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The communication grid: an introduction of a model of four communication strategies

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Abstract

Increasing numbers of professionals in public relations consider themselves to be strategic managers and consultants. Surprisingly, they have difficulty in making clear what it really is that they manage and what their consultations truly represent, what aims they have and what strategies they use. In this article I present a model consisting of basic communication strategies, derived from communication theory and rooted in described public relations approaches in the Netherlands.

Keywords: Public relations roles; Communication strategy; Communication theory

In the professional community in the Netherlands the question of what's good and what's not in public relations practice, is constantly debated. It is unfortunate that as a consequence of the absence of a list of constructed options and criteria, the discussions never fail to be dominated by strong emotional overtones. As a result, opinions on "questionable behavior in pr" are formulated without any reasonable explanation to justifying this. The following research project means to present options that can bring a structural approach to the discussion and the problems at hand. However, as the project developed, it proved also to bring a new model of basic communication strategies.

1. Background of the research project

Since 1978, Broom has fathered the debate about roles in public relations practice, being abstractions of the everyday activities of public relations practitioners (Broom, 1982; Broom & Smith, 1979; see

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for an overview Dozier, 1992, p. 329). In the same year, Katz and Kahn (1978) introduced roles as a central concept in organizational theory. A role can be seen as "the expected behavior associated with a social position" (Banton, 1996). Broom's research was focused on the consultant's roles enacted for senior management by public relations experts. Broom and Smith (1979) conceptualized four dominant roles: the expert prescriber, the communication facilitator, the problem-solving process facilitator and the communication technician. Research indicated that the first three roles were highly interrelated, being part of a common underlying manager's role. In addition to conforming that the first three roles were indeed interrelated, Dozier (1984) found two major roles (the manager and the technician) and two minor roles (the media relations specialist and the communication liaison), and concluded that "the manager and technician roles emerge empirically time and again in studies of different practitioners" (Dozier, 1992, p. 334).

His Manager–technician typology has been tested numerous times in various countries (Grunig, Toth, & Childers Hon, 2001; Toth, Serini, Wright, & Emig, 1998; see for an overview also Dozier, 1992), including the Netherlands (van Ruler, 2000). This Dutch research project confirmed the veracity of J. Grunig's lamentation that "in carrying out their duties, those who were both responsible for communication planning and involved in organizational decision-making make little use of data acquired from research" (cited in Dozier, 1992, p. 336). In addition to doing the same kind of operational work as the communication employees, these Dutch public relations professionals took on a wide range of planning activities and other managerial tasks. They showed themselves to be rather overloaded "hands on managers." No confirmation was found for Dozier's suggestion (1992, p. 338) that there is a relationship between evaluation activities and participation in management decision-making. The latter appeared to be related to hierarchical position rather than to evaluation activities. When "evaluation activities" were used as an indicator of managerial roles, as Dozier suggested, the result was that almost all practitioners (even those in the upper echelons) had to be classified as technicians (van Ruler, 2000).

On a more aggregate level, Grunig (1976, 1989, 1992b) and Grunig and Hunt (1984) conceptualized four public relations models: publicity, public information, two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical. All models reveal accompanying roles that are typical of practitioners. In a study among the top 200 companies in the Netherlands, van Ruler (1996, 1997) concluded that while these four models did indeed have empirical power in the Netherlands, this manifested itself in unexpected ways. Most of the top public relations professionals in these large companies overtly stated that the real power of public relations could be traced back to the two-way symmetrical model. However, in describing the everyday contributions of public relations to their organizations, and without analyzing their own responses, they demonstrated an asymmetrical view. Nevertheless, their actions were shown to be guided by the publicity and public information models.

The research designs of these two Dutch studies, which followed the Dozier-dichotomy and the four Grunig-models, did not permit firm conclusions to be drawn about differences in Dutch public relations practice. However, from the accompanying interviews in the Dutch study it became obvious that the interviewees differed in terms of their views on the essence of their jobs. This, however, seemed more an echo of their view of how communication works and the practical communication model that they seemed to feel was applicable to their job. Paraphrasing Toth (1992, p. 12), it seemed that a major contribution could be made to the research of public relations by the delineation of what is meant by communication and how communication can build relationships and trust and break these as well. It was for this reason that the study reported here focused on the construction of public relations roles, derived from different communication models.

In modern Europe, the term “communication management” is becoming the field’s real common denominator, both in academia and in business life (cf. van Ruler & Vercic, 2002; van Ruler, Vercic, Buetschi, & Flodin, 2000; Vercic, van Ruler, Bütschi, & Flodin, 2001). This differs from the situation in the USA, where “public relations” appears to be more common. We can, however, equate it with public relations (as many other authors do, e.g., Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995; Grunig, 1992b; Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002; White & Mazur, 1995). For comparative reasons, the term “public relations” is used in this article.

2. Method

Roles research is often done by observing people as they perform their daily activities, or by questioning them about these tasks. Roles research on Dutch public relations practice has not yet been able to demonstrate the existence of a powerful, empirical roles model. As a result, other methods had to be used to develop insight into possible differences in practice. In this article, I will review 50 years of Dutch professional literature on public relations in order to produce a typology of possible roles in public relations. The methodology used was derived from typology research. This social science methodology is aimed at categorizing phenomena in real life, in order to clarify any differences. Ritzer (2000, p. 223) claims that “The important thing about typologies is that they are heuristic devices; they are meant to be useful and helpful in doing empirical research on understanding a specific aspect of the social world.” Gadourek (1967) differentiates between two types of typology research: inductive-typifying and constructive-typifying. The inductive typology method is a quantitative method (often conducted via factor or HOMALS analysis) for correlating the relationship of all kinds of indicators with certain kinds of factors. The constructive typology method is a theoretical construction in which certain aspects are highlighted on theoretical grounds, while others are neglected. These two types are sometimes combined, for example in the case of Hofstede’s (1980) typology research into national cultures and the above-mentioned dichotomy of Dozier.

