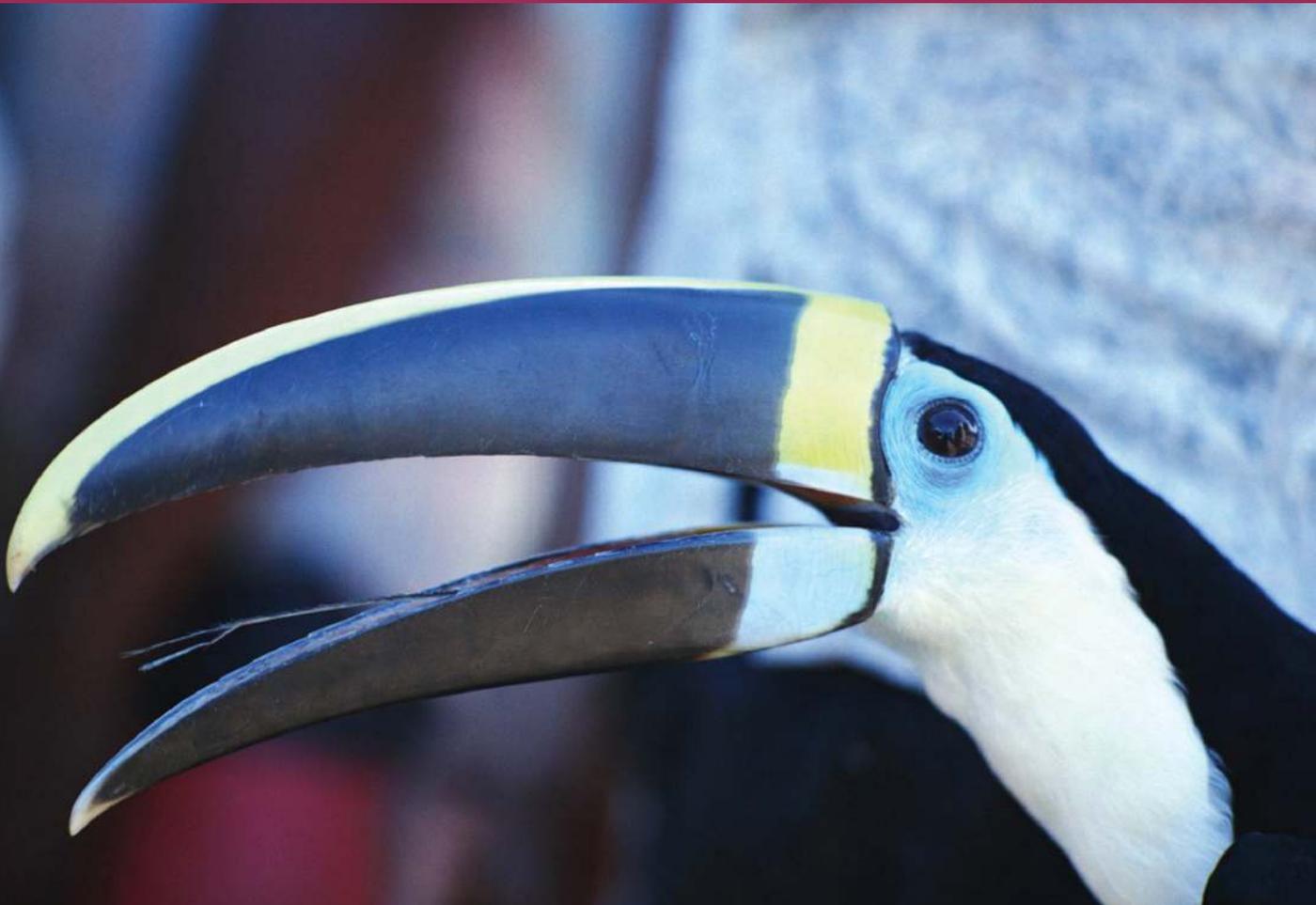


CHAPTER 3

Role of the public relations practitioner



Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- describe issues and debates surrounding the role of the public relations practitioner
- consider the role of public relations in society
- recognise the range of activities undertaken by practitioners
- evaluate the skills needed by individual practitioners
- recognise the issues around the education and training of the public relations practitioner
- apply the above to real-life contexts.

Structure

- Who are the public relations practitioners?
- Who does what: the bigger picture
- Role of the communicator
- What public relations people do: individual practitioners
- Skills for the ideal practitioner
- Role of theory in practice
- Professionalism
- Education and research

Introduction

Everyone thinks they know what public relations practitioners do. They either hang out with celebrities and sell kiss 'n' tell stories to the Sunday newspapers or they whisper in politicians' ears and 'spin' the entire national media. Don't they?

A glance at the contents page of this book will suggest otherwise. Each chapter addresses a particular area of public relations theory or practice and while there are chapters on media relations and public affairs, the reality does not match the image (which may be disappointing for some).

This chapter aims to show where people work in public relations and what they do in the jobs. It explores the problems caused by difficulties in defining the field, but also the opportunities for individual and professional development. Public relations practice is linked to public relations theory and the need for individuals to undertake lifelong learning is stressed. The role of education and the question of professionalism are also discussed, along with the role of professional bodies.

Traditionally, books about public relations have tended to be either too academic to shed much light on the practice or 'how to' lists by retired practitioners who only describe what they did in their heyday. This chapter aims to bridge that divide by setting practice clearly in a theoretical context and including examples of practice from different countries. It also reflects a range of experiences, through case studies and diaries, of being a practitioner at the start of the twenty-first century. Throughout the chapter you will be able to read mini case histories and diaries of public relations practitioners who are working in different types of settings to help you appreciate the diversity of the practice and hopefully gain an insight into what people actually do.

activity 3.1**What is public relations all about?**

Ask your friends and family what they think PR is all about and/or which PR practitioners they have heard of.

Feedback

Chances are that the responses will not be flattering and that the individuals named may be high profile themselves or certainly represent activities or individuals with a significant media interest (sport, music, politics).

You may also find that media relations is the function or activity most closely associated with these individuals. Take a quick look at the contents list of this book and the breadth and range of subject matter covered under PR. Are these activities reflected in most people's understanding of the practice? Probably not.

Who are the public relations practitioners?

There is a lot of confusion about who does what in public relations (PR) – see Activity 3.1. It may be helpful to look at some facts about the industry in Britain and in Spain (see Boxes 3.1 and 3.2 and then complete Activity 3.2).

activity 3.2**Comparing public relations in two countries**

Look at the information in Boxes 3.1 and 3.2. What are the key differences? How does each country's PR association define PR? Look at each of their websites (the Spanish site has an English translation).

Feedback

Check out other websites – how do their ideas and statistics vary? How many have English translations? Does the UK site have other languages available? If not, why not? (See also Chapter 7.)

Who does what: the bigger picture**Definitions of field**

Chapter 1 has already explored the historical evolution of PR and discussed the various definitions that are provided from a range of sources including academics, practitioners, national and international professional bodies.

This lack of an agreed definition is, however, still a problem for the practice. Deciding what it is and what people do has evidently caused much distraction and expenditure of individual and collective energies. Some of the long-winded definitions still do not easily convey what the discipline stands for and

**box
3.1****Key facts about public relations in Britain**

According to the UK's Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR):

- On a global scale, the UK PR market is second only to that of the United States.
- Private and public sector organisations in Britain will spend about £6bn on PR services this year.
- A *Guardian* poll shows that more than 30% of UK media companies will increase spending on less expensive media over the next few months, including PR, direct marketing and email marketing (Source: *The Guardian* 20 August 2003).
- PR is one of the top three career choices for graduates (Source: The UK Graduate Careers Survey 2003).
- A survey of 300 marketing professionals by the Marketing Society showed that nine out of every 10 believed that PR will become more important (over the next five years) than TV/radio advertising, sponsorship, email marketing and events/exhibitions (Source: *Financial Times*, Creative Business 21 October 2003).
- There are approximately 2800 PR consultancies in Britain.
- The combined turnover of the top 20 PR consultancies in 2004 was more than £366m (Source: *PR Week*).
- All listed FTSE100 companies have a PR department communicating on their behalf.

Source: www.cipr.co.uk (CIPR)

**box
3.2**
Key facts about public relations in Spain

- PR is defined as: ‘Strategies for generating trust between the company and its audiences, thus developing a favourable predisposition.’
- Turnover: €192.3m.
- Growth on previous year: 22%.
- 71% of companies consider their relation with their PR agency is very good and that 78% of agencies have a very high level of commitment.
- Agencies have an average of 21 employees.
- The average agency is 10 years old.
- 100% of agencies demand proficiency in at least two languages.
- Postgraduates make up 82% of agency employees.

Source: *El Estudio de la Comunicación y las Relaciones Públicas en España* (The Study of Communications and Public Relations in Spain), compiled in 2002 (using data from 2000) by ADECEC, IESE and PricewaterhouseCoopers

ADECEC (Asociación de Empresas Consultoras en Relaciones Públicas y Comunicación), is the Spanish association of businesses dedicated to PR and communications consultancy. It is a non-profit-making organisation founded in January 1991 by a group of professionals from Spain’s main PR consultancies.

ADECEC’s member companies employ more than 1000 people and are active in the field of PR and communication, not only in Spain but also abroad. ADECEC, as a sector representative, holds as its mission to dignify the profession for the people working in it and to contribute to growth in the practice of PR in Spain.

