PUBLIC RELATIONS AMONG CHRISTIAN, MULTINATIONAL, NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS IN EUROPE

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by
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Professor Fritz Cropp

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Professor Maria Len-Rios

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Professor Shelly Rodgers

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Professor Lilliard Richardson
To Dawn, who believed in me
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The idea for this study first arose during Marjorie Kruvand’s excellent course on Public Relations. During this class, I became aware of the wider world of international public relations, and found that several multi-national corporations had their global headquarters right on my doorstep, just a few miles down the road in Basel, Switzerland. Top people in their public relations departments were kind enough to make themselves available for interviews.

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Public relations as a profession has existed in Europe for more than a century, yet most current practice and teaching is based on the American model. To address this situation, in 1998 the European Association of Public Relations Education and Research (CERP) launched a task force to begin work on a European Public Relations Body of Knowledge (EBOK). The current research reviews literature related to European public relations, then investigates the public-relations efforts of European branches of three global Christian non-profit organizations, using a qualitative approach. Its purpose is to discern how the principles and practices of the organizations align with the EBOK findings, and draw conclusions that may guide future practice. It became apparent that the roles of public-relations practitioners in the Christian, non-profit world in Europe falls within the Managerial Dimension of the EBOK parameters. Management’s expectations fell within the same dimension. Furthermore, respondents seemed to embrace a one-way communication model simultaneously with the two-way asymmetrical model. These findings are unexpected, since the EBOK study suggests that the Reflective or Educational dimensions should be most important, and Grunig holds that the two-way symmetrical model represents the pinnacle of excellence in public relations. Conclusions are drawn as to what these findings represent.
Introduction

When one lives in Europe for any length of time, it does not take long to discover that Europe is not America. Rather, it is a kaleidoscope of cultures, languages and value systems wrestling for space in a land-mass roughly equivalent to the Eastern United States (depending on how many countries one includes in the definition of “Europe”).

The European Union consists of 27 countries, with many more under consideration (EU, 2011). Each has its own way of looking at life, its own unique history and its own values and symbols.

As a result, Europeans think differently than Americans – and even from each other. Since public relations cannot help but be influenced by the context in which it is applied (K. Sriramesh & White, 1992), it would be natural to conclude that an approach that resonates in America might not fare so well abroad.

Yet the American model is widely taught in European universities and applied by practitioners (van Ruler, Verčič, Flodin, & Buetschi, 2001). When the PRSA published its bibliographic work The Public Relations Body of Knowledge in the early ‘90s, it completely overlooked non-American publications and authors. Even the chapter on international public relations was written by Americans. Most likely this was due to the fact that until the 1990s, most public-relations research centered on North America and was ethnocentric (Krishnamurthy Sriramesh & Verčič, 2007). Such a dearth of
international knowledge hampers educators around the world (K. Sriramesh & Verčič, 2002).

To ameliorate this situation, in 1998 the European Association of Public Relations Education and Research (CERP) launched a task force to begin work on a European Public Relations Body of Knowledge (EBOK).

This task force consisted of several European scholars (Betteke van Ruler, Dejan Verčič, Bertil Flodin, & Gerhard Bütschi), who organized a Delphi study into the state of public-relations practice in 25 European countries (D. Verčič, 2000). A Delphi study, according to van Ruler et.al, consists of a series of group interviews with experts, and is premised on the idea that answers will either converge to a midrange or show a clear dichotomy. A series of interviews are conducted, and the answers of participants in one round are used in follow-up rounds.

Initial results of the Delphi study found a wide variety of approaches to public relations, which seemed to reflect the diverse realities of Europe (van Ruler et al., 2001). The researchers condensed the approaches into four main “dimensions” of public relations: the managerial, the reflective, the educational, and the operational.

They go on to recommend further research into several areas, including:

1. The relationship between translation and conceptualization of public relations in different languages. In many countries the term “communication management” is replacing “public relations.”

2. The role of public relations in a business enterprise.
This author would add a third area in which research is needed: the role of public relations in the non-profit world. Organizations whose income depends on donations have an even greater need for good relationships with its many publics and stakeholders. Indeed, the introduction to BledCom 2007 (an annual International Public Relations Symposium held at Lake Bled, Slovenia) hints at this, in pointing out that “the body of knowledge is almost completely silent on the use of public relations in altruistic and information campaigns” (Krishnamurthy Sriramesh & Verčič, 2007).

The non-profit world is vast, and encompasses organizations with a wide variety of emphases—humanitarian aid, environmental causes, religious concerns, health issues. Furthermore, some groups are local, some regional, some global. The author’s experience is with global, multi-national, interdenominational Christian groups.

This research project, therefore, is limited to the latter group. In many ways, these organizations are comparable to secular multi-national corporations, albeit with a very different mission. Many of the same challenges exist, such as how to translate a global brand into different cultures, languages and environments, while still maintaining a consistent message.

Thus European public relations will be examined within the context of four multi-national Christian organizations: Operation Mobilisation (OM), Youth with a Mission (YWAM), Agape Europe (pronounced ah-GAH-pay) – the Western European branch of Campus Crusade for Christ, and New Life – the Eastern European branch of Campus Crusade. More information on how these organizations are structured can be found below, under “Description of the Organizations Studied.”
The wide variety of publics for such organizations: audience, staff members/employees, donors, the global organization, the Christian press in each country, churches, the secular press, etc. – create a great deal of complexity for the public-relations practitioner. A series of pilot interviews explored this question and uncovered a variety of publics for these types of organizations. Appendix B lists the publics found during those interviews.

This study examines the role of public relations within these organizations, thus applying the EBOK findings to the Christian non-profit environment. The EBOK project describes the main roles, or dimensions, of public relations in Europe today. To what degree does the role of public relations within European Christian non-profit groups, as well as actual practice, match up with the four dimensions surfaced by the EBOK project?

Since Creswell recommends a qualitative approach when one does not know which variables are significant (Creswell, 2009), this study takes a qualitative approach, based on interviews. The researcher wishes to know which variables are significant in the Christian non-profit context.

Overarching research questions include:

1. What are the roles and responsibilities, both actual and ideal, of the communications/public-relations practitioners within Agape Europe, as well as the European branches of Youth With a Mission and Operation Mobilisation?
2. How do these roles and responsibilities correspond to the dimensions of the EBOK project?

3. Does any one dimension seem most important, and if so, why?

Explanation of Terms and Concepts

**Qualitative Study** – Qualitative research focuses on everyday life and its meaning as perceived by participants (Jensen, 1991). It seeks to interpret meaning and perceptions, often through a filter (Stokes, 2003).

**European theory of public-relations practices** – In the late ‘90s, European scholars began to feel that most public-relations theory was American-oriented, and organized the European Body of Knowledge Project to focus on European practices. EBOK studied public-relations practices in 25 countries and found a wide range of practices, as described elsewhere in this paper. Numerous follow-up studies exist, by both the European scholars and others, applying the findings in different contexts.

**Models and Metaphors**—Basic models of one-way and two-way communication were first described by Grunig, as mentioned elsewhere in this paper. Grunig then developed metaphors to explain these models. On the European side, van Ruler developed a separate set of metaphors that built on Grunig’s work. When discussing metaphors in the results section, this paper uses van Ruler’s metaphors. The models and metaphors have to do with the way communication is carried out and the end objectives, while the roles and dimensions mentioned below have more to do with the specific practices.
**Roles and Dimensions** – Most American public relations scholars would likely look to Dozier and Broom when thinking about public relations roles (Dozier & Broom, 1995). When the European Body of Knowledge Project began developing European scholarship, it used the term “dimensions” to describe broad areas of responsibility. At times these dimensions overlap with Dozier’s “roles,” at times they differ. This paper is primarily concerned with understanding how these dimensions play out in the Christian non-profit context in Europe, and uses the terms “role” and “dimension” interchangeably.

**Christian non-profit organizations** – A Christian non-profit, as defined in this paper, consists of global, multi-national organizations dedicated to spreading the message of Christianity, and existing primarily through donations. Furthermore, these groups are non-denominational, which is to say independent from the European state church (though participants may be members of a state church). This type of organization would be a subset of the broader field of faith-based non-profits, which would include those devoted to humanitarian aid and those based on other religions. That, however, is beyond the scope of this study, as is the vast world of non-profits in general.

**European Union and neighboring countries**—This study does not attempt to cover every country in Europe, but representative countries in both Eastern and Western Europe. It was hoped that participants would be found from Scandinavia, the British Isles, the German-speaking countries, southern Europe, the Balkan countries, and some of the newer Eastern European members of the EU (EU, 2011). In the end, participants were found from two Eastern European countries, two German-speaking countries (Germany and Switzerland), the Netherlands, and the UK. The pilot interviews included
respondents from the British Isles, southern Europe (Portugal), France and a Baltic country (Estonia). Taken together, a broad spectrum of Europe was covered, including both European Union countries and a non-EU country.

**Public Relations** – The term “public relations” can have a variety of meanings, but within Europe at least, most if not all of those meanings would fall within two main areas (D. Verčič, 2000):

1. Management of communication between an organization and its publics.
2. Management of relations between an organization and its publics.

This question was also examined in several pilot interviews done by the author. Respondents believed that public relations involves getting a message to an audience, regardless of whether the term used was PR or communication. Most preferred the English term “PR” over the national word, and said it was not seen in a negative light.