Weber is the founding father of typology (Eliaeson, 2002). His “ideal type” can be seen as a lasting contribution to sociology. “An ideal type is formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct” (cited in Ritzer, 2000, p. 223). A typology creates a mental construct, made for the purpose of knowledge formation (Eliaeson, 2002, p. 38). Weber himself wrote that the ideal type “serves as a harbor until one has learned to navigate safely in the vast sea of empirical facts” (cited in Eliaeson, 2002, p. 49).

Ideal types are not the product of the social scientist’s whim or fancy, they are logically constructed concepts which must pass the test of empirical adequacy. Rather than a simple exercise in intuition, they are actually based on rational interpretation, as Eliaeson argues. Ideal types are not intended to be “one best form,” they serve to highlight the relativity of cultural meanings (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000). The word “ideal” refers to the fact that a typology, as such, cannot be found in reality. A typology is not meant to reflect reality on a one-to-one basis. However, a typology has no value if it cannot be used to make sense of the real world. That is why the first part of the research question posed in this article is: how can we construct a typology of communication models-in-use, based on differentiations in communication theory. The second part is: can we trace these models in the professional public relations literature, and if so, which models are present and which are not, and what public relations approach does they reveal. The third part is: what can we say about these approaches from a communication theory perspective.

In the Section 3, differences in communication theory are highlighted in order to provide a valuable system for classifying possible communication models-in-use.

3. Communication models

J. Grunig's models of public relations represent a first classification of insights into communication. He distinguished PR models that stress a one-way model of communication and models that emphasize a two-way model. In his more recent work, Grunig (2001) claims that one-way models are always asymmetric, since the sender is only concerned with the transmission of his message and does not take the receiver into account. Describing two-way models, Grunig (1976, 2001) initially followed Thayer (1968), who drew a distinction between synchronic and diachronic views about the concept of communication. In more recent publications, Grunig described his two-way models as symmetrical and asymmetrical, after Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson (1970), who described the circular character of communication. Thayer was concerned with the development of meanings in messages (dia-cronic means literally "through time"), whereas Watzlawick was concerned with people's socially related behaviors. Although Watzlawick uses (a)symmetry in a different way, Grunig (1989) and his co-researchers Dozier and Ehling (1992, p. 176) define asymmetry as a communication model in which a one-way, linear causal effect is predicted and evaluated. They state that "The presupposition is asymmetrical, for it conceives of communication and public relations as something organizations do to—rather than with—people." Symmetrical public relations means "the use of bargaining, negotiating, and strategies of conflict resolution to bring about symbiotic changes in the ideas, attitudes, and behaviors of both the organization and its publics" (Grunig, 1989, p. 29). Symmetrical communication means that each participant in the communication process is equally able to influence the other. Thus, in J. Grunig's theory of public relations, we can find three distinct concepts of how communication works. These are one-way asymmetrical, two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical.

In J. Grunig's work, it remains unclear what is exactly meant by one-way. Does this predict the existence of a receiver or not? If so, what is the difference between one-way asymmetrical and two-way asymmetrical? If not, what is meant by one-way? Looking for a more precise way of distinguishing between these concepts, and looking for other public relations scientists who make distinctions in relation to the concept of communication in public relations, the Belgian communication scientist Fauconnier (1990) is helpful. He promotes a scientific concept of communication in which one is not only concerned with the way in which a message is expressed, but also with what happens at the receiving end. However, he claims that, in practice, many are concerned solely with expression. Communication which is limited to expression is, of course, a kind of one-way model, but without any concern for the destination of what is expressed. The only concern is in relation to the expression itself, or "the emission." This is an "un-addressed process," so to speak. It is questionable whether communication as emission can be defined as a one-way process, because there is no concern whatsoever for the destination of what is expressed. It implies that there is no need to do any kind of research, nor to segment target groups in a methodical way, or to know anything about potential receivers, let alone about different publics. This suggests that communication should here be described as an "emission" rather than as a one-way process. As soon as one starts to take account of the effects of the communication process, for example in terms of the " intended reach of the message transmitted," then attention is focused on some kind of a one-way process with some effect. The concept of communication as emission is fully undirected and therefore fully sender-oriented, in so far that effects play no role at all, not even at the clipping-level. It sees communication "as a magic bullet," as Schramm (1971) cynically described it.

During the 1960s, Bauer (1964, p. 319) concluded that there are two different views regarding the idea of effects. The first of these, which he describes as the social model, is "held by the general public, and by social scientists when they talk about advertising, and somebody else's propaganda, is one of the exploitation of man by man. It is a model of one-way influence: The communication does something to the audience, while to the communicator is generally attributed considerable latitude and power to do what he pleases to the audience." Bauer called his second model "the scientific model of communication as a transactional process in which two parties each expect to give and take from the exchange approximately equitable values." Although this scientific model allows for influence, this does not follow a linear causal model. Bauer stated that, while research shows that the scientific model is by far the more adequate of the two, it is the social model that is dominant in practice.

Bauer's social model of one-way influence is equivalent to J. Grunig's asymmetrical models, including the two-way asymmetrical one, while the two-way symmetrical model reflects Bauer's scientific model. Bauer, however, talks about one-way influence in his social model, because of the presumed linear causality. It is questionable whether we can use the concept of "two-way" to describe the social model, as the receiver is seen as object who is only able to receive or, possibly, to answer the sender's questions. The receiver is not seen as a full participant in the two-way process, and the same is true of Grunig's two-way asymmetrical model. That is why I prefer to describe J. Grunig's two-way asymmetrical model as "controlled one-way" communication.

