

Public Relations Among the Functions of Management: A New Zealand Perspective

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Public Relations in New Zealand lives in a tension somewhere between where it is and where it would like to be. Its relationship to management functions currently varies according to two major variables. One is how public relations defined. The other is who defines it. These two factors have had a direct bearing on where the function is placed in the company or organization. However, changing demands in the social, commercial and media environment are having a direct impact on public relation practice in New Zealand. Academics propose the field should be viewed as a management function, as a relationship builder, as a conscience to the organization, but the reality of the marketplace is a more powerful determinant of the role of public relations. Given this apparent yawning chasm between practitioners and academics and the reality of business, this study was designed to ask senior managers from the country's 200 largest companies how they view public relations. The study explores where public relations is placed in New Zealand business hierarchy, what perceptions business leaders have about public relation and where these senior managers are deriving their opinions from.

Introduction

Changes in the NZ business environment such as the need for interactive communication processes, more careful consideration of the physical environment, fragmentation of audiences, convergence of media and an increased emphasis on the relationships required to do business are calling for new ways of managing and conducting business. Recently the government indicated that legislation would be introduced to make corporate social responsibility reporting compulsory. The percentage of LOHAS (people choosing a lifestyle of health and sustainability) has risen from 4% to 36% in two years with an expected acceleration. Migration and globalization have introduced new dynamics to business requiring a reexamination of reporting processes, customer care, supplier relationships, multicultural awareness and different ways of measuring business outcomes. NZ has the largest concentration of Pacific Island peoples living in one city in the world. NZ has a high pick up rate for technology. 85% of NZ homes have internet connection and the large majority of these are on broadband (Cisco Connected Consumer Survey, 2008).

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Currently however, old perceptions of PR still exist in the minds of NZ business leaders. One common perception of PR defines it primarily as media publicity. According to this view, PR is relegated to the fringes of business operation reporting to marketing. A second definition frames PR as strategic communication. This view holds PR as a senior management function with direct representation to the CEO. It might find itself standing in its own right as GM corporate communication or public affairs alongside legal counsel, the chief financial officer, marketing, strategic innovation, human resources and others or it could find itself included in the portfolio of one of these GMs. A third view holds that PR elements such as reputation management, media relations and relationship building are the responsibility of the CEO or MD. In this case there is reluctance to involve PR at any level. “The CEO does our media. If there’s a problem, we might call in a PR firm for advice but generally we do not see a need for PR.”

Approach

Data was gathered in two ways. 100 companies listed in the top 200 NZ companies (Management Magazine, Dec 2006) were phone interviewed to find out “Where public relations or communication was placed in the company” and “What is the relationship between PR and marketing?” 81 of the contacted companies responded to the short interview. In addition, 42 companies two from each of the 16 Deloitte’s categories together with the top ten companies, regardless of their category (See Table 1.) Cluster sampling (Babbie, 2004) was applied in a multistage process to achieve a distribution of companies throughout all levels of the 200 and to achieve a proportionate distribution of companies with head offices throughout New Zealand. 28 companies (66.7%) agreed to participate in the longer interviews

The response rates of 81% and 66.7% were very acceptable. Face to face interviewing regularly achieves response rates between 60 and 85% (Stewart, 2002). This research included data from eight of the top ten New Zealand companies. Despite the care taken in selection, there was an uneven distribution of respondents for the longer interviews however. The Primary Production section, a key sector in the New Zealand economy, contained three top ten companies all of whom declined to participate. The top telecommunications company in New Zealand (also in the top ten) was embroiled in controversy and did not participate either. Primary Resources, Food and Beverages, Transportation, and Retail/Wholesale and Distribution were well represented. Industrial Services, Communications and Media, Insurance, Automotive, and Primary Production were less well represented.

For the longer interviews, a total of 32 senior managers were interviewed including 8 CEOs, 4 Marketing GMs, 5 Chief Financial Officers, Legal Counsel or Strategic GMs and 15 Corporate or Public Affairs GMs. Of these, 24 were male, 8 were female. All of the females were in the Corporate or Public Affairs group. Three companies with female CEOs were included in the study but all declined to participate.

