

## QUESTION ONE:

At the beginning of the 21st Century, we have witnessed the expansion of socio-cultural and critical turn in public relations. What is the meaning of this turn for the discipline and what is its relevance? How has it influenced or has a potential to influence and challenge public relations practice? Support your arguments with theoretical ideas and provide examples of how these can be applied to practice or used to gain greater understanding of contemporary communication phenomena and challenges that organisations face. In your answer, you can focus on a particular paradigm/school of thought or discuss the turn in general.

### **Introduction**

In this essay I will be discussing the Socio-Cultural turn in Public Relations theory, attempting to define it, discussing it's classification as a critical theory, discussing it's understanding of power-dynamics and its relationship to Rhetoric, Discourse and Rhetorical-Discourse. Examples of some of these points will be made. I will then attempt to discuss some of the points of the Multi-Paradigm approach, the reason for this is that I believe Socio-Cultural turn and the Multi-Paradigm approach is closely related. If I have time I will attempt to show these links, and by way of concluding I will [in note form] mention what I believe is its most important contribution not only to PR but also to us as individuals.

### **Socio-Cultural Turn**

Social-Cultural Turn in Public Relations Theory is not exactly a theory, so much as re-shaping and refocusing of the already present theories, whilst, perhaps, adapting functional theories, and adding its own, Socio-Cultural Turn is the preferred term:

*'The increasing prevalence of research taking a different path from the functional, normative approach that has historically dominated public relations scholarship suggests something of a socio-cultural 'turn' in the field.'*

(Edwards, Lee., and Hodges, Caroline E. M., Introduction: Implications of a radical socio-cultural 'turn' in public relations scholarship, in Edwards, Lee., and Hodges, Caroline E. M., (ed.'s.), *Public Relations, Society and Culture: Theoretical and Empirical Explorations*, (Abingdon, England, UK: Routledge, 2011) pp. 1-14, quotation from p. 1).

Edwards and Hodge highlight that traditionally and historically Public Relations Theories have been dominated by Grunig and *'by organisational interests, treating the profession as an organisational function first and foremost.'* (Edwards, Hodge, 2011, p. 1). Edwards and Hodges' criticism is not that Grunig's theory is wrong but that it only applies *within* an organisation and doesn't realise how important the society and culture surrounding the organisation is:

*'...this singular focus on public relations in organisations has tended to exclude the social world in which those organisations operate. Public relations itself is a social and cultural practice, a profession with its own dynamics that generates discourses in order to shape our attitudes, values and beliefs in the interests of organisations.'* (Edwards, Hodges, 2011, p. 1)

The argument is that essentially the organisation itself is front-and-centre in Excellence Theory, rather than the publics it serves. It is an issue within PR that Edwards and Hodges describe:

*'...the degree to which the organisation is served—rather than providing a more balanced view of the profession that incorporate its wider effects.'* (Edwards, Hodges., 2011, p. 2)

Further adding that:

*'This approach has a number of drawbacks: it frames public relations in a way that excludes the interests of increasingly diverse audiences; it ignores the*

*dynamics produced by the profession pursuing its own interests; and it does not address the role that public relations plays as a discursive force in society, shaping social and cultural values and beliefs in order to legitimise certain interests over others (Edwards, 2009b; McKie & Munshi, 2007; Motion & Weaver, 2005).'* (Edwards, Hodges., 2011, p. 3)

Again arguing further, that this is a turn not a theory in and of itself:

*'We argue that this work constitutes a 'turn' in public relations theory that shifts the ontological and epistemological focus of the field towards the socially constructed nature of practice, process and outcomes. Simpson (2009:1330) defines 'turn' as a movement of thought that 'opens up new intellectual frontiers, invites new ways of seeing and suggests new questions to be answered. It demands the rigorous contestation of ideas and a deep probing of the philosophical assumptions that shape our intellectual discourses'.'* (Edwards, Hodges., 2011, p. 3)

Not only is 'turn' the better description, but the Socio-Cultural perspective relies heavily on Social Constructivism:

*'In this theoretical turn, public relations moves from being understood as a functional process enacted in the organisational context to being a contingent, socio-cultural activity that forms part of the communicative process by which society constructs its symbolic and material 'reality'(Daymon&Hodges,2009).'* (Edwards, Hodges., 2011, p. 3)

Edwards and Hodges write that:

*'Consequently, each case of public relations will be unique, formed through the beliefs, values and attitudes that shape the context in which it unfolds, and structured by different configurations of social, economic and political factors (Hodges, 2006; Curtin & Gaither, 2005).'* (Edwards, Hodges, 2011, p. 3)

This is all to say that each instance of the use of Public Relations as a tool will do within a unique environment, a unique culture both externally and internally to where

the public relations function is performed, and it is important that public relations considers this when *acting*.