That means that, looking at the degree of involvement of "the other" in the communication process, we can differentiate between communication as emission, as controlled one-way process and as two-way process.

From a communication science view on communication, another concept needs to be discussed as well, and that is the concept of influence. Communication can be said to be about the process of meaning creation (Rosengren, 2000). Meaning involves questions such as how people create meaning psychologically, socially and culturally, how messages are understood mentally, how ambiguity arises and how it is resolved. "Communication does not happen without meaning, and people create and use meaning in interpreting events" (Littlejohn, 1992, p. 378). The crucial question, however, is what kind of meaning of whom is created by whom and what implications does this have in terms of interpreting the world (Littlejohn, 1983, pp. 95–113).

Meaning can be explained as the "whole way in which we understand, explain, feel about and react towards a given phenomenon" (Rosengren, 2000, p. 59). According to Langer (cited in Littlejohn, 1992, pp. 67–70), the concept of meaning has two dimensions: a denotative and a connotative one. A denotative meaning of a phenomenon is the meaning one can find in a dictionary. It is overt, being the inter-subjectively shared signification of a word. The connotative meaning refers to all personal feelings and subjective associations to a symbol. A dog is denotatively a four-legged domestic animal. But for some the word 'dog' contains connotations of fear while for others it contains connotations of tenderness. Many communication scientists stress that the connotative meaning is the steering factor of cognition and behaviors (see e.g., Berlo, 1960; Littlejohn, 1983, 1992; Rosengren, 2000; Thayer, 1987). However, not all theories stipulate connotative perspectives of meaning.

Early communication theories were focused on communication as a one-way process in which a sender does something to a receiver. However, the identity of this 'something' remained a matter of debate.

Some theories view communication as a dissemination process, a flow of information in which a sender disseminates a message to receivers by revealing its meaning in this message. The focus is on the flow of information (Shannon & Weaver, 1949) and this information is seen as "objective," thereby implicitly focusing on the denotative side of meaning. A typical definition within this scope of communication is: "Communication is the transmission of information, ideas, attitudes, or emotion from one person or group to another (or others)" (see for an overview: Littlejohn, 1992; McQuail & Windahl, 1986).

Other theories view communication as an attempt by a sender to produce a predefined attitudinal change in the receiver, i.e., a change in the (connotative) meaning of the situation as perceived by the latter. One well-known theory of this type is the Two-Step Flow theory, which stipulates that mass media inform certain people, who on their part influence the meanings perceived by others. The focus is on the flow of influence (Lin, 1971). It is obvious that there is no flow of influence without a flow of information, but a flow of information is for these authors not necessarily also a flow of influence, at least not in such a way that the sender can forecast how it will be interpreted by the receiver (Nillesen, 1998). However, as long as the meaning of the message is seen as objective, there is no need to differentiate between information and influence.

The former view of one-way communication is here referred to as a transmission view, while the latter is a one-way persuasion view. The one-way transmission view focuses on the transmission of (denotative) meaning, while the one-way persuasion view emphasizes the one-way synchronization of (connotative) meaning. The transmission view is concerned with the transfer of a message, while the one-way persuasion view is about changing the receiver's cognition and behavior.

Many recent approaches to the concept of communication view it as a fundamental two-way process that is interactive and participatory at all levels. This involves the paradigmatic change of a sender/receiver-orientation into an actor-orientation, e.g., a process in which all actors can be active and take initiatives. That is why the emphasis nowadays is often on communication as a process in which meanings are created and exchanged, or even shared, by the parties involved.

Once again, there are two different views on this two-way process. For some scientists, the key to communication is the fact that it creates meanings inter-subjectively (see for example, Putnam & Pacanowsky, 1983). The key word in this approach is dialogue, which literally means 'a free flow of words and its interpretations' (Matson & Montagu, 1967). In linguistic terms, dialogue is not the same as discussion. Trying to convince each other of the "best idea" is a discussion; putting your idea before others and stimulating them to bring in ideas in the hope of improving on the first idea, is dialogue (van Ruler, 1999). This idea of dialogue fits the diachronic view of communication, as Thayer (1968, 1987) holds, stipulating that communication is an ongoing process of learning, in which meanings develop through developing cognitions, feelings, etc. For others, this process goes further and actually creates a shared meaning, e.g., a new denotative meaning, which we normally call consensus (Schramm, 1965; Susskind, McKearnan, & Thomas-Larmer, 1999).

The first view sees communication as an ongoing rather emotional process of co-creating of (connotative) meanings, while the second view sees communication as the rather rational co-creation of a new (denotative) meaning, which is normally called consensus-building.

The above analysis of differences in communication theory reveals at least two dimensions of the communication model, namely the degree of involvement of "the other" in the communication process and the view of meaning. We have found three positions regarding involvement: communication as emission, as controlled one-way process and as two-way process. Two positions, denotative and connotative, have been identified with regard to meaning. If we place these dimensions into a three by two matrix, we can

	Focus on denotative meaning, information as 'objective'	**Focus on connotative meaning, information as 'subjective'**
Communication as an undirected emission process (magic bullet)	Communication as an expression of information to all concerned	Communication as contact with others who actively present themselves for this purpose
Communication as a controlled one-way process (linear causality)	Communication as transmission of meaning to target groups	Communication as a one-way synchronization of meaning in target groups
Communication as a two-way process (interaction)	Communication as consensus-building with publics	Communication as diachronic co-creation of meanings with publics

Fig. 1. Six possible communication models, defined by differentiations in the process of meaning creation.

find at least six different models of communication (see Fig. 1). These six communication models reveal six potential categories for a typology of public relations approaches. This typology is presented in the Section 4.

