Building a New Scenario for Public Relations

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Contemporary public relations, as a career and profession, is evidently in transition and even more seriously, in rapid transformation as the world enters the third millennium. Amid the still pestering maze of misconceptions which continue to hound and cast negative “spell” on it, the world has not stopped to challenge its characteristically dynamic nature.

The world is in endless pursuit of building, a new scenario for public relations. Its people continue to crave for changes to discard the unimportant and useless in their struggle for existence and survival. More specifically, those in the future generations, will in a way, seek to utilize the potentials and real power of public relations to make this world a much better place to live in.

Today, human beings in this aging planet must face the harsh realities of the times. They must deal with the uncertainties of a continuously changing environment and meet the challenges posed by the year 2000 and beyond. In a fast-shrinking world, the emergence of a “global village” can no longer be ignored. Growth and development must be greatly underscored to ensure the “institutionalization” of human organizations and concerns.

Public relations must, therefore, fully attune itself to the almost endless strings of demands of present-day society for a harmonious, productive, and progressive community of nations. Writer Loet A. Velmans, in the book of Daniel L. Wilcox, Phillip H. Ault and Warren K. Agee, Public Relations Strategies and Tactics, pointed out that public relations has changed dramatically during his nearly 40 years in the business of communication—but, “the changes have been in scope and means, not in its basic purpose.” Indeed, the more enterprising practitioners will never hesitate to stress that from its beginnings in the 1920s in the United States, “the mission of public relations has not changed substantially.”

Velmans, who is the chairman, president and chief executive of Hill & Knowlton, Inc. cited his predecessor, John W. Hill, an illustrious public relations practitioner who wrote:

“The roots of public relations are fixed in the basic fact that public opinion, confused, obscure, unpredictable as it may often seem, is the ultimate ruling force in the free world. A fundamental function of public relations is to help public opinion reach conclusions by providing it facts and interpretations of facts... Only with the understanding and support of public opinion can business flourish and grow” (Wilcox, et al: 1986).

In the Philippines, public relations practitioners consistently and persistently address the developments in information technology, professionalization, and field of specialization. They must, however, focus on the greatest problem which has time and again threatened the profession: public relations literacy or public relations education. Public relations practitioners are almost unanimous in asserting that, usually, 90 to 95 percent of their time are eaten by the pressing need to define public relations the way Ms. Dennis Griswold of the Public Relations News did, orient the persons concerned with the nitty-gritty work in public relations, yet still find no relief in the process.

Public relations literacy covers the whole gamut and milieu of informal and formal education. Whereas before, informal public relations education referred to seminars and workshops, orientations and symposia, today, a four-year degree course known as Bachelor of Science in Public Relations (BSPR) opens a much wider door of opportunities to practice the profession with greater confidence. In addition, after close to two decades (since 1977), the revision of the BSPR Curriculum was finally completed in a masteral dissertation. It elicited the approval among the best of the crop of practitioners and others in
the higher echelons of the academy.

Undoubtedly, public relations must uphold education as the key to align it with the other world-renowned professions and disciplines. Frank Jefkins, in his book, Essentials of Public Relations, wrote that three things are likely to occur to meet the changing situation in the world of public relations: "The public relations practitioner will need to be a technician capable of using the new technologies; public relations education will have to change from its present emphasis on training people already in the profession to preparing younger people for entry into it; and such people already in the profession to preparing younger people for entry into it; and such people will need to be qualified professionals like architects who combine vocational training with practical experience to gain admittance to the professional body" (Jefkins: 1988).

On the other hand, Fraser P. Seitel, wrote in his book, The Practice of Public Relations: "Undeniably, the people who practice public relations today must be better than those came before them. Institutions today operate in a pressure-cooker environment and must keep several steps ahead of the rapid pace of social, economic, and political change. The environment is being shaped by many factors." He identified these factors as: "economic globalization, shifting public opinion, aging of society, downsizing (in the corporate world), corporate responsibility, and technology."

Seitel further wrote in a rather futuristic style that among the "significant challenges" that will confront public relations professionals will be: "need for tailored approaches, development of new media, increased specialization, results orientation, creativity, decreased sexism, increased globalization, and technology." He summed up these challenges into a totally emerging trend known as "globalization."

Truly, as advocated by authors Leonard Saffir and John Tarrant in their book, Power Public Relations, "As we move toward the millennium, we can prepare for it by fostering the spread of public relations literacy. Everyone who aspires to business success should be literate in today's (and tomorrow's) 'Power Public Relations.'" They further wrote that, "Public relations literacy is important for two reasons. It is growing in stature; before long, just about any organization of any size will have a real public relations function, either in-house through an agency, or with a consultant." (Saffir: 1993).

