

The Role of Public Relations in Effective Organizational Management

Okafor, Godson Okwuchukwu*, Malizu, Chinonye Faith

Department of Mass Communication, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka-Nigeria

***Corresponding Author:**

Okafor, Godson Okwuchukwu

Email: amaro4baya@yahoo.com

Abstract: In recent years, the argument concerning the effects of Public Relations in organization management has engaged various scholars. Consequently, professionals and scholars alike have looked for the key concepts to establish the value of public relations. However, the terms “relationships” and “reputation” have emerged as the focal concepts in explaining the purpose and value of public relations. The concepts of organization-public relationships and organizational reputation can be integrated within a theoretical framework of public relations effectiveness. When those concepts are integrated in a model, the role of Public Relations can be captured more clearly than when there is a separate focus on each of the concepts. Therefore, this paper examines the effects of Public Relations in achieving effective organizational management.

Keywords: Public Relations, Organization, Management, Professionals, Reputation.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Public Relations tend to be obvious as existing within the management of organizations. Also, Public Relations has shifted from an emphasis on the technical role of the communicator to the strategic communication role of the manager. Management theory has defined organizational effectiveness in a number of ways. Early theories of management stressed meeting goals as measures of effectiveness. This approach proved to be rather simplistic and did not recognize the interconnectedness of organizations with their environments. A systems model approach was developed as a reaction to the limitations of the goal-attainment perspective. However, the systems approach tends to be too abstract to measure effectiveness. A third approach, which recognizes the dependency of the organization on its environment, places specific focus on key constituents and is more measurable because of its focus on relationships with these stakeholders. This approach, recognizes the value of strategic constituents to the success of any organization, and recognizes that the interests of these stakeholders often conflict. Each impacts on how Public Relations is practiced within the organization.

However, a wealth of studies has underscored the effects of marketing and advertising on companies' sales volumes. But few of them deal with the potential effect of Public Relations—especially one that focuses on media relations—on organizations' management. Therefore, this study sought to examine the effects of

Public Relations in achieving effective organizational management.

DEFINING PUBLIC RELATIONS

Due to the dynamic functions of Public Relations in human society, the concept has attracted varied views and definitions from different scholars of management and social sciences, especially of communication, public administrations and business management, etc. The Public Relation News of New York quoted in [1], conceptualized public relations as:

The management function that evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual or organization with the public interest, and plans and executes a programme of action to earn public understanding and acceptance.

In the words of [2], Public Relations is the art and science of achieving harmony with the environment through mutual understanding based on truth and full information. Udeze & Okoro [3] views Public Relations as:

A distinctive management function which helps to establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organization and its publics and involves the management of problems or issues.

To the British institute of Public Relations, the term Public Relations is conceptualized “as a deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organization and its publics”. Also, the 1978 Mexican statement, posits that “Public Relations is the art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counseling organizations leaders and implementing planned programmes of actions which will serve both the organization and the publics”.

Basically, the above definitions and descriptions of Public Relations are concerned with the communication function of an organization’s management towards making the organization effective. Hence, effective organizational communication has a lot to do with effective Public Relations communication.

Public relations can be defined in terms of what practitioners do as opposed to what it is. For a clear definition, the field of Public Relations can be delineated as the management function that identifies, establishes, and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the various publics on whom its success or failure depends. Public Relations play a crucial role in organizational success. An organisation’s profitability, appearance to the public, and its reputation is the direct remit of Public Relations.

PUBLIC RELATIONS FUNCTIONS

The different definitions of Public Relations from scholars of differing orientations and professional bodies stem from the dynamic nature and function of Public Relations. However, no matter how Public Relations is perceived and defined, certain features remain outstanding and tends to run through the different conceptions of the subject matter of Public Relation. Some of these outstanding features include, Public Relations as a management function, Public Relations as deliberately planned, Public Relations establish mutual understanding between individuals or groups and organizations etc. It is therefore from these prominent features that Public Relations derives its roles and functions which in turn enables it’s practice to impact positively on organizations thereby helping to enhance organizational effectiveness.

