

# Research in Public Relations: Current Status and New Directions<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

As research into Public Relations progresses, the problems that have arisen between the world of academics and professionals of this activity are revealed. It is evidently far from being a profession based on research, at best, professionals are interested in short-term research, and especially the effects of communication and its incidence on marketing. On many occasions, this is done to give credit to the investment made in PR, aiming to show that these investments are more profitable than advertising.

Academics are more critical than professionals, but they should consider that their research must also offer applications for professional activity. But, on the other hand, if researchers do not think theoretically before measuring something, they will not achieve useful or valid results.

In the area of organisations, reference is made to the contribution made by Public Relations in terms of the general effectiveness of the organisation. In this aspect, it has become patently evident that research has helped us to develop a global theory of Public Relations Excellence, and its general principles can be applied to several cultures.

**Key words:** publics, organisations, public relations and research, excellence and globalisation.

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## Resumen. *Investigación en relaciones públicas: estado actual y nuevas orientaciones*

Al hilo de la investigación en Relaciones Públicas se van desvelando los problemas que entre el mundo de los académicos y los profesionales de esta actividad se han ido suscitando. Queda patente que está lejos de ser una profesión basada en la investigación, como mucho, a los profesionales les interesan las investigaciones a corto plazo y, en especial, los efectos de la comunicación y su incidencia en el marketing. En no pocas ocasiones, se hace en función de acreditar la inversión dedicada a las RR. PP. Y trata de explicar que sus inversiones son más rentables que la publicidad.

Los académicos son más críticos que los profesionales pero deben tener en cuenta que su investigación también tiene que tener aplicaciones en la actividad profesional. Pero, por

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otro lado, si los investigadores no piensan teóricamente antes de medir algo no obtienen resultados útiles y validables.

En el ámbito de las organizaciones se hace referencia a la contribución que realizan las Relaciones Públicas en aras de la efectividad, en general, de la organización. En este aspecto se ha hecho patente que la investigación nos ha ayudado al desarrollo de una teoría global de las Relaciones Públicas de la Excelencia, y sus principios generales pueden ser aplicados en plurales culturas.

**Palabras clave:** públicos, organizaciones, relaciones públicas e investigación, excelencia y globalización.

### Summary

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I began my career as a public relations researcher 40 years ago when I entered the Ph.D. program in Mass Communication at the University of Wisconsin. I conducted my first significant research in Colombia (J. Grunig, 1969a, 1969b, 1969c, 1971) to identify publics for agricultural development programs and to plan communication programs to assist those publics. After two years in Colombia, I joined the faculty of the University of Maryland where I have conducted a great deal of public relations research and have taught many students and counseled many practitioners about how to do research themselves. Over these 40 years, I have lectured or presented papers in more than 40 countries, mostly discussing how to do research or presenting the results of research. For the last 10 years, I have served as a member of the Commission on Measurement of the U. S. Institute for Public Relations Research.

This extensive experience with research around the world makes it possible for me to reflect on the status of research in the global public relations profession today. On the one hand, I believe great progress has been made. Academic research in public relations has made great advances in the last 40 years. When I entered the profession, I was one of perhaps five scholars conducting such research. Today, there are several hundred academic scholars and doctoral students conducting public relations research; and a number of scholarly journals are now published. Forty years ago, only a few practitioners used research in their work. Today public relations departments in major corpora-

tions and government agencies, as well as public relations firms, commonly use research. Measurement also is among the most popular topics at professional conferences, in teleconferences and webinars, and in trade publications.

In spite of this progress, the public relations profession is still far from being a research-based profession. Most practice still does not include research, and most of the research conducted in the practice of public relations measures only the short-term effects of marketing communication programs. Too often, this research is conducted only to justify the money spent on public relations programs, to try to prove that publicity in the media has value to an organization, or that public relations should get more of the money that goes to advertising in marketing communication programs. Seldom is research done to plan public relations programs or to improve them, and seldom is research used as a form of communication to bring information from publics into management decision-making processes. In spite of the growth in academic research, there still are few researchers; and most practitioners are not aware of this research or pay no attention to it.