It is understood that to deliver the impact for that power public relations, the basics and fundamentals of the profession must dictate the pace. In this regard, to maintain the relationships with its publics, Glen M. Broom, and David M. Dozier in Using Research in Public Relations, consider research as the "foundation of effective public relations." They subsequently detailed the four-step public relations process that casts research as central to the definition of public relations problems, monitor of public relations programs, and assessment of program impact. Without reliance on the rudiments of research, there can definitively be no public relations program to ever conceive and formulate.

Merton Fiur, in his article, "Public Relations Faces the 21st Century" which was included in the book, Precision Public Relations authored by Ray Eldon Hiebert, wrote:

"We see public relations elevated to new heights of importance and receiving the social, political and economic support to which it aspires within the organization. We see the professionals in the field being given every opportunity, albeit without guarantees, to grow and prosper as a result. We see function overcoming traditional problems and achieving significant new levels of effectiveness in helping the organization similarly overcome and achieve" (Hiebert: 1998).

Moreover, what should be primarily considered by the practitioners as the way to build a new scenario for public relations is adherence to the philosophy of their profession. It would not be logical to ignore or even disregard such philosophical statements culled from authors Robert D. Ross in The Management of Public Relations and Roy J. Blumenthal in The Practice of Public Relations among others that:

1. The organization exists only by public consent and its existence is justified only in terms of its contributions to society as viewed by society.

2. An organization must obtain and maintain an environment or social climate in which it can prosper best."

For this matter, what practitioners have always relied on in their work could be summed up into the more pronounced "spirit" of public relations which simply refers to a person's or organization's "social conscience," "social responsibility," "corporate soul," or even the classic statement attributed to the late Don Andres Soriano, Sr. of San Miguel Corporation "profit with honor." Corollary to this, greater efforts must be exerted to uphold proactive public relations, with emphasis on creative work. It is definitely in line with the age-old goal of preventive, as well as promotional public relations. While remedial or crisis public relations forms part of the triad nature of the profession, it should be held in check and not allowed to be ruled by a reactive kind of public relations. Generally, reactive public relations provides no guarantee at all for success, and could even serve ultimately as the death blow to "institutionalization."

The expansion in the field of specialization in public relations offers much to build a new scenario. To date, practitioners have done much to keep up with such specializations as High-Tech Public Relations, Marketing Public Relations, Sports Public Relations, Hospital and Medical Public Relations, and Govern
ment Public Relations or Public Affairs; including sub-specifications as Political Public Relations, Lobby Operations, and Public Relations Advocacy. The public relations ecology today has evolved into what practitioners have identified as its spectrum, which covers the numerous preoccupations and professions of people. As cited: "Indeed, the emerging trends in public relations became much more pronounced with the advent of what can be claimed as its tie-up with other world-renowned disciplines." (Santiago, 1997).

The mass media will always play an important role in the creation of a new scenario in public relations. However, practitioners know only too well that if mass media will always be equated with publicity and thereby add up (as it had happened) to the numerous misconceptions in public relations, it can never contribute much to bring about a desirable scenario. The fact is, publicity is only one-sixteenth of the entire work of totality of public relations undertakings. What should count most is how public relations practitioners establish rapport with the newspapermen and broadcasters in their common task of sincerely upholding the truth. Public relations' concern for mass media gave birth to Mass Media Relations, but until today, looks forward to the managements of media organizations to influence and empower themselves to serve the public interests, through the public relations counsellors if not consultants, and answer the quest for survival and institutionalization.

If the wake of accusations from certain sectors of society that media today have reneged in their duty to inform the public, the matter must be understood more in terms of the "principal" and the "principle." As explained by an authority on contemporary mass media, matters which pertain to it must be ascertained within the purview of vested interests. This disclosure amplified a former newsman's claim that, "there is no free press and free newspapermen (including broadcasts journalists) in the world toady." Hence, the world "principal"

should identify the owners of mass media establishments (otherwise known as business entities) whose vested interests are actually described as the "sacred cows." Such "idols and untouchables", in effect, enslave the journalists no end in the practice of their profession. They compromise their real status as virtual lackeys of mass media owners.

With such lamentable "idolatry" in present-day mass media, public relations practitioners must still effect meaningful relations with the journalists; more especially, in the face of fast developments being experienced in the field of information technology. Somehow, problems continue to be ironed out between the two professions for a much more productive kind of collaboration, even if only to underscore that, as estimated by John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton in their book, Toxic Sludge is Good for You, and subtitled, Lies, Damn Lies and the Public Relations Industry, "forty percent (40%) of all news, both print and television flows unedited from public relations offices (in the United States)."