Source: www.adecec.com

what people do. Fawkes (2004) argues that the synthesised UK CIPR definition of PR below is one that at least simplifies the discussion and helps students and practitioners understand what it is they do or should be doing: ‘Public relations is about reputation – the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you’ (CIPR 2005).

However, modern ideas about PR are moving away from reputation as the key concept, to relationship building, so the CIPR definition may be revised or fade from use. Note also the rather different description by the Spanish PR association (Box 3.2). In fact, it is worth pointing out that the problem with definitions extends to problems with language. As Verčić et al. (2001) point out, the term ‘public relations’ is founded wholly on US references and does not translate across the Atlantic. Their own three-year research programme on PR in Europe (European Body of Knowledge (EBOK)) showed that all except English speakers had problems with the term ‘public relations’. For example, the German *Öffentlich keitsarbeit* carries associations with the public sphere and public opinion, perhaps rooted in the origins of European PR through public bodies, such as central and local government, rather than the corporate work of early PR in the United States.

So, shall we abandon the search for a decent description? It could be said that they encourage ring-fencing and competition and work against integrated communication approaches to problem solving. Other disciplines have similar problems, after all.

However, Hutton (2001) says that PR has lost the battle for supremacy with marketing and is terminally threatened by its failure ‘to define itself and to develop sophisticated and progressive theory’ or develop its central tenet or core concept. He comments that ‘there remains a critical need for public relations to define its intellectual and practical domain . . . to regain control of its own destiny’ (2001: 205). See Activity 3.3 (overleaf).

The debate will continue to unfold in journals and textbooks and at conferences for years to come. In the meantime, students and practitioners still need to be able to describe their jobs in terms meaningful to their friends and family. This chapter aims to provide information and insight to assist in that goal.

Of course, the answers to many of the questions raised by Activity 3.3 will depend on the type of role, its level and whether it is in-house or consultancy. The next section looks at how organisations see the role of the PR practitioner, before going on to look at what individuals do on a daily basis.

activity 3.3**Job descriptions**

One way of gathering information about what PR practitioners do is to look at the job ads. Find a publication or look online at *PR Week* or *The Guardian* for PR jobs. Read the adverts and make a note of what the employers are looking for. What job titles are advertised? What skills do they mention? How many ask for relevant qualifications? What specific knowledge (e.g. IT)? What personal qualities?

Feedback

Some of the job titles will vary from corporate communications to head of media. The duties described may not vary so much. The differences and similarities in these ads offer real insight into what people do in PR.



PICTURE 3.1 Does Samantha from *Sex in the City* represent what public relations is and what practitioners do? (Source: Getty Images.)

Role of the communicator

In Chapter 2 we discussed the division between managers and technicians in PR practice. However, the

dichotomy is not always clear-cut. Most PR practitioners are involved in both manager and technician work, but it is generally accepted that one role may dominate. On entry into the practice and at the start of their career, most recruits are given technical tasks. Through experience and after time this generally means they move on to fulfilling the more managerial role (see mini case studies on practitioner roles and responsibilities and Figure 3.1).

The emphasis on these roles of the communicator has also had an effect on the advancement of women in PR, as is explored more fully in Chapter 9, which also discusses the disappointing absence of research into the status of black and ethnic minority PR personnel. Another issue about the roles of communicators is that so many of the texts are US based.

The 2001 research report by Verčić et al. showed that for European respondents the key concepts for PR were 'communications' and 'relationships' (the respondents refused to choose between these two, on the grounds they were too interrelated to separate).

Four dimensions emerged as key roles for PR:

- 1 managerial
- 2 operational
- 3 reflective
- 4 educational.

The first two overlap with the familiar managerial/technician debate to some extent but the last two are not covered and are worth expanding:

- Reflective PR is described as the role of analysing 'changing social values to adjust organisations, standards and values of social responsibility' and is aimed at influencing the dominant coalition.
- Educational PR aims to increase the communication competence of employees.

Reflective PR emerged as the core role for PR in the eyes of European scholars and practitioners, with the aim of evolving a PR perspective on the organisation, parallel to the financial or legal perspectives taken by those elements of an organisation.

In many ways, the struggle to define the role of the communicator has an edge to it: this is not just an academic debate. PR practitioners need to demonstrate their value to the employing organisations – whether it is reputation management or relationship building that they are offering. Neither is the comparison with financial or legal aspects of an organisation misplaced. As Hutton (2001: 214) points out, the failure to have a clear rationale for PR has led to erosion of its base:

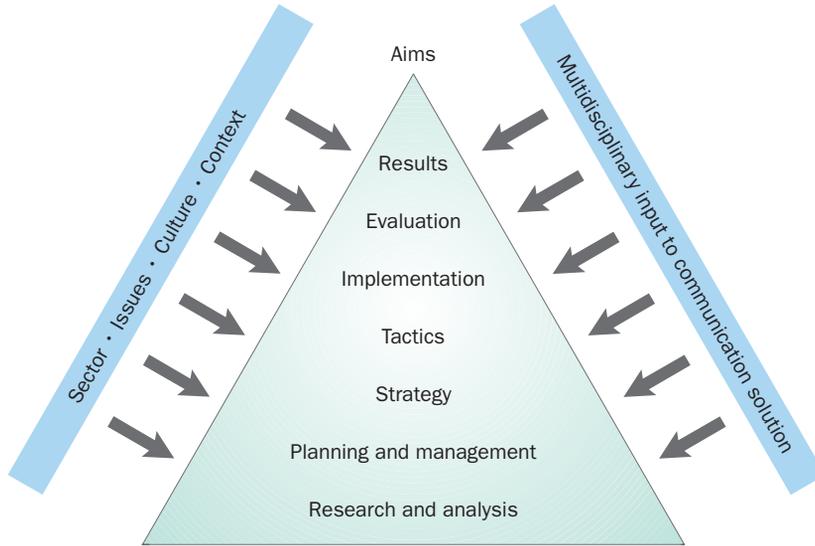


FIGURE 3.1 The public relations practitioner as ‘communicator’

Many corporate public relations departments have lost responsibility for crisis communications to management consulting firms and marketing departments, some have lost responsibility for corporate identity programmes to marketing departments, some have lost government relations to legal departments, and some have lost internal/employee communications to human resources departments.

The drive to get on the board of directors is also connected to the desire to be taken seriously. There is some success in this area: as Box 3.1 shows, all the top 100 companies in Britain have PR departments. The question is: how much authority do they have within those companies? A survey by Watson Helsby Consultancy of PR directors at 28 of Britain’s top companies, including BP, Vodafone and HSBC, found that while most reported directly to the chief executive, many failed to get the attention of the board. The survey found that only 30% of PR people sat on their company executive committees and none on the board (*Financial Times* 22 October 2003).

Other evidence suggests a flourishing time ahead for PR. For example, PR was considered the best return on investment by entrepreneurs in a survey for the *Financial Times* in 2004, as shown in Figure 3.2.

Mini case study 3.1 (overleaf) illustrates the kind of career available in PR and the richness (and challenge) of the PR role at a senior level. The communicator is often expected to play a wide range of roles.

The PR practitioner must be adaptable, energetic, versatile, diplomatic and resilient to get along with a mixed group of clients and stakeholder groups. Pieczka refers to the existence of ‘an expertise which is distinctive yet flexible enough to be applicable across a wide

field’ and suggests that public relations expertise is a complex interactive structure organised through past experience and current exigencies (demands), which modifies itself through action (Pieczka 2002: 321–322).

This perspective would suggest that there is no one paradigm or template for the role but that it is a dynamic process created through the interface of our

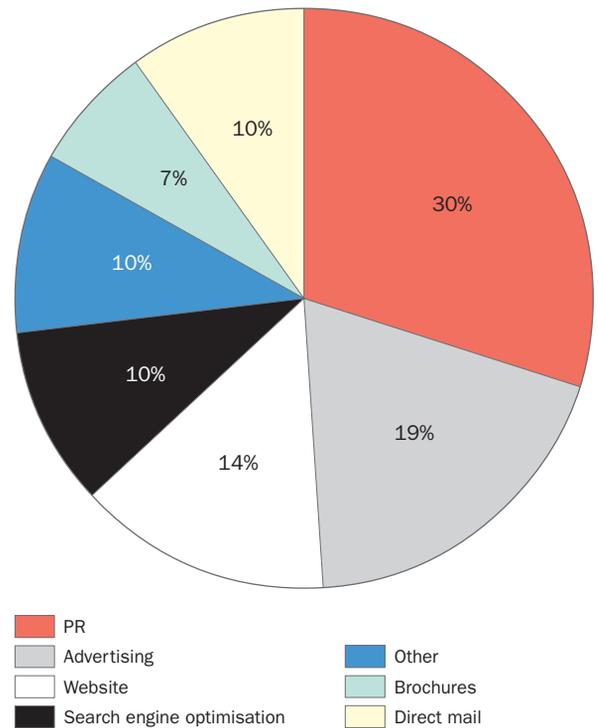


FIGURE 3.2 What type of marketing activity gives the best return on investment for startup SMEs? (Source: *FT Creative Business* 13 July 2004 based on research by new2marketing accessed www.ipr.org.uk, July 20)

mini case study 3.1

Katherine Bennett OBE – Head of Government Affairs, Airbus UK

Role at Airbus

Katherine joined Airbus UK as Head of Government Affairs in 2004. Her role encompasses managing relationships between Airbus and national, regional and local government. She takes the lead on all public policy issues affecting the company and ensures that key government and interested stakeholders are kept informed and aware of company developments. Her time is split between Bristol, where Airbus UK's HQ is based and an office in Westminster, London. The Government Affairs Department has a direct reporting function to the managing director in the UK.