Because so few practitioners pay attention to academic research, even those who use research in their work, the profession suffers from a lack of conceptualization. Professionals are doing, buying, or talking about measurement; but most are not thinking about (conceptualizing) what they are measuring, why they are measuring it, or how their measures can be used to make the public relations function or the overall organization more effective.

In this paper, therefore, I will attempt to provide conceptual guidelines for public relations professionals who want to use research in their practice. First, I will discuss how research done in the practice of public relations should interact with academic research. Second, I will discuss how research should be conducted at different levels of analysis—for public relations programs, public relations departments, the overall organization, and society. Finally, I will discuss some ongoing programs of academic research that offer promise for improving the public relations profession.

## 1. Research in, on, and for public relations

I believe there is a great deal of confusion among both practitioners and academic scholars in the public relations discipline about their differing roles and the extent to which their work complements each other. Practitioners often seem to believe that academics are practitioners like themselves who have chosen to teach and conduct research rather than practice. As a result, they often think that most academic research is useless because they see no way to apply it in their work. They also typically believe that academics should learn from practitioners and use what they learn in teaching the next generation of practitioners.

Academics, on the other hand, typically see themselves as critics and analysts of the public relations profession more than as practitioners. Although academics hope their criticism and analysis will improve the profession, they

do not believe that all of their research must have practical applications. They express dismay when practitioners show little interest in research to develop the profession from a broad perspective. They generally believe that practitioners should learn from academics to improve or change their practice. Academic scholars are willing to help practitioners understand how to conduct research *in* the practice of public relations; but, for the most part, they are more interested in conducting basic theoretical research *on* the profession.

To overcome these misconceptions of each other, we must realize that public relations is a profession. In professional disciplines such as law, medicine, education, and management, academic researchers and practitioners interact and learn from each other. Each, however, contributes something different to the body of knowledge. When academic scholars conduct research *on* the profession, they often develop ideas *for* the profession—that is, ideas that flow from basic research that practitioners can use *in* the profession. To develop those ideas, however, academic scholars must understand the problems that practitioners experience; and they must interact with practitioners to understand whether their ideas are useful in practice.

If we are to understand the nature of both academic research and applied research in public relations, therefore, we can begin by distinguishing among these three types of research:

- *Research in public relations* is conducted by practitioners as part of the practice of public relations or research conducted by professional researchers in research firms or research units in public relations firms or in-house public relations departments. Academic public relations scholars often conduct such research for public relations practitioners or train applied researchers to do it. However, research in public relations generally does not lead to a broad theoretical understanding of the public relations profession unless it is based on research *on* the profession.
- *Research on public relations* is usually conducted by academic scholars using a theoretical framework they construct. At times, professional associations, public relations firms, and trade publications conduct research on public relations, although they usually do not do so from a theoretical perspective. Most scholars who conduct research on the profession do so in order to identify best practices and to improve the profession. The most extensive such research project was the 15-year Excellence project that my colleagues and I conducted with funding from the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) Research Foundation (L. Grunig, J. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). Other scholars, critical scholars, conduct research on the profession to expose its negative activities and what they believe to be weaknesses in the theories of scholars working to improve the profession.
- *Research for public relations* usually results from research on the profession, except for the research of critical scholars. For example, researchers have identified best practices in crisis communication, issues management, envi-

ronmental scanning, and media relations and then diffused those best practices to practitioners. Others have developed theoretical ideas such as symmetrical communication or a strategic managerial role, as we did it in the Excellence study (L. Grunig, J. Grunig & Dozier, 2002) and research that preceded it, and use such ideas in the teaching of new practitioners and diffuse them to current practitioners. These best practices and theoretical ideas then can be used and evaluated *in* the practice of public relations—thus fusing research *on* the practice, *for* the practice, and *in* the practice. Such fusion is the hallmark of a true profession.