### ***A Critical Theory***

The Socio-Cultural turn is grouped with the theoretical challenges to the Functionalist Managerial model of Gunrig et al, known as the Critical Theories, and this is reflected in that Edwards and Hodges included Jacquie L'Etang in their list (Edwards, Hodges., 2011, p. 1) of 'socio-cultural' researchers, who has traditionally be aligned with the critical school (see L'Etang, Jacquie., *Public Relations: Concepts, Practice and Critique*, (London, England, UK: SAGE Publications, 2008), as well as their subsequent statement: '*Findings that emphasise the productive capacity of agency find it impossible to negotiate structural barriers to change. Critical analyses find change and development in the field problematic.*' (Edwards, Hodges., 2011, p. 4). And they see this as a duality that the Socio-Cultural turn must overcome, through an '*ontological and epistemological break*' with current conceptualisations of public relations. (Edwards, Hodges., 2011, p. 4). Note also that Jacquie L'Etang also contributed the first chapter to the Edwards, Hodges, book – Imagining public relations anthropology' (L'Etang, Jacquie., 'Imagining Public Relations' in Edwards, Lee., and Hodges, Caroline E. M., *Public Relations, Society and Culture: Theoretical and Empirical Explorations*, (Abingdon, England, UK: Routledge, 2011) pp. 15-32).

### ***Power and Transactional Power***

Socio-Cultural applications can be made in a vast array of sub-focal areas, or better put sub-cultures, down to the micro-sub-culture of the individual and family, to that of larger-sub-cultures within an area, community or wider afield. It can therefore take advantage of other disciplines out-with public relations, such as '*sociology, cultural studies, post-colonial scholarship, post-structural work, political economy, ecological*

*studies, feminism, queer studies and more.*' (Edwards, Hodges, 2011, p. 3). I would personally argue that public relations should also be looking to look at studies in things such as anthropology, as a way of understanding cultural heritage, and construction on a deeper level, anyone engaging on the faith-level, for faith communities and their approach to public relations should probably study subjects such as hamatology (doctrine of sin) and within Christianity Pauline Anthropology, as well as more generally ancient-philosophical views of anthropology, as these three studies have affected the psyche of the western modern world immeasurably, the latter of these studies would be of great benefit out with the faith communities.

To mention, any form of social-justice campaigning or studying, such as feminism, queer-studies and faith-based communities, cannot ignore that a lot of the underpinnings of our society are about power. As the fictional Prime-Minister Francis Urquhart (played by Ian Richardson) in the BBC Drama 'House of Cards' (and it's subsequent two series, 'To play the king' and 'The final cut', 1990-1995) was famous for saying (which also made it into the US version starring Kevin Spacey as the equivalent character Frank Underwood) – 'Everything is about sex, except sex, which is about power'. This is an important, rather post-modern (and thus cynical) attitude to the way of the world, but the concept of power, and transactional power, is at the heart of any social-justice study, be in faith-based or sex or sexuality-based. Highlighting, however, that [traditionally and] *'ontologically, public relations remains positioned as a separate entity from both the structures that are assumed to shape its enactment and from the agents that 'do' the enacting. Consequently, research tends to reflect this division: either public relations may be a (structural) source of domination, or it is an (agentic) force for change.'* (Edwards, Hodges., 2011, p. 4).

Whilst discussing power, I here mentioned transactional power, which Edwards and

Hodges discuss after a section on the ontological problem of power within public relations, however, transactional power, is a wider study than they mention, (they simply called it transactional, cf. Edwards, Hodges., 2011, p. 4-6) but it is not only the transaction between individuals, but the nature of the ability to empower another through our transaction (that is our communication with and our conversation with them) that we can see change occur, it is not enough to simply pass information about homeless shelters to the homeless, but we must empathise and 'enter' into their place of being, through a transactional relationship, of mutuality, where we encourage them to rise beyond their current circumstances. Essentially the 'you are more than where you are' – empowering to change through encouragement, support and empathy, rather than simply through information giving. But rather than simply being just about our influencing and empowering of the homeless individual (per this example) but it can be seen that this interaction benefits me, whether it is the psychological 'feel-good' factor of 'doing a good turn' or the mutuality of the relationship ('winning friends and influencing people') or perhaps, they know the best restaurants in town. Whatever the consequence in the verbal-physical-psychological, there is the deeper impact, the life-altering impact of this relationship – the what-if I had never met them, my life, and any relationships I did/do/would have would be different because it was not enriched by the unique perspective of another. Thus all relationships are about empowering one-another (mutually beneficial) but also are about mutual-transactional-value as they impact our lives. (Whilst this section is largely from my reading here, the 'unique' view-point I've brought to bear has been flavoured by private conversations (and possibly some of his academic work, which he has shared with me in the past) with Church of Scotland Elder, former theological student and Clackmannanshire Labour Party Councillor David Clark, who rightly

