reach and influence audiences. For some government communicators, those methods may entail older strategies, such as email links on the unit's website or even a telephone number. For others, having social media presence makes sense, but only if there are adequate staffing resources to monitor and respond in a timely manner. Even a unit that uses Twitter to provide emergency or important updates, for example, should also have sufficient resources to monitor and respond to that platform during non-emergency times as well. In thinking through possible strategies, it's helpful to think about the benefits of all types of media, be they owned, earned, paid, or shared and to employ them accordingly.[26]

Regardless of unit resources, communicators need to consider several factors before choosing the strategies they will employ. They must understand their audiences' communication preferences, how simple or complex the issues and the messages they want to relay are (for example, print and digital media are more suitable for complex issues than are broadcast or social media), the timeliness associated with the communications, and the strategies that will be most effective to help achieve specific knowledge, attitude and behavioral objectives and goals.

Key message repetition and consistency are needed to cut through the distractions of modern life, so key messages should be disseminated through as many applicable media channels as possible to reach your specific audiences. Such consistency extends beyond USPs, taglines, logos, and hashtags; even the use of consistent colors to represent your agency or a particular campaign makes a difference in how readily your audiences identify your "presence."

Influencers or opinion leaders who can speak on behalf of your agency or provide testimonials can be powerful in gaining people's attention. We know from the communication concept of *homophily* that people tend to be more open, receptive to, and persuaded by messages from people who are perceived to be similar to themselves. Also, messages that include both emotional and logical appeals can be effective, with emotional appeals particularly useful for gaining attention and making messages more memorable. Logical appeals tend to be well received by more highly educated and analytical audiences, particularly for "high-stakes" – or more difficult or expensive – audience actions.

One must always remember that spurring behavior is the hardest part of any communication effort. Behavioral motivation takes time and requires messages that resonate repeatedly to lead people from the knowledge/awareness stage to a point where they are ready to act. This reality is important to consider as you develop your annual or campaign-specific communication plans.

Developing Tactics

Finally, the communications plan must be formalized and integrated. Specific tasks or tactics must be outlined to carry out the identified strategies to help you meet your objectives and thus, the organization's goals. You might think of tactics as the specific mechanisms through which your unit's messages will be distributed. (For example, an organization's reputation goal to "become more visible in the community" might include a strategy of interpersonal communication with the objective: "to schedule at least one external presentation per quarter to a local civic or school group." Therefore, the tactic would be the development of a presentation and the confirmation of its delivery.)

These communication tools or tactics, including website updates, training sessions, social media posts, news releases, videos, speeches, etc. must be included in the plan. Each should be designed to carry key messages for its intended audience and include a specific call to action, which tells people how they can act on the message. For example, some form of contact information can be given, so people may learn more or register for a service or ask questions or better follow the organization. These actions can then be tracked to help you assess responses and results. Of course, personnel and a monetary cost must be assigned to each task and tactic as well to allow for budgetary and operational planning.

Creating a Timetable

It is helpful to create a Gantt-like chart (see Chapter 4 for an example of a Gantt chart) in Excel or some other spreadsheet software to view at a glance your communication plan's scheduled task deadlines and personnel assignments. Such a visual helps the communications team ensure consistent messaging and workload distribution throughout the plan's timeframe.

A regular "drip" campaign is common in annual communication plans, for it disseminates key messages to audiences steadily over time. However, if a unit needs to communicate something new, different, or urgent, such as a pandemic response, a "rapid fire" approach to communication is more effective. This latter approach "front loads" messages using multiple strategies and tactics, with far more repetition in a shorter time frame than "drip" campaigns. Because the message involves something new, audiences must first receive and process that information before they can simply be reminded of it through less frequent messaging. Therefore, the initial burst of messaging should be more frequent and widespread.

Being Inclusive

Unit employees must be included in and informed about the strategic communications plan and its importance, ideally from top management. With this insight, activities take on higher priority and employees understand the unit's key messages, constituents, and overall organizational goals.

It is critical that employees who participate in message dissemination, be it outreach activities or telephone and email correspondence, understand their important role in the process. One disgruntled employee who, for example, believes that such activities only increase workloads, can derail the unit's efforts to enhance reputation, relationships, and service. Therefore, authentic internal discussions and realistic outcome objectives are important elements in gaining participating colleagues' support.

Tracking Progress

Strategic communication plans should be dynamic documents that are continuously evaluated against desired results and adapted accordingly to help meet objectives and goals. As mentioned above, objectives should be developed and shared among staff and management each year, even if it just builds upon the previous year's document.

Conclusion

With a formal plan in place, you can document how your unit is moving forward strategically and not merely reacting each day to immediate demands without thought to strategic overall improvement. Such planning can also help create a renewed, more focused sense of unity and mission within your organization and can help you reconnect it to your service community.

A strategic communication plan outline is provided below for your convenience. You may refer back to earlier parts of this chapter – or to chapters 4 and 7 about public information campaigns and social media, respectively – for additional details related to each section.

Strategic Communication Plan Outline

I. Define larger agency/department's

   a. Vision
   b. Mission
   c. Goals

II. Conduct research

   a. Identify problems and opportunities surrounding the goals above

      i. Are they related to reputation, relationship, and/or task management?

   b. Develop background/situation analysis

      i. Define strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats/challenges in working to achieve the goals

         1. Consider political, economic, societal, technological environments in which the organization operates

   c. What do your audiences know, think/feel and do now relative to the goals?

      i. Media monitoring

         1. Content analysis

            a. Determine tone toward the organization, services or issues (positive, negative, neutral)
            b. Is there key/repeated message consistency?

               i. Issued by organization
               ii. Amplified by others

      ii. Boundary spanning

         1. Internal listening/dialogue
         2. External/constituent listening/dialogue

            a. Correspondence/calls/complaints
            b. Social media monitoring
            c. Opinion polls
            d. Other research, formal and informal

               i. Focus groups, interviews, meetings …

III. Set objectives

   a. What are the SMART communication objectives that will support the overall goals?

      i. What do you want your audiences to know by when?
      ii. How do you want them to feel/think by when?

         1. Example: You want people to know about more convenient and efficient electronic service options – by May 31, 2021
         2. You want them to feel as though they are still receiving personalized attention – by June 30, 2021

iii. What do you want people to do by when?

1. Example: Increase electronic customer service usage by 30% with same or increased customer satisfaction by October 31, 2021

b. How will these objectives be measured?

i. Example: Social media shares and media placements of news releases about new service and potential audience reached (media impressions) will be tracked; website hits of pages that discuss new service will be tracked
ii. Example: Constituent feedback and questions regarding new service will be tracked; social media content will be analyzed for comments about the new service
iii. Example: Electronic service registration numbers will be tracked and compared to traditional service registration numbers. Voluntary customer satisfaction survey will be developed and included at the end of electronic service interactions

IV. Decide upon strategies to achieve objectives

a. Interpersonal/outreach

i. Sample tactic:

1. Seek out at least one opportunity per quarter to speak to a relevant community group or organization about services

b. Mediated interpersonal

i. Owned and shared media

1. Sample tactics:

a. Regularly monitor, respond to, and track email feedback on the unit website
b. Update website's FAQs by end of the fiscal year
c. Develop social media calendar and schedule posts

i. Post one new feature story link per quarter on social media that highlights community-oriented employee or satisfied service user

ii. Earned Media

1. Sample Tactics:

a. News release announcing new service delivery options by May 15, 2021

c. Opinion Leaders/Influentials/Spokespersons
    i. Testimonials
        1. Sample Tactic:
            a. Place testimonial on the front page of the unit website by May 15, 2021
            b. Include a quotation from a service user in each news release issued
    ii. Endorsements
        1. Prominent individuals with strong social media followings
        2. Other high-reputation groups/units to their networks

V. Target Audiences
  a. Whom do we need to reach to achieve our objectives?
    i. Demographic description
    ii. Psychographic description
    iii. Geographic description
    iv. Create audience personas

VI. Key Messages
  a. What types of content will be created to interest and resonate with our audiences?
    i. Unique "selling" proposition/value
    ii. Simple vs complex
    iii. Use of emotional appeals
    iv. Use of logical appeals (e.g., stats, facts)
    v. Consistent visuals/design
    vi. Campaign taglines/slogans

VII. Communication Tactics
  a. Where/how will we disseminate these messages (through what means/media)?

VIII. Timeline
  a. How long will the campaign(s) last?
  b. When and with what frequency will messages/tactics be deployed?
    i. Drip vs rapid fire dissemination
  c. Gantt chart or spreadsheet of each tactic, person/s responsible for its development, dissemination of tactic, cost of development/dissemination over the course of the plan's timeframe

IX. Budget

   a. Research (pre-, ongoing and post-campaign)
   b. Message creation/production/maintenance

      i. Outside vendors

   c. Other planned tactics/tasks

      i. Presentations, meetings …

   d. Employee time

      i. Regular time
      ii. Travel expenses
      iii. Other

X. Tracking (ongoing after launch)

   a. What progress is being made toward each objective?
   b. What can/should be adjusted to meet each objective?
   c. How are our internal and external audiences/community responding?

      i. Seek out audience members to listen, learn, engage/co-create and serve

XI. Updating (ongoing after launch)

   a. What is working?
   b. What can be improved upon or changed?

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to West Virginia University graduate students Garrett DeFries and Kaiyah Clarke for their assistance in updating this chapter.

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7 Harnessing Social Media Effectively on Behalf of Governments

Kara Alaimo

Government public relations practitioners are increasingly using social media to communicate, build relationships with critical constituencies, and attempt to enhance the reputations of their offices and principals. According to Bertot, Jaeger, and Hansen (2012, p. 30),

> Social media refers to a set of online tools that are designed for and centered on social interaction. In practice, social media serves as a catchall phrase for a conglomeration of web-based technologies and services such as blogs, microblogs (i.e., Twitter), social sharing services (e.g. YouTube, Flickr … text messaging, discussion forums, collaborative editing tools (e.g., wikis), virtual worlds (e.g., Second Life), and social networking services (e.g. Facebook, MySpace).

Social media offers governments the potential to increase democratic participation by encouraging the public to have a voice in policy-making, working with the public to improve services, crowdsourcing ideas, and increasing transparency (Bertot, Jaeger, Munson, & Glaisyer, 2010). It can also help build trust in government. One study found that people who had followed or chosen to become a fan of a government agency or official on social media or read a blog by a government agency or official perceived the government to be more transparent and trusted it more (Song & Lee, 2016). Additionally, with social media, "communication with constituents can be more frequent, open, and targeted." (Graham & Avery, 2013, p. 1).

While accounts on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are free, "social media needs constant feeding" (Newcombe, 2015), which can require a great deal of time from public relations professionals and should be accounted for in departmental planning and budgets. Additional sources of expenditure can include advertising on social media to reach targeted constituencies and the use of platforms such as Hootsuite to manage posts on different platforms and measure social media conversations and engagement.

Building a Social Media Following

The first step to using social media is setting up an account on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter and building a following so that posts are actually seen. Public relations practitioners may wish to invest in small advertising budgets on platforms such as Facebook, which can target users based upon location, to encourage citizens to follow their accounts. It is also a good idea to promote government social media handles on other official communication materials, such as signs, forms, documents mailed to homes, and the government's website.

Another strategy to gain followers is to use a social media handle to make a much anticipated or otherwise high-profile announcement. In 2008, for example, NASA used one of its Twitter handles to announce that it had found water on Mars. The handle, @MarsPhoenix, gained 75,000 followers and became the eighth most-followed account on Twitter after the bombshell announcement (Marberry, 2016).

Additionally, a good way to gain followers is by following others. If government public relations professionals start following the pages and handles of other local organizations and influencers – including community leaders, religious groups, politicians, neighborhood associations, and other nonprofit organizations – they will often follow back. In addition, it is critical for government public relations professionals to participate in conversations that are happening about their work and communities. This is a great way to attract the attention of people who are interested in what they do and thereby gain new followers, as well as help shape conversations about their offices, principals, initiatives, and areas of expertise.

As Bonsón, Torres, Royo, and Flores (2012, p. 131) argued,

> Many citizens are discussing local policy online and local governments should not miss the opinions expressed there. Rather than passive onlookers "out of the network," local governments should reside "in the network," as an integral part of it, contributing to discussions as peers rather than outsiders. For local governments, not engaging now involves a greater risk than engaging: citizens will use these networks to talk about them, whether local governments add their voice to the conversation or not.

Government public relations professionals should be sure to use hashtags so that users who are interested in the topics they are discussing can easily find their posts. (Hashtags are keywords that begin with the # sign that signify the topic under discussion). However, before using a hashtag, it is critical for public relations professionals to research how it is being used on social media to make sure it does not have a meaning other than the one they intend (Alaimo, 2017f: 199).

Ultimately, however, to attract and retain followers, it is critical to share compelling content.

Creating Content

In Chapter 6, you read about strategic communication planning in the digital age. Government public relations professionals should create annual plans for social media content by considering what their office's goals will be at particular times of the year. At different times, they may wish to remind citizens that it is a recycling or election day, for example, or that deadlines for filing their taxes are coming up.

Indeed, it is critical to try to be the primary source of information about topics for which an agency is responsible in order to thereby ensure that the information the public receives is accurate. As Haro-de-Rosario, Sáez-Martín, and del Carmen Caba-Pérez (2018, p. 42) explained, "a social media presence is not just a strategic opportunity, but is mandatory in order to prevent other parties from supplanting the local government in providing information and enabling interaction."

Social media is a highly effective, free tool for proactively communicating policy positions and new initiatives. It is now commonplace for reporters for traditional media outlets to quote directly from tweets by politicians and government offices. Additionally, whereas prior to the widespread adoption of social media the source of citizens' information about governments and politicians was often the traditional media, social media also allows politicians and government public relations professionals to bypass the filters and interpretations of reporters and communicate directly with the public (Alaimo, 2016).

Social media is now used heavily by many governments as part of broader efforts to enhance transparency, increase two-way communication with citizens, and engage with populations who might not be reached through other government communication channels (Bertot, Jaeger, & Grimes, 2012). As a social media director for a U.S. federal agency explained, one benefit of utilizing social media is that it allows her department to "create a better sense of understanding with stakeholders when we speak in a way that is familiar and comfortable with people, instead of speaking in jargon and acronyms" (Mergel, 2013, p. 126).

It is also important for government public relations practitioners to portray their communities as attractive places to live, work, visit, and do business. This is because communities are in competition with one another to attract tourists, business investment, and, in the case of poor countries, aid from richer nations. According to Anholt (2007, p. 25), a country's reputation is formed based upon how it promotes itself as a tourist destination, the experiences of visitors, its brands, its policies, the business climate, its cultural products, and the experiences other people have with its citizens.

One great way to promote localities is to enlist citizens in the effort. For example, in 2010, after a massive volcanic eruption threatened to diminish tourism to Iceland, the country launched "Iceland hour," during which it encouraged citizens to share information about why their country is great on social media. Astonishingly, a third of the country's citizens participated in the initiative, resulting in a significant increase in positive perceptions about and tourism to the nation (Institute of Practitioners in Advertising, 2014).

As part of annual social media plans, government public relations practitioners should also come up with ideas for creating evergreen content that can be used at any time. It is important to have these kinds of posts at the ready to use during slower times when there is not a particular message to push. This is important because it is critical to keep social media accounts active with a steady stream of content. Research finds that organizations that post regularly end up with more followers and are also viewed as more credible and transparent (Fussell Sisco & McCorkindale, 2013).

But practitioners should not be completely beholden to pre-set plans. One of the best ways to attract attention and gain followers is by quickly jumping into conversations that are happening on social media in real time – and these are, of course, impossible to predict in advance. Therefore, public relations professionals should monitor social media conversations carefully and constantly and be ready to act on their feet when opportunities arise.

Of course, during disasters and emergencies, citizens and the media turn to the social media handles of government agencies for updates and information (King, 2018). This also presents an opportunity to gain new followers. For example, when the city of Roanoke, Virginia experienced a major snowstorm in 2014, a city communications coordinator asked citizens to share images of the snow on social media. The photos were viewed by over 400,000 people and after realizing the potential of social media, the city decided to make it more of a priority. As a result, the city increased its followers from around 22,000 to over 100,000 on Facebook and Twitter in little more than a year (Newcombe, 2015).

Another way to gain and keep followers is by creating compelling content. Alaimo (2014) noted that, on social media, "when employed appropriately, a bit of humor – and even self-parody – can be a great tactic for humanizing an organization, particularly when it is controversial or under attack." For example, the CIA's first tweet was, "we can neither confirm nor deny that this is our first tweet." And the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) managed to significantly boost awareness about the need for citizens to prepare for emergencies with its tweet "Prepared for a #zombie apocalypse? If so, ur prepared for any emergency. Learn how: CDC PH Matters blog." The tweet went viral in ten minutes. In a single day, the tweet, blog, and web page garnered 200 million impressions. Catherine Jamal, who was responsible for the initiative, said the idea for the popular content came from "social listening." When the CDC asked on Twitter what people were preparing for, a significant number responded that they were readying for a zombie apocalypse – so Jamal's team decided to play on the fantastical idea (CDC, 2018).

Of course, it is critical to be aware of laws governing the content that can be shared on official social media platforms. For example, in the U.S., the Hatch Act prohibits official government accounts from posting or sharing content that is intended to support or hurt a political candidate, party, or group (U.S. Office of Special Counsel, 2018). State and local governments may also develop such laws (see National Conference of State Legislatures, 2020).

Engagement on Social Media

The major difference between the use of social media and more traditional communication platforms such as press releases and websites is that social media allows audiences to talk back. This poses both a major risk and a major opportunity.

Public relations practitioners now widely recognize that excellent public relations involves two-way communication, in which professionals are genuinely open to receiving feedback and changing their own practices as a result of their interactions (Grunig & Grunig, 1992). Social media provides an ideal platform for fostering such dialogue.

As one federal department social media director explained,

> You are cutting off your visitors' voice if you are not engaging them and not soliciting feedback, and then there is really no point. It's not an effective use of the medium … So yes, we allow people to comment openly [on Facebook] and we also go through those. Sometimes we solicit feedback from them by asking questions … and we will follow up on those.
>
> (Mergel, 2013: 128)

Indeed, the goal of government public relations professionals should not simply be for people to read their content, but also for audiences to like it, share it, and get involved in conversations about it. This is known as engagement. According to Paine (2011, p. 60), "engagement is generally defined as … taking some action beyond viewing or reading, for example, commenting, registering, downloading, retweeting, and so on."

Importantly, gaining a lot of followers is not enough to achieve engagement. In fact, one study of the use of social media by 75 local governments in 15 European countries found that having more fans on social media was actually not associated with higher levels of citizen engagement, which suggests that what is critical is developing the types of content that will promote interactions (Bonsón, Royo, & Ratkai, 2017, p. 333)

A great way for government public relations practitioners to engage people is to ask them questions or ask them to create and/or share particular pieces of content, such as a picture of them doing an activity that the government is trying to promote (for example, recycling). However, this strategy can easily backfire. For example, when the U.S. Army tweeted the question "How has serving impacted you?" just before Memorial

Day in 2019, service members began sharing accounts of sexual assault, suicides, and other heartbreaking experiences –generating a great deal of negative publicly for the army (Samuel, Van Sant, & Schwartz, 2019). It is therefore critical to consider possible responses before posting questions or other requests such as this one. Of course, any time that professionals engage with audiences on social media, they need to be prepared for some negative feedback, but they should avoid soliciting posts that are likely to generate more negative than positive conversations about their offices and departments. If a government public relations professional is not sure what kinds of responses to expect to a potential social media post, it is wise to talk to members of the community privately in person to gauge likely reactions.

Another way to promote engagement is by being transparent. A study of the use of social media by local governments in Spain found that when municipalities were more transparent, they achieved higher rates of engagement on social media. Posts on social media also received more engagement than posts on Twitter. However, it is important not to overwhelm citizens; municipalities that published "large-scale" messages on Facebook and Twitter saw lower levels of engagement (Haro-de-Rosario, Sáez-Martín, & del Carmen Caba-Pérez, 2018: 41).

Berger (2013) found that people are especially likely to share information when it meets any of six criteria:

- it has social currency (meaning it makes people look good)
- it contains triggers to things that people are already thinking about
- it arouses emotions
- other people can be seen doing the same thing publicly
- it has practical value
- it contains stories

Getting people to share content is, of course, one of the best ways for public relations professionals to reach friends of their followers – who often live locally and have the potential to become followers themselves. As Song and Lee (2016: 443–444) explained,

> citizens are not only connected to government but also tied to other citizens who do not actively use social media in government. This is because the interactions through social media are visible to anyone who joins a social media site. In this regard, the citizens who use social media in government play a crucial role in bridging and bonding government to other citizens who do not use social media in government.

Timing of Social Media Posts

It is also important to pay careful attention to the conversations happening on social media and events happening in the real world in real time before posting content. Alaimo (2017e) argued that it is inappropriate to post trivial messages on social media while members of a community are suffering – such as, for example, during a hurricane or other major disaster. She noted that, while many practitioners write and pre-schedule tweets to be posted at later times using tools such as Hootsuite, the danger of this practice is that the landscape may have changed between the time the tweet was drafted and the time it is posted.

Measuring the Impact of Social Posts

When measuring the impact of social media posts, it is important to go beyond simply looking at the number of people who were reached to ascertain whether users have actually engaged with content. Walter and Gioglio (2014, p. 130), for example, reported that one measure of how viral Facebook posts become can be calculated by adding the number of likes, comments, and shares and dividing the total by the number of impressions garnered, while they recommended measuring the impact of tweets by adding the number of replies and re-tweets and dividing the total by the number of followers multiplied by 100.

Influencer Engagement

It has become commonplace for brands to pay social media influencers – people with significant followings on social platforms – to create content. Government public relations practitioners have also worked with such content creators. One benefit of working with some influencers is that it allows public relations practitioners to reach audiences who might not seek information from the government. For example, in the U.K., the Department for Transport worked with social influencer Anto Sharp, who has a large following among young people, to reach its target demographic by creating a video illustrating how much road space they could miss if they checked their mobile phones while driving (Ibrahim, 2017). In 2020, as this chapter was being written, Michael Bloomberg became the first U.S. presidential candidate to pay influencers to create memes and other social media content to promote his campaign, raising new questions about how such paid content should be identified on social sites (BBC News, 2020; Klepper & Seitz, 2020).

Before considering working with influencers – regardless of whether they are paid for their content – it is critical for public relations practitioners to carefully research them and their past posts to ensure that they have not previously made remarks with which the government would not want to be associated. Also, in the U.S., the Federal Trade Commission requires that paid posts and posts for which people have received other consideration, such as perks, be prominently disclosed (United States Federal Trade Commission, 2019).

Targeted Advertising on Social Media

Social media also offers public relations practitioners the opportunity to target advertisements to users based upon very specific characteristics. Ads can be purchased, sometimes with modest budgets, to target people based not just on location but also a variety of specific characteristics, such as their past purchasing behavior, online searches, genders, and political affiliations (Alaimo, 2018a). This can be an efficacious way to reach very specific audiences with tailored messages.

Learning and Professional Development

Social media also allows government professionals to connect with one another via Facebook groups and other forums to learn from one another. Professional forums provide spaces in which members can ask questions to members of groups and share resources in order to gain new ideas and improve performance. Bonsón, Torres, Royo, and Flores (2012, p. 131) argued that "by forming or joining existing online communities that discuss issues of relevance to local policy, service delivery, and regulation, local governments and their officers will become more informed, responsive, innovative, and citizen-centric."

Intelligence and Data Gathering

Social media is not just an effective tool for government communication. It can also be a helpful resource for gathering data and information. For example, questions can be posed to members of communities about their priorities or experiences and the responses they garner can help guide policy-making. As one social media director for a federal agency in the U.S. government explained, "given the opportunity, people are really excited and willing to provide really fantastic insight in things that help us get closer to the taxpayer and to the people that we serve by listening" (Mergel, 2013, p. 128).

The best government communicators also stay on top of the conversations happening about their communities and their offices on social media in real time so that they can identify problems and try to resolve them before they become full-scale crises. Another way to avoid outrage on social media – and elsewhere – is to test possible reactions before finalizing new messages and policies. This can be done through focus groups, polls, or simply speaking to key stakeholders to ask how they would react to a plan in advance of making decisions.

Of course, oftentimes the public will state their views and demands without any prompting by government communicators. Social media has emerged as a powerful tool for the public to make its needs and priorities known. In India, for instance, Sepaha (2019, p. 1431) found that "social media has emerged as the best apparatus, in recent times to flag the issues, content, opinions and direction of any social movement, and has demonstrated that it will have a far-reaching effect on government." The best government communicators take these concerns to their bosses so that they can be addressed. Widespread discontent – on social media or elsewhere – should never be ignored. But, at times, anger boils over both on social media and in real life and catalyzes political change. At the most extreme, social media has been used as a tool for organizing protests and opposition to officials that has toppled governments; Facebook, for example, has been widely recognized as a tool that was vital to the protestors who overthrew Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak in 2011 (Alaimo, 2015; Ghonim, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012).

During disasters and emergencies, it is also important to monitor and respond to the social media posts of people in need. When Hurricane Harvey hit Houston, Texas in 2017, for example, emergency phone lines were overwhelmed, but citizens began posting requests for help on social media, using the hashtags #sosHarvey and #helphouston. The Twitter account @HarveyRescue then created a list of the names and addresses of people in need of rescue. King (2018, p. 22) concluded that "federal, state, and local agencies need to understand the importance of using social media in disasters and build social media into their disaster plans." In particular, during crises, "social media may be valuable in reaching some people that might not be reached by traditional media. For example, undocumented immigrants may be reluctant to use traditional channels like 911, but may feel more comfortable using social media."

The public can also be of considerable help to government agencies on social media, so government public relations practitioners should consider asking for help when citizens can contribute. For example, the Federal Bureau of Investigation has used a Facebook fan page for crowdsourcing in order to identify crime scene evidence (Mergel & Bretschneider, 2013, p. 394).

Responding to Negative Feedback and Attacks

Of course, government public relations practitioners must be prepared for negative comments on social media – whether they are in response to their own posts or created by citizens of their own volitions. Indeed, a study of the use of social media by local governments in Spain found that citizens engage with governments on social media more when they are unhappy than when they are happy (Haro-de-Rosario, Sáez-Martín, & del Carmen Caba-Pérez, 2018, p. 41).

If citizens have specific grievances that can be resolved – for example, their road was never plowed or a pothole needs to be fixed – the best thing for government public relations professionals to do is to ask the users to message them directly. The aggrieved citizens can then be connected offline to an individual in the government who can help. Government public affairs offices should have staff who are specifically dedicated to monitoring social media conversations and doing this kind of work. Government public relations professionals should also respond on social media to grievances. Ultimately, government officials work for the citizens of their communities, so it is critical for them to be respectful and positive in all of their interactions – even and especially when their interlocutors are not. Oftentimes, people simply want to be heard, so responses that thank people for their feedback and pledge to follow up to address an issue will sometimes be well received. The trick is to be as specific as possible about the steps that are being taken to resolve the problem.

Of course, some citizens will simply disagree with a government's policies and will not be placated by any posts. The best that government public relations professionals can do under such circumstances is to explain why they believe the course of action they are pursuing is correct. Even if citizens disagree with such policies, reasonable people will often be less incensed if they feel that a government's representatives are respectful and have made a thoughtful, considered decision.

However, not every insult or obscure comment on social media deserves a response. Garcia (2017, pp. 135–136) advises that it makes sense for public relations professionals to respond to a negative post when the answers to the following questions are yes:

1. Will those who matter to us expect us to do or say something now? …
2. Will silence be seen by our stakeholders as indifference or as an affirmation of guilt? […]
3. Are others talking about us now, thereby shaping the perception of us among those who matter to us; is there reason to believe they will be soon? …
4. If we wait do we lose the ability to determine the outcome?

Under these circumstances, it makes sense for government public relations professionals to respond to criticism on social media in order to maintain the trust of important stakeholders and have the opportunity to provide information and explanations in their own words, rather than allowing others to speculate about their motives and actions.

It is generally a good idea to allow the public to comment on government social media platforms such as Facebook pages because it facilitates democratic deliberation, even when users are unhappy. However, truly inappropriate posts should be deleted – such as, for example, threats, obscene language, or information containing private information about others. Of course, when government public relations practitioners delete content, they risk coming under attack for doing so. Therefore, it is critical to publicly post rules about when content will be removed as soon as social accounts are created, so that deletions can later be justified by a pre-existing policy and do not appear to be arbitrary, politically motivated, or otherwise unjust.

Another new challenge for government public relations practitioners is addressing inappropriate social media posts by their own supporters. For example, during the 2020 U.S. presidential campaign, Sen. Bernie Sanders garnered negative attention because of the vitriolic behavior of some of his supporters, who, for example, tweeted snakes at his rival for the Democratic nomination, Sen. Elizabeth Warren, and her supporters (Flegenheimer, Ruiz, & Bowles, 2020). It is critical for government officials to speak out against such attacks – even at the risk of alienating core supporters – so that it is clear that they do not endorse such tactics.

Twitter Attacks

After President Trump came to office in 2017 in the United States and began attacking politicians and other individuals with whom he disagreed on Twitter – including, at times, members of his own cabinet – public relations professionals began preparing in the event that they became the next target of a presidential tweet (Alaimo, 2017a; Pengelly, Pilkington, Phillips, & McCurry, 2017; Magan & Breuninger, 2018). Alaimo (2017a) advised that, when a public relations professional realizes that his or her principals or organization could be attacked on Twitter by a person with a high profile, it is critical to monitor the statements and social media handles of the person and, if applicable, his or her administration as well as media outlets that support the person, since they can provide insight into their priorities which could help predict the next targets of their attacks. If such an attack seems possible, responses and messages should be planned and agreed upon internally in advance. It is also wise for government public relations practitioners to recruit allies ahead of time who would be willing to publicly defend their bosses and offices in such an event. These people could include politicians, constituents, nonprofit organizations, or local business owners, for example.

Ambushes by Activists

Of course, the most challenging interlocutors for government public relations practitioners and their principals are political opponents who are actively working to oppose them. Government officials on all sides of the political spectrum have fallen victim to activists ambushing them in places from restaurants to the gym with questions that are designed to elicit dramatic responses – and recording the episodes on video with hopes that the encounters will go viral on social media. In such situations, Alaimo

(2018b), advised, "the best way [for officials] to respond is by refusing to play the roles opponents want to assign them. Officials shouldn't allow themselves to be portrayed as uncaring or angry." Rather, they should be as boring as possible and offer information on how the protestor(s) can obtain assistance in a different forum – such as by handing them business cards of aides who can help. Alaimo (2018b) noted that staying civil in the face of such a confrontation "gives a politician the option to score a political point by highlighting an antagonist's rude behavior." It is the job of government public relations professionals to prepare officials to deftly handle such situations in advance.

Responding to Fake News

A major problem that first became appreciated as a widespread phenomenon during the 2016 U.S. presidential election is the proliferation of fake news. While in the U.S. President Trump has used the term fake news to refer to accurate reporting which he disliked (Alaimo, 2019a, p. 356), the academic definition of the term fake news refers to "news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false, and could mislead readers." (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017, p. 213). Many fake news stories have been determined to be deliberately created and disseminated by states including China, Russia, and Iran which were seeking to influence both domestic and international politics (Wu & Alaimo, 2018; Chen, 2015; Hamilton, 2018). One project announced in 2020 by Jigsaw – the parent company of Google – and the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab spotlighted 60 different recent disinformation campaigns alone (Alba, 2020). Such stories are often shared by "troll armies," which are groups of people often paid by their governments to create and disseminate information on social media, sometimes by creating accounts for people who do not actually exist (White, 2017).

Because fake news stories are often deliberately designed to be dramatic and provocative, they can spread like wildfire across social media. One study found that fake news was 70% more likely to be retweeted than stories that were true (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018). And they can also be astonishingly convincing. Another study found that Americans believe 75% of the fake news they consume (Silverman & Singer-Vine, 2016). It is therefore important to take the potential of fake news stories to have a significant impact seriously.

Of course, it is essential for public relations professionals to have staff members monitoring social media conversations round the clock so that they immediately become aware if they become the victim of fake news and can set the record straight on social media right away. Peter Duda, head of the global crisis and issues practice at the communications firm Weber Shandwick, said that the tone of such messages is important. "Be authentic, not overly emotional or critical," he recommended. "Don't play the victim, but rather be the trusted provider of information" (Alaimo, 2017b).

Handling Social Media Crises

Of course, no matter how much preparation is done in order to avoid crises, eventually nearly all organizations experience them. The Institute for Public Relations (2007) defined a crisis as "a significant threat to operations that can have negative consequences if not handled properly." Garcia (2017) warned that it is critical for organizations to respond on social media during the first hour – which he calls the "golden hour" – after such an event begins and to immediately demonstrate that they care. Speed is of the essence because "incremental delays in showing that an organization cares can lead to greater-than-incremental harm." (Garcia, 2017, p. 130). As Garcia (2017, p. 131) explained,

> The longer it takes to show we care, the harder it becomes. That's because more and more people are reaching conclusions about the situation, making judgments, and believing and acting on what they hear. What would have been sufficient in the early phases of a situation becoming public would be woefully inadequate hours or days or weeks later.

The reason why many public relations practitioners do not respond immediately is because they are still gathering facts and figuring out whether they are to blame for a situation. Additionally, lawyers are especially wary of approving any statements that could be interpreted as an admission of guilt. But that should not stop public relations professionals from immediately posting on social media to convey empathy and indicate that they are gathering information and will have more to report soon. Garcia (2017, pp. 126–128) warned that silence is interpreted as indifference or guilt and noted that practitioners can acknowledge what happened, express empathy, explain their values and outline their approach and commitment without increasing the risk of litigation.

Regaining Trust after a Crisis

After experiencing a crisis, it is critical to use social media to help regain trust. Garcia said that "trust is the natural consequence of expectations and promises that are fulfilled." Therefore, the best way to restore trust is to publicly state promises, fulfill them, and then remind the public that they have been fulfilled (Alaimo, 2017d). Social media is an ideal platform for sharing such statements.

Social Media Algorithms, Filter Bubbles, and Cognitive Dissonance

Another major challenge for government public relations practitioners is that audiences on social media are selectively exposed to information based on their pre-existing political beliefs. Part of the reason for this is self-selection. People who are friends on Facebook tend to share political affiliations. One study found that only 18% of people who were friends with conservatives self-identified as liberal, while 20% of people who were friends with liberals identified on the site as conservative (Bakshy, Messing, & Adamic, 2015).

But social media algorithms magnify the problem. When a Facebook user views content in his or her News Feed, they are not, of course, seeing everything their friends and the pages they follow have posted. There would simply not be enough space for that. Instead, an algorithm chooses certain posts to show. Facebook is famously secretive about how the algorithm is programmed but it is well-known that it and other social media sites show users personalized content based upon their behavior. If a user clicks on articles about a certain topic frequently, for example, he or she will see more information in the future about the subject. But this leaves people in what Pariser (2011) called a "filter bubble": They are less exposed to information and ideas with which they do not already agree.

Social media users therefore see fewer alternate points of view that might change the way they think – or help them empathize with people who are different. In fact, the opposite tends to happen. Studies show that the more that people communicate with others who share their beliefs, the less moderate their beliefs become. Sunstein (2014, p. 6) explained, "group polarization refers to the fact that when like-minded people get together, they often end up thinking a more extreme version of what they thought before they started to talk to one another."

But even when users are exposed to content that might challenge their beliefs, it may backfire. This is because people often reject information that contradicts their pre-existing worldviews. Sunstein (2014, p. 15–16) explained, "a great deal of work demonstrates that people try to reduce cognitive dissonance by denying claims that contradict their deepest beliefs, or the beliefs that they most want to hold." Research has found that when people are exposed to information about the other side of an issue, they become even more committed to their prior opinions (Sunstein, 2014: 45). This helps explain why Wael Ghonim, the former Google executive who used Facebook to help incite Egypt's 2011 revolution, has described social media as more effective for overthrowing governments than for facilitating the consensus needed for governing (Ghonim, 2015).

One solution that can help overcome this challenge is to use sources that people trust. Sunstein (2014, p. 55) noted that "if you want people to move away from their prior convictions, and to correct a false rumor, it is best to present them not with the opinions of their usual adversaries, whom they can dismiss, but instead with the views of people with whom they closely identify." This explains why, for example, the endorsements of prominent Republicans, such as former secretary of state Colin Powell and former solicitor general Charles Fried, were so valuable to the presidential campaign of then-Democratic senator Barack Obama.

Another reason that filter bubbles are so challenging for government public relations practitioners is because they make it harder to communicate about issues. Since most people won't click the "like" button on topics about important but upsetting subjects – who likes the idea of a famine or war? – algorithms end up showing them less content about such issues (McNamee, 2019). It therefore makes sense for government public relations practitioners to consider crafting posts that will garner likes – such as, for example, by framing an issue about an upsetting problem in terms of solutions or members of the community who are doing something about it.

Corporate Activism

Another challenge for government public relations practitioners is the recently emerged expectation that businesses should take stances on political and social issues (Alaimo, 2017c). While the era of so-called "CEO activism" began earlier with chief executives such as former Apple CEO Steve Jobs and Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz weighing in on social issues such as guns and bathrooms for transgender individuals, particularly after the 2016 election of President Trump in the United States, businesses have increasingly been taking stances on such issues. For example, after President Trump temporarily banned people from Muslim-majority nations from entering the U.S. in 2017, dozens of companies spoke out publicly against the policy (Meyer, 2018). Of course, social media is a key place where such positions are communicated and discussed.

This means that government public relations professionals need to view not just citizens but also corporations and their leaders as important audiences and potential supporters or detractors for their policies. While corporations often use social media sites as platforms for their positions, it makes sense to develop offline strategies for attempting to build their support or address concerns in an effort to head off social criticism.

Hackings

Governments are particularly prone to having their emails and websites hacked and it is certainly to be expected that their social media platforms may be targeted more in the future. It is a possibility for which every government public relations practitioner must be prepared.