4. Construction of the typology

The second part of the research question addressed by this article is "can we trace these models in the professional literature, and if so, what approach of public relations do they reveal?" Since earlier research showed that the communication model or definition which is explicitly presented is almost never the actual communication model-in-use, it was not enough simply to look for the definition of communication or the communication model that is overtly given by an author (van Ruler, 1996). For this reason, the following variables were used to identify the communication model-in-use:

- the existence of "the other" in the description of the communication process
- consideration for research and the kind of research that is seen as applicable
- explicit and/or implicit definition of the process of communication
- metaphors used to typify the process of communication

Secondly, the typology of public relations practice had to be fleshed out, in order to reveal an accompanying public relations approach. This has been done by examining:

- explicit and/or implicit definitions of public relations
- theories that are seen as necessary for public relations action
- the criteria of success in public relations
- typical catchwords

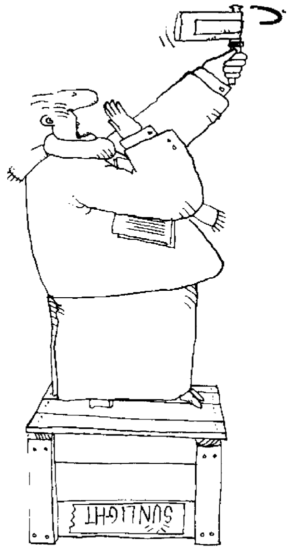
In order to obtain an empirical clarification of the communication models-in-use and the accompanying public relations approaches, a survey was carried out of Dutch professional sources, published between 1950 and 2000. These sources included the ceremonial speeches of the Dutch Association of Communication, practical and scientific professionally oriented books published in the Netherlands, the Association's journal as well as the journal of the Dutch Association of Public Communication. The method followed was typical case selection, which involved creating a profile of characteristics and then looking for examples in order to clarify the characteristics. This kind of sampling is useful for achieving typicality in a study (Daymon & Holloway, 2002, p. 162).

The typology is presented by means of metaphors, which were derived from the professional sources themselves and afterwards translated into comparable English terms. The essence of metaphor is experiencing and understanding one thing in terms of another (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000). A metaphor is an instrument for organizing qualitative social science work and for influencing the interpretations of the facts. A famous metaphor is "theory is story," introduced by feminist researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 927). Denzin & Lincoln consider metaphor as "the backbone of social science writing," especially in reports on qualitative research. The problem with qualitative inquiry is also that the normal social science writing format does not reveal enough of the wealth of acquired data. That is why the essay format is used here. Overt statements as well as small details are deconstructed into comparative statements, according to their type. They are then combined in an essayistic picture (Eliaeson, 2002, p. 47), following the style of the "realist tale" (Daymon & Holloway, 2002, p. 138) by providing a "play of metaphors" (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000, p. 191) and making parallel readings (cf. Morgan, 1986). The types, constructed from communication theory and public relations literature, are presented in the following. Although the profession is becoming increasingly dominated by women, the authors of the professional literature are almost all men. That is why, in the typology, 'he' and 'him' are used instead of 'she' and 'her.'

4.1. The town crier: public relations is broadcasting his master's voice

The view of communication as a magic bullet, in combination with a focus on the denotative side of meaning, characterizes the "town crier" type. When describing the core business of their job, authors of the town criers type employ a jargon typified by catchwords such as factuality, honesty, clarity, correctness, punctuality, reliability and creativity. In their opinion, communication is action, it's what they do, nothing more or less. Their job is to broadcast their master's voice.

Town criers are the type of public relations professionals whose public announcements all concern things that have been decided elsewhere. They take care of presenting the announcement according to professional standards within a given timeframe, and to distribute it to all concerned. Segmentation of target groups is no problem, since town criers have a list in their computers of groups or individuals that they want to reach. If no list is available, then they will use the mass media to reveal their messages. Their profession is the act of emission in itself. Their business is making the organization's positive presence felt in the outside world. This is the basis of the town crier's claim to fame. Their actions are based on former experiences and practical models. No priority is given to questions about the effects of their activities, as they are convinced that research is unnecessary. Town criers seem to think that they have "a special insight into certain publics and how to control them" (Pavlik, 1987, p. 18).



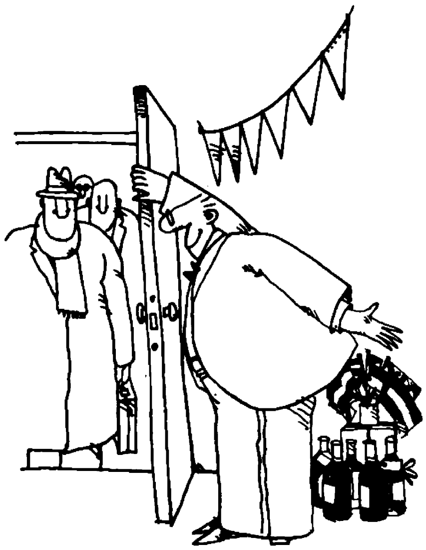
Town crier: public relations is broadcasting his master's voice

In the first two decades of the period that was researched, the town crier was in fact the dominant model in public relations literature related to the public sector. Rooij and Nieuwenhuis (1969) stated that it is the job of the "voorlichter" (the "enlightener," as the public relations professional in the public sector used to be called) to spread messages, geared to suit the demands of the chosen media. They will rigidly negate any influence on the meaning of the message. They are "as cool as the moon" as Schelhaas (1979), a well-known public relations manager in the public sector, put it. A small association of "voorlichters" (part of the Dutch Association of Journalists) still proclaims in the brochure for new members that "he (sic!) takes care of the provision of information, together with journalists." They are, so to speak, the in-house element of journalism. Among many, Weisglas (1955) stated that the natural background of a PR professional is indeed a journalism background.