The term “communication” does appear to be broader and more inclusive for the respondents, as it clearly includes both internal and external relations. It may be less confusing to reserve the term “public relations” for use in external contexts and “communication” for internal communication. However, for the purposes of this study, “public relations” will be used to refer to both external and internal activities, and will encompass both managing communication and managing relations with stakeholders.

**Description of the Organizations Studied**

As mentioned above, the topic will be studied in the context of four Christian non-profit organizations: Operation Mobilisation (OM), Youth with a Mission (YWAM),
Agape Europe (pronounced ah-GAH-pay), and New Life. All are the European divisions of a global organization, with the ministry in each individual country being an independent legal organization. Each group has national leadership and a strong sense of European identity. The majority of employees are European nationals, not Americans (with the exception of New Life, where it is about 50/50 European/American). All but two of the interviewees were European – the two exceptions being a New Zealander married to a Dutch woman, and an American married to a Dutch woman. Both have lived many years in Europe and speak Dutch fluently. Thus it is expected that although three of four of these organizations are the European branch of an American organization, the research results will accurately represent a European view, not an American one.

These organizations exist primarily through donations. The majority of donors give to the individual staff member or short-term missionary, so while the policies of church bodies may not affect donations, decisions of the parachurch organization could. For example, when Campus Crusade for Christ in the USA changed its name to Cru recently, some staff members in Europe lost donors, even though nothing in Europe had changed.

All of these groups are inter-denominational, parachurch organizations. That is, they are not affiliated with a national church, nor with any denomination. All consider themselves an arm of the church with a specialized ministry, and encourage all staff members and volunteers to be involved with the local church of their choice. Thus staff members come from the entire spectrum of Christendom, from Catholic to Protestant to evangelical to Pentecostal. The common denominator is what Europeans call a “living
faith,” i.e. a conviction that God is real, that Jesus Christ was indeed God, and that the Bible is true and a guide to life and living – together with a desire to have a personal relationship with God. This relationship drives their desire to help people know God, as well as their desire to help people in need.

None of these groups take political stands, and both donors and staff come from all parts of the political spectrum.

**Agape Europe/New Life.** These are the Western European and Eastern European divisions of Campus Crusade for Christ Int’l, an organization with 25,000 full time staff members in 191 countries around the world. In Western Europe, Agape includes about 1,000 staff members in 18 countries. In Eastern Europe, New Life counts about the same number of staff members in 20 countries. An area team leader directs the ministry in each region, together with leaders from different ministries, such as the university ministry. The global mission is to “Launch spiritual movements by winning, building, and sending Christ-centered multiplying disciples” (CCCI, 2011)

The national ministries in Western Europe have always been highly independent. Under the current area team leader, a man from Spain, decentralization has accelerated, with most of the European leadership living in their home country and working as a virtual team. The ministry in Eastern Europe, on the other hand, has been much more centralized, with a large central office in Budapest. Global trends in the parent organization are trending toward decentralization, however, and this is influencing New Life as well.
Agape seeks to present the message of Christianity in a relevant, understandable way to university students, leaders of society and others. They have branches working with the arts, with sports, with the business community, with churches, with families and with university students. They also have a branch carrying out humanitarian aid projects, and a strong internet presence. The mission of New Life is similar. Each group generally has a presence in the major cities of each country where they are active, as well as on several of the leading universities.

**Operation Mobilisation.** Operation Mobilisation began in Europe, and currently includes 6,100 workers in more than 110 countries. This includes 730 staff members in 30 European countries. Each national ministry is independent, more so than in Agape and New Life. The European director has little positional authority, but rather must operate through persuasion and influence with the national entities. Each country determines its own strategy – for example, OM Switzerland focuses almost entirely on recruiting people for short-term missions, while OM Germany would emphasize both short and long term opportunities. OM has a strong international culture, with multi-national teams serving around the world. Thus local OM work involves both sending people overseas, and serving the local community.

OM has historically been known for its two ships – Logos and Doulos – that sail the oceans of the world. When they dock at local ports, they work with local churches to help carry out their mission.
According to the OM website, the global mission is to restore hope by “working to rebuild lives and raise up a generation established on a strong foundation and filled with hope in Jesus” (OM, 2011).

OM Europe, in particular, seeks “to transform lives and communities by reaching neighbours, caring for the marginalised, loving Muslims, empowering kids & youth and partnering with the Church.”

**Youth with a Mission.** YWAM (commonly pronounced “why-wham”), based in 149 countries around the world, sends out some 25,000 short term missionaries each year. These short-termers, together with long-term staff members, seek to make known the message of Christianity, serve people in need through “mercy ministries,” and train Christians in various areas (YWAM, 2011).

In Europe, YWAM is active in at least 25 countries. Although national ministry entities exist, YWAM is built around the local “base,” which provides training and sends out short term missionaries. Bases consist of multi-national teams that run their own affairs and communicate freely with other bases around Europe and the world.

YWAM Europe is broken into four regions – north, south, central and east – and each region has a director. These four people together make up a team of peers who direct the ministry in Europe.

**Significance of the Study**

Van Ruler, Verčič et.al have done extensive research on the dimensions of European public relations practice, but most of the research involves the corporate world.
Little research has been done on these dimensions within the non-profit world, especially the Christian non-profit world. It may well be that the dimensions are weighted differently in the non-profit world, due to factors such as the need for fund-raising.

This study builds on theory already developed by EBOK and extends the findings into the Christian non-profit arena. The research leads to both practical and theoretical conclusions: practical in that it demonstrates to what degree the non-profit reality reflects European public relations theory already developed, and theoretical in that reasons are put forth as why this is the case.

As this study compares the EBOK findings to the three organizations in question, it adds to the body of literature regarding non-profits. As previously mentioned, very little research has been to consider how the EBOK dimensions apply in the non-profit world in Europe, especially the Christian non-profit world. The current study represents a needed first step in this direction. It also serves to inform other such organizations regarding the implications of European research, and non-profit practitioners not trained in public relations can apply conclusions to their work.

This paper begins by reviewing the literature on European public relations, and then delves into the qualitative methodology used in the study. It goes on to describe the study itself, the results of the research, and finishes with some conclusions. Finally, appendices describe the respondents, the publics of a Christian non-profit, and lists some of the roles and responsibilities discovered.
International Public Relations

Ristino argued that the primary role of public relations is to shape, sustain and transmit an organization’s culture over time and through space (Ristino, 2008). He went on to claim that the professional practice of public relations carries the DNA of the organization, and helps to enculturate the employee into the organization’s culture and values.

Thus it’s critical for an organization to understand how public relations may differ when carried out in lands far from its mother country.

International public relations is often confused with domestic public relations done by a foreign national in his or her own country (Wakefield, 2008). International PR is different from domestic PR, and much more complex. Back in the late 1980s, Reed (1989) provided a foundational definition: “International public relations means you do it somewhere else, with audiences different from you culturally, linguistically, geographically (Reed, 1989).

Others have since expanded on this definition (Dejan Verčič & Sriramesh, 2003; Wakefield, 2008; Wilcox, Cameron, Ault, & Agee, 2007), but Reed’s somewhat folksy approach captured the essence.

As this study progressed, many of the findings seemed to overlap both international and domestic public relations, as defined by Wakefield. The EBOK findings, for example, seek a common European theoretical foundation, yet that common
ground encompasses numerous cultures, each of which would have its own domestic public-relations practices.

In this author’s view, multi-national organizations conduct public relations in a complex interplay between domestic and international. The wider organization has messages it wants to promote, but they must be done in a local context. And while the local division operates in a domestic environment, it still represents a European and/or global brand.

Therefore, research findings from both aspects of “international” illuminate this study—international in the sense of reaching out to audiences different than oneself linguistically and culturally, and international in the EBOK sense, which is to say “based in Europe.”

Within the groups being studied, this tension is reflected in the legal status: the work in each country is chartered as a separate legal entity in that country. Despite being part of a global organization, each national ministry is semi-independent. Somewhat the same dynamic appears to be at work in the multi-national corporation, (Krishnamurthy Sriramesh & Verčič, 2007; D. Verčič, 2003).
Literature Review

Most international studies in the 1990s examined local practice in Europe by using theoretical foundations and public-relations models developed in the USA (K. Sriramesh & Verčič, 2002).

That has begun to change, however, as in recent years academics from Slovenia, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Sweden and elsewhere have begun examining the unique aspects of European public relations. The present study examines local practice in several European Christian groups and compares it to theoretical foundations developed by European scholars.

Several streams of theory converge to give direction to this study.

Cultural Differences

First, any study spanning several cultures must begin with Geert Hofstede, a Dutch researcher who pioneered the scholarly study of national culture differences. Hofstede conducted a study of national differences on behalf of IBM in the 1970s, and published the results in a landmark work, *Culture’s Consequences* (Hofstede, 1980).

Hofstede boiled the differences down to five main dimensions of cultural differences, which are currently summarized in his personal webpage (Hofstede, 2008) and denoted below:

1. **Power Differences** -- the degree to which less powerful members of society accept that power is distributed unevenly.
2. Individualism – opposed by collectivism. In an individualistic society, each person looks out for himself or herself. In the collective society, individuals belong to strong social networks, such as families, which watch out for the individual.

3. Masculine vs. feminine societies – has to do with the distribution of gender roles.

4. Uncertainty avoidance – the degree to which a culture programs its members to feel comfortable or uncomfortable in the presence of unstructured events. Uncertainty avoiding societies try to minimize lack of structure via many laws and regulations. The opposite society can live with a great deal of ambiguity. They tend to have relativistic values, and fewer laws.