More importantly, the new scenario for public relations should be in keeping with the greatest potentials harnessed by "Power Public Relations" or that concern which is a "research-based matrix of sophisticated techniques which are being used today to influence thinking and shape public reaction in ways undreamed of a few years ago...techniques which add to a potentially powerful arsenal of tactics for the aggressive engineering of perception." The approach should be realistic, admits mistakes, conveys balanced information rather than just puffery, and most of all, innovative (Saffir et al.: 1993).

Professionalization, equated with accreditation, must therefore be the all-consuming objective of practitioners, if at all that new scenario of public relations should become a reality. As it is, public relations men and women cannot be licensed to practice their profession, since they deal primarily with ideas and concepts within the confines of freedom of expression.

The practitioners have no resource but to police themselves through their professional organizations and comply with the known "Code of Professional Standards for the Practice of Public Relations." More ideally, a situation should ensue wherein the professionals on one side and academicians on the other, plus a more updated relevant public relations education, answer the agitations of a world with a burgeoning population obsessed with progress. Thereafter, a new scenario for public relations could be built, to be later on unfolded expeditiously and effectively. Based on such a direction and approach, there can be no qualms about success.

Bibliography
The microenterprise model in the undergraduate business curriculum of DLSU

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Background

De La Salle University-Manila envisions itself as the leading institution in the country and in the Pacific Region, one that produces entrepreneurs and corporate managers who are socially responsible, nationalistic and globally competitive. It is inspired by its mission to educate Lasallian students in the entrepreneurial and corporate skills through the use of innovative teaching methodologies, to conduct quality research, and to maintain a pool of competent and committed faculty and administrators.

With the assassination of Ninoy Aquino in 1983, the political, social and economic conditions of the country became unstable. Foreign investors left the country forcing multinational companies to close down. The unemployment rate increased and it became difficult even for college degree-holders to seek employment.

The Business Management Department of DLSU-Manila shifted its focus from corporate thrust to entrepreneurship track in order to address the problem of unemployment. Starting schoolyear 1985-1986, the Business Management Department took the cudgels of developing Lasallians in acquiring skills and motivation to start their own business and therefore be self-employed. The then newly-appointed chairperson Gloria Chavez nurtured the program from its conception to its implementation, developed courses, syllabi, and flowcharts, and initiated the forming of micro-enterprises out of a pilot group of 80 Business Management majors. Faculty members of the Business Management Department, both full-time and part-time, supported and assisted her in the program development.

Business Management Department’s objectives

Since then, the entrepreneurship program’s goal was to prepare and equip the students with knowledge and skills in the conceptual aspect (visioning, analytical thinking, critical thinking, and integration); technical aspect (accounting skills, financial skills, statistical skills, mathematical skills, oral and communication skills, research skills, marketing skills, production management skills, human resource management skills and computer skills); and personal aspect (hard working, self-confident, responsive, assertive and team-oriented). Furthermore, the program aims to inculcate among students the values of honesty, diligence, compassion, commitment, competence, nationalism, perseverance and pursuit of excellence.

Strategies

The objectives mentioned above are achieved by allowing the students to go through the basic quantitative and qualitative business subjects, and by exposing them to actual business practices of entrepreneurs through a Practicum Program that aims to give students a hands-on experience of a micro-enterprise.

Policies

To be accepted in the Practicum Program, the students should have passed all the pre-requisite subjects such as:

All Mathematics subjects up to Inferential Statistics (College Algebra 1&2, Calculus, Statistics 1 &2) -- The basic Algebra courses are offered to develop in the students the ability to think critically and logically. Furthermore, the students form the habits of neatness and orderli-
marketing with primary emphasis on its four basic elements such as product, price, place, and promotion. The students are encouraged to prepare a marketing program and develop a hypothetical product for presentation.

Course description

The Practicum Program of the Business Management Department gives the students a hands-on experience in the organization, operations and liquidation of a micro-enterprise. The program is being handled by a Practicum Coordinator, who appoints practicum advisers, conducts general assemblies, trains business officers, invites trainors or resource speakers for workshops, schedules submissions of reports, collates grades, and serves as the liaison officer of the Practicum Program.

These are the steps that the students undergo in the Practicum Program:

1. **Grouping** - During the Environmental Scanning course, the students are grouped into a minimum of six and up to ten members, from which they will pool their resources to scan the environment for business opportunities and prepare a product concept paper for their choice of business enterprise.

Each group makes the product proposal by writing a concept paper. The product concept papers are reviewed by the practicum committee for screening purposes. Only approved products are carried over to the research proper.

2. **Research Work** - Once the product proposal is approved, the group does the marketing and technical study in their basic research subject for one term. They do the actual survey for market demand using their primary and secondary markets. During the following term, the students undergo the production and financial studies. It is ideal that the group is guided by the same teacher for two successive terms in the research subjects for purposes of continuity. At the end of the second research subject, the students defend their product feasibility proposal before a panel. They present the prototype of their product, which is then criticized by the panel for further improvement and development. The feasibility proposal is in the form of a paper submitted to the panelists. The copies of the feasibility study are turned over to the department for the library files.

