PUBLIC INFORMATION IN GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS: A REVIEW AND CURRICULUM OUTLINE OF EXTERNAL RELATIONS IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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Abstract

External relations in public administration encompasses the use of information outside the boundaries of a government agency to accomplish administrative purposes. It is integral to the conduct of public administration, whether as a specialized activity or as an approach held by the agency's leadership. However, the contemporary curriculum in public administration education pays little attention to external relations. With the rapid expansion of the digital age and the information explosion, the importance of managing informational relationships in the 21st century is certain to increase. Public administration practitioners and educators need to broaden their scope of attention to embrace external relations.

External relations can accomplish many different management goals and can be planned to reach specific audiences. Once a government manager has analyzed an external relations challenge and identified the purpose and audience involved, then the techniques for such an effort can be selected from standard menus available to the practitioner.

Scope of the Study of Information

In this information age, of e-this and virtual-that, one could easily overlook some subjects within the overall topic of a symposium on Information and Public Organizations. Nowadays, the usage of the word 'information' has become nearly monopolized by its computer-related meaning. Whether discussing the work of a Chief Information Officer (CIO), the IT needs of an agency or the information resources at its

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disposal, the intent is clear. Information is the topic that is synonymous with the computerized age. In this context, information essentially refers to the process of handling data – whether numbers or words.

The problem with this usage is that it obscures a different historical meaning of the word in public administration. For Roberts, 'government information' is the topic covered by Freedom of Information (FOI) laws *(Roberts, 2000, p. 309)*. The activities and offices in public agencies that deal with the press have been called 'government information media' *(Rivers, Miller and Gandy, 1975, p. 222)* or 'government information systems' *(Asante, 1997, p. 35)*. The most common coinage is 'public information' *(Schedler, Glastra and Kats, 1998; Gordon et al., 1973)*. 'Public information officer' is the personnel classification for someone working in that area *(Dunwoody and Ryan, 1983; Press and VerBerg, 1988, p. 241)*.

This essay focuses on the latter meaning of the word. In particular, it reviews the scope of public information in public administration and outlines a curriculum approach that would present the subject comprehensively.

Status in Public Administration Education

Previously, this author has argued that public relations is integral to the conduct of public administration *(Lee, 1998-99)*. The first textbook in public administration *(McCurdy, 1986, p. 176)* asked in 1926, "How can a working connection be maintained between the official and the public?" *(White, 1926, p. 476)*. Herring answered in 1935 that "the skillful and effective use of publicity is one of the essential devices of successful administration" *(Herring, 1935, p. 170)*. Within a year, he had already sharpened and broadened that statement from a generalized administrative focus on 'publicity' to the importance of "an office for the management of public relations" *(Herring, 1967, p. 368)*. Four years later, Woolpert stated that for municipal administration, "public relations problems are inseparable from the program of a city and…every member of the organization is, or should be, a public relations officer" *(Woolpert, 1940, p. 45)*. Some contemporary observers have concurred about the continuing value of this activity in public administration by noting – not necessarily approvingly -- that public managers can effectively use citizen participation and other

public outreach programs as "an instrument for the achievement of administrative objectives" *(Hummel and Stivers, 1998, p. 54)*.

Yet, public information is not part of contemporary public administration pedagogy. Also previously, this author documented the disappearance of public relations from the graduate curriculum by comparing Public Administration textbooks from the 1920-1950's with those of the 1980's and 1990's *(Lee, 1998)*. At the mid-point of the same time period of that textbook review, an international survey of curricula documented that public relations was rarely part of public administration training in institutions of higher education. An agency of the United Nations had sponsored a study of public administration education that included a summary of the curricula of 17 schools in 11 countries. Only four schools listed public relations, external relations or communication as a subject for study *(Molitor, 1957, pp.158, 170, 174, 189)*.

Both practitioners and scholars have called for increasing the attention to external communication in public administration pedagogy. Kell described communication as "public administration's forgotten art" *(Kell, 1992)*. Swoboda examined the literature on relations between public administrators and the media and concluded that it was "sparse," containing little applicable guidance to budgeting practitioners *(Swoboda, 1995, p. 75)*.