deserves credit for his transactional relationship with me. And by-way of a semi-conclusion to my ramblings, I refer back to Edwards and Hodges (2011, p. 6) who write of public relations that their '*understanding of public relations as a locus of transactions that produce emergent meanings, implicates the profession as itself an articulation of the different moments of the circuit of culture.*' Essentially to say that public-relations cannot so easily hide away and pretend, as a journalist or politician (may claim), that they are 'above' the events, no, they are actually deeply ingrained in them, intimately involved, and public relations functions as a voice in a cacophony of voices, and one that has the transactional power to change the lives of others for better or for worse, to empower or to disenfranchise and disavow.

### ***Discourse and Rhetoric***

As with the Two-way symmetrical model of Grunig, it is hard to escape the use of rhetoric and discourse as two sides of the same coin. Interestingly at times the two may merge, but discourse is primarily about two-way communication, the transactional quality of a relationship, whereas rhetoric (persuasion through argument) is about making a point, and persuading another of your position.

Currently advice to big business men and women who enter the boardroom as the chair of the board, is to be the last to voice their opinion. There are two reasons for this, one is to empower and encourage the rest of their team to voice an opinion (it prevents a 'yes-man' typology) and also to develop your own argument for your final decision. You may have entered the board-room with a well-developed idea and plan, but you can adapt it (on your feet) and make better arguments as to why this is the correct and best way forward, if you have first taken part in the transactional discourse of listening to others (without judgement or correction) and then you are able to build arguments for and against your plan, with appropriate responses, as

well as being to 'fold-in' the ideas of your board members, to create a consensus. This is where rhetoric is both a tool and an act – the tool to persuade and the act of doing so, but also where discourse is both the act and tool, the act of listening and being in transactional relationship, as well as the tool to sharpen your own arguments and viewpoint. (The board-room motif is adapted from a video titled 'Be The Last To Speak' which I saw a while ago, by Simon Sinek, author and motivational speaker - <https://www.goalcast.com/2017/06/24/simon-sinek-be-the-last-to-speak/> - one should also read the two sections 'Questions of Discourse' and 'Questions of Context' in the aforementioned introduction by Edwards and Hodges, 2011, p. 6-7). Other examples of Rhetoric are John F Kennedy's "Don't ask what you're country can do for you" speech (<https://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/BqXIEM9F4024ntFI7SVAjA.aspx>) and Martin Luther King Jnr.'s "I Have A Dream Speech" (<https://www.aol.com/article/news/2017/01/16/dr-martin-luther-kings-i-have-a-dream-speech-full-text/21655947/>). Despite both of them, arguably, being about Civil Rights and Championing freedom and the American Dream (however intangible and re-definable that really is) they are both rhetoric, in the Propaganda come Public-Information mode, yet people remember those famous lines – because they stir and idea, they sell a dream, a vision of a nation where no one is judged by the colour of their skin, but by the content of their character.

## Multi-Paradigmatic Approach

Patricia Curtain ('Public Relations and Philosophy: Parsing Paradigms' in *Public Relations Inquiry*, 2011, 1(1), pp. 31-47) writes in her abstract that:

*'...that Kuhn [who developed the idea of paradigms in Social Science] believed the social sciences to be inherently multi-paradigmatic, making the*

*quest for a single, overarching paradigm for public relations research misguided.'* (Curtain, 2011, p. 31)

This is therefore, perhaps, one of the most critical approaches against the Grunig model, in that it says, there is not one theory, but many, and there are many approaches within each theory, one dominant view is not the right approach.

### ***Defining Public Relations***

Curtain highlights a quote about philosophy and states: *'One could just as easily substitute 'public relations' for 'philosophy' in that sentence, as in fact many loosely have (e.g. Hallahan, 1993). The difference, however, is that the philosophical community accepts its lack of consensus as business as usual, whereas the public relations community decidedly does not.'* (Curtain, 2011, p. 31). And as if to emphasize this fact, here is a short list of 25 definitions compiled by Michael Turney at Northern Kentucky University for his Public Relations class:

1. *Public relations is the engineering of public consent. - Edward Bernays, Crystallizing Public Opinion (1923)*
2. *Public relations is planned, persuasive communications designed to influence significant publics. - John Marston, The Nature of Public Relations (1963)*
3. *Public relations is a distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance, and cooperation between an organization and its publics. - Dr. Rex Harlow Foundation for Public Relations Research and Education*
4. *Public relations exists to help an organization achieve its goals by ensuring that the right public thinks the right thing. - Simon Moore, An Invitation to Public Relations (1996)*
5. *Public relations is the effort to produce goodwill in the company's various publics so that these publics do not interfere in the firms profit-making ability. - Raymond Simon, Public Relations: Concepts and Practices (2nd ed., 1980)*