Some of the non-responses are worthy of comment because of their view of PR. One communications contact bluntly told the researcher “Our CEO does not believe in PR. So there’s no use interviewing him.” Another (receptionist) divulged that her company, “...was not keen for people to know that they employed PR people and since the CEO is new it would not be a good time to talk to him.” Three others had CEOs who were in a state of transition and could not be contacted. In two of these cases the communication function was with the legal counsel or secretary. Of the remaining invited respondents, some expressed openness to participate but became ‘busy’. Others either turned the research down immediately or did not return calls or emails. The reasons for these responses were not accessible but it is fair to say at a minimum, that they reflect a neutral or negative attitude towards PR and research on that subject conducted by this researcher.

The questions for the questionnaire and the interview were pre-tested by a group of senior managers, the PRINZ national executive and two academic researchers to check the conceptual and operational elements, question clarity and relevance to the purpose of the research. A semi- structured approach to interviewing was adopted. Set questions were declared ahead of time but used flexibly at interview time. The interviews generally started with some openers to warm up with such as top of mind responses to terms like ‘advertising’, ‘social responsibility’, ‘marketing’, ‘triple bottom line’. Structured questions such as, “What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of PR?” were followed up by exploratory funnel questioning about social responsibility, the place of PR in the company, whether additional PR resourcing would help achieve company objectives, and who has responsibility for such things as reputation management, crisis communication, community relations and tracking on changes in stakeholder opinions. Cross checking was achieved through the use of a questionnaire distributed before the interview. The interview was tape recorded and the interviewer took notes to put responses in context (Reinard, 1994) Feedback to subjects took the form of an Executive Summary to each participant and a PRINZ report back to senior practitioners.

For analyzing the data from the longer interviews, this study utilized symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969) to explore definitions and concepts with the goal of uncovering embedded sources of discourse creation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Notes and tapes were reviewed and analyzed to extract themes and common threads running through the interview responses. These were tested with PRINZ and academic researchers by way of discussion and challenging of assumptions and conclusions made by the interviewer.

Findings

NZ senior managers often define PR as 'gaining media publicity'.

According to this view, good coverage is good PR. This kind of PR is strongly associated with event management, launches, marketing PR, promotion of personalities and media management in times of crisis. When viewed this way, PR tends to be relegated to the role of marketing PR. 57% of the respondents reported that "PR reports to marketing. PR's job is to write good stories to support our products and to promote the brand." This kind of PR is regarded as fluffy and light weight and having a strong element of paid lying and spinning embedded in it. It involves promoting a positive view of the client not the whole view. This definition is most commonly embedded in the minds of CFOs, Legal Secretaries, Marketing GMs and Strategy GMs. In this case, PR is viewed as something which needs strong control by senior management (Haywood, 1998).

NZ PR suffers from the stigma of spin doctoring and paid lying largely derived from negative media coverage of high profile practitioners such as Alistair Campbell and companies like Enron, Union Carbide, and Mobil. More recent examples can easily be located on the Center for Media and Democracy's website, www.prwatch.com. NZ has its own stock of dark-siders some of whom have been popularized by NZ writers such as Nicky Hager in *Secret and Lies* (2000) and *The Hollow Men* (2006).

NZ business leaders despise these practices and do not want to be associated with this kind of PR. They have assigned them to the 'less credible practitioners' – an ill-defined group, perhaps only one or two under closer examination. Most senior managers will quickly brush this kind of PR aside as inappropriate in the modern world and associate it with the eighties or nineties along with long lunches, expense accounts and questionable publicity stunts. They see it as the responsibility of PRINZ and PR practitioners themselves to change the image by better practice and marketing of the profession. This can be achieved through 'really good practitioners who understand how PR needs to be done these days'.

PR is at the senior management table but it is not called PR

In 42/81 cases the communication function is at the senior management table under a variety of titles, GM, Director or VP of public affairs, communication, corporate affairs, community relations, investor relations, or internal communications. 30 sat alongside marketing but also had PR reporting to marketing at a lower level. 13 described their relationship as independent but overlapping or intertwined. This is an interesting finding for graduates from PR courses entering the industry. Junior level positions have a strong marketing element to their practice. In fact junior PR practitioners, whether in-house or consultancy, may even find themselves reporting directly to Marketing. But they will find work among NZ's larger companies. At least 73% of them employ PR at some level of their business operation.

When PR sits at the senior management table it espouses a model of communication characterized by integrity, transparency, integration and strategic alignment with the company goals.