In the public affairs industry, the managing director's direct involvement is a prerequisite for the function. Government affairs needs to be integral in company strategy and direction. This integration can take a number of forms, whether in considerations over avoidance of risk, ensuring there is a supportive legislative background for the company's forward plans and product development or indeed issues surrounding sustainability and CSR.

Airbus's Communications Team is a sister department to Government Affairs and the two functions are closely aligned, which allows joint allocation of resources when required and the necessary coordination of messages to Airbus's key audiences.

Issue management

Airbus is the market leader in aircraft manufacturing and sales, employing over 50,000 people worldwide, of which 13,000 are in the UK and represent highly skilled research and development (R&D) and manufacturing jobs. The UK business is the Airbus 'Centre of Excellence' for wing design and manufacture and also heads up the integration of landing gear and fuel systems for Airbus aircraft.

One of Katherine's first challenges was to ensure the UK business was fully represented and involved in the unveiling of the new A380 aircraft. With the capacity of seating 555 passengers, this is the largest civil airliner ever launched and brought a completely new dimension to the aircraft market in terms of customer offering and innovative systems technology.

The unveiling ceremony took place in Toulouse, France, in front of over 5000 assembled media, government representatives and customer representatives. Katherine undertook the coordination of the logistics, media activity and protocol surrounding the participation of UK Prime Minister Tony Blair. The key part of this activity was to ensure the smooth running of a two-way satellite link between Blair and Airbus employees back in the UK.

The event was probably one of the largest product unveilings ever seen and the media coverage reflected this. Over 500 media representatives with 60 film crews attended the ceremony. In the UK, the event attracted 650 separate items of media coverage, including BBC/ITV main TV news slots of more than two minutes. The Airbus website had live coverage, and received 3,419,398 hits that day.

Background

Katherine is a member of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations and graduated in history and politics from Leicester University. She has a postgraduate diploma in marketing from the Chartered Institute of Marketing. Katherine's previous employment was with Vauxhall/GM UK where for nearly nine years she also headed up their government affairs function. Her time at Vauxhall involved managing numerous public policy lobbying campaigns and issues management such as major industrial restructuring programmes and CSR. Her time with GM included several months based in the USA. Before joining Vauxhall, Katherine was an account manager in the Public Affairs Department of Hill and Knowlton (an international PR company) working on behalf of energy, charity and automotive clients. While at Hill and Knowlton she undertook several in-house training courses. Katherine was awarded the Order of the British Empire in June 2004 for services to the motor industry and charity.

Source: based on interview with author and information supplied by Katherine Bennett.

past and our interactions with the present. Figure 3.3 presents a model that uses systems theory as the basis for the concept of this role as a dynamic, interactive and open system.

Systems theory works on the basis that everything in the social world is part of a system that interacts with other systems in that the whole equals more than the sum of its parts (von Bertalanffy 1969). Building on the work of Katz and Kahn (1978), PR scholars (e.g. Cutlip et al. 2000) use systems theory to explain the interactions between organisations and

their environments, interactions between organisations and interactions within organisations. (Systems theory is fully explained in Chapter 8.)

This model assumes that the PR practitioner is part of an open system interacting with other systems, and therefore the nature of the role will not be fixed but depend on the influences both in and out of the system, from early experiences and education through to ongoing *continuing professional development (CPD)*. Key to this model is that the system does not exist in isolation, but only exists insofar as it relates to

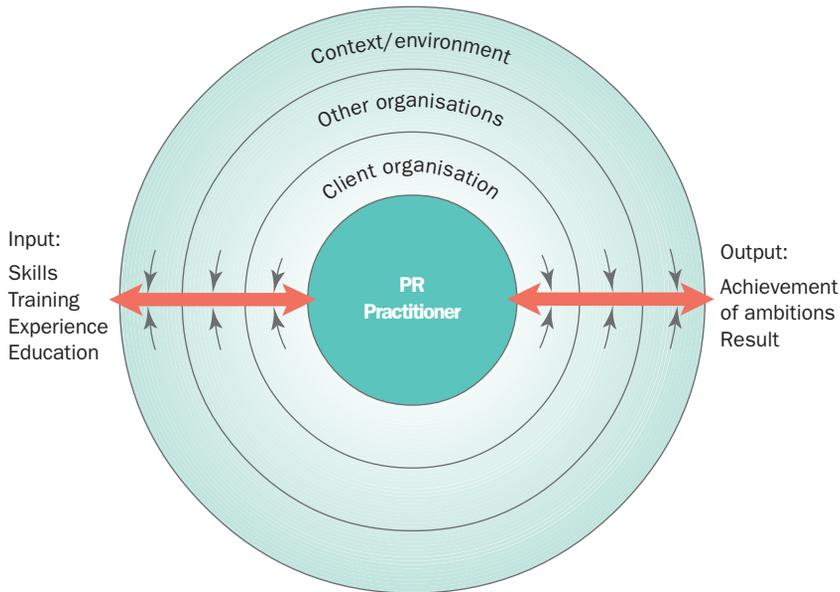


FIGURE 3.3 Public relations practitioner role within systems theory

other systems. This model also reaffirms that the PR practitioner as counsel must be aware of the context of their own role, and the context of the organisation or client they are representing. That requires an interest in, and understanding of, the wider community, whether it is political, economic, sociological, and any number of other ways to frame the narrative of the twenty-first century.

Definition: CPD (continuing professional development) acknowledges in all professions (law, medicine, accountancy, PR, etc.) the role of continued learning and updating throughout the career.

There is an increasing body of research, with enormous potential for further development, looking at the role of the practitioner and using a number of methodologies to explain and measure the role. Moss et al. (2004) have identified a number of common themes in both the UK and USA among senior practitioners, such as their part in the dominant coalition and their contribution to strategic decision making.

Wilkin (2001) provides an interesting and controversial perspective on the implications of global communication; Allan (2000) on the social divisions and hierarchies reproduced by the news media. Research among employers' needs in graduates tends to highlight the requirement for employees who can manage change and understand the context the organisation is functioning in and can evidence the more abstract cognitive powers.

The argument supports the idea that the role of the PR practitioner is a very wide-ranging one, far wider than many PR exponents might feel happy with, but worth

considering if we want to move PR onto a higher plane. Those with a background in corporate communications will already recognise the role. It is often with the introduction of a corporate communicator and the playing out of territorial and functional wars that the true potential of a role, which both oversees and connects, is appreciated, not only by senior management but also by the organisation as a whole. This is a role which, with the right training and development, can become synonymous with the PR role (see Figure 3.4). (See also Chapters 2 and 10 on the management and planning of PR activities.) See Think about 3.1 (overleaf).

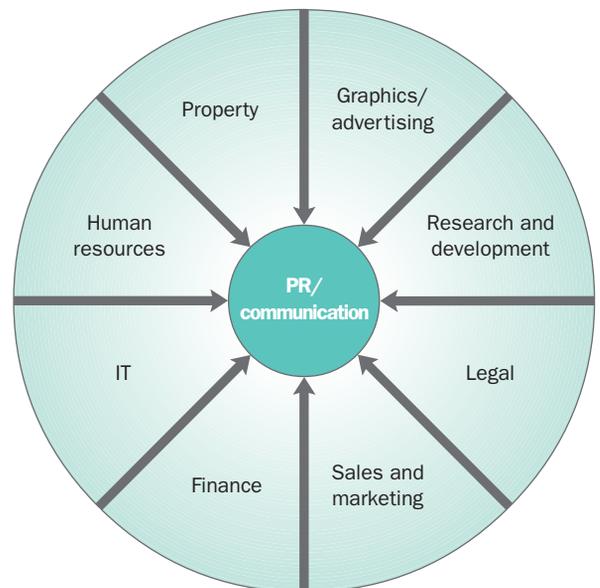


FIGURE 3.4 Public relations/communication role within an organisation

think about 3.1

Public relations and its influence within organisations

Is there anywhere in the organisation where public relations does not have a role to play?

What public relations people do: individual practitioners

Lots of people work in PR and in a range of roles. As Activity 3.3 showed, there is a huge variety of job titles in trade or national newspapers, including public relations/corporate communications *consultant, executive, manager, director, officer, advisor, counsellor*, etc. To help us understand in more detail what these individuals are actually doing it is necessary to simplify and classify the locations in which they are working. So, there are three simple categories of where people work in public relations:

- 1 In-house (employed by an organisation, whether a public or private company or a public body, charity or non-governmental organisation, NGO).
- 2 Consultancy (agency where practitioners work for one or more different clients for a fee).
- 3 Freelance practitioner (where an individual works for himself and is employed by in-house departments or consultancies on a short-term contract basis either for a specific project or to fill in during peaks in demand or because staff absence requires additional resource).

While much of the work is the same across these categories, there are key differences:

- In-house: get to know one organisation in depth, work across wide range of PR activities, from writing/editing house journal to arranging visits by or to MPs/opinion formers, etc., get to know a sector or industry well, e.g. music, motoring.
- Consultancy: work across many accounts, variety of clients, changing environment, may work in specialist area such as technology, finance or public affairs.

Fawkes (2004) argues that understanding the practice is helped by analysing how people engage in different activities. She does this by describing the common PR areas with examples of what practitioners will do in each area (see Table 3.1, Box 3.3 (p 46) and Activity 3.4.).