Academic writers have made similar observations about the importance of public relations (and, in general, communications) to the public administrator as well as the paucity of such training in university curricula. In 1991, Waugh and Manns suggested that one of the modifications needed in the curriculum of public administration would be to teach "public administrators [how] to promote their services better and good communication skills are necessary to accomplish that public relations task" *(Waugh and Manns, 1991, p. 137)*. In 1997, Cleary updated his 1989 review of the curriculum of MPA programs *(Cleary, 1990)*. In his original survey, he had "found little evidence of coverage of communication skills in these materials." Eight years later he "continue[d] to find little evidence of coverage of these concepts" *(Cleary, 1997, p.1)*.

From the broader perspective of communications in general, Garnett observed that "a sizable gap exists between what government practitioners and students need to know about communicating and what training and

reading are available to them" *(Garnett, 1992, p. xvi)*. Waldo called communication "a significant but neglected topic" in public administration *(Waldo, 1992, p. xi)*. Five years later, Garnett co-edited a comprehensive handbook that focused on the importance of the communication in public administration and the need to have a greater research-based understanding of it *(Garnett and Kouzmin, 1997)*. He specifically called for an "increase [in] the salience of communication within public administration education" *(Garnett, 1997, p. 764)*. Another writer declared that due to research-based scholarship, "public relations has become a respected domain within both the disciplines of communication and management" *(J. Grunig, 1997, p. 268; see also J. Grunig, 1992b).*

In response to such observations from practitioners and academicians, the accrediting body for MPA programs, the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) has gone back and forth on its curriculum recommendations in this area. Its 1974 guidelines and standards included training in communications theory (B-2-e) and skills (C-1-c) *(NASPAA, 1974, p. 9)*. Specifically regarding external communications, the guidelines for values to be learned by MPA students included being "open in communication and interpretation of data and findings to the public" (B-3-d) and support for "measures to increase citizen understanding of public policies and their impact" (D-3-c) *(NASPAA, 1974, pp. 9, 11)*. However, new standards finalized in 1992 and still in effect in 2000 were much less detailed and only glancingly referred to "communication" (4.2) *(NASPAA, 1992, p. 2; NASPAA, 2000)*. Yet, the subject kept returning to the fore. In 1996, NASPAA's Commission on the Curriculum recommended that public administration curriculum more explicitly include "communication skills and abilities [that] are critical to viability as a public administrator" *(NASPAA, 1996, p.1)*. At the time of writing, no formal action had been taken on that recommendation *(Brintnall, 2000)*. In 1999, one of the recommendations of a joint committee of NASPAA and the American Political Science Association's Section on Public Administration was that "those involved in shaping public administration curricula should work to ensure that managers more fully understand how to get their message out to the media" *(APSA-NASPAA Committee, 1998, p. 4)*.

Another reason why public administration programs need to include public relations in their offerings is that nonprofit administration is looming

larger within MPA programs. NASPAA, the accrediting organization for MPA programs, has emerged as the leading accrediting body for nonprofit administration programs. Young reported that "schools of public administration have been the most enthusiastic developers programs of nonprofit management programs *(Young, 1988, p. 36)*. According to Mirabella and Wish, "most degree programs for nonprofits have evolved as concentrations within MPA programs" *(Mirabella and Wish, 2000, p. 221)*.

In addition, nonprofits are also becoming a major destination for new MPAs, whether or not the degree they earned included a concentration in nonprofit administration. An article in the annual PA Times Education Supplement in 1998 identified employment in the nonprofit sector as a major trend for MPA graduates *(Tricarico and Ravindra, 1998)*. Similarly, Light's survey of the recent graduates of the leading schools of public affairs and administration found that "recent graduates were twice as likely as members of earlier classes to take first jobs in the nonprofit sector" *(Light, 2000, p. 22)*.