Many such events are, of course, politically motivated. For example, after President Trump ordered the killing of the head of Iran's security and intelligence services in 2020, hackers who claimed to be supporting Iran posted pictures of the slain general on the websites of the cities of Minneapolis, Missouri and Tulsa, Oklahoma – local governments that had no involvement in the killing – and also changed the homepage of the Federal Deposit Library Program's website to feature a picture of President Trump being assaulted (Kanno-Youngs & Perlroth, 2020).

At other times, hackings have been intended to influence political campaigns. For example, Russian operatives hacked the emails of staffers working on the 2016 presidential campaign of former Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton as well as the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee and Democratic National Committee, in an apparent effort to sabotage Clinton's campaign (Chang, 2018).

Other such events appear to have been financially motivated. *The New York Times* noted in 2020 that dozens of cities had been targeted by ransomware attacks over the past year. In such attacks, hackers shut down computer networks and demand payments if owners want to re-access them. The average cost of ransomware payments is $190,946, according to one security firm. In some cases, attacks disrupt not just communications but actual operations. For example, the U.S. Coast Guard was forced to shut down a transfer facility for more than a day in December 2020 after a ransomware attack disrupted its ability to control transfers and operations. Cities in the U.S. are required to publicly report such attacks (Popper, 2020).

However, sometimes such attacks are not politically or financially motivated, but rather conducted simply because hackers are bored and find such events to be funny. For example, Olson (2012, p. 14) explained that oftentimes hackers are driven simply to generate "lulz," which she defined as "entertainment at someone else's expense." Alaimo (2019b, p. 168) warned that "the willingness of … hackers to attack organizations just for lulz poses a threat to every person and organization on the Internet today."

The best way for government public relations practitioners to prepare is to ensure the use of secure passwords and educate their colleagues about cybersecurity. A common way that hackers are able to access information is through email phishing. For example, John Podesta, chair of Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign, clicked on an email directing him to reset his password that he did not realize was not authentic (Chang, 2018).

Government public relations professionals should also train their colleagues not to put sensitive information in writing when possible, since emails and phones can be hacked. According to one former U.S. State Department official, "for someone who's truly a high-value target, there is no way to safely use a digital device" (Warzel, 2020).

Of course, if sensitive information does become public, it will quickly be discussed on social media, so it is critical for practitioners to mount appropriate crisis management responses during the "golden hour."

Employee Use of Social Media

It is also critical for government public relations professionals to ensure that their colleagues are educated on laws regarding how they may use social media. For example, under the Hatch Act, U.S. federal government employees are prohibited from posting, liking, or sharing social media accounts or content supporting or opposing political candidates, parties, groups, or events while they are on duty or physically present in their work locations. They are also not allowed to post, like, or share content soliciting political contributions or inviting people to political fundraisers at any time – even when they are not working (U.S. Office of Special Counsel, 2018). Local governments can also develop their own laws, policies, and guidelines about such matters – state municipal leagues and organizations like the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) are resources for guidance on respective state laws and best practices.

Conclusion

Social media offers government public relations practitioners an unprecedented, free tool for bypassing the traditional media and communicating directly with the public, offering the potential to increase transparency and trust in government, ensure that citizens receive critical information, obtain valuable feedback to improve the work of their offices, and network and learn from their peers. It is also a weapon that has been used to attack and even topple regimes, sometimes with information that is patently untrue and generated from individuals who are not members of their constituencies. Furthermore, the speed with which information circulates on social media has made it critical for government public relations practitioners to respond to crises and demonstrate that they care in the "golden hour." By learning and utilizing best social media practices, government public relations professionals can work to maximize engagement and minimize enragement.

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8 Why Do Places Brand? Branding in the Public Sector

Staci M. Zavattaro

Introduction

Growing up a Florida kid, going to Disney World was almost a rite of passage. My parents packed me into the car as a child, not telling me where we were headed. Imagine my delight when we ended up three hours north of our home at the steps of Mickey Mouse's house for my first-ever visit. Since then, I have loved visiting the parks. For a state like Florida and a city like Orlando, the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the setting during which this is written, is staggering given the reliance on tourism.

Travel restrictions, social distancing measures, and a loss of spending power have drastically altered the tourism and hospitality industries (Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2020). According to one report from March 2020, global tourism could decrease by as much as 30% compared to prior years (UNWTO, 2020). In Florida, data from Visit Florida, the statewide tourism branding agency, show hotel demand in the state dropped nearly 75% in March 2020 as people began canceling vacations (Visit Florida, 2020). For the week of March 22, 2020, that equated to a loss of $416.1 million (Visit Florida, 2020). The losses for Florida and other areas reliant on tourism could be catastrophic.

Orlando is synonymous with its theme parks and tourist culture. For many, Orlando's brand image *IS* Disney World. Though living here shows the various neighborhoods with their individual identities equally important to the local economy (Zavattaro, 2019). Orlando has one of those brands that do not need real explanation. Hearing cities such as Las Vegas, Paris, New York City, Amsterdam, and Hong Kong, for examples, immediately conjures an image in someone's mind. Hearing cities such as, say, Coral Springs (Florida), Albuquerque (New Mexico), Brookings (South Dakota), and Amos (Iowa) might have less obvious brand associations, but those cities and many others still paid consultants to develop a city brand identity.

This chapter explores why public entities undertake branding exercises. Branding is part of an overall strategic governance process meant, ideally, to set one place apart from another in a competitive realm. Nations, states, cities, museums, parks, art centers all either have or actively seek a brand identity similar to products, companies, and services (Eshuis & Klijn, 2012; Kotler & Levy, 1969). I begin with how place branding came to be in public administration before turning toward definitions of terms. I then give some examples, and end with questions for future research. Branding is changing in a digital realm whereby a click of a button can get someone "canceled" and brands damaged instantly (the inverse also holds true for positive news), so more work needs to be done to understand the increasingly changing needs for and inputs into public branding processes.

Public Sector Branding – How Did We Get Here?

Before defining the terms, I turn toward a short explanation of how brands and branding really took hold in the public sector. It should be little surprise that as New Public Management (NPM) came to popularity, so too did branding (Wæraas, Bjørnå, & Moldenæs, 2015; Zavattaro, 2013). As branding became popular in practice, isomorphic forces took control and other places and organizations began exploring branding strategies (Fay & Zavattaro, 2016; Sataøen & Wæraas, 2015).

NPM is commonly known for incorporating business-like practices into public administration with an eye toward efficiency and economic savings. Some of those practices from business that came into the public sector included marketing and branding, in addition to more typical practices such as contracting out and privatization. Marketing and public relations took hold in the public before branding did (Wæraas, Bjørnå, & Moldenæs, 2015) because of the marketization of the state via NPM (Butler, Collins, & Fellenz, 2007). Wæraas and colleagues (2015) note branding in the public sector can serve three functions: place, organization, and democracy. Place branding targets tourists, organization branding is more internal to employees, and democracy focuses on attracting voters. Each, according to the authors, serves a different purpose with various target audiences and desired outcomes so it is important to distinguish the purpose of any branding efforts in the public sector. (Eshuis and Klijn [2012] offers a similar view on the purposes of branding.)

Seeing branding as a competition makes sense in the private sector but sometimes less so in the public – but municipalities, states, and destinations do compete for scarce resources. "Municipalities compete with other municipalities with respect to reputation, human capital, financial resources and organizational culture, as well as recruitment and employer policies" (Wæraas et al., 2015, p. 1290). The economic exchange model customary in marketing, for instance, also struggles but manifests in terms of taxes, social infrastructure, and loyalty to a place (Butler, Collins, & Fellenz, 2007).

Place marketing as a governance strategy fits with NPM and inherent competition (Eshuis, Braun, & Klijn, 2013). In their study of place marketing in the Netherlands, the authors were interested in understanding obstacles practitioners face when undertaking marketing strategies. Based on factor analysis of survey findings, the authors revealed big challenges included small budgets, difficulty reaching consensus on a path forward for marketing, and insufficient impact on the place and new product development. Essentially, what they found are typical administrative problems – governance issues, implementation issues, funding issues. It is not surprising that given the importation of marketing and branding into the public sector, things rooted in business norms and values struggle even when transformed to achieve public sector ends. Go and Trunfio (2012) call it a shift in how we produce and consume knowledge related to branding when framed as a governance strategy that serves a clear purpose. There is a constant negotiation and rethinking what community assets should be shared and promoted to make a certain place stand out among competitors (Go & Trunfio, 2012).

Tschirhart et al. (2005) outline some of the challenges and what they argue are incompatibilities between branding and collaboration. They begin by mentioning the devolution of services inherent in NPM-style reforms, whereby some government functions were outsourced or privatized entirely. Devolution, then, created ironically more complex systems of collaboration as more stakeholders became involved with delivering what was once only a government provision. As such, they argue branding is not compatible with collaboration, as branding is individual-focused, guided by competition, and requires a unique mission with distinctive elements. Collaboration requires shared values, reciprocity, and interdependence.

Since their writing, research has been done to extol the values of co-creation and co-production in public branding (Eshuis & Klijn, 2012). In that view, conflict is necessary though sometimes does bring out the political in people (Gonzalez & Gale, 2020). For scholars using a co-production lens, there is a relational underpinning to the work (Lucarelli & Brorstrom, 2013). For example, Cai (2002) found cooperative processes were beneficial in a rural community setting because of resource limitations – pooling makes sense. There is a way to discuss and draw out shared brand attributes and preferred measures of success (Cai, 2002).

It makes sense that branding, too, would move into an era of co-creation and co-production as NPM reforms also went that way. As a governance strategy, branding can help center citizen preferences for both the place and policy (Eshuis, Klijn, & Braun, 2014). Including stakeholders in the process from the beginning can work to ensure buy-in to end results, which can help spread positive word of mouth (Eshuis, Klijn, & Braun, 2014). Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2007) in their case study of branding Amsterdam identified at least seven target groups crucial to the brand development process, thus showing the complexities involved in this approach yet also the necessity to draw a holistic picture.

It is not surprising that brand communities are vital to creating, communicating, and sustaining a place brand identity because co-creation is inherently relational (Hatch & Schultz, 2010). Hatch and Schultz (2010) note some building blocks of strong brand co-creation include dialogue, access, transparency, and risk. As noted earlier in the chapter, it is people who ultimately make a brand successful, not the organization. Taking the time to use various stakeholders at the beginning of the process shifts branding from thing-dominant to people-dominant (Payne et al. 2009).

Research indicates that different stakeholders add to the various aspects of the branding bubble. Eshuis et al. (2018) find involving residents and public managers positively influences spatial planning policies, and business stakeholders more so influence tourism identities. A clear brand concept also can strengthen the ties between business owners and public managers in their study, taking marketing and branding beyond a one-time endeavor into meaningful policy change and continuation of the branding strategies.

In another study, Stevens, Klijn, and Warsen (2020) explore another co-productive aspect of place branding – corporate partners with local governments. They operate using a framework that shows how branding has three perspectives: selling, value enhancing, and community building. Given the differing goals and values of those in the branding process, it becomes important to understand how actors perceive the process and outcomes. Using Rotterdam in the Netherlands as their case study and completing a Q-sort analysis, the authors found most business leaders wanted a brand that enhanced neighborhoods with businesses that revitalized an area. Moreover, they found business owners will only participate in a collaborative branding exercise if they see monetary, equity-based value to them. This shines light on the differing needs of community members involved in collaborative branding processes.

While most of this literature focuses on a direct connection between stakeholders in branding processes, it is important to note brand success comes from users. In this aspect, there is a less direct co-creative process taking place whether government entities know it or not or like it or not. In other words, brand meaning is socially constructed (Aitken & Campelo, 2011). A person needs to feel a connection to a brand for it to succeed, and this is also important for places and neighborhoods (Zavattaro, 2020). As such, it becomes important to realize that organizations might develop a brand but the ownership and success of the brand comes in how people interpret it and interact with it (Aitken & Campelo, 2011).

While branding is gaining popularity in public administration scholarly research (practice has been way ahead with implementing branding and marketing strategies), some big questions still remain (Zavattaro, 2018).

Measurement remains a contest concept, especially as it relates to capturing the emotive side. Perhaps experimental methods could lend some insights into this. Social media, too, are changing and challenging brand hegemony. In this volume, Manoharan and Wu explore digital branding and some questions emerging therein. Network analysis also can lend insights into questions about the branding network, who is active and who leaves, and if network ties matter.

What is a Brand Anyway?

With a better understanding of how branding and marketing imported into public management, we can turn toward better conceptualizing the terms. Like many terms in public management and administration, we take the definitions of branding and marketing for granted. So often people conflate brand for reputation in practice and in research. While the concepts are closely coupled, they differ in that brands focus on how customers and users feel while reputation is about the organization's credibility (Ettenson & Knowles, 2008). It usually is a reputational deficiency that will turn people away from the organizations rather than a brand deficiency (Ettenson & Knowles, 2008), yet brands in the public sector are seen almost as a fix for economic and social drawbacks.

For the purposes of this chapter, a brand is defined as "a symbolic construct that consists of a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or combination of these, intended to identify a phenomenon and differentiate it from similar phenomena by adding a particular meaning to it" (Eshuis & Klijn, 2012, p. 6). While products can have and be brands (think iPod and iPad, which are products with their own brand identities and images), the brand is not the product itself (Eshuis & Klijn, 2012). This is easier to see in companies, whereby one company can have multiple product brands (think about your favorite car company and their various vehicle offerings). In the public sector, this is less visible but, for instance, a county can have several brands with its various departments and services.

What we often hear is the word branding. Branding implies an active process meant to draw out and distill a brand identity (Anholt, 2010). Many places already have a brand whether they know it or not, and whether they like it or not. While not impossible, correcting a negative place brand image is challenging (Gertner & Kotler, 2004). Nuttavuthisit (2006) details how the government of Thailand launched a branding campaign to overcome its sex tourism image, which dates to the 1960s. Perhaps more common than the Thailand example is places wanting to move on after economic decline, such as Dundee, Scotland's effort to shift its post-industrial image to a more metropolitan one (Peel & Lloyd, 2008).

Place branding applies this active process to cities, states, and nations, and more ideally using a governance framework that includes relevant stakeholders in the process (Eshuis & Edwards, 2013). Branding is an attempt to control how people think about and perceive a place (Anholt, 2010), but this is challenging because as noted people already have an idea in their minds so changing that is difficult.

Brand image is "the set of beliefs or associations relating to that name or sign in the mind of the consumer" (Anholt, 2010, p. 7). Brand identity is the associated images, slogans, and logos the organization tries to control and communicate, usually reflecting the organization's overall values and mission (de Chernatony, 1999). This explains why Ettenson and Knowles (2008) argue a brand is consumer-centric while reputation is linked to organizational credibility. As Braun, Eshuis, and Hans-Klijn (2014) find, place brand image plays a role in attracting both residents and tourists to a place, but they also show the limits of more traditional forms of communication such as advertising and slogans. Brands, remember, are about how a person feels so that could explain why traditional reliance on slogans do not work as well as word-of-mouth communication.

Corporate branding practices might be straightforward because the end goal is clear – make money. In the public sector, the end goal becomes a bit murkier given the myriad stakeholders involved (Hanna & Rowley, 2011). Hanna and Rowley (2011) detail a process that starts with relationship-building among and between relevant community stakeholders who would want to have a say in the overall branding direction and identity. Residents, for instance, will often have a different opinion when compared to business owners (Braun, Kavaratzis, & Zenker, 2013).

Once defined, the brand elements are then communicated. Primary communication can include urban design, infrastructure, and amenities such as museums and parks (Kavaratzis, 2004). Secondary communication includes planning public relations and marketing strategies including the logo and slogan, while tertiary communication is word-of-mouth and/or word-of mouse (Kavaratzis, 2004). Brand communication is ideally changed if there is misalignment between image and identity (Hanna & Rowley, 2011), though again this is challenging because of the myriad stakeholder involved (Kavaratzis & Kalandides, 2015; van Ham, 2008).

Place marketing is a close cousin of place branding, though again we sometimes see the two used interchangeably in the literature. Marketing is "the development, promotion, and distribution and sale of products and services" (Anholt, 2010, 2). Marketing moved into the public arena thanks to Kotler's (1972) assertion that organizations such as museums and police departments might want to communicate a value added. Marketing, be it for places or products, is about economic appeals and measures of success rather than emotional connections prevalent in branding (Paddison, 1993).

As such, place marketing strategies are demand driven and based on consumer preferences (Eshuis, Klijn, & Braun, 2014), so a broader concept is needed when it comes to marketing the good available in places

(Ashworth & Voogd, 1988). A product marketing campaign might focus on one aspect or attribute, while a city marketing campaign, for instance, needs a wider view to take into account existing (such as residents) and new consumers (potential small business owners, for example). City marketing is "a process whereby urban activities are as closely as possible related to the demands of targeted customers so as to maximize the efficient social and economic functioning of the area concerned in accordance with whatever goals have been established" (Ashworth & Voogd, 1988, p. 68). Just as with branding, place marketing also involves many people with varying views of success (Eshuis, Klijn, & Braun, 2014).

Gonzalez and Gale (2020) report results of branding efforts in Tasmania in Australia. The purpose of their research was to better understand collaborative branding in Tasmania to explore and explain successes and barriers to participant engagement in branding processes. A participatory process was adopted, and the researchers used a participatory, qualitative case study approach to understand what participants thought about the collaborative process. Based on those findings, the authors found participants reported common problems such as power differentials, stakeholder disengagement, and stakeholder fragmentation. Their research also highlighted the inherently political nature of a co-produced branding process, showing the push and pull between an individual's desires versus the collectives' (Gonzalez & Gale, 2020).

This brings back the question of why a place would want a brand anyway? "Brand awareness and loyalty can influence the actions of employees, grant makers, contractors, donors, policymakers, and the voting public, as well as those who directly consume a product or service" (Tschirhart, Christensen, & Perry, 2005). Place branding allows for a place to build upon its strengths and try to obtain a competitive advantage (Florek & Kavaratzis, 2014) in the economic, social, cultural, and political realms (Kaplan et al. 2010). At its core, branding is about perception and emotional connection to a place usually through unconscious psychological associations (Eshuis & Klijn, 2012). In the public sector as a governance strategy, then, branding can influence those emotional connections to a place for residents, tourists, and business owners alike (Karens et al. 2016).

Hankinson (2004) elucidates four purposes of public branding strategies. First, branding is both an input (the active process) and outcome (the logos, slogans, and communication strategies that ideally build those emotive connections). Second, brands are perceptual entities communicating a person's tastes, values, and character. For instance, someone might prefer Apple versus a PC computer for both functional and aesthetic reasons. Third, repeat purchases or visits can lead to brand equity. Finally, brands can use personality traits (see also Kaplan et al. [2010]) to build those connections (think Paris as the City of Love, or Las Vegas where what happens there stays there).

Looking through an economic lens to answer the question of why brand, the clearest tie hearkens back to my Disney example in the beginning – destination branding. Destination branding focuses on touristic places led usually by destination marketing organizations (DMOs), yet there still is not total agreement in the literature about what constitutes a destination (Pike & Page, 2014). Brand USA is a congressionally regulated DMO for the United States, marketing the country abroad – though there are questions about its efficacy when certain controls are put into place (Zavattaro & Fay, 2019). For instance, in their study Zavattaro and Fay (2019) used a difference-in-difference analysis incorporated data from Brand USA with that from the National Travel and Tourism Office to examine the efficacy of the program. Using controls such as per capita income, population, and consumer price index – measures Brand USA does not use or provide – they found less success than the organization touts. Importantly, countries that received marketing from Brand USA did not show an increase in visitors to the U.S., which is the entire point of that organization.

Another way branding manifests is through placemaking, which is a holistic design concept usually found in urban planning that ties people to creative design to give a sense of identity to a place and space. Similar to branding, placemaking is a process that involves myriad stakeholders with a bent toward economic success through social and cultural interventions (Richards, 2017). As Lew (2017) notes, there is no agreed definition of placemaking, let alone agreement on how to spell it, as some people use place making or place-making. For Lew (2017), this is because they might actually be different. He argues place-making is bottom-up, driven by individuals, while placemaking is top-down led by government agencies. The former is meant to engender more buy-in from individuals who daily interact with and live in the space, while the latter is more tourist driven (Lew, 2017).

In the literature, there are countless examples of placemaking endeavors with a bent toward economic productivity. Strunk and Richardson (2019) examine urban agriculture initiatives in the Midwest in the U.S., specifically focusing on how refugees use the community gardens to create and foster a sense of community. Their piece is particularly interesting because typically community gardens are the purview of White people, so they highlight the differences when led by and incorporating refugees into the process. In another example, Nejad, Walker, and Newhouse (2020) explore how Indigenous populations, similar to the population in the Strunk and Richardson study (2019), are often not included in placemaking efforts, leading further to their othering and invisibility. They argue that contemporary placemaking that focuses on the creative class leaves out Indigenous populations who have a different sense of place. These are critical issues to consider as this trend continues.

A next logical question after why a place would want a brand is how to know if it is working – and what constitutes success. This question, naturally, becomes trickier to answer depending upon who is involved and how they are measuring outputs (rather than outcomes). Zavattaro and Fay (2019) examined Brand USA and found the organization makes its mission almost readily achievable by targeting countries and people with disposable income already inclined to visit the U.S. They tout success on the website, but when control variables were added, there was little to no return on investment in Brand USA (Zavattaro & Fay, 2019). Easily achievable measures such as hotel stays or tax receipts are typical success measures (Zenker & Martin, 2011), but Teodoro and An (2018) argue for a citizen-based brand equity approach. They borrow the concept of brand equity from the corporate space and import it into public management – though a careful reading shows their experiment is more about organizational reputation than brands. Measurements in general are difficult because of personnel constraints (Zenker & Martin, 2011), and it is even more challenging to measure affective and emotional connections inherent in branding success.

Real-World Examples

To show some examples from cities (my primary area of study), I return first to my current hometown of Orlando. Again, Orlando is best known for its association with theme parks and tourism. Funnily, Disney World is not actually located in Orlando but within its own specially created improvement district. No matter, the Disney brand image is so strong (for better or worse) it subsumes Orlando's brand image. To rebrand – or at least carve an identity independent of Disney – the city and relevant stakeholders engaged in a branding process at the start of the 2010s.

Led by the Orlando Economic Partnership, the campaign primarily focuses on attracting business development and workers to the region. The brand slogan is "Orlando: You Don't Know the Half of It" hearkening to more than tourism in the region. Early stakeholders from Disney were involved in building the brand in partnership with local elected officials and an advertising firm that came up with the tagline (Orlando Economic Partnership, 2016). The brand is meant to focus on making Orlando a player in economic development projects and a focus on its technology offerings. Signature orange-colored brand communications appear in places throughout Orlando and beyond, and according to the Partnership the brand has garnered more than 150 formal partners and more than 2,000 media mentions.

In the 1990s, Milwaukee, Wisconsin stakeholder undertook a branding strategy to rebrand as the Genuine American City and ability to be the "real America" (Kenny & Zimmerman, 2004: 79). While Orlando's economic brand focuses on attracting business ventures, the Milwaukee venture relied on nostalgia for its core values. Yet the nostalgic bent is tricky because many people are left out of that often-white vision (Kenny & Zimmerman, 2004). The Genuine American City brand was chosen because it was nostalgic enough to appeal to various stakeholder groups, including local residents who city officials wanted to draw back into the city's economic center and newly redone public spaces. Marketing materials, for example, focused on this walkability and notable architecture (Kenny & Zimmerman, 2004).

Kalandides (2011) shares his personal experience as a consultant helping develop the Bogota, Colombia brand. Colombia as a country has a difficult brand image often associated with drugs and violence, and as part of the team developing the brand for Bogota, Kalandides (2011) was worried about legitimacy in the process. His research showed some shortcomings of both branding process and co-creation, as participants in focus groups envisioned Bogota as a world leader in clean air and environmental protection, but this vision did not and likely could not match reality. There also was a tension between efficiency and broad participation, again highlighting a common problem in public administration processes in general and also in the public branding realm.

A simple Google News search reveals several more examples of cities not known as tourist destinations undertaking branding campaigns. Brooklyn, Ohio is spending $40,000 to develop a brand identity and associated marketing campaign as part of an overall master planning process (Benson, 2020). Consistent with co-productive practices, an advertising agency hired to carry out the process is having people interview new residents to the city their opinions about the place to distill a hopefully authentic identity. But throughout the article, there seems to be a focus on the visual aspects of the brand, noting a new website, business cards, and letterhead will contain the identity (Benson, 2020).

Hutchinson, Tennessee officials spent $75,500 on a contract to have an agency develop its new branding campaign and identity. The goal of the branding strategy, according to the advertising agency head hired to create it, is to have people tell stories of their associations with Hutchinson (Wiblemo, 2019). The new brand slogan is "A City on Purpose," and it came after a community participation effort involving 24 community stakeholder interviews, 47 participants in focus groups, and 312 completed community surveys (Jones, 2020). Again, this illustrates the co-creative strategy and the difficulties in coming up with an identity unique to only that place.

There are countless examples not just at the city level. Universities, hospitals, museums, parks, cemeteries, and many more public places are getting in on branding and marketing strategies to achieve competitive advantage. There is not enough space to delve into all of those nuances, but the point is practically speaking, place branding is here to stay so is behooves scholars in public management and administration to better understand the process, outputs, and outcomes given the involvement of taxpayer dollars.

Conclusion

As I write this chapter, the COVID-19 pandemic is still actively affecting everything in the U.S. and countries abroad. Governors are suing mayors for trying to enforce a mask mandate. Political leaders are telling people to go back to working and playing because economic production is more important than public health. Government management and communication about risk affects how people respond to the policy process (Gerber & Neeley, 2005). Several public entities and political leaders are steadily damaging their brands and it will take an uphill battle to win back potentially lost trust with the public.

This is why studies about branding and marketing in the public sector should no longer be dismissed as silly or simply propaganda. Narratives are important to engender engaged citizens and share vital information (Piotrowski, Grimmelikhuijsen, & Deat, 2019). Indeed, in their study, Piotrowski et al. (2019) find that simply presenting information as is does not create a transformational strategy so narrative devices are key and not incongruous with government transparency initiatives. Ethics, though, are still important and should not be taken for granted when communicating a brand identity (Piotrowski et al., 2019).

Promotional symbols associated with a brand identity are found to nudge people toward desired behavior and even erase negative interaction experiences with the organization (Alon-Barkat & Gilad, 2017). This could be an important finding if we keep the Tiebout (1956) hypothesis in mind that people often "vote with their feet" and tend to leave (or try to leave) places no longer serving their needs. This, of course, affects the tax base (or donor base) and ability to provide service.

While branding is still emerging in public administration, there are some points to consider to further this area of study. First, conceptual clarity is needed when studying branding. Branding and marketing are different, as are brand identity and brand image. Brands are not reputations. Reputation management could involve a branding strategy. It does get confusing, so scholars should be clear with their study and practitioners should understand why they want a branding strategy other than the place next door is doing it.

Second, metrics for performance measurement in both research and practice can be improved. Most measures of branding success focus on things that are easily quantified, such as tax receipts or hotel stays. Research emerging in public management that gets at behavioral changes and reactions could be a stride toward improving measures. Overall, scholars can borrow from emotional branding research to see what applies in a public sector context. Qualitative methods can also help this by asking people how they respond to a public brand and why.

Finally, some questions remain about the connection of branding to other public organization functions such as strategic planning and human resources. Internal branding strategies can help here, but questions need to go beyond figuring out the efficacy of internal branding to the connections between other core functions. Surveys and survey experiments might be possible methods, as well as interviews with practitioners in the field.

Orlando, like other touristic cities, is struggling with its brand image. When theme parks opened back up during the pandemic, Disney World took the brunt of the critique with people questioning opening up during a global public health crisis. Yet this critique is incompatible with public leaders encouraging economic production. The Disney World example ties into the interconnectedness of place branding ideas and ideals. The fate of Florida is quite literally tied directly to tourism. Funding public entities such as schools, for one example, can suffer without that influx of millions of dollars. Cities such as Orlando will be looking to revamp a brand identity, but only time will tell how stakeholders respond.

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9 Digital Branding for Government Public Relations

Aroon P. Manoharan and Hsin-Ching Wu

Digital Branding for Government

In this digital era, cities and nations are exploring new avenues to brand themselves online and to shape and influence public perceptions. The branding strategies used in the commercial sphere are gradually being adopted by cities to market their unique features. Digital branding provides cities and nations tremendous opportunities to market and position themselves to audiences across the world. Many cities have integrated such techniques in attracting potential tourists and visitors (Björner, 2013). The popular mechanisms for digital branding are through official websites and social media (Paganoni, 2012; Molina, Fernandez, Gomez, & Aranda, 2017).

An important element of the branding process is to emotionally connect with target audiences. These new digital platforms offer a great variety of tools and features for this purpose. There are various usability tools such as color, font, style, etc., that can enhance the user experience and create a positive image of the city brand. The website can also be personalized to offer a unique brand experience and allow users to share their feedback with the city.

Perhaps the most unique feature that distinguishes online branding and traditional offline branding is the promise of a "brand experience." Ritchie and Ritchie (1998, p. 17) emphasize the concept of experience in their definition of destination brand as

> a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates the destination; furthermore, it conveys the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; it also serves to consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurable memories of the destination experience.

The use of official websites and social media present new opportunities for cities, and government in general, to digitally brand and define themselves to local and global audiences. The increasing use of website analytics can provide real-time insights on website traffic, including webpage clicks, views, and visits. This data provides valuable feedback and enables cities to shape their brand online. The city can also post their slogans, logos, or interactive tools on their official websites.

"Websites are an effective information channel as they can also offer suppliers an alternative way of representing their offerings to potential customers" (Florek, Insch, & Gnoth, 2006, p. 7). In the age of fake news, it is more persuasive to hear about a city and its offerings from the city itself, and digital branding is an effective strategy to connect with the public. A city's official website has the potential to directly communicate to its audiences, both internal and external, and contribute to brand building efforts.

Website platforms can address the relational paradigms in branding by functioning as an effective mechanism for public relations. The practice of public relations was traditionally associated with the dissemination of information from the government to the public. Overtime, it has evolved into a relationship management paradigm between the public organization and its stakeholders. Public relations scholars Bruning and Ledingham (1998) conceptualized this relationship as "the state which exists between an organization and its key publics in which the actions of either entity impact the economic, social, political and/or cultural well-being of the other entity" (p. 62). According to Szondi (2010), the primary goal of nation branding should be to build better relations between the nation and its stakeholders through dialogue, engagement, and mutual understanding. This is applicable to cities as well. An effective public relations strategy can help build brand communities that enable stakeholder engagement across boundaries. An essential element of an effective public relations strategy in the digital age is to develop a robust, official website that is accessible on multiple devices, including mobile phones.

The role of official websites for providing e-government services has been researched extensively in the literature (Manoharan, Ingrams, Kang, & Zhao, 2020; Melitski, Holzer, Kim, Kim, & Rho, 2005; United Nations, 2016), including one that examined the potential of public reporting and performance reporting of government websites (Holzer & Manoharan 2016; Lee 2014; Melitski & Manoharan, 2014). Few scholars, however, have examined the branding potential of cities' official websites. This chapter focuses on the digital branding strategies for cities, their potential and their implications for improving municipal public relations and public engagement.

Place Branding as a Modern Public Relations Framework

The concept of place branding provides an effective, holistic framework for government managers to approach public relations. The main goal of branding a place is to establish its uniqueness, in order to differentiate it from others, and to create a competitive edge when attracting people to live, visit, work, and invest in the area. In the previous sections, we introduced what branding is, and why public managers should adopt branding techniques as a means for improving public relations of local governments. In essence, branding a place involves pinpointing and spotlighting the positive characteristics of a town, city, state, region, or other geographic location. These positive features, when put together, help build the place's image(s). Branding is the process connecting said image(s) with identified audiences (including stakeholders) and prompting them to think positively about the targeted place. The ultimate rule of branding is substance. The brand has to be established on reality. Both tangible and intangible features can be included. For example, if a municipality positions itself as a suitable community for certain types of industry or business, it should possess the policies and infrastructure that could contribute to the growth of those targeted entities.

In this section, we will delve into the "how to" of branding. Below we list 12 tactics (Table 9.1) that are essential strategies for building a brand image for a town, city, state, or region. We will then define each element and provide examples of best practices when possible. This list serves as a toolkit for government managers when crafting a brand for their communities.

Form a Brand Leadership Committee

Leadership is a key institutional factor for successful place branding. A committee is preferable because this process is multi-faceted and requires coordinated and organized efforts. Therefore, forming a brand leadership committee is the first step. The aim is to involve those who understand what the town or city (or other type of geographic administrative unit) needs and how branding may contribute to those objectives. In the initial stage, committee members will likely be public managers in selected positions. This may include elected officials, the municipal manager (or other chief executive), the communications director, the public relations officer, the public information officer, the director of information services, and the director of planning. Particularly, the committee members should research the various characteristics and activities of their city which differentiate it from other locations. From these, the committee can then consider which should be emphasized to make up their city's "place identity."

To carry out this type of research in practice, the committee can apply a SWOT analysis. The term SWOT stands for strengths (internal), weaknesses (internal), opportunities (internal and external), and threats (internal and external). It is commonly used as a management tool to analyze a firm's competitive advantages and shortcomings and has been applied in place branding (Pirnar, Igneci, & Tutuncuoglu, 2017; Mirmoini & Azari, 2018).

Table 9.1 Essential List of Branding Strategies

Place Branding Strategies	*Tactics*	*Purpose*
Organizational Planning	Form a Brand Leadership Committee Form a Brand Management and Media (Traditional and Digital) Team Stakeholder Engagement Based on Story Telling	This category includes the most essential tasks for public managers and their offices and agencies to think about and develop in the initial stage since these activities will help lead, manage, and legitimize the branding efforts.
Brand Symbols	Design Logos, Slogans, and Other Visual Identification	Visual representation is a key for brand communication as it helps transform a brand's personas from abstract ideas to relatable imagery.
Outreach Actions	Create A New Website or Redesign Current Website Collaborate with Traditional Media Create Email Campaigns Plan Social Media Campaigns Integrate Mobile Apps	The outreach actions focus on five popular and highly recommended methods of communication with stakeholders and targeted audiences. Four are digital branding and one is physical branding. If using multiple platforms, there should be coordinated, consistent messages across the board.
Supplementary	Hosting Events and Gathering Build Municipal Partnerships – Sister Towns/Cities, Alliance, or Network	If resources permit, these two could be adopted to further enhance the brand images.
Security and Inclusivity	Ensure Security, Privacy, Accessibility, and Legal Compliance	This includes measures for cyber security and considerations for privacy, accessibility, and other relevant regulations.

We have included two templates. Table 9.2 shows a SWOT analysis (adapted from the SWOT analysis from the City of Edmonton, 2012) and Table 9.3 shows branding strategy comparisons. Through comparison of other place brands, public managers will get a better sense of how they can customize the identity of their place to emphasize its uniqueness. Preliminary research of this kind will also contribute to the formation of mission statements and associated objectives for the overall branding efforts.

The committee should also investigate its target audiences which may include residents, visitors, business, and so on. In other words, they

Table 9.2 SWOT Analysis Template

SWOT	*Definitions*
Strengths	Positive attributes or assets (as compared to other places)
Weaknesses	Negative local issues or characteristics that limit the growth of the place now or in the future
Opportunities	What can be done to address the weaknesses
Threats	Local, statewide/provincial, regional, national, and global trends that can pose challenges to the place's strengths and growth

Table 9.3 Analysis of Similar Places

Similar Geographic Units (e.g., Towns, Cities, States, or Regions)	*Visual Identifications (Logo, Slogan, and other brand symbols, etc.)*	*Features Offered*	*Reviews and Mentions*	*Branding Efforts*
City A	What types of visual identifications does City A use?	What positive characteristic does City A highlight?	What do people (e.g., residents, visitors, businesses, etc.) say about City A?	What branding tactics does City A have?
City B	What types of visual identifications does City B use?	What positive characteristic does City B highlight?	What do people (e.g., residents, visitors, businesses, etc.) say about City B?	What branding tactics does City B have?

should know whom the brand identity is for. Moreover, as part of the city's planning process to create its brand, stakeholders will need to be identified. This may include the legislature, other governmental agencies, local chambers of commerce, restaurant associations, cultural institutions, sport organizations, academia, facilities and transportation providers, etc. Relevant stakeholders must be included in the planning process, if possible, in order to get their inputs on the proposed brand identity (Kavaratzis, 2012; Klijn, Eshuis, & Braun, 2012). Stakeholder analysis serves another purpose. More often than not, governments nowadays operate on tight budgets, and these stakeholders could potentially provide additional support in the form of public-private partnerships. Stakeholder engagement will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

All these considerations are fundamental to the creation of a strategic branding plan, which not only defines the scope of the project, but also sets the objectives with detailed action items. Once the committee has devised the plan, we recommend a continued review every two to four months with updates once a year.

Form a Brand Management and Media (Traditional and Digital) Team

Branding is a dynamic, interactive operation. Creating a brand identity is only half of the process. The other half is communicating the place identity both offline and online to intended audiences in order to build recognition, loyalty, and perceived quality of the brand (Molina et al., 2016). In other words, effective place branding requires continuous presentation and management of the brand identity. Therefore, we recommend the formation of a dedicated team responsible for the coordination and maintenance of the messages associated with the place brand. The leadership committee develops the branding plans and strategies, but it is the brand management and media team that hammers out the details.

Communication is the brand management and media team's main task. It is both the storyteller and coordinator of the brand identity. The team finds ways to incorporate the new brand identity and narratives to the place's existing events and activities. In fact, many municipalities have already publicized themselves through media relations and publications such as annual reports, websites, flyers, etc. (Zavattaro, 2010). Other responsibilities of the team may include contracting for professional graphic design, video, and photography, and other public relations functions, such as creating and managing various media campaigns. Below, we will discuss some of the brand communication methods in detail since they are foundational to branding success.

