UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

CORRELATES OF PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS' ROLE TYPES IN MALAYSIA

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By

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in the Center for Extension and Continuing Education Universiti Pertanian Malaysia

March, 1993

UPM

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my husband who supports me so unconditionally throughout my career and personal life.

To him with

love and thanks.

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March, 1993

Chairman : Professor Dr. Sulaiman Mohd. Yassin

Faculty : Center for Extension and Continuing Education

The objectives of this study were (1) to determine the role types that could be used to describe the PRPs' roles in their organisations in Malaysia and (2) to determine the relationships between selected personal factors, organisational factors and psychological factors with the role types that had been identified.

A total of 208 names were randomly drawn from IPRM's membership. Data was gathered employing the mail questionnaire method. Seven hypotheses were formulated to be tested using a t-test for correlated samples of which the correlation coefficients of the selected independent variables were transformed into standard correlations or the Fisher's Z scores.

The study revealed that the two role types as suggested by several researchers could also be used to describe the types of roles the PRPs in Malaysia performed. The study found that the PRPs' role

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types in Malaysia could be sorted into the communication manager role type and the communication technician role type.

Several selected independent variables of the study correlated significantly with the two role types. The PRPs' role types were significantly influenced by (1) the types of communication functions they performed such as PR writing, customer/management relations, media relations, and speaking, (2) the PRPs' communication practices such as interaction with the public and interaction with other PRPs, (3) the organisational climate in which the PRPs work, (4) the amount of encroachment from other non-PR department, (5) the PRPs' age and experience in the PR field, (6) the PRPs' psychological profiles such as their sense of responsibility and need for achievement.

However, the study failed to find any significant correlation between several selected independent variables. No significant correlation was found for (1) the communication function of promotional writing, (2) amount of print media exposure in PR related issues, (3) organisational type and size, and (4) the PRPs' gender, education, and training.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Pertanian Malaysia sebagai sebahagian daripada keperluan untuk mendapatkan ijazah Master Sains.

FAKTOR-FAKTOR YANG MEMPENGARUHI JENIS PERANAN PENGAMAL PERHUBUNGAN AWAM DI MALAYSIA

Oleh

LING LIONG ING

March, 1993

Pengerusi : Profesor Dr. Sulaiman Mohd. Yassin

Fakult : Pusat Pengembangan dan Pendidikan Lanjutan

Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk (1) menentukan jenis peranan yang boleh digunakan untuk menerangkan peranan-peranan pengamal perhubungan awam (PPA) dalam organisasi mereka di Malaysia dan (2) menentukan perkaitan di antara faktor-faktor peribadi terpilih, faktor organisasi dan faktor-faktor psikologi dengan jenis-jenis peranan yang telah dikenalpasti.

Sejumlah 208 nama telah dipilih secara rawak daripada ahli-ahli Institut Perhubungan Raya Malaysia (IPRM). Data telah dikumpulkan dengan menggunakan kaedah penghantaraan borang kaji selidik melalui pos. Tujuh hipotesis telah dikemukakan untuk diuji dengan menggunakan ujian-t untuk sampel-sampel yang berkaitan di mana nilai korelasi ditukar kepada nilai korelasi lazim iaitu nilai Fisher's Z.

Kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa dua jenis peranan seperti yang dicadangkan oleh beberapa penyelidik juga boleh digunakan untuk menerangkan jenis-jenis peranan yang dimainkan oleh PPA di Malaysia.

Kajian ini mendapati bahawa pelaksanan peranan PPA boleh dibahagikan kepada jenis peranan pengurus komunikasi dan jenis peranan juruteknik komunikasi.

Beberapa angkubah tidak bersandar terpilih didapati mempunyai kaitan bererti dengan dua jenis peranan itu. Jenis peranan PPA adalah jelas dipengaruhi oleh (1) jenis fungsi komunikasi yang dilaksanakan seperti penulisan perhubungan awam, perhubungan pelanggan/ pengurusan, perhubungan media, dan syarahan, (2) kebiasaan komunikasi seperti interaksi dengan publik dan interaksi dengan lain-lain PPA, (3) suasana organisasi di mana PPA bekerja, (4) pencerobohan daripada jabatan bukan perhubungan awam, (5) umur dan pengalaman PPA dalam bidang perhubungan awam, (6) profil psikologi seperti rasa tanggungjawab dan keperluan untuk pencapaian mereka.