4.2. The steward: public relations is pampering

The view of communication as a magic bullet, in combination with a focus on the connotative side of meaning, creates the "steward" type. When describing the core business of their job, stewards employ a jargon typified by catchwords such as atmosphere, socializing, representation, etiquette, humanity, and the like. In their view, communication is contact. Their job is to pamper.

Stewards are the type of public relations professionals whose task it is to put invited guests at their ease. They take care of the contacts with these particular prospects. Their responsibility is to socialize with the prospects and to make them receptive to positive notions about the organization they represent. They stimulate people to mingle and socialize under the organization's roof. Their business is creating an atmosphere for (future) business partners as well as for employees through wining and dining. The steward's claim to fame is based on success in keeping doors open. They need no theory for that, just a mix of experience and intuition. This requires most of all a certain level of maturity. Stewards gauge the success or failure of their actions by closely observing people's responses. They conduct research simply by walking around. "The eyes-and-ears method" was the most commonly used research method in public relations departments in 1993 (KS PR, 1993) and the naming of this method was used in this research project without any inhibition.



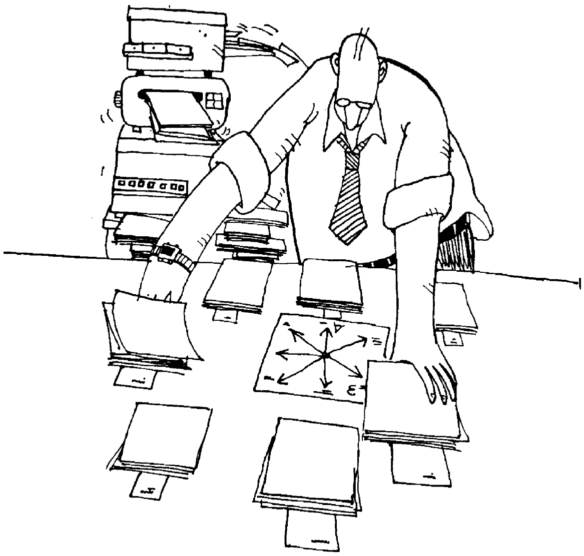
Steward: public relations is pampering

While the steward type dominated the early literature on public relations in the commercial sector, it did often so in a very specific way. Van Santen (1966, p. 13) expressed his disapproval of this type, as a reaction to an image of public relations in society. "If people feel that public relations is all about knowing lots of people, having a vast network of contacts, attending numerous parties, wearing designer suits, frequenting expensive restaurants, shaking hands and drinking sherry, or just stimulating sales, they are wrong. That is not what PR is about." Nevertheless, the whole book is on this type of public relations practice. Most authors of that time stress that networking is what PR is about, and that social skills and a high level of general intelligence, coupled with a certain maturity, are much more important than professional skills for being successful in the business (Bekman, 1960; Kingma, 1965). Van Ruler and de Lange (1995) found that representation was the second most time-consuming task. By contrast, the modern literature devotes scant attention to stewarding.

4.3. The traffic manager: public relations is transfer of information

The view of communication as a controlled one-way process, in combination with a focus on the denotative side of meaning characterizes the "traffic manager" type. Traffic managers employ a jargon typified by catchwords such as proper distribution, noise prevention, communication track, feedback on reach, quality control, structures and communication channels, digging canals, logistics. They take the view that communication is (physical) information transfer, and that their job is to manage this transfer properly.

Traffic managers are the type of public relations professionals who see to it that messages are distributed efficiently and effectively. They are responsible for the physical transportation of information carriers to selected target groups, much like the logistic manager in the automotive industry. The traffic managers look after the means of communication, the targeting, timing and reach. Unlike the town crier and the steward, the traffic manager's main concern is the planning and control of the distribution process to target groups and it's evaluation. However, a traffic manager's gospel is "reach equals effect." In other words, control over the transportation of information is their core business. The traffic manager's claim to fame is based on success in bringing the right information to the right people at the right time. Their business is making the organization's positive presence felt within selected target groups.



Traffic manager: public relations is transfer of information

Traffic managers emerged in the professional literature in the eighties, especially in literature that was written by marketing-oriented professionals. The literature includes many books in which communication is seen as a logistically oriented flow model for transporting data from source to destination. This view is usually based on the model developed by Shannon (Shannon & Weaver, 1949) to describe undisturbed information transport. He warned that all of this has no meaning whatsoever in terms of the content of the message and its effects, instead it is restricted to the transmission of data itself. Unfortunately, this warning has been neglected by most of those who have used this model. For them the transmission of information and its subsequent feedback covers the communication process sufficiently well (e.g., van Eunen, 1980). Traffic managers measure the effect of the message by researching the reach of their items of information. The measurement instruments that they use for this purpose are clippings and recall. Back in 1993, the collection of clippings was a common way of "measuring" the effect of public relations, together with "the eye-and-ear" method (KS PR, 1993), and it probably still is.

4.4. The conductor: public relations is harmonic performance

The view of communication as a controlled, one-way process, in combination with a focus on the connotative side of meaning characterizes the "conductor" type. Conductors employ a jargon typified by catchwords such as helming attitudes, creating support, influence, gaining goodwill, image building, creating one voice, and enthuse people. They see communication as persuasion. Their job is to manage this persuasion through harmonic performance.

Conductors are the type of public relations professionals who take the score provided by the organization, and brings it to life. They see to it that the correct instrumentation is used, in order to project a well pitched and persuasive voice. They are responsible for pleasing the eyes and ears of their target groups, thereby inducing positive feelings towards the organization. While it is the marketing manager's task to develop markets, the conductor's task is to develop a prominent brain position for the organization's mission and position in selected groups. To this end, research is of the essence. Only by this means is it possible to define and recognize target groups, and to monitor and evaluate the process of persuasion itself. Conductors are convinced that their actions are the product of a calculated process and that they have a predictable outcome. The conductor's claim to fame is based on faith in their own ability to find the right tone of voice under any and all circumstances. To them, public relations means interpreting and recreating the opus that has been passed down from those at the top. In order to properly perform this task, the conductor claims a position close to the upper echelons.

