The Role of Public Relations in Management And Its Contribution to Organizational and Societal Effectiveness

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Speech delivered in Taipei, Taiwan, May 12, 2001

Public relations today is a complex profession practiced by hundreds of thousands of people around the world. Some public relations professionals are employed by a single organization. Others work for public relations firms that have many organizations as clients. Public relations people work for businesses, government agencies, professional and trade associations, nonprofit charities, schools and universities, hospitals, hotels, and many more. They work for large and small organizations. Many public relations people work entirely within their own country; others practice their profession on a global basis.

I have observed public relations practice around the world as a scholarly researcher for over 35 years. In general, I believe five trends are occurring. First, public relations is becoming a profession with a scholarly body of knowledge. Second, public relations is becoming a management function rather than only a technical communication function. Third, public relations practitioners are becoming strategic counselors who are less preoccupied with publicity in the mass media than their predecessors. Fourth, public relations has moved from a profession practiced only by white males to a profession with a female majority and with practitioners of many racial and ethnic backgrounds. Finally, I believe that almost all public relations practice today is global rather than confined to the borders of only one company.

Historians disagree about when public relations was first practiced, who practiced it first, and where it was practiced originally. Traditionally, Americans have claimed that they invented public relations; but Chinese scholars have pointed out that Chinese rulers practiced something resembling contemporary public relations over 5,000 years ago. Even though the first rudimentary practice of public relations may have begun thousands of years ago, public relations has been an occupation only for about 100 years.

It is only recently, however, that public relations has developed from an occupation to a profession in many countries of the world. That is, public relations has been something that people did to earn a salary; but it has not

been a discipline for which they studied to prepare for the work. There was no formal education in public relations. There was no scholarly research that provided a body of knowledge that could be taught. And there were no recognized standards for effective practice nor ethical principles for the moral practice of public relations. Most public relations practitioners could be described as what the Canadian public relations practitioner Michel Dumas called "improvised practitioners"--people who practiced public relations without theoretical knowledge of why they practiced as they did and why public relations is important for an organization.

Public relations also has been an occupation defined more by its techniques than by its theory. Most public relations practitioners have been the masters of a number of techniques. They have known how to secure media coverage, prepare press releases, write speeches, write and design brochures, produce video news releases, lobby representatives in Congress, stage a special event, or prepare an annual report.

In addition to being an occupation defined by techniques, public relations practitioners also have devoted most of their efforts to communicating through the mass media. Most have believed that they could affect large numbers of people through publicity alone. The organizations that employ public relations people also have believed that they could get massive numbers of people to behave in ways the organizations wanted by creating a good "image" in the media.

Today, however, the most sophisticated practitioners have begun to understand that people exercise control over how they use the media to a much greater extent than the media control the behavior of people who use the media. At the same time, neither public relations practitioners nor the media create the powerful impressions that usually are called "images." Images are nothing more than what people think, and most people think for themselves. They construct their own thoughts--their own images--about organizations.

Public relations practitioners are most likely to help members of publics construct positive images about the organization when they counsel the organization to behave in ways that people outside the organization want. In other words, sophisticated public relations practitioners now understand that they must serve the interests of people affected by organizations if they also are to serve the interests of the organizations that employ them.

Today, therefore, the organizations that employ individual public relations practitioners or public relations firms have begun to recognize public relations as an important management function. They recognize that public

relations has value to an organization because it helps to balance the self interest of the organization with the interests of people who are affected by the organization or who have the power to affect the organization--people that I call "publics."

As public relations has become recognized as a management function, however, its move toward greater status has been affected by the large numbers of women who have entered the profession. In the United States, approximately 75 percent of all public relations students and 60 percent of working professionals are women. Women traditionally have been excluded from management roles in the United States, and researchers have found that members of the new female majority in public relations have had difficulty being recognized as public relations managers as well as technicians. If public relations is to continue its growth as a management function, therefore, researchers must identify ways to empower women public relations practitioners.