Most of the current research *in* the profession, however, lacks a basic conceptual foundation. In addition, most of it fails to use research *on* and *for* the profession to develop a conceptual framework. The next section, therefore, explains conceptualization; and the rest of the chapter conceptualizes how research *in* the profession can be conducted and how researchers working in the profession can use academic research conducted *on* and *for* the profession to improve their conceptualization of their research and practice.

## 2. How to conceptualize public relations

Conceptualization is the process of thinking logically and systematically about concepts, definitions, measures, and the relationships among them. Researchers begin to conceptualize when they isolate and describe problems—both theoretical and applied—that are worthy of study. They then think logically about how to solve the problem by identifying a concept, which usually is called a dependent variable, whose presence or absence defines the problem. Thirdly, they identify independent variables that have a logical effect on the dependent variable. Independent variables can be changed to have an effect on the dependent variable—thus solving the problem. Most of this conceptualization takes place at an abstract, or theoretical, level. If researchers do not think theoretically before they measure something, their measurements usually turn out to have little or no value—other than measurement for its own sake.

Public relations people can apply the same kind of rigor to practice. They need to define problems, identify variables that can be changed to solve the problem, change these independent variables, and then measure to determine if the dependent variable has changed and the problem has been solved. Practitioners, however, tend to do what they have always done—or what others in their organization have done. As a result, they usually cannot explain why they do what they do or what effect it has when a skeptical top manager or client asks.

This is not to say that public relations practitioners do not have a theory. Nearly every human being can construct an explanation for his or her behavior if asked. The difference between a scientist and a layperson is that the scientist has systematically developed his or her conceptualization. In public

relations, practitioner theories often include concepts such as image, reputation, brand, relationships, and issues. The word «management» then is attached to these concepts (such as reputation management) to suggest that the dependent variable (reputation) can be changed (managed). However, dependent variables seldom can be changed directly because they are outcomes of behaviors or processes (independent variables) that can be changed. Thus, we can manage the behaviors and processes that result in a reputation, for example; but we cannot manage the reputation.

Although other theorists might conceptualize the process differently, I believe that a logical conceptualization of the public relations process states that public relations people manage *communication* with *top managers* and with *publics* (concepts are italicized) to contribute to the strategic decision processes of organizations. They manage communication between management and publics to build *relationships* with the publics that are most likely to affect the behavior of the organization or who are most affected by the behavior of the organization.

Communication processes can be managed (they are independent variables), and processes that facilitate dialogue among managers and publics also can contribute to managing *organizational behaviors*—although public relations people cannot manage organizational behaviors by themselves. Dialogue among managers and publics, in turn, can produce long-term relationships characterized as communal relationships that result in higher levels of the indicators of the quality of a relationship my students and I (e.g., J. Grunig & Huang, 2000; J. Grunig & Hung, 2002) have identified and defined—trust, mutuality of control, commitment, and satisfaction. Relationships also are affected much more by the behavior of management than by one-way messages sent out by public relations or advertising people.

The independent variables, therefore, are *communication activities* conducted by public relations departments and *management behaviors* that result from strategic decisions. The key dependent variable is relationships. Relationships do influence dependent variables farther down the causal chain, such as reputations, images, attitudes, and brands. But these variables also are affected by other variables outside the control of public relations—such as financial markets, the state of the economy, or corporate behaviors over which public relations has little influence.

If practitioners are to do research to improve this public relations process, they should keep two basic conceptual distinctions in mind: levels of analysis and the difference between formative and evaluative research.

### *2.1. Levels of Analysis in Public Relations Research*

Public relations practitioners and scholars have strived for many years to explain the value of communication programs. Until recently, they have focused most of their efforts on the evaluation of individual communication programs, such as media relations, community relations, or employee relations. In fact, the

root of «evaluation» is «value.» Focusing only on the evaluation of individual programs is too narrow, however, although evaluation should be an ongoing part of all communication programs.