Conductor: public relations is harmonic performance

Conductors first emerged in the professional literature in the eighties, especially in literature, written from a functionalistic perspective. As the first author to seriously define public relations this way, van Woerkum (1982, p. 39) put it "Influencing the knowledge, attitude and behaviors of target groups in a direction that is predefined by the organization." At a 1992 national congress of public relations, keynote speaker Van Persie stated that "Public relations is a matter of conducting a large orchestra, in which all sections amalgamate for the benefit of a well written symphony." She and the other speakers described the public relations professional as the "great communicator." Van Riel (1995) provided the theoretical background for this approach with his concept of corporate communication. This he defined as "an instrument of management by means of which all consciously used forms of internal and external communication are harmonized as effectively and efficiently as possible, so as to create a favorable basis for relationships with groups upon which the company is dependent" (p. 26). The conductor type dominated the professional literature from the mid-eighties to the mid-nineties and it was the type most communication managers used when describing the everyday contribution of public relations to their organizations (van Ruler, 1996).

4.5. The creator: public relations is about creating a bond

The view of communication as an interactive process that is combined with a focus on the denotative side of meaning characterizes the "creator" type. Creators employ a jargon typified by catchwords such as mutual understanding, relationships, mutual appreciation, cooperation, and partnership. In their opinion, communication is all about bonding. Their job is to build bridges between individuals.

Creators are the type of public relations professional who aim to create agreement between the organization, or its members, and its constituencies. They are responsible for creating mutually beneficial relationships. They inspire parties to look for connection potential in surfacing interdependencies. To achieve this, they set out to explore each party's agenda. To this end, they monitor the track records and interests of publics and screen standpoints on issues, to find points of mutual interest. They will never talk about target groups, since these represent categories to be exploited. They prefer to talk about publics as "the more aware and active stakeholders" (Grunig & Repper, 1992, p. 124). They stimulate a positive climate in which parties can negotiate to find mutual understanding. For the creator, public relations is a feasible construction of cooperative relationships. Enlightened self-interest on the part of both parties leads to a two-way street. Their claim to fame will be based on the productive creation of partnerships. To achieve this, influence on strategic decision-making is essential. That is why they claim a position in the dominant coalition.

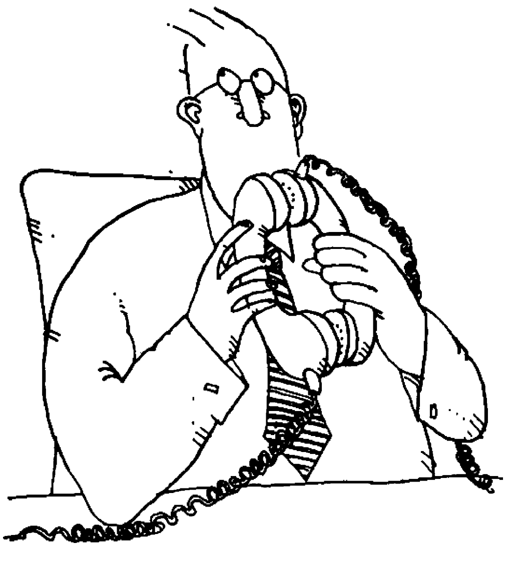
Creator: public relations is about *creating a bond*

For many years, the official definition of the Association of Communication was "the management function which helps to establish beneficial relationships between an organization and its publics." Later on, "beneficial relationships" was amended to "mutual understanding." These definitions were directly derived from the Anglo-American professional literature and the PRSA definition (1982; cited in Baskin & Aronoff, 1992, pp. 12–13). These definitions state that public relations helps an organization and its publics to adapt mutually to each other. Grunig (1989) adopted Schramm's view to theoretically underpin this definition in stating that "communication leads to understanding." In the Dutch undergraduate handbook of public relations, which has been one of the best-selling publications in its field for many years, Groenendijk (1997, p. 14) states that "Public relations is aimed at creating an equilibrium between an organization and its publics."

4.6. The facilitator: public relations is hosting the dialogue

The view of communication as an interactive two-way process combined with a focus on the connotative side of meaning characterizes the "facilitator" type. Facilitators employ a jargon typified by catchwords such as dialogue, interaction, revealing meanings, monitoring, facilitating, process management, and communicative competence. They see communication as a dialogue. Their job is to host the dialogue.

Facilitators are the type of public relations professionals who create environments in which meaningful dialogues can flourish. They select the actors, put them together, either virtually or directly, and chair the dialogue. They are not involved in the dialogue process itself, since this involves the free exchange of the participants' meanings. They are responsible for the continuation of the communication process in which the parties are engaged, not for its outcome. No longer a communicator themselves, they have become a manager of communications. Their claim to fame is based on successfully facilitating the communicative interactions of the organization's members, both inside and outside the organization. Facilitators typically prefer a staff position with professional autonomy, but without operational responsibilities. For the facilitator, public relations is all about mediation.



Facilitator: public relations is hosting the dialogue

Donkervoort (1993) was the first author, focusing on this view of public relations, claiming that the public relations professional should assist the manager and administrator in the communication aspects of policy development. In the nineties, van Woerkum (1997) radically changed his earlier definition of public relations by propagating the facilitator's role as the solution for all the communication problems encountered by managers and administrators. It is a view that can also be found in the Anglo-American literature on organizational communication consulting (see DeWine, 2001), but as far as I know of, it is not a common view in the Anglo-American public relations literature. Facilitators assist each communicating party by highlighting the meanings of the other party. They also facilitate members of the organization, enabling them to communicate well and making their interactions effective. A good number of publications in the professional journals show that public relations professionals endorse this facilitating view of their job. However, they fear that the very nature of this practice makes results hard to visualize, which in turn means that it is difficult to quantify and defend their productivity. That is why this view recently caused an extensive identity discussion within the Dutch public relations community.