5. Long-term vs. short term orientation – first discovered by Chinese scholars, this dimension has roots in Confucian thought, but applies to non-Asian societies as well.

Hofstede assigned each society to a different place on the spectrum. A country’s place on the spectrum may influence how they perceive public relations.

Hofstede’s most recent work, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*, written together with his son, Gert Jan Hofstede, updates his theories and adds further studies on organizational differences, explaining how differences within organizations and differences between cultures interact with each other (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

Hofstede also collaborated with McCrae in examining data leading to the conclusion that the Five Factor Model does indeed denote universal characteristics. They
propose reasons this may be so, and correlate the five factors with four facets of personality (Hofstede & McCrae, 2004).

Leary took the Five Factor model, applied it to a United Nations study of 30 high-level diplomats, and found that it shed light on the interplay between cultural differences and diplomatic relations and negotiations (Leary, 2005).

Likewise, Hofstede’s dimensions were found to greatly influence the processing of information (Steinwachs, 1999). Information flows from the sender to the receiver via a channel, and components of the system can be influenced by cultural dimensions. In societies with a high power distance, for example, the student is expected to learn from the professor and not seek out additional information. Therefore, such a student may be less receptive to information contradicting the professor’s views.

Steinwachs also listed criticisms of the Hofstede model, such as the fact that it focused entirely on IBM employees with a culture of their own, that it focused on a single industry, and that the fact that it assumes that national borders correspond to the limits of culture. Nevertheless, she concluded that it is highly influential, has been widely used in intercultural research and is a practical way of considering the effects of culture.

**Generic/Specific Theory**

Though public relations is a theory-based field that cannot survive without theory (van Ruler, Verčič, Bütschi, & Flodin, 2004), researchers agree that there has been relatively little theory developed that relates specifically to international PR.
One that does, the Generic/Specific Theory, was developed in the early ‘90s by Grunig, Grunig, Verčič and Wakefield (Wakefield, 2008). This theory had its roots in a discussion between two points of view regarding international public relations carried out by multi-national corporations. One side claimed that all PR must be centralized to ensure greater uniformity; the other side said that national cultures are so different that local solutions must always be sought and implemented.

The Generic/Specific Theory sought to strike a middle ground: “We developed a theory of generic principles and specific applications that falls midway between an ethnocentric theory (that public relations is the same everywhere) and a polycentric theory (that public relations is different everywhere)” (James E. Grunig, 2006).

The second basis of this theory involves the factors of excellence in public relations and communication management, such as including the top PR office in top management, and separating PR from the marketing department. The excellence factor also includes the two-way symmetrical model mentioned earlier.

Though some have challenged the theory (James E. Grunig, 2006), Wakefield believes that most challenges come from one side of the original discussion (global vs. local), and maintains that a balance still is needed. He does submit that with the rapid change of society into an interconnected global culture (Friedman, 2006), the theory needs updating. Nevertheless, Wakefield feels that internet communication in the “flat world” only facilitates the two-way symmetrical communication at the heart of the theory.

**Grunig’s Four-Way Model**
Grunig framed all further discussion of public-relations theory with his landmark work on communication models (J. E. Grunig & Grunig, 1989; J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984; J. E. Grunig & White, 1992). Stemming from research as to what constitutes excellent public relations, Grunig and his colleagues postulated four approaches.

They broke the various approaches down into two models of “one-way” communication, in which the communicator is only interested in getting the message out, and models of “two-way” communication, in which the communicator desires feedback from the audience.

They dubbed one of the one-way communication models the Press Agent/publicity model. People using this model seek to persuade and manipulate the audience to behave as the organization desires. Another approach, also based on one-way communication, is the Public Information Model. These practitioners are referred to as “journalists in residence,” and seek to disseminate information via such tools as press releases and brochures.

The two-way asymmetrical model uses research to develop messages that will persuade the public to behave as the organization wants. Finally, the two-way symmetrical model uses research and dialogue to manage conflict, improve understanding and build relationships with publics. In this model, both the public and the organization can be persuaded, both also may change their behavior (J. E. Grunig & White, 1992).

Grunig proposed the two-way symmetrical model as representing excellence in public relations. He claimed that reciprocity is a social norm and provides the foundation for this...
idealistic, symmetrical model. The more ethically developed an organization is, the more it uses concepts of reciprocity and symmetry to decide what is moral (J. E. Grunig & White, 1992).

Not all scholars have agreed that Grunig’s two-way symmetrical model represents the pinnacle of ethical action and excellence. Cancel and Cameron argued that the best public relations strategy depends on the circumstances, and highlight 87 variables that affect this strategy (Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, & Mitrook, 1997). They propose a continuum from pure advocacy on the one end, to pure accommodation on the other end. True excellence, in their view, means choosing the right spot along the scale, given the situation. They go so far as to conjecture that in order to declare two-way symmetrical communication as the most ethical approach, with its inherent willingness to allow outside publics to influence the organization and its message, one must assume moral relativism. Not everyone accepts moral relativism, and certainly not the groups represented in this study.

More recently Gower has criticized Grunig’s models from a different angle, pointing out that society has changed, and that a symmetrical model presupposes a modernistic world view (Gower, 2006). She describes the first generation of researchers as having laid the groundwork, but argues the need for a second generation of theorists to rise up and define the field in light of the post-modern age.

Not all would agree: last year a North Carolina State researcher found the concepts of reciprocity and symmetry useful in understanding the relationship a non-profit organization has with its donors (Waters, 2009). And Grunig himself would argue that
one’s world view provides the foundation from which one evaluates theory (J. E. Grunig & White, 1992).

**European Developments**

In 1999, Hutton pointed out that public relations is unlikely to fulfill its promise until it identifies its fundamental nature and scope (Hutton, 1999). He attempts to do this, and concludes that “managing strategic relationships” offers a concise, relevant definition that can serve both theory and practice.

Several European scholars took issue with Hutton’s description of the “definition, dimensions and domain of public relations” (Hutton, 1999). They critiqued Hutton’s work as inadequate (D. Verčič, van Ruler, Bütschi, & Flodin, 2001) and disagreed with his apparent assumption that a definition based solely on US theory and practice has global validity. This was the approach taken by most international studies in the ‘90s – they examined local practice by using theoretical foundations and public-relations models developed in the USA (K. Sriramesh & Verčič, 2002).

Sriramesh & Verčič (2002) pointed out that “true advancement of any body of knowledge will occur only when studies go beyond describing public-relations practices . . . and attempt to link public-relations activities with environmental variables” (K. Sriramesh & Verčič, 2002) One example of this would be a discussion of *offentlichkeitarbeit* (the German term for public relations), and how it has roots in a type of political authority that developed in the 19th century in opposition to monarchic rule (D. Verčič et al., 2001).
This also relates to issues of nomenclature. Just as \textit{öffentlichkeitarbeit} implies “work in the public sphere” rather than “managing publics”, so the term “public relations” often doesn’t translate clearly. As a result, either the English term “public relations” is used, or another term altogether (van Ruler, 2000; van Ruler et al., 2004; D. Verčič et al., 2001). In many countries of modern Europe, in academia and business life, the term “communication management” is replacing “public relations” as the common denominator term (van Ruler, 2004).

\textbf{European Public Relations Body of Knowledge}

In the past decade, scholars involved with EBOK have unleashed a torrent of articles and research advancing knowledge in the area of international public relations. Scholars from elsewhere in the world have published material as well, but this paper will look primarily at those doing work within Europe.

The Delphi study conducted by EBOK defined key concepts in building a definition of public relations. The researchers found that “communication” and “relationships” cannot be separated, as they were in Hutton’s work (D. Verčič et al., 2001), indeed, they are virtually synonymous in the European point of view. They also found that most public-relations experts held one of two perspectives: a one-way persuasive view or a two-way relationship view. More than 20 concepts were distilled down into the following four main dimensions of public-relations practice (van Ruler et al., 2004; D. Verčič et al., 2001):
**Managerial:** To develop plans to communicate and maintain relationships with various groups in order to gain public trust and/or mutual understanding. This role involves both internal and external groups, and is aimed at the execution of organizational mission and strategies.

**Reflective:** To analyze changing standards and values in society and discuss these with members of the organization, in order to adjust the standards and values of the organization. Essentially, it brings society inside of the organization, so the leadership does not become so insular they lose touch with what is going on outside.

**Educational:** Help all members of the organization become communicatively competent to respond to societal demands. Concerned with the mentality and behavior of the members of the organization, it enables them to better communicate, and is aimed at internal audiences.

**Operational:** To prepare the means of communication and help the organization formulate its communications. It’s concerned with communication plans developed by others, and centers around technical implementation.

Most participants agreed that these dimensions are acceptable in defining the domain of public relations. In many countries there is an additional aspect to the Relational Dimension, the issue of legitimacy: “Public relations is also seen as the public relationship any organization has with society, and the search for a ‘license to operate’ any organization needs” (van Ruler et al., 2004).
Europeans tend to be suspicious of persuasion, though some felt it appropriate when accompanied by sufficient facts and figures. The two-way relationship view was more common, therefore, implying that a corporation must interact with its publics in order to get its message across.

This two-way relationship perspective in the Delphi study echoes the two-way symmetrical communication aspect of the generic/specific theory (Wakefield, 2008). This aspect of the theory states that both the corporation and its publics have a symmetrical relationship, where both seek a mutually beneficial result.