Bagaimana pun, kajian ini gagal untuk memperolehi sebarang kaitan bererti di antara beberapa angkubah tidak bersandar terpilih. Tidak ada kaitan bererti diperolehi untuk (1) fungsi komunikasi penulisan promosi, (2) jumlah pendedahan media cetak dalam isu perhubungan awam, (3) jenis dan saiz organisasi, (4) jantina dan pendidikan dan latihan PPA.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Public Relations (PR) efforts is an attempt to help our now complex society to reach decisions and functions more effectively by contributing to the mutual understanding among groups and institutions (Awad, 1983). Through mutual understanding, private and public policies can be brought into harmony in our society.

In the modern times, the missions and functions of PR are forever broadening and becoming more important because of new challenges that are confronted by the top management in organisations (Greyser, 1981). In other words, PR helps to serve the organisations and groups to adapt to their changing times.

According to Dowling (1990), since PR is indispensable in modern society, the most important role of the public relations practitioners (PRPs), is basically to bring rationality, reason and integrity in the process of responding to evolving demands. Whether the field of PR is going to advance or fall depends the following (Lesly, 1981b):

a) the performance of the PRPs themselves in the field,

b) how are the new practitioners being educated and trained,

c) how is the field perceived by others who need its services, and

d) how the field adapts itself to the multiple demands of the emerging era.

Since the mission of PR is broadening, it also means that the field of PR would entail new roles, require more capabilities and is in need of a more vigorous educational system. In this era of change, time and circumstances can both mean great opportunity as well as danger to the PR field (Greyser, 1981). Hence the PRPs must often think of ways to survive, grow and excel under the broad range of new demands in modern society.

PR is now at a critical junction (Bates, 1984). The tide of change can either bring it to new heights or be doomed. But, for the past twenty years, there were still arguments on the scope of the roles and functions that should be performed by a PRP in an organisation (Culberston, 1985). For example, are the PRPs supposed to be merely writing, editing and message-production specialists? Should they also help set policy and interpret the client's social, political, economic and geographical contexts? Are PR departments concerned only with speaking to the publics? Or do their roles also include listening to and interpreting what the publics said?

Researchers today have invested great effort in researching the role types of PRPs - especially the differences between the communication managers and communication technicians. Although most researchers argued that both role types have value in PR, they

also argued that the senior person in a PR department should preferably be a manager for that department to contribute to organisational effectiveness (Grunig, 1991).

Accordingly, the roles of PR should involve the full broad spectrum of what it encompasses and should also be involved at the highest level of decision-making in organisations. However, many PRPs only perform specialised functions prescribed to them by the top management people. In other word, they are only performing the communication technician role type. This is not a healthy sign because PR should also be a management function apart from a technical function.

It is not uncommon that PR is still positioned in the organisation structure of many firms under other departments like marketing, advertising, or finance. If the PR field is still often perceived by others in the organisation as being subordinate to such departments, then the chance of a PRP to achieve acceptance as top manager is probably very much doubted. Dilenschneider (1990) also agreed with Bates (1984) that in the new era of the 1990s, it will be a make-or-break time for the PR profession because by now the PRPs themselves should think of their profession as a serious business function, rather than as a mere after thought after all the major organisational decisions have been made by the top management people.

Leuven (1989) had indicated that there would be increasingly frequent alignment of PR activities with other departments such as marketing, human resources, personnel and communications toward the year 2000. Every day, PRPs have to interact with professionals in

other fields since no organisation function can exist in isolation. Sometimes this interaction occurs due to shared organisational resources or sometimes due to shared organisational goals. And according to him, when two organisational functions overlap in terms of goals, skills and tasks, one function is often considered to be substitutable for the other. And the problem with PR is that it is often thought of as being substitutable to other more established disciplines as listed above.

Gray (1990), however, was concerned that the PR profession might be caught unprepared for the challenges of the 1990s. She reiterates:

> ... apart from the organisation's perception of PR as occupying a secondary level of management, the PRPs themselves have to take some blame for this lack of recognition for the profession. In a discipline in which people and their talents are the only true capital, PR appears to be dangerously unprepared for the challenges.

The reason PR is often thought of as a second level of management might be due to the fact that PR has always had trouble defining itself over the years (Friedman, 1990). The PRPs have also been talking about professionalism for at least a century (Jackson, 1988). So it is indeed time for the PRPs to stop, think and assess their roles clearly (Bourke, 1990). This can help to reduce or avoid the increasing aggressive movement (encroachment) of marketing, legal, personnel, and human resources departments into PR activities (Lauzen, 1991).