Stakeholder Engagement Based on Story Telling

More recent research on place branding calls attention to the importance of stakeholder involvement. Instead of a top-down approach which limits place identity formation to a leadership circle and professional public relations firms, there is an increased recognition that a bottom-up, participatory model is conducive to branding success (Hereźniak, 2017; Lichrou, Patterson, O'Malley, & O'Leary, 2019; Warnaby & Medway, 2013). It is suggested that stakeholder engagement contributes to the democratic legitimacy of the branding process, as a shared sense of identity could be formed from the mutual learning of the public managers and the diverse interest groups, including residents (Eshuis & Edwards, 2013). When stakeholders are invited as collaborators in creating a place's narratives, they will be more likely to buy into the results.

Some municipalities even go a step further by appointing a permanent "Chief Storyteller"; this is an adaptation of the concept of using stories to help public managers or elected officials to understand the perceived community identity of a place (Bennett & Orr, 2019; Stamm, 2020). The storytelling element is critical in the formation of a brand's persona because audiences will associate with a place more if they feel connected to its identified values (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010). The practice of storytelling as a tactic in place branding involves providing appropriate platforms for residents to express their views concerning the narratives of their community. These expressions are then moderated and transformed into usable information for public managers or elected officials to make informed decisions about choosing a place identity.

The following recommendations are based on the key practices from the literature regarding stakeholder engagement in place branding (Bennett & Orr, 2019; Grenni, Horlings, & Soini, 2020; Hereźniak, 2017; Joo & Seo, 2018; Keskin, Akgun, Zehir, & Ayar, 2016). Public managers could identify relevant interest groups and, as appropriate, invite them into the planning and decision-making stages. Briefly stated, stakeholder engagement may be achieved in various ways. These include using focus groups, surveys, or other participatory governance approaches, such as town hall meetings, expert-led workshops, etc. In fact, social media could also be used as a method of engagement, as digital influencers could help promote a place (Chatzigeorgiou, 2017; Uchinaka, Yoganathan, & Osburg, 2019).

Residents and identified stakeholders could also be invited to submit ideas for the creation of the new identity or vote for any proposals. There could be planning initiatives focused on collecting stories from various groups, including minority and marginalized groups, in order to understand what the community means to them. That stated, this sort of engagement process will likely take a long time and have moments of real disagreement. Public managers need to recognize that the results could be contested as different groups might have conflicting views about the place. For this reason, stakeholder inputs must be balanced to prevent certain influential groups from dominating the conversation.

Design Logos, Slogans, and Other Visual Identification

After the leadership decides on the identity of their place, it is time to consider how to engage the various targeted groups. To do so, public managers will need to consider how they can communicate place identity to their audiences.

Communication takes many forms and travels via multiple channels, both in the physical and digital domains. Its main goal is to evoke feelings, emotions, ideas, opinions and beliefs of the audiences about a brand or, in this case, a place. Through communication, public managers must highlight what makes their place unique (i.e., the brand identity) to residents, visitors, businesses, etc. The obvious goal is to prompt the targeted audiences to think positively about the place. The various ways in which targeted audiences associate with a location help to create images of that place (Florek et al., 2006).

Public managers can employ several tools to communicate the identity or, in an informal expression, the "personality" of their place. To get the message across, "visual presentation and identification" is the foundation (Florek et al., 2006). This can include logos, mottos, slogans, characteristic colors, seals, wordmarks, coat of arms, flags, anthems, and symbols (in the forms of landmarks, animals, botanical specimens, mascots, etc.). Examples of each in this short list can be found from the literature (Florek et al., 2006; Kotler & Gertner, 2002; Soltani, Pieters, Young, & Sun, 2018). As has been pointed out, "[these visual presentations and identifications] enable the presentation of the [place] in a consistent manner and cause the growth of its awareness and popularity" (Florek et al., 2006, p. 280). Once created, the brand imagery can be incorporated into the design of other promotional materials for online and offline uses, such as websites, emails, brochures, posters, etc.

There are many exciting examples of cities soliciting proposals for their brand development projects. Some focus on graphic design components while others seek outside consultancy firms to be in charge of the entire project. For instance, the City of Philadelphia released an RFP for its Global Identity Project (2018; 2020).[1] In another example, the City of Dallas issued an RFP for its plan for community branding (2014). However, there are also cases like the County of San Mateo in California (2018) and the City of Brentwood in Tennessee (2018). Both solicited proposals but only for the graphic design components of their community brand identities. Instead of focusing on an all-encompassing project, a small municipality, which may have a more limited budget, could instead focus on just one brand symbol such as the city's logo.

Create a New Website or Redesign Current Website

An official website is likely one of the most essential methods of communication for place branding. As a long-standing e-government tool, websites can be used to store and transmit a large amount of information. In addition, they provide a platform for selected interactions between government managers and constituents. These features make websites invaluable for place branding. Public managers are able to inform targeted audiences the place brand identity in a controlled setting, either in a form of passive dissemination of information or live interactions (Florek et al., 2006). Literature on the use of websites is vast, and only a snapshot of the key elements when using this digital medium is presented here for municipal, state/provincial, regional, or national branding.

Given its importance, public managers must seriously consider building a designated, separate promotional website. Alternatively, place branding could be integrated into an existing official web portal. In this latter case, the brand managers should conduct an assessment of the current site and determine how to transition into the new brand identity. The old webpages should be recalibrated using the new logo, color schemes, slogan, etc.

In terms of content, we recommend including information such as the place's mission/vision statement about the brand, bylaws, event notices/calendar, public reports/documents, maps, newsletter, external links to other resources, sign-up pages for alerts, such as email, RSS feeds, Facebook, Twitter, or other social media notifications, and so on. Moreover, increasing the website's usability for targeted audiences and constituents is just as important. For example, there could be specific information for residents who are searching for details about various municipal services, for visitors who are traveling, for businesses which wish to start a new venture, etc.

There could also be selected options for channels of communication, some of which may be interactive. These include contact information for officials and staff, feedback tools, newsletter or Listserv subscriptions, synchronous videos of public events, and so forth. Lastly, above all, public managers should check if the newly designed or refurbished website is compatible with different mobile operating systems to ensure accessibility. Under a separate sub-heading, we will further discuss the topic of accessibility, along with security, privacy, and legal compliance.

Tables 9.4 and 9.5 provide elements for website design considerations for public managers. The first, Table 9.4, offers a list of general features that should be available on a municipal website. Table 9.5 is based on the three e-government dimensions for official websites adopted from Manoharan (2013): e-information, e-transaction, and e-participation. They are a helpful guide when developing the various channels of communication and service delivery.

Besides building websites from scratch using in-house IT staff and support, governments could consider using third-party platforms for website hosting and content management. For example, CivicPlus is a popular third-party vendor providing various options for integrating website solutions and other technology services for local governments in the U.S., Canada, and Australia (n.d.). Public managers could also check an unofficial list of content management systems utilized by government agencies,[2] which is compiled by the Technology Transformation Services under the U.S. General Services Administration.

Collaborate with Traditional Media

In spite of the popularity and prevalence of websites, traditional media campaigns are indispensable. Traditional media, particularly broadcasting, still remains the primary method of dissemination of public

Table 9.4 Examples of Website Features

Common Website Features
Slogan
Logo
Video
Webcam/Picture-Gallery
Maps/GIS
Sister cities
News/Event calendar
Community board members
Contact information (phone, mail, addresses)
General information/overview of city
Target audiences
(Vision/Mission/Purpose)
(Search engine)
Newsletter/E-notifications
Mobile application
Online feedback form
Opinion survey
Real-time chat
Social networking (e.g., Facebook)
Public notices
Plans/Policies
Bylaws/Charter
Reports and publications
Open data

information in many parts of the world. It is estimated that around half of the world's population is not yet online; and, in many places, broadband Internet is still not widely accessible (Roser, Ritchie, & Ortiz-Ospina, 2015). Even in the U.S., the digital divide persists between rural and non-rural areas (Perrin, 2019). Therefore, we also recommend creating traditional media campaigns in the forms of in-house publications (posters, brochures, flyers, etc.) as well as public announcements broadcasted or published on the platforms of third-party outlets like radio and TV channels, newspapers, magazines, and periodicals.

Create Email Campaigns

Email is another great tool for communicating information about a brand. The private sector regularly uses it for marketing purposes. Email usage among governmental offices and agencies is also a common practice, not only for internal and external communication but also service delivery. One of the fundamentals for an email branding campaign is the integration of selected essential visual representations of the brand identity, such as the logo, slogan, characteristic colors, etc. The incorporation

Table 9.5 E-Government Dimensions for Official Websites

E-Information

Targeted audience links: Are targeted audience links available on the homepage? (e.g., general citizens, youths, family, citizens in need of social welfare services, businesses, industry, small businesses, public employees, etc.)
Does the website provide a FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) corner to guide citizens in administration?
Does the website provide information about the location (direction, address) of offices?
Does the website offer contact information for agencies/departments or employees/public officials?
Does the website offer job listings of public office or position vacancies at the county government online?
Does the website provide minutes of public meetings?
Does the website offer a calendar of events?
Does the website have GIS capabilities?

E-Transaction

Does the website allow users to pay utilities? (utilities in description: e.g., tap water, sewage, gas, electricity)
Does the website allow users to file or pay taxes?
Does the website allow users to pay fines or tickets?
Does the website allow e-procurement?
Does the website allow users to apply for permits (or register)?
Does the website allow users to apply for licenses?
Does the website allow users to register or purchase tickets to events in arenas, or facilities of the city/county/state?
Does the website allow users to purchase or order documents, reports, or books (publications)?

E-Participation

Does the website offer online survey/polls for specific issues?
Does the website offer a newsletter or community updates linked to the main homepage?
Does the website have online bulletin board or chat capabilities for gathering citizen input on public issues? ("Online bulletin board" or "chat capabilities" means the county website where any citizens can posts ideas, comments, or opinions)
Does the website offer access to social media technologies?
Does the website allow users to report crimes, violations of administrative laws and regulations, or corruption?
Does the website allow users to provide comments or feedback to individual departments/agencies through online forms?
Does the website allow users to file complaints?
Does the website offer tools for online decision-making? (e-petition, electronic citizen juries, e-referenda) Note: E-petition or electronic petition is a formal request to a government agency, signed by a number of citizens online to raise issues of concern.

of the brand imagery and messages should be used in both internal and external communications. For instance, email messages as well as the staff signature should include these brand identifications.

In terms of message delivery, the campaign should be internally announced with periodic updates shared among employees inside the governmental office. Research has underlined the importance of having the support of internal stakeholders who will likely help push the branding efforts through word of mouth or other interactions if they also believe in the brand message (Judson, Aurand, Gorchels, & Gordon, 2008). Therefore, email campaigns should be launched from inside the government to the outside. The campaign for external stakeholders and audiences could be done in tandem with the subscription options on the website by enabling website visitors to sign-up for newsletters. Regardless, email campaign messages should be brief, focusing on the most important information, using plain language, and providing an easy way for people to unsubscribe. Privacy is also a key consideration for email campaigns and will be discussed in a separate subsection.

Plan Social Media Campaigns

Social media has fundamentally transformed how people interact and engage with each other. This applies to organizations, governments, and cities as well. As discussed in Chapter 7, the social media paradigm has also evolved with a great variety of channels and platforms for users to adopt based on convenience. It is also increasingly common for individuals and organizations to have multiple social media accounts. This use of technology has been widely adopted by the general public. In fact, about one-third of the world population is now on some form of social media platforms (Roser, Ritchie, & Ortiz-Ospina, 2015). In the U.S., more than two-thirds of Americans (72%) use some types of social media (Pew Research Center, 2019).

Social media has also become ever more widespread among public officials and organizations. Research shows that governments at the local level have readily adapted social media for communication (Bennett & Manoharan, 2017). There are also examples in the literature that suggest the integration of user-generated content and expert opinions on social media platforms in destination branding (Oliveira & Panyik, 2015). Moreover, social media may provide the channels for targeted audience engagement in the process of place branding (Cleave, Arku, Sadler, & Kyeremeh, 2017).

There are several popular social media platforms available. Some of the prominent ones include Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, TikTok,[3] Reddit, Snapchat, and WhatsApp.[4] When adopting these technologies for place branding, we recommend public managers follow their internal social media policies which regulate their use, including who has access to the official account and content, what is acceptable user conduct (for both internal and external users), and associated security and legal issues. If there is no such policy, public managers should develop one, which could be used for both branding and general administrative purposes.

Cities need to adopt cohesive strategies to engage residents and visitors through multiple channels. They need to brainstorm about which channels will reach which audience and ensure that there is proper alignment between the various channels. Along with a city's official social media platforms, various city departments will also have their respective social media channels. There needs to be alignment among these departments. They could either appoint a social media director to coordinate the activities of the various departments, or select a social media manager from any particular department and delegate the functions for the city and various departments. They need to be aware of the frequency and timing of their posts on various platforms and remember to always engage residents and users on their posts.

One of the most valuable aspects of social media is its capacity for public engagement. Cities, and governments in general, need to be aware that social media has provided a certain level of citizen empowerment. Citizens feel free to voice their opinions and thoughts on government policies, functions, and daily activities. Public managers need to embrace this new mode of public engagement because it is creating new expectations for government's social relationship with residents and stakeholders. Cities should also be aware of the privacy implications of using social media, and emphasize the social media Do's and Don'ts for their employees and citizens.

Therefore, instead of using it only for one-way communication, the brand leadership committee and the brand management and media team should make it a participatory tool. For example, in the earliest planning stages, social media could be used for soliciting stakeholder inputs. It could be continuously used to reinforce the brand identity and message with updated media campaigns including news, event information, and so on. Finally, cities need to be aware of the digital device ownership and usage by various segments of population in the city. For example, many citizens are increasingly using mobile phones and tablets to access the Internet. In Chapter 7, you can find more information on best practices for official websites and social media platforms should therefore be mobile compatible and mobile optimal.

Integrate Mobile Apps

For the public sector, the prevalence of mobile usage and the advancement of smartphone technologies have opened another door for disseminating information and engagement. In the U.S. in 2016, for example, cellular phone subscriptions (93% of the population) and smartphone usage (73%) have both exceeded landline use (50.7%) (Ritchie, 2017). Governments at all levels have been adapting to this new technology to various extents. Mobile apps can be categorized generally into two categories: enterprise-focused that is for the internal use inside the organization, or citizen-oriented that emphasizes on providing information and a channel of submitting non-emergency service requests (Ganapati, 2015). Mobile apps are related to destination branding (Scolari & Fernández-Cavia, 2014) and the following key aspects should be considered when incorporating this technology.

For the purpose of place branding, citizen-oriented apps are more relevant as they usually offer information on parks, recreations, and leisure activities, traffic and transit update, and public engagement linked to 311 centers.[5] Mobile apps could be produced and operated by governmental offices/agencies, accessed via web applications,[6] or adopted through third-party applications that are equipped with relevant public data that may and may not use location-based (i.e., GPS) services.[7] Regardless of type, the mobile apps should have a consistent linkage with the official website. For examples, users should be able to locate the information about the apps and be directed to either the download page or the associated web applications. The apps should bear clear identification such as the logos and names of the governmental offices/agencies responsible for the place brand. If possible, we recommend having the same communication team (the brand management and media team) in charge of both mobile and web promotion to maintain message consistency.

Hosting Events and Gatherings

Events are recognized as a way to promote a place. Events could constitute diverse forms of activities, including entertainment, arts and culture, sports, festivals, etc. (Kavaratzis, 2005). There are examples of municipalities utilizing these functions to promote and improve rural development (Blichfeldt & Halkier, 2013; Fan, 2014; Lee, Wall, & Kovacs, 2015). The successful use of events and gathering as branding strategies requires a holistic approach that integrates stakeholders' (including the residents) inputs and participation in the planning process (Richards, 2017).

Public managers should consider the following points when using events and gathering as part of their branding strategy. First, there should be clear guidelines for hosting events and gatherings, regardless whether they are produced by the public entity or a third-party. Existing events and new functions should be linked with the brand, with the brand identity of the town, city, state, or region integrated in the promotional messages. If the events are produced by a third-party, there should be clear rules regarding the use of the official logo, slogan, etc. of the place, and such use should be reviewed by the appropriate governmental office. In the case of newly proposed events, it is highly recommended to bring stakeholders into the proposal and planning stages since resident backing is critical to the success of this approach.

Build Municipal Partnerships – Sister Towns/Cities, Alliances, or Networks

The idea of inter-municipal cooperation within the same country or cross-border municipal partnerships is not a novel one. Municipal practitioners have long been networking and sharing ideas through professional associations. Some of the research suggests that cooperation and partnerships are more beneficial to long-term social, economic, and environmental resilience (McLarty, Davis, Gellers, Nasrollahi, & Altenbernd, 2013; Douglass, 2002). In many parts of Europe, inter-municipal and cross-border cooperation is used to promote regions and enhance governance (Casula, 2019; Witte & Braun, 2015). In some of the latest trends, there are municipal collaborative networks that focus on climate change and sustainable development as "green city branding" (Busch & Anderberg, 2015).

Based on our review of the literature (de Villier, 2009; Hogan, 2019), here are a few points to keep in mind when pursuing municipal cooperation in the context of place branding. Public managers should clearly identify the rationales, particularly the benefits for entering a partnership, and potential candidates for their twin town or city. Once a decision is made, all parties in the alliance should agree to the same objectives (i.e., the brand and who are the wider audience, what collaboration would entail, its procedures, etc.). For positive results, all partners should have a strong commitment to cooperation. Each member municipality should also have a dedicated team to maintain the collaboration, which should also involve some of key stakeholders in each other's business networks and communities.

Ensure Security, Privacy, Accessibility, and Legal Compliance

Since many items on our list of the recommended branding strategies deal with the use of Internet technologies, we think it is important to discuss security and privacy concerns when adapting these e-portals. Studies from e-commerce show that having clear policies in these areas contributes to higher trust in the brand (Ha, 2004; Lin & Lee, 2012). This is applicable for place branding since these measures make people associate the brand with safety.

Therefore, public managers should make sure there are clear statements on these portals to explain how browsing data is collected, handled, and protected (e.g., if the website uses cookies to store the data). When presenting a user with the option of a subscription to receive notifications, there should be policies stating how personal information is secured and if it could be used beyond the sign-up service (e.g., if the information would be used for other data analysis, it should be disclosed). And, a dedicated budget should be set up for IT security measures.

Accessibility is another key area of concern not only for meeting disability laws (in the case of the U.S., the Americans with Disabilities Act, also known as ADA), but to make the place branding an inclusive practice. Efforts should be made to ensure accessibility of information and services. As society becomes more diverse, there is a pressing need to include all populations. Therefore, we recommend making the branding messages available in other languages in a culturally accessible presentation.

Lastly, any type of public relations endeavor should comply with local, state, provincial, and national laws. These could include compliance with anti-discriminatory regulations (e.g., civil rights laws in the U.S., LGBTQ rights, etc.), public records request (PRR) laws, and other legal provisions.

Conclusion

Cities are now at a crossroads in the digital world, and urban centers are becoming the new engines of growth for several nations. Smart city initiatives are being established in many regions around the globe with the goal to provide a higher quality of life. In the United States, many cities are beginning to brand themselves and, in some cases, rebrand themselves to attract new residents, investment, tourism, and to create a positive image. Cities have traditionally been branding themselves physically through budget documents, performance reports, etc. With the advent of the Internet and digital era, cities are beginning to realize the reach and significance of branding themselves through digital channels.

This chapter introduced several strategies for digital branding for cities, ranging from websites and social media to consulting with stakeholders for brand promotion. We also suggested that cities can be selective in the features they do choose and make a collective decision based on brainstorming and consulting with stakeholders. The following suggestions should be considered when choosing and customizing a digital branding strategy for a specific city.

First, the city needs to take an integrated approach to digital branding with simultaneous campaigns through traditional media such as reports, publications, television and radio channels, newsletters, etc. This helps to provide consistent messaging to multiple sections of the city's population. Second, the city needs to be considerate of the public value component of their digital branding initiative. The brand should reflect its commitment to sustainability, inclusivity, equity and social justice, in their communication to residents and stakeholders. Third, the city's branding should be part of its larger public relations function, an oft-neglected aspect of government. This should include regular interactions with the city's residents and stakeholders through surveys, polls, focus group discussions, and workshops, to ensure that the brand reflects their emotions, values, and characteristics.

In our ever-competitive global environment, cities will face unprecedented socioeconomic and public health challenges. In these trying times, in addition to well-conceived public policies and plans, strategies for place branding can open the door for maintaining good public relations and for (re)building trust. Although our chapter primarily focuses on cities, these strategies can also be adopted by state and local governments in their public relations endeavors.

Notes

1. Philadelphia's project is part of the Global Cities Initiative (CGI), which is spearheaded by the Brookings Institute and JP Morgan. The CGI program focuses on increasing cities' images based on economic development and other competitive features. More information can be found via https://www.brookings.edu/project/global-cities/
2. This list is accessible via https://digital.gov/resources/content-management-systems-used-by-government-agencies/
3. Despite its worldwide popularity in recent years, TikTok has been put under spotlight due to alleged security and privacy concerns. India became the first country to ban the app in June 2020 (Pathak & Frayer, 2020). The US federal government also announced its plan to implement a ban on the app starting on September 27, 2020. As the chapter is written, this is still an ongoing development concerning TikTok in the US as the planned ban has been temporarily blocked by a federal court (Allyn, 2020).
4. The examples given here are the main social media platforms and messaging apps in the US. There are many other messaging applications, such as WeChat, Line, Telegram, and Viber, widely used in other countries.
5. The 311 systems are a mechanism developed by cities to handle non-emergency calls from residents who could dial the phone number 3–1-1 to ask questions, request services, and solve other non-emergency issues. It is commonly adopted in the US for municipalities as part of service delivery (Holzer, Schwester, McGuire, & Kloby, 2006).
6. Web applications are websites that use responsive web design, which automatically adjust the contents to various screen sizes and can be accessed on different devices.
7. Some examples of third-party apps using open government data may be found, in the case of the US, on Data.gov (https://www.data.gov/applications); in the case of European Union, on its open data portal (https://data.europa.eu/euodp/en/apps).

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10 Ethics in Government Public Relations and Modern Challenges for Public Sector Organizations

Shannon A. Bowen and Alessandro Lovari

Introduction

Public relations in government faces an unprecedented demand for trust. With the advent of 2020s global pandemic, trust in government has skyrocketed up 11 points in just 5 months, and it is the only institution trusted by the general public.[1] But prior to the global COVID-19 pandemic, more people than ever documented said they *distrusted* government and its institutions. Why the sudden change? And is the government of today really more ethically responsible and trustworthy than the government of just a year ago? A deeper look at the ethics of our institutions and governmental public relations is warranted.

This chapter discusses ethics in strategic issues management, professional standards and code of ethics, and the more advanced forms of moral analyses useful in maintaining ethical standards in public sector organizations as well as the corporations and NGOs who also engage in public policy creation. Due to the global pandemic of 2020, you have likely seen the myriad ethical challenges and public responsibilities with which government is tasked. This chapter seeks to provide both the means of analysis needed for resolving complex ethical dilemmas, and means of articulating moral deliberation and rationale to citizens in various sorts of situations.

The ethical challenges faced by those who work in government public relations are likely to be far more complex than those found in any other arena because they touch on matters of essential liberties, public health, international conflict, and human rights. The sheer magnitude of ethical challenges involved in government public relations shows the import of these decisions – millions of people can be impacted by the consequences of a single decision, and a chain of each subsequent decision can have even farther-reaching impact. The ramifications of governmental decisions are enormous, and the responsibility to critically analyze those decisions is ever-growing. Moral deliberation and discernment are needed to respond with rectitude to the public trust placed in government and her institutions.

Commonality of Ethical Dilemmas

Every day in offices of capitals around the world, a dilemma arises. Should a situation be handled from the perspective of loyal advocate or of critic? You may be surprised to find out how often the advocate versus critic debate emerges.[2] For communicators, acting as an advocate or "cheerleader" is sometimes expected by those outside of the public relations function: the candidates, supervisors, appointees, and workers in government. It also happens in public affairs groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), corporate boardrooms, public relations firms, and any locale that the challenge of defining facts is associated with setting public policy. These debates are to be expected as a part of government public relations.

Communicators report that they are being called upon to counsel the leaders of their organizations on ethical dilemmas.[3] About 65% of public relations practitioners in a recent worldwide study reports directly to the highest-ranking person in their organizations or said that they have regular access to counseling that person on ethics.[4] In that large study, communicators reported that there are five main reasons for being called to counsel a CEO: a crisis, an ethical dilemma, an issue high on the media agenda, their own credibility within the organization, or having a leadership role in the organization. In applying these results to government public relations, one will most frequently be called upon to counsel on crisis, and with attention to ethics, especially when there is media attention or conflict needing your help to resolve. That type of issue arises with elected officials, government agencies, corporate public affairs units, NGOs, and the many support services, such as research/polling firms, that the government hires. In essence there is no escaping ethical dilemmas in government and public affairs. The best time to prepare to conduct an ethical analysis is *before* a crisis or dilemma occurs and rapid answers are needed. For government communicators, public information officers, or those who work in public policy, being ethically aware and prepared is a key to successful practice.

What is Government PR versus Public Affairs?

Government public relations or government relations deals with the interaction of the citizenry with the government, with governmental regulators, and the legislative (elected and appointed) and regulatory arms of government. Corporate public affairs differ in that it is the type of public relations that manages how an organization interacts with the government, its governmental regulators, and the legislative branch of government. Although these two functions are often discussed as synonyms, there are some slight differences to clarify. Government public relations helps to facilitate communication with constituencies and with other governmental stakeholders. Public affairs is often a corporate function through which the organization maintains communications with legislators and government regulatory agencies. It is also used to educate and inform public sector organizations on behalf of organizational interests.

Government relations and public affairs are two sides of the same coin. These two functions often overlap but despite the slight differences, the approaches to ethical analyses put forward in this chapter can be used in both government relations or in public affairs. Both government public relations and corporate public affairs must deal with strategic issues on matters of public policy. This imperative demands that communicators understand how their organizations interact with government and with constituents/stakeholders. Heath contended: "**Public policy issues** are those with the potential of maturing into governmental legislation or regulation (international, federal, state, or local)."[5]

Public policy issues are complicated to manage because of the many competing interests and perspectives involved in the debate. When counseling on strategic public policy, one must ethically analyze the responsibilities of the communication professional to publics, organizations, and government entities. There are several schools of moral philosophy that allow a measured and rational assessment of ethical choices.

Based on moral philosophy, there are advanced ethical decision-making models for use in government relations and public affairs.[6] Moral philosophy holds numerous perspectives to help analyze ethics: materialism, consequentialism, and nonconsequentialism. Each will be discussed. But first, it is helpful to review how to identify ethical dilemmas before they become crises through the use of strategic issues management.

Strategic Issues Management and Public Policy

Ethics and government public relations cross at the intersection of a function called strategic issues management (SIM). SIM is how organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, build and interact with the public policy process. Bowen and Heath argued:

> An ethically engaged and rhetorically astute SIM process offers a constructive alternative to understanding complex, contested issues and offering informed problem resolution. Relationships do not have to be mutually beneficial to be included within the realm of public relations. In fact, relationships can span a continuum while still warranting and requiring the attentions, expertise, and activities of public relations. As long as ethical standards are maintained, those relationships can exist in whatever form is most intelligent for the handling of issues.[7]

Public policy issues faced by governments, legislators, corporations, regulatory agencies, NGOs, and their counterparts at various levels of

Table 10.1 Issues Management Process in Government Public Relations

1.	Identify public issues and trends; identify stakeholder values
2.	Evaluate potential impact and prioritize issues; examine ethical responsibility
3.	Conduct research and analyses, including ethical analyses
4.	Develop strategy, integrating external ethical values when possible
5.	Communicate ethically about the issue
6.	Evaluate results in both opinion and issue change

government must be monitored and managed with vigilance. Dramatically and swiftly changing public opinion coupled with the interactive relationships of organizations, governments, and their publics and constituencies lead to a dynamic information environment that requires the public relations professional to engage in sophisticated issues management.

Issues management begins with research of various forms to identify new, emerging issues (see Table 10.1 for a summary of the issues management process). Any issue that can affect the future of an organization, government, legislative initiative, or public policy issue is considered worthy of identification, monitoring, and analysis. When an issue is *identified*, it moves into the issue *monitoring phase* to see how rapidly it gains saturation among publics. Issue identification varies from visiting with the leaders of activist groups to using sophisticated analytical software that can monitor social media discussion. Multiple sources must be monitored on a consistent and regular basis via traditional and social media as well as numerous other channels. Continuous, systematic issue monitoring occurs daily through the use of searching keywords, names, terms, and groups that could be associated with the issue, as well as informal conversations with influencers. Issue monitoring helps to evaluate the potential impact of an issue on the organization as well as to set priorities on the various issues facing an organization.

Once an issue is identified, the arduous process of conducting issue research begins. Issue research can be formal or informal, primary or secondary, and is often future-reaching to identify emerging issues. Ethical issues spark research from a multiplicity of perspectives for use in ethical analyses. Data are collected via numerous methods, including primary and secondary, quantitative and qualitative, formal and informal methods. For any side of this equation from government agencies to politicians and corporations, is common to hire a research firm who conducts original data collection around the issue and public policy issues, as well as to seek understanding of public opinion surrounding the topic. Issue research takes numerous forms, such as focus groups, statistical polls, informal interviews, or analyzing media mentions. Much research goes into defining an issue and learning as much as one can about that issue from various perspectives and sources. Research in various forms informs decision-making regarding an issue and the public policy surrounding it, so we term it SIM. Scenario building among varied potentials and issue prioritization results are used in SIM to plan for optimal problem resolution. Almost every issue will contain a public policy, public affairs, or government relations component. SIM often involves strategy both for, with, and through governmental agencies at various levels.

Issues, of course, must be managed ethically. It is arguably the most crucial component of issues management to use ethical discernment early and often when defining, monitoring, researching, and developing strategy around issues. If a communicator fails to identify a rapidly emerging ethical issue, chances are decreased for creating a strategic and ethical plan resolve the conflict before it becomes a crisis or damaging issue. When an ethical dilemma enters the public policy arena, an organization's autonomy or ability to manage and define the issue is dramatically decreased. Timely issue identification of potential ethical problems, adroit monitoring, and rapid research helping to inform strategy are of the utmost importance in ethical SIM.

Developing strategy in issues management focuses on using the research above to create varied decision alternatives, or *issue action options*. In each option one needs to determine the ethics, pros and cons, and costs or benefits to the organization and various stakeholders. In this phase, data collection may continue or discussions with different stakeholders take place, so that each weigh in and provide their unique perspective on the issue and various resolution options. Many communicators ask constituents who care about this issue to provide their perspective or ideas regarding the options that are being considered. Incorporating stakeholder values, or those of constituents, into decision alternatives is exceptionally important from both a relationship maintenance perspective and as an ethical construct. Analyzing issue resolution options from numerous different perspectives often results in an innovative creation of the optimal option for the best issue resolution.

Once an option is chosen as the best for how to manage an issue, a strategy surrounding that option is created by the government public relations professional to implement a communication plan, oftentimes using a public policy initiative. Creating new or updated policy for an organization, as well as interacting with the legislative process around an issue, demands ethical issue strategy and communication of that strategy to stakeholders. That strategy can be grouped into one of four perspectives:

1. proactive: defining an issue and strategic responses
2. interactive: seeking to create mutually acceptable options with stakeholders
3. inactive: ignores the issue or simply adapts
4. reactive: obstructing and fighting to redefine the issue[8]

Depending on the priority level of the issue, strategic management is likely to be proactive or interactive. Low priority issues may be managed with an inactive strategy. Hot issues, high priority problems, or those with large stakes for the organization may also be contested with a reactive strategy. Proactive, interactive, and reactive strategies are all likely to include a great deal of research, analyses, and often result in public policy changes. Lobbyists may be deployed to educate legislators and advocacy or grassroots campaigns initiated. It is routine to have numerous public relations specialists involved in strategic message creation around the issue in order to build understanding, inform, persuade, or alter public opinion. The length of an active issue communication campaign will vary due to the priority and complexity of the issue, as well as other facets such as intended outcomes, relationships with stakeholders, news media agenda, election cycles, budgetary constraints, and changing issue priorities of the organization.

Issue communication activities must be undertaken ethically. Additionally, lobbying is a highly regulated component of government affairs (specialized information on lobbying ethics and regulations exists through organizations like the Lobbying Institute).[9] Applying a high standard of ethical behavior across all sectors of government relations is a necessity to maintain public trust, integrity of public sector organizations, trust in corporate and NGO management, and fairness across the public policy process. Waymer[10] argued that the U.S. Constitution is often understood in a utilitarian sense of the greatest good for the greatest number of people, but that understanding should be expanded to include a more relationship-based responsibility of both government and the governed.

Scholars have argued that issues management is responsible for "operationalizing social responsibility."[11] Professional associations offer codes of ethics that can help to guide issues management and public policy. For example, the American Society for Public Administration offers a proscriptive code centered on "the spirit of responsible professionalism" seeking to promote public interest, upholding the Constitution, equity, and informed advising. Likewise, the Association of Government Relations Professionals begins its code of ethics with a statement that lobbying must always be undertaken with the honesty and integrity to protect the democratic process and the public trust.[12] The professional environment is shaped by not only associations, but the numerous channels available to public communicators. Scholars argue that government PIOs see social media as a tool through which government can become both more transparent and accountable as well as support democratic involvement and citizen engagement.[13]

The last phase of issues management, *evaluation research* is undertaken to show if the strategy for issue change was effective. The campaign will continue seeking stakeholder and public change on the issue, refine its messages and strategically retarget, or the issue may be considered resolved.[14] If the issue is resolved, other issues will escalate up the priority chain and gain the focus of SIM. Depending on the size of the organization in question and the number of arenas (localities, states, or nations) in which it operates, 5 to 30 issues are often being managed concurrently. In the fray of SIM, it is vital to remember that ethics must drive our decisions. During complex issue resolution, it is often thought that codes of ethics are not specific enough despite the best efforts of professionals in their creation.[15] Therefore, learning to conduct an independent moral analysis is of great benefit.

The ongoing cycle of issues management allows professional communicators in varied roles from government to public policy in the corporate world to identify, monitor, and understand future challenges so that they can be addressed in an ethical way before becoming crises. Various ethical paradigms or frameworks are used for moral analyses in issues management and strategy development. A closer examination of the most useful perspectives from moral philosophy assists in keeping governmental relations ethical and aligned with the highest ideals of responsibility and rectitude.

Ethical Approaches

Moral philosophy imposes an analytical form of examination to complex ethical questions. It seeks to allow the consistent analysis of complex questions, responsibilities, and outcomes based on critical analyses or logical thought. Efforts to engage in critical analyses desire to create objective rationality and minimize bias, oversights, the deleterious effect of cultural norms. In this manner ethics creates a more fair, just, and consistent civil society, equally, for all people. One could argue that without ethics civil society is an impossibility.

In a non-ideal but common approach to ethics, materialism holds that the decision-maker should do what is best for one's own interest. Although highly pragmatic and based on competition, unfair advantage quickly ensues and this approach tends to degenerate into egoism or brutal selfishness leading to anarchy. Therefore, philosophers must turn to a more normative ideal, or best practices mode of ethical decision-making in order to gain guidance and true help in navigating the complex terrain of government public relations. These normative approaches are where we look for analytical guidance. Normative ethical approaches require the decision-maker to strive for the ideal or best case scenario. This approach guards against bias by ruling out gut instinct, cultural traditions, intuition, or based-on-experience decision-making. Analytical approaches are intellectually challenging and require research or data as well we insight from multiple perspectives. However, the rigor of such analyses offers government public relations practice a heightened level of responsibility, integrity, insight, and defensibility.

First, we discuss a major form of consequentialist (or teleological) philosophy known as utilitarianism. A utilitarian approach would ask *what is the greatest good for the greatest number of people based on predicted consequences?* Next, there are two major forms of principle-based philosophy: virtue ethics and deontology. Each moral philosophy has strengths and weaknesses. A virtue ethics approach would ask *what would a person of high character do in this situation?* A deontological approach would ask *what moral principle should be upheld that is underlying this decision?* Moral philosophers argue that deontology is the most rigorous approach to ethical decision-making so it will be addressed last.

Consequentialism (Teleology): Utilitarianism

Consequentialism or teleology is an outcome-based form of ethical decision-making in which the decision-maker examines potential consequences of an action to determine what is ethical. Most consequentialist paradigms fall into utilitarian philosophy, based on what a decision does, also known as its utility. There are two primary ways of engaging in a utilitarian analysis that are useful in government public relations. Overall, utilitarianism holds that the best decision will maximize good outcomes for the greatest number of people and minimize harms or negative outcomes.

In two limited approaches within utilitarianism, we see different concepts being maximized. Hedonistic utilitarianism considers maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain as that which is ethical. Eudaimonistic utilitarianism uses the calculation of defining the ethical as that which produces the greatest happiness, or applies them which should be maximized to happiness. In that approach, the decision which maximizes happiness and minimizes unhappiness is the ethical course of action.

Finally, ideal utilitarianism does not confine the maximization to only one concept, but seeks its application over all of the concepts that are considered intrinsically valuable. Those concepts could be knowledge, honor, kindness, honesty, friendship, public health, and so on. Defining the good is a challenge in any form of ethics, but in the general utilitarian framework it is, 'the greater good for the greatest number of people while minimizing harms.' That idea resonates with those who work in government public relations because it highlights our civic responsibility to managing in the public interest.

There are two types of utilitarianism to consider. The first type, act utilitarianism, considers maximizing the greatest good for the greatest number while minimizing harms in a specific situation. All the specificity of that situation must be weighed and potential outcomes predicted and accurately as possible. The aggregate good for the citizenry, while minimizing negative effects, will be the ethical outcome in a specific situation alone. The second type of utilitarianism, rule utilitarianism, is similar. However rule utilitarianism goes further than a specific case by seeking to generalize to a rule or a class of actions would maintain the greatest good for the greatest number. Historical or past cases are to be consulted and considered for the overall rule as to what would benefit the most number of people in a longitudinal view. Although rule utilitarianism is more difficult to implement than act utilitarianism, it often results in more enduring decisions because the consequences it considers are long-term outcomes.