There are several roles played by Public Relations in organizations with regards to organizational communication which also ensures organizational effectiveness. As highlighted in the definitions above: Public Relations analyzes trends and predicts their consequences; public relations counsels organization’s leaders; it processes are to plan and execute a programme of action; it also evaluates public attitudes, and identifies the policies and procedures of an

individual or organization. Other roles of Public Relations include: research and data collection, media relations that helps to keep abreast of media or communication technology, familiarizing with traditions and culture of foreign lands in the case of IPR etc. [4]. These functions and lots of others make organizations function effectively:

a) Analyzing Trends and Predicting their Consequences

The Public Relations unit or personnel in an organization play this role of analyzing trends through venturing or looking into the future situations from the present through data collection and giving analytical reports. Ahukannah & Ugorji [5] posit that “analytical reports are usually formal reports that present analysis of data, an interpretation of data and perhaps recommendations. It also examines all sides of a problem or subject, evaluate the findings and put out alternative result or conditions impartially. It is always unbiased and should allow facts to speak for themselves”. The Public Relations personnel carry out research on issues or subjects which in turn enables the fulfillment of this function.

b) Counseling Organization Leaders

This is another important function of Public Relations in organizations which helps organizations function effectively. Okpoko [6] posits that Public Relations practitioners give warning to organization leaders in advance of factors that can trigger off crisis or constitute impending danger; hence, they advice or counsel organization managers on what to do to solve existing problems and/or avoid getting into one.

c) Planning and Executing Programme of Action

To plan a program of action means articulating, organizing and drawing up what actions to take. Public Relations play this role by arranging the parts of a design; devise or project the realization or achievement of the design. Also, to execute means to carry out actions on already planned design. The role of Public Relations in the words of [1] is to plan and execute short, medium and long term programs in order to ensure knowledge and understanding, particularly through dialogue so as to create an atmosphere of confidence and goodwill needed for the harmonious co-existence of both organization and its various publics. Public Relations uses different models of planning to formulate and apply step-by-step and systematic manner of solving various problems that face organization [4].

d) Evaluates Public Attitudes

According to [6], evaluation means taking stock of what has been done and what would be done if not done. It also involves feedback, which provides the organization with information concerning her success and failure. The evaluation of public attitude as the

function of Public Relations implies the review of the feedback from the program already executed. It is where the results are related to the original objectives; it involves ascertaining the present level of achievement, the opportunities still available to be exploited and the major weaknesses to be corrected [4]. By doing this, Public Relations assesses the effectiveness or ineffectiveness and success or failure of activities on such program that had been executed or the ones to be executed.

e) Identifying Policies and Procedures of an Individual or Organization.

This is another vital role that Public Relations play in organization, making known the policies, interests and activities of both organization and its publics on individual basis. Public Relations seek to identify the interest of the individuals making known to the organization vis-à-vis the organizational interests to the individual publics. In other words, Public Relations keep management or clients informed about public opinion, as well as other trends or events that could undermine or adversely affect their reputation [1].

f) Educating management, staff and public through communication.

Public Relations is a communication facilitator, sensory agents and information broker [6]. Public Relations strategy provides a two way channel of communication between and among the publics of an organization. The practitioner/personnel ensures this through:

- Maintaining an open-door policy between management, staff and publics.
- Conducting opinion polls from time to time amongst organization's publics.
- Holding regular dialogue session/meeting with internal publics in particular and external publics occasionally.
- Ensuring that authorities keep promises made.

g) Planning and managing Communication Activities and Procedures in Organization

It may be useful to think of Public Relations simply as the use of communication by an organization to inform, resolve conflicts, and improve understanding with its strategic publics. Public Relations as the management of communication between an organization and its publics is also taken as the management function that plans activities and procedures of information flow (communication process) in the organization. Communication between employees and the management is an essential element of conflict resolution. The Public Relations personnel use internal communication process in ensuring goodwill and mutual coexistence of the individuals working together in same environment. Planning as we noted earlier involves articulation and organization and

drawing up a system of action [7]. Communication activities in organization are planned and managed to produce effective result. It is the role of public relations to plan all the communication activities and procedures in organizations.