‘PR is not in isolation from the business operation ... Good PR is integrated into the business plan. It is holistic – internal, media, external, stakeholders.’ This model of PR takes a broad view and is likely to be about consistent messaging, maintaining relationships with stakeholders, reputation management, maintaining accessibility to the media, linking to the strategic objectives of the company, listening to stakeholders and advocating your role to the other senior managers who ‘wonder what you do all day’. The characteristics of this approach bear some similarity to those found by van Ruler, Vercic, Butschi, & Flodin (2004) who identified four characteristics of European PR – reflective (of societal values and opinion); managerial (strategic); operational (tactical); and educative (influencing internal and external stakeholders).

Communication practitioners are well aware that their place at the senior management table needs to be reinforced by competent performance and strong advocacy of their role to the other senior managers. ‘You have to learn how to speak to the engineers who wonder what the Comms team does all day...operations needs to know that we are delivering value to the company as much as they are.’ It was about advocating for the Communications role not about additional staffing. Most companies did not think that adding to the 2.5 to 4 staff in their communications departments would necessarily improve company performance.

There was a clear emphasis on being strategic in communication. ‘Good PR is listening, understanding issues, distilling key points. Then preparing, planning and implementing key messages.’ It should be noted that measurement was not included in this manager’s comment. A PRINZ Survey on Measurement of PR in New Zealand (April, 2004) found that only 45% of private companies in New Zealand link communication evaluation to their financial bottom line and less than 5% of PR budgets was spent on measurement. But the sentiment clearly aligns with the priority set by CEOs and other senior managers on alignment with company goals.

There was a strong theme of relationship building based on open communication over the long term. ‘Good PR is transparent communication. It involves trust, building credibility over time. It’s harder in politics where it is more incestuous but in the corporate world you can play hard but it only works once ... You are judged on the quality of your communication. The internet has changed this. It is a kind of ‘public court’. Information is too easily available for concealment to occur. Trust is built over time by supplying information for the benefit of the public and the company.’ This represents ethical pragmatism. Relationships are needed to do business. Credibility of the participants and trust between them are at the heart of relationships that work. Transparent communication over time builds both credibility and trust. Because information is easily accessible these days, you can’t risk getting caught out trying to hide or twist information.

There was a strong rejection of one way communication in favor of two way interaction. 'Best practice enables quality dialogue ... involves integrity and two way relationships ... being an honest, reliable, two way gateway. You have to be a reliable source of information ... one way communication is so nineties.' This constitutes strong support for two way symmetric communication. Examples were provided of attempts to incorporate more poorly resourced groups into the communication process (for example, indigenous groups). Whether or not this reflects what actually happens is worth further investigation however. Some New Zealand PR researchers contend that two way symmetric communication is not practical because of the imbalance of power between the participants (Leitch & Neilson, 2001; Roper, 2005). The fact that several respondents defined good PR as 'managing expectations of stakeholders' would suggest that the participants reflected a strongly business orientated view of communication rather than a truly symmetrical approach.

Where the **Marketing** GM has PR included in their portfolio, PR will find itself serving the interests of marketing – providing publicity to support products and personalities, stories and arguments (preferably third party endorsement) to justify company practices and place products and services in a favorable light. Consultants may be called in to help out with specialist areas such as government relations or crisis management. 'I was taught that PR is communication manipulated my marketers to get their message to the market or to get journalists writing about you. PR people haven't done much to alter that perception. It is seen as a soft area companies can opt in an out of over time – like HR. They are a by-product that can be taken care of by management.' One Marketing GM referred to the pressure coming from his parent company in the USA to 'use more PR because it's cheaper than advertising and has more cut through these days.' The marketers all saw PR as serving the 'engine room' - marketing. Most acknowledged the role PR can play in working the ground for them. Some recognized that PR could have a more strategic role in stakeholder management but tended to regret that this had not happened much in their company. This view of PR did not tend to mention internal audiences very much and did not make much of the need for relationships with local government, suppliers, and local communities except in terms of their potential buying power.

CEOs were unequivocal in advocating for good reputation. But they were not convinced that PR was the way to achieve it.