In the Excellence project (L. Grunig, J. Grunig & Dozier, 2002), my colleagues and I searched the literature on organizational effectiveness for ideas that could explain the value of public relations beyond the effects of individual communication programs. We believed it was necessary to understand first what it means for an organization to be effective before we could explain how public relations makes it more effective. We learned that effective organizations achieve their goals, but that there is much conflict within the organization and with outside constituencies about which goals are most important. Effective organizations are able to achieve their goals because they choose goals that are valued by their publics both inside and outside the organization and also because they successfully manage programs designed to achieve those goals.

Effective organizations choose and achieve appropriate goals because they develop relationships with their publics. Ineffective organizations cannot achieve their goals, at least in part, because their publics do not support and typically oppose management efforts to achieve what publics consider illegitimate goals. A public relations department makes an organization more effective, therefore, when it identifies the most strategic publics as part of strategic management processes and conducts communication programs to develop effective long-term relationships with those publics. As a result, we should be able to determine the value of public relations by measuring the quality of relationships with strategic publics. And, we should be able to evaluate individual communication programs by measuring their effects on indicators of a good relationship.

Organizations must be effective at four increasingly higher units of analysis —1) the program level, 2) the functional level, 3) the organizational level, and 4) the societal level. Effectiveness at a lower level contributes to effectiveness at higher levels, but organizations cannot be said to be truly effective unless they have value at the highest of these levels. Research in public relations can be conducted to systematically plan how to increase effectiveness at each level and to evaluate the extent to which a public relations program has contributed to organizational effectiveness.

The *program level* refers to individual communication programs such as media relations, community relations, customer relations, or employee relations that are components of the overall public relations function of an organization. Communication programs generally are effective when they meet specific objectives such as affecting the cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors of both publics and members of the organization —effects that subsequently affect relationships between the organization and publics.

The *functional level* refers to evaluation of the overall public relations function of an organization, which typically includes several communication programs for different publics. Even though individual communication programs

successfully accomplish their objectives, the overall public relations function might not be effective unless it is integrated into the overall management processes of an organization and has chosen appropriate publics and objectives for individual programs. The public relations function as a whole can be audited by comparing its structure and processes with those of similar departments in other organizations or with theoretical principles derived from scholarly research—a process called benchmarking. These audits can be conducted through self-review or peer review.

The *organizational level* refers to the contribution that public relations makes to the overall effectiveness of the organization. Public relations contributes to organizational effectiveness when it helps integrate the organization's goals and behavior with the expectations and needs of its strategic publics. This contribution adds value—sometimes, but not always, monetary value—to the organization. Public relations adds value by building good, long-term relationships with strategic publics; and research can be used to monitor and evaluate the quality of these strategic relationships.

Research at the *societal level* refers to evaluations of the contribution that organizations make to the overall welfare of a society, such as through a social responsibility review and report. Organizations have an impact beyond their own boundaries. They also serve and affect individuals, publics, and other organizations in society. As a result, organizations cannot be said to be effective unless they are socially responsible; and public relations adds value to society by contributing to the ethical behavior and the social responsibility of organizations.

## 2.2. *Formative and Evaluative Research*

Scientists conduct research both to formulate theories and, after theories are developed, to evaluate and improve those theories. Both formative and evaluative research should be used at all four levels of analysis. Public relations departments should conduct *formative research* to identify strategic publics, to determine how the organization can communicate best to develop quality relationships with those publics, to develop departmental structures that facilitate communication with strategic publics, and to determine how the organization can align its behavior with the needs of its publics. Public relations departments should conduct *evaluative research* both to pretest and to posttest those programs, structures, and organizational policies and behaviors.

With these important conceptual distinctions in mind, I now will describe the nature of research at each of these levels.