Not all have accepted these dimensions as uniquely European (L. A. Grunig & Grunig, 2002). Indeed, an early European analysis of the results found evidence to this effect as well, coming up with a definition of the field as “PR is the management of relationships (with) publics (by) communication (in order to) establish mutual understanding” (van Ruler et al., 2001). As van Ruler points out, this is a common Anglo-American definition, and not particularly European.

She goes on to explain that nevertheless, participants felt that there is a uniquely European aspect to the field, in that European PR is more public related than business related, with roots in enlightenment, and somewhat influenced by socialism.

Verčič feels that the reflective and educational dimensions may be more typically European (D. Verčič et al., 2001), and adds the issue of legitimacy as a central concept in European PR. He believes the four dimensions adequately delineate the domain, and suggests using them as broad categories into which individual national practices may fall.
The issue of legitimacy may resonate elsewhere in the world as well, for it hearkens back to the very beginnings of public relations (Gower, 2006), and may well lie at its heart.

Tension has arisen in the literature between ideals and actual practice. Oftentimes public-relations professionals consider themselves strategic managers, or communication managers, yet they have difficulty explaining just what it is they manage (van Ruler, 2004). The question of “what is good PR and what is not,” is often debated, at least in the Netherlands, but due to the lack of accepted criteria, the debate is often highly emotional. Van Ruler noted that scholars and practitioners often had very different approaches to the field (van Ruler, 2005).

**Evaluating and Developing Country-Specific Strategies**

Sriramesh and Verčič proposed that environmental variables be taken into consideration as a means to understanding public-relations practice in various countries (K. Sriramesh & Verčič, 2002). They operationalize several variables as a step toward cross-national research, and identify five variables that can be used by public-relations practitioners to design strategies specific to a given country: political ideology, economic system, level of activism, culture and media culture.

Van Ruler chose a different approach to understanding and evaluating public-relations practice. Beginning with Grunig's symmetrical and asymmetrical models of communication (J. E. Grunig, 1976; J.E. Grunig, 2001), she develops several metaphors for how public-relations communication functions (van Ruler, 2004).
One metaphor is that of the Town Crier, in which public relations is broadcasting the master’s voice. This is the “magic bullet” approach, as van Ruler describes it, simply making public announcements about things decided elsewhere. Another metaphor is that of the Steward, in which public relations involves pampering, and is all about networking. Also a “magic bullet” approach, where the practitioner socializes with people in hopes of making them more receptive to the organization’s message. Another PR approach is simply a transfer of information. This metaphor, dubbed the Traffic Manager, is a controlled one-way process, with the practitioner making sure messages are distributed efficiently. The Conductor brings all parties into harmony. People applying this approach, also a controlled one-way process, see communication as persuasion.

Some people see Public Relations as creating a bond. This approach, called “The Creator” by van Ruler, sees communication as an interactive process, and practitioners want to create productive partnerships between the organization, its members and its constituencies. Influence on strategic decision making is essential. In the Facilitator metaphor, Public Relations is all about hosting the dialogue. It’s an interactive, two-way process. They are not involved in the dialogue process itself, but rather bring the different parties together, and communicate meaning between the groups.

Finally, the “Seat of the Pants” approach. Here practitioners see Public Relations as an art, not a profession. These people see communication as a “magical mystery,” and draw upon their personal experiences rather than professional literature and research.

Van Ruler believes aims that the “magic bullet” and the “magical mystery” approaches are unscientific and cannot be taken seriously. While messages must go out,
they must always do so with the receiver in mind. Thus she concludes with four perspectives: the Traffic Manger, the Conductor, the Creator and the Facilitator, and uses them to develop a public-relations strategy matrix, balancing controlled one-way communication with two-way communication. These strategies, she states, can serve as a “tool kit” that communicators can use to meet varying needs.

The tension arises in that oftentimes what the theorists recommend and what the CEOs demand is quite different (van Ruler et al., 2001). In fact, as van Ruler found out in an earlier study of Dutch companies, the communications professional is often viewed as a mere technician implementing company plans (van Ruler, 2000). This can lead to disastrous consequences, as a British research team observed within the European Parliament (Anderson & McLeod, 2004).
Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to investigate the public relations efforts of the European branches of three global Christian non-profit organizations, discern to what degree their principles and practices align with the findings of European scholars, and draw conclusions that may guide future practice in these groups. Therefore, a qualitative approach built around interviews makes the most sense. To this end, the following research questions were developed:

1. What are the roles and responsibilities, both actual and ideal, of the communications/public relations practitioners within Agape Europe and New Life Europe, as well as the European branches of Youth With a Mission and Operation Mobilisation?

2. How do these roles and responsibilities correspond to the dimensions of the EBOK project?

3. Does any one dimension seem most important, and if so, why?

A presupposition of this study is that public-relations practice in Europe is somewhat different than in North America. According to the EBOK findings, one might expect the reflective and educational roles to be quite important. Yet most practitioners in the organizations considered have no formal training in public relations, and are not acting according to theory. They are primarily doing what seems to work. It may be that the results of the study will help guide their efforts in the future.
Methods

Research Materials and Procedures

This study has been conducted primarily via personal interviews with both top management and communications personnel in the aforementioned organizations. The personal interview approach is expected to elicit the most substantial amount of previously unknown information. Furthermore, it is the same method used in researching the EBOK project, and seems a natural method for extending the findings of EBOK into the Christian non-profit world.

The author comes to this study as somewhat of a participant observer (Jensen, 1991), having worked in the communications department of one of the organizations for many years. As this study began, he had just been promoted to Director of Communications for Agape Europe. Thus he interacted with several subjects of this study on a colleague basis.

There was no direct supervisory relationship, so there were no power issues involved, yet the author does hold a position of influence in the organization. Such “backyard” research can lead to bias (Creswell, 2009). Thus the study was widened beyond the confines of the author’s sphere of influence, as a form of triangulation (Jensen, 1991), by interviewing leaders of his own organization in Eastern Europe (a
different division), and two other organizations with whom the author had no contact when the study began.

The author held the same basic Judeo-Christian world view as his subjects, which provided the lens through which results are interpreted.

Each participant was invited to participate in a 60-minute Skype interview. This minimized travel costs, as well as used a form of communication (Skype) widely popular in Europe. During each interview, the author asked a specified set of questions and recorded the answers, both digitally and through hand-written notes. The Eastern Europe participants were interviewed in person, as was Agape’s Director of Communications in Switzerland. Twelve individuals were interviewed, as is described in Appendix A.

These individuals included the following types of individuals, as it was felt they were the types of people most likely to have something of substance to contribute:

- The organization’s European director
- The organization’s regional communications director
- National directors in individual countries
- Communications leaders in individual countries

The author involved two groups outside his own – Youth with a Mission and Operation Mobilisation – in order to expand the study and increase reliability. When the study began, the author did not know anybody within these two groups, so sought to meet leaders of these groups through his own network of contacts. This turned out to be a valuable approach, and nearly everybody contacted proved willing to participate in the study.
The Interview Method

This study is built around the interview method. As Berger points out, “depth interviews” work well in drawing out perceptions and attitudes (Berger, 1998). The researcher himself becomes the key instrument (Creswell, 2009) and formulates his own list of questions to ask. This approach allows the gathering of a great deal of information regarding public relations practices in these organizations, as well as practitioners’ perspectives on what is working and what is not.

As a precursor to this study, the author conducted several pilot interviews. Results of those interviews were used to guide and inform the current study. Several of the questions were similar, and where appropriate, data from the pilot study will discussed in the current paper.

People from 13 countries participated in the study, thus covering a broad range of European cultures.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed following steps laid out by Creswell (Creswell, 2009). First the interviews were transcribed and read through. Then coding began. Two interviews were used to develop a list of topics discussed. The topics will be clustered together into similar groupings, then each group was given a code. A codebook was developed to facilitate standardized coding.
Finally, the interviews were read and codes assigned to all topics in the interview. The author used one of the software programs described by Creswell, atlas.ti, to facilitate coding and data analysis. A college student, Chris Wilhelm, was taught to use atlas.ti, after which he helped do the coding.

The author then reviewed each interview to make sure Chris Wilhelm’s coding had not drifted from the original definitions, and that the coding was consistent.

Research Results

The Respondents

Twelve persons were interviewed, four from each of the three organizations studied. Four of these were at the “management” level, which for the purposes of this study was considered to be people in a director type of position (national or European director), but without a direct communication role. This person would be comparable to the CEO in the business world. Usually the communications person reports to this person.

The remaining eight people were classified as “practitioners,” all of whom had a communications role at a national or European level. One was the global communications director of her organization. A complete list of respondents can be found in Appendix C. Classifying the respondents in this manner allows one to see if there is a difference in perspective between the management perspective and the practitioner perspective.

The Interview Questions

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The respondents were asked 15 questions during the interview, as described earlier. About half of them explore different aspects of the dimension question, coming at it from various angles (questions 1,4,6,7,8,9,10 and 12), while others explored other aspects of public relations. Taken together, they should give a good idea of which dimensions are most important to the organizations studied.

The following section on research results will examine the trends uncovered by these questions. The various questions are grouped under the research question to which it best relates. Each research question sub-section will include the number of the interview question, the question as it was asked, and a review of the responses.