6. *Public relations is the management function through which management responds to and attempts to influence an organization's environment. - Baskin & Aronoff, Public Relations: The Profession and the Practice (2nd ed., 1988)*
7. *Public relations is the gentle art of letting the other fellow have your way. - Nielander & Miller, Public Relations (1951)*
8. *Public relations is the activities and attitudes intended to analyze, adjust to, influence, and direct the opinion of any group or groups of persons in the interest of any individual, group, or institution. - Richard Weiner, Dictionary of Media and Communications (1990)*
9. *Philosophically, public relations is all of the activities by which an individual or an organization seeks recognition; presents its interests and perspectives to various audiences; and establishes its integrity and credibility. - David Finn co-founder and CEO of Ruder Finn Public Relations (1995)*
10. *Public relations is the art of getting believed. - Ivy Ledbetter Lee (1914)*
11. *Public relations is the deliberate, planned, and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organization and its publics. - British Institute of Public Relations*
12. *Public relations specialists make flower arrangements of the facts, placing them so the wilted and less attractive petals are hidden by sturdy blooms. - Alan Harrington, Forbes (Aug. 1992)*
13. *P.R. is gift-wrapping. Whether delivered in plain or fancy paper, truth is truth, and the public ultimately comprehends it. The trick is packaging truth on your own terms. - Michael Levine, Guerrilla P.R. (1994)*
14. *Public relations is the managed communication behavior of an organization. - Grunig & Hunt, Managing Public Relations (1984)*
15. *Public relations is presenting a client in the best light so that the client will benefit financially and with positive recognition. - Dick Delson Los Angeles public relations practitioner (1991)*
16. *Public relations is the management function that identifies, establishes, and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the various publics on whom its success or failure depends. - Cutlip, Center, and Broom, Effective Public Relations (7th ed., 1994)*

17. *Public relations is organizational programs that promote the exchange of influence and understanding among organizations' constituent parts and publics. - Baskin & Aronoff, Public Relations: The Profession and the Practice (3rd ed., 1992)*
18. *Public relations is communicating what you believe in to important audiences, at the right time, to achieve a goal. - Frank Walton, vice president of Ruder Finn Public Relations (1995)*
19. *Public relations is linking the general public to social and political issues of interest. - Lyle Gregory Hollywood booking agent and social activist (1991)*
20. *Public relations practice is the art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counseling organization leaders, and implementing planned programs of action which serve both the organization's and the public's interest. - World Assembly of Public Relations (Mexico City; 1978)*
21. *Public relations is the skilled communication of ideas to various publics with the object of producing desired results. - Harlan & Scott, Contemporary Public Relations (1955)*
22. *Public relations is the business of creating and changing attitudes. - Harold Burson chairman and CEO of Burson Marsteller*
23. *Public relations is the management function that evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual or organization with the public interest, and plans and executes a program of action to earn public understanding and acceptance. - Denny Griswold, publisher of Public Relations News*
24. *Public relations has become a communications medium in its own right, an industry designed to alter perception, reshape reality and manufacture consent. - Mark Dowie, former editor/publisher of Mother Jones magazine*
25. *A public relations professional is a bridge builder, ... building longterm relationships between a company or an organization and its publics based on two-way communication. - Peter Jeff Grand Rapids, Michigan public relations practitioner*

([https://www.nku.edu/~turney/prclass/readings/pr\\_definitions.pdf](https://www.nku.edu/~turney/prclass/readings/pr_definitions.pdf))

Dr Rex Harlow found in his own research 472 definitions in 1976 – it is conceivable that as the world has changed many more definitions have been created and/or added to the defining of Public Relations. (Wolstenholme, Sue., 'Chapter One: What public relations is and what it is not' in Wolstenholme, Sue., (ed.) *Introduction to Public Relations*, pp.4-6, directly referencing p. 4)

### ***Unifying Theory***

Curtain writes, referencing and quoting Thomas Kuhn:

*'Kuhn denied the applicability of the normal science model, and thus a singular paradigm, to the social sciences, declaring that social scientists face an 'immense variety of problems' to be solved, rather than a focused research stream (1996: 165). Kuhn believed that the relative isolation of natural scientific research – scientific work is judged only by other scientists – allowed this insular community to develop a grand unifying theory or paradigm to guide their efforts. Kuhn viewed social science, however, as immersed in the ever-changing problems of society, with the result that 'very little of what goes on in the [social sciences] resembles the normal puzzle-solving research of the natural sciences.'* (Curtain, 2011, p. 34).

