

## RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT: THE HALLMARK OF PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE

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### ABSTRACT

*Public Relations is described as a calculated endeavor to establish and maintain a certain level of understanding between an organization and its publics. It is calculated because the major aim is to develop and encourage attitude and behavior which foster mutual understanding. Organizations conceptualize Public Relations as an effort to cultivate favourable public image essential for their success, based on this, organizations are always willing to invest maximally on such an endeavor through the concept of Relationship Management which usually serves as a formidable platform to achieve this mentioned major interactive need aimed at organizational development and the societal progress at large. The goal of Relationship Management, therefore, is to engender transformation, cooperation, peaceful co-existence, strengthening social responsibility, development and cordial relationship between an organization and its publics. It is on this premise that this paper examined Relationship Management roles in the practice of Public Relations and to open the practitioner's eyes to the powerful magical wand of the concept in achieving total Public Relations target goals of an organization. The study utilizes secondary source such as libraries, textbooks, journals, Newspapers, Magazines, archives and desk study in its methodology. Under the theoretical framework, Persuasion major thinking models were employed- The Psychodynamic Model and The Sociocultural Model- respectively. The paper concluded that Relationship Management and development is not only central to Public Relations practice and activities, it appears that much will not be achieved in the area of goodwill promotion and image management if there is a break up in relationship of any form. The study, however, recommended that there should be a strong relationship linkage between the organization and its publics in order to achieve enhanced satisfaction and improved loyalty. Also, Public Relations practitioners should take the lead in preparing strategies or action plans that will help organizations and publics to enhance mutual understanding, trust and benefits. Finally, organizations and publics should set common interests and goals.*

*Keywords: Public Relations, Relationship, Management, Publics, image, Social Responsibility*  
*Words count: 315*

### 1.0 Introduction

The fact that Public Relations practice has been globally accepted by modern organizations and individuals is obvious going by the rate at which Public Relations professionals are being hired by these organizations to handle communication issues and problems, especially those bothering on the image and goodwill of these establishments. The growth of Public Relations has been widely attributed to a number of factors including the need for adequate

and two-way flow of information, need for companies to meet up with corporate responsibilities, big governments, population growth, expansion and competition (Raufu 2014).

Organizations, by nature consist of interrelated parts that make the whole systematic arrangements which facilitate the production of goods and services that an organization engages in. Basically, at the centre of production of goods and services are the 'people' (human resources), at another end are the people whose needs the product/service is designed to meet (consumers), at another end are the people who facilitate the processes getting materials for production to the company (suppliers). There are those who are also involved in the process by which the goods and services reach the final consumers (the distributors). While these categories of people (publics) are vital to the establishment, other groups of people are also important to the success or failure of the company. To think that one or any of the group of people within the chains of an organization's overt and covert activities are less important is to make a big mistake. Like the saying goes, a leper may not be able to make milk, he definitely will find it easy to pour milk away.

It is from this perspective that one can easily establish that for an organization to exist, grow, develop and expand, it has to function within a nexus of relationships that oil the wheels of progress of the company. Public Relations is mostly concerned with deliberate and concerted efforts to establish relationship and maintain same using communication as the basic ingredients with the conviction that the organization had studied and understood the characteristics, strengths and weaknesses of each public relative yearnings and contributions to its operations.

## **2.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study is anchored on the Social scientific thinking on Persuasion Theories. Persuasion is defined as the process whereby an attempt is made to induce changes in attitudes and behaviours through involvement of a person's cognitive and affective processes. (Brandley, 1984). According to Burgoon and Ruffner (1978), most definitions of persuasion emphasize conscious intent, message transmission and behavioural influence. Roger Brown (1961), states that it is persuasion when the message stresses the interests of the receiver or the mutual interest source and receiver. This study principally looked at the models of persuasion – The Psychodynamic Model and The Sociocultural Model – respectively. These two models provided a bearing for most of the persuasion theories. These models were expounded by De Fleur and Ball-Rockeach (1975).