3. **Practicum Proper** - The students take a 6-unit course equally divided into three terms (Practi1-2 units, Practi2-2 units, and Practi3-2 units). The students are then tasked to operate as a micro-enterprise that will manufacture goods or offer services for their customers. As they go through the process of setting up their business, each group is subjected to the following steps:

a). **Registration** - In the first term of the Practicum Program, each group registers as a corporation, under a corporate name, with dummy agencies that are set up by the department, namely: BIR (Bureau of Internal Revenue), SEC (Security and Exchange Commission), Office of the City Mayor, and DTI (Department of Trade and Industry). Each member of the group invests a sum of at least P1,000 as his/her subscribed share for the capital stock.

   Each group pays a minimal fee upon registration, which is then used by the Department for its operating expenses.

After registration, each group operates as a business entity for three terms, governed by by-laws and corporate mission/vision. Each member of the group is assigned his or her position with particular duties and responsibilities, following an organizational structure. Among these
positions are: Chairman of the Board, President, Corporate Secretary, Corporate Treasurer, Production Manager, Marketing Manager, Finance Manager, Human Resource Manager, Cashier, Accountant, Purchasing Officer, and Sales Officer.

The students are given seminars and workshops during the practicum program on the different business functions such as production, marketing, accounting and human resource management to further assist and guide them in their operations.

b) Actual production is done on plant sites outside the school campus. The students purchase raw materials, apply their technical skills in product design execution and rent machines and tools depending on their needs. The use of locally manufactured materials is highly encouraged. Practicum advisers are assigned to oversee the performance of the group members, by making regular plant visits. A periodic evaluation of the group and individual performance is done by the adviser and by the students themselves. Monthly reports are submitted to the adviser. The adviser takes charge of grading the students for three successive terms. They conduct actual board meetings and monthly meetings.

c) Actual selling is done in bazaars on or off-campus. The Philippine Trade Center has always been the showcase of most of the practicum products.

Most of the time the students are engaged in personal selling. All financial statements are audited by a Board of Auditors which is composed of some faculty members from the Accountancy Department.

The students go through steps b) and c) in all three Practicum courses. At the end of each Practicum course, the students make an assessment of the program.

d) Integration Paper—During the third term of operation or Practi 3, each group prepares an integration paper that narrates the students’ experiences as micro-scale entrepreneurs. The paper is presented before a panel of faculty members during a formal business presentation. A copy of the integration paper is submitted to the department for the library files.

c) Liquidation—At the end of the term, each group is required to liquidate and pay the corresponding income tax to the BIR in case of profit. Then the students file a notice of dissolution. The profit earned by the company, if there is any, is divided equally among the members.

Some students opt to continue their business after graduation.

Conclusion

In effect, with the practicum program, the students are able to go through a full cycle of conceptualizing, operating and liquidating a business enterprise. Since the first batch of entrepreneurship majors graduated in 1988, there have been numerous micro-enterprises that came and went, hundreds of products that were manufactured and sold, and thousands of pesos that were earned or lost by the students. But at the end of the Practicum Program, though each student has his own story to tell, most of them end up saying: “We learned much from the entrepreneurship program”. The values of hard labor, patience and commitment to one’s work are significantly appreciated by the students. Self-reliance, confidence, perseverance, nationalism and pursuit for excellence are instilled in them. Furthermore, the department has community outreach activities in the form of technology transfer to non-government organizations (NGO) involved in production of goods and services.

Until today, the Entrepreneurship Program undergoes continuous improvement. A periodic assessment of the program is being undertaken by faculty members as part of their research work. A practicum manual has been prepared by a group of selected Business Management teachers. The manual serves as a guide not only to the students of Entrepreneurship but also to the practicum advisers. It constitutes a significant step for further development.

The micro-enterprise model has inspired not only the students but also the faculty members who have learned with the students. During the almost 14 years of running the entrepreneurship program, the Business Management Department has been slowly achieving its objectives. It has been educating Lasallian students in the entrepreneurial and corporate skills through the use of innovative teaching methodologies. More importantly, it has maintained a pool of competent and loyal teachers and administrators who are committed to keep the fire burning.

References


BM Department Planning Workshops
Course Syllabi of Comath1, Comath 2, Comcalc, Comsta1, Comsta2, Busorga, Envsca, Accoma1, Accoma1b, Acctwoa, Acctwo, Finama1, Finama2, Market1 and Market2.

Correction: On page 4 of the May-June 1999 issue, the title of the article should have been "An analytical study of the amendment under Republic Act No. 8424" (not 8224). Our apologies.