4.7. The seat-of-the-pants: public relations is an art, not a profession

Although not foreseen in the theoretical typology construction, a seventh type emerged from the literature research, the "seat-of-the-pants" type, characterized by a non-view of communication. The seat-of-the-pants hates the typical catchwords in the public relations professional's jargon, like planning, image building, communication models, communication techniques, interaction, co-orientation, perceptions, etc. In their opinion, communication is magical mystery, which they, of course, will not define. They cannot say exactly what their job involves. In fact they are not interested in trying to define it, they just love it.[1]

Seat-of-the-pants feel that the sheer complexity of public relations means that it cannot be analyzed and categorized. They are the type of public relations professionals who feel that talent is everything. Public relations is a matter of inventing solutions instead of looking up empirical analyses and theoretical or practical models. They are generalists rather than specialists. They draw on personal experiences from their own life instead of keeping up with the professional literature and doing research. They hate handbooks and journals, because they feel that these contain no applicable solutions whatsoever. The same goes for professional education. Since they cannot use it to derive tools for everyday practice, they deny that it has any value. For them, public relations is at once everything and nothing, as there is no common denominator. What they do cannot be learned. Their claim to fame is to be a comforting factor of any kind to their bosses, whose unbiased trust they crave.

Obviously, this type is not to be found among the ranks of serious professional authors of handbooks and "how to" books. However, they are very well represented among biographies and miscellanea, and in columns, speeches and interviews. While specimens of this type excel in eloquence, they exhibit a marked lack of professional substance. To them, their professional life is a string of unpredictable incidents that need to be tackled on a case-by-case basis, problems that could never be solved using theories. The afore-mentioned Dutch 1996 research on public relations models revealed that quite some public relations professionals feel that communication is all things to all men, and that it defies definition. Dig Istha is a public relations consultant who is known for his outspoken views on the profession. He is also a columnist for *Communicatie*, the leading professional journal in the Netherlands. Writing in this journal, he fulminated against the "public relations professors with their SWOT analyses, their highly complex presentations, and their flow charts, full of triangles in circles and circles in triangles" (Istha, 2002, p. 25). His column leads with the statement that good public relations is "natural public relations." Public relations is not like mathematics, he claims; some people can do it, most people can't. His conclusion is that there is only one person in the Netherlands who merits a full professorship in public relations, and that is Mart Visser, one of the country's most famous couturiers. The reason? Merely because, if Istha is to be believed, Visser possesses this indefinable "je ne sais quoi."

[1] In Dutch this type had been called "the amateur," since this means "what one loves to do as a hobby" in Dutch.

5. The seven in perspective: a model of basic communication strategies

What can we learn from this exploration of theoretically constructed and empirically clarified public relations approaches? First of all, the typology reveals an interesting historic–genetic approach to public relations. Each of these types were found to be present in the professional literature, and their history was traced. The town crier and the steward were dominant in the early professional literature on public relations in the public sector and in the context of enterprise, respectively. The traffic manager and, more especially, the conductor were the dominant types in literature dating from the mid-eighties to the mid-nineties. This applied both to the public sector and the commercial sector. The creator was traced to official definitions by the Association of Communication dating from the sixties to the nineties. This type was also found in the most successful undergraduate handbook since the seventies, which is still used in most bachelor's programs. The facilitator was introduced only recently, first by the literature on public relations in the public sector and later by the business-oriented literature. The seat-of-the-pants type spans all periods and is found in interviews, columns and biographies. The typology, therefore, produced an instrument capable of generating historical insights into the practical thinking behind public relations. It can also help to rationalize the discussion on good and bad practice, and in the Netherlands it does so.

The ideal type, however, is also an instrument for theory-construction. Weber was reluctant to see ideal types as a normative isolation of 'the best' (Eliaeson, 2002). Rather than being viewed as an instrument for developing a normative theory of what should be done, ideal typing can be seen as a means of elucidating relationships between variables and of developing an empirical theory.

In 2001, Grunig (2001, p. 25) concluded that his models should be valued as a "contingency model that includes both symmetrical and asymmetrical elements." He described the two-way symmetrical model as a mixed-motive game in which asymmetrical and symmetrical strategies are used. In their empirical study on Excellence in Public Relations, Grunig et al. (2002, p. 208) claim "For public relations practitioners and public relations professionals to serve as effective bridge builders, they must act as the eyes and the ears of organizations, as well as their spokespersons. This means that communication practitioners must supplement the traditional crafts of one-way communication (such as organizing press conferences, writing news releases, and producing public relations materials) with competencies that permit them to enact two-way communication." Clearly, Grunig et al. (2001, p. 26) have decided that no single model can be rated as "best" for all aspects of everyday practice, as long as it is "bounded by a symmetrical world-view that respects the integrity of long-term relationships."

Following this reasoning, one could argue that all of the approaches developed above fit certain situations. However, from the point of view of social scientific communication theory, we have to argue that a model which views communication in a pre-scientific way, as a sort of magic bullet, cannot be classed as appropriate. Of course, press releases have to be written and materials have to be produced, but this must be done in support of specific aims. The potential receivers must always be borne in mind and the effects of these actions must be evaluated. These materials are simply a means, and not an end in themselves. That is why the town crier's and the steward's communication model-in-use cannot be taken seriously. The same is true of a model which treats communication as magical mystery. To paraphrase Schön (1987, p. 13), while the art of improvisation is certainly necessary, this does not imply that communication is all things to all men, as the seat-of-the-pants type would like us to believe.