In addition to the change in the gender of public relations practitioners in the United States, organizations also face increased racial-ethnic diversity in their environments. Publics in the United States now come from many non-European racial and ethnic groups. Multinational organizations also have publics from around the world. Public relations practitioners, therefore, have had to develop principles of multicultural public relations to communicate with their diverse publics both domestically and globally.

Public relations cannot be practiced as a profession rather than an occupation and a management function rather a set of techniques unless practitioners have a body of knowledge based on scholarly research available to them. In the last 25 years, a small group of public relations scholars, first in the United States, and now throughout the world, has made remarkable progress in developing a comprehensive theory of public relations that puts public relations on a par with recognized professions such as law, medicine, or education. At first public relations researchers borrowed heavily from other disciplines such as communication and other social and behavioral sciences. Now, however, they have developed their own body of research and theory.

Since 1985, I have headed a team of six researchers who have conducted research, funded by the International Association of Business Communicators Research Foundation, on the characteristics of excellent public relations departments and on how such departments make their organizations more effective. We have

studied over 300 organizations in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom to identify how organizations practice public relations in an excellent way--practices that are most likely to make organizations effective.

The result is a theory that consists of several generic principles that seem to apply throughout the world, although we believe that these concepts must be applied differently in different cultures and political-economic systems. The theory also applies in different organizational settings such as government agencies, corporations, nonprofit organizations, and associations. In short, the theory offers a conceptual framework for a professional culture of public relations, which, with appropriate applications and revisions in different organizational and national cultures, is a fundamental component of effective management throughout the world.

The Value of Public Relations

My colleagues and I began our study of excellent public relations by addressing the research question posed in a Request for Proposals issued by the IABC Research Foundation: How, why, and to what extent does communication contribute to the achievement of organizational objectives? When we began the research, however, the members of the research team realized that the one question posed by the IABC Foundation--the effectiveness question--was not enough. We realized that many organizations do not manage communication programs strategically and that these programs do not make their organizations more effective. Thus, we added what we called the excellence question: How must public relations be practiced and the communication function organized for it to contribute the most to organizational effectiveness?

As we developed a theory of the value of public relations, we also looked beyond the value of public relations to organizations alone. We also believed that public relations should have value to the larger society as well as to specific organizations. To determine this value, we looked at theories of business social responsibility, ethics, and conflict resolution to identity the value of public relations to society as well as to organizations.

To study the value of excellent public relations, we first reviewed previous research on excellence in management and searched for explanations of what it means for an organization to be effective. We learned from organizational theory that an organization is effective if it achieves the goals it sets for itself.

Organizational theorists also have pointed out that organizations, like people, do not exist alone in the world. Organizations exist in an environment, and that environment consists of many groups--many strategic publics. If people had no relationships with family, neighbors, friends, enemies, or co-workers, they would have no need to take anyone but themselves into account. But people do not live alone, and they must coordinate their behavior with people who affect them and are affected by them.

Organizations also have relationships--within their "family" of employees and with communities, governments, consumers, investors, and the media. Organizational theorists call these groups' strategic constituencies. Public relations theorists call them stakeholders or publics. Strategic constituencies or publics make up the environment of an organization. These publics can support or oppose the goals of an organization. They also want organizations to pursue goals that are important to them but not necessarily to the organization--such as jobs for workers, safe products, less pollution, and a safe community. Publics have a stake in organizations, and they attempt to influence the missions and goals of these organizations.

Organizations are effective, therefore, when they choose and achieve goals that are important to their self-interest as well as to the interests of strategic publics in the environment. Public relations departments help organizations become more effective by building <u>relationships</u> with <u>publics</u> that affect the organizations or are affected by the organization's activities.

Although an organization with good relationships with its strategic publics may have to incorporate the goals of those publics into its mission, in the long run it will be able to pursue its own goals more effectively than it would if it ignored or fought the goals of publics. As a result, good public relations helps an organization make money by allowing it to sell products and services to satisfied customers, secure funds from constituents or donors, or expand its manufacturing or sales operations. Public relations also saves money for the organization that might be spent because of opposition in the community, lawsuits, regulations, boycotts, or training of employees to replace those who leave.