Communications Management employs the processes required to ensure timely and appropriate generation, collection, distribution, storage, retrieval, and ultimate disposition of information. These processes also provide the critical link among people and information that is necessary for successful communications. The processes include:

- ❖ Communications Planning – determining the information needs of the public and management/stakeholders.
- ❖ Information Distribution – making needed information available to the management and the publics in a timely manner.
- ❖ Activities/function Reporting – collecting and reporting performance through status reports, progress measurement and forecasting.
- ❖ Communicating the Management/Stakeholders – managing communications to satisfy the requirements of, and resolve issues with, organization management/stakeholders.

All of these processes interact with one another throughout the life of the organization and as far as the organization exist.

Communications Planning

Communication planning in an organization determines the information and communication needs of organization management and its publics. The role is more efficiently played by the Public Relations unit of an organization. It includes identifying who needs what information, when they should receive it, and how it will be provided. It therefore, identifies the information needs of the organization entirely and devises a suitable means of meeting those needs for the success of any project in the organization. Organization that maintains good and effective communication planning functions effectively, as well as maintains effective organization management.

According to [8], communication management plan provides:

- Stakeholder (management) communication requirements
- Information to be communicated, including format, content, and level of detail
- Person responsible for communicating the information
- Person or groups who will receive the information
- Person or groups who are responsible for making decisions

- Methods used to convey the information, such as memoranda and email
- Frequency of the communication, such as weekly
- Escalation process for resolving project issues that cannot be resolved at the staff level

Information Distribution

Information distribution involves making information available to both the management and publics of an organization on a timely manner. This is because, according to [8], information distribution includes implementing the Communications Management Plan, as well as responding to unexpected requests for information.

Take for instance; information can be distributed using a variety of methods, including:

- Regular meetings, hard-copy document distribution, manual filing systems, and shared-access electronic databases
- Electronic communication and conference tools, such as e-mail, fax, voice mail, telephone, video and Web conferencing, and Web publishing
- Electronic tools for project management, such as Web interfaces to scheduling and project management software, meeting and virtual office support software, portals, and collaborative work management tools.

It is obvious that we cannot exhaustively discuss the roles of Public Relations in organizational communication in a work like this. This implies that there are more roles Public Relations can play in organizational communication. Udeze & Okoro [3], believe that “Public Relations practice if well harnessed, stands at the centre of every human and organization activities, because in every of our communication activity, we try to present a good, descent and robust image of ourselves or our organizations”. The function of image presentation discussed by [3], is played by Public Relations in organizations.

ASSESSING THE EFFECT OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT

Public Relations literature tends to suggest that Public Relations scholars and Public Relations professionals generally embrace different concepts to assess Public Relations effectiveness.

According to [9] organizations are “social entities that are goal-oriented, deliberately structured activity systems linked to the external environment”. To answer the “effectiveness” question, the Excellence research team identified the following four approaches from organizational theory [10]:

1. **The goal attainment approach:** Organizations are effective when they meet

their goals. The goal-attainment approach is limited, however, because it cannot explain effectiveness when an organization has multiple goals and different stakeholders of an organization have conflicting goals. It also cannot explain the role of the environment in organizational effectiveness.

2. **The systems approach:** Organizations are effective when they survive in their environment and successfully bring in resources necessary for their survival. The systems approach, therefore, adds the environment to the equation of organizational effectiveness, but it is limited because survival is an extremely weak goal. The systems approach also defines the environment in vague terms. It does not answer the question of how an organization determines what elements of the environment are important for its success.
3. **The strategic constituencies approach:** This approach puts meaning into the term ‘environment’ by specifying the parts of the environment that are crucial for organizational survival and success. Strategic constituencies are the elements of the environment whose opposition or support can threaten the organization’s goals or help to attain them. Taken broadly the environment is both external and internal, so employee groups and management functions can be strategic constituencies as much as can external groups.
4. **The competing values approach:** This approach provides a bridge between strategic constituencies and goal. It states that an organization must incorporate the values of strategic constituencies into its goals so the organization attains the goals of most value to its strategic constituencies. Thus, different organizations with different goals, and their effectiveness will be defined in different ways.

Organizational theorist [9], defined organizational effectiveness as “the degree to which an organization realizes its goals”. Daft differentiated “effectiveness” from “efficiency.” According to him, “Effectiveness is a broad concept. It implicitly takes into consideration a range of variables at both the organizational and departmental levels. Effectiveness evaluates the extent to which multiple goals—whether official or operative—are attained”. For this reason, Daft’s definition of organizational effectiveness falls into the goal attainment approach identified by the IABC research team. To explain how the term organizational efficiency is different from organizational effectiveness, Daft added that: “Efficiency is a more limited concept that pertains to the internal workings of the organization. Organizational efficiency is the amount of

resources used to produce a unit of output. It can be measured as the ratio of inputs to outputs”.