There is, however, no empirical or logical evidence that any one of the four remaining communication models alone could outclass the other three models. We all try to inform and persuade others, and we also engage in dialogue and negotiations, depending on the context and the situation (van Ruler & Vercic, 2003). For that reason, following Weick (1987, p. 106), the question is not "Is the model true?" All models are true in their respective fields of application. We can therefore postulate that all four remaining models can be of use in public relations, but as strategies rather than as isolated models. The question then is "When, and under what conditions, are the models true?"

This fits the approach to models of organizational communication adopted by Krone, Jablin, and Putnam, 1987. They described four perspectives of organizational communication, e.g., mechanistic, psychological, interpretive-symbolic, and systems-interaction. They argue that "research and even application in the field of organizational communication espouses, either explicitly or implicitly, a particular view of communication. This view shapes the way people see organizational communication and the way they interpret what they see" (p. 37). However, their conclusion is that no single perspective is either right or wrong. All four models yield different insights into communication, "In effect, communication encompasses all of the four perspectives" (p. 38).

If we adopt their reasoning, this implies that we could use the four remaining communication models-in-use as strategies for public relations practice. To this end, the four models are placed in a matrix, producing a situational model of communications strategies. The degree of involvement of "the other" in the communication process forms one axis and the dominant view of meaning the other. The resultant model thus has four squares, which can be seen as part of the basic communications competencies of public relations. I refer to this model as the communication grid.

6. The communication grid explained

The four fields identified in the matrix can be seen as strategies of public relations practice. Each has its own theory, which sets out those conditions under which these strategies could be applicable and could, therefore, realistically be deployed. The four strategies constitute the "tool-kit" of public relations, so to speak. Anyone wishing to manage the organization's communications could use selected individual strategies to resolve specific communication problems. The matrix is therefore a situational diagram (see Fig. 2).

The square bounded by monitored one-way traffic and the denotative side of meaning provides the *information* strategy. Extension science ("Voorlichting" science) refers to this as "providing information in order to help people in forming opinions or decisions"(van den Ban, 1980; van Woerkum, 1982). While the concept of help is open to discussion, this wording defines what belongs in this square, namely the strategy of informing someone about something. Press releases and public relations materials are often made just to inform. The strategy demands a well-rounded policy (since there has to be a clear message), an informative message, and an aware, information seeking public (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Renckstorf, 1994).

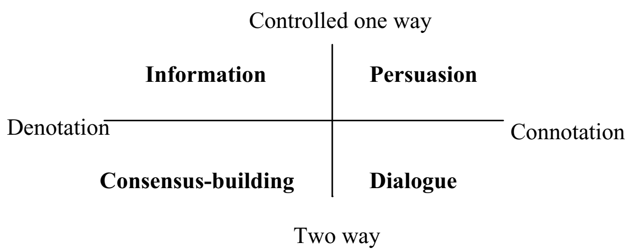


Fig. 2. The communication grid.

The square bounded by monitored one-way traffic and the connotative side of meaning provides the *persuasion* strategy. This is the basis of advertising and propaganda. What also fits this square is corporate communication, in the sense of presenting the organization so as to generate a favorable basis for further relationships with relevant stakeholders (cf. van Riel, 1995). It is a targeted tuning of the knowledge, attitude, and behaviors of specified others. The strategy demands a well-rounded policy, a persuasive message, and a latent public (Perlof, 1993).

The square bounded by two-way traffic and the connotative side of meaning provides the *dialogue* strategy. This ties in with the fact that many organizations are currently seeking consultation with prioritizing stakeholders, with regard to developing their policies (van Woerkum, 1997). It is a facilitating strategy that is specified in so-called interactive policy-making and socially responsible enterprising. This strategy can also be used for the effective handling of job discussions, for small-scale brainstorming to identify particular problems and for the collection of possible solutions to problems (Senge, 1990). The strategy is in keeping with the first phase of interactive policy development and decision-making (exploration and identification of the problem). It requires informational messages from both sides, and an aware public.

The square bounded by two-way traffic and the denotative side of meaning provides the *consensus-building* strategy. This strategy deals with building bridges between the organization and the environment or between employees (Dozier, 1992). This strategy can be deployed when there are conflicting interests at stake among interdependent parties, and it covers a process of mutual agreement. The strategy is in keeping with the second phase of interactive policy development and decision-making. It advocates an active public, clear negotiations, and room in the policy development process of the organization (Grunig, 1992a).

The theoretical aspects of the information strategy are mainly discussed within theories of mass media communication and journalism. Theories on persuasion are chiefly found within social psychology, advertising and propaganda. Discussions of dialogue and consensus-creation strategies are less common in the theoretical field of mass communication science. Yet dialogue and consensus creation is an important feature of conflict and negotiation theories, and a major point of study within organizational communication, interpersonal communication and mediation. It is currently being widely discussed and applied in the context of the learning organization and knowledge management.

7. Discussion

At first sight, the four basic strategies are all identifiable in reality because they are used on an everyday basis in communications between people. In the practice of public relations, however, one-way strategies are deployed more often than two-way strategies. As far as I am aware, no single textbook or manual in the field of public relations or related fields addresses all these forms of communication, let alone dealing with them as strategies for well-managed communications in the context of the organization. However, I propose to go beyond the limiting traditional practical public relations borders and view these four models, based on communication theory and derived from described public relations practices, as basic communication strategies to be used in public relations practice. As a model of basic strategies in public relations, the Communication Grid could serve as a "tool-kit" for everyday practice. As yet, however, it is nothing more than a model developed from theory. It needs to be tested, to determine which strategies are applicable under given conditions, and how they should be used.

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