The central role of public relations for MPA graduates working in the nonprofit sector is as important, if not more, than for the traditional bearer of the MPA who goes on to public sector employment. NASPAA's nonprofit education guidelines distinguished between topics that are unique to nonprofit administration and those that should be included in all curricula, whether nonprofit, public or business administration. The list included external relations as a "component topic" that should be included in all administrative training:

> The relationship between the organization and its constituents, how that is managed, and various interpretations of accountability should be included in the curriculum. Within this context are the principles of communications, particularly in the form of public relations… *(NASPAA, 1998, p. 6)*

Wish and Mirabella list public relations - within the larger rubric of 'fundraising, marketing and public relations' - as one of the seven major categories of a curricular model of nonprofit management education *(Wish and Mirabella, 1998, p. 104)*. A survey of faculty, practitioners and students regarding the skills needed by nonprofit administrators listed public

relations as one of eight 'most important' core subjects *(Tschirhart, 1998, p.70)*.

Nomenclature

Should a consensus develop that the general subject of public information indeed belongs in public administration pedagogy, then the next level of analysis is to identify the component parts of such a curriculum. As a first step, attention needs to be paid - again - to titles, usage and meanings of words. For a focus on both the internal and external communication challenges that face public managers, the field has been variously referred to as "communication in public administration" *(Highsaw and Bowen, 1965)*, "public agency communication" *(Schachter, 1983)*, "public sector communication" *(Graber, 1992)* and "administrative communication" *(Garnett and Kouzmin, 1997)*. In their commonly understood meaning, "boundary spanning" would describe this endeavor well, but that title has already been appropriated by a separate and unrelated academic subject *(Hailey, 1998)*.

This essay focuses on the narrower topic of out-of-house communication activities in public administration. The first modern social scientist to study this field in depth named it 'government publicity' *(McCamy, 1939a)* or "public relations in public administration" *(McCamy, 1939b)*. Since then, it has been variously called "promotion" *(Simon, 1947, p. 217)*, "public information" *(Fitzpatrick, 1947-48)*, 'administrative public relations" *(Pfiffner and Presthus, 1967, p. 154)*, "public affairs" *(Stephens, 1981)*, "external communication" *(Graber, 1992, Chapters 7-8)*, "public relations management in government" *(J. Grunig, 1997)*. Other recent terms, but unlike the previous titles are not oriented to the public sector, include "external affairs" *(Heath, 1994)* and "relationship management" *(Ledingham and Bruning, 2000)*.

"External relations" appears to be a term that is the most descriptive and accurate for this activity. Some of its early uses, half a century ago, included its role in federal agencies during World War II *(Anonymous, 1944, p. 335)*, in municipal administration *(Institute, 1940, Chapter 12)* and in federal regulatory agencies *(Davis, 1953, p. 749)*. Recently, it has returned somewhat to popularity – both with practitioners and academics – as they seek to broaden the focus beyond activities that are delimited by

such monikers as "public information" and "public relations." For example, a 1994 handbook on nonprofit management included discussion of the importance for leaders to spend time on external relations *(Herman and Heimovics, p. 143ff)*. NASPAA's 1998 guidelines recommend that "external relations" be included in the curriculum of graduate level programs in nonprofit administration and public administration *(NASPAA, 1998)*. On the federal level, NASA has an Office of External Relations *(NASA, 2000)* and the National Weather Service maintains an External Relations program *(National Weather Service, 2000)*. At the state level, the California Department of Information Technology has a Legislative and External Relations Division *(Annual Report, 1996)* and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has a Division of Customer Assistance and External Relations *(Organizational Structure, 2000)*.

Organizing Principles

External relations can be presented as an important component of the toolbox available to government managers to implement their goals. Some textbooks have presented this approach. For example, Dimock and Dimock - an influential textbook *(McCurdy, 1986, p 199)* with multiple editions - observed that "public relations lies at the heart of administration" *(Dimock and Dimock, 1964, p. 329)*. In the 4th and last edition of that textbook, the authors declared that "public relations is now an integral part of the philosophy of administration, and consequently not separate from the rest of administration" *(Dimock and Dimock, 1969, p 591)*. A more recent textbook explains that "agencies also engage in public relations not only to generate greater political support for their activities but also to help clients, regulatees, and others to understand what they do" *(Rosenbloom, 1993, p. 458)*.