In analysing organisational effectiveness, levels of analysis in Public Relations effectiveness is very crucial. To clarify the ways to demonstrate the value of Public Relations, [11] explained levels of analysis in Public Relations effectiveness at the programme level, the functional level, the organizational level, and the societal level as follows:

1. **The programme level:** Individual communication programmes such as media relations, community relations, or customer relations are successful when they affect the cognitions, attitudes, and behaviours of both publics and members of the organization—that is, the cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioural relationships among organizations and their publics.
2. **The functional level:** The Public Relations or communication function as a whole can be audited by comparing the structure and processes of the department or departments that implement the function with the best practices of the Public Relations function in other organizations or with theoretical principles from scholarly research.
3. **The organizational level:** To show that Public Relations has value to the organization, it must be clarified that effective communication programmes and functions contribute to organizational effectiveness.
4. **The societal level:** Organizations have an impact beyond their own bottom line. They also affect other organizations, individuals, and publics in society. As a result, organizations cannot be said to be effective unless they also are socially responsible; and Public Relations can be said to have value when it contributes to the social responsibility of organizations.

According to [11] “the programme level has been the traditional focus of evaluative research in Public Relations. However, effective communication programmes may or may not contribute to organizational effectiveness; many operate independently of the organization’s mission and goals”. This means that Public Relations effectiveness at the programme level alone cannot ensure the value of Public Relations at the organizational level, although effectiveness at the programme level is the starting point of effectiveness. Thus, for Public Relations to have value to organizations, Public Relations professionals need to consider higher levels of analysis in effectiveness—relationship management with strategic publics—than short-term outputs or outcomes at the programme level.

Based on the findings of the Excellence study, [12] suggested that the value of Public Relations is in “relationships” that an organization develops and maintains with strategic publics. This is because organizations become effective when achieving their goals; by means of quality relationships, organization can achieve goals because they choose goals valued by strategic publics [10,11].

In addition to the focus on the value of Public Relations at the organizational level, Public Relations scholars have also extended the value of Public Relations to society in general based on the relationship concept [13]. Practitioners generally have attempted to prove the bottom-line value of Public Relations in terms of the effect of favourable reputation on the organization’s financial performance, assuming the viable role of Public Relations in creating favorable reputation [10].

In contrast, some scholars suggested that Public Relations obtains value by helping organizations reduce organizational costs, associated with issues, crises, regulation, litigation, and bad publicity, by means of cultivating quality relationships with strategic publics [11]. Likewise, many Public Relations theorists have suggested that organization-public relationships affect organizational reputation [14, 10-11]. For instance, [11] explained the results of the IABC Excellence study:

In a nutshell, we show that the value of public relations comes from the relationships that communicators develop and maintain with publics. We show that reputation is a product of relationships and that the quality of relationships and reputation result more from the behavior of the organization than from the messages that communicators disseminate.”

It is important to understand how organizations define their success because they place more value on the functions that contribute to that success.

CONCLUSION

The interest of every organization is to function effectively and achieve its primary goal and objectives. It is obvious that organization cannot function effectively without effective communication which is the major function of Public Relations. Therefore, Public Relations roles are very critical toward enhancing effective organization. Organizations are managed with a number of skills and strategies to ensure functionality; these strategies are more of Public Relations strategies applied with communication skills. These include crisis management strategies: social responsibility/community relations tool, corporate social responsibility tool, synergistic communication strategy, consent engineering tool; the management strategies: total quality management tool, consultative decision-making tool, etc; communication

strategies: propaganda, publicity, advertising tools; Relation strategies: opinion poll, negotiation, mediation, inquiry, conciliation, arbitration, mass media tools etc. [15].

Lots of Public Relations/communication scholars [15-22] believe and have mentioned these strategies/tools one way or the other attributing them to Public Relations tools. This implies that, Public Relations as a management concept and function is very critical to the effectiveness of organization [15].

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