Skills for the ideal practitioner

So what skills are needed to work in PR? It would probably be quicker to identify those which are not re-

quired, although that is not easy either. Because there are so many kinds of work and so many kinds of employer, there is room in PR for everyone from the extrovert party person to the researcher glued to the PC.

However, some indication of what employers are looking for can be gleaned by their responses to questions posed by Fawkes and Tench (2004b) (see Table 3.2–p 48). This research shows that there was agreement from employers that literacy was the primary skill required by PR graduates. Both in-house and consultancy employers also ranked teamwork as the next most important attribute, followed by problem solving, analytical thinking, research skills, IT skills and numeracy. There were some variations between the employer groups, with in-house employers giving greater weighting to IT skills over research skills – the opposite of consultants' priorities.

Another insight into skills required by PR practitioners can be found in the results of the major research-based investigation into PR education in the United States, presented in the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) *Port of Entry* report (1999) (see Table 3.3–p 48). This surveyed employers and debated with other academics before concluding that the range of knowledge and skills listed in Table 3.3 were desirable in PR practitioners.

While the DTI/IPR report (2003) is not about education, but practice and the future of the sector, it is notable that the practitioner requirements shown in Table 3.4 are very much more limited than those suggested by practitioners and educators in the United States.

activity 3.4

In-house and consultancy jobs

Look at the job ads you gathered in Activity 3.3. How many of them are for in-house, how many for consultancy jobs? What differences are there in the skills, qualifications and interests they require?

Feedback

It may be easier to find in-house jobs, especially for public sector jobs, as they are more likely to advertise in national newspapers. Consultancies often advertise in *PR Week* in the UK or recruit informally through word of mouth and 'headhunting' (asking an individual to change agencies). You can find out about some of these jobs by looking at the PR agency's website.

TABLE 3.1 Examples of what public relations people do (source: Fawkes 2004)

Public relations activity	Explanation	Examples
<i>Internal communication</i>	Communicating with employees	In-house newsletter, suggestion boxes
<i>Corporate PR</i>	Communicating on behalf of whole organisation, not goods or services	Annual reports, conferences, ethical statements, visual identity, images
<i>Media relations</i>	Communicating with journalists, specialists, editors from local, national, international and trade media, including newspapers, magazines, radio, TV and web-based communication	Press releases, photocalls, video news releases, off-the-record briefings, press events
<i>Business to business</i>	Communicating with other organisations, e.g. suppliers, retailers	Exhibitions, trade events, newsletters
<i>Public affairs</i>	Communicating with opinion formers, e.g. local/national politicians, monitoring political environment	Presentations, briefings, private meetings, public speeches
<i>Community relations/ corporate social responsibility</i>	Communicating with local community, elected representatives, headteachers, etc.	Exhibitions, presentations, letters, meetings, sports activities and other sponsorship
<i>Investor relations</i>	Communicating with financial organisations/individuals	Newsletters, briefings, events
<i>Strategic communication</i>	Identification and analysis of situation, problem and solutions to further organisational goals	Researching, planning and executing a campaign to improve ethical reputation of organisation
<i>Issues management</i>	Monitoring political, social, economic and technological environment	Considering effect of US economy and presidential campaign on UK organisation
<i>Crisis management</i>	Communicating clear messages in fast changing situation or emergency	Dealing with media after major rail crash on behalf of police, hospital or local authority
<i>Copywriting</i>	Writing for different audiences to high standards of literacy	Press releases, newsletters, web pages, annual reports
<i>Publications management</i>	Overseeing print/media processes, often using new technology	Leaflets, internal magazines, websites
<i>Events management, exhibitions</i>	Organisation of complex events, exhibitions	Annual conference, press launch, trade shows

Before turning to the academic debates about skills, it is worth looking at mini case study 3.2 (p 49), which lists the kind of skills required by one particular sector, financial and investor relations (IR). (See also Chapter 24.)

The skills debate

What skills do PR practitioners need in order effectively to deliver results and how do they acquire these skills? The wider UK contextual framework for education and training puts skills centre stage. In some ways this has worked in favour of PR education and training. No one will argue the need for 'skills' in one form or another. The debate over skills has been

muddled by the different terminologies employed and by the fact that whereas some skills may be transferable and portable, others are very subject specific. The UK Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), the Dearing Report (1997), Coopers and Lybrand and many others have come up with a variety of skills categories. Specifying skills as learning outcomes is now driving the educational agenda. This may be a useful discipline, but can exclude other equally important agendas. The discourse of skills can take on a life of its own, even to the exclusion of some skills we might think should be taken for granted but, in fact, cannot be. Undergraduates may lack basic literacy skills, for example, something we might (and practitioners do, according to Fawkes and Tench 2004a) see as essential for the PR role.

**box
3.3**
Practitioner diary 11–14 November

Two weeks in the life of financial public relations consultant, Melanie Gerlis, associate partner for Finsbury financial public relations consultants

Thursday 11 November

Client reported results today so I was in at 6.45am – only advantage is that we can get a taxi and there is no traffic! Results themselves are not very exciting and today has proved a busy day in the markets, so we don't expect a huge amount of coverage. There is a rumour going round the market that my client is going to be bought by a German competitor (this rumour has been doing the rounds for three years!) so the unwilling management all wore their Armistice poppies in order to present a united front . . . They did a presentation to sell-side analysts this morning which went smoothly. As ever, the Q&A session is always more worrying than the presentation but all questions asked had been prepared for which made a pleasant change.

Another client (an Italian retail bank) has sent a letter complaining about our services over the last two years. We are more than certain that this is not a fair reflection of the work we have done (which has included a glowing profile in the *Financial Times* and *The Banker*) and I am having to write a response that makes sure they know that this is the case without explicitly saying 'you are wrong'. It is a difficult balance to strike.

OK coverage coming in on the newswires/*Evening Standard* on the client that reported results, although as suspected mostly about the possible German approach (the *Daily Mail* – unsurprisingly – is calling it 'Operation Sealion', the codename given to the abortive invasion of Britain by Hitler in 1940).

Just got a call from a client who we worked for five months ago – his deal collapsed but we did a good few weeks of hard work and had put in an abort fee. I have been chasing him for ages and he has finally agreed to pay us – will believe it when I see it but good to know he agrees in principle!

The Sunday Times is writing a feature on pension fund trustees (who have shown themselves to be very powerful in bid situations such as the proposed private equity bid for WH Smith which they eventually blocked) – as we look after three private equity companies (including Permira, the largest in Europe) we have been trying all day to find someone to be quoted in this feature and I have finally pinned someone down.

Very busy day today – difficult to describe but the 170 emails in my inbox are some indication. And a potential client dinner tonight . . .

Friday 12 November

I had to get in early again today in order to look through all this morning's press coverage of yesterday's client results and be in a position to summarise them to one of the partners here (who had gone up to Manchester on business) before he then spoke to the client. This is both a moment of damage limitation and self-promotion: if the press coverage had been dreadful, we would need to acknowledge where we went wrong/could do better before the client gets too exercised about its FPR firm; if the press coverage had been fantastic, we would want to claim credit before any other advisor (banks, in-house PR, investor relations)!

Press coverage of results was not particularly strong, but at the same time there wasn't too much about the client needing to do a transaction with its German competitor, so on the whole the client was relieved. This is clearly something that won't go away, though, so we had to give our thoughts on the strategy going forward: namely, to demonstrate – as much as possible – how well the client is doing as an independent



box 3.3 (continued)

firm. I think this will be more difficult than it seems as most of the new initiatives will take a relatively long period of investment before they turn to profit/competitive advantages, but it is certainly worth trying.

At about 11am we heard that my team – that looks after the financial services sector – had won a very competitive pitch for a high-profile UK mortgage bank. We had beaten several of our major competitors, including both those who have been in the industry for several years and those who had recently launched as a challenge to our business. Our pitch had taken place on Thursday and it has been unusual in recent years to get a positive response so quickly. Most UK companies now see changing FPR advisor as a very big change but at the same time tend to leave the decision making at the bottom of their ‘to do’ lists. The guy in my team who was part of the winning pitch has only been at the firm for about a month and this was particularly endorsing for him – both personally and in the eyes of the company. So a few of us went out to lunch to celebrate (curry and champagne – very glamorous!). We then carried on celebrating for most of the afternoon, doing most of our work in a pub from our mobile phones and Blackberries. Not the usual way of spending an afternoon, but it was a great celebratory moment and also a Friday at the end of a particularly hard-working week.

Weekend 13/14 November

No surprising news/press calls relating to my clients. *The Mail on Sunday* wrote about the client that reported results last week: ‘The market is now reaching fever pitch, with some predicting a bid at any moment’; *The Independent* wrote: ‘It is already less profitable than its two main European competitors . . . It is a prime takeover candidate’ – as I say, this isn’t going away . . .

I got a few calls on my mobile on the back of a *Sunday Telegraph* report on a transaction that another team is doing. Most journalists have my mobile number because of a very contentious and ever-moving transaction that I worked on through several weekends last year and tend to call me in desperation when they can’t get hold of my colleagues! I was able to get hold of the right person to return these calls, so annoyingly journalists have the right strategy . . .

One of my friends works in the same industry as me, also in charge of financial services, and I met her for lunch on Saturday. She had been one of the losing teams in the pitch we had won on Friday (from a newer firm) and she was almost too upset to talk about it. They had put in three weeks of very hard work and it reminded me just how much resource winning new business can demand from an agency. I was surprised, however, how seriously she took this and spent a lot of time telling her about times when we had been in the same situation in order to make her feel better!

(See Box 3.6 (pp 57–8) for the next diary entry.)