A key decision point is to select the optimal organizing principle for an external relations curriculum. In their presentation of a broader curriculum in communication, Waugh and Manns focus on skills and competencies *(1991, p. 135-139)*. For example, in the sections of their curriculum that would be relevant to external relations, they emphasize learning the skills of written communication and of oral communication. Similarly, Garnett's approach focuses significant attention to the direct and indirect ways to communicate with external audiences *(1992, pp. 165-200)*. The difficulty with this common skills-centered focus is that students are

presented with a seemingly sterile checklist of technical ways to conduct external communication, but this is largely disconnected from the administrative situations that call for such skills or the purposes those skills help accomplish. A shift in focus from the 'how' to the 'why,' 'what for' and 'to whom' helps integrate the uses of external relations into the broader goals of a public manager.

It is my contention that skills and techniques flow from goals. When a practitioner is able to identify the variety of situations that the external relations focus can help accomplish administrative goals, then the act of picking-and-choosing specific tools to use in any particular situation is a logical outgrowth of the goal itself. Skills and techniques emerge logically from a situational analysis of the challenge facing the manager and the benefits of the external relations perspective. Therefore, I argue that the organizing principle of the external relations curriculum needs to be on the ends rather than the means.

With the approach that focuses on reviewing management issues through the perspective of external relations, a curriculum would first focus on the actual purposes of external relations and, after that, on the audiences of external relations and the techniques to communicate with them. In other words, after the public administrator has identified an administrative goal ('what'), the next decision is the purpose ('what for') followed by a selection of specific audiences ('who'). The final decision is the choice of the optimal techniques ('how') that contribute to reaching the goal and purpose.

Purposes

A central organizing principle of communication is to identify, as specifically as possible, the purpose of any communication effort. This approach can be of special utility to public administrators because of the different reasons that the manager may seek to use the tools of external relations. Different methods logically emerge when trying to accomplish distinct purposes. From analysis of purpose flows the particularistic and logical decision about methods of communication in a given situation. Hence, the specific decision of how to do external relations emerges naturally from the reason that it is being relied on.

However, the theoretical nature of the purposes of external relations outlined below needs to be balanced with tangible examples that make the abstract more concrete for learners. The use of examples from local and national newspapers can help accomplish this goal. Newspapers are a traditional component of public affairs teaching *(Knowlton and Barefoot, 1999)* and are especially appealing to students because they provide relevant examples *(Besser and Stone, 1999, p. 31)*. The following discussion includes references to some concrete examples and relevant newspaper articles. Those adapting the curriculum outline for their specific requirements can cull other local and contemporary examples from media outlets that they have at hand and which would be familiar to the audience.

1. Media relations:

The most common purpose of the external relations activity of a public administrator is to deal with reporters, who usually have a negative predisposition when covering government agencies. According to Gates and Hill, "the popular media is often filled with complaints that the bureaucracy is out of control" *(Gates and Hill, 1995, p. 138)*. Most public managers experience receiving a phone call from a reporter seeking information or a quote - and generally dread it *(Denning, 1997)*. Yet, according to Viteritti, "no high-level public manager can survive the crossfire of public discourse without learning how to deal with the press" *(Viteritti, 1997, p. 88)*.

The obligation to cooperate with the press is a combination of the publicness of public administration *(Kirlin, 1996; Moe and Gilmour, 1995)* and the constitutional expectation that the media would serve "as an instrument of democracy" *(Patterson, 1998)*. However, contemporary journalism is less and less a serious conveyer of news about government *(Hess, 2000)*. Instead, the orientation of reporters seems more a "hunt for government scandals…'Waste-fraud-and-abuse' has become a single word in the media" *(Kettl, 2000, p. 26)*. According to the spokesperson for the State Department, "journalists get much more excited when they find an example of error than they do when they find an example of success" *(Rubin, 2000, p. 110)*.

To paraphrase the bestseller, administrators are from Jupiter and reporters are from Mercury. For the Romans, Jupiter was the god of government: of oaths and treaties, of duty to the state and of obligation and

right dealing. The annual festival at the Jupiter temple was in thanks for the preservation of the state *(Jupiter, 2000)*. On the other hand, Mercury was the bearer of messages who was eloquent of expression, but cunning and unpredictable *(Mercury, 2000)*.