## 3. Public relations research at the program level

Most research conducted *in* the practice of public relations is directly related to specific communication programs. When public relations people think of media relations, for example, they think of monitoring the content of media. When they think of community relations, they think of a survey to determine



the level of satisfaction that community residents have with an organization. When they think of employee relations, they think of an audit of employees' satisfaction with the organization, their jobs, or the quality of communication in an organization. Although such research is useful, it will be more useful if there is a strong conceptual basis for choosing objectives and measuring whether they have been achieved.

In the Excellence study, we found that the most effective public relations departments participated in the making of overall strategic decisions in organizations. Less-effective departments generally had the less-central role of disseminating messages about strategic decisions made by others in the organization. By participating in organizational decisions, excellent public relations departments were in a position to identify the publics who would be affected by organizational decisions or who would affect those decisions. Once they had identified publics, excellent public relations departments strategically developed programs to communicate with them. They conducted formative research to identify potential issues and define objectives for programs to communicate with the stakeholders, they specified measurable objectives for the communication programs, and they used both formal and informal methods to evaluate whether the objectives had been accomplished. Less-excellent departments conducted no formative or evaluative research and generally had only vague objectives that were difficult to measure.

#### 4. Public relations research at the organizational level

At the organizational level, the central concept for planning and evaluating public relations programs is the *relationship* between the organization and its publics. The concept is inherent in the term «public relations» —which means managing *communication* to build *relationships* with *publics*. At the organizational level, the public relations staff contributes to strategic decision-making by using formative research as a means of environmental scanning to identify publics with which an organization needs relationships. The staff also can do formative research to assess the quality of relationships with these publics before it develops specific communication programs to establish, maintain, or improve relationships with publics. Finally, the staff should conduct regular evaluative research to assess the effects of its communication programs on these relationships with strategic publics.

Recently, academic public relations researchers have studied the literature on relationships in related disciplines such as interpersonal communication, social, and organizational sociology to identify key characteristics of relationships and to develop measures *for the profession* of the quality of long-term organization-public relationships. My graduate students at the University of Maryland and I have identified two types of relationships (communal and exchange) and four relationship outcomes (trust, mutuality of control, satisfaction, and commitment) that define the quality of long-term relationships. These indicators can be measured to monitor the overall effect of public rela-

tions programs on each strategic public and, therefore, the value that the public relations function has to an organization.

We also have conducted research to develop valid and reliable measures of the six indicators of the quality of long-term relationships —the two types of relationships and the four relationship outcomes. Details of the research can be found in a report published by the Institute for Public Relations (Hon & J. Grunig, 1999). In addition to quantitative measures that can be used in survey research, we also have developed qualitative measures for the indicators that can be used both in formative and evaluative research on the quality of relationships (J. Grunig, 2002).

Public relations managers can use these measures as indicators of the quality of their relationships with strategic publics —such as community members, journalists, and employees. Public relations professionals should measure these indicators regularly to monitor the quality of the relationships their organizations have developed with each of their publics and, therefore, the value that the public relations function has contributed to the organization.

## 5. Public relations research at the functional level

At the functional level of analysis, a public relations department should conduct research to evaluate itself —how it is organized and what it does. Then it should ask whether the public relations function is organized in the best way to contribute maximally to organizational and societal effectiveness. Research at the functional level is «benchmarking» research. Typically, benchmarking studies identify organizations that are believed to be leaders in an area of practice and then describe how these organizations practice public relations or some other management function. Such benchmarking studies are useful, but they would be even more useful if they were based on a foundation of scientific research that provides a theoretical rationale explaining *why* the practices of the benchmarked departments contribute to organizational and societal effectiveness.

Our study of excellent public relations departments (L. Grunig, *et al.*, 2002) provides such a theoretical profile, a theoretical benchmark, of critical success factors and best practices in public relations. It is a profile that we initially constructed from past research and by theoretical logic. In addition, we gathered empirical evidence from more than 300 organizations in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom to confirm that this theoretical profile explains best actual practice as well as best practice in theory.