When the public relations department helps an organization build good relationships with publics, it has value to society as well as to the organization. Organizations practice social responsibility when they take the interests of publics into account as well as their self-interests. When an organization ignores or opposes the interests

of publics, publics typically organize into activist groups to confront and challenge the organization. The result is conflict. Public relations serves society, then, by working with publics to resolve the conflicts that tear societies apart.

In many Asian countries, publics may not be as activist or confrontational as they are in Western countries, but they probably exist in different forms and act in ways that are consistent with the culture and political system of a country. An important goal of our research on public relations outside the United States has been to identify forms that activism takes in different countries. The form activism takes may differ, but we believe that publics form around organizations in all cultures and that they find ways to express their dissatisfaction with organizations that do not serve the interests of publics and to support organizations that do.

The research that my colleagues and I have conducted for the IABC Excellence study has identified nine general principles of excellent public relations that the organizations we have studied use to build better relationships with their publics. The increasing practice of each of these principles represents an important trend in the practice of public relations in the United States. Four of these characteristics are especially important, and in the rest of this speech I will explain each briefly.

Excellent Public Relations is Strategic

The idea that public relations should be strategic has recently become popular among public relations practitioners. The International Public Relations Association, the Public Relations Society of America, and the International Association of Business Communicators have held seminars and issued publications on strategic public relations. Most of these discussions of strategic public relations consist of references to the idea that public relations should be planned, managed by objectives, evaluated, and connected in some way to organizational objectives.

In the Excellence study, we took the idea of strategic public relations further by examining scholarly research on strategic management and identifying the role of public relations in that process. Organizations engage in strategic management when they look at the opportunities available in their environment and the extent to which they have characteristics that allow them to capitalize on those opportunities.

Two words, <u>mission</u> and <u>environment</u> permeate theories and research on strategic management. Together, they suggest that organizations must make long-term strategic choices that are feasible in their environments. In

most theories of strategic management, however, the idea of the environment is general and vague. Public relations theory, however, helps managers make sense of their environment, because a large part of the environment essentially consists of the stakeholder publics that are familiar to public relations managers.

Strategic management theorists distinguish between two kinds of environments--the economic, or task, environment and the social, or institutional, environment. The task environment consists of such groups as consumers, competitors, suppliers, and creditors. They provide the organization with necessary resources and purchase or use the organization's products and services. The social or institutional environment consists of publics that want to help determine the mission of an organization--such as governments, communities, stockholders, employees, and activist groups.

The difference between the economic and social environments helps us to distinguish between marketing and public relations, two management functions that often are confused, especially in countries where public relations is new. The marketing function essentially works with the economic environment and the public relations function with the social environment of organizations.

Marketing helps the organization <u>exchange</u> products and services with consumer <u>markets</u>. Publics are different from markets, however. Markets consist of <u>individuals</u> who purchase goods and services. Publics consist of <u>social groups</u> who respond to the consequences that organizations have on them and in turn try to <u>participate</u> in management decisions in ways that serve their interests.

Because of this difference between public relations and marketing, we found in the IABC study that excellent public relations departments kept the two functions separate. Public relations professionals are experts in using communication to build relationships. Therefore, they can and do work with marketing departments to build relationships with consumers—with markets. However, if public relations professionals are placed entirely in the marketing department they typically communicate only with markets and not with publics. The result is that the organization loses the ability to build relationships with its social environment as well as with its economic environment.

Originally, scholars of strategic management conceptualized the environment in negative terms--as a constraint on an organization's decisions and mission. Harvard University scholar Michael Porter, however, has

pointed out that the environment can provide a strategic advantage to an organization. For example, Porter found that multinational corporations with strong competitors in the economic environment of their home country compete effectively in other countries because of the pressure to excel at home. Porter also pointed out that corporations pressured by government or customers to improve the quality and safety of products or to reduce pollution have an advantage in other countries because they know how to work with publics that constrain their competitors.