The public administrator is assimilative in orientation, seeking to emphasize continuity and precedent. When explaining, the administrator is likely to use phrases such as "just like," "related to" or "an outgrowth of." On the other hand, the reporter's focus is distributive, seeking to communicate startling and new information as quickly and as broadly as possible. The journalist is seeking to use such phrases as 'controversial,' 'disagreement' and 'different' – vocabulary that is generally anathema to the government manager *(Cater, 1959, pp. 17-18)*. In administration, specific details are crucial, while the media focuses instead on the larger issues or themes *(Cohen and Eimicke, 1995, p. 224)*. These bedrock differences contribute to an inherently dissatisfied attitude by administrators when conducting media relations. Elsewhere, I have argued that if the media is not interested in government, then administrators need to learn new strategies to fulfill their obligations in a democracy *(Lee, 1999)*.

2. Public education and public service campaigns:

By using paid and free media coverage, an agency can accomplish its mission and reduce its expenditures by encouraging behavior that has broad social approval and reflects widely held values *(Weiss and Tschirhart, 1994; Rice and Atkin, 1989)*. The most widely recognized example is the campaign by the US Forest Service to reduce fires in national forests through the Smokey the Bear campaign. By encouraging a change in public behavior regarding use of fires while camping, the Forest Service was able to reduce the demand on its fire suppression infrastructure.

3. Seeking voluntary public compliance with laws and regulations:

Agencies can reduce their regulatory costs by engaging in public relations to encourage voluntary compliance with the new laws, regulations and programs they have been assigned to administer. This is a cost-effective approach to the implementation phase of the policy process. A common example is the effort by the U.S. Postal Service to inform the public about an increase in postal rates as a way to reduce the number of letters that have

to be pulled from the mail stream and returned for "postage due." Another example is the effort by prosecutors to notify the public about a new aggressive policy of increasing criminal charges for crimes committed with guns. One of the prosecutors was quoted as explaining, "If those people don't know about it, how's it supposed to serve as a deterrent to them?" *(Burnett, 2000)*.

4. Using the public as an extension of the agency: "eyes and ears" reporting:

Government agencies can encourage citizens to serve as their eyes and ears, thus reducing the need for staffing. For example, when a person chooses to call 911 in an emergency, he or she has been co-opted effectively by the police and fire departments to serve as a member of its 'informal' organization. Incentives for participation can vary from self-satisfaction to rewards. The key to the success of this function is that citizens are familiar with their potential role as an extension of the agency, an awareness accomplished through public relations. For example, a Wisconsin sheriff said that he could not afford to put deputies to patrol for drunk drivers all the time. Instead, he created a program called Mobile Eyes that pays drivers who use their car or cell phones to notify deputies of probable drunk drivers they observe. Callers receive $100 for calls that result in an arrest for drunken driving *(Murphy, 1998)*. New digital communication technologies permit citizens to report the location of a pothole and then to expect that the agency will respond promptly to their report *(Perlman, 2000)*.

5. Increasing responsiveness to stakeholders:

Public relations, and communication in general, entails two-way communication *(L. Grunig, 1992, p. 525)*. Agencies can use public relations to be, organizationally, "good listeners." The evolution of e-mail has created new opportunities for listening and interacting *(Neu, Anderson and Bikson, 1999)*. Public administration is enhanced when government agencies hear the message sent by the public and choose policies and programs based on that information. For example, the US Mint had failed with its introduction of the Susan B. Anthony dollar coin. However, a stakeholder, the vending machine industry, very much wanted a dollar coin to be widely used. So, the Mint conducted in-depth research about public preferences and then successfully introduced the "golden" Sacagawea dollar coin *(Kever, 1999)*.