Although using a utilitarian analysis does not ensure an ethical outcome, this approach to ethics is fair and unbiased based on predicted consequences seeking to maximize the good for all. Act or rule utilitarianism is thought to produce more good than harm, although some negative outcomes are to be expected. For example, the U.S. justice system is based on a utilitarian framework. Although there are mistakes and some innocent people are indeed incarcerated, the overall framework of trial by jury years is thought to produce more good for most people than it does harm. Therefore, using utilitarianism in act or rule forms should benefit the public interest, as is often a common consideration in government public relations.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism provides a powerful idea of conducting public relations in the interest of the greatest good for the greatest number of citizens. There is little doubt that viewing the consequences of decisions upon citizen stakeholders and publics is a responsible part of government communications. As with any theory, the framework has strengths and weaknesses that the communicator should bear in mind:

- Potential future consequences of decisions must be predicted with accuracy
- All of the options or issue alternatives should be considered for their particular consequences
- Various stakeholders and publics will react in unpredictable ways to the decision and one must consider all of those potential reactions and viewpoints
- Anticipating unintended consequences should also be considered especially for negative outcomes or harms
- The rule of the majority should never silence legitimate or valid concerns of a minority
- Utilitarianism has the caveat of always reinforcing a majority opinion or status quo
- A minority can have a very valid moral perspective, yet this view does not consider moral principles, only consequences

- Infringement of rights, negative outcomes, and harms should be minimized
- A "sacrifice" of a smaller public in the interest of a larger public is not allowed
- Is extremely difficult to accurately predict the future public policy environment, diplomatic states, and trade agreements among nation-states

Utilitarianism can be used to thoroughly think through the consequences of a decision while maintaining awareness of these caveats. The utilitarian weighing of outcomes in a rational and objective manner can lend insight into future scenarios for managing an issue, as well as reveal factors that preference or bias a decision. Utilitarianism resembles a cost-benefit analysis and is a relatively easy way to measure the impact of the decision on stakeholders, citizens, and publics.[16] Utilitarianism requires a more analytical and researched version of an innate cost-benefit analysis. However, knowing which issue options create the greatest good or the greatest beneficial outcome for the largest number of citizens is helpful. After all, government public relations should be conducted with the public interest in mind.

Accurately predicting future consequences and repercussions, even with much research, is difficult. Opposing sides of an issue may point to different evaluations of what the good to be maximized is or should be. Take for example climate change research as discussed in Bowen and Heath in which either side has difficulty predicting future outcomes with any accuracy and therefore none can claim moral vindication.[17] Another problem of utilitarian theory is that seeking to serve a majority does not lend itself well to matters that are difficult to reduce to numbers. For instance: what is the value of a person's life? Utilitarianism cannot answer such questions of principle.

Implementing Utilitarianism

As long as one remains cognizant of utilitarianism's strengths and challenges, using that approach in government public relations could be helpful in countless situations concerning the ramifications of government and public policy. Utilitarianism lends itself well to government public relations because it considers the consequences of actions on the constituencies affected by a decision.

Virtue

Virtue ethics are an ancient Greek form of philosophy that seeks to examine the character of a person of true integrity. This person would argue for truth, as a rhetor in the court of public opinion. Audience members used their own rational autonomy to determine truth based upon hearing a persuasive argument. Engaging in rhetorical argument and debate allows the truth to become evident to all involved.

The person of virtuous character is responsible for evaluation of his or her decisions using a reflexive position of evaluation and hindsight in pursuit of the life well lived, demonstrating virtue of character over time. Although this framework is based upon moral principle, it is difficult to implement without the benefit of hindsight and time. The nonconsequentialist philosophy of deontology was developed in order to refine the virtue approach and make it easier to implement with discrete ethical tests.

Non-Consequentialism (Principle): Deontology

Nonconsequentialist reasoning is known as deontology because it is based on duty to uphold moral principle. Nonconsequentialist philosophy does, in fact, consider consequences but only as one factor among many, as opposed to using a potential outcome to determine the ethical nature of the decision. The most important consideration in deontological philosophy is a duty to moral principle. The creator of deontology, Immanuel Kant, offered: "there can be no will without an end in view."[18] Discovering the moral principle underlying a decision is the purpose of deontology. This analytical framework is based on the concept of rigorous rational analysis of all decision alternatives available from the various perspectives of constituents. Rationality is used to prevent bias, selfishness, fear of retribution, or similar that would taint the analysis. The philosopher Kant held that rationality is what makes all humans equal, and what gives each person the ability to engage in upholding moral principle.

The second concept driving deontology is moral autonomy. Moral autonomy refers to the independent analysis of decisions. Similar to rational objectivity, autonomy seeks objectivity to ensure the decision against bias or other influence. Rationality and work with one another in that one must be able to engage in an autonomous analysis without being compelled in any direction to result in a truly ethical answer. If a rational approach and moral autonomy are present, the government public relations practitioner can move forward to analyzing ethical dilemmas by using the three tests of deontology: The categorical imperative.

Implementing Deontology: The Categorical Imperative

Kant's categorical imperative holds three decision tests: duty, dignity and respect, and good will or good intention. In order to be deemed ethical, an action must pass all three of these tests affirmatively. In the first test, Kant asked us to pose the question, does the action uphold duty to moral principle?[19] In other words, could you obligate everyone else who faces a similar situation to take the same action you are about to implement? And is the decision reversible, in that it would be viewed as ethical if you were on the receiving end?

In the second test of the categorical imperative, does the action maintain the dignity and respect of all people involved? And in the third test, is the decision made with good intention or good will alone? If the answer is affirmative, the public would feel respected by the decision and not have their dignity stripped, then the decision is ethical and one can proceed to the next test. If the answer is confused or negative, it is not ethical to strip the public of dignity or respect based on the desires of an organization, government, or representative. The ethical theory Kant created requires all three tests to be answered positively for a decision to be ethical. If one test is failed, a decision becomes patently unethical. For example, a government fining those who speak out against it is unethical because it violates the dignity and respect of those persons. Reasonable people can disagree respectfully and maintain the dignity of an opposing party. To abridge that ability strips a public of the moral autonomy to create its own rational assessment of a situation.

One deontological philosopher, Rawls, attempted to make the categorical imperative tests easier to employ by using a thought device he termed the "veil of ignorance."[20] In employing the veil of ignorance, one must imagine that all of your demographic characteristics are unknown, and your relation to the issue at hand. Thus one can be detached from the outcome of the decision and create fair and respectful resolution to the issue, because you could ultimately find yourself on any side of the issue.

Asking "What intention supports this action?" is Kant's most stringent test of morality in the third categorical imperative test. Deontological ethics holds that only decisions made from good will or good intention to do the right thing are ethical. In governmental public relations, intentions should be routinely evaluated. Only the intention to do the right thing for its own sake is ethical. Kant called good will or good intention the ultimate norm of morality because it is his most stringent test.

Ethical Challenges for Governments and Public Sector Organizations in Digitized Environments

The complexity of contemporary society has led to new challenges for governments and public sector organizations that are having a strong influence also on public relations activities and strategic communication practices. In particular globalization and the impact of digital technologies have deeply changed communication ecologies requiring new skills and competences for issues managers and public affairs professionals, but also raising ethical challenges and threats for organizations worldwide.

Thanks to widespread Internet access and web 2.0, citizens have started to inhabit the social web, in particular social media. Indeed, these platforms cannot be considered solely information channels but as communication environments wherein relations can be created and nurtured among different type of online users, like citizens, organizations, institutions, associations, NGOs, journalists, bloggers, and so forth. In a connective society, these online relations enabled by digital platforms can be mutually beneficial for different interlocutors, including governments and public institutions. For instance, scholars have noted that social media can benefit public sector organizations in promoting participation, dialogue, and providing a voice in discussions of policy development and implementation. Furthermore, they can be used to engage digital publics in discussing public policies, in developing government services through co-production processes among public servants and citizens, or they can stimulate crowdsourcing activities that can generate new ideas to benefit the public interest.

At the same time digital and social media can create and amplify crisis and conflicts that have direct impacts on governments and public policies' decision-making. Online and digital activism are constantly increasing in digital avenues. With this term we mean the use of digital platforms such as social media or instant messaging chats (like Telegram, WeChat or WhatsApp) for various forms of citizens' activism, like raising awareness on specific problem or issue (climate change; women rights; health inequalities, and so on), delivering local information to a larger audience, protesting against governments or public sector organizations for lack of transparency on public policy process. In particular, social media allow messages to become platforms for the mobilization of oppositional publics, setting in motion a politics of visibility and amplifying the elements of collective ideas and identities. Digital activism can be visible in different modalities, like the creation of political "ad hoc issue public";[21] "hashtag public" that is a community born on Twitter created to respond to an emerging event or issue with political or social relevance; or "networked counterpublics," fostering the spread of counternarratives, oppositional interpretations, or critical opinions in order to have an effect on institutionalized politics. Thus, social media have added pressure on authorities not only to adopt an attitude of collaboration and dialogue with citizens, stakeholders, and strategic publics. For example, the microblog Twitter allows President Trump to communicate directly with followers without the intermediary of the media. Social Media also holds influence on decisions related to political and social issues that need research, as well as a strategic issue management approach for assessments of responsibilities, virtue, principles, and their possible consequences for populations.

This visibility and compression of time deeply influence government public relations since they impact on agenda building, on trust and credibility of the organizations and their leaders, requiring a strategic role of those professionals in charge of managing public sector organizations' social media channels. Heightened visibility and time compression allow less time for SIM and ethical analysis when the issue plays out with digital activism. Being prepared and conversant with ethical frameworks is key to identifying ethical issues as well as engaging the SIM process with alacrity.

Social Media: Challenges, Barriers, and Ethical Dilemmas

Scholars have shown how the adoption of a social media logic for governments and public sector organizations is a complex process since administrations still fundamentally rely on bureaucratic structures based on a Weberian model of controlled and centralized information.[22] These organizations are also faced with diverse organizational and cultural constraints that have limited the use of the potentiality of these platforms, thus preventing organizations to fully embrace technological innovations. This mentality clashes with the erosion of power and centralized control enabled by social media and enhanced by digital activism, thus generating ethical dilemmas in some cases, institutional discomfort, or even barriers in adopting these platforms in the public sector.[23] Nonetheless, social media implementation seems to be inevitable in the public sector due to the rapid technological improvements driven by third-party private providers (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, Google), and by the evolving citizens' behaviors in the realm of digital skills and media consumption's patterns. This process was recently speeded by the pandemic of Covid-19 that has accelerated the institutionalization of social media channels and the adoption of digital platforms to stay in contact with citizens and to offer them digitized public services, especially during the countries' lockdowns.

It is important to say that social media have, specifically, brought a number of challenges for governments public relations and public affairs officers: for instance, issues of privacy, security, e-participation, democratization, and engagement. All these challenges should be ethically evaluated using one or more of the analysis frameworks (utilitarianism, virtue, or deontology) discussed earlier in the necessity to maintain trust and integrity for government and public sector organizations. Indeed, they can turn into threats or ethical issues that should be decreased before they could become crises, or areas of conflicts in a relationship perspective with citizens and media. For instance, some authors have pointed out how an increased digital transparency could foster online surveillance where administrations and administrators can become omnipresent in tracking citizens and in controlling the dialogue with the organization.[24] Indeed, the production of communication enabled by the Internet and social media makes everything more visible and at the same time controlled, evolving in a digital panopticon in which everyone can be observed and monitored from every side, everywhere and from everybody. This panopticon state is a serious threat to the autonomy necessary for moral deliberation that we discussed earlier.

Surveillance, Data Use, and Engagement

Surveillance of digital publics and collection of data on social media are connected problems needing ethical guidance and they can represent an ethical challenge for public sector organizations and communicators' activities. Data management is an ethical issue that has acquired great visibility in the media and in public opinion after the 'Cambridge Analytica' scandals and the "Brexit" in the U.K. In fact, social media platforms are property of digital companies that are quoted on the stock exchange. Their business model is based on data management that are sold to companies and advertising agencies to make profits. Indeed, social media algorithms are designed to make user profiles and activities marketable first and only secondarily meaningful. Consequently, government and public sector organizations can get trapped in the "social media logic"[25] that exposes citizens to personalized and polarized information, sealing them in filter and cultural bubbles where they are interconnected but isolated in a social foam that shapes their expectations. This creating of polarization may be an unethical form of isolation from the needed information to conduct a moral analysis from multiple perspectives. Most of the time, public organizations rely outside of these bubbles for the poor quality of their social media presence, mainly organizational-centered and not strategically managed or oriented by trained public affairs officers (PAOs) or skilled communicators. This factor raises ethical questions, since social media listening may not represent all voices. Or citizens' feedback can be exploited to solve problems saving time and money for public consultations. Fundamentally, asking citizens to engage in co-producing initiatives on social media for their governments raises several moral questions related to the creation of surplus value for these organizations by such engagement and the public nature of these administrations is against any form of labor exploitation.

Another key ethical consideration is participation and engagement. Scholars have found that there is still a limited number of people who interact online with governments and actively contribute to services, policies, and decision-making processes on social media, despite their potentialities. Thus, we can be in front of an ersatz participation, and social media can paradoxically widen the gap between governments and citizens.[26] Beyond the enabling functions of social media, these platforms are most often used as a one-way tool for the dissemination of messages. Therefore, social media are not strategically managed to favor dialogue, to stimulate civic engagement or to enhance trust, so that governments cannot incorporate stakeholders' ideas and values. For this reason, social media seems to promote a "symbolic participation rather than genuine participation, making people feel a part of the process but giving no one a genuine voice."[27] This opens an ethical dilemma for government public relations and PAOs. This practice seems to satisfy the egoism and the online visibility of political leaders instead of maximizing the opportunity to create an arena for collaboration and listening for a great number of online publics interested in relating with governments or public sector organizations. The result is a "rhetoric of technological innovation" that repeatedly disappoints citizens and reduces their trust in such organizations that are not able to change perspective and to use digital technologies and social media dialogically for empowering communication and participation. In the same perspective, Macnamara[28] has emphasized the collapse of public communication into post-communication favoring an architecture of speaking, designed to influence and coerce publics into acquiescence and compliance, rather than debate, dialogue and negotiation.

A deontological ethical framework is best in facing these challenges because it is powerful, rigorous, and analytical and allows the information publics needed to engage in the public policy process. Additionally, it offers reliance on authenticity, rationality, duty, dignity and respect, as well as good intention.

Rumors, Misinformation and Crisis Communication

Another key area and another challenge are related to the rapid spread of rumors, fake news and misinformation in contemporary society that can represent a threat for democracy and can harm governments and public sector organizations' reputation and credibility.[29] Though the spread of false or misleading information are not new phenomena, the term rose to prominence in recent years, gaining a high popularity among politicians, journalists, and the lay publics. Due to the possible impact of misinformation on citizens' choices, incorrect information diffusion on the Internet and social media can represent a severe issue for democracy, but also in relation to topics of public interest, such as public health, crisis and natural disasters. Kim and de Zúñiga[30] use the term "pseudo-information" to include all types of false or inaccurate information which can result in harmful social consequences. Decisions based on truth, not consequences, can counteract these types of ethical problems.

Governments and public sector organizations are today fully immersed in this scenario, characterized also by the development of interconnected and hybrid media systems, together with the activism of citizens on social media. Scholars showed how ethical guidelines for social media use have been published and codes of ethics for governments and professional communicators routinely deal with ethical guidelines for social media, both in ordinary and crisis situations. Crisis, emergencies and disasters represent communicative arenas in which government credibility, trust, and veracity are put under pressure by the quick spread of fake news and disinformation. Seeger and colleagues[31] claimed that "truthfulness, honesty, deception, and even lying become even more complex moral issues during a crisis." Crises for their nature pose dilemmas and ethical challenges for public sector organizations in the authority-citizens relationship. Social media enables more ethical authority communication, and public sector organizations should adopt a communitarian view for their public relations in order to ensure the formation of trust between authorities and citizens. To resolve these challenges, a deontological paradigm can be used to reveal honest moral principles rather than relying on potential outcomes or the character of one individual.

Lovari and Bowen showed how ethical concerns of presenting honest and accurate information to citizens and media in order to prevent and quell rumors were a central concern in the use of social media by public sector organizations in South Carolina during the 2015 flooding disaster.[32] They also suggest PAOs need to train in big data and invest in artificial intelligence (i.e., chatbots), in order to rapidly carry out digital research and real-time monitoring, to spread effective information, and to quickly reply to simple questions in disaster situations, also for mitigating misinformation tending to increase on digital avenues. The use of artificial intelligence for public sector organizations besides requiring technological alignments, and cultural and organizational changes, poses new ethical challenges for government communicators and public managers.

Moreover, the recent COVID-19 pandemic has represented a difficult challenge for government public relations and public sector organizations in general, due to the fear and uncertainty related to the lack of knowledge in the etiology of the virus and its consequences at health, political, economic, and social levels. In this crisis, fake news intertwines with "infodemic" (an epidemic of information),[33] giving rise to a cacophony of voices. In this cacophony governmental and institutional communications were often misaligned with media coverage and with an indistinguishable mix of misinformation, unverified rumors, and intentionally manipulated disinformation.[34] An ethical solution is desperately warranted in the use of logic and rational analyses needed for moral autonomy and assessment of honest, principled information. All these voices were difficult to monitor and to control especially on social media, posing new ethical issues and challenges for communicators. Coombs argued that social media showed their duality in front of the COVID-19 pandemic.[35] From one side these platforms represent an asset for their role in understanding and reaching citizens; from the other side they represent a liability and complication in terms of digital divide, ethical concerns, and the veracity of information shared online. The ethical demands on public sector organizations were so heightened during the Covid-19 pandemic that a new model of ethics as the driver of public sector communication dynamics was offered, as shown in Figure 10.1.[36]

Having ethics drive the other factors of government public relations as well as citizen engagement allow public institutions to be ethically

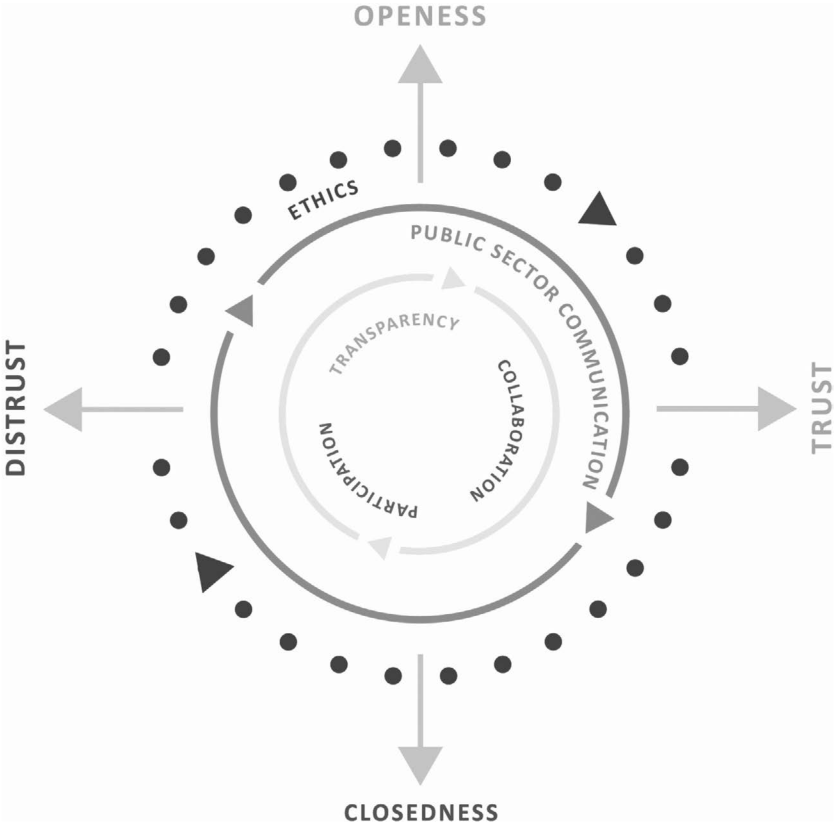

Figure 10.1 Ethics as the Driver of Public Sector Communication Dynamics

Source: Lovari, D'Ambrosi & Bowen (2020).

responsive to issues as they arise – which was rapidly, in the case of COVID-19. Furthermore, a new and more ethically aware approach should be developed by governments and public affairs professionals in the social web, aiming at decreasing the polarization of opinions, inherently shaped by platforms' algorithms, and having a credible and reliable digital voice, fighting misinformation using fact checking strategies, but also collaborating with other organizations, mass media and digital platforms to curb the curve of fake news.

Conclusion

Strategic issues management should be used to identify and solve problems in government and public affairs before these issues become crises. Issues of this type normally involve one or more ethical components that should be analyzed using one or more of the philosophical frameworks discussed above: utilitarianism, virtue, or deontological ethics.

Applying one or more of these ethical frameworks can help to simplify the complexities surrounding the challenges faced in government and public affairs brought on by activism, social media, rumors, misinformation, and crises. Examining consequences and the greater good for the greatest number, virtuous ideals of truth and character, and the underlying moral principle of duty, dignity, and good intention all provide strong and well-considered ethical decisions.

Governmental public relations and public affairs professionals should always include ethical analyses in issues management and public policy initiatives. It is essential to identify ethical issues, collect data from multiple perspectives, and use the ethical decision-making frameworks presented in this chapter to create SIM intelligences. Taking a proactive strategic approach can result in ethical issue responses, increased transparency, and more honesty in government. Using deontology, argued to be the most rigorous ethical approach by moral philosophers, coupled with the ideas of virtuous character and keeping consequences on citizens, stakeholders, and constituencies in view can lead to more trustworthy governmental public relations. Using these ethical analyses in SIM should allow government relations and public affairs professionals to achieve an active role in creating more ethical, responsive, and responsible public policy outcomes.

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11 Operating in Awareness of Legal, Institutional, Political Contexts

Kevin R. Kosar

Right and Wrong: What's The Difference?

Who wants to do wrong? Assuredly, everyone does wrong at one time or another, and some individuals even take delight in bad behavior. However, nobody – except for the truly disturbed – wants to be caught doing wrong. It is a painful experience. Humans are social animals, and human groups tend to punish those who violate their norms. When caught, the wrong-doer often suffers tangible retribution, such as fines, and intangible punishments, like shame and the loss of one's reputation.

For the government public relations practitioner, doing right and avoiding wrong is an existential imperative. The essence of his occupation is to provide useful information to large audiences, sometimes numbering in the tens of millions. The moment his audience views him as untrustworthy or even his colleagues, he loses the power inherent to his position. In high-profile instances, the opprobrium of an entire nation can pour upon him, washing him out of his job.

But how can he do right and avoid doing wrong? Right and wrong are not always black and white – one need not be a nihilist to recognize that. In different times and places the same words can have fantastically different effects.

Unfortunately, there is no all-encompassing list of do's and don'ts that the government public relations practitioner can keep tacked on a corkboard by one's desk. Learning any formal rules that may exist is critical, but that will not save him from slip-ups. This is because the perception of wrong-doing is not limited to those actions that actually are wrong. There is a much larger realm of behaviors that can provoke condemnation. Those who violate these unwritten rules often suffer blowback from politicians, the media, and the public for "the appearance of wrongdoing." Whether the action broke a rule often becomes secondary to the mere fact of audience outrage. Again, the efficacy of a government public relations practitioner is greatly dependent upon his audience's and colleagues' trust.

Figuring out what is good and bad is awfully complex. To increase his odds of staying in the right (or at least, out of the wrong), the government public relations practitioner may find it useful to think about the right- and wrong-doing in terms of his institutional position. Specifically, he can consider how a proposed action would appear when placed within the five macro-contexts in which he, as a government public relations practitioner, operates (1) his occupation, (2) his agency, (3) his country's laws, (4) his country's constitution, and (5) his nation's sense of the sacred.

To operationalize this, the practitioner would ask himself before executing a public relations activity, "How does action X look in the context of (1) my occupation; (2) my agency; and …" If a proposed action squares with each of these contexts, he might feel comfortable going forward with it. Oppositely, if the action does not comport with one or more of these contexts, he should think hard about the perils of proceeding.

The Five Institutional Macro-Contexts

Occupation

While this chapter speaks generally of the government public relations practitioner, clearly there are many species of this professional. In the United States, there are agency liaisons, spokespersons, public information officers, communications directors, and more.

With the different titles often come different job descriptions, and to make matters even more confusing, there is no government-wide position description for each of these job titles. The communications director for an elected official has a very different job than the communications director for the U.S. Army.

Accordingly, wherever one is employed, the government public relations practitioner must familiarize himself with his agency's policies and rules, and its past public outreach activities. Additionally, he should peruse media and talk to members of the public in order to get a sense for how people outside the agency perceive it. What do they think that it does? What do they think that it ought to do? And if the government public relations practitioner can find time to consult with the legislators who control the purse strings for his agency, all the better.

In the United States, government public relations practitioners can be divided into two types – civil servants and political appointees. A civil servant is hired by agencies based upon their knowledge, skills, abilities, and experience. It is a merit-based process. In exchange for life tenure in his position, a civil servant is expected to serve the public good, not shill for any particular politician. A political appointee, on the other hand, is chosen by a president or agency head (who also is nominated by a president), and the political appointee serves as an advocate for and an executor of the president's agenda. His time tends to be short – no more than a few years, as he has little job protection beyond the goodwill of the president.

Hence, the government public relations practitioner must be clear which he is – a servant of the public and the agency, or a player on the president's team. The former is expected to deliver messages that are more substantive and less political and promotional; the latter is more free to sell a president and his programs.

Agency

The extent of activities that a government public relations practitioner may undertake is partially a product of the nature of the agency for which he works. Put generally, these questions are, "What does my agency do, why, and for whom?" Put specifically, the questions might be: "Does it provide services to other government agencies, or the general public? Is the agency's job to collect income taxes from the public, or to deter certain behaviors that are individually and socially dangerous (e.g., using illicit drugs)?"

Once these questions are answered, the government public relations practitioner may then consider what sort of communicative activities flow from the nature of his agency. So, for example, the U.S. Navy is an agency that staffs itself through voluntary service (rather than conscription). Accordingly, it spends millions of dollars each year running high-profile advertisements (e.g., during televised major sporting events) encouraging young men and women to enlist in the Navy. Few people object to these expenditures as they are understood to be necessary for the agency to do what it does – pay individuals to serve to fight wars and defend the nation's interests.

Similarly, there was no outcry when the Department of Health and Human Services held a competition to see who among the public could submit a video that would most effectively encourage individuals to get flu vaccinations. (The rapping "Hip Hop Doc" took the $2,500 prize.)[1] Though a little unorthodox at the time, the campaign was perfectly in keeping with the agency's legal duty of the agency to promote public health. Nor has the media written scathing stories about the National Park Service's Twitter feed, which features photographs of wild animals and the great outdoors.[2] Encouraging the public to appreciate and visit public lands is part of the agency's mission.

And even though there are serious questions as to its efficacy, the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy's (ONDCP) permanent media campaign against illegal drugs continues with little significant political criticism.[3] Whether advertisements are an effective deterrent to illegal drug use is not for ONDCP to decide; that is the job of politicians. Its job is to promote drug-free living, and the agency does this with gusto.

Legal

Government agencies are born from laws, and laws both create and curb agencies' authorities for action. Some agencies, for example, may collect taxes and fees; others may not. Every government public relations practitioner should have some familiarity of the statutes that encourage and limit his agency's work. Ideally, he also should become familiar with any adjudications on these laws, be it a court ruling or the official perspective of an enforcement agency. Not only is it the right thing to do, but it can give the practitioner a real sense of what is permissible and what is not, and keep him from putting his agency in legal jeopardy.

In the United States, the federal government has two sorts of statutory controls relevant to government public relations activities – two laws, and a provision that appears in annual federal appropriations laws.[4] One of the laws was enacted in 1913, and reads, "Appropriated funds may not be used to pay a publicity expert unless specifically appropriated for that purpose" (5 *U.S. Code* 3107). Another law from 1919 forbids a government agency from encouraging the public to lobby on its behalf. An agency may not

> directly or indirectly to pay for any personal service, advertisement, telegram, telephone, letter, printed or written matter, or other device, intended or designed to influence in any manner a Member of Congress, a jurisdiction, or an official of any government, to favor, adopt, or oppose, by vote or otherwise, any legislation, law, ratification, policy, or appropriation, whether before or after the introduction of any bill, measure, or resolution proposing such legislation, law, ratification, policy, or appropriation.
>
> (18 *U.S. Code* 1913)

In 2002 this latter law was amended so as to allow penalties of up to $100,000 for wrong-doing (116 Stat. 1778).

Additionally, each year Congress passes laws to appropriate federal funds for spending by agencies, and frequently it includes this boilerplate language in these laws: "No part of any appropriation contained in this Act shall be used for publicity or propaganda purposes not authorized by the Congress." (Few laws, it should be noted, carry any language permitting publicity experts or publicity activities.)

At first glance, then, it would appear that the U.S. government does not do much public relations because of the tough statutory limitations. And that perception would be utterly incorrect.

As with most laws, understanding what they mean in practice requires looking at the official interpretations of these laws. Both Congress and its auditing agency, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) can police these statutes; so too the Department of Justice (DoJ), which is the agency responsible for enforcing federal laws. Curiously, the sum total of the interpretations and applications of the aforementioned statutes is much more relaxed than the laws themselves. The GAO has issued the most thoroughly explicated interpretation. Illegal government public relations communications include those that:

- involve large-scale publicity campaigns to generate citizen contacts with Congress on behalf of an agency's position on pending legislation;
- involve "self-aggrandizement" of the agency, its personnel, or activities;
- are "purely partisan in nature," that is, is "designed to aid a political party or candidate"; or
- are "covert propaganda," that is, the communication does not reveal that government spent money to craft or spread the message.[5]

So, for example, if a government public relations practitioner drew up a press release touting his agency's successes of the past year, sent it to newspapers around the country, and offered to sit for interviews, that likely would be viewed as appropriate. If, however, this same practitioner were to mail this flyer to members of the public and urge them to call their Congressmen and demand more appropriations for his agency, that action may well provoke ire and GAO, DoJ, and congressional investigations. And, finally, if this government public relations practitioner paid a citizen to ghost write an op-ed condemning a bill before Congress, he might well find himself out of a job and facing government prosecution.

To some degree, then, the above restrictions reflect elected officials limited tolerance for government agencies attempting to influence the lawmaking process. Understanding why politicians feel this way requires an appreciation for the constitutional presuppositions that underpin the U.S.'s democratic republic.

Constitutional

A nation's constitution both reflects and affects the sentiments of its people. A constitution holds both explicit and implicit ideas (or principles) about the relationship between the governors and the governed, and the general goals of the nation-state (e.g., liberty and equality).

In most modern nation-states, the general view is that political power flows from people, and elected officials and their bureaucratic servants are obliged to use this power in accordance with the public's sense of right. To this end, the public elects legislators and executive figures to represent the public. These elected officials are responsible for directing the governmental apparatus that gets things done. The public pays government employees' compensation, and it often feels that this makes it the boss of government.

This arrangement is terrifically complex. While the people do have beliefs and feelings about many matters, they most assuredly do not have well-formed opinions on the myriad issues that governments deal with daily. This is not a matter of stupidity, it is simply inherent to modern mass government. (Quick: Who among this book's learned readership can explain, say, what are the top priorities of the International Monetary Fund, or what is the total value of U.S. agricultural subsidies was in fiscal year 2020?) An elected official faces an ineradicable tension between serving as a delegate to do as the people demand, and operating as a trustee who is to make decisions in the best interests of voters. Similarly, the public does recognize that government employees have jobs to do and have only a limited discretion to do them. Yet, the public often gripes about the things that government agencies do, and condemns public servants for failing to serve the public's whim du jour.

Muddled as this arrangement may be, there is one general principle that is beyond dispute – the public will little tolerate either elected officials or government employees deceiving it. The entire governing arrangement is predicated on trust – it is a fiduciary relationship between the governed and their governors. Yes, the public will tolerate the government's efforts to honestly persuade it, but it will turn on anyone who appears to be trying to put one over on it. The government public relations practitioner must keep this in mind.

Beyond this, the government public relations specialist should be mindful of other principles contained with the constitution of his country. The U.S. Constitution explicates a vision of limited government with certain enumerated ends. It also establishes a federal system, one where public policy responsibilities are divided between the national government and subnational (state) governments. The federal government, for example, is entrusted in matters of war and peace. State and local governments, on the other hand, have the authority to operate schools and license gambling establishments. Limited government and federalism are but two of the many principles within the Constitution.

The government public relations practitioner would benefit from familiarizing himself with his country's basic constitutional ideas. This does not mean he must take a course in constitutional law or history. Rather, it means he ought to ponder how his public relations efforts fit or collide with the ideas in his country's constitutional ideas. These principles serve as both curbs and opportunities. Messages that are consonant with a nation's constitutional ideas likely will have greater resonance with the public; dissonant messages may have the opposite effect.

Sacred

Nearly every nation has a founding and developmental myth that tells how its people came to be and who they are. Here "myth" should not be read to mean "untrue story" or "fantasy," like the "myth of the Loch Ness Monster." Rather, here a myth means the sociological process by which a people construct a narrative that defines their society and its ordering institutions.[6] In short: Who are we? How did we get here? Where are we going? Why do we do things as we do?

While Mother Nature may impel people to love their family, nations' founding and developmental myths play a critical role in developing the bond between a citizenry and its government. They bridge the gap between the particular (me) and the abstract whole (America), and thereby enable citizens to assume a national identity, and to recognize certain rights, duties, and perspectives as a member of that nation. Founding and developmental myths socialize people to treat some aspects of their nation as sacred. Some aspects of these myths and stories are intangible, such as ideals (equality) and memories (a great battle), and others are tangible (the nation's flag, or the house where a revered citizen once lived). With the passing of time, founding myths and developmental stories are reinterpreted by societies. One age's heroes may be unknown to another.

Those individuals who have run political campaigns well understand the power of a narrative that taps into the nation's story. But to many government public relations practitioners, this all might sound a bit nebulous. Make no mistake – founding and developmental myths are very real, and they can have profound effects on how people perceive your actions and words. The government public relations practitioner who runs roughshod over something sacred likely will face outrage that borders on the irrational.

Examples of the Macro-Contexts Applied in the U.S.'s Federal Context

Occupation

Every government agency has an interest in communicating with the media and public, and every agency wants to see that it is perceived positively. This holds true for political appointees and civil servants alike. Neither of them wants their agency to look bad. Bad press and hostile public opinion get picked up by elected officials, the folks who oversee agencies and provide an agency's operating budget.

"You gotta accentuate the positive" is an old slogan in the public relations world, and the public has remarkable patience for political appointees selling their bosses' policies. Appointees frequently give speeches extolling their bosses and his grand plans and nobody bats an eye. It is expected behavior. However, when civil servants join them in aggressive public relations activities, politicians, the media, and the public take exception.

Too bad the people in charge of public relations for the Social Security Administration (SSA) some years back did not heed this point. The SSA and its employees long have had a dowdy reputation. They collect payroll taxes, then use the money to pay retired workers a small pension. The SSA need not advertise its services much, and its communications tend to be about as exciting as an accountancy lecture – "Here is the current funding level of the Social Security Trust Fund, here are the expected levels of disbursements in 50 years, which is based on actuarial assumptions drawn from …"

Critics have long raised honest questions about the long-term fiscal health of the Social Security program as currently structured. Some have suggested that the program would benefit from adding a private investment account to it, a sort of Individual Retirement Account that could provide additional funds to retirees. (Federal employees have had this sort of arrangement for decades.) President George W. Bush was a strong advocate of this adding private accounts to Social Security, and some of his SSA appointees decided to use the SSA and its employees to stoke public opinion in favor of improving SSA.

The agency produced a "strategic communications plan" that urged SSA employees to disseminate the message that "Social Security's long-term financing problems are serious and need to be addressed soon." President Bush undertook a "60 stops in 60 days" tour of the country and brought with him SSA civil servants.

The Congress largely was not amused. In a hearing, Senator Paul S. Sarbanes stated:

> I have great respect for Social Security employees. I think they're very much committed to their mission … But I think they've always understood that they're outside of or removed from politics, that politics ought not to come into play. Politics is done elsewhere and by other people, but not by career employees of the Social Security Administration. And I am deeply concerned about this effort now to depart from this traditionally neutral role with respect to the Social Security career employees in policy debates in an effort to make them part of a highly politicized public relations campaign. It's so contrary, not only to what has been the practice, the precedent, but it's so contrary to essentially the integrity of government. I mean, the government is not there to be used in any way possible by a particular political group to its advantage. I understand the temptation is there, but in the past, we've succeeded in forestalling that temptation.[7]

The SSA public relations campaign backfired. A lot of the media coverage focused on the controversy of using SSA and its civil servants to stump for a contentious policy change. The campaign did not boost the public's receptivity to adding private accounts to Social Security, and in the end the president's proposal went nowhere.[8]

How Can This Government Public Relations Challenge be Solved?

Regardless of political party, there is widespread recognition that the Social Security program faces long-term financing challenges. There are a variety of ways to approach this policy problem, and some are better than others.[9] *How might an agency express its expertise-based views on reforms without being perceived as pushing an agenda?*

Agency

In the United States, the conception of government is that politicians decide what policy should be pursued, and then a government agency is supposed to execute that policy. The reality is more messy than that, of course, as elected officials constantly are asking for the advice of agencies as to which policies work better. Nonetheless, those who face the voters consider themselves the policy deciders.

Too often, this simple notion has been breached, to ill effect. There is an old barb that the first casualty in war is the truth. Sadly, this barb has proven true innumerable times. The job of the Department of Defense (DoD) is to defend the nation from attacks, and to fight wars as directed. The DoD is free to inform the president and Congress about its views of the any particular confrontation either before or during the fight. But, it runs great political risks when it attempts to sell a war to the public.