### **2.1 The Psychodynamic Model**

The Psychodynamic Model is traceable to the individual differences perspective and it holds that for a persuasive message to be considered effectively, it must succeed in altering the psychological functioning of the recipient(s) in a way that they will respond overtly with the model of behavior desired or suggested by the communicator. Sometimes, the psychological motivations used as intervening variables between the message stimulus and audience response include social urges, status drives, opinions, innovative ideas and a host of others. This model is in congruent with the ideals of Relationship management which indicates the professionalism of a Public Relations practitioner to be able to carry its publics along effectively on the activities of his/her organization by working on their social psyche for collective organizational participations.

### **2.2 The Sociocultural Model**

This drives at social relations perspective and it seeks to explain the ways in which variables such as organizational membership, work roles, reference groups and others. It employs cultural norms or antecedents to achieve social control, help to shape and change people's overt actions in a way from their own internal psychological dispositions. Messages are presented in such a way as to make recipients understand that these are the socially acceptable model of behavior with reference to given circumstances. The model, thus, presents a picture of consensus validation. As those who failed to conform are described as deviants, the conformists are eulogized as complied and integrated human beings. The model is particularly adaptable to behavioural change and its usefulness is not limited to this only area, advertising developer also use it extensively. The model assumed that change in value usually leads to corresponding changes in attitudes and behavior. The relevance of the model to the study is that it emphasizes the importance of communication in behavioural value change that happens to be the catalyst of relationship management between the source, receiver and the feedback. This means that once there is a concrete communication system in an organizational membership, firm and integrated relationship is always achieved easily.

## **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

This study utilized secondary sources such as libraries, textbooks, journals, archives, Newspapers, Magazines

and desk study.

## 4.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 4.1 Public Relations: Searching for definitions

Scores of definitions of Public Relations are showcased in different perspectives by scholars of Mass Communication. The British Institution of Public Relations had defined the practice as a ‘deliberate, planned and sustained efforts to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organization and its publics. The Mexican statement also viewed Public Relations as ‘art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counseling leaders of organizations and implementing planned programmes of action that will benefit both the organization and its publics. Seitel (2011) defines PR as a Planned process to influence public opinion, through sound character and proper performance, based on mutually satisfactory two-way communication. These definitions placed emphasis on two things which are vital to this write-up - organization and its publics. These two concepts have to be clearly explained in the context of this paper.

#### 4.1.1 Organization

The concept of organization has diverse meanings. Operationally, it could be seen as a method of bringing about coordination among various departments within an establishment so that relationships among positions can be established to ensure symbolic cooperation among individuals who are to reform specific tasks leading to the accomplishment of corporate goals. From this perspective, one can define organization based on relationships. These relationships can be formal or informal. Formal organization points to a structural system wherein jobs are well defined with a reasonable allocation of authorities and responsibilities so that goals can materialized when established norms are complied with. The key thing here is that every person/officer is responsible for his performance because the organization is arbitrarily established to accomplish pre-defined goals. (Arigela 2012). However, in a formal organization, a nexus of personal and social relationships co-exist to lubricate the work environment within the formal setting. Therefore, social groups are formed to establish informal relationships developed out of likes, dislikes, feelings and emotions (Angels 2012) even though they were not willingly established. On a general note however, an organization consists of a group of people conscientiously brought together for the purpose of achieving pre-determined objectives which may or may not be profit driven. The definition of organization dropped by Sreenivas (2012) appears most useful for this discourse, “many means it as it pertains to mean a group of people, a structure of relationship ... adding that organization is a mechanism or structure that enables living things to work effectively together. Simplicity, unity of command, better discipline, fixed responsibility, flexibility and prompt decision are the merits of line organizations.

From the definition above, one can see that the massive buildings that serve as production centres and the ones from where policies and decisions are made are nothing but mere facilities. Without people to turn these facilities, equipment and machines around into finished goods and services, no company or organization can exist. Without a group of people who get the raw materials and other things prerequisite to production ready, without those who get the product to points of access for consumers and without the consumers themselves coming forward to do the needful by way of effective demand, no matter how hard an organization thrives, it won’t accomplish its objectives. These facts serve as pointers to the relevance of another important component of acceptable definition of Public Relations:

#### 4.1.2 Publics

The publics of an organization according to Seitel (2011) is a group of people with a stake in an issue, organization or idea. This international Public Relations professional, scholar, writer and researcher sees the term Public Relations as misnomer preferring the term ‘Publics Relations’. Seitel argued that an organisation leads, not with one but many groups of people who are distinct. A Public <sup>Relations</sup> ‘publics’ is formed when a group of persons face similar situation that are uncertain or undetermined, sees something indeterminate and problematic concerning the situation and or come together to address the identified problem. Therefore, Publics usually assume dynamic nature and can be shaped by the issue at hand. By categorization however, Publics can be internal, external, primary, secondary or marginal, traditional and future, proponents, opponents and uncommitted. For Grunig (1992) Publics can be grouped into the following; Latent Publics, Aware Publics and And Active Publics. Seitel (2011) also generated the under-listed publics for Multinational Corporations. The comprehensiveness of this list has made it all encompassing for any establishment such as Employees families, Managers / Supervisors, Media, Stakeholders, Investment Community, Competitors, Suppliers, Special Interest groups, Community

Neighbors, International Community, Bank, insurers, Trade Associations, Dealers, Consumers, Federal, State and Local Legislations, Regulatory authorities, Academic community, Labor Unions, Board of Directors, Clerical Employees.

Most of the public of organization that Public Relations work for are members of the community within which the organization is established. This may inform why Cutlip and Centre (1982) defined a community as comprising the traditional rulers, Community leaders, Local press, Civil groups, Students facility, school officials, Municipal employees and local officials, Local merchants and industrialists, Organized labour Unions, Artisans and others. The community and the organization have to relate effectively and this relationship should be initiated and oiled by planned communication efforts of the organization. That every community has its own movers and shakers is not in doubt. It is imperative for the organization to identify who the movers and shakers of the community are as a basis for establishing rapport. Adefolakan (2014) identified the following as movers and shakers of the community; Traditional rulers, Community leaders, Opinion leaders, Leaders of youth organization, The mass media, Students' bodies, Market men and women leaders, Human right activities, Indigenes of other tribes and Foreigners. The scholar noted the following as prime movers of communities; Employee's family, The press, Opinion leaders, Social/philanthropic organizations, Crusaders, and pressure groups.

Both the organization and the publics have one fundamental thing in common – the underlining force is the people -. While one may reasonable argue that the major concern of an organization is to use people to engage in activities that will make it achieve its aims and objectives at a profit, it may also not be out of place to reason that Public Relations is mostly concerned with the people and their attitudes towards the organization with the intent of ensuring that good will and better image that can continue to drive the purpose of the organization and increase the investor's dividends are not jeopardized and where it has already been jeopardized, are remedied. Buttressing this fact, Grunig (1992) perceived Public Relations as “the effort to motivate and influence people primarily through communication to think well of an organization, to respect, support and stick with it through trial and trouble.

Perhaps, the reality of the involvement of people in organization's activities, fortune, misfortune, was why Christian [ibid] included terms such as motivation, influence, communication and support in the above definition. Of course, communication is not only central to human settings, it is very essential to the establishment and maintenance of team work that make the attainment of corporate objectives possible. This might be the thinking of Jefkins (1998) when he defined Public relations as consisting of all forms of planned communication, outward and inward between an organizations and its publics for the purpose of achieving specific objectives concerning mutual understanding. Quite a number of definitions of Public relations proffered by scholars stressed the idea of 'mutual understanding. This is because when diverse interests are involved, conflicts of interests will set in naturally. Without doubt, mutual understanding, once established is the only antidote to resolving image-damaging crisis for the establishment. From this angle, it is obvious that Public Relations is also a very useful tool of resolving issues involving an organization. Therefore, another way to explain PR is to say that the letters stand for 'problem resolution' and that what PR practitioners do is use communication strategies and tactics to resolve varied problems for clients or organizations (Raufu 2014).

The phrase “to resolve varied problems” is suggestive of the fact that problems are inevitable in any human society or organization. To be able to prevent or solve problems, the study of attitude is germane. Odedeji, Oketokun and Adeleke (2009) viewed attitude as a predisposition either to notice, to perceive, to select, to remember and to react to a particular issue or topic (in reality or abstract or verbal form) in a particular way whenever arises. Fagboingbe and Longe (2005) saw attitude as a construct, an abstraction which cannot be directly apprehended. Adding that it is made up of enduring cluster of beliefs, feelings and behavior tendencies held by individuals towards issues, objects or groups. According to Aluko (2007) attitude is a person's feelings about objects, events and other people. Aluko's definition of the concept of attitude captures its essence in Public Relations practice.

