

PUBLIC RELATIONS –GENERAL ASPECTS

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Abstract:

The relations established between people, between them and the organizations they belong to, have evolved and are evolving permanently, are changing according to the changes occurring in the society and must reflect its permanent needs. Therefore, frequently the phrase “public relations” is confused with other expressions that have no direct connection with these, or at all.

Key words: *public relations, communication, people, evolution, activity.*

To talk about public relations, about what they are representing nowadays, about their importance and influence in a world in continuous motion, in a constant transformation, we must know how they appeared, the reason why they did, and how the public relations evolved.

Public relations represent a phenomenon characteristic of the twentieth century, but the roots of this activity spread to ancient times, seeming as old as human communication. Thus, some communication techniques, which are integrated in today’s public relations activities, have been used in different times of history, by different groups and personalities. The improvement of these techniques, their institutionalization and theorizing led to imposing a field by itself, some clean-cut activities and a professional category with a well-defined individuality. [1]

On the other hand, the evolution of public relations, meaning their individualization and legitimacy as an independent professional activity, is almost entirely an American phenomenon. As stated by the authors of a reference book:

... undoubtedly public relations have grown faster in the USA than in other countries due to the national, economic, social, political and specific cultural climate and the unique power that the media here benefited from. (D. Newsom et al., 1993, p.33). [2]

If we were to summarize the public relations activity, the public relations practitioners, we should search and analyze the activity developed in the USA in the early 20th century. There were well-known founders of this field, there were settled the terminology, the principles and the strategies, and reference works or the first companies in the field emerged there.

Thus, in 1990, in America, there were 162,000 practitioners of public relations and it is estimated that their number reached about 197,000 at the end of the century. The most important professional organization is Public Relations Society of America, which has about 20,000 members; in 1955, in the USA, 28 universities offered programs of public relations; in 1985 their number increased to 150 and the number of students who graduated each year such academic

cycle is about 10,000. These figures exceed by far those offered by European education system, where public relations occupy positions less privileged, standing at the edge of other areas. [3]

Over the years, the public relations concept, the field has evolved, has grown, has tackled public relations from new perspectives, more constructive, more innovative, and the evolution and the development of the society that the public relations were serving, have put its print on them.

As indeed was observed from their evolution, public relations acted in a certain way on the North American continent (from their appearance until today), and influenced the activity of those who have used them, and they acted and made their presence felt differently in other parts, especially in Europe .

Public relations practitioner serves as an intermediary between the organization that he represents and all that organization's audience. As a result, public relations practitioner has responsibilities both to the institution, and to its various audiences. He or she distributes information to enable the institution's audiences to understand its policies. [4]

What do the public relations actually represent?

The phrase "public relations", so banal for the contemporary vocabulary, was used in a theoretical acceptance, for the first time in 1882, when a lawyer named Dorman Easton, held a speech, in front of students from the Faculty of Law of the Yale University, entitled "Public relations and duties of legal advisers". He perceived the public relations as the concern for the public good. With the same meaning, the phrase is also used by Theodore Veil (the president of American Telephone & Telegraph Company) in 1909, when he named his company's annual report "Public Relations". Later, in 1920, Edward Bernays used the phrase "public relations counselor" to describe the work of practitioners in this field (until then they were individualized by terms such as "press agent" or "advertiser"), imposing the current acceptation of the term. [5]

After years of activity in this field, public relations began to be employed with more reliability, with confidence in the results of the work of those who were carrying them out, being received in as many and different fields.

Public relations imply analyzing all publics: receiving information from them, warning the management about their attitudes and reactions, help given in establishing policies that demonstrate increased attention to audiences and constant evaluation of the effectiveness of all public relations programs. This default role includes all activities related to observation and influencing the opinions of a group of people. This is the only communicative aspect. [6]

Either we are talking about the first moments of their appearance, or we are talking about public relations from 20th and 21st centuries, public relations are closely related to communication. They cannot get their desired results without good and effective communication, and without a close liaison established between audiences, between the managers and the subordinates, and vice versa.

This is why, when dealing with public relations, inevitably it reaches to communication as a phenomenon that accompanied and will accompany public relations.

Communication implies reversibility of messages within the relationship which brings together two entities, even if the messages are not of the same order. It involves creating a sense, according to the uninterrupted correlations between our faculties to perceive signals, the richness of the vocabulary (to decode them), the imagination (to interpret them), and the memory, to keep them consistent when in turn, we become transmitters and address messages in return. [7]

As the communication field authors concluded, its definition is also given by the field researched by the person who gives the definition in that moment.

In this case, communication can take the accents of linguistic, psychological and psychosocial philosophical, mathematical, and pedagogical definitions. Therefore, as noted by Jean Lohisse when referring to the term communication : "Every field of knowledge has its definition or definitions which emphasize , as appropriate, the exchange, the contact, the transfer, the transport, the energy, the information ..." (Lohisse , J. 2002 , p.12). [8]

The word "communication" is part of those general notion that possess a special extension: communication may be human, animal , vegetal or mechanical [...] Communication is what allows establishing a relationship between people, between objects, or between people and objects. It designates either the action to communicate, or the result of this action (R. Rieffel , 2000 , p.18). [9]

The public relations and the communication have been and always will be in a direct, closed and indestructible connection, because they need each other, because the audience whom public relations address to need a comprehensible communication – regarding each field in part - , and messages that reach their addressees with the desired and pursued meaning.

Most public relations experts consider effective communication as the key to success in public relations between an organization and its audience. They argue that it involves the creation of two-way communication waves, from the medium to the organization and vice versa, with mutual benefit. An organization must be a good listener, sensitive to public’s restlessness, interests and values, a good communicator, able to persuade the public to listen its messages, to understand and accept that point of view. Pointedly, public relations aim to establish a communication medium, mutually beneficial. [10]

Public relations circumscribe an area where numerous types of activity are integrated, some specific, and some common to other spheres of activity. Therefore, public relations are often confused with different areas such as advertising, marketing, lobbying, public affairs, fund-raising, etc. or with actions as propaganda, manipulation, promotion of interests, etc. Furthermore, the name of "public relations" circulates in combination with other formulas, referring to the same type of activity: due to the attack (often unfair) of the press, many departments and firms use euphemisms such as " public affairs", "public information", " enterprise communication", "information management" etc. [...] Public relations represent a function and a factor supporting democracy, ensuring processes transparency, fair and equal communication, and mutual trust. [11]

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