(This is a diary of the day-to-day experiences of a financial PR manager. See Chapter 24 for more details. Source: Melanie Gerlis.)

Definition: The *Dearing Report* was a report by Sir Ron Dearing in the UK into the whole of UK higher education (HE), which came up with specific recommendations for the sector as it moved towards the millennium. Many of his proposals were applauded and adopted by HE institutions.

What is clear is that skills have become an integral component of benchmarking (setting achievement and quality levels), and are therefore now part of the curriculum. There has been a trend in the last decade towards generic skills and towards the involvement of employers and educationalists in defining those skills. This has led to new concepts such as ‘employability’ and ‘externality’. These have translated in the UK into the requirement for all students to have a personal progress file, which records and reflects on their individual achievements, and which follows on from school-based records of achievement. This sits

well with the portfolio-based work of many PR-related HE courses.

This at least provides us with a potential paradigm for the PR practitioner where they become a lifelong learner and are able to reflect on their own learning and development throughout their career (and beyond). Education and training does not end with the last day of term or the last exam. From school, through education and training where learning logs or portfolios are used to evidence and assess certain skills, including reflection, through to CPD responsibility for our own learning, we never stop learning (see Mini case study 3.3–p 49).

Hargie (2000) suggests that competence in a profession involves three sets of skills:

- 1 cognitive (the knowledge base)
- 2 technical or manipulative skills inherent in a profession
- 3 social or communication skills.

TABLE 3.2 Key graduate skills (source: Fawkes and Tench 2004b)

Employers – combined evaluation of skills	Not important		Fairly important		Very important	
		%		%		%
Numeracy	7	7	65	63	28	27
Literacy	0	0	0	0	101	98
IT skills	2	2	49	47.5	49	47.5
Problem solving	1	1	21	20	77	75
Analytical thinking	0	0	26	25	73	70
Teamwork	0	0	11	10	87	84
Research skills	0	0	56	54	45	44

TABLE 3.3 Port of Entry recommendations on knowledge and skills (source: PRSA 1999)

Necessary knowledge includes	Necessary skills include
Communication and public relations theories	Research methods and analysis
Societal trends	Management of information
Legal requirements and issues	Problem solving and negotiation
Public relations history	Management of communication
Multicultural and global issues	Strategic planning
Participation in the professional PR community	Issues management
Working with a current issue	Audience segmentation
Applying cross-cultural and cross-gender sensitivity	Informative and persuasive writing
Communication and persuasion concepts and strategies strategies	Community relations, consumer relations, employee relations, other practice areas
Relationships and relationship building	Technological and visual literacy
Ethical issues	Managing people, programmes and resources
Marketing and finance	Sensitive interpersonal communication
Use of research and forecasting	Fluency in a foreign language
Organisational change and development	Ethical decision making
Message production	
Public speaking and presentation	

TABLE 3.4 DTI/IPR recommendations on knowledge and skills (source: based on DTI/IPR 2003)

Necessary knowledge includes	Necessary skills include
Understanding of business	Written and verbal communication
Corporate strategy	Creativity
Finance and corporate governance	Media relations
Data analysis	Crisis management
Audience research	Issues management
Management of resources and people	Interpersonal skills
	Credibility and integrity
	Flexibility

mini case study 3.2

Financial investor relations skills

- Understand in-depth how the markets work
- Count top opinion formers among contacts
- Able to talk to top broadsheet financial journalists
- Have the ear of the board members, if not on the board
- Understand the financial calendar and rules/regulations of the Stock Exchange
- Overview of all communication activity related to financial and investor relations
- Oversee production of annual report, etc.
- Effective proof-reading skills/on-press checking
- Manage media events
- Train senior management in media interviews
- Produce media and other stakeholder information

He points out that education and training have usually focused on the first at the expense of interpersonal skills. For the PR practitioner, interpersonal skills must surely be as important as any other and perhaps even a given.

This is a confusing situation, but the graduate in disciplines related to PR has the advantage that the sector already encompasses skills and employability as a key component, even intrinsic to the subject

matter. Therefore, a portfolio that may evidence skills the student has mastered, illustrated in outcomes such as strategic campaign planning, press release writing or event management, may also be valuable for taking around to interviews to show employers what they can actually do and have done.

The Hargie approach to the skills debate, outlined above, mirrors the earlier suggestion that PR practitioners must have a wide range of skills to move up

mini case study 3.3

A student placement with MINI (Emma Knight)

I realised my interest in the PR profession as the UK government's 'spin doctors' were frantically 'burying bad news' in the wake of September 11th. I wondered who dealt with crisis management, image preservation and damage limitation.

Having worked for two years, I decided my first step was to get a good educational foundation. Navigating a diagonal career path from my current position (sales) to where I wanted to be (PR), seemed like the slow-track approach.

I opted for a university degree to give me the fundamental underpinning theory and practice required to kick start my career. University also offered support from practising lecturers who encouraged me to take my industrial year placement.

This was how I came to work as a PR year-placement student for MINI in 2004 – an international brand, part of an international organisation, the BMW Group.

The environment in which I worked was fast paced and continually changing. MINI was and still is one of the most exciting and fun brands in the motor industry, which provided lots of scope for PR. As a student, I was fortunate to be involved in projects at the strategic planning stages as well as implementation.

A typical day? There wasn't one. But that is the beauty of most PR roles, I think. Obviously there were some routine tasks such as preparing press kits and collating

daily press coverage, but the majority of my role was spent working on projects to support the brand. I would arrange logistics for events, book flights and hotels for journalists, compile itineraries for press trips and host journalists at events.

In order to get the information I required for a press release, make an event work or obtain permission for a certain activity, occasionally my 'typical day' would be spent on the phone or writing emails to nobody other than MINI and BMW Group employees.

I believe building internal relations is among the most challenging issues that an in-house PR practitioner must deal with. Cynical though it may seem, everyone needs a favour once in a while. If you haven't any favours to cash in on, a potentially simple job can become quite time consuming.

PR as an industry is not always given the credibility it warrants. Fortunately PR for MINI is considered a fundamental part of the brand's presentation. As a sector I believe practitioners will continue to face the ongoing challenge of being taken seriously. It is the responsibility of each practitioner to promote PR as an indispensable function that adds value to an organisation. Do it, if not for the sector, for the sake of your budget!

Source: Emma Knight

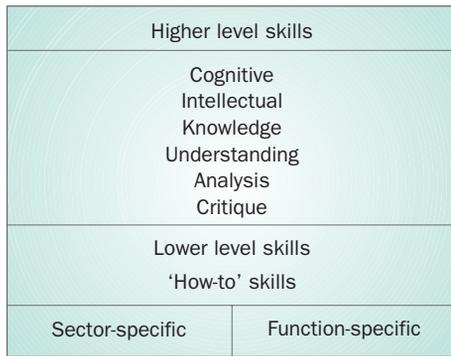


FIGURE 3.5 Skills range

the continuum. The UK-based perspective is supported by evidence from the United States. The PRSA study (1999) provides a wide perspective on addressing the 'next PR crisis', which is ensuring appropriate education and training. The emphasis here is on the complementary approach of knowledge that graduates are expected to have and skills specific to the profession (see Figure 3.5).

The model of the PR practitioner is now someone who encompasses both higher level and 'how to' skills, and is still (and always will be) learning. This provides a continuum with, at one end, someone ready to learn and, at the other, no end point as there is always room

box 3.4

Public relations competency factors

a) Strategy and action

1 Takes a strategic/long-term view

- plans ahead, remains focused on organisational objectives
- thinks beyond immediate issues and links to business
- has a vision of objectives and reviews them regularly

2 Investigates and analyses

- gathers, probes, tests information; analytical, gets to heart of issue
- uses a wide variety of sources, grasps key facts quickly
- analyses potential outcomes of situation

3 Makes decisions and acts

- willing to make tough, unpopular decisions based on information
- suggests various solutions, decides on course of action quickly
- makes things happen and acts with confidence

b) People skills

4 Understands others

- open minded when considering others, interested, empathic
- looks for win-win and mutual benefit
- shows respect, works to understand motivation of others

5 Leads and supports

- provides direction, advice and coaching
- fosters openness and information sharing, acknowledges contributions
- elevates insights to the board

c) Personal communication

6 Networks

- talks easily at all levels internally and externally
- builds strong, extended infrastructure across functions
- builds relationships with gatekeepers and is visible

7 Communicates

- verbally and in writing, clearly, consistently and convincingly
- supports arguments with facts and figures
- confronts senior people with difficult issues

d) Personal characteristics

8 Takes responsibility for high standards

- consistent with clear personal values aligned with organisation
- sets high goals and standards, accepts responsibility for them
- handles criticism well and learns from it

9 Maintains a positive outlook

- responds well to changes or setbacks, manages pressure well
- aware of difference between setback and failure, uses humour
- deals with ambiguity well, grasping the opportunity

10 Prepares thoroughly

- spends time understanding tasks and objectives, scenario plans
- involves team in planning
- constantly aware of arising issues

Source: Gregory 2005

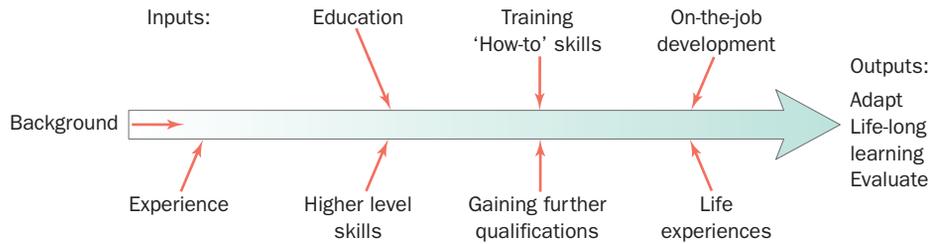


FIGURE 3.6 Public relations practitioner lifecycle

to learn more. What point they are at on that continuum will depend on background and experiences and the context in which they function. The school leaver who joins an agency on a trial period will be at one end of the continuum. If the employer provides in-house training, supports them through further education and training and the student wants to learn and develop, then they are as likely to get to the boardroom position in due course as someone who has come up a different route. They will be moving up the continuum. Their ability to succeed will be a combination of their own abilities and experiences and the expectations and input of others around them. This links well with the model of the practitioner as a system.