**Research Question 1**

*What are the roles and responsibilities, both actual and ideal, of the communications/public-relations practitioners within Agape Europe, as well as the European branches of Youth With a Mission and Operation Mobilisation?*

**Interview question 1 – What are the responsibilities of public-relations people in your organization?**

The first approach at finding out the importance of the EBOK dimensions in Christian non-profits involves looking at the actual responsibilities of the people interviewed. In order to do this, all responses were coded as Q1 – xx, where “xx” stands
for the particular responsibility. Then the responses were assigned to one of the four dimensions, based on where it seemed to fit best. Some pertained to more than one category, and were assigned to both. The following chart lists all the responsibilities discovered, and the dimensions to which they were assigned.

As will be seen, the majority of the responsibilities were almost equally divided between the Managerial and the Operational Dimensions, with two each in the Reflective and Educational Dimensions.

**Responsibilities of Public Relations personnel**

**Separated by Dimension and code**

**Managerial Dimension (8)**
1. Q1 – Advise
2. Q1 - Church relations
3. Q1 - Coordinate all communications efforts
4. Q1 - Fund raising
5. Q1 – Networking
6. Q1 - Press relations
7. Q1 - Recruiting
8. Q1 - Visit conferences

**Reflective Dimension (2)**
1. Q1 – Advise
2. Q1 – Networking

**Educational Dimension (2)**
1. Q1 – Training
2. Q1 – Personal communication

**Operational Dimension (7)**
1. Q1 - Fund raising
2. Q1 – Determine best channels
3. Q1 - Manage mailing lists
Interview question 4 – What is the role of PR in a Christian non-profit?

As in Question 1, all responses to Question 4 were coded as Q4-yy, where “yy” refers to the specific role described. Each code/role was then assigned to one of the four dimensions, based on where they seemed to fit best. The chart below provides an overview of the dimensions and which roles fell where, together with the rationale for that selection. The results were startling, as the vast majority of answers fell within the Managerial Dimension.

Eleven different roles fell under Managerial, whereas each of the others had just one or two roles each.

An interpretation of the results from questions 1 and 4 will be given in the Conclusions section.

Roles of Public Relations
Divided by Dimension and Code

Managerial Dimension
1. Q4 - Recruiting, because potential recruits are a “public” that needs special messages. So one must manage and create these messages. It could be operational, too, when it comes to actually writing the messages.
2. Q4 - Motivate people to give, go and pray – this has to do with creating vision and developing messages for each audience, challenging people to do different things.
3. Q4 - Inform – again, it has to do with creating messages for the audience
4. Q4 - Define who we are – it’s still about the message
5. Q4 - Voice of the ministry
6. Q4 - Raise the profile in Europe
7. Q4 - Make known what we have to offer, make our work known
8. Q4 - Internal connections – this would have to do with internal communications, which is one of the publics to be considered
9. Q4 - Build relationships and networking – though very important in the implementation stage of the Operational Dimension, this falls primarily under the Managerial Dimension aspect of managing communication with different audiences. One must have relationships with those audiences in order to understand them.
10. Q4 - Donor relations
11. Q4 - Cast vision

Reflective Dimension
1. Q4 - Create Credibility

Educational Dimension
1. Q4 – Training

Operational Dimension
1. Q4 - Word of mouth – this would be an implementation strategy, a form of viral marketing, or viral PR
2. Q4 - Helping people at the national level – could almost go in any category, but fits best here because it has to do with a regional person helping national communications personnel do their jobs better.

Research Question 2

How do these roles and responsibilities correspond to the dimensions of the EBOK project?
**Interview question 6: Rate the following statements:**

In Question 6, respondents were asked to rate a series of statements on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being most important. Each of the first four statements described one of the four dimensions. The final two statements were added after a couple of interviews were done, in order to look at different aspects of two of the dimensions. The chart below shows the average rating of each statement, with a separate rating for Management and Practitioner.

Despite the Quantitative look of this chart, with its “average rating” of each category, it must be kept in mind this is a qualitative study, and the numbers serve only as a general indication of perceptions. It is felt that organizing the results in this chart form facilitates a more rapid grasp of the relative value placed on each category. And while the results may be intriguing, they cannot be generalized to apply to all people in these organizations or positions.

The discussion following looks at each of the statements/dimensions in turn, and analyzes the results in different ways.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Dimensions:</th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>Management</th>
<th>Practitioners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managerial</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Statement 1 – Managerial Dimension–

Public relations within your organization is all about managing communication with different audiences in order to gain trust or mutual understanding.

Within the organizations studied, public relations/communication falls clearly within the managerial dimension. Nine of the 12 respondents classified this as a 4 or a 5, while two considered it a 3, and just one considered it as a 2. This latter result may be due to the fact that the latter person has an IT background, and is just learning the role of European communications coordinator. The average rating, however, was 4.25, and not significantly different between management and practitioner.

This corresponds very closely with the results of the pilot interviews. In those interviews, public relations also corresponded with the managerial dimension, with four of six respondents rating it as a 4 or 5, and all indicating they saw it as a management role. In fact, several of the national communications directors from that study were part of the national leadership team, thus giving them the coveted “seat at the table” (Capozzi, 2005).

Most, if not all, of the communications people interviewed have a great deal of freedom in developing and implementing a communications plan. They are not just given

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2.9</th>
<th>3.5</th>
<th>2.6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Operational 2: Communicate the message</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective 2: feedback</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
a communications plan from above and told to implement it, as might be the case if the operational dimension predominated. However, the communications plan must follow the ministry strategy, as opposed to driving the ministry strategy, as the director of OM pointed out.

Respondents emphasized both aspects of this statement. Several talked about the different audiences to which they must relate, as described in the section on the various publics of a Christian non-profit. But the predominant theme was the need to develop trust and mutual understanding. In any group funded by donations, it is vital that the donor base trusts the organization to use the money wisely. It’s equally important for the people with whom the non-profit is working to trust the organization and its message.

The general perspective in the groups studied seems to be that public relations is a two-way relationship. Perhaps not completely symmetrical, as per Grunig (J.E. Grunig, 2001), but certainly in keep with van Ruler’s Creator metaphor (van Ruler, 2004) and its on creating productive partnerships between the organization and its publics.

One group, YWAM, addresses the various publics with what they call “3D Communications.” Simply put, this concept involves developing the same message for all audiences. In the past, the tendency was to use evangelical terminology with the donor base, but something quite different with the audience, so they could understand the message without being distracted by unfamiliar terms, or terms which have come to have a negative connotation. The 3D Communication concept is to develop a single message which can be understood and accepted by both audiences.
Statement 2 – Reflective Dimension

Public Relations within your organization involves talking about it within society, in order to communicate its values and the sense that it has a legitimate role to play.

The Reflective Dimension rated high with practitioners, not as high as the Managerial or the Educational Dimension. Six of seven practitioners rated this at a 4 or 5, with an average rating of exactly 4. Yet the respondents in management positions rated it lower – with three putting it at the 2-3 level, and one giving it a 5. The average was 2.9.

Management vs. Practitioner

Based on the EBOK findings, the Reflective dimension should be very important. In this study, however, there was a discrepancy between the way managers and practitioners valued it. (See page 33, under “The Respondents,” for definitions of “manager” and “practitioner” as used in this paper). The practitioners considered it important, though at least one person gave it a 5 while making it clear he was talking about the Christian public only. The people in management said the same thing, but rated it low. Clearly the latter group understood the question better. So it is unclear if the high rating from the practitioners resulted from a clear understanding of the question.

One respondent in the pilot interviews, the national director of Ireland, did understand the question. He rated this dimension quite high, explaining that for a period of time the dominant church body in his country was quite opposed to Agape. Yet Agape
had been sending regular press releases to the local paper, simply mentioning activities that were going on. When a point of crisis arrived, the press told the church, essentially, “We know who these people are. They are a legitimate group, and not a cult.” And it defused the crisis.

This is quite in keeping with Verdi’s views (D. Verčič, 2011), as he points out how for historic reasons, public relations in Europe must be more concerned with demonstrating that the group has a legitimate right to exist. This would be especially true for Christian NGOs, which are not a part of the national church system.

**A Question of Resources**

The Swiss OM respondent pointed out that it was a question of resources – Switzerland has many NGOs with far more resources than OM, so they leave it to the others to communicate to society at large, while OM focuses primarily on the Christian audience who would be likely to value their mission.

The OM practitioner in the Netherlands, however, took a different view, believing that good publicity makes it easier for the short-term people raising support in their local community. As a result, he works hard to get local papers to write about OM. He even values negative publicity, such as when the national press berated the OM ships for visiting Rotterdam, rather than someplace like Africa. The Dutch get some money from the government, too, for their work with youth, thus it makes sense that they would value the reflective dimension.

**The View from Eastern Europe**
All three respondents from Eastern Europe rated this dimension as a 5. One, the national director of New Life in Hungary, said it clearly: “In our society it is new and different what small Christian groups are doing, and viewed so suspiciously that we always feel a constant need to justify our existence before society.”

The two respondents from Romania said much the same thing. In Romania, New Life is called “Choose Life.” At one point, they developed a tool to communicate with university students—a yearly magazine named “Fitzuica,” or “Cheat Sheet.” It provided an orientation to the city, where to eat, what to do, how to find classes, and included a Christian message and an invitation to a local Christian gathering. This magazine was so well received that people began calling the campus group “Fitzuica,” and it had a positive reputation.