Public Relations practice is more interested in four types of human attitudes: the attitude of Hostility, the attitude of Prejudice, the attitude of Apathy and the attitude of Ignorance. All these four attitudes are negative to the organization in the area of Public Relations for which positive attitude must be sought. The positive attitudes which the Public Relations officer wants to replace the negative ones with are sympathy, acceptance, interest and knowledge. According to Jefkin (1992) who coined this Public Relations model, hostility should give way to sympathy, prejudice should be replaced by acceptance, apathy should be changed to interest while ignorance



should be over-powered by knowledge. This is the change process model. Again, this model only confirms that human beings are central to the organization's survival, growth, development and expansion. All known scholars in the field of communication and Public Relations have placed much emphasis on the human factor (people), which is what qualifies Public Relations to fall within the social sciences.

#### **4.1.3 Relationship as people oriented**

The basic functions of management in any establishment are designed to control workers (people's) attitude so that productive activities can be achieved in line with the investors' interest. That is why early definitions of the concept saw it as the art of getting things done through people. What this means is that management facilitate the accomplishment of organizational goals by making arrangement for the task to be performed by other people and ensuring strict compliance with the primary objective of achieving organizational goals, and be able to attain competitive hedge or meaningful profit for the establishment, all managers perform the function of planning, organizing staffing, directing, and controlling (Cunningham, Aldag and Swift 1984). The above functions which managers perform regardless of the nature and activities of organizations their work has naturally provoked the need to establish and maintain relationship that are informal even within the formal setting. If there is no controversy about the fact that the bulk if not all management's activities are geared towards getting workers (people) to know what to do and who does it? In what volume and quality? If there's no argument about the fact that the management, as a matter of necessity must get other people involved to achieve the pre-determined objectives, then, there should be no opposing opinion concerning the place of "relationship" and its "management" as far as the operations of Public Relations are concerned.

#### **4.1.4 The concept of Relationship**

By simple definition, relationship is a term used to describe a person, group or association connection with others. Naturally, as social animals, human beings rely heavily on these associations or connections to form societies and uplift same to this level of modernity. The various elements that characterize the society are driven by relationship or association of the parts with one another to make a whole. In fact, 'relationship' and 'system' are two words that are difficult to separate by definition. Therefore, to maintain relationship, management as system will not be out of place. Having established that Public Relations is the management function that establishes and maintains mutual benefit, relationship between an organization and the public on whom its success or failure depends cannot be overlooked (Cutlips, Centre and Broom 2006). It stands to reason that relationship management is *sin-qua-non* to the survival, growth, failure and success of organization. Hon and Grunig (1999) established that through its communication programmes which often result in quality long-term relationship with strategic publics, especially stakeholders, Public Relations has added some value to the organization.

Two types of relationships with four features were pointed out by Hon and Grunig (1989). These are Exchange relationship and Mutual relationship. In the former a party tries to help or assist the other in appreciation of the assistance or help that the other party had rendered to him/her in the past or better still in anticipation of the assistance or help that is being expected from the other. Something "benefit" is being exchanged in such a relationship. This form of relationship identifies "obligation" from someone or a "debt" that has to be paid back. When products or services of an organization are being effectively demanded for by the consumers, an exchange relationship has taken place because mutual benefits have manifested. That is why it behooves on the organization to keep such relationship intact and improved by giving to consumers' values of the money they have given in exchange for the product/service enjoyed. The emphasis here is on the need to evolve, maintain and sustain the culture of quality. The thinking that Public Relations inputs should be brought in at the point of product/service generation idea is to facilitate certain uncompromising ingredients of the product/service that will make "quality" the tradition as a way of planting the seeds of goodwill that will germinate and develop to a big tree" of image that would be difficult to tamper with.