Gregory (2005) conducted research for the UK Communication Directors' Forum with board-level practitioners to draw up competency characteristics for the PR community. The research involved depth interviews with seven senior practitioners and identified 10 competency factors organised under four themes (see Box 3.4 and Figure 3.6).

Role of theory in practice

The value of theory as underpinning practice is up for discussion. Some practitioners will have managed

very well for many years without theory, or rather they will have relied on their own version of common sense theory. Others have taken postgraduate courses, like a masters degree or the CIPR Diploma and been exposed to theory through education. Increasingly, public relations graduates who have studied theoretical modules in their degree courses are joining the profession and shaping the expectations of the next generation. The theory that practitioners have been exposed to will inform the role they play.

Relevant to this discussion is research conducted by Tench and Fawkes (2005) into PR education in Britain. Research was conducted with employers of PR students who were asked about different aspects of the curriculum and its value. Related to theory the practitioners were asked about the dissertation and how important it was as a core part of a public relations curriculum. The research found there was more enthusiasm for dissertations among in-house employers than consultancies, with over three-quarters (78%) of the former supporting dissertations, as against 56% of consultancies (see Figure 3.7, overleaf). Qualitative comments help explain these responses. Support for the dissertation was expressed as: '[proves] the student's understanding and application of theory and practice, assuming that the topic of the dissertation is relevant'; 'closest thing to thinking through a situation

mini case study 3.4

A public sector practitioner's view

Working in the complex communication environment of local government, one seasoned PR practitioner, Michael McGivern from Chester City Council, has a particular view on the role of the PR practitioner. He suggests that they fulfil the textbook definition of 'communication technicians', but that in many cases that is all they are seen as. However, 'once your reputation is established, you will be called on as problem-solving

facilitators'. He concludes that they operate under a communications management system in theory only, and that, in practice, senior management and other decision-makers see practitioners as advisors and facilitators rather than as one of them, the final decision-makers. 'This in turn means our role as organisational positioners is essentially theoretical.'

think about 3.2 Disciplines that inform public relations

Which subject disciplines could inform the PR role (apart from PR)?

Feedback There are lots of disciplines that are relevant to the education and training of the PR practitioner:

- business and management/human resource management
- communication subject areas: marketing/marketing communication/advertising
- psychology
- cultural studies
- politics/sociology/social psychology
- media
- human geography.

The list is, in fact, endless. Are there any that are not in some way relevant?

from start to finish which is what is required to handle PR campaigns for clients'; 'a dissertation shows an ability to think and analyse, takes planning and writing skills and hopefully places demands on a student'. It should be noted that a minority of employers were extremely dismissive of all theory, and dissertations in particular: 'PR is concise; dissertations are long', said one.

Tench and Fawkes argue that the supporters seem to appreciate what a dissertation involves, unlike the detractors who clearly place no value at all on abstract thought. They argue that there are serious implications 'for the intellectual health of the industry. There is also evidence of a "shopping list" approach to education, with [a number of] employers mentioning the lack of benefit to them of a dissertation.'

The range of theory relevant to PR is explored fully in Chapters 8 and 9, but it is worth pointing out here that the majority of employers do value the role of theory in educating practitioners, albeit not so much as they value actual practical experience. Moreover, it is not only the views of employers that count in this

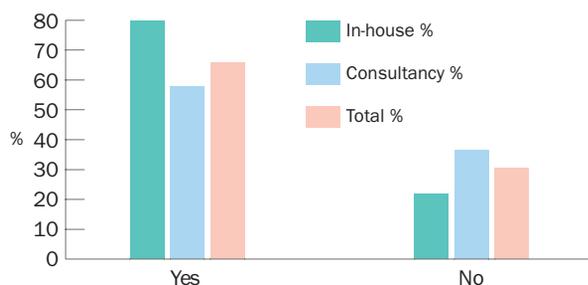


FIGURE 3.7 Should public relations degrees include a dissertation? (Source: Tench and Fawkes 2005)

debate. See Think about 3.2, as Cheney and Christensen (2001: 167) point out:

Still, it is important that a discipline's theoretical agenda not simply be beholden to trends already present or incipient in the larger society. Otherwise, a discipline can fail to exercise its own capacity for leadership on both practical and moral grounds.

Professionalism

The issue of defining PR to protect its jurisdiction (or borders), discussed at the beginning of the chapter, has an impact not only on practice, as described earlier, but also on issues concerning the professionalisation of PR (Pieczka and L'Etang 2001).

There are a number of different approaches (called 'trait' and 'process') to what defines a profession and some controversy over whether PR qualifies for the term. For example, practitioners are not licensed, as doctors or lawyers are – indeed, even the UK CIPR's 8000 membership represent perhaps one-third, maybe less, of all eligible practitioners.

The 2000 Global Alliance of PR associations, however, declared its guiding principles of professionalism to be characterised by:

- mastery of a particular intellectual skill through education and training
- acceptance of duties to a broader society than merely one's clients or employers
- objectivity and high standards of conduct and performance (Theaker 2004).

The problematic nature of some of these concepts, such as defining or measuring 'objectivity' or the

think about 3.3 Professions

Is PR a profession? Throughout this book we do use the term 'profession' and associate it clearly with PR. However, it is important to acknowledge that, according to sociological definitions of professions, there is debate about whether PR meets the criteria. This is a useful topic for future discussion, research and student dissertations.

difficulties in controlling members' standards of behaviour, is not examined.

However, everyone agrees with the first point: that education plays a key part in establishing any profession. L'Etang (2002) called education the 'crucial plank in PR's quest for professional status' and this view is shared by the PRSA *Port of Entry* (1999), which quotes Kerr (1995) as saying 'a profession gains its identity by making the university the port of entry'.

The development of PR education is discussed in more detail below. However, to set the context, there has always been a tension between education as training for the profession and as an end in itself. Research (Chan 2000, cited in Rawel 2002) continues to show that practitioners want PR education to be primarily of service to the industry. The focus for many academics, including Neff and Grunig, is also employability and the perspective of the profession: 'Research must address problems faced by working professionals and be directed toward improvement of the profession' (Grunig and Grunig 2000: 36).

L'Etang and Pieczka (1996: 11), on the other hand, argue that 'public relations practitioners must be generalists and . . . [develop] a habit of flexibility and a sensitivity to different ways of seeing the world'. Like Grunig, these authors stress the importance of education to the professionalisation of PR, but they assert that the professional status of the practitioner will be enhanced by intellectual reflexivity, following a multidisciplinary approach, rather than relying on one particular model of PR as the foundation for its education (see Think about 3.3).

Professional bodies

Another requirement for a profession is the existence of a body that represents and, in some cases – although not for PR – licenses its members to practise. The UK's professional body is the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR).

Key facts about the UK's Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR)

- The CIPR was founded in 1948 and awarded charter status in 2005.
 - The Institute has over 8000 members, with a turnover of £3m.
 - The CIPR is the largest professional body for PR practitioners in Europe.
 - The CIPR is a founding member of the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management.
 - CIPR membership has more than doubled in the last 10 years.
 - Approximately 60% of its members are female – this has grown from only 20% in 1987.
 - 45% of its members work in PR consultancy and 55% work in-house.
 - Two-thirds of CIPR members are based outside London.
 - The CIPR has a strict code of conduct that all members must abide by.
 - Membership grades (of the total CIPR membership):
 - Members: 56%
 - Fellows: 4%
 - Associates: 19%
 - Affiliates: 10%
 - Students: 10%
 - Global Affiliates: 1%.
- The Institute represents and serves the interests of people working in PR, offering access to information, advice and support and providing networking and training opportunities through a wide variety of events, conferences and workshops.
- The six grades of membership (Member, Fellow, Associate, Affiliate, Student and Global Affiliate) span the different levels of experience and qualifications in PR. Membership assessment is rigorous and is based on educational qualifications and multidisciplinary experience, ensuring standards are high.
- The CIPR is represented throughout the UK by 13 regional groups and has 13 sectoral groups, these being:
- arts, sports and tourism
 - construction and property
 - corporate and financial
 - education and skills
 - fifth estate – not-for-profit sector
 - government affairs
 - health and medical
 - internal communication alliance
 - international PR
 - local government
 - marketing communications

**box
3.5**
European public relations associations

PRVA – Public Relations Verband (Austria)
 BPRCA – Belgian Public Relations Consultants Association
 APRA – Czech Association of Public Relations Agencies
 DKF – Dansk Kommunikationsforening (Denmark)
 STiL – Finnish Association of Communicators
 Information, Presse & Communication (France)
 DPRG – Deutsche Public Relations Gesellschaft EV (Germany)
 HPRCA – Hellenic Public Relations Consultancies Association (Greece)
 PRII – Public Relations Institute of Ireland
 FERPI – Federazione Relazioni Pubbliche Italiana
 Beroepsvereniging voor Communicatie (Netherlands)
 Kommunikasjonsforeningene (Norway)
 NIR – Norwegian Public Relations Consultants Association
 APECOM – Association of Public Relations Consultancies in Portugal
 PACO – Russian Public Relations Association
 APRSR – Public Relations Association of the Slovak Republic
 PRSS – Public Relations Society of Slovenia
 ADECEC – Assoc de Empresas Consultoras en Relaciones Publicas (Spain)
 SPRA – Swedish Public Relations Association
 BPRA – Bund der Public Relations Agenturen der Schweiz (Switzerland)
 PRCI – Public Relations Consultancies Inc. of Turkey
 PRCA – Public Relations Consultants Association (UK)

Source: www.cipr.co.uk (CIPR)

- science, technology and engineering
- women in PR

The aims of the CIPR are:

- To provide a professional structure for the practice of public relations
- To enhance the ability and status of our members as professional practitioners
- To represent and serve the professional interests of our members
- To provide opportunities for members to meet and exchange views and ideas
- To raise standards within the profession through the promotion of best practice – including the production of best practice guides, case studies, training events and a continuous professional development scheme, Developing Excellence.