Not long after the start of the Iraq War in March 2003, the DoD began propagating a story about the heroics of Private Jessica Lynch, who fiercely fought an ambush before being captured and abused. (It was barely half-true.)[10] A year later, DoD told another tall tale, claiming that the former football star Patrick Tillman had died while fighting in Afghanistan. (In fact, he was killed by friendly fire.) These were feel-good stories for boosting patriotism. These were just the tip of the iceberg.[11]

During the run-up to the war, political appointees at the agency's public affairs office had undertaken a formidable and stealthy public relations effort. One part of it involved identifying high-ranking, retired military officers (RMOs) who they thought would be sympathetic to the DoD's sunny view of the war and its progress.[12] The DoD provided these RMOs with private briefings and junkets to Iraq and elsewhere to see how well things were going. The RMOs then made themselves available to television and print journalists who were looking for scoops on the war. Many of them performed exactly as DoD had hoped – as "message force multipliers" for the agency, who told the public that the war was necessary and would be low cost.

Though it took a while, this agency campaign was sniffed out by reporters and retribution was swift and severe. The Congress investigated, as did the GAO and the DoD's inspector general. Although these activities were not found to be illegal, they elicited palpable disgust. Much of the public had been against the invasion of Iraq, and this public relations mischief fueled their anger further. Rather than just fight the war, the DoD had done as it so often had done before – entered the political fray over the wisdom of war-making in the hopes of bolstering support for one side.

How Can This Government Public Relations Challenge be Solved?

In most modern nation-states, military agencies report to elected officials, who usually have divergent views on where and when to employ military force. When should a military agency weigh in on these debates? How can it communicate its views without being perceived as favoring certain elected officials over others?

Legal

Even though the United States' legal prohibitions on government public relations are pretty lax, some practitioners have nonetheless broken them. When the breeches are small, there seldom is an outcry. But brazen transgressions of the laws can invite a punitive response.

President Barack Obama's Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was caught breaking laws against illicit public relations activities in 2015. The agency had proposed a new rule that would have expanded the reach of the Clean Water Act's restrictions and the EPA's domain of authority, a source of concern for dairy farmers, home-builders, timber companies, energy producers and dozens of organizations and companies.[13]

Anticipating antipathy to the rule, the EPA launched a PR campaign. Tweets, memes and videos were pumped out over social media singing the rule's praises and enlisting the public to declare support. The agency gamed the regulatory process by working with environmental groups to gin up positive public comments about the new rule. In subsequent congressional testimony, EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy cited the surfeit of glowing comments on "Waters of the United States" as evidence that America loved it.

Congress was not amused. It conducted aggressive oversight of the EPA's actions and had the GAO issue a legal opinion. Rather than admit it had overstepped, an agency spokesperson glibly denied wrong-doing and told the press, "We use social media tools just like all organizations to stay connected and inform people across the country about our activities."[14] It was a tone-deaf response that ignored the fact that the EPA is a government agency and is to follow the law and serve the people, not a private company doing sales.

Subsequently, the GAO issued its opinion, and the non-partisan government watchdog concluded the EPA had broken the law, and had misspent tax dollars.[15] In the end, the proposed rule was stopped by federal courts.

How Can This Government Public Relations Challenge Be Solved?

When an agency proposes a rule for public feedback, it should take steps to encourage comments. But it violates the law if it aims to encourage perspectives that agree with the rule. *How can an agency explain the wisdom of a proposed policy yet remain open to constructive criticism for revision of the policy?*

Constitutional

Elected officials and government employees well recognize the power of television and online video to persuade the public. The ubiquity of video cameras has encouraged them to script and sculpt more and more of their public appearances. There is nothing objectionable about an official working up smooth answers to questions before they are asked. Governing is complicated, and even a slight misstatement might sow needless media and public confusion.

But, in their zeal to control their message and frame the debate, some government public relations figures frequently have gone too far in recent years. They have taken interactions that are supposed to be interlocutory and turn them into unilateral performances wherein they act less as officials responsive to the public – per the U.S. Constitution – than unaccountable hucksters.

We have this in public officials' press conferences, which too often have become less than what they are supposed to be – an opportunity for government officials to provide information and take questions from reporters. Politicians' and agency heads' handlers sometimes have prescreened media and audience members to ensure that the questions asked were not threatening or raised issues the speakers wanted to discuss. The Administration of President Donald J. Trump, for example, pulled the press passes of media they found too critical, and gave passes to sympathetic bloggers.[16] This was a bad look for a president, and is a horrific one for agency heads and other officials.

And in one particularly egregious instance, the government faked a press briefing entirely. In October 2007, the deputy administrator for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) held a press conference to address FEMA's efforts to control wildfires in California. His performance was flawless, and soon it was discovered why – his audience (which the cameras did not show) consisted of FEMA public affairs employees.[17] Despite the fact that the deputy administrator was providing good information that was useful to the media and reporters, he drew mocking condemnation. Not only had he offended the press by co-opting their constitutional role as public watchdogs, he had deceived his boss, the public, by pretending to hold a press conference.

Trouble also has befallen government public relations personnel when they forget their agency's place in the constitutional system. This form of failure was on full display when President Obama's Administration revealed that it was going to give a "welcome back to school" speech at a public high school in Virginia in August 2009. This was not a novel bit of public relations. Previous presidents, including Ronald W. Reagan and George H.W. Bush, had given school speeches. It was far from radical stuff – the president would discuss the importance of schooling and encourage students to take responsibility for their studies and grades. His speech would be broadcast to schools nationwide, which were free to tune in or not.

Nonetheless, a small political firestorm erupted, and some parents threatened to boycott the speech by keeping their children home from school. In part, the backlash was simply politics – some members of the political far right sincerely disliked and distrusted the "liberal" president.

But the Administration itself tripped a constitutional landmine through public relations overreach. Apparently, it was not enough to have the president give the speech and broadcast it around the nation. The Department of Education went a step further and hired a contractor to produce curricular materials related to the speech which would be distributed to the schools. This was a very bad decision. The U.S. Constitution does not give power over the schools to the federal government, and for over 50 years there have been vitriolic political disputes over "unconstitutional federal meddling" in the schools and their curricula.[18] Although the federal role in schooling has grown, about 90% of school funding still comes from taxes collected by states and localities. But, it gets worse – the initial curricular materials urged students to "Write letters to themselves about what they can do to help the President." Somehow, somebody in the public affairs office missed this gaffe.

The picture was terrible, and critics pilloried the president for spending tax dollars to indoctrinate children and use them to promote his political agenda.[19] The Administration reworked the offending curricular materials and spent a great deal of energy tamping down the flames. In the end, the speech came off well, but the president's image had taken a harsh and needless hit.

How Can This Government Public Relations Challenge Be Solved?

Government agencies understandably want to show that they can help. Nonetheless, they do not operate in isolation and often share responsibilities and jurisdictions with other parts of the governance system. *Where do we draw the line between an energetic agency and an overreaching one?*

Sacred

The modern American president is, quite plainly, a highly visible public figure. Much of what he does is make public appearances for the sake of advocating his policies and persuading both the people and legislators. Like other public officials, he has scores of employees who assist with public relations activities, and who oversee the acquisition and production of presidential tchotchkes and memorabilia – paper weights, photographs, and the like. (The president is not alone in this. The U.S. Congress has both Senate and House of Representatives gift shops which sell golf balls, shirts, and coffee mugs stamped with each chamber's emblem. Some federal agencies, such as NASA, also sell self-promotional souvenirs.)

By all accounts, Louis E. Caldera was a fine person to be appointed the director of the White House Military Office, which provides military support to the presidents. President Obama no doubt saw plenty in Mr. Caldera's resumé to inspire trust – Caldera had served Secretary of the U.S. Army, as a California State legislator, and as the head of the University of New Mexico. Six months after he took his White House post, though, Caldera was engulfed in a public relations firestorm and lost his job. What went wrong? In short, Caldera approved a government public relations activity that violated the sacred.

In April 2009, Caldera's office approved a photo shoot using one of the presidential jet airplanes. This was not unprecedented, and it should have been no big deal. Take the plane up, have another plane or two follow it and snap some photographs – voila, the White House would have nice pictures to share with the media and the public.

The day of the photo shoot, the Boeing 727 and two Air Force fighter jets took off bright and early in the morning and headed toward the Statue of Liberty, which would serve as a handsome backdrop in the photograph. The sky was blue, the sun was coming over the horizon; it was a perfect day. In order to get good pictures, the jets had to drop down to a mere 1,000 feet over the ground and swing over New Jersey and the southern tip of Manhattan. The public had not been notified of the flyover, and had they been, they no doubt would have objected strongly as the flight path led right over the site of the horrific 9–11 attacks that demolished the World Trade Center and World Financial Center buildings and killed 2,800 people.

And so there was a small public panic. People saw the fighter jets tailing the large plane at a height not much above the city's skyscrapers. Government police and 311 hotlines lit up, some buildings were evacuated, and the New York City Mayor, Mike Bloomberg, was furious. "Why the [federal government] wanted to do a photo-op right around the site of the World Trade Center catastrophe defies imagination."[20]

A White House review of the matter revealed a series of bureaucratic slip-ups that lead to the flyover being kept mostly secret from the public and some local officials. Remarkably, one of Caldera's aides had told him that the flyover was not going to elicit local media attention. (Never mind that the city is the nation's media center.) Caldera himself reported that he had approved of the flyover, but that he did not realize how low the planes would be flying.

Despite the fact that nobody was injured in the mini-panic, despite Caldera's decades of public service and proximity to the president, and although the incident was the result of honest errors, there had to be a blood-letting. The government's public relations effort had come off as grossly insensitive and a violation of a part of New York City that many American feel as sacred. (Anyone who has seen how tourists and others silently queue up to view the area cannot but be struck by their solemnity.) Two weeks after the flyover, Caldera resigned, noting that controversy had become a "distraction" to the president.[21]

How Can This Government Public Relations Challenge Be Solved?

The New York City jet flyover example illustrates the public often responds sharply when a government agency offends the public's sense of the sacred. When an agency makes this sort of mistake, what steps should it take to respond to the outcry? Review the transcript of Press Secretary Robert Gibb's response to tough questioning on the flyover.[22] *How well did he do?*

Conclusion: Thinking Institutionally

Doing government public relations is not for the faint of heart. No matter how conscientious a practitioner is, someone somewhere will grouse. What this chapter aimed to do was to help government public relations practitioners do right and avoid doing wrong in a big way. The approach advocated here does require the practitioner to undertake substantive learning. For example, to understand a constitution's ideas one needs to read a constitution or a good primer on it and its interpretation.

But, the major thrust of this approach is to argue that a practitioner should think institutionally, to consider how his actions and messages fit within five macro-contexts that derive from his position as a government public relations practitioner. This institutional approach, assuredly, does not cover the whole of right and wrong conduct. But this chapter does show, a great deal of trouble could be avoided if government public relations practitioners would simply pause to consider – *"Could this particular public relations activity be construed as offensive to or in contravention of: (1) my occupation (2) my agency; (3) the law; (4) my country's constitution; or (5) my country's sense of the sacred?"*

Checklist

To do right and avoid wrong, the government public relations practitioner should consider the following contexts before acting:

___Position: Would this action be an abuse of my position?
___Agency: Would this action be consistent with my agency's mission?

___Legal: Would this action violate the law(s) of my nation?
___Constitutional: Would this action offend my country's constitution?
___Sacred: Would this action offend my nation's sense of the sacred?

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12 Monitoring and Evaluating Government Media and Social Media Engagement

Maureen Taylor

Introduction

According to U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), just four agencies within the federal government spend approximately 1.5 billion dollars each year on communication (GAO, 2017). If we add in the money spent by local, county, state and other federal agencies then it becomes clear that billions of dollars and hundreds of thousands of work hours are devoted to inform and engage American citizens. How information is shared is changing as organizations move from one-way communication to two-way communication interactions Graham (2014) noted that "the instantaneous, direct, and interactive communication components that social media provide can be particularly beneficial to governments at all levels as they pledge to be more transparent, participatory, and collaborative with their citizens" (p. 361). DePaula et al. (2018) noted that "government use of social media provides a variety of democratic functions for government institutions" and that "social media are tools for self-presentation, the exchange of symbolic content, and marketing" (p. 98). There are so many different tools available for government communicators including websites, online media platforms, blogs, traditional media outlets, and social media. These communication tools provide platforms for public administrators to communicate to citizens and more importantly, they provide platforms for citizens to communicate to government.

Engagement is a major part of your job and many of you reading this book are allocating your scarce (and often shrinking) human and economic resources to engagement activities. Yet, how do you prove that your communication engagement has achieved the outcomes and impacts that you planned? When called upon to explain the effectiveness of citizen engagement efforts, many public administrator professionals, especially in local government, have a difficult time producing anything more than a clipping file of news stories appearing in the local media or anecdotes of small scale successes. For many of us, our answer comes in the form of number of communication outputs: number of media stories, number of emails, number of website visits, number of Facebook followers, number of likes, and other outputs. Yet, these outputs are only the beginning of truly measuring the outcomes and impacts of communication engagement. In a results-driven public sector, these outputs are no longer enough to capture the full story of government–citizen engagement.

This chapter takes the public administrator one step further in their ability to prove the outcomes and the impact of communication engagement activities. It has two objectives. The first objective seeks to explain and contextualize communication engagement as a framework for structuring government public communication. Engagement has emerged as a multidimensional framework to guide organization–public relationships. The second objective of this chapter is to discuss best practices monitoring and evaluation (M&E) to measure the outcomes and impacts of communication engagement. Monitoring and evaluation is becoming an increasingly common professional tool for measuring communication engagement effectiveness.

The next section explores engagement as a communication activity and shows how engagement can support productive government public relationships.

Enacting an Engagement Approach in Relationships with Citizens and Publics

Conceptual and Practical Approaches to Engagement

The term "engagement" has been used to describe just about every type of interaction in society. Political parties encourage people to "get engaged." Marketers and advertisers create opportunities for "brand engagement." What is engagement and how can it help to improve government public relationships? Engagement has been defined in many different ways. Johnston and Taylor (2018) edited the *Handbook of Communication Engagement* to bring together over 30 chapters dedicated to conceptualizing and operationalizing communication engagement.

Engagement settings comprise actors, including organizations, government agencies, stakeholders, consumers, employees, community, users, partners, parties, or social institutions. Engagement is conceptualized as an "iterative, dynamic process, where participation, experience and shared action emerge as central components of engagement" (Johnston & Taylor, 2018, p. 3). It is through interaction and exchange that meaning is co-created, such as described in the dialogic nature of engagement, to achieve understanding, or what Buber called the *I-Thou*. The focus on interaction and exchange also highlights strong connections to the relational and social nature of engagement. Johnston and Taylor (2018) noted that "relationships emerge as an outcome to, or part of, an interaction" (p. 3).

Engagement with citizens in consultation, policy-making, and service design requires specific communication skills and a positive orientation to citizens. The successful, public-focused public administrator is someone who understands communication and can use various types of communication to engage citizens. Engagement is a new paradigm in public administration that involves a shift from a "command and control top-down" mindset to an orientation of collaboration and co design. It represents a shift in communication approaches among public sector organizations. In particular, we see government communication moving away from the traditional "tell and sell" model, to a more participatory and inclusive approach of fostering meaningful two-way communication and engagement with citizens. This increased focus on engagement is in part a result of the impact of social media in shifting expectations of communication as a conversation. Additionally, governments are now recognizing that trust is the necessary precondition of effective communication – and it requires new approaches to dialogue, engagement, and openness. Governments in Canada (including provincial governments) are using diverse techniques such as citizen panels, Google Hangouts, online deliberative dialogue and open houses as foundational elements of a communications model designed to elevate relevance and trust through engagement. In Australia, city councils enact multi-year engagement campaigns and are often the winners of engagement competitions held by marketing associations. In the United States, cities such as Cupertino, California (Spano, 2000) and Boston, Massachusetts (Issacs (1999), enact engagement and dialogue to improve community relationships).

Engagement is "both an orientation that influences interactions and the approach that guides the process of interactions among groups" (Taylor & Kent, 2014, p. 384). As a relational process, engagement facilitates collaborative decision-making through exchange of information, collective learning, involvement and understanding (Johnston et al., 2018). Engagement is a pattern of activities that can be implemented by public sector organizations that involve community members, and that aim to address, respond, or mitigate issues that affect the health, well-being or social status of the community (Bowen et al., 2010; Fawcett et al., 1995). Government agencies responsible for engagement programs create (or co-create) meaning through listening (Macnamara, 2016), communication and action, and for the consequences of those actions to hold value for both the individual and also members in a community (Johnston, 2018).

Engagement as a social and relational activity therefore becomes about facilitating diverse relationships, an emotional response, or a behavior. Engagement is an iterative process where communication is both an *antecedent* for more engagement and an *enabler of* engagement. Participation, experience, and shared action emerge as central components of the dynamic process of engagement presented. One of the most popular ways that public administrators can engage is through media and social media. The next section explores media and social media engagement.

Media and Social Media Engagement

According to the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) Code of Ethics, members should "inform the public and encourage active engagement in governance. Be open, transparent and responsive, and respect and assist all persons in their dealings with public organizations" (ASPA, 2020). Graham (2014) observed that governments have usually relied on traditional mass media like television and newspapers to inform the public. Public administrators regularly give interviews to media and send news releases to print, television, and radio outlets. The end goal is to inform and engage citizens. Traditional media are still important as they serve an agenda-setting function (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) because they provide frameworks for people to think about.

In the past, most communication among public administration officials and the public was mediated by television, newspapers, and radio. Many local and regional newspapers and televisions stations are being refashioned into "news hubs" that push out news and information to audiences 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Journalists are expected to have a social media presence. Today, blogs, podcasts, and social networks now provide government officials ways to directly communicate with community members. There is a synergy in mediated communication because social media platforms carry feeds of traditional media content

Yet, more and more people are getting their news and information from social media platforms. Social media also have merged as engagement tools building on and often extending the reach of local media. Pew has found that "Americans who mainly get their news on social media are less engaged, less knowledgeable" (Mitchell, Jurkowitz, Oliphant, & Shearer, 2020). Figure 12.1 provides insight on social media use in the United States in 2020.

Public administrators are now using a mix of traditional and social media to communicate with and listen to citizens. What are the outcomes and impacts of this engagement? The next section explores some best practices in monitoring and evaluating public sector engagement.

Monitoring and Evaluation Engagement in the Public Sector

Toward Greater Accountability

Today, large and small public sector agencies are being held accountable by stakeholders, the media, and the community. This is true for local, county, state, and national government offices. Open records laws and open government initiatives have made operational topics including budgets, expenditures, and hiring decisions subject to public scrutiny. Government agencies are now regularly developing performance management plans (PMP). According the U.S. Government Office of Personnel

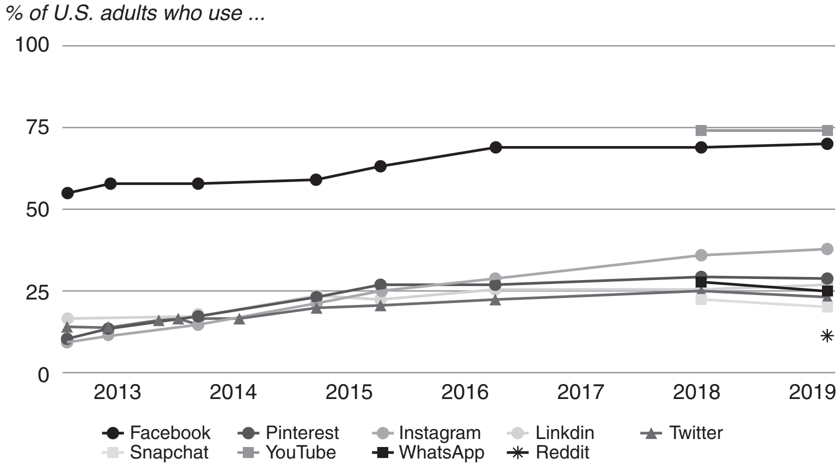

Figure 12.1 Which Social Media Platforms are Most Popular?

Source: Surveys conducted 2012–2019. Pew Research Center.

Management (OPM), performance management plans are guiding tools to improve accountability.

> Performance Management (PM) is more than the end of year appraisal. It's about translating goals into results. Performance Management focuses not only on individual employees, but also on teams, programs, processes and the organization as a whole. A well-developed PM program addresses individual and organizational performance matters necessary to properly create and sustain a healthy and effective results-oriented culture. Public agencies have a greater challenge to define and measure results than private sector organizations, whose results are almost exclusively tied to financial goals. Public agencies are also required to comply with complex regulations that govern their performance management programs. Effective PM will help your organization raise individual performance, foster ongoing employee and supervisor development, and increase overall organizational effectiveness.

Local and state governments can also follow the PMP process to guide their activities, enact M&E and provide evidence of results.

The philosophy behind M&E is quite simple: government communication efforts are intended to have outcomes and impacts and you need a way to prove that your efforts have indeed had the impact you anticipated. Macnamara (2017) provides an excellent summary of outcomes and impacts in communication. An outcome is what occurs as a direct result of an activity (i.e., what comes out of actions taken). Outcomes can be short-term or long-term. Short-term outcomes mean that something has happened such as increased awareness or positive attitudes. Long-term outcomes are higher level changes that contribute to impacts. An impact is the result of an action or condition, particularly the broader implications and downstream effects. It is an enduring impact that provides a benefit for members of the public and the agency.

Public administrators are not alone in your need for increased reporting. A number of government agencies have begun to develop useful performance management systems. Government agencies and the military have developed various methods to provide information on topics such as program quality, program outcomes, and impact indicators.

You might ask, how is a USAID or World Bank program's evaluation requirements relevant to my local government office? The answer is simple: measuring effectiveness is now required by every type governmental organization. Everyone needs to monitor and evaluate his or her organization's outcomes and impact. The terms monitoring and evolution are often used together but they are not synonymous. For the public administration professional, monitoring examines whether or not the intended outputs, outcomes, or impacts of a program or activity were actually achieved. When done well, monitoring can be invaluable to project implementers and managers to make mid-course corrections to maximize impact. When done poorly, even the most effective communication or operational efforts appear to be haphazard and arbitrary. Your goal should be to develop a systematic process for planning, implementing, and evaluating your communication outreach. There is no cookie cutter approach. Each organization will develop its own unique procedures reflecting priorities, strategic planning, and organizational culture (Macnamara, 2017).

Government public engagement is challenged by the lack of measurement tools, such as empirically reliable scales and variables, and presents an opportunity for future research to focus on advancing measurement and move away from descriptions and settings. In the past, website and social media interactivity have been the proxy for measuring engagement. Many communicators believe that counting social media clicks, likes, shares, and comments is a fruitful way to measure engagement. It is a start but it is the lowest level of measuring engagement. Truly, without interactivity, there can be no engagement but interactivity is a necessary but not sufficient standard to identify if engagement has the potential to occur.

Monitoring and Evaluating Tiers of Engagement

Johnston and Taylor (2018) identified three tiers of potential measurements of engagement to help all types of organizations improve

Table 12.1 Tiers for Measuring Engagement

Tier	*Possible Measurements*
1 – Low-level: • Presence • Occurrence • Manifestation	• Indicator that an activity has occurred • Counts and amounts of news items appearing in media • Website visitors • Social media i.e., likes, page visits • Reading/ viewing/visiting/impression/awareness of publicity materials
2 – Mid-level: • Understanding • Connecting	• Indicators of relationship qualities • Trust, reciprocity, credibility, legitimacy, openness, satisfaction, understanding • Interaction quality • Share of voice • Indicators of engagement dimensions at individual level measuring affective/cognitive/ or behavioral outcomes e.g., user-generated effects
3 – Higher level: • Action • Impact	• Indicators of social embeddedness • Social awareness and civic (greater good) indicators • Acknowledgment of other (diversity/empowerment) • Indicators of action, change, and outcomes at social level • Engagement in a larger, ecological system • Recognition of diverse perspectives • Social capital for individuals and the community

Source: Table modified and used with permission from Johnston and Taylor (2018), p. 7.

communication engagement. Table 12.1 identifies possible measurements of engagement across Tier 1 through Tier 3.

The tiers were created to capture the incremental progression of relationships over time. The levels include low-level manifestation (Tier 1), mid-level understanding (Tier 2) and connecting (Tier 3), which occurs at the higher level because there is action and impact. Each tier is explained below.

Tier 1: Information

Tier 1 is the lowest level of engagement and measurement and will indicate whether an activity has occurred. Possible measures of activity includes counts and amounts, social media impressions such as page likes and visits, and monitoring of both traditional and social media – all indicating that individuals are interacting with the content at a low level. While many claim this is an indicator of engagement, *interactivity indicates the potential for engagement* to occur but it is a low level of engagement.

Media relations contributes to Tier 1 engagement. Government communication to the public has been generally through the media. Media relations has a central role within the practice of government communication because the media are the "gatekeepers controlling the information that flows to other publics in a social system" (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 223). Administrators, Public Affairs representatives or Public Information officers seek to "maintain media contacts, place news releases, and figure out what the media will find newsworthy about their organizations" (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995, p. 112). Government agencies rely on media relations to communicate important messages to multiple publics.

Media monitoring is one M&E approach that can help you to monitor which key message, announcement or event is appearing in the media and the potential effect that it might have on public awareness, attitudes, and engagement behaviors. Media monitoring counts and measures what the media are saying about your organization or your issues. It is one way to measure the impact of your messages. Monitoring allows us to count the number of times the communication output has appeared in the media. Media monitoring examines the tone, prominence, and placement of our strategic messages. For most government offices, you will want to measure the tone of newspaper, blog, and electronic media stories about your key issues, statements, and decisions.

Media monitoring examines news stories for three distinct dimensions of *tone*:

1) *Positive stories* use adjectives that are supportive of the agency, person, or issue in question.
2) *Neutral stories* are basic facts about the agency, person, or issue in question.
3) *Negative stories* place the agency, issue, or person in a negative light. These types of stories create doubt, raise questions, and cause distrust in readers/viewers. They may contain errors or use quotes or data out of context. These are the stories that need your team to respond to correct the record.

Tone is the crucial first step in monitoring media coverage. Placement and prominence are also key factors in monitoring content. *Placement analysis* refers to the actual location of the story in the media outlet (lead story on nightly news, above the fold in newspaper). *Prominence analysis* combines the location of the story with circulation and readership numbers. It assumes that "bigger and earlier" is better (although this is not always the case). Tone, prominence, and placement analysis all provide details about whether or not your message is getting through.

Table 12.2 illustrates how a public affairs officer working at Walter Reed Army Medical Center (WRAMC) might have monitored the content of the first week of news coverage that broke in February 2006 identifying problems at the facility (Taylor, 2011, p. 222). The first column identifies the general tone of the stories (ranging from –3 to +3), the placement column identifies where it was placed in the *paper* or radio

Table 12.2 Monitoring Media Coverage Example

Walter Reed Hospital Media Coverage (1 Week)			*Score*		
Date	*Title of news article Reporter Name, Page of Placement*	*Outlet*	*Tone*	*Place*	*Prom*
2/25	Admin Issues Cited at Walter Reed Steve Vogel, A9	*Washington Post* (Print)	0	8	3
2/24	Review at Walter Reed is Ordered Steve Vogel, A1	*Washington Post* (Print)	0	10	3
2/24	Army's Preemptive News Briefing Howard Kurtz – Columnist, C1	*Washington Post* (Print)	–3	6	3
2/21	Swift Action Promised at Walter Reed Dana Priest, Anne Hull, A8	*Washington Post* (Print)	–3	8	3
2/20	Army Fixing Patients Housing Dana Priest, Anne Hull, A1	*Washington Post* (Print)	–3	10	3
2/19	U.S. Army Facility Reported in Poor Shape Robert Siegel (with Dana Priest, Anne Hull)	National Public Radio (Radio)	–3	6	3
2/18	Soldiers Face Neglect, Frustration at Army's Top Medical Facility Dana Priest, Anne Hull A1	*Washington Post* (Print)	–3	10	3

The author thanks Dr. Suzanne Holroyd for her insights into this case study.

show (ranging from 1–10 with 10 meaning the highest placement value), *and* the prominence score shows how important that outlet was to *decision-mak*ers and opinion leaders (ranging from –3 to +3). The chart shows WRAMC public information officers which media outlets they need to reach out.

Today, with the diffusion of social media, public administrators can also monitor social media for Tier 1 engagement. To measure social media engagement, there are now many tools that provide insights in social media Tier 1 outputs. Hootsuite, Social Studio, Brandwatch, and other software can provide daily, weekly, monthly, and annual data to show your organization's social media presence. Tier 1 metrics that are relevant in social media monitoring are:

- Number of *mentions* of key words or phrases (e.g., regulation, agency name, law, policy, meeting etc.) and #hashtags
- Number of *likes*

- Number of *followers* of key spokespersons and influencers (both positive and negative) – often counted as *impressions*

The fastest way to present Tier 1 social media and media monitoring findings is through a dashboard application, such as Sprout Social, Buffer, Cision, Falcon.io, or Hootsuite, which captures a variety of social media metrics in one easy-to-use location as depicted in Figure 12.2.

Tier 2 is a mid-level of engagement. Public administrators can measure connections and relationships but these measurements will be mostly at the individual level of analysis. Possible measures of connecting and understanding include relationship indices including levels of trust, legitimacy, and satisfaction. There is a growing research that helps us to pinpoint relationships that occur at Tier 2. For example, the organization–public relations (OPR) research surveys publics to evaluate their relationships with organizations. Measures of trust, mutuality, and satisfaction provide insight into one side of the engagement relationship.

In the past, most media content was one way in nature. People read, watched, or listened to the news and news outlets could not create engagement. However, with the advent of digital media, publics can now engage around news thus creating new opportunities for Tier 2 engagement. For example publics who engage with organizations through social media can be divided into faith-holders and hate-holders (Luoma-aho, 2015). While faith-holders are positively engaged with the organization and are ready to defend it to others, hate-holders are negatively engaged stakeholders who "dislike or hate the brand or the organization and harm it via their behaviors" (Luoma-aho, 2015, p. 11). Kochigina (2020) found that "hateholders" can post negative comments about the organization to try to damage its reputation. They arise because they had some negative experiences with the organization or because they simply engage in trolling" (p. 2). Being able to identify real engagement by unhappy citizens versus social media outreach by hate-holders is a key task for public administration professionals.

How does media engagement work? Subscribers can "sign in" and engage with others. For instance, online media outlets allow visitors to post comments, raise questions, or offer additional information. News consumers can engage with each other on discussion boards. These discussions can be monitored and insights drawn from the online threaded conversations. These media interactions provide insights into Tier 2 engagement.

For digital media and social media outreach, Tier 2 allows for public administrators to work toward both short-term outcomes.

- Engagement (e.g., re-tweets, shares, positive comments on news sites or social media platforms)

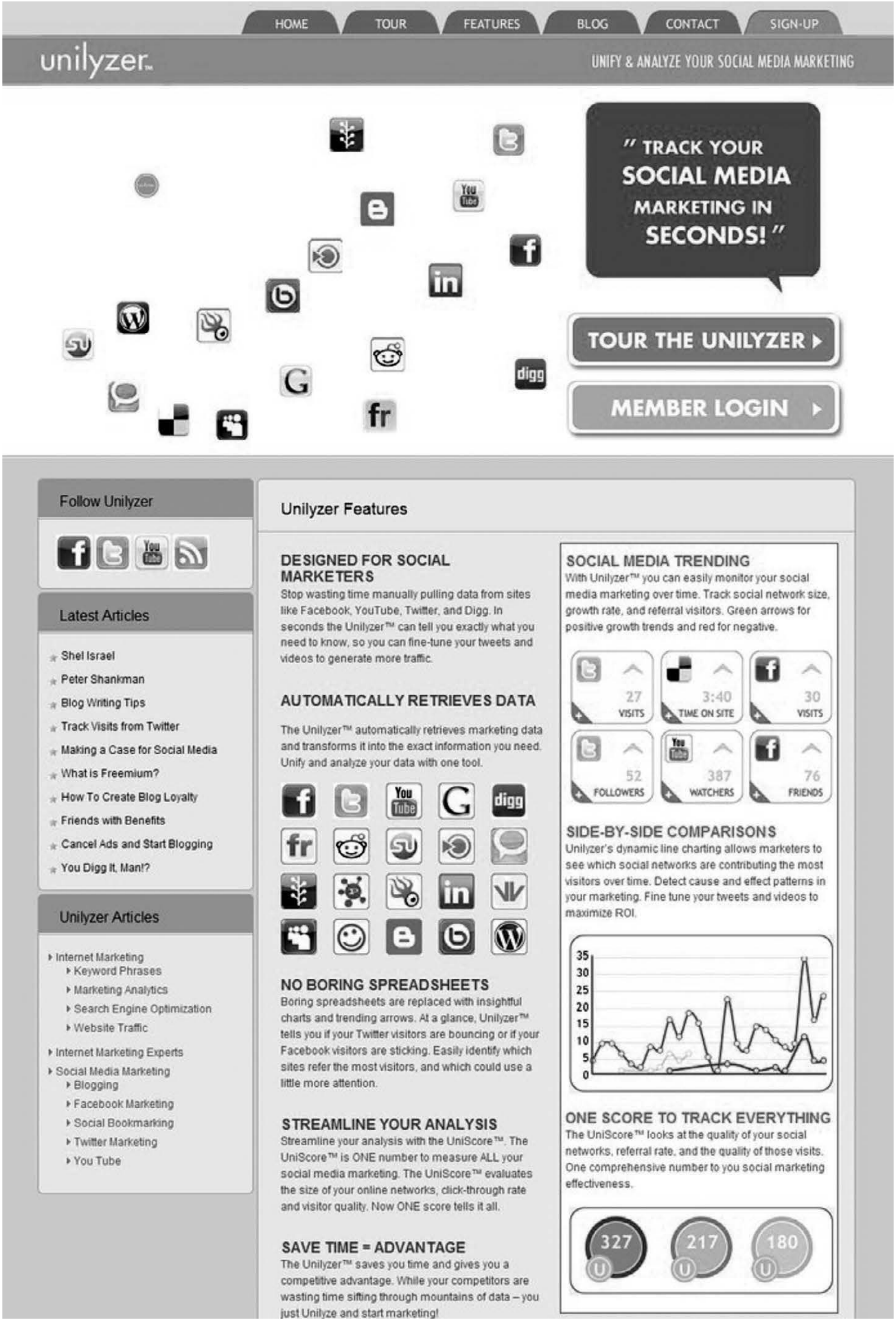

Figure 12.2 Example of Social Media Monitoring Dashboard

- Conversions (e.g., click-throughs from news story or social media to your agency's website)
- Statements of support (e.g., by influencers and faith-holders)

Tier 3 is the highest level of engagement and it may be difficult for public administrators to measure. High-level engagement is sustained, repeated interactions with relational give and take. The outcomes are group level outcomes created by interpersonal engagement. In this Tier 3 approach, measurement would focus on actions and seek to show the impact of engagement at a social level of analysis such as a community or city. Measurement of engagement at this group level could include civic indicators (social capital/community-based); participation by disempowered or silent groups in community-based programs; or indicators of social change, action as a result of engagement. Long-term outcomes from social media and other engagement activities may include:

- Increased awareness (such as knowledge of community norms, regulations, codes)
- Positive attitude change (such as increased support for agency goals, positive reputation)
- Behavior change (including increased or decreased actions)

Communication engagement should aim towards higher (Tier 2 and Tier 3) level outcomes. Social media creates Tier 1 interactivity that provides the floor for engagement but organizations should not stop once they have initiated Tier 1 activities. Instead, public administrators need to strive for high-level Tier 2 and Tier 3 engagement and plan out communication tactics that facilitate each of the levels.

Moving Forward Toward Enhanced Engagement

This chapter explained communication engagement as a useful framework to reimagine government public communication across the U.S. and the world. Engagement takes many forms including media and social media communication and like other organizational activities there needs to be evidence that engagement is providing tangible outcomes and impacts to government offices. Monitoring and evaluation can provide that evidence.

In an era of scarce human and economic resources, public administrators need to be able to direct their time and focus to those activities that provide the most return. Engaging with the public has the potential for high-level returns on investment and in community level outcomes and impacts.

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13 Reputation Management

Alan Abitbol and Judson Meeks

Introduction

Government agencies are tasked with overseeing the day-to-day operations of our country. As such, these public organizations must maintain relationships with multiple stakeholder groups, none more important than the American public. Unfortunately, the public's trust in government has steadily declined over the past 15 years, with numbers hitting historic lows in 2019 (Pew Research Center, 2019). Public trust is directly tied to an organization's reputation, as reputation rises and falls based on its actions and how these actions are received. Extant research posits that an organization's reputation can be presumed to be its most valuable asset (Walker, 2010), therefore it is essential that government organizations take steps to enhance and manage its reputation within the perceptions of its constituents. Through proper reputation management, government organizations can legitimize their actions in the eyes of their constituents, which will lead to public support for the organization's mission and function.

This chapter will first define reputation within the context of government organizations including the challenges these organizations face when trying to build, maintain, and enhance reputation. Second, the chapter will discuss two theoretical constructs – driven by public relations research – that can provide these organizations guidance on best practices for proper reputation management. Third, it will link theory to practice by highlighting examples in which governmental organizations took steps to manage its reputation among stakeholders, which ultimately led to positive stakeholder outcomes. Finally, the chapter will provide future guidance and direction for governmental agencies on overcoming challenges they face in order to improve their reputation.

What is Reputation Management?

Reputation has many definitions within the management literature. Some define it as the overall estimation of an organization by its stakeholders

(Fombrun, 1996). Others see it as the cognitive representation of publics about an organization based on its past behaviors (Coombs, 2000; Grunig & Hung, 2002). Regardless of definition, reputation is an intangible asset that encompasses a perception of an organization. The nature of an organization's reputation depends upon all actions and activities associated with the organization (Weigelt & Carmerer, 1988).