A Slovenian colleague, Dejan Vercic, and I have extended Porter's idea to include relationships with stakeholder publics in the social environment. For example, we believe that a corporation that successfully solves its pollution problems, usually when pressured by environmental publics, will gain an advantage over competing organizations that refuse to collaborate with environmental activists to solve its pollution problems. For a business corporation, bad relationships with such publics as stockholders, employees, communities, government, and the media cost the organization money. Likewise, a government agency that responds well to pressures from its constituents will be more likely to gain support from those publics as it competes for limited public funding.

At this point, you might want to ask what public relations practitioners do, specifically, when they participate in strategic management. In the IABC Excellence study, we found that participating in strategic management was the single characteristic that most distinguished excellent public relations from less-excellent public relations functions. In the organizations with the most-valuable public relations departments, the senior public relations manager--usually the head of the public relations department--was considered to be one of the most powerful managers in the organization or had access to the most powerful managers. Sociologists call this powerful group of managers the dominant coalition of the organization. It consists of the people who make the final decisions for an organization.

In excellent public relations departments, the senior public relations manager was part of or easily could make contact with the members of the dominant coalition. When the members of a dominant coalition discuss strategic, long-term decisions, different managers (such as marketing, financial, or human resources managers) provide different kinds of insight into the decision. In a real sense, managers from different management disciplines recognize different problems for the organization to solve and propose different solutions to those problems. Each of these perspectives is important if an organization is to understand all of the consequences of its decisions.

The senior public relations person brings the problems and views of publics--both employee publics and external publics--to the attention of other managers when crucial decisions are made. The senior public relations person is able to point out the consequences that decisions such as closing a manufacturing plant, introducing a new product, or changing labor relations will have on publics. He or she makes it possible, through communication programs with publics, for the people affected by these consequences to be aware of them and to discuss them formally or informally with management so that they have an opportunity to influence the final decision that affects them.

Public relations practitioners identify consequences of decisions and the presence of publics by engaging in environmental scanning and issues management. Environmental scanning means that they do research and talk to community leaders, leaders of activist groups, or government officials to find out who the publics are and what issues these publics might create. They then help the organization manage these issues by communicating personally or through media with the publics who create them.

In the IABC Excellence study, therefore, we found that the most effective public relations departments participated in the making of overall strategic decisions in organizations. Less-effective departments generally had the less-central role of disseminating messages about strategic decisions made by others in the organization. By participating in organizational decisions, excellent public relations departments were in a position to identify the stakeholders who would be affected by organizational decisions or who would affect those decisions. Once they had identified stakeholders, excellent public relations departments strategically developed programs to communicate with them. They conducted formative research to identify potential issues and define objectives for programs to communicate with the stakeholders, they specified measurable objectives for the communication programs, and they used both formal and informal methods to evaluate whether the objectives had been accomplished. Less-excellent departments conducted no formative or evaluative research and generally had only vague objectives that were difficult to measure.

Figure 1 displays this role of an excellent public relations department in the overall strategic management process of an organization and the nature of strategic management of public relations programs. The central concepts in Figure 1 are Management Decisions at the top,

Stakeholders and Publics on the right, and Relationship Outcomes on the left. Connecting management and publics are the consequences that the behavior of each has on the other—the interdependence between an organization and its environment that creates the need for public relations.

The double arrows between management decisions and stakeholders at the upper right of Figure 1 show that strategic decision-makers of an organization should interact with stakeholders through the public relations function because their decisions have consequences on publics or because the organization needs supportive relationships with stakeholders in order to implement decisions and achieve organizational goals. Stakeholders also might seek a relationship with an organization in order to seek a consequence from the organization to solve a problem it recognizes—such as an environmental group that seeks a reduction in pollution from a chemical plant or nuclear laboratory. Thus the consequences of organizational decisions (and behaviors resulting from those decisions) define who the stakeholders of an organization are and, therefore, the stakeholders with whom the organization needs a relationship.