When one of the Romanian respondents introduced herself to a university official as the editor of Fitzuica, she was told, “Oh, we know your magazine. We respect your work, and we can have a partnership.” Another day, this same woman was in a dorm talking to students about Jesus, and one student said, “You people from Fitzuica are very nice, but those from Choose Life, they are a cult!”

It’s apparent that the magazine served as an effective public-relations tool, essentially creating a brand with a good reputation. “Before the magazine,” says the Romanian respondent, “it was almost impossible to have a partnership with a university. But after distributing this magazine all over Romania, it is now very easy to have a partnership.”
So in Eastern Europe, at least, the reflective dimension plays an important role. It appears that it would be valuable in Western Europe also, though perhaps more practiced on the local level, when resources permit.

Statement 3 – Educational Dimension

Public relations within your organization involves helping staff members better communicate “who we are” both to donors and to those with whom they work.

Most respondents considered this dimension very important, second only to the Managerial Dimension. Again, this was more so among practitioners, of whom six of eight rated it a 4 or a 5, with an average rating of 4. This makes sense in a non-profit where most people raise their own financial support from donors, for each person represents the ministry as they seek donations. As the Romanian woman put it, “Each volunteer is doing public relations, in the way they communicate with people, through their monthly newsletter, through their personal Webpage or Facebook. They are doing PR stuff, they just don’t know it.”

Agape’s Swiss director of communication agreed: “Our best communicators are our people. It’s important that people in our own organization are well-informed, have a strong identity, and can present that wherever they are. They represent the organization.”

This conviction was also evident in the pilot study, where it became apparent that the first line of public relations is the individual staff newsletter, which gives the donor regular information on what is happening at the local level.
Those in management rated it around a 3. Yet even so, they seemed to place a higher value on the concept than their rating would indicate. For example, the former European director of YWAM rated this dimension a 3, yet said they do a lot of helping staff members present their story to donors. “We are very much involved in [this dimension],” he says, “but we don’t see it as public relations.” The current director of YWAM in Western Europe says they are not involved in this at all, as when a young person goes through the Discipleship Training School (DTS), they naturally pick up the DNA of the organization, and then live that out and present it to others.

So it appears that training workers to present the organization well is highly important in these Christian NGOs, whether it is termed “public relations” or not, and whether it is consciously taught or not.

These individuals probably fall within the “Traffic Manager” metaphor presented by van Ruler (simply passing on information) or the “Seat of the Pants” metaphor, where they see public relations as an act, not a profession, and rely on personal experiences rather than professional literature and research (van Ruler, 2004). Though van Ruler believes this approach cannot be taken seriously as a professional approach, it may be very effective indeed for an organization where hundreds of its field workers represent the organization in their everyday interactions. Their enthusiasm for the mission, together with their personal experiences, guided by a bit of training on how to represent the organization, may well create a very positive image among the publics.
Statement 4 – Operational Dimension

Public relations within your organization is primarily about implementing communication strategies.

Responses for this dimension varied widely, but trended overall lower than the previous dimensions. The concept here is that the communications director merely implements the plans of others, rather than helping develop the plans and strategies. Overall, nine of 12 respondents rated it a 3 or lower, with practitioners having an average score of 2.6 and management an average score of 3.7.

Comments reinforced this view, that the practitioners are expected to help develop the strategy. “As head of PR and also an associate field leader,” says the former director of public relations of OM Switzerland, “I have to help very much to develop the strategy. And at the end I have to implement it.”

Agape UK is much the same. The various national and regional ministries function with very limited resources – even those with a strong ministry like the UK – so the communications director often implements the strategies and even designs or writes the materials. “In the UK,” said one respondent, “[the communication director] designs the strategy together with top management, then passes the ball to herself to get it done. She is both the quarterback and the wide receiver.”

Over at Youth with a Mission, the situation is less clear. The European communications department is very new, and feeling their way along as to what needs to
be done. “YWAM is not a top-down organization,” says the director of that team, “so there is not a lot of stuff coming down from above that needs to go out, and people just do it. We don’t work that way.”

Yet both the former and current European directors rated it highly. Perhaps they, from the vantage point of top leadership, see the need for implementing communication strategies more clearly. Nevertheless, even they would say that the communications people must be involved in formulating the strategies.

Once can clearly conclude that the respondents felt that although plans must be implemented, few felt that was a primary role of the communications/public relations position.

**Operational Dimension, part 2**

Public relations within your organization is primarily about communicating the organizational message

This question was added after a couple of interviews, in an effort to get at the operational dimension from a different angle. Nevertheless, results were very similar to the previous statement, with widely varied responses trending on the low side. Five of nine people rated this a 2 or 3, with an average of 3 for practitioners and 3.7 for management. As in the previous operational dimension question, management saw a stronger need to communicate the organizational message. And the one practitioner who rated it a 5, the global communications director of YWAM, would also be in a position to
see the need for this. Also, she sees the message as being “to know God and make Him known,” and considers this the heart of everything that YWAM does. Thus she feels that it almost has to be a 5.

The other practitioner who rated it highly, a 4 or 5, saw it in terms of helping the churches know who we are, and how we can help them. Though his comments indicated it wasn’t a high priority, he rated it higher due to this church angle.

This idea of communicating the organizational message would be classified as one-way communication, and regarding van Ruler’s metaphors, would fall under either the Traffic Manager or the Conductor, wherein practitioners are making sure the organizational message is getting out (van Ruler, 2004).

Looking at the results overall, however, the responses corroborate that the Operational Dimension, while important and necessary, is not the predominant dimension of public relations in these Christian NGOs. Nor are Traffic Manager or Conductor the primary roles of public relations.

**Reflective Dimension, part 2.**

PUBLIC RELATIONS PEOPLE WITHIN YOUR ORGANIZATION SHOULD RESPOND TO FEEDBACK AND HELP THE ORGANIZATION ADJUST ITS APPROACH TO BETTER ALIGN WITH THE NEEDS/DESIRES OF THE AUDIENCE.

This question touches on another aspect of the reflective dimension not touched on earlier – the need to have somebody within the organization monitoring society, bringing feedback to leaders as to who society is changing, and how the organization can better present itself within the changing environment.
The answers to this question did not, at first glance, follow any pattern, though practitioners overall rated it as somewhat less important, and management as somewhat more important. Three of six practitioners gave it a 2 or 3, while the other 3 gave it a 4. Likewise with management – one rated it a 2, two rated it a 4 or 5.

It’s probable that this divergence stems from the wide range of publics for the Christian NGO. When speaking of the audience, or of society at large, one thinks not of churches, or the donor base, but rather of the general public that needs to hear the message. And a conviction intrinsic to these organizations is that the message does not change, and one does not pander to the desires of the audience.

As a Romanian respondent put it,

Feedback is important, but we are not adjusting our message with the desires of the audience. Our goal is to [explain the message of Christianity], but the audience will want, let’s say, more discotheques and alcohol. So they give us feedback – we don’t need your gospel, we want more fun. Do we give them more fun? I think we should know our goal, and adjust our [approach] so they will understand, but not [adjust] our mission.

The Hungarian national director of New Life believes one should not just react to the desires of the audience, but shape and guide those desires to some degree, in order to help them see their deeper needs. “We want to influence them for something better,” he says, “something they might not see a need for, but a need that exists deep down in their life.”
And the first step in that process, he believes, is public relations. “Let’s say we want to talk to them about Why Wait [until marriage before having sex]. This is not a popular message, or a desired message. So how do we position that through research, through stories or whatever, so they would want to hear the message? There is a difference between servicing their desires and influencing them so they would have a good desire.”

One European director dismisses this area by pointing out that PR/marketing should not drive the ministry strategy of the organization.

These examples reflect one of Cancel and Cameron’s conceptual concerns in critiquing Grunig’s position that a two-way symmetrical approach is the best model of excellence and ethical behavior in public relations (Cancel et al., 1997). The groups studied do not hold to moral relativism, and thus to change the message based on audience input would be “repugnant,” to use Cancel and Cameron’s terminology.

Rather, knowing they would be willing to change their methods in response to feedback, but not their message, would lead one to the conclusion that the two-way asymmetric model is the model of excellence and ethical behavior in their situation. The goal is to help people understand the message, unencumbered by stereotypes or preconceived notions. Once the message is understood, the individual is free to accept or reject it as he or she chooses. This corroborates Cancel and Cameron’s view that excellence in public relations may fall anywhere along a continuum between advocacy and accommodation, depending on the circumstances.
In the author’s view, all these organizations are naturally changing their methods, if not the message, to meet a changing society. Part of this is intentional, such as the move toward decentralization. Part is organic – Agape/New Life, for example, has always sought out methods that work, discarding methods that don’t.

But a big part is inherent in having a continue inflow of young people, who are a part of the society that is being reached. They bring their values and skills with them. For example, the young generation today has a great interest in humanitarian aid, so many of the younger staff naturally seek out such opportunities. This resonates with society and helps validate the message.

OM emphasizes care for the marginalized, such as women and children, and stands up against sex trafficking in developing nations. YWAM’s Mercy Ministry teams follow Jesus’ example of compassion to those in need, by operating relief and development programs in over 100 countries.

It might be said, of course, that Christian missions have always emphasised social mercy to some degree, for example establishing hospitals and schools in countries where that had not previously been a priority. But within the organizations studied, the younger generation is bringing renewed emphasis on this.