Source: www.cipr.co.uk (CIPR)

The following statements and comments are from the press release (February 2005) from the CIPR to announce the Charter status approval for the Institute:

This marks the 'coming of age' of the PR profession and is official recognition of the important and influential

role that public relations plays in business, government and democratic society.

The award of a Charter by the Privy Council is affirmation of the role the Institute plays in the public relations industry – providing leadership, developing policy, raising standards through training and education, and making members accountable through the Code of Conduct.

Chris Genasi, 2005 President of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations, said:

This is a milestone for the Institute and the PR industry. The CIPR can now implement its strategy to further improve and support the industry with the formal stamp of approval from Government.

The IPR has been acknowledged as the official body to strengthen and lead the profession. The Government has recognised the PR industry as a leading player in public and corporate life and PR practitioners as professionals with specialist skills, knowledge and qualifications.

Colin Farrington, Director General of the CIPR, said:

Chartered status will make it easier for employers, clients and the general public to distinguish between PR

practitioners who are prepared to commit to the industry code of conduct and to be accountable, and those who aren't. Membership of the Institute has always been about professionalism, commitment and standards and now Chartered status gives CIPR members external, third party approval and endorsement. Membership of CIPR is a clear demonstration of professionalism.

Source: www.cipr.co.uk (CIPR)

Box 3.5 details other European associations. All their websites contain much relevant information for further investigation (see Activity 3.5).

activity 3.5

Join an institute

Find the web address of the national institute where you are studying or working. Search the website for details about the national association. How many people are members? What benefits does membership bring? Could you be an associate or student member? Talk to a friend or colleague about the benefits of membership. If it is possible for you to be a member, why not think about joining?

Education and research

The first UK undergraduate degree in PR was launched at Bournemouth in 1989, followed by Leeds Metropolitan University and the College of St Mark and St John, Plymouth in 1990. The pioneer post-graduate courses were launched at Stirling University in 1989 and Manchester Metropolitan University shortly after. Research conducted in 2003 found 22 PR or similar undergraduate degrees in Britain, of which 13 were then approved by the CIPR. With the addition of non- or recently approved CIPR courses, it is estimated that approximately 500 PR undergraduates enrolled on UK PR courses in 2004 (Tench and Fawkes 2005).

PR education continues to evolve (Fawkes and Tench 2004a) and while most PR educators have practitioner backgrounds, many in Britain now have over a decade of teaching and research experience (L'Etang 1999). Teaching academics in the UK institutions are also increasingly acquiring doctorates and other research qualifications. New ideas, drawing on critical theory and other cultural and political approaches (see below) are being developed and taught as academics seek to expand the theoretical frameworks with which to critique PR and its role in society.

There has been a worldwide growth in courses at higher education (HE) level that aim to feed the profession, including general degrees covering PR as one part of a wider remit and specialist PR degrees (the UK CIPR approves a number) that focus on PR and its related context, with a commensurate growth in academics and academic publishing. According to Fawkes and Tench (2004b) even here the emphases in the programmes differ, from PR as a management discipline with an emphasis on strategy (in the business schools) to PR as an aspect of media activity with an emphasis on communication (media schools).

For many years the United States was the main repository of PR research; now Britain and Europe have developed an impressive research base. The term 'public relations' may not be familiar in other European countries, but the roles are similar. Van Ruler and Verčić (2004) highlight both the common underlying themes, such as professionalisation and the influence of communication technologies, set against the 'similar yet idiosyncratic' national backdrops, where differences are more obvious, from a study of PR within national contexts.

In addition, there are many other academic and functional disciplines, such as the social sciences, business and management, cultural studies, linguistics, media studies and psychology that also input into the research underpinning for the sector. This interdisciplinary approach is a strength; it provides a wide range of methodological options, such as a cultural studies approach to deconstruct PR case studies (Mickey 2003) rather than sticking to the traditional PR methodologies. This is known as theoretical pluralism (Cobley 1996).

Drawing on a wide range of references such as those outlined in Chapters 8 and 9 should increase the credibility in terms of knowledge and expertise of the practitioner who is pursuing a PR qualification.

Another backdrop to the role are the national initiatives within Britain at secondary and HE levels to encourage more vocational and skills-based programmes as a complement to the traditional academic route. This trend, which also attracts funding, means that a discipline such as PR, which successfully links academic, skills and employability, is well positioned for growth. So PR can be taught as a new-style foundation degree in the way that other subjects might not, given the inherent employer input prerequisite. Again, this may prove to be both a strength and a weakness: a strength because this offers a way forward where funding in more traditional programmes has been curtailed; a weakness because PR may lose academic credibility and become just another vocational training ground (see Mini case study 3.5). See also Boxes 3.6 and 3.7 – pp 56–9.

mini case study 3.5

Corporate communications for a university

David Marshall, Director of Corporate Communications at the University of Chester, emphasises the role of the PR practitioner as educator. He suggests that there are three stakeholder groups, all part of a continuum.

A key part of the role will be to advise the senior management team, taking them 'on a journey about changing the behaviour of the organisation'. At this boardroom level of education, the PR practitioner will need to speak their language and gain credibility through the appropriate use of theory and models. This is what he terms *strategic education*.

Then there is the *technician education* which is understanding and communicating the 'how to' but always within the strategic overview. You cannot divorce the theory from the practice and it is no good knowing lots about theory but less about the applied. The PR practitioner therefore must have the 'how to' confidence, which may span a number of different areas, such as media training, briefing design consultancy; and working with corporate video teams.

The final tranche in the educational triangle is *educating staff to represent the organisation*, the traditional ambassadors and advocates, both through strategic education (they need to see the bigger picture) and through technical training. This perspective suggests that the PR practitioner needs to know about education and training others and the best means of communicating sometimes difficult messages. It may be a foregone conclusion that because the PR practitioner knows about communication, they themselves will be effective communicators.

We know from the teaching profession that having the knowledge is not the same as being able to impart it.

David believes that the corporate communications role will often kick start this three-level process. The arrival of the corporate communications role will spark the discussion. The organisation will realise that it needs the corporate communications function. 'What surprises me is how many organisations struggle along without one for so long. All organisations need to be able to have an overview.'

box 3.6

Practitioner diary 15–18 November

More from the practitioner diary of Melanie Gerlis, associate partner for Finsbury financial public relations consultants

Monday 15 November

The son of one of my clients is in here on work experience this week. He is a recent graduate (2:1 in politics and philosophy from Leeds University) who is considering a career in PR and wants to learn more about it. I think it is a good idea to get work experience/internships before making decisions and admire people who have the energy to sort this out (even if it means using their parents' contacts . . .). However, I was struck by how difficult it is to explain exactly what we do. I talked to him for about an hour and realised that I hadn't explained: when the company was founded; its mission; our client list; and what we actually do all day! Instead, I had talked quite broadly about: how different the FPR industry is today compared to eight years ago (when I started); how financial reporting in the press has become much more sensationalist; and why it is difficult to expand our FPR model outside the UK – on reflection I don't think that any of this can have genuinely interested him at all. I have left him in the capable hands of one of the account executives who will hopefully be a bit more specific and will actually give him some work to do. Until people actually get stuck in I think it's very difficult to explain and understand.

Monday is 'conference call day' – most clients who have internal PR teams like to have weekly updates on Mondays. We talk about anything of relevance in the Sunday press (which can often set the agenda for the week ahead) and any other business that will relate to our ongoing work for the week. I regularly have a call with one client at 11.30am and a Europe-wide call with another client at 3pm. Depending on the workload, there is another client who likes a call at 4pm and another one that we talk to monthly on a Monday at 1pm – there are Mondays when I really don't move from my desk/headset! However, we do insist on regular contact – sometimes the client doesn't realise that they are doing something newsworthy that we can use for good coverage, and sometimes the client is so busy that they forget to tell us something of enormous significance that we then could get caught out on later in the week. The discipline of a regular call ensures that the communicators are communicating.

box 3.6 (continued)

Extra conference call put in at 5pm today – we are advising a hedge fund that is being bought by a US-based investment bank and have been expecting this transaction since July (i.e. for nearly four months). Eventually seems like we are getting somewhere but just tried to call in (to conference call) and the number we were given doesn't work. Given that the call combines people in New York, Paris and London, we could end up working late getting everyone on the same phone line even before we work out what work needs to be done. Very frustrating.