Similarly, Lauzen (1991) thought that the root of this encroachment might be traced back to the lack of well-defined communication functions and roles of the PRPs themselves. In many organisations including those of Malaysia, the absence of a clear definition of PR precludes a serious turf war and PR usually loses out because of the lack of boundaries.

Furthermore, the management of organisations still feels that anyone can do PR with the assumption that it requires little formal education and common skills. Indeed many studies have indicated that a great number of PRPs themselves are not professionally trained and possess few formal specialised skills (Lauzen, 1991). There is little point in discussing professional status of PR if the practices and roles cannot be defined clearly. To date, there have been quite a number of researches done on the PRPs' role types particularly those done by Broom and Smith (1979), Broom (1982), Dozier, (1983), Brody, (1985), Cottone et al., (1985), Culberston, (1985), Schneider, (1985), Acharya, (1985) and Reagan et al., (1990).

According to some of these researchers, the PRPs themselves lack the educational background necessary to function as corporate leaders. As a result of this lack of training, the PRPs frequently perceived themselves and are perceived by others as fulfilling highly substitutable and technical roles. In some cases, the PR functions are already subsumed by the larger and more powerful marketing functions (Broom and Tucker, 1989).

To quote Wolter and Miles (1983), today many people performing a wide variety of communication functions are called PR counselors, public affairs coordinators, corporate communication directors, community relations directors, PR directors, information specialists, media liaison officers, press secretaries, and the like. To Wolter and Miles (1983), these many titles and pretensions of PR not only reflect confusion and misunderstanding among the practitioners, their organisations, their critics, but also the general public.

Broom and Tucker (1989) had also written that the boundaries between PR and marketing continues to blur. In many cases, PR firms and departments do marketing communication and marketing PR while advertising agencies and marketing departments offer PR services. Many Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) even had the misconception that the two functions are just different techniques for achieving the same aim .

To reduce this conflict of marketing and PR, Harris (1991) proposed that the ideal solution would be to maintain a close relationship between the two disciplines, namely, marketing and PR. This is done not only because of the similarity of experience and skills, but also because of the need to integrate marketing objectives with corporate objectives.

Another possible reason for the alignment or subsumation of PR departments with other more established departments could be that the PRPs may not be doing enough to sell their

strengths (Shell, 1991). Lesly (1981b) felt that PR has not followed its own precepts because it lags behind the evolution of our society. In other words, the PR field has not grown intelligently by assessing the role its practitioners can fill or defining the means to fill it.

Lesly (1981a) had also reported that there also have been emphasis among the employers and clients on visible results demanding measurability and tangibility (management by objectives). Sometimes it seems that PR is contradicting the organisational goals because the growing complexity of PR's challenges has called to focus on less tangible functions such as building up the organisational image in the long run. And so, according to Lesly (1981a), this cleavage partially accounts for the tendency of some managements to let other senior management-minded people from other disciplines to manage the function, rather than to accept the PR people in their roles.

There is also a conflict between the orientation of many management executives and the roles that PRPs should fill (Lesly, 1981b). Dunham (1984) considered this type of different or conflicting expectations as **intrarole conflict**. For example, most of the managements are strongly oriented toward early results and immediate measurements particularly in corporations where the pressure is on each department's financial results. According to Lesly (1981b), this again puts a burden on PR's ability to gain acceptance because PR anticipate and shape what is developing, not to report or cope with what has already been determined. It is usually too late for PR by the

time an organisation is confronted with attitudes of its publics. Yet many CEOs have failed to see the long-term benefits of the PR programmes.

To conclude, to change others' attitudes, the PRPs must first examine themselves. The question now is not whether PR is a profession or vocation, as Jackson (1985) had said:

> ... that do the PRPs themselves truly believe that this field has an underlying body of knowledge based in the behavioral sciences or the humanities, do they know the science of PR, and are they able to apply it to their work?

This research was conducted to find out what were the types of role performed by the PRPs in the organisations in Malaysia and what were the possible factors that might correlate with the two role types as developed by Broom and Smith (1979). It was the aim of this research to shed some light for the field of PR in Malaysia to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills needed to stand as a profession and hence to avoid encroachment by other more established fields like marketing, communication, advertising, human resource management, personnel, legal and so on by defining clearly the role types of the PRPs and the factors that might influence their role types.

Statement of Problem

Previously, most of the research on PR was designed either to advance the profession or to improve the public's understanding of PR in society. The scholars conducting research on PR had been