27% believed they themselves were the only person who should speak for the organization and they did not see the need for communication staff except for specialized support in times of crisis or when they needed specialist help – 'something like using legal services'. All eight CEOs strongly emphasized the importance of good performance as the basis for reputation rather than 'good PR'. 'Good reputation speaks for itself ... you can't promote a reputation that doesn't exist ... you should be in the press when you have something worthwhile to say not just for the sake of profile.' They strongly rejected the 'smoke and mirrors' approach in favour of integrity

based PR. Their reasons for this were largely pragmatic – ‘New Zealand is a small place ... people have long memories ... you can’t hide these days because of easy access to information ... it makes sense to work openly with people. It’s all about relationships over the long term.’

Some CEOs valued strategic communication where it could ‘provide informed comment (to Government) ... enhance and protect our reputation ... secure fair representation in the media ... provide honest, timely, communication and say some things that are hard to say ...’ On the whole these comments reflected a desire to use communication to deliver business outcomes – but not at any price. ‘Providing informed comment to Government’ is a toned down version of lobbying, a deliberate attempt to be collaborative and low key rather than confrontational and high profile. ‘Securing fair representation’ contrasts with wanting to have the company’s story prevail. ‘Saying things that are hard to say’ indicates a willingness to make difficult confessions. Transparent communication to build trust and to support long term relationships was seen by CEOs as a necessary part of achieving business objectives in the New Zealand context.

Consequently, **CEOs saw communication as being embedded in the business**, flowing out of good business practice. ‘It has to have substance ... business drives strategy; communication delivers the various messages to stakeholders. ... inefficiency speaks loudly ... spin doctoring doesn’t work. People have long memories ... PR has a poor reputation - spin doctor, twisting the truth instead of promoting a real reputation.’ It reflects a strong commitment to performance based communication, letting actions speak for themselves. It also contains a clear rejection of spin doctoring as a way of enhancing and protecting reputation. In its place there was a theme of ‘tell it like it is’ which CEOs believed gave them the high moral ground when it came to difficult issues.

CFOs and Legal Counsel tended to be care-taking the communication function as it underwent change in the company. These senior managers emphasized the need for communication to be strategic and to deliver ‘real support’ for the company’s objectives. The PR practitioners they knew could not perform this function because they ‘lacked a solid understanding of business processes’ or were ‘too lightweight to command respect at the senior management table’. This was the reason for their having the communications role report to them. In some cases, the allocation of the portfolio had been accompanied by the Communications Manager having just been made redundant. This was not so much a reflection of what they thought PR should but rather a reflection of their estimation of the capacity of practitioners to meet the demands of modern business.

The CFO and Legal Counsel group tended to be anxious for the company not to have too high a public profile. Some spoke of ‘managing the CEOs ego,’ others were at pains to explain that they are ‘working through customers’ (as third parties) so they

themselves do not want a media profile. Legal Counsel was wary of the ‘sticking their necks out’ and risking liability. These findings echo the findings of the IPR studies (2003, 2004) which identified a shift away from media relations to strategic communications and that good PR is highly personalized, being different from organization to organization and from situation to situation. Where PR is placed under legal counsel or the GM for strategy in NZ, it is likely that the communication team has just been disbanded. PR (or the communication team) will have found that it was measured (by financial, philosophical or situational circumstances) and found wanting. It was ‘too fluffy’ or ‘not capable of handling the weightier aspects of business operation’ and so was removed in favor of someone who could ‘better represent the views of the company’ or who ‘could hold things together while we decide what to do about it [our communication policy]’.

Relative importance placed on communication elements

Participants in this study were asked to rate the relative importance of six elements of communication in terms of achieving company objectives (see Table 3.) The PRINZ definition of public relations as “the deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding and excellent communication between an organization and its publics,” would group the last four elements on the table together but for the purposes of this study they were listed separately. The CEOs gave PR the lowest rating of the communication elements offered. It should be remembered that they were defining PR as events management and media publicity rather than reputation management or strategic communication. Like PRINZ, their preference was to discuss communication in a holistic way rather than as disintegrated elements. They insisted that reputation is established by actual performance rather than by talking about performance. It reflects their disdain for hype and talking things up. They considered that they themselves and their senior management were the keys to reputation management in their companies rather than PR companies or their own Communication General Managers.