The second relationship is 'communal' in nature. This relationship provokes help or assistance being voluntarily rendered by all parties concerned and to one another because of consideration for the welfare of the others without having the mind of such action being reciprocated. Public Relations must be able to impress it upon the management that mutual relationship with the Public – employees, the community government, media and stakeholder etc should be willingly established, sustained and maintained. Communal relationship will also portray the organizations as being socially responsible. This will no doubt add value to the society and client organizations. Formal relationships inherent in "exchange" and "communal" are essential to the success of an organization. But also important is the need to put in place better interpersonal relationships that can strengthen these formal

relationships. Again Hon. & Grunig (1999) concerned the following ingredients of interpersonal relationship.

- Control Mutuality which talks about the extent that parties in a relationship are contended with the amount of control they have in the relationship. Although power imbalance is natural, for stable and favorable relationship, certain degree of control must be enjoined by all parties to bring time into the relationship.
- Trust: This has to do with confidence that parties involved have for one another in each other as the case may be. The magnitude of the confidence will determine how open minded the parties will be in the relationship. Facilitators of trust in a relationship are factors such as integrity, dependability and confidence. Integrity for an organization rest on the extent to which it can be adjudged to be just and fair. Such organization is dependable in it is noted for “doing” whatever it says it will do while competence has to do with the ability of the organization to what it has promised to do.
- Commitment: This is manifested by the degree of the believes and feelings that the parties think such relationship should be dissipated energy on in order to maintain and promote the relationship. Here, if both parties feel that nothing is too much to sacrifice in the sustenance of the relationship, high commitment results.
- Satisfaction explains the feeling of being favorably treated, attended to or accommodated by each party through the communication that positive expectations concerning the relationship have always been promoted and driven.

To be able to serve as the value of relationship quality between organizations and their publics and the supportive behaviours from stakeholders that are more likely to result when the organizations and publics have a positive relationship (Jo, Hon and Brunner 2004), Public Relations must device unique communication strategies for relationship building. This requires impressing it upon the organization to be open and honest with stakeholder, talk on their need regularly, develop close personal relationship, jointly record and agree actions to avoid potential misunderstanding. Definitely, communication, when used strategically can serve instrumental purpose (Aina, 2006).

#### **4.2 Relationship Management**

Relationship management is a strategy which enables one organization to maintain a continuous level of engagement with its audience. It entails devising a process that would build support for the business and its products by increasing brand loyalty. Relationships should be built not only at customer level but also at the level of business. The concept of relationship management as embraced by Public Relations can greatly reformed media relations and publicity model (Watson and Noble 2007). Media Relations and Publicity as we have seen over time have reduced Public Relations efforts and activities to align with the asymmetric model of Public Relations Practice (Jefkins, 1990). Not only should the voice of the organization be heard, the response of the publics should also be enlisted to foster early relationship. Ledigham (2003) suggested that relationship management is a general theory of Public Relations. The scholar contented that there are major tools to be employed for effective Public Relationship, these are the media which involves photography, press conference, News releases, Press briefing, Press reception Press luncheon, media facility visit and documentary. Others are Publication, Lobbying, Sponsorship, Events management, Trade fair and exhibitions and film production and video.

#### **4.3 The Place of Inter-Personal Relationship**

Attempting to defining interpersonal communication Trenhohun (1991) noted that it is generally reserved for two people, face to-face interaction and is often used interchangeably with the term dyadic communication. When a maximum of three to six people converge to crack a joke, share news or information, when a student asks the teacher a question, when there's a family discourse, or a situation that prompt one to express love, affection or romantic gesture, the terrain falls within the territory of interpersonal communication. The fact that two people are engaged in communication does not suggest interpersonal communication neither does face-to-face interaction a pointer to inter-personal communication. The defining characterizes of interpersonal communication (Burgeon and Ruffner (1978) in Aina (2006) noted are not context-bound, rather, it is the nature of the communication that makes it interposal or non-interpersonal.