Noting further that Kuhn defined the word paradigm as a '*disciplinary matrix*' but that by 1991 '*he gave up on the term altogether*' as it had been hijacked by others. Just because, however, an over-arching and over-riding paradigm is impossible to find, does not mean one should abandon it all together. (Curtain, 2011, pp. 34-35).

My own use of the word paradigm has fallen into a trap, which most literature using the term has done, using it as a synonym for other words, in my case, theory, Curtian writes:

*'If we adopt Kuhn's use of the term as a disciplinary matrix, however, a paradigm is inclusive of compatible theories, not synonymous with theory (Botan and Hazleton, 2006).'* (Curtain, 2011, p. 35)

That is to say that a Paradigm is like (but is not?) a 'genre' of theory, for example a multitude of theories that use a Socio-Cultural Approach (Feminist, queer studies etc...) the individual theories within may be different, but the overall approach or mindset is the same, a paradigm. She further adds:

*'Within different paradigms, theory takes on different meanings and purposes (Rakow, 2005), and the tools used to study theory vary as well (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).'* (Curtain, 2011, p. 35).

A classic, non-public relations example of this would be the definition or theory behind the sovereignty of God in Christian Theology – a Calvinist theologian may define it as all-powerful and all-controlling, whilst an Arminian theologian may cast it in view of our knowledge of earthly kings, and say that whilst the King (God) is all-powerful, He does not control all, primarily through self-limitation, though He could if He so desired, GGe does not because He gave 'dominion' to mankind. Curtian continues:

*'If we accept this broader conception and that the social sciences do not lend themselves to a grand unifying paradigm, what emerges in public relations scholarship is multiple, competing paradigms embodying different relevant questions to be asked (theories) and different means to be used to answer them (methods).'* (Curtain, 2010, p. 35).

Which is to say that a paradigm is an approach, a theory is an attempt to answer the question, and a method is a means to answer them. So in the above example, the Calvinist's approach is with an all-powerful, all controlling God, whilst the Arminian's approach is with an all-loving, all-powerful, and *in-control* God. The question they try and answer is where does man's responsibility for sin, salvation etcetera fall in to

this, (the theory of Soteriology – or doctrine of Salvation, and formerly Harmatology, the doctrine of sin, essentially how does divinity relate to anthropology and how does anthropology relate to divinity). The methods they use to answer these questions, but some will use scriptures (the bible), other theologians (early Church fathers such as Augustine, Origen, and later Church leaders, John Calvin, Martin Luther, Jacob Arminius, John Wesley etc.).

When it comes to Public Relations the general paradigms, and the ones Curtin proposes herself, are:

'...post-positivist, constructivist, critical/cultural and postmodern paradigms...'  
(Curtin, 2010, p. 35)

Of course in the future we may have to seek out other paradigms, such as post-postmodern, and possible re-categories those listed.

## **The links between the Multi-Paradigm and the Socio-Cultural Turn** [To be completed]

### **Influence**

Some of the influence has already been discussed, but for greater clarity, and in note form, I believe that Socio-Cultural Turn will influence PR in that as it has already led people away from the Management Models towards the People – a reminder that Public Relations should not just serve an organisation, but the public itself. A challenge to us all, as Martin Luther King and J. F. K. challenged the 1960s, Public Relations professionals can challenge the future.

**READING LIST**

Edwards, Lee., and Hodges, Caroline E. M., Introduction: Implications of a radical socio-cultural 'turn' in public relations scholarship, in Edwards, Lee., and Hodges, Caroline E. M., (ed.'s.), *Public Relations, Society and Culture: Theoretical and Empirical Explorations*, (Abingdon, England, UK: Routledge, 2011) pp. 1-14

L'Etang, Jacquie., *Public Relations: Concepts, Practice and Critique*, (London, England, UK: SAGE Publications, 2008)

Sinek, Simon., *Be The Last To Speak*

(<https://www.goalcast.com/2017/06/24/simon-sinek-be-the-last-to-speak/>)

Kennedy, J. F., *Inaugural Address, 20 January 1961*,

(<https://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/BqXIEM9F4024ntFI7SVAjA.aspx>)

Luther-King Jnr., Martin., *I Have A Dream Speech or March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom Speech*,

(<https://www.aol.com/article/news/2017/01/16/dr-martin-luther-kings-i-have-a-dream-speech-full-text/21655947/>)

Curtain, Patricia., 'Public Relations and Philosophy: Parsing Paradigms' in *Public Relations Inquiry*, 2011, 1(1), pp. 31-47

Turney, Micahel., *An Assortment of Public Relations Definitions reflecting various theories, philosophies, and phases of public relations practice*,

([https://www.nku.edu/~turney/prclass/readings/pr\\_definitions.pdf](https://www.nku.edu/~turney/prclass/readings/pr_definitions.pdf))

Wolstenholme, Sue., 'Chapter One: What public relations is and what it is not'

in Wolstenholme, Sue., (ed.) *Introduction to Public Relations*, pp.4-6

**QUESTION TWO:**

Excellence study represents the most comprehensive study ever undertaken of public relations practice. Outline and critically evaluate its basic premises, concepts, models and contemporary

developments in their socio-historic context. What are the major strengths and critiques of the Excellence study? What kind of influence has the Excellence study had for the development of public relations theory and practice and what is its value today?