Another notable outcome from this exercise was the low rating given to advertising by the CEOs and by the Communications GMs. This was linked with a rejection of two things. Firstly, it was a rejection of one way communication. There was a strong acknowledgment that ‘we cannot just sell things to people these days ... There is so much information already available on the internet, by means of social media and under the Official Information Act that we have to be open in our communication, invite feedback and engage with our customers. Secondly, this is associated with the high level of investment required to sustain advertising on television and the falling revenue from such advertising. This is a major concern as audiences fragment and become more difficult to target around ‘prime times’. The changing landscape of NZ’s cultural mix has added to this dilemma. New migrants are not using traditional media in the same way as older NZers. Young NZers are going to the internet for their news – if at all. Furthermore they are using blogs and word of

mouth to discuss products and reputations rather than using the traditional media or radio, television and the print media.

Where are NZ senior managers getting their information from?

Participants were asked to identify the most important influences on their perceptions of PR. The most frequently identified sources were personal experience, the opinions of other senior colleagues and the media. The least influential sources were the internet, seminars and education. The most powerful influences were through personal experience. Some experiences of PR were positive, some were negative. Good practitioners 'demonstrate real value ... can operate credibly in the business environment by understanding processes, legal constraints, stock exchange regulations, current trends and events...can deliver refreshing insights into problems... are solution orientated.' One CEO recommended the relationship he had with his Communications GM as ideal. He described it using the metaphor of a ship. He was the captain, at the helm, making the decisions and taking overall responsibility for the direction of the vessel. His Communications GM was the pilot, on the bridge alongside the captain, giving advice about the best directions to take through the various types of water and local conditions. This metaphor had been suggested to him by the Communications GM.

Bad experiences included 'using smoke and mirrors...overstating and being unable to deliver...pretentious PR practitioners...overcharging...thinking that media coverage is the Holy Grail.' These reflections were a mixture of actual practice and professional demeanor. Interestingly, they included a rejection of the media publicity model as being too narrow and inadequate.

These insights reflect a largely pragmatic approach to perception formation rather than a theoretical one. Few senior managers are reading about PR theories, attending seminars where they are exposed to PR perspectives or gaining insights through the internet. Their perceptions have been formed over time through experience and conversation with other senior managers. Many had worked overseas, particularly in the UK. Old stories of PR disasters such as Bhopal, Exxon Valdez and Enron and newer media representations of NZ incidences of government spin doctoring confirmed the impression they had that PR 'has a lot to answer for'. Senior communication managers are scanning widely, but other groupings used more narrow ranges of media intake. Many are listening to commercial radio for their news coverage. Several of the CEOs had MBA qualification. This introduced them to useful case study input which made them aware of the power and importance of communication in reputation management. But generally, the academic world is not making much impact on New Zealand senior management.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Where PR fits in an organization depends on two key things – the definition of PR and who defines it. Working from these two premises, what can be learned from the NZ situation? What are the new directions for PR in NZ?

PR needs to decide whether it is PR or Communication Management or both.

There is clearly baggage attached to the name Public Relations. This creates confusion between senior managers and PR practitioners over what PR involves. Some NZ researchers have suggested that PRINZ should abandon the name public relations (Tilley, 2005; Morton, 2006). There is clearly room in the market for the narrower functional media relations model of PR which involves event management, marketing PR, crisis management and so on. But many practitioners would like to be involved in a wider role than the publicity model. CEOs would agree that the role should be wider. Some practitioners have achieved this wider role through personal reputation or relationship. But PRINZ, the industry body itself, exemplifies the ‘caught between two camps’ situation of PR in NZ. Its by-line is Public Relations and Communication Management. NZ training institutions are also equivocal about PR. They teach public relations under Communication Management, Applied Communication, Organizational Communication or simply, Communication. The advanced qualification in PR is called APR (Accreditation in PR). Which PR is this referring to, the one in the minds of the senior managers who are major clients or the one in the minds of the senior PR practitioners who teach on the APR? It is clear that PR for PR is a key priority in NZ.

PR practitioners may debate the place of PR but the market will decide.