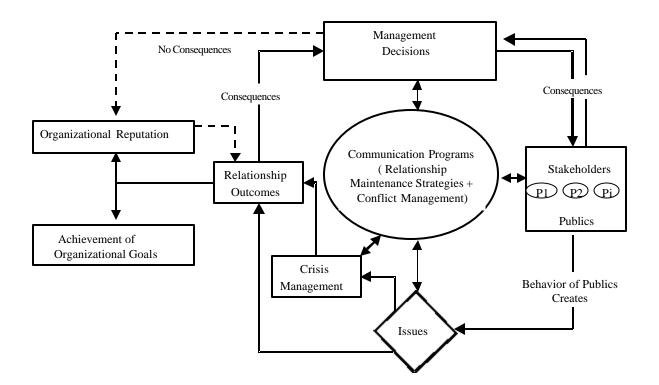


Figure 1. Model of Strategic Management of Public Relations

I define stakeholders as broad categories of people who might be affected by management decisions or affect those decisions—such as employees or community residents. When a strategic public relations manager scans the environment, therefore, his or her first step should be to think broadly in terms of stakeholder categories. Then he or she should use a theory of publics to identify and segment active, passive, and latent publics from the nonpublics that might also be present in the stakeholder category.

It is important to segment active publics, because active publics typically make issues out of the consequences of organizational decisions. This behavior may be individual or it may be collective—when members of publics organize into activist groups. Sometimes publics react negatively to harmful consequences of an organization's behaviors—such as pollution or discrimination. At other times, they act positively to try to secure a behavior from an organization that has useful consequences for them—such as a community public that wants cleaner streams. At still other times, publics collaborate with organizations to secure consequences of benefit to

both. Figure 1 then shows that publics that cannot stop the consequences that harm them or secure the consequences that benefit them generally make issues out of the consequences.

Issues, in turn, can become crises if they are not handled well. When issues or potential issues are discussed and negotiated with publics, the result is improved relationships with publics.

At the center of the strategic processes described in Figure 1 is an oval representing communication programs—programs to build and maintain relationships with publics and to manage conflict with publics.

Communication with potential publics is needed before decisions are made by strategic decision-makers, when publics have formed but have not created issues or crises, and during the issue and crisis stages. Communication programs at the latter two stages are generally termed "issues management" and "crisis communication" by public relations practitioners. What Figure 1 illustrates, however, is that communication with publics before decisions are made is most effective in resolving issues and crises because it helps managers to make decisions that are less likely to produce consequences that publics make into issues and crises. If a public relations staff does not communicate with publics until an issue or crisis occurs, the chance of resolving the conflict is slim.

The center oval in Figure 1 depicts the strategic management of public relations programs themselves—as opposed to the participation of public relations in the overall strategic management of the organization.

Communication programs should begin with formative research, then develop achievable and measurable objectives, implement the program, and end with evaluation of whether the objectives have been met.

The final path in Figure 1 can be found in the dotted lines from "Management Decisions" to "Organizational Reputation" to "Relationship Outcomes"—a path labeled "No Consequences." This path captures the approach practiced by public relations practitioners who believe that positive messages about management decisions—mostly disseminated through the mass media—can by themselves create a positive organizational reputation. Such a path would produce what we call a "reputational relationship." We believe that publicity about management decisions can create such a reputational relationship between an organization and the audience exposed to the messages, but only to a limited extent. We have labeled the dotted line "No Consequences" because we believe that organizations have reputational relationships only with people for whom the organization has no consequences. We describe such people as "audiences" because they are not truly "publics." As such, these

audiences have little importance to an organization. As soon as an organization or public has consequences on the other, it begins to develop an involving behavioral relationship rather than a low-involvement reputational relationship. It is at that point that a group of people becomes an active and strategic public rather than a passive audience.