Please provide examples to support your statements.

### **Introduction**

In discussing excellence theory I will look at trying to define its key tenants, my previous essay has addressed some of its weaknesses, so I will not rehash old ground, but I will say that I do cover some other points here. I will discuss the Situation Theory and the Relationship Management theory as well as the Roles of Public Relations, I will then spend a short time (time permitting) addressing this general theory of PR as I understand it, and giving some examples, by way of conclusion.

### **Excellence Theory**

To define excellence theory, is to see it as one of many in a specific theoretical branch. Jeong-Nam Kim and Lan Ni (Kim, Jeong-Nam., & Ni, Lan., Chapter Three: Seeing the Forest Through the Trees: The Behavioural, Strategic Management Paradigm in Public Relations and Its Future, in Heath, Robert L., (ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Public Relations, Second Edition*, (Thousand Oaks, California, USA: SAGE Publications Inc., 2010), pp. 35-57. – this particular reference is to p. 35.) note that this is part of *'the managerial approach, also called the behavioral, strategic management paradigm in public relations'*. With references to the specific theoretician who developed Excellence Theory – James Grunig, they quote him (and others) as saying that it is a *'full-participation approach'* to public relations, whereby the Public Relations managers are involved not only in the public-relations of the organisation, but also of the decision making of the organisation. Excellence theory

is associated with managerial, strategic and symmetrical, with a claim by the Grunig's and Dozier as being 'ethical'. Kim and Ni's article notes that Excellence Theory which is based on substantive data, research, which is so vast as to warrant being a general theory, rather than a more specific theory, such as theories of Public Relations Roles, which of course came from Grunig and Hunt.

Excellence Theory is a theory of how to do Public Relations in an excellent manor, but is based on criteria each organization must be (such as environment and organizational ethos). For PR to be practiced (at least the chance for it to be so) excellently the organisation itself must work in a certain way.

Excellent theory defines seven areas of study and/or practice within PR which enable it to be practiced excellently, effectively and ethically. The seven areas are:

1. Empowerment of the Public Relations Function: the management of an organisation must value and empower the PR functionary. (Kim, Ni., 2010, p. 37)
2. Public Relations Roles: Managers and Technicians, in Grunig's theory. (Kim, Ni., 2010, pp. 37-38)
3. Organisation and Management of PR: PR and Communications is its own management function, and should not be integrated into another function ; and PR/Comms itself must be run through one department of the organisation. (Kim, Ni., 2010, p. 38)
4. The Models of Public Relations: Press-Agency; Public Information; Two-Way Asymmetrical; and Two-Way Symmetrical – this final one being the 'ideal' for 'excellence'. (Kim, Ni., 2010, pp. 38-39)
5. Characteristics of Individual Communications Programmes: that is extending the life-cycle of a PR campaign; programmes of intentional relationship development. (Kim, Ni., 2010, p. 39)

6. External Context: the organisations external environments, whereby perhaps external pressures, such as a pressure group, might lead an organisation to develop excellent PR praxis. (Kim, Ni., 2010, p. 39)
7. Internal Context: the organisations internal environment(s), whereby organisational '*structure, culture, internal systems of communications, treatment of men and women, and power of the dominate coalition*' effect how excellent in practice the organisations Public Relations is. (Kim, Ni., 2010, p. 39)

The original research that Grunig, on behalf of the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), who funded the research, was to answer the following two questions:

1. '*How do public relations functions make organizations more effective...?*'  
and
2. '*How should public relations functions be organized to help achieve such effectiveness...?*'

These two questions are known respectfully as the effectiveness and excellence questions. (Kim, Ni., 2010, p. 36).

The purpose essentially therefore is to understand how PR makes an organisation better and how that organisation can 'organise' (or manage) it's PR efforts to help achieve that effectiveness, or more simply – does PR add value to an organisation, and how can that PR make that organisation better. It was an attempt to 'demonstrate the value of Public Relations' to organisations and to increase the theory behind the practice of PR to increase the value of PR to organisations, basically: PR is effective (effective), now how do we replicate that effectiveness and if possible increase its effectiveness (excellence)? (Kim, Ni, 2010, p. 36).