In most benchmarking studies, communication units compare themselves with similar units in their industry or with similar functional units inside the organization. The Excellence study, in contrast, is an example of what Fleisher (1995) called «generic benchmarking» in his book on public relations benchmarking —identifying critical success factors across different types of organizations. Generic benchmarking is most valuable theoretically because it is unlikely that one organization will be, in Fleisher's words, «a world-class per-

former across the board.» In the Excellence study, only a few organizations exemplified all of the best practices, many organizations exemplified some of them, and others exemplified few of the practices. A theoretical benchmark does not provide an exact formula or detailed description of practices that a public relations unit can copy in order to be excellent. Rather, it provides a generic set of principles that such units can use to generate ideas for specific practices in their own organizations. The criteria we developed and tested in the Excellence study can be used as a theoretical benchmark for auditing a public relations function. This is an example of how research *on* the profession can result in useful concepts and tools *for* the practice of public relations.

The Excellence criteria require knowledge and professionalism by the public relations unit. They also require understanding of and support for public relations by senior management. They can be used both for formative and evaluative analysis of a public relations function —as prior research that can be used to plan and organize the function and as a standard for reviewing the past structure and performance of the function.

The characteristics of an excellent public relations function fall into four categories, each of which contains several characteristics that can be used to audit a public relations function (for specific criteria, see L. Grunig, *et al.*, 2002).

- Empowerment of the public relations function through participation in strategic management, providing public relations professionals access to key decision-makers, including women as well as men in senior public relations positions, and planning an evaluation of communication programs strategically.
- Organizing public relations as a managerial role rather than as a technical support activity for other management functions.
- Integrating all communication programs through the public relations function and not subordinating public relations to other management functions such as marketing, human resources, or finance.
- Practicing public relations as a two-way communication process and with a «symmetrical» purpose of using communication to foster collaboration between organizations and their publics.

## 6. Public relations research at the societal level

The value of public relations at the societal level results from the cumulative impact of what it does at the program, functional, and organizational levels. The value of public relations at the societal level is the long-term impact of good relationships identified at the organizational level and cultivated at the program level. As a result, research on the quality of relationships also can be used to establish the contribution of public relations to society. In addition, the public relations function should evaluate the ethics and social responsibility of the organization and serve as an ethics counselor to management as part of its role in strategic management.

The extent to which a public relations function performs in an ethical and socially responsible manner can be determined by comparing its behavior with two principles of ethics derived from the principal branches of ethical theory: teleological (or consequentialist) and deontological (or rules-based) approaches to ethics (J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1996). Public relations programs should be assessed according to the extent to which they have considered two questions in their role in the management of an organization:

- The teleological question: To what extent has the public relations staff helped management address the consequences the organization has had on publics and addressed the needs of publics?
- The deontological question: To what extent has the public relations staff carried out its moral obligation to communicate with and disclose the organization's behavior to publics when it has consequences on them or the public expects consequences from the organization?

## 7. Conclusions about research in public relations

Public relations should be an integral part of the management of every organization. The public relations function helps the organization interact with the stakeholders in its environment both to accomplish its mission and to behave in a socially responsible manner. An excellent public relations staff cannot serve this role, however, unless research and measurement are an integral part of the function. Formative research is necessary to identify strategic publics with which an organization needs a relationship and to determine how to develop and maintain relationships with those publics. Evaluative research is necessary to establish the effectiveness of public relations programs and their contribution to organizational effectiveness. Public relations functions as a whole can be audited by comparing them to a theoretical benchmark and by their contribution to the ethical and socially responsible behavior of the organization.

This section conceptualizing research *in* the practice of public relations should provide a roadmap for public relations professionals who want to design and evaluate an excellent public relations function. I will conclude by highlighting recent academic research that provides useful tools *for* the practice of public relations.