The continual inflow of young people also brings much technical knowledge, as these youth are “digital natives,” completely at ease with the world of technology. So they naturally incorporate things like the Internet or the iPod into all they do, thus connecting with a changing society.
However, it is continually a challenge for leadership of a previous generation to listen to the input of the younger generation. In at least one of the organizations studied, a communication director feels there is insufficient integration between the young people giving this kind of feedback, and the leadership (the “older generation”).

Interview question 15: What differences do you see between public relations in the corporate world and in a Christian non-profit organization?

This question approaches R2 from a different angle, by asking about general differences between the corporate world and the non-profit world.

Most respondents felt that would be a lot of similarities between public relations in these two spheres, much as Verčič (D. Verčič, 2011) suggested would be the case. However, they did see some significant differences. One, naturally would be in the area of finances – the expectation would be that the corporate world would have more resources to give to public relations.

A more profound area would be in terms of the personnel themselves. People working in the Christian world are not doing it for the paycheck, but rather are highly committed to the values and mission of the organization. They are intrinsically motivated and generally eager to do a good job not because their job might be on the line or because they want a promotion, but because they want to honor God in all they do. Of course, employees in the corporate world may also be committed to the values of the organization and be intrinsically motivated, but most likely there are a higher percentage of such people in the non-profit world.

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A negative aspect of this, however, is that they may lack professionalism. Most likely they arrived at the position not due to their training or background, but due to natural skill or interest. They joined the organization because of the mission, not to work in communications. It is highly unlikely they have been exposed to communications or public relations theory.

While one area of difference is the motivation of the personnel, another would be in the relationship with similar organizations. Ideally, a Christian organization is not trying to compete with similar organizations, or push another group down in order to build oneself up. Communication is generally positive, with more affirming and honoring of each other’s mission than might be the case in the corporate world.

A final area of difference that arose from the interviews was the relationship with the various publics, especially the various church groups or individuals that form the support base. This particular public shares the values of the Christian non-profit, and the organization generally seeks a mutually beneficial partnership. The goal is not to get something out of this public, whether money or people.

This approach is essentially a two-way symmetrical relationship, to use Grunig’s terminology (J.E. Grunig, 2001), or the Creator approach, to use van Ruler’s metaphors (van Ruler et al., 2004).

**Research Question 3**

Does any one dimension seem most important, and if so, why?
Interview question 8: Which of the statements in question 6 is most important in the context of a Christian non-profit?

Another question which sought to understand which dimension was most important asked just that question – which aspect is most important to a Christian non-profit? The author expected this to be the managerial dimension, based on the distribution of roles, but instead the managerial, educational and reflective dimensions were considered equally important. Three respondents considered Managerial most important, three chose Reflective, three Educational, while one chose the Operational aspect of “Communicating the Message.” This latter person was the YWAM global director of communications, so it makes sense that the organizational message would be one of her dominant concerns.

One of the people choosing Educational spends most of his time teaching seminars on how to communicate better, especially through technology. Again, it stands to reason this would be top on his list. A second person choosing Educational – the Romanian Communications director, compared it to society at large in Eastern Europe, where companies spend huge sums on advertising, but don’t train their employees to relate to the public.

The third person choosing Educational, the Swiss Agape Communications Director, felt that since the organization and its mission is all about people, and due to the great decentralization in the Swiss ministry, each individual needs to be able to communicate well.
It the author’s view, it appears that one’s job responsibilities also influence the choice. This could explain why the current YWAM director chose Managerial as the most important dimension. With the big picture in mind, he says it captures both internal and external communications, plus the relational aspect. Others choosing Managerial pointed to the need to cast vision to the Christian community, and invite them to join in the mission.

Of the three people who chose Reflective as the most important, one seemed to misunderstand the question, for his answer related to the Managerial dimension, and the need to help the Christian public grasp the vision and embrace the mission for themselves, whether it be through OM or another organization. If one were to reassign his answer to the Managerial dimension, based on the content of his answer, the results would better line up with what would be expected.

The director of New Life Hungary also chose Reflective, saying, “We need to position ourselves within society, and communicate our legitimate existence.”

The former director of YWAM captured the reason for such divergence, perhaps, by pointing out that the mission of the organization influences which statement is most important. In fact, he refused to answer this question, as he felt it one could not give a general answer that pertained to all groups.

To sum up this category, the answers generally reflect that the managerial dimension is most important, with variations due to actual responsibilities and organizational mission.
Interview question 9: If you had more budget and resources available, would you change your priorities? If so, how?

The general trend in these answers was to do more of the same, or to make no change at all. Responses were about evenly split between managerial-related tasks and operational tasks. Managerial tasks described included more strategic thinking, more networking, and being more proactive, rather than reactive.

The Swiss director of Agape Communications would first evaluate return on investment regarding what has already been done, then work on strengthening the corporate image. Agape Switzerland has many branches, each of which has a strong brand, with its own logo and name. But the public does not necessarily know they are part of Agape.

Responses falling under the Operational Dimension involved primarily social media and websites – many respondents saw the need to do more in this area, even to the extent of bringing in younger people to manage these areas. Others would produce more materials. One respondent would create training programs (Educational Dimension) in how to use the new media most effectively.

Interview question 10 – What would you expect Public Relations to accomplish within the broader movement of your organization?

It turned out this question did not shed light on the question of Dimensions. Several of the answers did not relate cleanly to one dimension, though they leaned more in the direction of the Managerial Dimension. Two answers related to creating a stronger
corporate identity overall and answering critics. Other answers include giving the national communications people more direction on how to communicate better, and how to stay more “cutting edge” in using technology.

One interesting answer regarded helping the national ministries know what kind of terminology is most effective in communicating to the public. The OM European Communications director (who was not interviewed) has apparently spent a lot of time raising awareness within the organization of what language to use, and what kinds of words to use, to describe the work. These words shape the image of OM, and the Swiss Communications director felt this was a very helpful service provide by the regional communications person. This approach may echo the 3D Communication approach developed in YWAM.

A final area described had to do with internal communications, simply helping connect the different countries and branches, so everybody knows what is going on, and can learn from each other.

In general, it can be concluded that the regional communication people/teams can help strengthen the corporate image, and can serve the national offices by giving direction and training.

Interview question 12 – How could your organization improve its public relations, in the context of a European-wide movement?

This question turned out to be similar to Question 9. Answers were about evenly split between the Managerial and Operational Dimensions, and had to do with better internal communications and better communications to the younger audience using social
media and websites. The former director of YWAM mentioned the need to bring in more younger people to harness the new media, pointing out that he stepped down from his position when he turned 60 because the name of the organization, after all, was *Youth with a Mission*.

The current YWAM Western European director gave an interesting analysis of the pros and cons of centralized vs. decentralized organizational structure. In a centralized organization, communication is much easier, for it is all top down, and a single newsletter goes out to everybody, with the organization line. But in a group as highly decentralized as YWAM, this is much more difficult. YWAM’s global communication director echoed this – in an organization where the primary unit is the local base in a given city, the bigger, stronger bases develop their own communications and fund-raising approaches. Yet the decentralization can lead to different bases giving different messages as to what YWAM is all about – the challenge is to coordinate all this. As she puts it, “The local level, the regional level and the international level all need to work together in public relations. It has to be the same message everywhere.”

This would clearly relate to the managerial dimension, and coordinating the messages going to different audiences. If they hear different messages coming from different bases, and different countries, that does not promote trust in the organization.

The Swiss respondent from Agape, incidentally, did not feel it is possible to do European-wide public relations at all, due to the different languages and cultures. He felt that, at best, the regional level can pass on principles that the countries can apply in their own situation.
Interview question 13: What are some differences between public relations in Europe and North America?

Several of the respondents were asked about the difference between public relations in North America and in Europe. Answers generally had to with differences related to carrying out the task, such as the greater wealth of the Americans, or the different languages and cultural values of Europe making cross-national public relations difficult. The responses did not, in general, deal with the theoretical differences mentioned in European literature, such as greater importance of relationships.

Another comment was that Americans are more direct, and less holistic. For example, the Swiss communication director of OM is content to say that a development project in the "Global South" was a Christian project, or that it had Christian values at its core. In her experience, however, Americans feel a need to add a sentence at the end about how many people became Christians as a result. She also pointed out that when she puts on a donor-appreciation weekend, it is much simpler than a similar event for Americans.

This comment about European public relations being more holistic was intriguing, and hinted at the connection between “communication” and “relationships” described by EBOK (D. Verčič et al., 2001). It could be that the relationship aspect inherent in European public relations, or in this case donor relations, makes it less necessary to make the connection to evangelism explicit. People trust the organization due to the relationship. It may also be a cultural difference between Switzerland and America.
Interview question 14 – What is the government opinion of non-profit agencies, especially Christian ones, and does that affect how you do public relations?

The respondents from Eastern Europe saw this as a greater problem than those from Western Europe. The Romanians, for example, said there is no support whatsoever for non-profits. Instead there is suspicion of illegal activity, since the first NGOs in the country, after the fall of Communism, did things like bring in cars from the West to sell tax-free. As a result, all NGOs are suspect, especially ones where people live from donations. “The government says, ‘This is not the real reason you are here,’” says one of the Romanians. “Probably the real reason is something else, something to do with money.”

