



Part II: Preparation/Process

Chapter Three: Communication



Goals of communication

ALL planned communication must have a goal. Here are a few:

- To inform or educate on a particular topic.
- To persuade people to take certain actions.
- To motivate; for example, motivating employees to “pull for the team” is a regular organizational communications goal.
- To build mutual understanding; the simple attainment of understanding of a group in opposition.

In all efforts, an integrated, strategic approach is key.



Traditional theories of communication

- Two-step flow theory: stated that an organization would beam a message first to the mass media, which would then deliver that message to the great mass of readers, listeners, and viewers for their response.
- Concentric-circle theory: assumed that ideas evolve gradually to the public at large, moving in concentric circles from great thinkers to great disciples (followers) to great disseminators (distributors) to lesser disseminators to the politically active to the politically inert (static, not moving).
- Pat Jackson's Five-Step Process theory:
 1. Building awareness through all the standard communications mechanisms
 2. Developing a latent readiness: people begin to form an opinion
 3. Triggering event: something that makes you change your behavior, i.e., slimming down in time for beach season
 4. Intermediate behavior: when an individual is determining how best to apply a desired behavior. Information about process and substance is sought.
 5. Behavioral change: the adoption of new behavior.



Contemporary theories of communication

The complexity of communications in contemporary society has led us to more "audience-centered" theories:

A. Constructivism

Suggests that knowledge is constructed. It is therefore concerned with the cognitive process that advances the actual communication within a given situation rather than with the communication itself.

The message sender must understand:

- the receiver's beliefs, preferences, and backgrounds
- how receivers think about issues, then hopefully convince them to adopt a new point of view



Contemporary theories of communication.....

B. Coordinated Management of Meaning

- According to this theory, we construct our own social realities and ideas about appropriate action.
- When we interact, we try to coordinate our own beliefs and values with those of others

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Contemporary theories of communication.....

C. Grunig-Hunt Public Relations Models:

- Press agentry/publicity: one-way communication that beams messages from a source to a receiver with the express intention of winning favorable media attention.
- Public information: another early form of one-way communication to inform. Both this and the above have been linked to the common notion of "PR as propaganda".
- Two-way asymmetric: a more sophisticated two-way communication that allows an organization to put out its information and to receive feedback from its publics about that information. Under this method the organization would alter its responses to more effectively persuade publics to accept its position.
- Two-way symmetric: this preferred way of communicating advocates free and equal information flow between an organization and its publics, based on mutual understanding. This approach is more balanced as the PR communicator serves as a mediator between the organization and the publics.

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Consider the power of the word

- Communication begins with words. They are among our most personal and potent weapons.
- Words mean different things to different people depending on race, education, occupation, and personal background.
- Words significantly influence the message conveyed to the receiver.
- You, as a PR interpreter, must carefully understand and encode your client's messages.



The message: what is it?

The true importance of words lies in building key messages to move publics to action.

We can view them in three different ways:

1. The content is the message: the most popular; the content of a communication, constitutes its message. Neither the medium through the which the message is being communicated nor the individual doing the communicating is as important as the content.
2. The medium is the message: the content of a communication may be less important than the medium in which the message is carried. For example, a story carried on an Internet blog would generally carry considerably less weight than one reported in The New York Times.
3. The person is the message: for example, Adolf Hitler was a master of persuasion. Today, in a similar way, we often refer to a leader's charisma. The point is that a speaker's words, face, body, eyes, attitude, timing, presence-all form a composite that, as a whole, influences, the listener. In such cases, the source of the communication becomes every bit as important as the message itself.



Receiver's bias

- It is critical to understand the biases, preferences, and knowledge of our message receivers.
- Everyone is biased; no two people perceive a message the same way.

What factors can influence a receiver's bias?



Factor 1: Stereotypes

We live in a world of stereotypical figures. What images do the following bring to mind?

- Bankers
- Feminist
- PR flack
- Librarian
- Blue-collar workers

• For example, research indicates that a lecture delivered by a person wearing glasses will be perceived as significantly more believable than the same lecture delivered before the same audience by the same lecturer without glasses. The stereotyped impression of people with glasses is that they are more trustworthy and more believable.

❖ Like it or not, stereotypes influence communication.



Factor 2: Symbols

Consider the following symbols. What images do they create in your mind?

- The thumbs-up sign
- The Statue of Liberty
- The World Trade Center
- The Star of David
- The swastika

When properly used, symbols can be highly persuasive.



Factor 3: Semantics

- Semantics is the study of what words mean.
- Because words mean different things to different people, practitioners must realize how the careful selection of words can influence the interpretation of a message by an intended public.
- Language and the meanings of words are always changing, therefore, semantics must be handled with extreme care.
- i.e., pro-life signifies those against abortion and pro-choice to signify those in favor of allowing abortions.



Factor 4: Peer groups

- Recall the power of peer pressure from your high-school days. Did it ever cause you to believe or do things that you normally wouldn't?
- To frame effective messages, PR professionals must understand the intricacies of peer-group influences on attitude and action.

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Factor 5: Media

The media is a powerful agenda setter. The Agenda-Setting Hypothesis states that:

- The media do not reflect reality: they filter and shape it.
- Media concentration on a few issues leads the public to perceive those issues as more important.

By interesting the media to pursue client-centered stories, PR professionals also play a role in agenda setting.

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Feedback: the final link

Communicators must get feedback to know what messages are getting through, and how to structure future communications.

You aren't really communicating unless your recipient:

- hears your message.
- understands it.
- Reacts to it.



Feedback: the final link (cont'd)

What happens next?

Once the message is clearly understood, it may trigger one of several effects:

- Change attitudes: very difficult to achieve and rarely happens
- Crystallize attitudes: much more common. Often will influence receivers to take actions they might already have been thinking about taking but needed an extra push to accomplish.
- Create a wedge of doubt: can sometimes force receivers to modify their points of view.
- Do nothing at all: sometimes, changing attitudes and motivating action takes time, i.e., campaigns to reduce cigarette use and sales.

❖ Review Questions:

1. List the typical goals public relations professionals see for communication.
2. Define and discuss what semantics is and how it can affect a message.