6. Increasing public support:

At mid-century, Graham declared that "the art of achieving and maintaining support for sound public policies is as much a part of public administration in a democracy as is the execution of policies" *(Graham, 1950, p. 73)*. Government units can use a wide variety of communication techniques to try to increase the support they have with the public *(Simon, Smithburg and Thompson, 1991, pp. 385, 415-421)*. In 2000, the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press conducted a survey to gauge the favorability ratings of individual federal agencies and found significant variations *(Pew, 2000; Barr, 2000)*. For example, in an attempt to gain favorable ratings, the armed services will cooperate extensively with the production of movies that will enhance their image and decline to cooperate with movies that would put them in a bad light *(Ryan, 1995)*.

Attempts to woo public support can backfire as well. Politicians have a fingertip feel for the public mood. They can sense when an agency is particularly popular or unpopular with the public. Therefore, agency efforts seeking public support can trigger attacks from elected officials who are its adversaries and do not want it to gain this support. Opponents of the Forest Service's policy to limit logging attacked its public communications plan *(Hughes, 1998)*. Here's what a US senator said about military public relations during the Viet Nam war:

> There is something basically unwise and undemocratic about a system which taxes the public to finance a propaganda campaign aimed at persuading the same taxpayers that they must spend more tax dollars to subvert their independent judgment. *(Fulbright, 1969, p. 36344.)*

7. Marketing: Increasing the utilization of services and products:

Like all other producers of goods and services, government agencies need to market their programs *(Kotler, 1998; Kotler, Haider and Rein, 1994)*. With increasingly innovative channels for delivering government services, administrators can no longer count on the "we're the only game in town" attitude. For example, building public awareness of available public

services helps maximize the usage of the service and accomplish its public purpose.

Another element of marketing is to provide quality service to customers, whether they can take their business elsewhere or not. Public managers need to review all aspects of the experience that their customers have when they come in contact with the agency. Small details, such as the wording and location of signs, the availability of information and seating arrangements are all critical elements for a positive interaction *(Underhill, 1999, pp. 45-91)*. This service orientation is a manifestation of the two-way aspect of public relations.

8. Democratic accountability to the citizenry:

As part of the public sector, government agencies have a general obligation to report to the public on their activities. This form of direct reporting to the citizenry is different from the oversight function of elected officials to whom agencies are formally accountable. Its origins date back to the establishment of public administration early in the 20th century *(Cooke, 1919, pp. 197-204)*. Current examples of this activity include agency annual reports, websites updated with information about the activities of the agency and informational material sent to public libraries for the citizens to take based on their individual interests. The Government Finance Officers Association sponsors a Popular Annual Reporting Award to encourage public agencies to produce financial reports that are understandable to the lay public and thus promote democratic accountability *(GFOA Awards, 2000)*.

In summary, it is valuable for public administrators to be able to distinguish between the different purposes of external relations since the attainment of a specific purpose would call for a mix of techniques that are most appropriate for that goal.

Audiences

The other central organizing principle of communication is to identify, as specifically as possible, the intended audience of any communication effort. This approach can be of particular utility to public administrators because of the multiple external stakeholders in an agency's

world. Each distinct audience has different needs and interests. Therefore, through audience analysis a public manager can more precisely focus on the identifiable audiences that have a particular stake in the issue at hand. From audience analysis flows the specific decisions about methods of communication in a given situation. For example, one demographic group may have a predominant focus on oral communication, while another may be a newspaper-reading one. In such a case, the specific decision of how to do external relations emerges naturally from the audience analysis.

For curriculum purposes, this proposal suggests segmenting the universe outside the agency by the following audience categories:

1. Customer Relations: Individuals and groups "consuming" the agency's goods or services.

2. Community Relations: Minority populations or residents who live in close proximity to a specific government facility.

3. Group Relations: Organized special interest groups that are particularly attentive to the work of an agency. In some cases, these groups would not be consumers of the agency's product, but they nonetheless have intense interest in the work of the agency, whether for economic, ideological or other reasons. For example, the snack food industry may not be inspected by an Agriculture Department, but has significant interest in the department's nutritional recommendations. A prisoner rights advocacy group would not be a consumer of correctional services, but for ideological reasons would be attentive to the operations of the correctional institution.