Holding deferring opines (Hybels and Weavers, also in Aina (2006) said interpersonal communication exists where we talk to people on a one-on-one basis, usually in an informal setting. Broadening the concept, Brooks (1976) in Aina (2006) wrote that interpersonal communication is a process in which from one to twenty persons attempt to influence one another through the use of a common system, in a situation permitting equal

opportunity for all persons involved in the process to influence one another. It is when there is opportunity for relationship building at dyadic, triadic and small group level (Aina,2006) that organizations can enjoy good relationship and management. Interpersonal communication strategies are rooted in the display of inherent human relations approaches to relationship management. Although, these approaches are informal, they can be quite useful for relationship enhancement. A better understanding of these human relations methods is to seek answers to the following question:

- i. Do we know the birth dates of all employees and other persons who are key to the operations of the establishment?
- ii. Do we care to wish them well on these occasions?
- iii. Do we show concern when we ought to have seen but could not see them by attempting to knowing their whereabouts?
- iv. Do we attend social functions/parties when invited?
- v. Are we showing enough concern to the plights of these people during difficult times?
- vi. Do we care to know where they live and visit them occasionally?
- vii. Do we ask questions about the welfare of their families?
- viii. Are we projecting ourselves as a “friend” to the other persons?
- ix. Do they see us as trusted fellows?
- x. Is our attitude friendly and accommodating?
- xi. Do we make them lively when they are with us?
- xii. Do we listen to their complaints and work on the when brought to our notice?

The “we” here needs to be thoroughly explained. Relationship management is a comprehensive, multi- level and multi-facet activities that should involve every member of staff of the organization. All the questions posed above intend to expose what the well being of people either as employees or whatever means to the organization. Adamolekun and Ekundayo (2002) were of the opinion that organization that identifies with the well being of the people is providing itself with new opportunities for growth and development. Therefore, induction orientation for staff should necessarily make it a tradition to explain and inculcate in the workers, the policy of the organization on relationship management. Successful public relations practice sees every member of staff of the organization as its image projector through strict compliance to the principles and tenets and public relations, one of which is relations development and management.

#### 4.4 Evaluating Relationship

Relationship development and management naturally involve investments in time, money and other resources by the organization and persons concerned. Certainly a blue-print stating the objectives of an organization’s relationship management strategies should be developed. This entails planning as well. This is to enable the organization do an assessment of its efforts at relationship management with the public. Evaluation of these activities can be measured against the pre-determined objectives to ascertain the level of success or failure. Grunig (2002) posited that non-statistical methods like interview and focus groups can be used to evaluate relationship. He noted that there could be a guide to questions concerning six dimensions of relationship while information collected can be analysed. The core areas of evaluating relationship and on which relevant questions should be coined are control mutuality, rust, Commitment, Satisfaction, Exchange relationship and communal relationship. Then, Public Relations can measure the four “Os” of:

**Output:** A measure of the volumes and quality of messages which have been received by specific audiences.

**Out-take:** What is the understanding of the public about the Public Relations messages.

**Outcome:** Are the Relationships Management objectives being achieved?

**Outflow:** Can we pin-point, in specific terms, the relations with stakeholders. (Thellusson 2003).

This intelligence will help Public Relations to assist an organization grows and develops in no small ways. Although measurement of relationship is relatively new in the area of Public Relations evaluation (Watson and Noble, 2008), the idea of evaluation is one of the corner-stones of effective Public Relations which presents answers to questions of effectiveness and efficiency in the practice.

#### 5.0 Conclusion

Relationship development and management is not only central to Public Relations practice and activities, it appears that much will not be achieved in the area of goodwill promotion and image management if there’s a break-up in

relationship of any form. This area of Public Relations added to the already wide scope of Public Relations practice. Unfortunately, a good number of organization have not considered the practice (Relationship) as being really worthy of gaining its attention in the area of budgetary allocation for organizations to benefit even more. The total efforts of Public Relations are geared towards making people (the Publics) to think well about the organization and identify with it in all facets. To be my friend, you must show that you are not my enemy. The emphasis here is on “good deeds” which Adefolakan and Ajibola (2010) described as the Public Relations technique for establishing and maintaining mutual understanding, adding that Public Relations is the all of getting credit for achievements.

## 6.0 Recommendations

1. There should be a strong relationship linkage between the organizations and publics in order to achieve enhanced satisfaction and improved loyalty.
2. Public Relations practitioners should take the lead in preparing strategies or action plans that will help organizations and publics to enhance mutual understanding, trust and benefits.
3. Organizations and publics should set common interests and goals.

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