Previous research has described several factors that can drive a favorable reputation including good communication (Murray & White, 2005), providing quality products and services (Fombrun et al., 2000; Helm, 2005), social responsibility and accountability (Fombrun et al., 2000); strong leadership and workplace environment (Dowling, 2004; Fombrun et al., 2000), and quality relationships with strategic publics (Yang, 2005). These factors can be categorized into three main domains: organizational capabilities, social accountability, and strategic communication. Organizational capability includes aspects of leadership, product and services and workplace concerns and it lays the foundation for a favorable public evaluation of the organization. Social accountability pertains to being a good community citizen and demonstrating ethical organizational behaviors (Dowling, 2004). Strategic communication is central to building a favorable perception among stakeholders and protecting reputation (Murray & White, 2005). Thus, reputation management entails managing these factors to ensure favorable perceptions that will ultimately form the reputation of an organization (Elsbach, 2006).

The Stages of Reputation Management

Reputation management is an ever-evolving process that typically includes several stages. The first stage is assessing the organization's current identity in order to define how the organization wants to be perceived. To do this, organizations should engage in a "process of discovery designed to unearth the 'beating heart' of the organization – what the organization stands for at its core, what it really is" (van Riel & Fombrun, 2007, p. 62).

The second stage of the reputation management process involves the active attempt to influence the public's perception. This can be done through the development of programs where the organization can present and express its identity to others (Wæraas & Byrkjeflot, 2012). This stage of the reputation management process entails closing the gap between organizational identity and stakeholder perceptions of the organization. Communication efforts that enhance the organization's visibility, authenticity, transparency, consistency, responsiveness, and distinctiveness (van Riel & Fombrun, 2007) is essential in this stage.

The next stage involves the organizational measurement of audience perceptions. Gaining an understanding of what an organization's stakeholders think about the organization will help provide a background for further reputational-building programs; those that will help reduce the gap between identity and image (Hatch & Schultz, 2008). To gain this perceptional insight, organizations can conduct reputation surveys that can be used to readjust organizational strategy, identify additional stakeholders, and enable more effective reputation-building initiatives (Wæraas & Byrkjeflot, 2012).

Overall, a strong reputation provides an organization with a competitive advantage and an increase in performance (Rhee & Valdez, 2009). For public organizations, it can provide "valuable political assets – that can be used to generate public support, to achieve delegated autonomy and discretion from politicians, to protect the agency from political attack, and to recruit and retain valued employees" (Carpenter, 2002, p. 491). However, for public sectors managing and maintaining a reputation, challenges are presented that may not be as evident for private companies.

Reputation Management Challenges for the Public Sector

In theory, reputation management is a strategic process that can help an organization bring value to an important asset. However, for the public sector, developing a plan to manage reputation favorably may prove to be less straightforward compared to other industries. This is mostly due to a variety of perceptual challenges that are unique to the organizations within this realm. According to Wæraas and Byrkjeflot (2012), five problems or challenges plague the public sector. These are politics, consistency, charisma, uniqueness, and excellence.

The first challenge in managing reputation in the public sector is the *inherent politics that are associated with many affiliated organizations*. Public organizations are created to meet a need or solve a problem through administrative coordination, regulation, or services produced. However, these organizations must work within a mission that was assigned by "superordinate political bodies, regardless of what it is and how positively or negatively the general public perceives the mission" (Wæraas & Byrkjeflot, 2012, p. 194). Moreover, the politicians that create the policies that enact these organizations are not likely to relinquish control over their jurisdictions (Mintzberg, 1996).

The second challenge in managing reputation in the public sector is *consistency*. According to Fombrun and van Riel (2004), organizations that have a good reputation are those that are believed to be more consistent in terms of their identities, values, and self-presentations. For public organizations, pursuing the consistency ideal can be problematic for several reasons. First, because of the policies that shape the foundation of the public organizations, the value systems and the identity of the organization may change depending on who runs the organization at any given time (Christensen et al., 2007). Second, the publics of these organizations tend to fluctuate based on the value systems and identity an organization adopts at a given point (Wæraas, 2008). Thus, public organizations must juggle a range of priorities and values, some of which could be conflicting or inconsistent.

The third challenge is *charisma or emotional appeal*. Organizations with a strong reputation have an emotional connection with their publics, which usually leads to increased loyalty and care (Fombrun & van Riel, 2004). Organizations gain support from the public when the organization appeals to the publics' identity and makes them feel good, admired, or respected (Wæraas & Byrkjeflot, 2012). However, for most public organizations, emotional appeal can be hard to attain. Unlike private organizations, the public sector typically cannot pick their publics. Public organizations must appeal to everyone within a community, which can lead to a lack of autonomy. Moreover, public organizations deal with insoluble problems (Brunsson, 1989). From unemployment and crime to poverty and social disparity, the issues public organizations try to tackle typically are hard to solve and typically involve endless discussions that never conclude (Brunsson, 1989). Thus, whenever these organizations are highlighted, the perspective is largely negative, which does not typically evoke a positive emotional appeal.

The fourth challenge is *uniqueness, or in other words, what the organization does that sets it apart from similar organizations*. Having a unique identity that makes it distinctively different from rivals is an advantage for any organization (Fombrun & van Riel, 2004). However, public organizations are not usually recognized for having a unique identity. According to Wæraas and Byrkjeflot (2012), "public organizations probably seem more similar than unique, given their common characteristics as political, hierarchical, and rule-oriented entities" (p. 198).

It should be noted that public organizations do vary considerably in size, functions, and organizational culture, but often struggle to communicate those differences, which make it hard for publics to understand what differentiates one organization from another (Wæraas & Byrkjeflot, 2012). This can lead to what is called a conformity trap (Antorini & Schultz, 2005); making it hard for one organization to capitalize on its uniqueness. Moreover, all public organizations are part of a larger conglomerate (i.e., regulatory agency, higher education sector, the state, etc.) with which it is crucial to conform to some extent. And, the organizations that comprise these larger groups are required, to some degree, by law to offer the same or similar services (Wæraas & Byrkjeflot, 2012).

And, finally, *achieving excellence* is presented as the fifth challenge. According to reputation management scholars (e.g., Fombrun & van Riel, 2004; Wæraas & Byrkjeflot, 2012), it is assumed that organizations are striving for an excellent reputation, one that is superior to others and prevails within reputation rankings. However, based on public opinion surveys, the public sector often has a poor image and is hard pressed to achieve an excellent reputation.

One reason why achieving excellence is challenging for public organizations lies within the uniqueness challenge outlined above. As most public organizations share a set of similar characteristics with other public organizations centered on a common mission, seeking to be perceived as superior to others involved in the same mission is problematic (Wæraas & Byrkjeflot, 2012). In a sense, the reputation construct involves a ranking and comparison of organizations, which would result in one organization falling in perception while one rises. This is problematic for public organizations because of "stronger expectations of similarity in services and quality" (Wæraas & Byrkjeflot, 2012, p. 199).

Reputation Management and Public Relations

Reputation management is a key construct in public relations research. In fact, many have argued that it is a public relations department's role to look after an organization's reputation as public relations practitioners understand who supports and influences opinion and behavior, two critical elements of reputation (Jain et al., 2014; Komodromos, 2017). The Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR, 2010) defines public relations as being "about reputation – the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you."

In general, public relations is a management function that, among other duties, evaluates public attitudes, identifies procedures and policies of an organization with public interest in mind, and initiates programs to earn public understanding and acceptance (Miller & Dinan, 2007). The crux of public relations is to ensure that an organization maintains, enhances, and fosters good relations with prospective and current stakeholders. These relationships should lead to positive outcomes for an organization, including those that are intangible such as attitude and those that are tangible, such as purchasing a product and participating in an initiative.

Based on this definition, public relations can be split into two components – relationship management and communicative behaviors. The next section of this chapter will highlight two theoretical public relations concepts – relationship management theory and transparency – that capture these two components and discuss how these concepts can help governmental organizations shape, manage, and enhance reputation.

Relationship Management Theory

As highlighted in the challenges above, one impeding factor preventing public organizations from building and enhancing their reputation is the lack of a consistent audience to target with their programs and messaging. A key contributor to this may be a lack of focus on the relationships between audience and organization. In her seminal work, Ferguson (1984) declared that the primary unit of analysis in public relations research should be the relationship between an organization and its key publics. This perspective led to the development of relationship models, the identification of relationship dimensions, the development of measurement tools for relationships, and the development of a relationship-centered theory. The relationship management theory posits that "effectively managing organization–public relationships around common interests and shared goals, over time, results in mutual understanding and benefit for interacting organizations and publics" (Ledingham, 2003, p. 476).

Organization–public relationships (OPRs), which can change over time, involve an ongoing exchange of needs, expectations, and fulfillment and include symbolic and behavioral, as well as community, professional, and personal-related types. Rating the relationship dimensions can define the OPR state, which in turn, can act as a predictor of public perceptions and behaviors (Ledingham, 2003).

Defining and Measuring Relationships

Early research into OPRs provided direction for measuring its quality. Grunig and colleagues (1992) proposed that communication quality is linked to the nature of relationships. In 1999, Hon and Grunig published guidelines for OPR measurement, making a case to measure relationships by examining Huang's (1997) proposed outcomes: trust, satisfaction, control mutuality, and commitment as indicators to measure the quality of OPRs. These four dimensions have repeatedly been considered as the most essential features of the quality of OPRs (Grunig & Huang, 2000; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Yang, 2007), and they have appeared consistently in various OPR scales.

Hon and Grunig (1999, p. 3) defined *trust* as "one party's level of confidence in and willingness to open oneself to the other party." *Satisfaction* is the amount of favor the two parties feel toward one another. *Control mutuality* is "the degree to which parties agree on who has the rightful power to influence one another" (Hon and Grunig, 1999, p. 3). *Commitment* is the level of feeling or belief that relationships are worth spending energy to promote and maintain.

Managing Reputation through Relationship Management

To acquire a reputation that is positive, enduring, and resilient, research posits that managers should invest in building and maintaining good relationships with key stakeholders (Fombrun, 1996). Like relationships, it takes time to build reputations (Walker, 2010), but reputation can vary over time and among stakeholders.

Reputation quality and relationship quality have been thought to exist along a continuum of engagement between stakeholder and organization. Strömbäck and Kiousis (2011) believe that for low-engagement stakeholders, reputation quality is more relevant, while relationship quality is more pertinent to stakeholders who are highly engaged. This is an important distinction for public organizations to understand as most of their stakeholders (especially those within a local community) are more likely to fall in the low-engagement category; indicating a need to focus on reputation quality. Yang (2007) proposed a conceptual model to integrate organizational reputation and relationships. He tested to see if strong OPR outcomes are associated with positive organizational reputation and discovered that, for all four organizations tested, the more positive a participant perceived their relationship to be, the more positive their views of the organization's reputation were. Although none of the organizations examined in Yang's (2007) study represented the public sector, the findings can still be relevant to it. Stakeholders who have a strong sense of connection with any organization will more likely support that organization.

Relationship Management in Practice: The National Park Service

The National Park Service (NPS) is the governmental agency tasked with managing the national park system. This system includes national parks like Yosemite and Yellowstone, historically significant locations like the George Washington Birthplace and the Gettysburg National Military Park, and national memorials like the Abraham Lincoln Memorial and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. (National Park Service, 2020).

The NPS has historically enjoyed a large number of visitors and is widely appreciated. Among government agencies, in a recent Pew Research study, the NPS was viewed as the second-most favorable organization with 86% of survey respondents having a positive opinion of the group (Pew Internet Research, 2019). In 2013, national parks registered more than 273 million visitors. However, a study conducted the same year found that 75% of visitors to national parks were more than 40 years old and disproportionately Caucasian (CommPro, n.d.).

To encourage attendance among both a younger and more diverse demographic, the NPS partnered with Grey NY to create the "Find Your Park" campaign. This campaign was coupled with the "Every Kid in a Park" initiative, which offered a free pass to any national park for every fourth-grade student and their family (CommPro, n.d.; Goldfuss, 2015).

"Find Your Park" was spearheaded and co-chaired by First Ladies Michelle Obama and Laura Bush. A series of YouTube videos were produced featuring a behind-the-scenes look at Mrs. Bush's annual camping trip. Celebrities like Bill Nye promoted the program through various social media platforms. The campaign was widely considered a success, credited with increasing attendance to national parks by 20 million visitors and creating interest in visiting the parks in 85% of minority and multicultural group members that were surveyed (CommPro, n.d.).

One key aspect of the campaign was the creation of lasting relationships with the public and corporate partners. This led to corporate relationships with groups like Subaru, Union Pacific, and Coca-Cola, among others. These relationships were made with an eye to the future, as NPS officials saw these partnerships as key to reaching specific stakeholder groups like millennials (Wichman, 2020; National Park Foundation, n.d.).

Campaigns like "Find Your Park" have created numerous relationships between the NPS, the National Park Foundation, and public and corporate stakeholders, directly addressing the challenge of excellence. These long-lasting relationships were instrumental in the face of hardship.

In 2018, the federal government failed to reach an agreement on a spending bill that led to a shutdown of "non-essential" government services. The NPS was instructed to furlough most staff while leaving parks open to the public. The remaining staff struggled to maintain the parks adequately, leaving them vulnerable to vandalism and damage (Nace, 2019). Joshua Tree National Park saw visitors cut down many of the park's revered Joshua trees to make way for makeshift roads (Boucher, 2019). Some civil war parks were subject to battlefield artifact theft with no park rangers around to prevent it (Jarvis, 2019).

To address the staffing and financial shortfalls, many private citizens, businesses, and corporations stepped in to help. Those living and operating near some of these national parks volunteered to help with basic cleaning duties of the parks. At Joshua Tree National Park, volunteers cleaned bathrooms and collected garbage left by park visitors, citing their love for the park as their motivation (Cuniff et al., 2019). In Yellowstone National Park, the company that operates the hotels inside the park covered the $7,500-a-day cost to maintain park roads. Several employees from the same company made sure that bathroom facilities inside the park were kept clean (Whitney, 2019).

Corporate partners also stepped up to help the NPS during the shutdown. The Delta Air Lines Foundation provided a grant to the NPS to keep the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Park open during the MLK Day holiday (Karcher, 2019). Noting that his company and its employees "have built our lives and livelihoods around the outdoors, and America's national parks hold a special place in our hearts," REI president and CEO Jerry Stritzke donated $250,000 to the National Park Foundation to help offset some of the lost revenue brought about by the shutdown (Stritzke, 2019). Burt's Bees donated an additional $50,000 to the same cause (Czarnecki, 2019).

This shutdown would prove to be the longest in U.S. history at 35 days. These examples show how maintaining relationships with key stakeholder groups benefited the National Park Service during this time. While the organization certainly suffered, through well-managed organization–public relationships, it received key support from private citizens, local business, and national corporations that helped the organization in its time of greatest need.

Transparency

Another public relations-driven path toward managing reputation for the public sector is the use of transparent communication. Literature suggests that to increase trust, organizations must be open and transparent in their communication (e.g., Rawlins, 2008; 2009). According to Heise (1985), as augmented by Rawlins (2008, p. 7), "transparency is the deliberate attempt to make available all legally releasable information – whether positive or negative in nature – in a manner that is accurate, timely, balanced, and unequivocal …"

Transparency comprises three dimensions: informational transparency, participatory transparency, and accountable transparency (Balkin, 1999; Rawlins, 2008). Organizations should provide stakeholders with information that allows them to make informed decisions regarding their relationships and interactions with the organization. The information shared must be substantial, useful to stakeholders (Rawlins, 2008) and must be accurate and provide clarity (Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2014).

Substantial information describes the organization's knowledge of what stakeholders need and want to know (Rawlins, 2008). To get a better understanding of this knowledge, "stakeholders must be invited to participate in identifying the information they need to make accurate decisions" (p. 7). Thus, participatory transparency includes working with stakeholders to learn what matters to them so the decisions the organization makes is not only informed by their own desires, but incorporates what matters to the stakeholders as well.

Accountable transparency requires organizations to be accountable for what they say, do, and decide. Accountability requires an organization to disclose all results of their actions, both positive and negative, and that they do not attempt to influence how stakeholders interpret the results (Global Reporting Initiative, 2006). Accountable transparency demonstrates an organization's ethical virtues, competence, and social responsibility, which may form the stakeholder's positive evaluation of an organization (Rawlins, 2008; 2009).

Overall, transparency holds organizations accountable for their policies and actions, and it provides those who deserve to have access to information respect and reasoning ability (Rawlins, 2009). According to

Koehn (1996), an organization opening itself up to its public should register faith in the public's understanding and trust in their decisions.

Managing Reputation through Transparency

Several studies have examined the relationship between transparency and reputation management. According to Fombrun and van Riel (2004), stakeholders will have confidence in the organization's abilities if the organization is perceived to be more transparent. Moreover, all types of stakeholders, from employees to community members, should believe that open and honest communication is the key to building organizational reputation. Huang-Horowitz (2015) examined public relations' role in building reputation within a small business environment. Through interviews with managers and employees of small nanotechnology companies, she discovered that the more the company communicates its strengths and weaknesses with its stakeholders, the better stakeholders perceive the company's reputation to be. Specifically, participants stressed the importance of transparency for small organizations that work within a more technical or scientific field as it can be difficult for people to comprehend.

Similarly, Komodromos (2017), in his study exploring public relations in reputation management within small service organizations, highlights the need for transparency within all communication activities of an organization. He discusses the power of transparency creating a "bank of goodwill" (p. 11). Transparent communication provides stakeholders with a consistent viewpoint as to what the organization stands for that can translate to future support and commitment in times of crisis or concern. Also, participants in Komodromos's (2017) study emphasized transparent communication being a tactic for organizations to utilize when trying to control its reputation. Without transparency, stakeholders lack a full understanding as to what the organization's purpose is, so they may search external sources to fill in the gaps.

Overall, transparency can help address three of the challenges that public organizations face – politics, consistency, and emotional appeal. The more an organization communicates pertinent information to its stakeholders and is not secretive in the programs and initiatives it implements, stakeholders will trust that the organization is operating in good faith and with the greater society in mind.

Transparency in Practice: U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)

United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is a federal agency charged with protecting the country from "cross-border crime and illegal immigration that threaten national security and public safety" (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, n.d.). Because of its controversial mission, the organization has low approval among the national public. In 2019, a nationally administered survey found that 54% of respondents had an unfavorable opinion of the agency (Pew Research Center, 2019). This placed it behind the FBI, the Department of Justice, and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), all of which have drawn the ire of the American public in recent years.

In an effort to combat their negative public image, ICE has instituted numerous regional efforts to be more transparent in an effort to improve its reputation with the American public. For example, ICE officials in Washington reached out to citizens and local media outlets in an effort to build trust and goodwill. Agents brought media members along as they shut down illegal drug activities, as well as providing tours of ICE detention facilities (Eldridge, 2019). Furthermore, ICE officials have conducted a letter writing campaign to inform the public of their mission and how it is carried out. In a letter from field office directors, the agency stated that "it greatly concerns us when advocacy groups, citizens and politicians share and support incorrect or misleading information about our mission that is a vital part of national security and public safety." Noting the growing potential for violence, the letter attempted to clearly define its role and differentiate itself from the Border Patrol. The letter ended by acknowledging the polarizing nature of the agency's work while asking citizens to "understand that the federal laws we enforce today are the same ones that have been law for decades" (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2019).

Lastly, the agency has created a "citizens academy" to give citizens an insider's look at how the agency operates. This program consists of "classroom instruction, visiting an immigration detention center, learning more about the health care ICE provides to those in its custody, and examining ICE's role in ensuring dignity, respect and due process of an immigration case from start to finish" (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2020). Those invited to participate include elected officials and their staff, business and religious leaders, and members of local community groups. ICE offices in Los Angeles, New York, St. Paul, Tampa, and San Juan, Puerto Rico have already graduated at least one class from this program, with many others in various stages of development.

Due to the nature of its mission, ICE may have the most challenging path of all governmental agencies to reform its image. However, current actions will serve as a solid foundation to enhance its reputation with its various key stakeholder groups.

Discussion and Conclusion

Reputation asks the question of "what do others think about us?" (Brown et al., 2006). For government organizations, the answer may not elicit positive thoughts. These organizations struggle with a negative image that is often attributed to many factors including bureaucracy, inefficiency, and politics. However, through strategic public relations, public organizations have a toolkit that can not only provide guidance in managing reputation, but ideally enhances it.

This chapter focused on the challenges of managing reputation for public organizations and how public relations can serve as a strategic guidepost for how to overcome these challenges. A strong reputation is an intangible asset that can help public organizations when facing budget cuts, scarce resources, and rising public expectations. However, achieving, maintaining, and managing a positive reputation is challenging due to unexpected issues that other organization types may not face. As outlined in this chapter, politics, consistency, emotional appeal, uniqueness, and achieving excellence are challenges that present obstacles public organizations must overcome if a favorable reputation is desired. However, overcoming these challenges is possible with the right approach. And, as the above discussion raises, strategic public relations may offer support for organizations to manage their reputation, overcome the reputational challenges, and ultimately, achieve a favorable reputation.

First, we suggest public organizations take a relational approach to managing their reputation. Reputation literature has repeatedly highlighted the importance of quality relationships between organization and publics (e.g., Yang, 2005) as a contributing factor to successful reputation management. By utilizing the relationship management theory for guidance when managing reputation, government organizations can first identify key stakeholders and then focus on building long-lasting relationships.

As literature has shown, quality organization–public relationships can lead to favorable organizational reputations (e.g., Brønn, 2007; 2010; Yang, 2007). OPRs are built through high levels of trust, commitment, satisfaction, and control mutuality. By creating relationships based on these dimensions, public organizations can create long-term advocates of their programs and initiatives. This partnership will help public organizations overcome the *uniqueness* and *excellence* challenges. Because many public organizations overlap in their purpose, it is hard for an individual organization to stand out. However, with loyal advocates, especially at the local and regional level, public organizations can count on certain key publics to drive their message forward, cutting through the "conformity trap." Excellence, as argued by many public relations scholars, can be achieved through two-way communication; building mutually beneficial relationships between organization and public (e.g., Grunig et al., 1992). Although public organizations may struggle to achieve excellence, showcasing effort to build trust and support may at least help public organizations get closer to achieving *excellent* reputations.

Second, when communicating with stakeholders, public organizations must be as transparent as possible. Transparency builds trust, and as documented in previous literature (e.g., Wæraas, 2008; Wæraas & Byrkjeflot, 2012), a key contributor as to why public organizations struggle to build favorable reputations is a lack of trust among stakeholders. Transparent communication allows for stakeholders to hold organizations accountable for their actions and policies, which should ultimately register faith in the public's understanding and trust in their decisions.

Through diligent efforts to be more transparent in their communication, public organizations can overcome the *politics*, *consistency*, and *emotional appeal* challenges. By disclosing substantial information and not being secretive with intentions, stakeholders will understand the organization's mission and be able to discern where it lies among the political line. Being honest with its intentions, at the very least, stakeholders will not feel that the organization is deviating from its purpose, as set forth through its mission. This disclosure of substantial information will also lead to perceptions of consistency in terms of organizational identity, values, and self-presentations. Lastly, through the transparent dimension of participation, organizations can create an emotional connection with their stakeholders. By learning more about their stakeholders, public organizations can better appeal to their identity and make them feel good, admired, or respected.

Finally, although not highlighted in the above discussion, as public organizations and stakeholder gravitate toward social media to gain information, a third public relations concept may offer guidance for public organizations' reputation management efforts. The dialogic theory of communication was introduced by Kent and Taylor (1998) as a means by which an organization and stakeholders can communicate interactively. Dialogic communication is "any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions" (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 325).

From a public relations perspective, Kent and Taylor (2002) posited that dialogue can be established through public relations by identifying channels and pathways for dialogic communication to take place, with a strong suggestion that this dialogue can be best practiced online. Studies have examined the impact of numerous dialogic strategies (e.g. Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Kelleher, 2006) and have repeatedly found three to be most beneficial in cultivating relationships. These are *disclosure*, a *user-friendly message format*, and *interactivity*.

Disclosure encompasses a company's ability to communicate useful information that will appeal to stakeholders (Abitbol & Lee, 2017; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2009). Key aspects of disclosure include transparency and openness (Kent et al., 2003). For full disclosure, organizations must post information that highlight content that stakeholders find impactful. A *user-friendly message format* refers to how information is presented. Typically, it should be highly-accessible. Online, this could include posting links to external news items about the organization or posting photos, videos or graphics from the company (Carrera et al., 2008). Finally, *interactivity* refers to the public's ability to ask questions and the organization's ability to respond. Interactivity is imperative for an organization to develop relationships with their stakeholders (Jo & Kim, 2003). It can be defined as an organization's strategy to facilitate interactions among stakeholders or between the organization and the stakeholder in an effort to encourage stakeholder involvement in the organization's activities (Saxton & Waters, 2014).

For government organizations, reputation management can be difficult due to many challenges that other industry types may not face. These include issues stemming from politics, consistency, emotional appeal, uniqueness and excellence. However, strategic public relations can provide a pathway for public organizations to effectively manage their reputation. By focusing on building quality relationships with stakeholders through transparent communication, public organizations can overcome the challenges they face, and ultimately maintain favorable reputations among stakeholders. Moreover, with the increase of social media as a way to reach and engage with stakeholders, building dialogue and interacting effectively provides yet another pathway to managing reputation. Although the connection between the dialogic communication and reputation has not been studied extensively, future research should explore how social and online spaces are utilized by public organizations to build and maintain reputation among stakeholders.

Reputation management for governmental organizations in a general sense can be an almost impossible task due to a variety of challenges, including those stemming from politics to consistency. The suggestions outlined in this chapter provide guidance on how to build and maintain reputation among constituents of governmental organizations. The key, however, may be to start small – at the local level – and through strategic efforts, build up to impact the government at all levels.

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14 Applying Mordecai Lee's Government Public Relations Model in Teaching and Practice

Paul K. Dezendorf

Introduction

"Why are you telling me this?" Have you ever heard that question? Human nature leads individuals to try and understand the purposes of a communication, whether that communication be from one's children, peers, bosses, or a government. This chapter describes a model for systematically analyzing the purposes for government communications as well as the perceived purposes by their audiences. The model appears suitable for undergraduate courses in disciplines such as political science or mass communications; graduate courses in public administration; continuing education for practitioners; and by practitioners either for their own work or to mentor others.

The current government public relations environment presents great challenges for practitioners. However, students in public administration programs often receive little or no government public relations education. They are often hired into positions that require public communications abilities yet they are often provided only limited, on-the-job training. Those experiences are frequently constrained by organizational policies which limit their communications activities as well as their own concerns with becoming the target of online attacks.

One technique that might benefit these practitioners is to systematically apply the question "Why are you telling me this?" to each communication with the public as well as asking that question from the public's perspective. Systematically analyzing the purpose for a communication is likely to aid in creating more effective communications; systematically analyzing how the intended audiences are likely to perceive the purpose of the announcement is also likely to help develop better communications as well as identifying possible adverse reactions.

A model for systematically analyzing the purposes of communications is described in this chapter. This chapter describes how this model was developed and the author's experience using the model with students and practitioners in the U.S., Russia, Germany, and Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. The model is based on the government public relations model developed by Mordecai Lee in Chapter 2.

Government Public Relations Environment

Many governments around the world are experiencing increased difficulties in carrying out communications about their activities. In many countries the low level of trust in the press, a traditional vehicle of communication, is driven by the low level of political trust, most notably in the U.S. (Hanitzsch, Dalen, & Steindl, 2018). The reduction of local news coverage in the U.S. has led to reduced citizen engagement and thus less interest in government communications (Hayes & Lawless. 2018). The reduced public interest in policy has contributed to reduced coverage even by major, traditional press sources (Watts & Rothschild, 2017). Similarly, public trust in academic institutions that provide analysis of government actions is also declining given rising institutional inequality that has limited individual opportunity (Taylor & Cantwell, 2019). Finally, the credibility of the media overall is decreasing as the boundary between press and popular information sources is fading; the enormous volume of false information consumed by the public is generated by millions of sources; and the credibility of a source often depends on an individual's beliefs rather than expert guidance (Patterson, 2019).

A simple example of these changes can be seen in Russia. President Putin's dominance of the Russian newspaper, radio, and television industries strengthened during his tenure. These traditional media provided almost no criticism of the government. The newly emerging social media technologies of the time were largely disregarded by Russian government ministries; in fact, some senior government officials believed that YouTube content was provided by the CIA to damage Russia. At the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 the traditional media carried news throughout Russia of the government's promises of substantial payments to coronavirus healthcare workers; as the pandemic grew, the amount of promised payments increased. The news that many workers were not receiving payments slowly began to trickle through the newly emerging social media, including YouTube, where workers told their stories of not being paid. This social media information was in stark contrast to the information passed up the chains of command in the Russian ministries to the president. President Putin could not simply ignore the problem and announce that the government was in control of the situation. On May 19, 2020 he acknowledged that the workers had not been paid and very publicly blamed his ministers (Macro-Advisory, 2020).

In the U.S., government media use evolved and expanded throughout American history. However, by the 1970s press coverage of political personalities turned negative, "and as the news turned negative, so did Americans' opinion of their political leaders" (Patterson 2019, p. 72). In the next several decades the media continued to fragment and decline as a source of public policy information. The "news" is now shaped by virulent partisanship with the public choosing media sources deemed appropriate for their own particular beliefs which has reduced the factual information required by citizens to make sense of policy (Jamieson & Waldman, 2003). Government communications is increasingly threatened as the uninformed among the public are being joined by a growing flood of the misinformed (Patterson 2019). As a result, almost any government public relations communication is scrutinized and frequently attacked in a manner far different than the past.

Mordecai Lee's Model of Government Public Relations

Public relations have been a part of American governments since the Revolution. The media used since that time include a growing number of technologies such as Revolutionary War broadsides to rally support, the telegraph's speeding the pace of politics, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's radio "fireside chats," and Twitter for carrying out foreign policy. Content disseminated using those media ranged from highly intellectual discussions, such as the Federalist Papers, to outright propaganda or even promotion of an industry such as by the Travel Bureau – a unit established by the federal government in the economic doldrums of the late 1930s in order to promote America's tourist economy.

During the 1800s, the combination of geographic expansion as well as increasing literacy pushed governments to increase their public relations activity. During this time, presidents used all of the components that we associate with public relations ranging from simple leaks to the press up to President Andrew Jackson's appointment of the first presidential press secretary with responsibility for polling, speech writing, and publicity. Government public relations also was spurred by public relations in the private sector, often remembered by the colorful exploits of Davey Crockett, Daniel Boone, and P. T. Barnum. The industrialization, growth of population, and other changes after the Civil War resulted in massive social problems. During the following Progressive Era period, democracy expanded with the growing role of women, minorities, and earlier voting ages as well as the direct election of Senators and other reforms. These changes were facilitated by improvements in communications' technologies. President Wilson used many of these technologies as part of the Creel Committee activities aimed at increasing public support for U.S. entry into WWI, one of the largest government public relations projects in U.S. history.

Wilson also led the development of public administration as a profession and a field of academic study. By the 1920s, textbooks and courses about public administration increased in numbers and importance which led to a model for describing public relations in public administration. The seminal volume, McCamy's book *Government Publicity* (1940), provided the first descriptive model for understanding this growing field and was followed by other publications that established the foundation for scientific study of government public relations. In the 1970s, Dr. Mordecai Lee's writings expanded understanding of the field and highlighted the central role of public relations in public administration. Lee argued that public administrators will better fulfill their job responsibilities by fully using public relations to help implement their agency's mission and fulfilling the democratic responsibilities of government. Lee updated McCamy's framework with a threefold typology that includes eight purposes of government relations. Comments on each of the purposes are given below; a full exposition of this framework can be found in Chapter 2.

I. Mandatory: Democratic purposes of government public relations.

Media Relations. The relationship between the media and government is complex and contentious. Despite these problems, a fundamental, mandatory purpose of agency communications is media relations – being open and responsive to media inquiries.

Public Reporting. Public administrators are responsible for directly communicating with the public about how their agency has carried out its mission and the use of taxpayer funds whether or not specifically required by statute or regulation.

Responsiveness to the Public as Citizens. The government must be responsive to all of the public; unlike other sectors such as business or nonprofits, every citizen has a right to be informed, obtain information, and participate in governance.

II. Optional: Pragmatic purposes of government public relations.

Responsiveness to the Public as Customers and Clients. Public administrators can use public relations to improve the pursuit of an agency's mission such as investigating complaints in order to improve service delivery.

Increasing the Utilizations of Services and Products. Public administrators can make sure that information about services is widely distributed so as to encourage equality.

Public Education and Public Service Campaigns. Public administrators can encourage behavior that has social approval and reflects social values by using public service campaigns such as seat belt use.

Seeking Voluntary Compliance with Laws and Regulations. Public administrators can reduce the cost of regulation by encouraging voluntary compliance such as notification of changes in zoning.

Using the Public as the Eyes and Ears of an Agency. Public administrators can help citizens to co-produce government services, such as by using 911 to make the caller a part of emergency services.

III. Dangerous, but powerful: Political purposes of government public relations.

Increasing Public Support. Public administrators have a responsibility to maintain support for sound public policies created through a democratic process. Therefore, the primary purpose for a communication with the public may at times be to educate the public about an agency in order to increase public support such as citizen academies conducted by law enforcement.

Adaptation of the Lee Model for Students and Practitioners

Lee's model was initially adapted, with his support, for use in a public sector public relations course in the MPA program at Western Carolina University, a branch of the University of North Carolina system. The goal of the adaptation was to create a simple, intuitive model that students could use as a tool in the course and later as practitioners to analyze the purposes of government communications and public perception of those communications.

The first objective for the adaptation was to simplify the Lee model in order to fit the basics on a single, double-sided handout that could be easily used in class or workplace and also provide an outline for teaching. This objective was accomplished by dividing the material into four components – purposes of communication, audiences for the communication, form of media used, and factors that are related to successful communications.

The second objective was to find a way to present the purposes in a simple and intuitive fashion that would facilitate understanding as well as lend itself to use in experiential learning. The Lee model purposes were converted into a list format and the other component areas were summarized into the two-page handout format shown at the end of this chapter in Handout 14.1. That assignment was used to create a descriptive worksheet and a prescriptive worksheet as shown in Handouts 14.2 and 14.3, respectively.

The third objective was to try and make the model generic rather than country specific. To do so, the model was tried out in teaching in the U.S., Russia, Germany, and the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic and adjusted based on feedback from students. For example, Russian students argued that their government was opaque for most citizens and as a result the primary purpose of a local government communication might be simply to demonstrate transparency. After consultation with Dr. Lee, transparency was added as a purpose to the model.

As well as being used in teaching, the model was designed to be adaptable by practitioners to unique circumstances. An example of how the model might be adapted was demonstrated by a U.S. MPA student employed in a city parks and recreation department. The staff were to discuss possible new signage for use in the parks and text for the city website including topics such as park hours, prohibited activities, relevant statutes, and potential fines. The student distributed copies of Figure 1's Component 1, modified with examples easily understood by staff members, for use in analyzing each of the proposed communications. She explained the model and asked the group about the first proposed communication, "Why are we telling them this?" The vigorous discussion demonstrated that there were strong underlying and previously unexpressed differences between the staff members about the reasons for the communications.

The student then asked what purposes the public might see about this communication. One staff member said that the perception of purposes was likely to differ among different groups in the community. Another staff member pointed out that many members of the city's minority population held strong feelings about law enforcement, park policies, housing discrimination, and other topics. He pointed out that the department's reviews of signage included legal clearance, reading level, and readability but the reviews had never included a formal review of how different groups viewed the purpose of the signage. The group then decided that carrying out focus groups the most practical way of understanding possible public reactions.

The first focus group began with strong statements by participants about what they saw the department doing and not doing for their members. The facilitator then explained the purposes intended by the department and asked the group to use the model to explain their perceptions of the purposes. The facilitator used the model to draw out reflections and suggestions related to minority group usage of the parks as well as a higher level of usage by the public as a whole. The use of the model reduced the tension and led to a thoughtful and productive discussion that expanded beyond the proposed communication.

A similar application of the model can be used in the development of strategic communications plans for management of reputation. relationships, and tasks. Reputation management involves enhancing or repairing a government unit's reputation with its various audiences. Enhancing or repairing begins with gaining an understanding of each of the audience's perceptions of the government unit. As with the use of a focus group for the parks and recreation department, the model can be used in the beginning of focus groups or during a listening session to help facilitate discussion. Similarly, the model can help in managing relationships, such as the internal relationships with a group of employees. Managing such relationships in certain situations can be difficult and the model may be used to help structure the discussion. Use of the model in task management, such as encouraging attendance at public meetings or a traffic safety program, can also be productive. The model also can be used in the design of public information campaigns. Public information campaigns rest heavily on factors such as the agency's credibility, trustworthiness of messages from the agency, and whether the agency is focused on the good of the community or the good of the agency.

Students and practitioners also should be sensitive to the broader, external social contexts in which the model might be applied. Practitioners should be aware of three types of influences: the influence of national culture on the nature of communications; the impact of the communications structures, such as extent of broadband service, on communications; and the media landscape involving such variables as the degree of press freedom.

Government public relations tools and practices may need to be altered based on the national culture context. Although that may seem an obvious statement, going from intellectually knowing something operationalizing that knowledge and to successfully working across different national cultures requires study, discipline, and often a bit of humility. In a very general sense, national culture involves norms, behaviors, beliefs, customs, values, and assumptions shared by a population. In going from one national culture to another, one example of a difference in communications may be a move from high-context and low-context communications (Hall, 1966). High-context communications may be very summarized as assuming that the listener is familiar with the issues and thus communication is more indirect and elaborate. Low-context communication can be roughly summarized as more direct. In the Russian teaching experiences, presentation of the Lee model and use by the students was clearly low context, as the students wanted direct answers to questions and produced results from their use of the model that were direct, succinct, and often strongly opinionated.