## 8. Recent research for public relations

Since the completion of the Excellence study, scholars working in this research tradition, which features the strategic management role of public relations, have continued to conduct research *for* the profession that has resulted in concepts and ideas that public relations professionals can use to participate in strategic decision processes. Much of the new research has been on relationships and evaluation of public relations —research already discussed in this chapter. In addition, research has provided new concepts and tools related to:

- *Environmental scanning*. Research to identify publics and issues and to evaluate information sources that can be used to bring information into the organization (e.g., Chang, 2000; and J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 2000b).
- *Publics*. Research to further develop my situational theory of publics (J. Grunig, 1997) and to explain the social nature of publics (e.g., Aldoori, 2001; J.-N. Kim, 2006; & Sha, 1995).
- *Scenario building*. Research to develop this technique for explaining the consequences of the behavior of publics to management and the issues created by the behavior of publics (e.g., Sung, 2004).
- *Relationship cultivation strategies*. Research to expand the concepts of symmetrical and asymmetrical communication to include a number of strategies to cultivate relationships (independent variables) that are most effective in producing high-quality relationships with stakeholder publics (dependent variables) (e.g., Hung, 2002, 2004; Rhee, 2004).
- *Interactions of relationships and reputation*. Public relations practitioners and management scholars have paid a great deal of attention to an organization's reputation in recent years, in the belief that reputation is an intangible asset that adds both monetary and nonmonetary value to an organization. Our research (J. Grunig & Hung, 2002; Yang, 2005; and Yang & J. Grunig, 2005) has shown, however, that public relations has a greater long-term on relationships than on reputation and that reputations are largely a byproduct of management behavior and the quality of organization-public relationships. Thus, attending to relationships will ultimately improve an organization's reputation. Reputation, however, cannot be managed directly; it is managed through the cultivation of relationships.
- *Development of an ethical framework for public relations practitioners to use as they participate in strategic management* (e. g., Bowen, 2000, 2004).
- *Empowerment of the public relations function*. Research to clarify the nature of the dominant coalition in an organization and how public relations practitioners become part of or gain access to empowered coalitions (e.g., Berger, 2005).
- *Specialized areas of public relations*. Research to extend the generic principles of excellence, used as a framework for auditing the overall public relations function in this article, to specialized areas of public relations, such as fund raising (Kelly, 1991), investor relations (Shickinger, 1998), employee relations (H.-S. Kim, 2005), community relations (Rhee, 2004), and government relations (Chen, 2005).
- *Global public relations and global strategy*. Research to develop a global theory of public relations, based on the theory that the principles of excellent public relations are *generic principles* that can be applied in many cultures and political-economic settings as long as *specific applications* are used to adapt them to different contexts (e.g., L. Grunig, J. Grunig, & Verčič, 1998; Verčič, L. Grunig, & J. Grunig, 1996; Wakefield, 1997, 2000). Recent research has applied this theory to a multinational organization (NATO) (Van Dyke, 2005), public diplomacy programs of governments in

other countries (Yun, 2005), and globalized and localized strategies of multinational organizations (Ni, 2006).

- *Institutionalization of strategic public relations as an ongoing, accepted practice in most organizations.* No research has been conducted on institutionalization to date, but Yi (2005) has made a compelling argument that research is needed to learn how organizations come to understand and accept public relations as a strategic management function rather than solely as a messaging, publicity, and media relations function.

## 9. In conclusion

Public relations practitioners today recognize the urgent need to include measurement in their practice. However, most measurement programs are not clearly conceptualized and fail to answer the questions and solve the problems they were developed to answer. Practitioners can improve their measurement programs by refining their conceptualization of the public relations function, public relations programs, and communication processes and of the effects these have in producing desired organizational outcomes. Practitioners can improve their research used *in* the practice of public relations most effectively by studying and making use of theoretical principles of conceptualization and by studying research that has been conducted *on* and *for* the practice of the discipline.

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