

Study Unit 1: Introduction to Public Relations

Introduction

Organisations today are encountering numerous issues that 50 years ago would have been considered unthinkable. Companies are not just concerned with making money, but they must also learn to navigate the land mines set by social justice warriors, activities, conservationist and other human rights organisations. Furthermore, it is important to note that crisis will arise sometime in the lifetime of any organization and it is the job of the PR person to be prepared and ready to respond to this issues as they arise.

It is therefore imperative that students of Public Relations must be given a background of the histories and definitions of PR.

This study unit will begin by introducing the concept of Public Relations, types of PR, and more importantly, the difference between PR and Marketing.

Learning Outcomes of Study Unit 1

Upon completion of this study unit, you should be able to

- 1.1 Define Public Relations
- 1.2 Types of PR
- 1.3 Distinction between PR and other related fields.

1.1 Definition of Public Relations

Public relations (PR) is used in a huge range of industries and in each one slightly different skills and competencies have emerged among practitioners. As a result, there is no one universally agreed definition of PR

According to Harlow,

“Public relations is a distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and co-operation between an organisation and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasises the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilise change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and ethical communication techniques as its principal tools”.

The 1978 World Assembly of Public Relations Associations in Mexico agreed that:

“Public relations is the art and social science of analysing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organisation leaders and implementing planned programmes of action which will serve both the organisation’s and the public Interest”.

The IPR is the UK’s leading professional body for public relations practitioners and it defines PR as:

“Public Relations is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and understanding between an organisation and its publics”.

1.1.1 Summarizing the definitions

Philip Kitchen (1997: 27) summarises the definitions as suggesting that public relations:

1. 1 is a management function . . .
- 2 covers a broad range of activities and purposes in practice . . .
- 3 is regarded as two-way or interactive . . .
- 4 suggests that publics facing companies are not singular (i.e. consumers) but plural
- 5 suggests that relationships are long term rather than short term.

Properly designed, such presentations can have dramatic effects on an audience. The overhead projector with black and white slides will give way to a multimedia business presentation controlled by a personal computer and the presenter. Such presentations are making large audience communications not only possible but dramatic as well.

Wilcox *et al.* (2003: 5) suggest that the following additional elements are also common to the various definitions:

- 1 Deliberate. Public relations is intentional, not haphazard.
- 2 Planned. It is organised, not short term.
- 3 Performance. Public relations cannot be effective unless it is based on the actual performance of an organisation.
- 4 Public interest. This reinforces the idea that public relations should be beneficial to the organisation and to the general public

1.2 Types of Public Relations

Another approach to understanding public relations is to describe what people do. These are organised either by the kind of audiences they engage with or by the content of the activity. It is important to note that these categories overlap. For example, a company intranet newsletter involves writing, new technology and internal communications.

Therefore some types of PR based on their functions are:

- **Internal communication**
- **Corporate PR**
- **Media Relations**
- **Business to Business**
- **Public Affairs**
- **Community relations and CSR**
- **Public Affairs**
- **Strategic communication**
- **Issues management**
- **Crisis Management**
- **Copywriting**

1.3 Distinction between PR and other Related fields

Sometimes, of course, it's easier to explain what you don't do. The following sections look at areas often confused with PR. As with definitions, the lines are not always clear.

To repeat, PR draws on expertise and experience from many fields; it overlaps with other disciplines; it tends to integrate rather than exclude – this is its strength as a practice, but a weakness when it comes to descriptions and definitions.

1.3.1. Difference between PR and Marketing

Marketing field is the most commonly confused with PR – not unreasonably since marketing refers to PR in its texts and practice as part of the marketing mix. To marketing practitioners and academics, public relations is one of the four Ps – product, place, price and promotion – which make up a successful marketing campaign. This is not incorrect

– public relations can play an essential role in creating successful products – if the other elements are right, of course. The use of public relations to promote goods and services is sometimes called marketing public relations (MPR). There is some dispute about how useful this term is, but it could reduce the confusion caused by using the

same term – public relations – to describe promoting products and planning strategic communications.

So what's the difference? The Institute of Marketing defines marketing as: 'The management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying consumer requirements profitably'.

The two central words here are 'consumer' and 'profit'. Understanding the consumer and producing products or services that will satisfy consumer needs to the profit of the

supplier is the traditional arena of marketing. There is a clear exchange – money for goods or services. It is easily measured.

However, public relations campaigns are often harder to quantify. Many organisations – the armed services, charities, local and central government, for example – do not have goods or services to sell. But they do all have messages to communicate and – importantly – to receive. They need to maintain relationships with all those who may work for them, give time or money, raise complaints, or vote for or against them.

Kitchen (1997: 28) explains,

Public relations and marketing are two major management functions within an organisation, but how they are organised depends upon managerial perceptions, organisational culture, and historical precedent.

He goes on to say:

Marketing is concerned with an organisation's exchange relationships with customers in which quid pro quo transactions occur. On the other hand, PR deals with a broader range of publics involved with or affected by the organisation . . . Both marketing and PR functions are important to an organisation. Subsuming PR into marketing delimits organisational ability to function successfully in highly competitive environments.

1.3.2 Difference between PR and Advertising

The distinction between advertising and PR is more easily made: advertising involves paying a medium (TV, radio, newspaper or magazine, for example) for airtime or column inches in which to put across a promotional message. The content of an ad is always controlled by the advertiser, unlike the content of editorial pages or programmes, which are controlled by journalists.

Public relations practitioners try to persuade journalists to cover their products and services on the grounds of newsworthiness. An ad doesn't have to satisfy any news value – it just has to be legal and paid for.

The Institute of Practitioners in Advertising defines advertising as follows:

Advertising presents the most persuasive possible selling message to the right prospects for the product or service at the lowest possible cost.

Here, the phrase 'selling message' distinguishes the two disciplines – PR aims not to increase sales, but to increase understanding. Sometimes, of course, understanding a product or service improves sales, but PR does not claim a direct causal link.

ITQ

Advertising, Marketing and Public Relations have some similar attributes, but are still unique. True/ False

ITA

True

Summary of the study unit 1

In this study unit 1, you have learned the following:

1. The definitions of PR
2. Type of PR
3. Differences between PR and Marketing
4. Differences between PR and Advertising

Self-Review Question (SRQs) for study unit 1

Now that you have completed this unit, you can measure how well you achieved its learning outcomes by answering the following questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on Self-Review Questions at the end of this study unit

- 1) Give two definitions of PR and what do they mean
- 2) Differentiate between PR and Marketing
- 3) Differentiate between PR and Advertising