4. Liaison with Elected Officials: Legislative bodies usually exert more power over administrative agencies than the chief elected executive *(Elling, 1992, p. 196; Linden, 1994, p. 271)*. Therefore, appropriate management of the flow of information between an agency and its legislative body is vital. This activity is variously called "Congressional relations," "legislative liaison," "Board relations," etc. Similarly, the agency needs to perceive that a different audience it interacts with is the chief elected executive of any particular level of government, such as "White House relations," "executive office relations," etc. Finally, sometimes there are other elected officials who have substantive oversight powers, such as a comptroller, that an agency liaises with.

5. Intergovernmental Relations: This includes relations with other agencies at the same level of government or other levels of government. It is generally done through direct communication, although agencies sometimes do this indirectly, by using media coverage to communicate with other agencies or other levels of government *(Morgan, 1986, pp. 67, 79)*.

6. Public Relations: This covers interaction with the undifferentiated public-at-large. As taxpayers, they are the funders of the agency. This is an apt title, with the literal meaning "public." However, "public relations" has evolved to have a different, broader and often negative meaning *(Spicer, 1997, pp. 43-48)*. Instead, a different way to identify an agency's interactions with this audience could be "citizen relations."

Techniques

After identifying and analyzing the purpose and the audience for an external relations effort, it then becomes timely for the public administrator to focus on the different techniques of external communication that would be most suited for the given situation. Garnett provides a standard listing and explanation of the primary techniques of external relations *(Garnett, 1992, pp. 176-194)*:

Direct Communication
- Face-to-Face Contact
- Telephone Calls
- Written Publications
- Television Programs
- Films and Videos
- Computers and Computer Disks
- Actions and Decisions

Indirect Communication
- News Media
- Intercessors

A review, itemization and explanation of the standard techniques of media relations are well summarized and easily accessible through several

"how-to" publications *(Bjornlund, 1996; Wade, 1993, Helm et al., 1981, Section III)*.

Lindstrom and Nie present a comprehensive list of techniques to use when the agency's purpose is to listen to the public (listed in order of citizen satisfaction, highest to lowest) *(Lindstrom and Nie, 2000, p. 34)*:

Video techniques
Drop-in center
Focus groups
Citizen survey
Collaborative task force
Facilitation
Visioning
Citizen's advisory committee
Brainstorming
Telephone techniques
Media strategies
Charette (an architectural term for a workshop that involves active collaboration on design)
Public meetings
Fairs
Newsletters
Open house
Booth at exposition/fair
Luncheon

Other External Relations Foci

In addition to the importance of focusing on the purposes, audiences and techniques of external relations, six other subjects belong in an overview of this aspect of public administration: crisis management, leadership, structure, performance evaluation, conflict management and internal communications.

Crisis Management: The preceding discussion reviewed the important elements of external relations in public administration. These all assume the normal periods of administrative work, with adequate intervals for planning, reviewing, testing and clearing before implementation. Such

conventional expectations disappear at times of crisis. External relations during a crisis are fundamentally different from other, more normal time frames *(Berry, 1999; Ogrizek and Guillery, 1999; Bjornlund, 1996, pp. 86-94)*. As such, external relations education needs to devote separate attention to operations in times of crisis.

Leadership: Training needs to focus on the two distinct meanings of external relations, as a specialized staff function within large organizations as well as an operating concept of administration *(Ehling, White and Grunig, 1992, p. 385)*. The higher a public manager moves up the hierarchy, the more she or he deals with external issues and constituencies. This necessitates a greater need for having and using public relations skills *(Simon, 1947, p. 217)*. In the private sector, corporate CEOs are now estimated to spend 25-75% of their time on external relations *(J. Grunig, 1992a, p. 236)*. For example, during the early years of Social Security, the agency's highest levels of political and administrative leaders used in-house public relations "with great skill" to establish the new program with the public at large and assure its long term future *(Lieberman, 1998, pp. 78-79)*. On the other hand, a review of three agencies in Michigan in the 1950's concluded that "most managers were, in fact, neglecting minimal outside information and education activities" due to the press of daily business, legislative antagonism to spending money on external relations and hostile special interest groups *(Janowitz, Wright and Delany, 1958, p. 96)*.