Another commonly referred to dimension is the relationship between collectivism, where in-group harmony is a major value, and individualism. Where in-group harmony is a major value, the members of the group are likely to favor more indirect modes of communication within their groups and thus may respond to surveys, such as those using the Lee model, in a more acquiescent manner. Such patterns can be seen in the values of East Asian cultures where speakers tend to moderate their communications so as to not hurt feelings nor impose themselves.

The impact of communications structures on communications is far less complex and abstract. The communications structure of a country refers to the mechanism by which communications is carried out. How extensive is the Internet? Is the Internet limited by the government? What is the capacity of the cell network? Communications structures also include the human dimension. What is the level of literacy? What is the typical reading level of those who are literate? Is communication carried out through leaders of groups to their followers or is communication more common across the country via mass media?

The impact on the media landscape of ownership and control is likely to be less complex to understand. Does the mass media's coverage tend to support government policy as in the Russian example in this chapter? Do newspaper owners dictate what news stories are covered? Are most of the broadcasting stations in the country owned by a very small number of companies? Sometimes ownership patterns are more difficult to discover, such as when media companies are owned by holding companies.

A very simple example of the influence of national culture on communications may suggest the challenges that could face practitioners. The author is a board member of the not-for-profit organization Sustainable Rural Development International (SRDI) which carries out economic development activities in Ukraine, Georgia, and Turkey. The meeting with potential partners in Ukraine seemed to go well until the lead SRDI person realized that while everyone in the audience was nodding in agreement, they actually understood very little of what was being said. The terminology being used was largely unknown to the audience because the language of the presentation was what is often referred to as "donor-speak," or the specialized language of international donor organizations like the World Bank, USAID, and the European Commission. For example, the audience assumed that SRDI was going to pay for everything on the program of proposed activities whereas SRDI thought it was clear that the project was a partnership and they would also need to make contributions. In subsequent meetings, SRDI used a local champion who actually understood the project and goals and made presentations in a simple manner with appropriate cultural context. The meetings also were changed to end with a summary of immediate next steps as presentations in that national culture which are left open-ended leave the assumption that no work will be done until the next meeting.

Turkey presented different challenges. In the large cities of Istanbul, Ankara, or Izmir, communication tended to be business-like once in the door. Getting that door to open, however, was another barrier which can summarized as "Who are you and why are you here?" Aggressive sales approaches were not acceptable. Potential partners needed to know the SRDI representative as a person before negotiating would begin, which led to lots of tea and talk for almost two years. There were also differences between the urban and rural areas. In rural areas, discussion was straightforward and answers to questions needed to be direct. If the audience saw a benefit to a proposal, then the conversation ended by defining concrete steps forward. If the discussion ended otherwise, then the presenter was politely thanked and no further communication was likely.

In Georgia, SRDI found a similar need for introductions before any conversation could begin. These introductions were often in the form of a series of dinners where personal questions were asked about family and children. But, once engaged, immediate follow-up – including proposing concrete plans – is required to maintain credibility. Georgians, like Turks and Ukrainians, want the visitor to be comfortable and as a result the word "no" will rarely be used. If a "no" to an offer or proposal is needed, the best approach is to couch the answer in terms of the level of difficulty. The higher the level of difficulty expressed, the firmer the "no."

Despite all of the differences, communications in all three countries included a common and fundamental requirement: don't be vague and make certain the other person or group actually understands what you said rather than assuming that they understand.

Trial of the Model in Four Countries

The model was tried in four countries with different types of audiences. In the U.S., the audience members for the most part were part-time MPA students in their 20s and 30s who also worked in the public sector. Most of them worked or sought to work in small government or nonprofit settings where they often could function as "street-level bureaucrats" with a great deal of discretion. They saw themselves and their peers at work as communicators with the public. In Russia the model was presented in undergraduate, graduate, and professional continuing education courses. The cultural setting was much different as the student perspectives were set within a top-down government culture where virtually all government activities were tightly regulated. As a result, they saw government public relations as being done only by designed officials following detailed guidelines. The German students were traditional-age undergraduates studying to be grade school teachers. Their interests were more intellectual and pedagogic. However, they found the model to be interesting as a possible way to think about communications with students and parents. Finally, the Nagorno-Karabakh audience were most of the staff members in the country's Foreign Ministry. The staff members were young, most in their 20s and 30s, and they found the model to be understandable but as in Russia they saw government public relations as confined to designed officials who follow detailed guidelines.

For those who might use the model to teach in other countries, one note of caution. Delivery in different cultures may require additional time. For example, for some presentations in Russia the course materials had to be translated and the lectures delivered via a translator. This type of delivery required an additional half-day teaching session with the translator who as might be expected sought to understand the exact meaning of many terms used in the course. At other times the lectures were required to be in English in order to develop students' language skills – but different classes sometimes had different language skills thus requiring the handouts and other course materials to be edited for their language needs. Finally, a single audience might include groups of people at different levels of language ability. In Armenia the course delivery was required to be in English, but the language ability of individuals ranged from excellent to non-existent. As a result, students were simultaneously translating to other students which often resulted in questions about the meaning of terms to the instructor thus sidetracking the discussion. The audience enjoyed the course but the time allotted for teaching should have been doubled.

Application in the U.S.

The course required each student to develop and carry out a public sector public relations project on an independent basis. The students were supported by textbooks, handouts, and mentoring during the semester but there were no group sessions. Assigned readings included the Lee model as well as other readings on government public relations. The model handouts were supplied to them along with other handouts. Students could use the model as they saw fit in their project. Given the idiosyncratic nature of the projects, there was no opportunity to evaluate the framework across the students as a whole. However, individual students provided feedback and helped with developing the model. In general, students found the model simple, intuitive, and practical. Many of them saw the model as a good "take away" from the course for use in their workplace as illustrated by the parks and recreation staff member described earlier in the chapter.

Application in Russia

The model in Russia was presented as a part of undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education courses; workshops; and a variety of public and guest lectures during eight trips to Russia over a period of six years, including one year as a Fulbright Scholar. This chapter describes experiences at three institutions where the model was used as a part of undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education courses and comments about the use of the model in lectures and workshops at several others.

In the undergraduate courses, the model was taught as part of that course and students used the model outside of class to analyze communications of their home city or region and then report back to the class. In the graduate courses, the model was taught as part of the course and the class worked in class in groups and then as a whole class to analyze the communications of the city in which the university was located. The third format, the model was used as a part of a course for government managers in a continuing education program where the managers worked in class in groups to develop hypothetical ideas for high quality public relations. In the fourth format, the model was used in a course in government public relations where students studied American government public relations using the model as an organizing framework. In non-academic settings, the model was used as a part of workshops, on topics such as American government or modern media, and guest lectures at three other academic institutions.

Moscow

The model was used in a traditional undergraduate course delivered at the School of Public Administration in the National Research

University-Higher School of Economics (HSE) main campus in Moscow, where the author was a Fulbright Scholar. HSE was one of the top-rated public administration schools in Russia and the students displayed a high level of academic ability and classroom engagement. The course, Public Relations and American Government, was intended to help students understand the development and practice of government public relations in the U.S. and the role that public relations play in American local and state governments. The lectures, handouts, and readings were very popular with the students, although almost all regarded the content as being far removed from life in Russia. As one student said, "It's like looking out the window at someone else's backyard." The students found the model's purposes to be comprehensive and applicable in Russia except for the lack of a "transparency" purpose, as noted earlier.

The first part of the HSE course included lectures and discussion and the second part was empirical work. The end product of the empirical work was a written and an oral report by each student about the government public relations of a city in Russia, usually the city where the student grew up before coming to Moscow for their university education. At the beginning of this second part, the model was reviewed and a project sheet was distributed that provided an outline for the report they were to submit. Each student then used the model to analyze their city's communications by examining the city's website. They could also telephone city officials or ask friends who still lived in that city for information. During this part of the course, most students came into class each week full of news about what they had found. Overall, almost every student was interested, engaged, and enthusiastic about their city projects.

Overall, the report assignment and the class presentation and discussion of the reports were highly successful in terms of pedagogy as well as ranking high in student perceptions of the value of the course to them. Each of the report sections are described below along with comments about student responses.

> Part 1. Introduction. Students were told to write a description of their city in the first section of this first part which helped the instructor understand the context for their report. Students then completed three more sections that described the city government, web sites, and the office responsible for government public relations.

The student descriptions of the office of government public relations led to some thoughtful and at times amusing discussions. For example, one student knew from the assigned readings that public relations staff co-located with senior officials were often more influential than those located at a distance. He plotted the physical distance expressed in time to travel between the office responsible for government public relations and the office of the mayor, which in most of the cities was the primary authority in city government. In turn, the other students completed their own distance measurements for their own cities. Then class then as a group at the board worked out a correlation between the distances and each student's perception of the quality of government public relations in the city. Their conclusion? Cities with government public relations offices located in or near the mayor's offices were judged to have a higher quality of government public relations.

Part 2. Purposes of Government Public Relations. The student comments in general reflected their views that government public relations in most cases were poorly conceived and executed using outdated styles and modes of communication. The examples below are given as illustrative of the student responses in this Moscow course; similar responses were given by students elsewhere in Russia.

Public Information Services: Most knew that information was available but very few had ever explored the extent of public information services. Most students were surprised at the great variation in information between the cities. This led to interesting discussions about possible reasons for the differences such as political or social context.

Voluntary Public Reporting: Students in general agreed with one student's comment, "There are numerous reports but none of them is voluntary." Students uniformly believed that city governments only disclosed what they were required to disclose and even then, information at times was lacking or deliberately misleading.

Responsiveness: The students uniformly complained about the lack of statistics that would provide feedback about the degree of responsiveness by the city services to the citizens. They pointed out that the data almost always was aggregated over time and across services. Frequently Asked Questions areas appeared in the opinion of many students to be those questions the government officials believe citizens should be asking rather than FAQs that citizens frequently asked.

Use of Services: Students found that information about services, such as public transport, was poorly presented.

Educational Programs: Students saw some public education programs in a positive light but were suspicious of the purpose of many others. Said one student, "Yes, of course, this is social control! We have a lot in my city. Why else would they have educational programs?"

Compliance with the Laws: "The only reason they communicate is to make us compliant with the laws" commented one student. Students found a great deal of forceful language on the web sites.

Public Participation in Government: The relatively small amount of encouragement from governments for public participation was criticized as being inadequate and misleading.

Support for the Government: The students found a great deal of self-promotion. One commented "The published information totally differs from the real situation where I grew up."

Transparency: Students found little evidence of communications whose purpose was to demonstrate transparency although all agreed that Russian governments should do more to demonstrate transparency.

Part 3. Audiences. All students agreed that there was a great difference among the cities regarding what audiences appeared to be targeted by government communications. Many students saw that the most important audiences targeted by the cities were veterans, persons were interested in athletics, and pensioners and there was almost no communications to many other groups such as mothers with children.

Part 4. Types of Communications. As was expected, students saw governments lagging behind in use of newer forms of communications. However, students went beyond simply listing modalities of communications and shortcomings and wrote instead in detail and with a great deal of imagination about possible future uses, content, and audiences.

Part 5. Factors that Influence the Success of GPR. This part was difficult for most students to complete. However, the value of this part was that the bits and pieces brought by individual students were then woven together in general classroom discussion thus bringing about thoughtful consideration of topics such as the character of city leadership and the relationship between city managers and employees.

Part 6. Conclusions and Recommendations. This part asked for comments about the amount, effectiveness, and future use of government public relations. One indicator of student engagement was the great number of ideas about possible improvements as well as the detailed comments about the perceived effectiveness of the government public relations that they examined.

Siberia

Another use of the model in a traditional undergraduate academic course was at the Siberian Academy of Public Administration, now The Siberian Institute of Management (SIM) – a branch of the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEPA). SIM is located in Novosibirsk, the third largest city in Russia and the largest city in Asiatic Russia. The course, Public Administration in the American System of Government, consisted of in-class lectures and discussions as well as out-of-class assignments.

The government public relations unit began with a review of government communications in the U.S. starting with the American Revolution.

The lectures and classroom discussion included the role of communications between the government and the public in the policy development process. There was a good deal of comment from the students regarding differences and similarities between the U.S. and Russian approaches. The course then moved on to a discussion of communication between local governments and the public using a handout similar to Handout 14.1 to help explain the model. Students were then given a version of Handout 14.2 and asked to make their notes about the purposes of government public relations by the city of Novosibirsk outside of class and to present their findings in class. The assignment helped students gain confidence in applying the model and to grapple with the difficulties of trying to characterize a city government. A version of Handout 14.3 was then distributed in class and students worked in groups to complete the form. Each group presented and then the class as a whole tried to develop a consensus document regarding Novosibirsk's government public relations.

Rather than consensus, there was a very animated and at times highly contentious discussion involving almost everyone in the class. Liberal activists forcefully argued with Communist party supporters as to the city government's supposed biases. Several women in class berated others about gender discrimination and maternal and child health care. Some students argued that certain city government departments, such as law enforcement, had very different public relations approaches than other departments indicating that government public relations were not a centralized function which lessened government effectiveness in communication.

There was general agreement among the students that this unit was highly useful for them in future public sector careers as well as members of the public. The students greatly enjoyed the material and demonstrated a solid grasp of and skill in using the model. However, the response among the faculty and administration was mixed. The head of the school found the material sufficiently interesting to arrange an additional lecture to interested faculty as well as extend an offer and funding for a return visit. Some more traditional members of the faculty regarded student criticism of some of the city government departments as unpatriotic.

Urals

The model was used in two courses at Urals Academy of Public Administration, now the Ural Institute of Management (UIM) – another branch of RANEPA. UIM is located in Ekaterinburg, Russia's fourth-largest city located near the border between Europe and Asia. The course, American Government Public Relations, was taught in the evening to government workers taking required hours of continuing public administration training. Most students had at least ten years of experience in that city's government or the government of a smaller city in the large region served by

UIM. The classroom had desks with two students at each one. The setting tended to pair students from the same organization.

The course lecture and discussion material, delivered during two evening sessions, presented an introduction to American government public relations. On the third evening, students were asked to apply the model to a unit of government. As expected, most students chose the department or agency in which they worked. As the course format did not allow for work outside of the classroom, the students in pairs spent half of one evening session in analyzing and discussing their chosen department or agency. The students tended to work down the rows of the handout by looking at each purpose and discussing the nature of their organization's communications. The second half of the evening session was dedicated to reporting on their results. The results, according to the students, was very satisfactory. The students had no criticism of the model and they were able to apply the model and draw conclusions. On this third evening, many of the students stayed after class to continue an enthusiastic discussion.

A second course at UIM, Government Public Relations Short Course, was a traditional graduate course. The students were in their 20s and just beginning their careers in public administration. The course was an introduction to American public sector public relations and content delivery was structured based on Figure 1. Each class session addressed one of the purposes shown in Component 1 or a topic from one of the other components. In addition, the students read several journal articles related to that week's topic before each class. Each evening began with a short, overview lecture followed by a group discussion of the topic. The discussion was frequently vigorous and at a high professional level. The students appeared to thoroughly enjoy the topic of government public relations and most of the evening was occupied by their discussions rather than lecture.

Application in Germany

The model was used in Germany at the Ludwigsburg Educational University (LEU) outside of Stuttgart in the state of Baden-Wurttemberg. The university provides education for future grade school teachers. The course, American Government and Politics, was intended as an enrichment course for students studying subjects such as English, political science, or history. On the last day-long session, the topic of government public relations was introduced using the model a framework for the content.

Students were asked to apply the model to the German government as a whole, first in small groups and then in an all-class discussion. The discussion was moderated by the instructor who moved the class through each of the purposes in the model and then components covering audiences, types of communications, and factors related to success. The instructor did not supply information or direction but rather asked questions to guide the discussion.

The results were a wide-ranging discussion of Germany's past, present, and future as students came from different walks of life and tended to see Germany's actions, such as handling the migrant crisis, from a number of different perspectives. The students found each of the model's purposes to be applicable to what they see in German government.

Application in Nagorno-Karabakh Republic

The model was used twice, a year apart, in diplomatic training for staff of the Foreign Ministry of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR). The week-long course at the Foreign Ministry covered a variety of government communications topics. The approach to teaching the model was similar to that used in Germany. The class broke into small groups. The groups discussed one element of the model among themselves followed by an all-class discussion. However, the discussion was far different than in Germany or Russia as the class only included members of the Foreign Ministry staff. As a result, many of the persons in the room were responsible for the communications being analyzed during discussions of the model. While there were vigorous differences of opinion during those discussions, all of the disputes were done in Armenian followed by a summary in English by one member of the staff to the instructor. The participants reported that Component 1 (purposes) and Component 2 (audiences) to be of possible use for them in developing and analyzing communications but that the other two components were not relevant for their work.

NKR also provided an interesting illustration of the influence of national culture on communications. NKR is a geographically very small area, about 1,700 square miles, with a population of roughly 145,000. NKR is a Christian republic located within Muslim and oil-rich Azerbaijan and connected by a narrow corridor through steep terrain to Armenia which provides economic and military support. Conflicts, including a major war in the 1990s and on-and-off raids and sniper fire, involving NKR/Armenia and Azerbaijan have been one of the most explosive issues in the Caucasus region for several decades. Inhabitants are very conscious of their political and military isolation as well as the great number of military and civilian deaths. The model handout for the participants had the heading "Nagorno-Karabakh Worksheet," which brought the class to an abrupt stop. The participants argued that the worksheet title inferred that they were a region and did not properly respect their status as a sovereign republic, in their view the oldest Christian republic in the world. While NKR is not recognized by any UN member state and NKR was widely referred to by media around the world as "the breakaway territory of

Nagorno-Karabakh" or the "disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh," the participants were adamant that they be known as the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. The participants also were critical of references to the regions bordering NKR that are held by Armenia but claimed by Azerbaijan as "occupied." To the participants, these areas were "buffer zones" against Azerbaijani aggression and should be referred to as such. Some of the participants also struggled with the concept that government public relations are based on two-way communications as they saw virtually the entire world set against them.

While the staff participants were overwhelming pleased with the training, the officials in the ministry were highly displeased almost entirely due to the national culture issues. As a result, the courses were discontinued although many of ministry's junior staff chose to continue taking similar courses outside of NKR.

Teaching Handouts

Based on offering the different communication courses in different countries and settings, the author developed a series of handouts to provide an introduction to the Government Public Relations model and to apply students' knowledge of their own government and governmental agencies to the component of the GPR.

Handout 14.1 was roughly similar in all four countries as the courses taught were based on American government and public administration practices.

Handout 14.1 Government Public Relations (GPR) Model Components

Component 1. Purposes

Notes: These purposes are common among U.S. governments. These purposes are built on the premise of two-way communications; every purpose presumes public communication with the government. The term "government public relations" refers to the communications between governments and citizens. However, the purposes can be used to examine communications by most organizations in the public sector. These communications can be implicit or explicit; the communications can occur via individuals, publications, etc. GPR as we use the term here involves three dimensions: (1) a two-way, values-based, symmetrical public relations approach that creates an enduring, problem-solving linkage; (2) modern communications tools; and (3) and an integration of traditional government with "virtual" government.

Typical GPR Model Components Explanatory - Purposes

Purpose	*Description*	*Examples*
Public information services	Provide information to all media, organizations, and individuals and help them research their questions. Also identify interests of the public based on those questions.	Historical records of all press releases; electronic press kits; access to all key individuals; posting FAQs; responding to all questions; and gathering public opinion information.
Voluntary public reporting	Providing useful reports to the public in addition to required reports to the government based on research on citizen interests and ability to understand information.	Reports to the people about the use of tax revenues, ethnic conflicts, effectiveness of police, etc. Also reports about unusual problems or crises.
Responsiveness	Responding quickly to citizen requests, solving problems without delay, and providing report back to the citizen and also providing cumulative reports to the public and press with trend information.	24-hour call centers for emergencies; Internet forms and automatic replies; tracking systems to measure fast response; customer satisfaction surveys and reports.
Service management	Using communications to encourage proper use and so increase efficiency and effectiveness and to gather information from the public.	Advertise service not properly used; temporarily change use of services (road repair); increase use of e-government.
Educational programs	Change attitudes, values, and behaviors of the public through education programs (not school education).	Encourage less drinking and smoking; inform about fire safety and garbage disposal; decrease ethnic conflicts; decrease domestic violence.
Compliance with laws	Reducing law violations by education about laws and punishments.	Advertising consequences of drunk driving or firearms possession etc.
Public participation in government	Create opportunities for citizens to learn, to work, and to help make decisions.	Using cell phones to report dangerous situations on highways; "police academies" to educate citizens about law enforcement.
Support for the government	Increase the popular support for government by demonstrating effective public policies	Holding frequent public meetings by elected officials with voters; public opinion surveys.
Transparency	Provide access to information in order to allow public knowledge of government activity and develop mutual trust.	Advertise where records may be seen; give assistance to public in doing research about government.

Component 2. Audiences for GPR in the US

These are the six of the most common audiences.

Customers for specific services Users of government services or products are consumers.
Communities These may include physical communities where consumers live or communities influenced by the government (military base) or communities of persons with similar characteristics (disabled persons).
Interest groups Organized interest groups are powerful political forces in the US. Often, they are not direct consumers of an agency's services or products but they have a direct interest in the policies of an agency.
Citizens All citizens are owners of the government and are treated as an audience separate from audiences of customers for specific services.
Officials GPR is used to educate elected and appointed officials.
Other governments American government is very dependent on intergovernmental relations due to the highly fragmented and local nature of government.

Component 3. Forms of Communications to Reach the Audiences

Almost all US governments use e-government for GPR. Forms of GPR communication include web sites, video, audio, interactive forms, chat sessions, etc. E-government provides fast, cheap, and 24-hour communications. Persons who do not have Internet get this information from other persons or use Internet in public offices, libraries, or with friends. Governments also use other types of communications that are suited for the particular municipality or region. Because American government public policy comes from two-way communication, there are highly developed methodologies for "engagement" of citizens in decision-making by the government.

Component 4. Factors That Influence the Success of Government Public Relations in the U.S.

These six factors are usually found in those governments that have very successful GPR. These six factors provide support for GPR.

Leaders with Communications Skills Modern successful leaders are usually good communicators. They see society as a partner in carrying out the work of government.
Structure and Activities of the GPR Office Governments with successful GPR usually have GPR persons located close to

top management; have those persons involved with all major decisions; and the GPR is based on a modern public relations model using mass communications and e-government.

Performance Measurement Public relations is more difficult to measure than many other forms of government services. High quality measurement of performance is usually associated with high quality public relations.

Conflict Management Modern GPR focuses on building relationships between the government and groups in the public and resolving conflicts between groups and with the government.

Crisis Management Ability Government public relations must be different during a crisis. At these times, all communications must be focused on the response to the crisis. To do so requires careful planning and practice.

Communications with Employees of Government Successful GPR offices usually have good communications with all parts of the government and all types of personnel. These communications result in better knowledge of government operations by the GPR office. Also, employees help the GPR office communicate with the public.

Changes between course offerings removed examples that did not easily translate or for students to substitute their own examples as previously described in the Urals course. The course handouts shown in Handout 14.2 and Handout 14.3 were used in conjunction with Handout 14.1. Handouts 14.2 and 14.3 differed from country to country and sometimes from course delivery to course delivery, the examples included here are from some of the courses in Russia.

Handout 14.2 was used to help students evaluate government communications as it includes the four components shown in the first handout but omits the explanatory text and adds space for students to take notes. The text of the Handout 14.2 is reproduced in condensed form; when used on a hardcopy basis, the printed handout's spacing is expanded to allow students to write their information.

The author tried a variety of instruments and settings for students to understand and develop skill in applying the model before settling on the version in Handout 14.2. Variations included a variety of data collection formats such as Likert scales, cloud maps, etc. While the more complex and quantitative instruments produced results of interest to the instructor, students preferred the single-page, fill-in-the-cells format for several reasons. The primary reason given was their perception that the complex instruments measured at a level of detail which they could not evaluate due to the limitations of time in the course.

Handout 14.2 GPR Model Components Analysis

GPR Analysis Handout for ______________________(Government Unit Name)

Component 1. Purposes

Analyze the communications in terms of what you perceive as their purposes. Rank the purposes by number beginning with 1, the purpose of primary importance. If a purpose is not present, enter zero.

Purpose	**Explain how the communication you are analyzing demonstrates this purpose.**	**Rank the purpose.**
Public information services		
Voluntary public reporting		
Responsiveness		
Service management		
Educational programs		
Compliance with laws		
Public participation in government		
Support for the government		
Transparency		

Component 2. Audiences

What are the four most important audiences for these types of communications? List at least four in order of importance and describe the quality of the GPR for each audience.

1		
2		
3		
4		

Component 3. Types of Communications

What types of communications are used well by this government? List no more than five in order of how well they are used.

1
2
3
4
5

Component 4. Factors That Influence the Success of Government Public Relations	
Leaders with Communications Skills Is there evidence that the leaders have good communications skills?	
Structure and Activities of the GPR Office How closely associated with senior offices are the offices responsible for GPR?	
Performance Measurement What evidence do you see of performance measurement?	
Conflict Management Ability What evidence do you find of the ability to manage conflict?	
Crisis Management Ability What evidence do you find of the ability to manage crises?	
Communications with Employees of Government What evidence do you find of the ability to communicate with employees?	

Handout 14.3, GPR Model Components Recommendation, was initially developed to help students in Russia structure their recommendations for improvements in government public relations. This was particularly helpful in settings where the students were not graduate public administration students or where the time to teach the model was limited.

Conclusion

This chapter described the development and trial of a model to help students and practitioners analyze and design government public relations communications. The model appears applicable to public administration courses, continuing education for practitioners, as well as use by practitioners. The model also appears adaptable to a variety of cultural settings. The checklist below summarizes some advice for use of the model.

Adapt the model to the audience. The model is designed to help audiences develop confidence and skill in understanding and analyzing government communications; adapt the materials to the learning objectives of the course and the needs of the audience. Handout 14.1 is an example of one handout used with a Russian undergraduate audience in an American Government and Politics course; the handout text was written to

Handout 14.3 GPR Model Components Recommendations

GPR Analysis Handout for __________________ (Government Unit Name) **Component 1. Purposes**	
Purpose	**Describe how the government might improve their communications for each purpose.**
Public information services	
Voluntary public reporting	
Responsiveness	
Service management	
Educational programs	
Compliance with laws	
Public participation in government	
Support for the government	
Transparency	
Component 2. Audiences What additional audiences should be included in government communications? Why? Try and list several.	
Component 3. Types of Communications <u>What new types of communications should the government use?</u> <u>Try and list several.</u>	
Component 4. Factors That Influence the Success of Government Public Relations	
<u>Leaders with Communications Skills</u> How could leaders improve their GPR?	
<u>Structure and Activities of the GPR Office</u> What improvements might be made in the GPR office?	
<u>Performance Measurement</u> What additional performance measurement should be created?	
<u>Conflict Management Ability</u> How might conflict management ability be improved?	
<u>Crisis Management Ability</u> How might crisis management ability be improved?	
<u>Communications with Employees of Government</u> What evidence do you find of the ability to communicate with employees?	

fit in with the course syllabus and using vocabulary suitable for those students.

Involve students in adjusting the handouts to your particular teaching or training needs. After presenting Handout 14.1, ask your audience if they have better examples of each purpose. This is particularly useful if you are going to present to multiple audiences, such as the experience in Russia described above. The practitioners in the Urals who dealt with government public relations as part of their jobs provided much more fine-grained examples as compared with undergraduate students in Moscow.

Use the model in experiential exercises in addition to didactic teaching. The teaching model presented in this chapter was designed to be very simple and descriptive so as to allow students in courses ranging from undergraduate introductory courses to advanced graduate courses to apply the model themselves to real-world situations. For example, the author has adapted the model as shown in the figures below to a wide variety of situations ranging from an analysis of a college president's speech by an undergraduate class to Foreign Ministry staff analyzing how their communications with visitors from other countries are perceived.

Expect and encourage differences of opinion among members of the audience. Students independently applying the model to the same situation (a speech, a public information communication, or even the communications of a small nonprofit or government unit) usually come back to the class with differences in their findings. Let them carry those differences into the classroom discussion and use them as a springboard for class discussions.

Use parts of the model for focus groups or in-house discussions. Encourage practitioners to use parts of the model and make modifications to fit their needs. In the parks and recreation staff example above, the student deleted everything from her course's version of Handout 14.1 other than Component 1, the purposes. She then made two more handouts, each with her course's version of Component 1 from Handouts 14.2 and 14.3. She explained the purposes with the first handout, guided discussion about a particular communication with the second handout, and then widened the scope by looking at the department's communications in general with the third handout.

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15 Public Relations(hips) through Public Engagement

Approaching Public Administration as Civic Professionals

Timothy J. Shaffer

Introduction: Thinking about Public Engagement and Public Administration

Roots of Democracy and Bureaucracy in the Progressive Era

At the center of human existence is the ability to communicate with one another. Public relations focus on the management of communication, particularly from an entity to various audiences, such as government to a population. The importance of engagement happening through communication can be expressed as a "dynamic multidimensional relational concept featuring psychological and behavioral attributes of connection, interaction, participation, and involvement, designed to achieve or elicit an outcome at individual, organization, or social levels" (Johnston, 2018, p. 19). Viewing engagement as a state of being and process at both the individual level (encompassing the cognitive, affective, and behavior dimensions) and the social level (with commitments to experience, participation, and collective action), one is able to recognize the importance and difficulty of engaging others in meaningful ways. Robert L. Heath writes about engagement as "collective individualism" (Heath, 2018, p. 36). By Heath's argument, engagement done correctly allows the articulation and expression of issues and concerns to shape actions taken by those in positions of power and authority. This raises, as Thomas Bender noted, the importance of thinking about the "dilemma of the relation of expertise and democracy" (Bender, 1993, p. 128).

The theme of professionals having the essential knowledge and expertise to address public problems is woven throughout the history of public administration (see Fischer, 2009, pp. 17–47). In many ways, the origin story of public administration and its "ritual mention" of Woodrow Wilson's (1887) essay highlights one of the serious challenges that must be considered if public administrators are to engage meaningful with citizens in ways that echo Ostrom's (1993, p. 8) co-production model and Mathew's (2020, p. 11) more recent language that speaks of complementary production: the relationship and role of public administrators with citizens that is relational rather than transactional.

The familiar roots of public administration tracing to Wilson's 1887 article misses elements from other early periods that complicate the understanding of some of these roots, especially if we look at the development of public administration happening through the work of both men *and* women, shaping our thinking based not only on the work of "bureau men," but also "those of settlement residents and members of women's reform clubs" during the beginning of the 20th century (Stivers, 2000, p. 3). The transformation of American society and the move toward order. As Robert Wiebe described the late 1800s and early 1900s as a moment of transition from American society being one of "island communities" with "local autonomy" that "could not even conceive of a managerial government" to a new scheme that "was derived from the regulative, hierarchical needs of urban-industrial life" (Wiebe, 1967, pp. xiii, xiv).

Efforts to reclaim and revisit earlier elements of public administration's history highlight the field's palimpsest; the retrieval of figures such as Mary Parker Follett highlights efforts by scholars today to find these important voices who have been obscured, but not erased (Barber, 1998; Mattson, 1998; Tonn, 2003). For example, Follett's *The New State* (1918) was a significant shift from her thinking in *The Speak of the House of Representatives* (1896) in large part because of her experience with small group democracy and the "association of citizens and groups together in a wider democratic public" throughout the Progressive Era shifts that included ground-level efforts to engage citizens in political processes (Mattson, 1998, p. 91). Significantly, Follett wrote about the significant impact of engagement with others in the work of building more democratic practices:

> In human relations, as I have said, this is obvious: I never react to you but to you-plus-me; or to be more accurate, it is I-plus-you reacting to you-plus-me. "I" can never influence "you" because you have already influenced me; that is, in the very process of meeting, by the very process of meeting, we both become something different.
>
> (Follett, 1924, pp. 62–63)

The striking tension of the Progressive Era was between the championing of democratic participation as a way of life and the technocratic problem-solving approach rooted in expertise and professionalism. This modern, technocratic, and efficient bureaucratic structure became and continues to be a defining characteristic of public administration, overshadowing the more democratic participation efforts. The success of "managerial progressivism" (Eisenach, 1994, p. 260) gave birth to the institutions we have come to know and advance through bureaucratic governance

(Gormley & Balla, 2008). And as we think about public engagement within the context of public administrators today, we benefit from thinking about some of the historical tensions from decades past. William Sullivan articulates succinctly the tension of the Progressive Era between technocratic and democratic approaches to public problems:

> Progressivism contained within itself contradictory tendencies. On the one hand, many Progressives promoted scientific expertise and technical efficiency as the keys to a more advanced form of society. On the other hand, Progressives also looked to civic ideals that seemed to require a moral and political integration of life which could only be achieved if modern citizens could be educated to a high level of public participation. Were social action and political reform to be conceived as tools wielded by superior experts or as processes of mutual involvement between civic educators and organizers seeking to enlist a broad public? This opposition within the movement was simultaneously played out in the evolution of the professions as the tension between technical and civic models of professionalism.
> (Sullivan, 2005, p. 101)

The lingering effects of viewing the development of public administration as devoid of politics leads to a challenge for professionals to encourage public engagement because it raises questions about how to bring values into an environment that is typically conceptualized as something detached – preferred or expected (Spicer, 2010). In addition to the first decades of the 20th century, we can also look at the 1970s as an opportunity to make sense of the challenges facing those in public administration when it comes to having public engagement being an essential element of governance.

Citizen Participation and Community Development Block Grants

In addition to thinking about the earliest decades of the field of public administration and its embrace of technocratic approaches being in tension with more democratic engagement with citizens, there is another moment that defines much of how we think about public engagement today. A useful mile marker is from 1974 when President Ford signed into law the Housing and Community Development Act.

At the signing of the Housing and Community Development Act, President Ford said, "Chairman Sparkman, who is here today, called this bill 'the most important piece of legislation on housing since … the National Housing Act of 1934. He also said that it is 'the most important legislation on community development since the … Housing Act of 1949 …' I wholeheartedly agree" (Ford, 1974, p. 1). The impact of this legislation was significant because of a public funding source that continues to shape much of urban housing, and thus social policy: the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG). In his comments at the signing, President Ford expressed the desired goal of the CDBG shifting the role of government from the federal to the local level:

> By replacing narrow programs such as urban renewal and model cities with a single block grant" program for community development, this bill marks a complete and welcome reversal of the way that we solve the problems of urban America. In a very real sense, this bill will help to return power from the Federal establishment to people in their own communities. Decisions will be made at the local level. Action will come at the local level. And responsibility will be placed squarely where it belongs – at the local level.
>
> (Ford, 1974, p. 1)

The explicit language highlighted a sense of what the CDBG program was designed to do. Namely, in order to improve communities, it was essential to move funding from the federal level to local cities, particularly those in urban contexts, so they could have greater say in how the work necessary to address issues in special communities was accomplished. For this reason, a major element of the program was citizen participation. Federal materials about CDBGs included language in its general statement about citizen participation in this way:

> This [city] shall provide citizens with adequate opportunity to participate in an advisory role in planning, implementing, and assessing the program. In so doing, the applicant shall also provide adequate information to citizens, hold public hearings to obtain views of citizens, and provide citizens an opportunity to comment on the applicant's community development performance. Nothing in these requirements, however, shall be construed to restrict the responsibility and authority of the applicant for the development of the application and the execution of his Community Development Program.
>
> (United States Office of Community Planning and Development, 1978, p. 2)

The commitment to providing opportunities for engagement was situated within the belief that such participation was "best understood in a two-way flow of communication" between public officials and citizens as "[b]oth have something to offer" (United States Office of Community Planning and Development, 1978, p. 11). Good communication, it was argued, replaced "suspicions with honest dialogue and lessens unproductive conflict …" Effective two-way communication is essential for developing a meaningful community partnership (United States Office of Community Planning and Development, 1978, p. 11). But this statement in a federal document about CDBG, just a few years after this new chapter in federal housing policy and community development, especially about the role of citizen participation was not without critique. An article in the *Journal of the Community Development Society* entitled "Citizen Participation is Not Community Development" published the same year as this report highlighted the "historical co-existence" of the terms citizen participation and community development but that there was a concern "that these two processes, having ideologically similar attributes, might be seen as synonymous and interchangeable" (Koneya, 1978, p. 23).

Efforts from the federal government shaped by the citizen participation ideology were "not looked upon very kindly by those residents of the central cities who recall the many social-program fiascoes of the 1960's and early 1970's" (Koneya, 1978, pp. 23–24). Arstein's ladder of participation and the sense of empty rituals versus beneficial processes reflected this sense of concern about efforts to have maximum feasible involvement when they were little more than "exacerbated rhetoric and misleading euphemisms" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216). The eight rungs of the ladder of citizen participation fell within three broad categories: nonparticipation, degrees of tokenism, and degrees of citizen power. This typology included manipulation, therapy, informing, consultation, placation, partnership, delegated power, and citizen control. In a study of four Connecticut communities, the view of citizen participation through committee participation was that they had "position without authority" because of the law's requirement to have citizens involved, but "[t]here was never a promise that citizens' recommendations would be followed" (Kettl, 1979, p. 443). Getting to the top of that Arnstein's ladder was a stretch for many within government to encourage or embrace. Getting up a few steps up was a heavy lift.

A major part of what made CDBG funds so appealing was that they were not raised by the local community. The federal funds were, in a sense, "free money" to help address local issues. But even this generally supported model of federal funding going to local communities had criticism, namely the use of funds to "buy off" particular citizens and neighborhoods in politically advantageous ways as well as not have funds address issues that went beyond very specific settings. The coordination of CDBG projects, for example, limited the impact because these funds were tied into specific agendas shaped by people in government and those aligned with them within the community (Kettl, 1979, p. 450). A particular neighborhood, rather than an entire city, would see the impact of CDBG funds. Those within those spaces as well as beyond were aware of this reality. As Kettl noted at the end of this article on whether cities were to be trusted with such resources, issues that demanded longer commitment were not often addressed because the "time horizon of local officials [was] too short" (Kettl, 1979, p. 451). For the residents of communities that were potentially more committed to a place, the superficial engagement familiar in citizen participation efforts only made it more obvious who had agency in the situation and who did not.