Tuesday 16 November

Difficult journey in today – tube shut; no cash for a cab; cash machine broken, etc. Amazingly I was only half an hour late.

The timing is still moving for this hedge fund sale – the latest is now 'hopefully by Thanksgiving' (Thursday week). The client, ideally, would like no press coverage of the transaction at all as they are worried about making public the very large amounts of money they will make and we are having to manage their expectations considerably as the UK press is particularly focused on wealth.

Lots of journalists chasing other stories today – LK Bennett, Phase 8 and Toys Я Us are all apparently up for sale and as a few of my clients are private equity companies (who have recently been buying out the high street) I got a lot of calls on the back of it – the *Financial Times* and *Sunday Times* are particularly keen to follow retail stories (although this is generally the most popular sector for most journalists). Frustratingly, I haven't yet been able to glean much more information from either bankers or clients.

We are organising a couple of events which involve some dull administration – one is a press conference in Paris at the end of this month for which our (French private equity) client is paying for journalists' travel and accommodation and people are being surprisingly picky about which Eurostar train they want to take/how long they want to stay in Paris/where they'd like to stay, etc. On reflection, I think we should have simply not given them the choice – it would be far easier to have dictated the train times we were prepared to pay for and let them make their own arrangements if they had specific requests. We are also organising our own Christmas drinks party for about 30 journalists in our sector and given that we have only just come up with the idea and format it is difficult to find anywhere in December that isn't already booked. And this is before we've even invited anyone.

Wednesday 17 November

I had a 10am meeting near home this morning so was afforded an extra bit of sleep which was great! The meeting wasn't particularly productive as it was with a client who likes to see us very regularly, even if there isn't anything specific to discuss. But it shows willing to turn up at their offices, rather than doing everything over the telephone/by email.

One of my insurance clients had an EGM (extraordinary general meeting) today to approve a rights issue it announced earlier this month, which extended its number of shares by an additional 50%. All shareholders are invited to vote to ensure that any change to the company's structure/policy/etc. is approved by its ultimate owners. The meeting was one of the smallest I've ever been to – three people from the company (who were the only shareholders present) and its advisors! Most votes had come in by proxy instead and there was an overwhelming majority so I guess corporate democracy was still in evidence. The client also agreed to pay us an extra fee for the work involved in the rights issue so we felt very satisfied with the outcome!

Work continued into the evening as my company celebrated its 10th anniversary with a drinks party at Christie's in St James's. All our clients were invited, together with luminaries from various banks, newspapers, Westminster and Whitehall. There was a very good turnout and I spent most of the time between 6.30 and 9.30 talking to contacts and clients, introducing them to each other and trying to steer clear of drinking too much champagne. There were quite a few people that I hadn't seen since our annual party last year so it was good to catch up, but on the whole I found it more like work than pleasure. We did then move on to a nearby wine bar and club to continue the celebrations more informally, but only once the very important people had left! I finally got home at 3am in a less than sober state, but by no means worse than some of my colleagues and the lingering journalists . . .

Thursday 18 November

Woke up worse for wear and went straight to a background meeting between my insurance client and a newswire journalist. As this was a client meeting, I got a taxi into the City and dutifully contacted a few colleagues to make sure that they would make it into the office (they all did!) and catch up on any



box 3.6 (continued)

gossip that I missed out on. Five minutes before my meeting was due to happen, the journalist cancelled (very rude, very annoying, but sadly not that unusual).

I had several emails/messages from people who had been at the party (for various stages), all of whom had enjoyed the evening. Our boss sent an email later in the day summarising the goodwill generated:

We had four national newspaper editors, seven city editors, four No 10 special advisors, a Cabinet minister, an EU trade commissioner and just over 30 chairmen and chief executives as well as many other interesting people from different walks of life. We have had a huge number of complimentary emails from clients, advisors and journalists.

A PR man to the core!

(See Box 3.7 for the next diary entry.)

(This is a diary of the day-to-day experiences of a financial PR manager. See Chapter 24 for more details. Source: Melanie Gerlis.)

**box
3.7****Practitioner diary 19–25 November****More from the practitioner diary of Melanie Gerlis, associate partner for Finsbury financial public relations consultants****Friday 19 November**

Very quiet day today as we had cleared the decks in anticipation of this investment bank/hedge fund transaction today, which didn't happen – again. We are now being told this will happen before Thanksgiving (next Thursday) but I have ceased to believe in it.

Sunday journalists still chasing for information on LK Bennett sale – all I could glean is that the price being touted in the press is higher than most people think will be the reality but this isn't something that people want to write about at this stage as they would be contradicting themselves.

Weekend 20/21 November

Business pages rather thin on the ground in terms of financial services stories so didn't get any press calls this weekend. Most of my boss's email re our party appeared in the business section of the *Observer*, which I'm sure he'll be delighted with!

Monday 22 November

Good interview with the finance director of my insurance client appeared in the weekly publication, *Financial News*, today. As it is a relatively small client, this is pretty good coverage and I am pleased because we had to twist the client's arm to get him to be a bit more proactive with the media. He is described as 'rapid speaking and focused but with an easy laugh', which is a relief as sometimes he can come across as a bit dry and uninteresting if he is uncomfortable.

The graduate who was here last week on work experience has proved extremely useful and has been asked to stay another fortnight. It has been interesting to watch someone go from complete ignorance to writing press storyboards for a major M&A (merger and acquisition) transaction. Proves the point that until you actually sit down and do the work it is difficult to understand.

We had drinks this evening to celebrate my insurance client's successful rights issue – a room in a bank full of advisors (mostly men) in grey suits. But some nice thank you speeches to make us all feel worthy.

Tuesday 23 November

Hedge fund client rang this morning to let me know that his sale will not be happening this week (so much for 'before Thanksgiving').

In the meantime, we are still trying to get journalists to commit to train times to and from Paris for a press conference next Tuesday. So far two out of four have actually agreed (different) times to travel, both of which are different to mine – secretary not happy. We also spent most of the day writing background

box 3.7 (continued)

information of all the journalists going on the trip and the publications that they work for in order to prepare the client prior to the press conference. I am getting concerned that we still haven't seen any evidence of what the client intends to say at this conference.

We are trying to persuade the *Financial Times* to write a big 'corporate restructuring' feature based on our Italian banking client whose CEO has totally reshaped the business after the last two years. We have managed to convince the comment editor, which is a very good start, but now have to ask the people who actually do the work (the journalists) to commit their time – ideally this side of Christmas. I suspect the workload will fall to the Milan correspondent, whom, unfortunately, I don't know – since (irritatingly) he has yet to return any of my calls on this.

Wednesday 24 November

The Business Life editor of the *Financial Times* has been persuaded to commission a corporate restructuring story on our Italian banking client, which is great news – it took a lot of convincing on my part and we are still at the mercy of our client pulling their finger out and not being unreasonable (unfortunately, they usually are . . .), but we can hopefully end the year on a better footing.

All seems in place for the press conference in Paris, I just need to organise myself for three days out of the office next week, which is more difficult than it should be. Luckily, I am well connected with my telephone and Blackberry and will hopefully be able to enjoy being away from the daily grind.

One of my other clients (another investment bank) has asked us to send them a broad strategy paper for their press activity next year. I have decided to do this on the back of telephone conversations with journalists so that I can back up my (very macro) suggestions with facts. I spoke to the banking editors at the *Wall Street Journal Europe* and *Financial Times* today and both conversations were extremely useful – both journalists have emphasised the need for the client to have a more visible European figurehead which will really please the new head of European banking who would like to have a higher profile.

Thursday 25 November

I had breakfast with a potential client this morning (another investment bank – isn't life exciting!). Actually a very useful breakfast – they don't use any external PR at the moment and are rumoured to be planning for an IPO (initial purchase offer) early next year so it is good to have an early 'in' with their head of PR.

Spent most of today writing up the journalist feedback on my existing investment banking client and turning it into a useful document. Took much longer than I expected to turn a few quotes into a strategy paper.

Yet another conference call about another transaction (private equity company buying a very small German car parts maker) – postponed throughout the day. We were finally meant to have this call at 5.30pm and it was postponed until tomorrow. I look forward to going through the same process again.

Pay day so all worth it . . .

(This is a diary of the day-to-day experiences of a financial PR manager. See Chapter 24 for more details. Source: Melanie Gerlis.)

Summary

This chapter has demonstrated the range of skills demanded of PR practitioners and, it is hoped, dispelled the false images of celebrity or spin presented in the introduction. It has shown the different ways in which PR is organised and delivered in Britain and in other countries and examined the issue of professionalism, as well as highlighting information about professional bodies in Britain and elsewhere. Finally, it addressed the evolving role of education in shaping the future of PR by providing the PR practitioner of the future.

This 'ideal' will be able to manage the complex, dynamic context and functions of their organisation as they will possess the cognitive, technical, social and communication skills to gain the confidence of colleagues from

other sectors and functions. They will facilitate communication within their organisation, as well as with external publics; they will be able to advise senior management using their higher level skills as well as oversee more detailed hands-on activity (not least because they will have a clear understanding of relevant theories and their value to practice); they will be committed to lifelong learning and continual professional development, as well as being active in the professional body; and they will also educate others about the value of PR and in this way help reinforce the position of PR as a profession.

Is this too much to ask? Perhaps, but it is not impossible that practitioners of the future, who will achieve these kinds of standard are, even now, reading this chapter.

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