Communication is placed at the senior management table in New Zealand but the PR or Communications practitioner may not be the one holding that portfolio. Sometimes it is held by the CEO, sometimes by marketing, the CFO or Legal Counsel and sometimes by a senior manager with Public Affairs as part of their portfolio. PR in New Zealand has to advocate for itself – not only with CEOs but with their senior managers from other fields who wonder exactly what it is that PR people do for the company. Some carry negative images of PR from politics, from television shows like *Absolute Power*, *Absolutely Fabulous*, *Spin Doctors* and from home grown media stories of bad practice by PR practitioners, some of whom are still in business in New Zealand today. These perceptions need to be corrected and brought up to date with stories and examples of best practice which illustrate the benefits of good communication practices. There is fertile ground here because senior business managers in NZ are aware of the need for excellence in this aspect of their business practice and are looking for good practitioners to help them to fulfill this need.

Under the CEO, PR may be somewhat invisible.

This may suit some operators who believe that the best PR is what audiences do not see. It may also mean that CEOs will assume the PR role without support, leaving no job or only an occasional appearance for the PR practitioner. This way of

operating sometimes has the advantage of speedy response times for media, embedded authenticity and a clear communication philosophy. It would be interesting to measure the success of this approach in varying circumstances, over time. If PR's invisibility is a result of a new definition involving integrated, strategic communication, then the change would surely be welcomed by PR practitioners. There is evidence that NZ is already moving in this direction with its senior in-house practitioners calling themselves Communications or Public Affairs GMs. In this case, PR has been relegated to occasional specialist advice from consultants.

PR practitioners reporting to a marketing GM need to be prepared for a narrow MPR role.

They will have to advocate for a wider role and budget if they want their job to be more than producing pamphlets, media releases and event management. There's a window of opportunity for a wider role within marketing given the questions being raised over the value of advertising but they will have to learn to operate interdependently. Petty hatred between advertising, marketing and PR is not amenable to achieving senior management objectives and does not build credibility at the senior decision-making level. In-house PR practitioners reporting to marketing will have to be very skillful at negotiating their role because they are likely to be seen as a junior partner in the Integrated Marketing Communication team rather than a strategic partner. As such they will be expected to provide cheap options for profit making which may compromise their role as facilitator of two way communication on issues of strategic importance. Developing a range of business skills and competencies will enable the practitioner to demonstrate value to the company beyond purely communications techniques and tactics. If the CEO has structured communication to fall under marketing it is likely that the dominant philosophy is driven by profit making rather than partnerships with key stakeholders. Marketing would not make a very good partner for PR in this case.

PR practitioners reporting to a CFO or Legal Counsel or Strategist need to emphasize the strategic nature of communication, evaluate and report on how goals have been met and learn to use the language of business process.

They will also need to be prepared for redundancy. The reason they have a CFO or Legal Counsel in charge of the communication function is probably because their company has already decided that the function has not been strategic and focused enough in the past. The company may decide to do away with communications completely and outsource what they think PR is – specialized help for emergencies, marketing support or event management. The practitioner will need to surprise their GM with what they know by providing insights to issues, solutions to business problems, and creative ways of communicating with key stakeholders. This is important so that the PR practitioner can command respect. This will also help to ensure that they don't get pigeonholed as a 'fluffy' and shallow operator who does not seem to understand the realities of business. Under legal counsel PR will struggle to speak freely and to come up with a strong argument as to why 'no comment' is not the

best answer in some situations. Arguing for transparent communication is a tough call in such a situation. The practitioner will need to demonstrate how their approach to communication can strategically support the goals and values of the organization. The biggest unknown factor in terms of freedom to operate as a PR practitioner is likely to be the personality or personal philosophy of the CFO or legal counsel.

A local model of PR should be articulated.

NZ PR can be characterized by five 'i's.

Integrative – bringing all the communications functions together to achieve consistent messaging across the organization – marketing, government relations, customer servicing, relating to suppliers, interest groups (such as relations with Maori tribal groups, environmental groups and activist groups), advocacy in the industry and so on. This reflects a demand for strategic communication, integrated into all business operations. It would be interesting to see the development of a specifically New Zealand model of PR. It could be argued that for Maori, the indigenous people of New Zealand, PR has existed in their culture for centuries. They have well established protocols for welcoming people, speechmaking and debate, subtle (and some less subtle) intertribal negotiations and relationships, reputation management through warfare, revenge taking, displays of strength and traditional performance, and so on. New comers like the British and European peoples have introduced new forms of public relations which have their own cultural expressions and technologies. In recent times these have been heavily influenced by US models of PR. Currently New Zealand is starting to feel the impact of new flavors of PR from Asia, the Middle East and Africa. All of these waves of definition are overlaid with the internationalizing impact of web technologies. They represent a unique mixture of influences which require integrative effort. A Maori model of PR which would espouse a holistic approach might offer some interesting insights into integration. Arguments could be made for an external PR or for an in-house communications role for this integrative function to be carried out. Either way however, an agent of integration must have access to the CEO and senior management team