The use of CDBGs continues, alongside many other efforts to encourage public engagement through the efforts of local government. The expansion beyond urban cities, for example, increased the scope of citizen participation through the Small Cities CDBG program (Jennings, Krane, Pattakos, & Reed, 1986). One additional and significant step that has been utilized in recent years is the use of deliberative approaches that have brought specific processes into the CDBG to help governments engage citizens through communication that is purposeful, structured, and productive (Carcasson, 2009; Leighninger, 2010). CDBGs, for example, have funded the use of participatory budgeting in cities including Buffalo, New York (Gilman, 2016, p. 10).

The participatory budgeting model for civic engagement at the local level has spread across the United States and elsewhere, highlighting one of the possible ways in which public administrators can help cultivate more robust engagement around issues utilizing these federal funds (Lerner, 2014; Röcke, 2014). But the concerns raised by Arnstein (1969), Koneya (1978), and others highlights the importance of not simply having the right language when actually including citizens in decision-making processes is much more complex. Additionally, by focusing on ways to approach engagement in a way that emphasizes impartiality as a commitment to a process, concerns about the injection of politics and values into such work is mitigated (Carcasson, 2018, 2019; Leighninger, 2006; Sprain & Carcasson, 2013). To make sense of such approaches, it is important to step back and think about communication's role more generally.

Communication at the Heart of Governance: Models for Thinking about Communication

Fundamentally, communication is a process, it is "dynamic and ever changing" (Johnson & Hackman, 2018, p. 8). For the purposes of this chapter focusing on public engagement from government agencies with various publics, it is important to view communication not as a one-way action model of communication from a source to a receiver in a passive way but in a more relational way, creating the possibility for the source (in this case, government) to be potentially shaped by what the receiver (in this case, the public) communicates in response. The transactional model is rooted in the notion that effective communicators pay close attention to the messages being sent to them as they speak with and engage others. In addition to simple messages, the importance of feedback defines the shift in thinking about communication in these three models.

The reason it is worthwhile to mention this rather basic framing of communication is that our governance structures, especially when it comes to public relations, are not designed with the goal of significant communication in mind. In many respects, the sharing of information (sometimes emergent and critical) is best embodied in Figure 15.1. The importance of sharing information about a new ordinance taking effect, the urgency of a water main break impacting health, or other issues worthy of public knowledge speak to the critical nature of having channels for communication to audiences.

The increased emergence and popular adoption of technologies that are immediately available to people (often, their smartphones) have transformed the ways in which we might think about the ability to communicate with constituents. Further, the capacity to reach out and communicate *to* specific departments (public works, for example) when there are issues with potholes or similar issue have diminished the obstacles of engagement between government and citizens. For this reason, public administrators may feel like they are engaging in more of the interactional model of communication that could be described as resembling a game of tennis (see Figure 15.2). Increasingly, public administrators are given the opportunity for feedback, but this step does not necessarily alter the roles and relationships between agencies and citizens.

The transactional approach depicted in Figure 15.3 assumes that "messages are sent and received simultaneously by source/receivers" (Johnson & Hackman, 2018, p. 9). This ongoing and continuous approach to communication is aligned with public engagement efforts that take

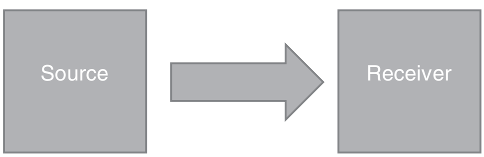

Figure 15.1 Action Model of Communication

Source: Adapted from C. E. Johnson & M. Z. Hackman, *Leadership: A Communication Perspective*, 7th ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2018).

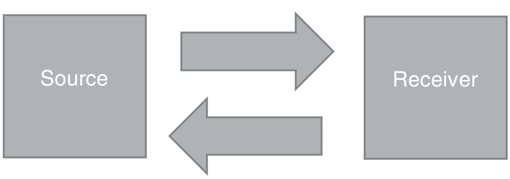

Figure 15.2 Interactional Model of Communication

Source: Adapted from C. E. Johnson & M. Z. Hackman, *Leadership: A Communication Perspective*, 7th ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2018).

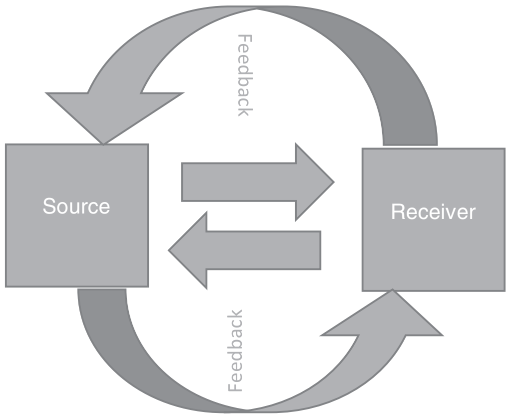

Figure 15.3 Transactional Model of Communication

Source: Adapted from C. E. Johnson & M. Z. Hackman, *Leadership: A Communication Perspective*, 7th ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2018).

seriously the perspective and experience of citizens to contribute to and, at times, animate, public engagement efforts for government. As will be highlighted in the Arlington, Virginia example, the transactional model can increase not only participation but also the receptivity of and resilience of decisions because they have involved stakeholders and communities in the process.

In a descriptive way, many of these increased and improved efficiencies fit within the framework of viewing citizens as consumers and the essential work of government is the provision of public services in the most cost efficient manner (Clarke, Newman, Smith, Vidler, & Westmarland, 2007). To *intentionally* doing something that is inefficient runs counter to the, understandably, familiar and dominant models of public administration. As Stivers (2000) reminds us, however, the differences between viewing public administration through the lens of managerialism and a business framework in contrast to seeing a city as a home with a focus on improving the living conditions for others has significant impacts. However, as will be highlighted in the case below about Arlington, Virginia, these inefficiencies from public engagement allow public administrators to approach the wicked problems they face from a different, relational, perspective (Rittel & Webber, 1973).

But if we take seriously that "one of the basic democratic purposes of public relations in public administration is *listening* to the public on multiple levels," then the ability to have citizen voices alter agency practices becomes a central orienting question about our task at hand (Lee, 2012, p. 17). Put another way, governance is shaped by citizens engaging as co-creators in the sense that their voice is an essential element of public decisions and policy making. Carolyn Lukensmeyer, founder of America*Speaks* and executive director emerita of the National Institute for Civil Discourse, refers to citizen engagement as "a deliberative process through which groups of citizens representative of their communities learn, express their points of view, and discover common ground to influence government decision making" (Lukensmeyer, 2013, p. 3). Commitments to such citizen engagement processes align public will and political will to the extent that those democratic results have a better chance for policies to hold up over time, be committed to be constituents, increase trust in government, and reduce the power and influence of special interests (see Figure 15.4).

The idea that government agencies might change course and rethink a policy or approach highlights how significant citizen voice might be. But, as research has shown, the interest on the part of government officials to engage meaningfully is not universally embraced. As Nabatchi and Leighninger (2015, p. 3) note:

> The reality of rising citizen capacity is not, however, a comfortable fact for public leaders. Trapped in systems designed to protect their expertise from citizen interference, besieged by people who no longer believe their data or respect their authority, and faced with hostile constituents at public events, public officials, managers, and other leaders are understandably skeptical about the virtues, capabilities, and good sense of their fellow men and women.

The most familiar form of public engagement, the public meeting with the ability to comment briefly without interaction, is woefully inadequate

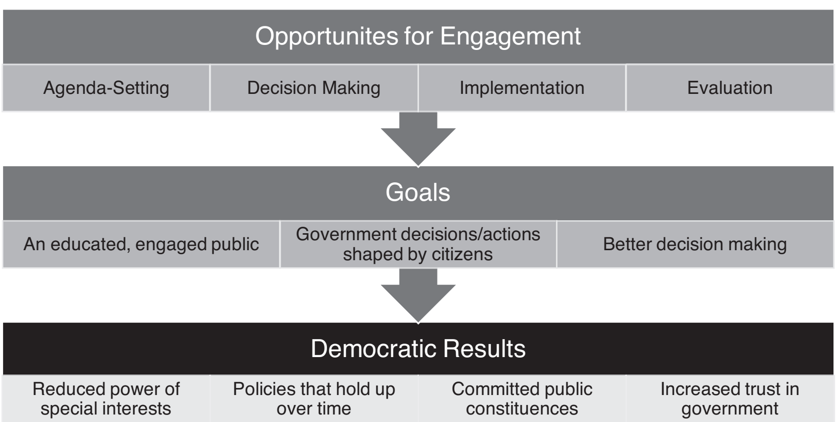

Figure 15.4 Linking Public Will to Political Will

Source: Adapted from Luckensmeyer (2013, p. 4).

and often adds to the negative relationship between government and citizens because the structure and process does not enable collective problem-solving approaches. The interest, commitment, and even passion that leads someone to attend a public meeting and express concern seemingly does little to advance the discussion around that topic. By design, there is not opportunity to do anything about it at that moment. Citizen capacity to possibly help identity and address a public issue dies as that person returns to their seat as they listen to others express similar concern or support about public issues. But if we also think about the institutionalized efforts to have citizen participation, through such efforts as the Community Development Block Program, there are many ways in which the "substantive importance of a bureaucratic ethic that values citizen participation" and, significantly, "[t]his has implications for the education and professional development of public servants, providing a powerful reminder of the importance of instilling and maintaining commitments to professional values which uphold the value of public participation and the effort to sustain it" (Handley & Howell-Moroney, 2010, p. 608).

Administrators often have "wide latitude in choosing how much and what form citizen participation will take" (Handley & Howell-Moroney, 2010, p. 602). What this means, practically, is that a commitment to public engagement is rooted in the individuals and organizations doing this work. In short, it becomes essential to think about the education and preparation of public administrators as becoming *civic professionals* working with citizens, rather than simply for them, however well-intentioned they may be.

Civic Professionals: Embracing an Identity beyond Expert

What makes robust deliberative public engagement possible for public administrators is approaching one's work as a civic or democratic professional, committing to fostering civil discourse through educative and participatory processes (Dzur, 2008, 2017, 2019b). Albert Dzur writes about these professionals as "reform-minded innovators" who "are democratic professionals not because they do democracy professionally, but because they do professionalism democratically" (Dzur, 2019a, p. 1). Writing about professionals who engage in community development, Gruidl and Hustedde (2015) suggest that there are seven core competencies of civic professionals: (1) listening, (2) emotional awareness, (3) cultural awareness and humility, (4) public deliberation, (5) facilitation, (6) appreciative inquiry, and (7) empowerment. These foundational and functional skills highlight the important role that communication and public engagement play for civic professionals, especially when thinking about this work happening within the context of political polarization and incivility (Shaffer, 2019b).

By reclaiming a model of professionalism based on what has been referred to as "social trusteeship" (Brint, 1994, pp. 203–205; Sullivan, 2005, p. 9) and acknowledging that such leadership is value-laden (Heifetz, 2010, p. 24), such professionalism acknowledges that there are two main aspects of professional practice: "a technical aspect having to do with the competent performance of skilled work, and a social aspect that grounds and guides professionals in an appreciation of the larger public ends they serve" (Peters, 2010, p. 11). Frequently, professionalism can "lock individuals into a narrow focus upon technical competence … to the exclusion of all other considerations" (Sullivan, 2005, pp. 30–31). Ideally, however, "professionalism is far more than that"; when work has "ends of social importance, an individual's skills and aspirations acquire value for others" (Sullivan, 2005, p. 196). When we think about public administration, it has long sought to distance itself from perceived political bias. This approach to issues as civic professionals does not dismiss or diminish the commitment to being neutral and serving the public, but it does suggest that one views the social and civic dimensions of their work beyond the application of efficiency models from the business sector to public issues.

Professionals have expertise, but what makes them civic professionals is the way they employ that knowledge to meet public-regarding ends in a public-regarding way. They embody a manifestation of professionalism that is "both expert and civic" (Sullivan, 2003, p. 10). Dzur went so far as to say that professionals are the "missing agents" of contemporary democratic thought, especially when speaking about deliberative democracy (Dzur, 2008, p. 213). To better understand how these professionals engage in democratic work and transform the relationship between public administrators and the public, we look at an example of this at work.

The Arlington Way: An Exemplar of Deliberative Public Engagement

Arlington County, Virginia, just outside of Washington, DC is home to more than 236,000 residents. But in 1931, Arlington County was just over 26,000 inhabitants. As Hugh Reid, then a member of the Virginia House of Delegates wrote:

> It is largely a county of homes although it has some business and industry … Ever since [World War I] a steady stream of new citizens has poured across the Potomac attacked by the open country on the southern bank and the natural beauty of the Virginia hills … This influx of new population has brought with it people from every state in the Union, with their varying experiences in local government.
>
> (Reid, 1931, p. 127)

The year prior, in 1930, Arlington voted to change its government to a manager plan, altering the way in which the community was governed.

As Reid noted at the end of his article about this transformation, "the display value of an experiment of this kind within hour miles of the White House will not be overlooked by those who seek advertisement for a major reform in county government" (Reid, 1931, p. 131). Fast forwarding to recent years, Arlington continues to be redefining local government though what is known as the "Arlington Way."

What is the Arlington Way? A recent county manager noted that:

> In its most positive framing, the Arlington Way means engaging with the public on issues of importance or concern (not always the same) in an effort to reach community consensus or, in the lack of consensus, a shared understanding and an opportunity for everyone to be heard. In its negative framing, the Arlington Way was derided as a way to talk everything to death so that ideas are killed or that people are so worn-down by the end that they do not care what happens as long as it is just over. It was quipped that Arlington's tagline should be, "Process. It's our most important product.
>
> (Carlee, 2019, p. 24)

For more than 60 years, the Arlington Way has been described as an "essential building block in … long-term success and attractiveness to a diversity of newcomers" (Hynes & Kresh, 2012, p. 18). It has allowed the community to address problems and take advantage of opportunities. In 2012, the County Board launched PLACE – Participation, Leadership, and Civic Engagement. This was done as an update to the long-standing practice of engaging citizens in community work. PLACE was to:

- Reinvigorate the Arlington Way – intentionally – with regular training for citizens, commissioners, and staff to promote interactive dialogue on key issues.
- Exploit technology without losing the value that comes from neighbors and working face-to-face to solve common problems and chart the community's future.
- Find new ways to encourage persistent, thoughtful, constructive citizens to engage in continually improving our community.

PLACE intentionally sought to bridge diverse groups within the community together, especially through the use of community dialogue and civic decision-making.

Arlington's civic infrastructure is rooted in the belief that good ideas can come from anywhere; that collaboration among citizens, businesses, and government typically leads to better results than working alone; and that strategic decisions stand the test of time when developed through robust, creative, respectful civic conversations. County board members, commissioners, county staff, and Arlington residents, nonprofits, and businesses worked together to delineate the roles and responsibilities of participants in civic decision-making. Staff, commissioners, and residents attended joint workshops and trainings to ensure that ongoing collaborations effectively support each sector's vital role in the community.

What emerged from this effort to reinvigorate the Arlington Way has continued the way the city engages its citizens as well as how it approaches its own work administratively. In March 2019, Arlington announced the Arlington Engagement Brigade of neutral facilitators to help convening groups across the community in a way that be "one of the first of its kind in the country" to focus on "larger engagement initiatives, specifically those where a neutral presence will add value to the process and increase community trust" (Munter, 2019). This group of facilitators came from the Neighborhood College, a free civic leadership development program for people who live and work in Arlington. Alumni commit to volunteer a significant number of hours in Arlington County after they graduate, and this Brigade was one practical way of doing that.

This effort complements to work that the various departments had adopted with respect to how they engaged the public. Most notably, a six-step public engagement guide for all capital projects has come to define what it means for Arlington County public administrators and street-level bureaucrats when they engage in their work is presented in Figure 15.5. As noted within the document, the guide was developed to advance public engagement practice across Arlington County government. Building on both the PLACE initiative and the Community Facilities Study, this guide integrates other feedback received from both internal and external stakeholders regarding opportunities to improve public engagement for Arlington County

Government capital projects. Utilizing the International Association of Public Participation model for conceptualizing levels of engagement, it moves from basic communication, to consultation, to involvement, and finally collaboration. Each of these steps are highlighted in detail and designed for those in county government positions at all levels to have the knowledge, capacity, and expectation of approaching every capital project with this guide in mind (Engage Arlington, 2018).

The results from commitment to this work through Engage Arlington highlight a systemic commitment to public engagement (multiple examples at https://topics.arlingtonva.us/engage/). Rooted in the idea of community discussion and deliberation, government staff have a step-by-step process to move through preliminary steps all the way through project completion and act action review. The values that guide this work, importantly, are rooted in communication. These include inclusion and mutual respect, early involvement and timely communication, transparency, and accountability, clear and accessible communication, open, two-way communication, fiscal sustainability, and continuous improvement (Engage Arlington, 2018, p. 4). Six of the seven values *explicitly* focus on

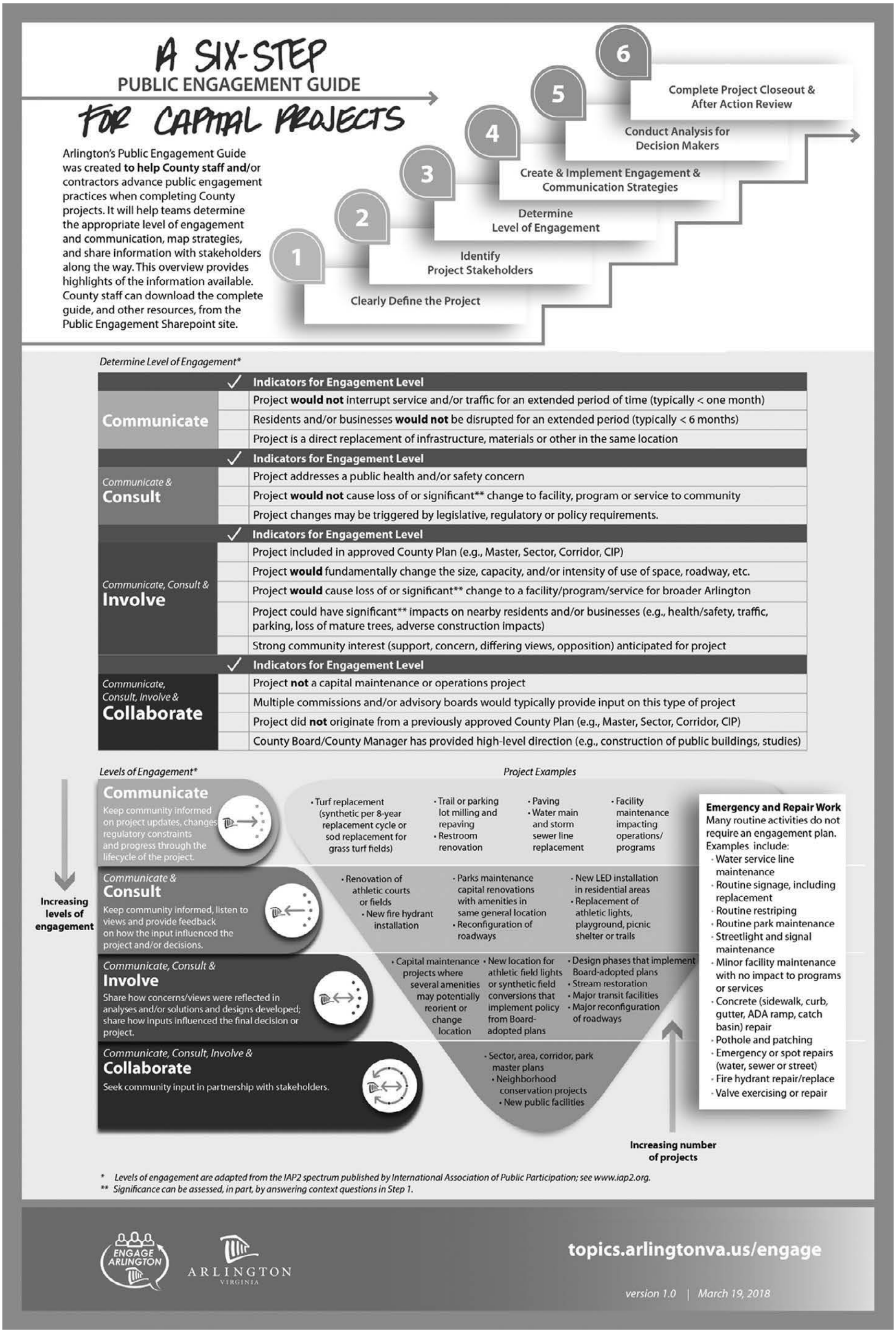

Figure 15.5 A Six-Step Public Engagement Guide for Capital Projects

communication, an essential element in creating conditions for citizens to see professionals within government as partners and collaborators rather than actors making decisions in which they have little or no say. Critically, Arlington County staff are trained in these public engagement skills, enabling the utilization of these values and commitment in any capital projects that impact the present and future civic life of the community.

Another example is the Site Plan Review Committee (SPRC), an entity formed in the 1970s by the County Board and is a subcommittee of the Arlington County Planning Commission. The Planning Commission advises the Board on growth and development in the County. The essence of the SPRC is a "discussion forum for citizens review of development projects" (Arlington County Planning Commission, 2018, p. 2). Clearly articulated as part of the "Arlington Way," this practice of intensive civic engagement "seeks not only to inform citizens of government decisions in all areas, but also to consult with and involve them in the creation of plans and policies" (Arlington County Planning Commission, 2018, p. 6). Engaging citizens in deliberative ways, government officials embody the ideals of the deliberative practitioner (Forester, 1999) and civic professional (Dzur, 2019b), taking us back in some ways to the Progressive Era with the commitment to technical knowledge and expertise along with a commitment to democratic processes and approaches.

While it is not the only example of robust public engagement, Arlington County is one of the best when it comes to seeing the systemic approach to governance with citizens being taken seriously. The continual transformation of its work in relationship with those its serves highlights Arlington's view that public engagement is something that can and should be woven into the elements of its work when possible. And, as demonstrated through the commitment to these ideals for capital projects, the extent to which public engagement has been integrated into the work of public administrators is significant. It is not the case that a singular person is charged with this role; entire segments of the Arlington County staff are trained in and comfortable using public engagement as a way to make decisions. And, importantly, this work is not inherently efficient when it comes to beginning and completing a project. It requires time for communication and movement through the six steps. But the trade-off is that serious projects for the community are participatory and inclusive throughout, reducing the possibility of the government's actions to run counter to the desires and/or expectations of the citizens.

Implementing Public Relationships: A Check List of Public Engagement Practices

What does it take for public administrators interested in and/or committed to communicating with citizens in ways that take seriously the efforts to do this meaningfully? While public engagement has been part of the American story especially through local government through the classic New England Town Meeting model, it has not been uniformly experienced or valued (Bryan, 2004; Mansbridge, 1983). Additionally, public engagement is more than simply convening. It is about creating conditions for a discursive process of governance, whether a town meeting or beyond (Shaffer, 2019a; Townsend, 2009). If such an approach to governance is foreign, that's understandable, but it does not mean it's irrelevant to the work of public administrators seeking to improve communication in their work.

The first thing is to recognize that many professionals in public administration are not trained for convening or engaging in robust public engagement. This is, largely, not a component of MPA programs. The role of public administration in a democratic society is a topic of frequent debate, "often framed as a dichotomy between administration and democracy" (Hornbein & King, 2012, p. 718). In a 2012 study, only 12 of 164 (7%) of NASPAA-accredited MPA/MPP programs offered courses "focusing primarily on public participation and citizen engagement" (Hornbein & King, 2012, p. 729). Yet this new normal of citizen engagement requires a level of knowledge to be able to engage meaningfully. For many in public administration, this is a new area. It is ripe with possibility but also challenges. It is, fundamentally, realistic in a variety of political and governance systems, as has been demonstrated through multiple studies about such democratizing efforts (Curato, Dryzek, Ercan, Hendriks, & Niemeyer, 2017, p. 29; Hendriks & Boswell, 2018). This possibility of difficulty in engaging meaningfully should not dissuade a municipality or department to shy away from public engagement. But it should reinforce the importance of doing it well. In short, this is part of what it means to become a civic professional engaging the public (Dzur, 2019a; Shaffer, 2019b). What follows are a few key elements to making public engagement meaningful in your work.

- Determine what your intentions are and be clear about that with your community. Is it about sharing information or are you asking for a different level of interaction, contribution, and engagement (Escobar, 2011)? If it is more than one-directional communication, plan to take the time to do the work correctly. Additionally, be inclusive in the process, even if that potentially slows down the process (Cervero & Wilson, 2006). It is better to take time planning rather than coming back later and try to mitigate deficiencies of citizen engagement.
- Utilize established models for public engagement rooted in dialogue and deliberation (National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation, 2014). There is no need to recreate models that exist and have been tested. This is especially true if you are new to the field of public engagement.

- Consider your civic spaces that can accommodate your intended model for public engagement. What tangible resources are necessary to make this public engagement impactful and beneficial? If you do not have it, explore partnerships with civic organizations (public, nonprofit, and/or private) that can collaborate with you in making this both possible and successful. (Dumlao, 2018; Klinenberg, 2018).
- Ensure that you use ground rules for public discussion. You cannot go back and determine what is/isn't acceptable after it has occurred (Longo & Shaffer, 2019, p. 29). Developing your own ground rules, dependent on the unique characteristics of your community, may be critical.
- View your role as a facilitator, not as an expert. Commit to passionate impartiality (Sprain & Carcasson, 2013). If you cannot engage in a public engagement process in this way, identify third parties who can facilitate public processes with you. Do not claim to facilitate impartially when you cannot or will not. There are professionals who can help you do meaningful public engagement work (Bherer, Gauthier, & Simard, 2017).

Conclusion: Takeaways as You Engage the Public(s)

So what is the relationship between government officials and broader publics when it comes to public engagement? What does it look like for public administrators to not only share important information with citizens, but also to engage them in decision-making processes through democratic practices? First, Mary Parker Follett reminds us to acknowledge how communication and engagement with others creates something new. This creative experience is to be seen as an asset as we interact with others, especially when we could easily approach the interaction in a way that is, typically, seen as something transactional and not equal when it comes to knowledge and/or skill. Significantly, public engagement can help foster social capital within your community, especially when people have experienced decreasing social relationships in recent years and decades (Carney, 2019; Dunkelman, 2014; Putnam, 2000).

Second, the "Arlington Way" embodies elements of the early decades of public administration, especially the commitment to bringing expertise and democratic practice together. Since its inception and the embrace of professional public administration at its core, Arlington has continually experimented with what it means to be a local government. As was noted by a member of the Arlington County Board and the director of the Arlington Public Library:

> The challenge for local government is to ensure that the right people are having the right conversations at the right time. Our hope is that with a revitalized Arlington Way, we continue to bring out the best

> in one another to create and nurture a social fabric that can be sustained only by mutual trust, meaningful participation, and inclusion.
> (Hynes & Kresh, 2012, p. 20)

Third, there is a shift with respect to one's role and sense of responsibility when approaching public engagement as an opportunity to listen. Public engagement is an opportunity to listen and learn to others, especially from those in other government agencies or from other content expert organizations. Listening is a critical, if underappreciated skill (Dobson, 2014; Hendriks, Ercan, & Duus, 2019; Lipari, 2010). This is especially true for public administrators who have the charge and responsibility to serving the public. John Dewey's statement that "No government by experts in which the masses do not have the chance to inform the experts as to their needs can be anything but an oligarchy managed in the interests of the few" rings true if there are not genuine opportunities to express concerns, support, or displeasure beyond minimal means (Dewey, 1927, p. 208). As Stivers (1994, p. 367) put it, "How can skillful listening help bureaucrats develop responsiveness in their work?" Her response to this question is a good reminder of why it is essential to think about rethinking the role and relationship with citizens. She writes,

> Responsive administrators should be open, able, and willing to respond, but also just that is, judicious, uncorrupted. They should know how to draw on their expertise while seeking diverse viewpoints and remaining open to the unexpected and the unpredictable. They should be receptive to the difference and able to help evoke the reciprocal dynamics and expressive potential of dialogue.
> (Stivers, 1994, p. 367)

What, fundamentally, is the role of government if we take seriously the idea of public relationships as a central tenet of governance rather than simply communicating information to citizens? In *The Good Society*, Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1991, p. 254) argued, "democracy is paying attention." Taking this seriously has the potential to alter practices that otherwise inhibit or diminish the opportunity to listening deeply and critically. If, as Mills (1959, p. 188), argued, democracy implies that "those vitally affected by any decision … have an effective voice in that decision," then those within public administration must be able to listen deeply to those within their community.

Further, based on his decades of work addressing deep conflicts in the Middle East and elsewhere, Harold Saunders offers us one of the most powerful and succinct statements on this point. Writing about what a dialogical process is and is not, Saunders referred to this work as a "process of genuine interaction through which human beings listen to each other deeply enough to be changed by what they learn. Each makes a serious effort to take others' concerns into her or his own picture, even when disagreement persists. No participant gives up her or his identity, but each recognizes enough of the other's valid human claims that he or she will act differently toward the other" (Saunders, 1999, p. 82). If this is the case, then "democratically minded public administrators may want to pay attention to their own listening abilities in order to be able to better pay attention – to respond – to the public" (Stivers, 1994, p. 368). In sum, this commitment to creating the conditions for listening to citizens is about cultivating public relationships through public engagement as civic professionals. As has been demonstrated in the case of Arlington, it is this relational, collaborative, and *civic* orientation to engaging publics that can be complementary to how we think about "all aspects of governmental public relations" (Neeley & Stewart, 2012, p. 2). This leads to the final take away.

Fourth, and finally, public administrators must think about civic space and infrastructure. What allows people to engage in any of the aforementioned efforts? Where are the spaces that enable experts and citizens, bureaucrats and communities to engage? There have been long established, but sometimes overlooked, resources in communities. Libraries, schools, grange halls, recreation centers, and athletic complexes serve as familiar locations and spaces for interaction – even for large groups (Klinenberg, 2018; Shaffer, 2019c; Studebaker, 1935). Related to these formal events designed for more deliberative engagement is consideration about the efforts to create built environments (Hester, 2006) that allow for everyday talk, the roots that shape what comes into and shapes so many of these formally-designed spaces (Conover & Miller, 2018; Mansbridge, 1999). We must be careful that we do not view everyday communication as a straight line to deliberative discursive practices and are simple part of the "*communicative practice* of ordinary collective life" (McCormick, 2020, p. 2). Yet, cultivating a more democratic and communicative environment may lead to more deliberative practices of "complementary coproduction" based on the commitment by those within governing institutions to engage those citizens in a productive way – through a "with" strategy of governance (Mathews, 2020, p. 11).

To make public relationships possible and meaningful, we must acknowledge how communication and engagement with others creates something new, how bringing expertise and democratic practices together is essential, how acknowledging and embracing the responsibility of listening to citizens altered professional practice, and why thinking about civic space and infrastructure helps make all of this possible. Public engagement invites professionals to look to citizens as co-creators of democratic life. The challenge for public administrators is to consider this lens to seeing citizens around them with all of its implications.

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16 Conclusion

Grant Neeley and Kendra Stewart

Over the past decade, changes in communication fueled by technological advances, the shifting media environment, and a more contentious governance landscape provide government public relations practitioners with significant challenges and the need to adapt to new means to address those challenges. We contend that government public relations may be seen as an afterthought in most organizations, only coming into play after a crisis or scandal attracts unwanted attention. Developing effective communications strategies are both vital to advance an agency's mission and to provide an important and required public service.

Public information provided both by government and through the media is one of the key aspects to government accountability (Gao & Murphy, 2020). Accountability to the citizenry is a defining characteristic of public organizations and sets those organizations apart from others in society. These organizations exist to serve the public in myriad ways and their survival depends on public support, albeit often indirect. Communication of what a government does and how it functions are crucial components for accountability and government transparency, underpinning a government's relationship with society (Lyrio, Lunkes, & Taliani, 2018). Given the rise in a negative view of the media held by the American public, government organizations have significant challenges in conveying their organization's mission to the public through media channels (Gottfried, Walker, & Mitchell, 2020).

Ultimately the responsibility for communicating with the public lies with government administrators. The notion that "democracies die behind closed doors"[1] was clear to our Founding Fathers and has been regularly upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court.[2] The press has historically served as the conduit for communication between the government and the public, often creating tension between public organizations and the media. However, the Supreme Court has frequently sided with the right of the public to have access to information over the right of the government to withhold that information. The importance of government transparency and openness was apparent when President Obama advanced the issue of freedom of information as one of his first presidential acts. In issuing a memorandum to his agency directors he wrote

> In our democracy, the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), which encourages accountability through transparency, is the most prominent expression of a profound national commitment to ensuring an open Government. At the heart of that commitment is the idea that accountability is in the interest of the Government and the citizenry alike.[3]

Obama went on to order that when responding to information requests, all executive agencies should "act promptly and in a spirit of cooperation, recognizing that such agencies are servants to the public."[4] This memorandum sent a clear message to federal agencies that the communication of public information is a critical aspect in ensuring transparency in government and that they should adopt "a presumption in favor of disclosure" in addressing public requests. The Obama memorandum reflected a growing public sentiment that policies clamping down on public access to information, "dampen public debate, diminish government accountability and actually hamper efforts to protect the United States."[5] However with the changing administration, we saw how governments could act in ways counter to the provision of information and may choose to remove previously provided public information – such as the Trump administration's removal of environmental information from US Government websites. Such actions undermine the ability of the public, the media, and other public-serving organizations to examine the actions of government and may even prompt organizations to form counter-initiatives to preserve the previously publicly available information (Dillon, Walker, Shapiro, Underhill, Martenyi, Wylie, S., & Environmental Data and Governance Initiative, 2017).

Government public relations is not merely an obligation, it is a necessity for survival. Agencies that are perceived in a positive manner by the public and public officials have access to more resources. Graber found that when agencies manage to ingratiate themselves with political leaders and influential publics, they are more likely to be well-financed, regardless of past efficiency or effectiveness. "Agencies are therefore greatly concerned about the images they present to important leaders. Agency heads strive to show off activities likely to attract favorable publicity."[6] Therefore, agencies that are better at conveying their message and communicating their mission, goals and success will be more positively viewed by the public and their elected officials. Today, this type of communication takes on many forms and is constantly changing.

Cooperation with the press through answering media inquiries or holding press conferences is a method of indirect accountability to one's citizens. Direct accountability is also undertaken by government agencies and is increasingly undergoing rapid transformation due to technological changes in the information sector. The advances made in social media (or owned/shared media) in the last decade have supplemented the staid production of annual, or otherwise time-specific, reports; new social communications channels can reach and inform those citizens interested in an organization's functioning. These new media have the potential to extend and expand government public relations beyond the retrospective function of merely reporting an agency's activities through an asynchronous format – the printed report. New communication technologies create and expand opportunities for agencies to reach a wide audience of citizens through electronic dissemination of their annual reports, as well as providing data and information that citizens might find useful. These technologies provide a possibility for richer interaction and engagement with citizens and potential for governments to provide the public with information in greater quantities, more frequency, and more detail. And citizens have begun to expect this from their governments.

Unfortunately the public relations function of government still face challenges in public engagement even with known technologies like organizational websites (Garrett & Jensen, 2011) and the hope for a policy relevant, electronically enabled democracy appears to remain a distant goal (Lindner & Aichholzer, 2020). For the government official, recognizing these shortcomings will allow us to build our capacities and continue to stress the importance of public relations to our peers and organizations.

Challenges posed by technology

Concomitant with the rise in technology, government public relations practitioners face new challenges posed by the speed and reach of false or malicious information. Dubbed "digital wildfires" of social media transmission (Webb, Burnap, Procter, Rana, Stahl, Williams, ... & Jirotka, 2016), the ease of creating anonymous social media (Oltmann, Cooper, & Proferes, 2020) or email accounts (Mazura, 2020), and alternative methods for widespread digital distribution of information all pose significant information management and media relations challenge for governments. Instances such as the WikiLeaks case of Private Manning and Edward Snowden in the National Security Agency which exposed classified and sensitive documents clearly highlight concerns over the internal protection of information and the ease of moving that information into the public sphere by an actor engaged in "guerrilla government" (O'Leary, 2019).

Aside from the more serious consequences of these classified exposures, the actions by alternative or rogue "anonymous government" accounts during the Trump administration demonstrate the difficulty in maintaining internal cohesion within government organizations for public relations purposes and also the ease of providing dissenting views to those outside the organization – including media (Davis, 2017; Gorman, 2017; Oltmann, Cooper, & Proferes, 2020). These actions by actors, who may or may not be government officials, provide counter-narratives and messages to the official government public relations efforts, thereby creating a more confusing messaging and media environment for the public.

These new developments portend a dynamic future for governments and in which public relations must take on a heightened role of importance to ensure the democratic purposes of media relations, public reporting, and responsiveness to citizens are upheld by public servants and governments. As Lee established in Chapter 2, to advance into the sphere of good governance, successful provision of these foundational democratic purposes provide the bedrock upon which the pragmatic function of public outreach – service utilization, public education and public service campaigns, voluntary legal compliance, and co-production or service by the public – can be pursued by governments.

Throughout the pages of this book we have attempted to provide you with a very practical and applicable approach to implementing government public relations. The academics and practitioners who have contributed chapters have all worked first-hand in some capacity of government public relations. We appreciate your commitment to public service accountability through open communication with the public and wish you the best with your organizations' public relations activities!

Notes

1. *Detroit Free Press et al. v. Ashcroft et al.* 2002.
2. *The New York Times v. The United States* 1971, *Kleindienst v. Mandel* 1972, *Detroit Free Press et al. v. Ashcroft et al.* 2002, *Thomas v. Collins*, etc.
3. White House Press Office, 2009.
4. Ibid.
5. K. Jost, "Government Secrecy," *CQ Researcher*, December 2005.
6. D. A. Graber, *The Power of Communication: Managing Information in Public Organizations* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2003), p. 9.

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