Issues Management and Crisis Communication

Public relations practitioners in many organizations and public relations firms view issues management and crisis communication as specialized public relations programs, rather than as integral parts of the overall role of public relations in strategic management. Typical practitioners conduct normal public relations programs such as media relations and product publicity. They may even have crisis communication plans ready in advance, plans that emphasize the logistics of communication during a crisis rather than a policy that specifies what to do about the problem that produced an issue or a crisis.

In contrast, our theory of strategic public relations views all public relations as issues management. Public relations professionals identify potential issues by scanning the environment for publics likely to be affected by the consequences of organizational decisions. Then they "manage issues" by participating in the management decisions that create the consequences that publics are likely to make an issue of. Research on crises shows that a majority of all crises are caused by management decisions rather than by accidents or natural disasters. As a result, most crises occur because management did not communicate with strategic publics about potential issues <u>before</u> the publics created an issue and eventually a crisis.

I recommend four principles of crisis communication. The first principle actually applies before a crisis occurs. That principle is:

• The Relationship Principle. Organizations can withstand both issues and crises better if they have established good, long-term relationships with publics who are at risk from decisions and behaviors of the organization. This principle, for example, has been used in the program of the U.S. chemical industry called Responsible Care—in which chemical companies have avoided crises such as the Bhopal accident in India by developing good relationships with publics in the communities where chemical plants are located.

Organizations can work to avoid crises, but crises sometimes still occur—especially accidents, natural disasters, and product tampering. The next three principles apply when a crisis occurs.

- The Accountability Principle. Organizations should accept responsibility for a crisis even if it
 was not their fault. Johnson and Johnson, for example, accepted responsibility for poison placed in
 Tylenol capsules, even though someone else put the poison there.
- The Disclosure Principle. At the time of a crisis, an organization must disclose all that it knows about the crisis or problem involved. If it does not know what happened, then it must promise full disclosure once it has additional information. This has been the case at the Brookhaven National Laboratory in the United States, for example, which regularly discloses all information about the leak of radioactive Tritium from a nuclear reactor into the groundwater and about pollution in a river whose source is on the laboratory's grounds.
- The Symmetrical Communication Principle. At the time of a crisis, an organization must consider the public interest to be at least as important as its own. Public safety, for example, is at least as important as profits. Therefore, the organization has no choice other than to engage in true dialogue with publics and to practice socially responsible behavior when a crisis occurs.

The principle of symmetrical communication, however, requires further explanation. It is an essential component at all times in excellence public relations program. Symmetrical communication is mandatory at the time of a crisis and essential at all other times. It was our second principle of excellent public relations.

Excellent Public Relations is Symmetrical

Public relations managers who participate in strategic management are located in a position where they can help the organization identify the strategic publics with which it needs to build a relationship. The principle of symmetrical communication describes the communication strategy that is most effective in building a long-term relationship that satisfies both the organization and its publics.

About 25 years ago, I began a program of research to identify the most typical ways that organizations practice public relations. I call these four typical types of practice "models" of public relations. Extensive research

has shown that one of these models, the two-way symmetrical, is more effective than the others either when used alone or in combination with a two-way asymmetrical model. Other research suggests that model also is inherently ethical and socially responsible, whereas the other models make ethical and socially responsible behavior extremely difficult.

Both of the first two models see public relations as a monologue. The <u>press agentry</u> model describes public relations programs whose sole purpose is getting favorable publicity for an organization in the mass media. It is common in the work of publicists who promote sports, movie stars, products, politicians, or senior managers.

The <u>public information</u> model is similar to press agentry because it too is a one-way model that sees public relations only as the dissemination of information. With the public information model, an organization uses "journalists-in-residence"--public relations practitioners who act as though they are journalists--to disseminate relatively truthful information through the mass media and controlled media such as newsletters, brochures, and direct mail. Although information communicated through this model is truthful, it usually does not reveal the whole truth--only "facts" that the organization chooses to release.