Structure: Dozier and Grunig have outlined the characteristics of an ideal public relations program in a large governmental or business organization as follows *(Dozier, 1995, Chapter 6; Grunig, 1997, p. 258)*:

I. Micro Level:
   Strategic management

II. Managerial (Meso) Level:
   1. A single or integrated public relations department
   2. Separate function from marketing
   3. Direct reporting relationship to senior management
   4. Two-way symmetrical model
   5. Senior public relations person in the managerial role
   6. Potential for excellent public relations, as indicated by:

a. Knowledge of symmetrical model
b. Knowledge of managerial role
c. Academic training in public relations
d. Professionalism

7. Schema for public relations in the organization reflects the two-way symmetrical model
8. Equal opportunity for women and minorities in public relations

III. Macro Level:

1. Organic rather than mechanical organizational structure
2. Symmetrical system of internal communication
3. Turbulent, complex environment with pressure from activist groups
4. Sufficientpower for public relations director in or with the dominant coalition
5. Participative rather than authoritarian organizational culture

IV. Effects of Excellent Public Relations:

1. Micro-level programs meet communication objectives
3. Job satisfaction is high among employees
2. Reduced cost of regulation, pressure and litigation

Each of these sub-topics needs to be explored so that public administrators will have an understanding of what factors contribute to an effective external relations program, whether they are directing it, utilizing its services or over it.

Performance Measurement: The increasing emphasis in public administration on performance measurement *(Hatry, 1999; Marshall et al., 1999)* can and should be expected of an agency's external relations just like other sub-units of an agency. Ehling and Dozier have developed several different quantitative, as well as qualitative, approaches that can be used in the public sector as well as the private and the nonprofit sectors *(Ehling, 1992; Dozier, 1995, pp. 218-230)*.

Conflict Management: Administrative organizations face inevitable tugs and pulls in different directions from their multiple external constituencies. For example, a classic situation has clients clamoring for more services while elected officials are seeking to cut budgets, or at least freeze them. According to Cohen and Eimicke, "managing relations with outside organizations is a delicate balancing act between protecting your organization's interests and catering to theirs" *(1995, pp. 239-240)*. Luke, as well, observed that "conflict naturally exists" when a leader tries to convene a group that consists of internal and external stakeholders *(Luke, 1998, p. 194)*. Given the permanent presence of friction when conducting external relations, government managers need to possess skills in mediation, negotiation and conflict management. He suggests that a leader must possess advanced conflict management competencies so that he or she is "conceiving ingenious solutions to conflicting interests" (*Luke, 1998, p. 216)*.

Internal Communications: Public administrators involved in external relations can only be as good as the information they posses. That's why a strong internal communication system is essential to undergird an effective external relations program. For example, an agency spokesperson must be well informed about policy discussions occurring within an agency. According to Hess, "press secretaries know that it is the sine qua non of spokesmanship to be in the loop" of an agency's inner circle *(1984, p. 26)*. Similarly, the external communications specialist should not only be well informed, but should also be a participant in internal policy deliberations by assessing probable external reactions to different policy scenarios. According to Linsky, "research and experience" confirm the value of utilizing the expertise of public affairs professionals to gauge the external relations implications of various policy options *(1986, pp. 125)*.

Summary

External relations in public administration is the use of information outside the boundaries of a government agency. It is integral to the conduct of public administration, whether as a specialized activity or as an approach held by the agency's leadership. External relations can accomplish many different management goals and can be planned to reach specific audiences. Once a government manager has analyzed an external relations challenge and identified the purpose and audience involved, then the techniques for

such an effort can be selected from standard menus available to the practitioner.

However, the contemporary curriculum in public administration education pays little attention to external relations. With the rapid expansion of the digital age and the information explosion, the importance of managing informational relationships in the 21st century is certain to increase. It turns out that Simon was premature when he observed in the 1939 Municipal Year Book that public relations was "no longer a stepchild" of public administration and instead "is being increasingly recognized as an indispensable element in effective administration" *(Simon, 1939, p. 38)*. Public administration practitioners and educators need to broaden their scope of attention to embrace external relations.

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