Grunig's Excellence Theory also contributed to the wider 'management' approach, the concept of '*stakeholder[s], public[s] and issues.*' – these are often used to describe the stages PR goes through – who the vested interests, the organisation themselves and those within the organisation(s) who will publically react to the product/company (stakeholders), who is the audience, how the audience pushes back for changes to product(s) and/or the organisation(s) behind them, (publics) and finally the issues, these are the actual responses and push-backs of the publics on issues they have with the organisation(s) and/or product(s). (Kim, Ni., 2010, pp. 40-41).

Whilst the public may be involved at the publics stage, it is as the issues stage that their problems become your problems, your issues and essentially your crisis (as a PR practitioner). (Kim, Ni., 2010, p. 41).

### ***Situational Theory of Publics***

A key component of these stages is understanding your publics, or more specifically the sections of those publics you are most concerned with (negatively and positively) – the constituents of your organisation. Therefore PR experts rely, on identification of these publics (and constituents) through the '*situational theory of publics*' (also developed by J. E. Grunig, alongside Hunt). (Kim, Ni., 2010, p. 41).

This theory has three branches, or '***independent variables***'

1. '*problem recognition*'
2. '*constraint recognition*'
3. '*level of involvement*' (Kim, Ni., 2010, p. 41)

These three variables are consistently shown to be affect the extent and whether individuals (publics) '*engage with communication behaviours*', the '***two dependent variables***' of the theory, are '*information seeking*' and '*information processing*', this is

to say how to engage the publics, what are the key reasons (variables) that encourage the publics to engage with the organisation, why they do so *'and when they are most likely to do so.'* (Kim, Ni., 2010, p.41).

### **Relationship Management**

Also known as the **Behavioural, Strategic Management Approach**, developed by Ferguson (1984) and later developed (in relationship to Excellence Theory) by J Grunig and Huang (2000). (Kim, Ni., 2010, p. 41)

The Grunig-Huang development is articulated as *'a three-stage model of relationship management'*. The stages are 'Antecedents', 'Maintenance Strategies' (or 'cultivation strategies') and finally 'outcomes of relationships'. The relationship quality can then be assessed based on its traits, such as *'trust, control mutuality, commitment, [and] satisfaction.'* These traits were developed as measures by Hon and Grunig (1999) and Huang (2001). These relationships can also be measured by their type such as *'exchange, communal, [and] covenantal'* which Hung (2005) explored. (Kim, Ni., 2010, p. 41).

### **Roles in Public Relations**

The four models of public relations as developed by Grunig and Hunt in 1984, are described best, in my opinion, by Sue Westenholme's table (adapted from Grunig and Hunt, 1984).

Characteristic	Press agency/ publicity	Public information	Two-way asymmetric	Two-way symmetric
<b>Purpose</b>	Propaganda	Dissemination of information	Persuasion	Mutual understanding
<b>Nature of communication</b>	One-way: Complete Truth not essential	One-way: truth important	Two-way: imbalanced effects	Two-way: balanced effects

<b>Communication model</b>	Source-Receiver Lasswell	Source-Receiver	Source-Receiver Feedback	Group-Group Riley and Riley/ Kincaid
<b>Nature of research</b>	Little: 'counting'	Little: readability, readership	Formative: evaluative of attitudes	Formative: evaluative of understanding
<b>Where practiced today</b>	Entertainment, sport, product promotion	Government, health, non- profit business	Competitive business, agencies	Regulated business, agencies

(Westenholme, Sue., Chapter One: What Public Relations Is And What It Is Not, in Westenholme, Sue (ed.), *Introduction to Public Relations*, (Harlow, England, UK: Pearson Education Limited, 2013) pp. 2-31) The above table appears on page 15.

*'The discussion about whether communication should be asymmetric or symmetric for public relations to be well practiced (or 'excellent' as claimed by Grunig in 1992) has provided a focus for discussion and a measure for practice. L'Etang sees public relations as 'necessarily partisan and intrinsically undemocratic' (J. Grunig in Grunig et al. 2002). To her the symmetrical model represents 'a utopian attempt to make an inherently evil practice look good'. (Westenholme, 2013, p.15)*

Speaking of Grunig's Excellent Theory or 'Systems Theory' Lee Edwards (2014, p. 124) writes that *'According to the study, two-way symmetric communication practices are a keystone for excellent PR, although in practice a mix of asymmetric and symmetric approaches is often used.'* (Edwards, Chapter 7: Public Relations Theories an Overview, in Tench, Ralph., and Yeomans, Liz., (ed.'s.), *Exploring Public Relations, Third Edition*, (Harlow, England, UK: Pearson Education Limited, 2014, pp. 144).