Both the press agentry and public information models describe communication programs that are not based on research and strategic planning. Press agentry and public information also are "asymmetrical" or imbalanced models--that is, they try to change the behavior of publics but not of the organization. They try to make the organization look good either through promotional hype (press agentry) or by disseminating only favorable information (public information).

Public relations practitioners who take a professional approach base their communication programs on more sophisticated and effective models. The two-way asymmetrical model uses research to develop messages that are likely to persuade strategic publics to behave as the organization wants. Thus, the model sees public relations as a dialogue--albeit a dialogue dominated by the organization. Because the two-way asymmetrical model uses research on the attitudes of publics, it more often achieves its objectives than do the press agentry or public information models.

Two way asymmetrical public relations is a selfish model, however, because the organization that uses it believes it is right (and the public wrong) and that any change needed to resolve a conflict must come from the

public and not from the organization. The model seems to work reasonably well when the organization has little conflict with a public and the public stands to benefit from a change in its behavior. For example, even though members of a target public for a health campaign may resist changes in behavior to prevent a heart attack or AIDS, they do benefit from changes advocated by the campaign.

The fourth model, the two-way symmetrical, describes a model of public relations that is based on research and that uses communication to manage conflict and collaborate with strategic publics. Because the two-way symmetrical model bases public relations on negotiation and compromise, it does not force the organization to make the choice of whether it is right on particular issues. Rather, two-way symmetrical public relations allows the question of what is right to be settled by negotiation--since nearly every side to a conflict--such as nuclear power, abortion, or birth control--believes its position to be right.

The Excellence project and my research that preceded it provide evidence that the two-way symmetrical model makes organizations more effective in building relationships with publics. Two types of research have been done: on the ethics of public relations and on the effectiveness of the models in achieving public relations objectives. Essentially, this research shows that the two-way symmetrical model is the most ethical approach to public relations and that ethical public relations also is the model most effective in meeting organizational goals.

The two-way symmetrical model clarifies the problem of how to make public relations ethical because it defines ethics as a <u>process</u> of public relations rather than an agreement on a specific decision. As a process, symmetrical public relations provides a forum for dialogue and discussion on issues for which people with different values generally come to different conclusions. As long as the dialogue is structured according to ethical rules, the outcome should be ethical--although not usually one that fits the value system of any competing party perfectly.

A public relations manager who participates in strategic management processes makes it possible for publics to engage in discussion and negotiation with an organization that affects them. The principle of symmetry means that the values and problems of both organizations and publics are equally important. Two-way dialogue, therefore, makes public relations inherently ethical and helps to make the organization more socially responsible.

An excellent example of the two-way symmetrical model can be found in a public relations program of the Chemical Manufacturer's Association in the United States called Responsible Care, which I mentioned previously.

After the accident at an insecticide plant in Bhopal, India, the U.S. chemical industry had great difficulty assuring communities around chemical plants that these plants were safe. Environmental and health groups also were concerned about the danger of chemical waste and the effects of chemicals on workers and consumers. Activist groups also attacked chemical companies because they produced such military products as napalm and Agent Orange.

After years of ignoring or fighting these groups, chemical companies and their trade association, the Chemical Manufacturer's Association, began to collaborate with these active publics. They formed community advisory panels. They opened their plants to visitors. They set up telephone "hot lines" that people could call for information when they thought there had been an accident. They openly answered questions from journalists who wanted information about the companies and their products. Chemical companies also worked with government to clean up sites where toxic waste has been disposed. It was not surprising, then, that we identified the CMA and a chemical company as two of the most-excellent organizations in the IABC study.

Excellent Public Relations is Diverse

Earlier, I said that public relations in the United States has moved from a profession dominated by white men to a profession with a female majority. I also said that public relations departments are hiring people from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds as the environments of organizations have become more diverse.

We found that excellent public relations departments in our study are as likely to have women in senior management positions as men and that they are at least attempting to employ people from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds. Organizations do so because they have learned that diversity in their public relations department makes the organization more effective.