Integrity based – working hard to maintain consistency between corporate values and practices, transparency, eradicating obfuscation and de-emphasizing deliberate spin, trying to marry corporate values with societal values. This may sometimes require the communications messages 'to be a bit raw', honest and not highly polished, thus adding credibility and a touch of humanity. This approach is a rejection of the smoke and mirrors approach. It is also a rejection of the transactional relationship approach to doing business in which clients and stakeholders are viewed as dispensable units to be dealt with under policies and precedent. The arguments for integrity are mainly pragmatic, the ease of access to information, 'NZ is small place. There's nowhere to run and hide', we don't have time for making up stories. This approach strongly advocates walking the talk over talking the walk. It also involves a rejection of boasting. It is fundamentally low key – 'speak if you have something

important to say, otherwise, keep quiet'. The integrity based function of the communication practitioner would argue the necessity for them to be an advisor to the CEO, something like the pilot on the ocean-going liner.

Interactive – two way communication practices (particularly in the web environment), listening to customers and suppliers, being responsive to suggestions and criticisms, maintaining open communication with staff. This reflects a keen desire to delineate between the slick, transactional approach to communication and the genuine, long term relationship based approach. This approach has theoretical roots in Ledingham's relational PR models but it also has a practical foundation. The emphasis on networks and communities based on relationships created over the internet and through e-technologies has emphasized the need for a relational approach to communication and doing business. Involvement with the more relational business practices of China, Japan, India, the Middle East have called on NZ business to adjust its western model. The flexibility and innovation required to be an interactive communicator and a responsive agent of change in the organization would argue for Communications to be placed independently as a member of the senior management team. It needs the seniority and freedom to effectively advise and influence the organization to be nimble and proactive.

Incorporative - a broad range of technologies to engage with a variety of stakeholders – internet for generation C, face to face for traditionalists, word of mouth for community groups, and written word for low context audiences. The proliferation of communication channels, the convergence of multimedia approaches, together with the need for feedback and interaction argue the need to develop PR practices that are inclusive of the diversity of cultures, subcultures and generations of e-communicators among our stakeholders. This element would argue for alignment with any of the management functions but perhaps the closest cousins here would be Marketing (appreciating the subtleties of communicating with diverse stakeholders) and Human Resources since incorporation lends itself to relationship building – internally and externally.

Interpretive – understanding trends in the environment and translating these into advice for the company. This equates most closely to van Ruler, et al's reflective characteristic.

This characteristic demands a high level of environmental awareness – something akin to the awareness needed to perform the role of Legal Counsel or Strategy. Insistence on research and measurement and evaluation to measure impact and to adjust policy to accommodate needed change would sit well with the Strategic function of management.

From recent evidence of NZ companies and government agencies handling of PR crises, it would appear that there is a long way to go in terms of effective issues

management and crisis communication in NZ. During the writing of this paper there have been PR debacles in the government sector where, in the process of introducing electoral finance legislation the government managed to insult the largest newspaper in the country; the power supply sector where a company bungled their crisis communication when a customer died after her power supply was disconnected due to bill non payment; and the health food sector where school students achieved international attention for discovering that a health drink did not contain the vitamin content it claimed to have. There is plenty of scope for PR to argue for inclusion at the senior management table in order to handle such issues and crises better.

In summary, it is clear that PR in NZ is in an exciting place. On the one hand there is still a place for the operational media publicity function and for the crisis management function. But there is also a place for a strategic role for PR. This place is recognized by many CEOs and senior managers, others are yet to be convinced. The future of PR is in the hands of its practitioners because senior managers are drawing most of their information about PR by observing practitioner performance. The complex demands of fragmented audiences, the demand for interactive communication practices and the increased exposure of business practices to the light of public scrutiny are all pointing towards a future of collaboration between PR and the various functions of management. This collaboration will best be achieved if PR has its own place at the senior management table occupied by a proficient, skilled, articulate practitioner who operates with integrity and has a long term view of relationships.

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