Magda Pieczka (Chapter 17: Paradigms, Systems Theories and PR in L'Etang, Jacquie., and Pieczka, Magda., (ed.'s.), *Public Relations: Critical Debates and Contemporary Practice*, (Mahwah, New Jersey, USA: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers: 2006) pp. 329-357) argued that Grunig's 'symmetric' model was one of

an open system (from organisational theories) and that he juxtaposes this with asymmetrical (as well as public information and press-agentry) which are 'closed systems' – and in the context that Pieczka argues about the Open System model, one is left questioning if Grunig has considered its impossibility – not so much that an open model can't exist, but that it can't be managed, at least not within the way a business organisation is managed:

*'free exchange of information across the boundary... communication leads to understanding... equal opportunities and respect for members of the organization... autonomy... innovation... decentralization of management... responsibility (i.e., social responsibility), conflict resolution... and interest-group individualism.'* (Pieczka, p. 353)

and goes onto argue that:

*'The concept of open system, interdependence, and moving equilibrium can in fact be summarized as some of the basic features of an organismic model. Autonomy, innovation and decentralization are elements of the open system, but also almost exact opposites of elitism, efficiency and central authority; this points to a juxtaposition of mechanistic and organismic models of social systems... "Closed"... connotes "bad" and "old-fashioned"; "open"... connotes "good", in fact more than that, "excellent."* (Pieczka, p. 353).

What I am attempting to say, rather poorly, is that Excellence Theory is about 'managing' Public Relations functions, it is a business approach, however, to have truly effective 'two-way symmetric' communications with a focus on mutual-understanding, one must ask if it is science or art, is it really less definable concepts that really does two-way symmetric, and is this not done on a rather ad-hoc basis? Can one really manage mutually beneficial and satisfy relationships which a two-way symmetric approach to communication requires?

## Examples

When one thinks of excellence in PR, one can not but think of the 'wizard' that was Edward Bernays, whether it's his campaign to liberate women from the stigma of smoking, by casting them as 'Torches of Freedom' (on behalf of Lucky Strike Cigarettes - <http://www.mediainstitute.edu/media-schools-blog/2014/02/edward-bernays/>) or for recasting Bacon as part of a hearty and healthy breakfast ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/business/the-secret-history-of-bacon/2016/06/27/d2daa166-3c80-11e6-9e16-4cf01a41decb\\_video.html?utm\\_term=.b0f30941c8a7](https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/business/the-secret-history-of-bacon/2016/06/27/d2daa166-3c80-11e6-9e16-4cf01a41decb_video.html?utm_term=.b0f30941c8a7)) but Bernays's for the second campaign, seems to have used a more Public Information model of PR rather than a Two-Way Symmetry, so he can't be considered 'excellent' in Grunig's model, and it is also true that propaganda was used for the Lucky Strike Cigarettes 'Torches of Freedom' campaign, if the MediaInstitute quote below is to be believed, then Bernays himself later understood (or perhaps at the time) that people don't necessarily want to be sold the truth, because that would mean admitting to themselves what they're doing is bad for them:

*'Bernays above all recognized the peculiar power of mediated experience, that which we learn through television, or radio, or newspapers, or Facebook, and one of his more famous quotes can also stand as a warning: "People are rarely aware of the real reasons which motivate their actions."'* (Tim Mickleburgh, Madison Media Institute, <http://www.mediainstitute.edu/media-schools-blog/2014/02/edward-bernays/>)

**READING LIST**

Kim, Jeong-Nam., & Ni, Lan., Chapter Three: Seeing the Forest Through the Trees: The Behavioural, Strategic Management Paradigm in Public Relations and Its Future, in Heath, Robert L., (ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Public Relations, Second Edition*, (Thousand Oaks, California, USA: SAGE Publications Inc., 2010), pp. 35-57.

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Pieczka, Magda., Chapter 17: Paradigms, Systems Theories and PR in L'Etang, Jacquie., and Pieczka, Magda., (ed.'s.), *Public Relations: Critical Debates and Contemporary Practice*, (Mahwah, New Jersey, USA: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers: 2006) pp. 329-357

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Mickleburgh, Tim., *Torches For Freedom: Selling Cigarettes to Women*  
(<http://www.mediainstitute.edu/media-schools-blog/2014/02/edward-bernays/>)

Washington Post, *The Secret History of Bacon*,  
([https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/business/the-secret-history-of-bacon/2016/06/27/d2daa166-3c80-11e6-9e16-4cf01a41decb\\_video.html?utm\\_term=.b0f30941c8a7](https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/business/the-secret-history-of-bacon/2016/06/27/d2daa166-3c80-11e6-9e16-4cf01a41decb_video.html?utm_term=.b0f30941c8a7))