Psychologist Karl Weick has developed a principle of <u>requisite variety</u> that explains why public relations departments should strive for diversity. The principle states that organizations need to have as much variety-diversity--among their employees as there is in their environment to be able to interact effectively with that environment. Or, as a senior manager in a chemical company we interviewed in the Excellence study said: "If every member of our publics were white men who had worked for the <u>New York Times</u>, then that would be the only kind of people we would need in our public relations department."

Excellent public relations departments, therefore, try to employ public relations practitioners from diverse genders and cultural backgrounds. They also expect these practitioners to be <u>multicultural</u> communicators--public relations practitioners who are open to people different from themselves and who have the ability to learn from people of different backgrounds. Multinational organizations, especially, need this kind of diversity in their public relations staffs so that they can work effectively in many countries.

Excellent Public Relations is Global

Among U. S. public relations practitioners today, the slogan initiated by environmentalist Rene' Dubos, "Think globally, act locally," has become nearly axiomatic. Practitioners use the slogan to make the point that all organizations have global relationships. Even a small, seemingly local business may have competition from other countries and purchase supplies from an international supplier. Nevertheless, the "act locally" part of the slogan suggests that most organizations still implement global strategies at the local level.

Given this trend toward global public relations, both practitioners and scholars have begun to ask whether there are or can be global principles of public relations: Can public relations programs in different countries be standardized or must different, localized, programs be developed for each country--or indeed for different regions within a country with different cultures? The question is especially important for multinational organizations--those that work in more than one country or have publics in more than one country. The question also is important for public relations education and for the development of a global public relations profession: Can the same principles be taught in different countries and included in a body of knowledge that can be used throughout the world?

Emerging out of this discussion seems to be a consensus that the ideal model for multicultural public relations lies somewhere in the middle between the position that public relations is the same and the position that public relations is different in every country. Two scholars of international management, Derick Brinkerhoff and Marcus Ingle, called this middle approach the use of generic principles and specific applications. That means that public relations programs in different cultures and political systems should be based on the same basic principles. In particular, I believe that public relations should be based on the principles I have just described--strategic, symmetrical, and diverse.

At the same time, however, I believe that public relations practitioners must apply these principles differently in different countries. In Taiwan, for example, the principle of symmetry will be applied through the tradition of guangxi:--a type of relationship that is quite different from Western relationships. Because of the importance of relationships in Asian countries, it is indeed possible that symmetrical public relations will be easier to apply here than in the United States.

Multinational public relations practitioners seem to agree on this approach of Think Global, Act Local. Scholarly research on the approach is only beginning, however. With my colleagues, Dejan Vercic, Larissa Grunig, and Robert Wakefield, I have done the first research to develop such a global theory. We have hypothesized that the characteristics of excellent public relations from the IABC Excellence study also will be generic principles of global public relations.

We have hypothesized also that six specific variables must be taken into account when the generic principles are applied in different settings: 1) the political system, 2) the economic system, 3) culture, including language, 4) the extent of activism, 5) the level of development, and 6) the media system.

In the first research on the generic-specific propositions, we conducted a case study of the PRISTOP public relations firm in Slovenia that has made the principles of excellence the knowledge base for its practice. This case study analyzed, in particular, how the change in the Slovenian political-economic system since it became independent from Yugoslavia affected public relations practice and how the generic principles were affected by cultural characteristics. We identified several examples of how Slovenians have adapted the generic principles to Slovenia and found evidence that these principles have indeed been effective in Slovenia.

In conclusion, I would like to ask for your reaction to the idea that the basic principles of public relations should be the same in Taiwan as in the United States. If you agree that ultimately we should share a similar body of knowledge, then I hope that in my short visit to Taipei that I can learn from you so that the common principles that we develop will be based on multicultural sharing and understanding. I truly believe that our profession of public relations will be of greatest value to organizations and societies if it is based on the values and worldviews of many cultures.