The Romanians have countered this by forming partnerships with institutions owned or managed by the state, which gives credibility and shows they have nothing to hide. As the Romanian communications director put it:

If we have a partnership with the Minister of Education, this opens doors. If we have a printed magazine, this opens doors. They say, “Oh, you have a magazine. You are not so poor, you are trustworthy. Hungary, according to the New Life director, is more tolerant of NGOs, but gives little or no active support or financial assistance. They, too, have formed partnerships – for the past 20 years, New Life Hungary has worked closely with the Department of Education on a program called “Youth at the Threshold of Life,” which is currently taught in schools across the country and has been well received by both students and teachers.
In Western Europe, people from three countries responded to this question. In the UK, all non-profits are treated the same, religious or not. In Switzerland, according to the former OM director of communications, there can be a problem when seeking government funding for development projects, as the government differentiates between a religious project and charity. “If [your faith] is just a tradition in your life,” she says, “it is ok. But if it is relevant in your life, it is not ok.” In other words, she goes on, if your religious convictions are what drive you to help people, the government considers this “religious” and will not support it. The Swiss respondent from Agape said much the same regarding internal activities: “If what you are doing is for the common good,” he says, “[response] is very positive. But as soon as it begins to look exclusive, it turns negative. It’s up to us to show that what we have to offer is good for our neighbors and our towns. I think it is about passing on God’s love unconditionally, with no expectation that such and such will happen as a result. We should follow the example of Jesus in this.”

The Netherlands has a different issue. Due to the tension over Islam, all religious groups are lumped together, and members often need to take special courses for religious workers. “It was obvious these courses were for people from Morocco, and for imams,” says the YWAM European communications director. “in my course, there were 14 of us, and 10 were imams. How do you get the message across that we are not about imams, but that we are an international organization that is all about influencing society [for the better]?”

This same person also ran into an issue due to his American passport. Though he speaks Dutch, and is married to a Dutch woman, he heard things like, “why do you need
an American to come here, why not hire a Dutch person?” The government had a hard
time grasping that YWAM places a high value on multi-national teams. Also,
governments do not grasp that you cannot just hire somebody to do a job – in these
organizations, most if not all workers raise their own financial support, so it is all about
who has the level of commitment necessary to do this.

To conclude, government suspicion of non-profits is higher in Eastern Europe,
while in Western Europe it varies from country to country. In general, though, it is not a
significant problem in the West.

Conclusions

Based on the findings related to the research questions, it can be stated with great
confidence that the EBOK dimensions (Managerial, Reflective, Educational, Operational)
serve well to categorize the various public relations practices, roles and values of the
Christian organizations studied.

Research Questions 1 and 2 ask about the roles and responsibilities of the
communications practitioners in the organizations studied, and where they fall in terms of
the EBOK dimensions. As was seen in the Results section, the actual responsibilities
were evenly divided between the Managerial and the Operational Dimensions, with one
or two each falling into the Reflective and Educational Dimensions. Yet when people
were asked about the desired role of public relations, nearly all the roles described fell
into the Managerial Dimension.
Why the difference? In the author’s view, it may well be due to the nature of the Christian non-profit environment. Both human and financial resources are limited, so the person leading communications needs to be a trusted advisor and strategic planner, not a mere hireling asked to execute the plans of management.

Yet at the same time, these organizations do not have large communications teams, indeed, it may be just one or two people. Since operational aspects do need to be conducted by somebody, often the communication director himself or herself must do the actual work. The preferred role of that person may be in the Managerial dimension, but the plans must be executed in the Operational Dimension. So actual responsibilities fall into both Dimensions.

Take Agape in the United Kingdom. They have one of the stronger communication teams in Agape Europe; they publish a quarterly magazine and have a small team of writers and designers. The communications director sits on the top management team. Yet even here, the communications director must do much of the actual work of carrying out communication plans. As was mentioned earlier, the Agape communications director “plans the strategy, then passes the ball to herself to carry it out.”

Others, such as the OM communications director in Germany, also plan the strategy, then do much of the actual writing – an operational task.

When it comes to R3, which of the Dimensions is seen as most important, respondents were evenly divided between Managerial, Reflective and Educational. This may be a result of their actual job responsibilities, or a result of the mission of the
individual group. However, a very intriguing possibility is that it corroborates the EBOK findings; indicating that Christian non-profits in Europe do indeed place a high value on the Reflective and Educational dimensions, but time and personnel constraints prevent them from giving much attention to them. As one respondent stated, with more resources, her group would be more pro-active in developing strategy, rather than reactive.

The EBOK framework serves well in categorizing the public-relations activities of the different groups. However, in these groups, the role of public relations has much more to do with the managerial dimension than would be expected. EBOK would say that being European, the Reflective and Educational dimensions should be more important.

It is most likely that the realities of the Christian non-profit environment (such as limited time, personnel and resources) push public relations and communications personnel in the direction of a management role, while often carrying out operational tasks themselves. They are highly respected by management and given considerable leeway in developing communications strategy. While they may value the Educational and Reflective dimension, and on occasion carry out tasks relating to these, the generally small communication teams are not able to do as much in these areas as might be desirable, nor are they expected to do so.

**One-Way vs. Two-Way Communication: Relationships are Vital**

Van Ruler and Verčič found that European practitioners sometimes hold both a one-way persuasive view of communications simultaneously with a two-way relationship view (van Ruler et al., 2004). This seems to be the case here, and may be another reason
why nearly all the expected roles of public relations fall within the Managerial Dimension, while three of the Dimensions seem to be considered equally important.

These organizations are built around relationships, so naturally practitioners want to build productive partnerships between the organization, its members and constituencies. This two-way communication, or “Creator” approach, to use the van Ruler terminology, is a deeply held conviction. There is little evidence of any of the respondents using the “Facilitator” approach described by van Ruler, a two-way communications approach where the public relations person merely facilitates communication between the organization and its publics, without being personally involved (van Ruler, 2004).

Yet at the same time there is a message to be communicated. The external audience needs to know who the organization is and what it stands for. The internal audience needs to know organizational values and direction. So practitioners would also use a one-way persuasive approach, depending on the situation, but still with the relationship in mind. Van Ruler’s “Traffic Manager” or “Conductor” approach would describe this approach to public relations.

If it is true that relationship and communication are virtually synonymous in many European cultures (D. Verčič et al., 2001), it would make sense that the tension between the need to cultivate relationships and the need to get a message out would lead to practitioners holding both the one-way and the two-way views simultaneously. Perhaps Cancel and Cameron’s description of public relations excellence lying along a
continuum, depending on circumstances (Cancel et al., 1997) holds even more true in Europe than in America.

**Legitimacy**

It is interesting to note that in situations where tasks relating to the Reflective or Educational Dimensions were carried out, results were very positive, as in the case of the Irish branch of Agape mentioned earlier, or the Romanian development of a student magazine, or when individual staff members are trained to represent the organization well through personal contact, newsletters, web pages, etc.

The author believes this is due to the issue of legitimacy, extensively described by Verčič and Van Ruler (D. Verčič et al., 2001). Verčič explained that in the days of the European monarchies, the monarch had to approve the existence of an organization (D. Verčič, 2011), and thus validate its right to exist. The citizen, and all organizations within society, were part of an organic interrelated whole. The United States, on the hand, was founded on different principles, with individual rights as the highest value.

Due to these historical roots, European democracies look quite different than American democracy. Citizens, companies and government have a different relationship than they do in America, with each being a part of the organic whole, rather than as individual entities. There is a subtle feeling in society that one needs the “right to exist” in the public sphere.
Practical Implications

1. Relationships are important. At first glance, the non-European practitioner visiting Europe – at least northern Europe – may notice that relationships do not seem important. Business associates and casual acquaintances may treat each other quite formally. Interpreting this through the prism of informal American culture, can easily lead the foreigner to a wrong conclusion. It is highly important to develop relationships with members of the various publics – not relationships meant to manipulate, but relationships with a genuine interest in the other person.

2. Establish the right to exist. For a Christian organization that is not part of a State Church, it is difficult for the citizen to understand how it fits in. Based on interviews touching on this, the Reflective Dimension plays a much more important role than realized by practitioners and management in these organizations. Activities relating to the Reflective Dimension, that show one’s legitimate reason for existence, or simply establish a normal role in society, brought very positive response. It would be wise for practitioners to devote even a small amount of time and thought to Reflective Dimension activities.
Closing Comments

As the globe grows ever more interconnected, the discussion of international public relations grows ever more important. The 2007 International Public Relations Symposium (BledCom 2007), recognized this, choosing as its theme: “The Impact of Globalization on Public Relations” (Krishnamurthy Sriramesh & Verčič, 2007).

In recent years, scholars elsewhere in the world have begun testing the EBOK findings in their countries. A South African researcher, for example, found the reflective component most important in her country (Steyn, 2009).

This paper tested the findings of EBOK within the Christian non-profit world in Europe, and, in a small way, advanced knowledge by applying research from the business environment to the non-profit environment. It found that with the limited resources of these organizations, public-relations practitioners in such roles as “Director of Communications” have Managerial roles, while at the same time carrying out Operational tasks themselves. While they value Educational and Reflective activities, they have little time to give attention to them.

It also found that Cancel and Cameron’s view of public-relations excellence (Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, & Mitrook, 1997) lying along a continuum, depending on the situation, better describes public-relations excellence in the non-profit Christian environment than Grunig’s two-way symmetric model. This study should prove of great interest to European researchers, and to practitioners in Christian non-profit groups.
Qualitative research, by its very nature, does not lend itself to wide generalizations, due to the small sample size. The current study interviewed 12 people in the main thesis study, and eight in the pilot interview. As a result, this study cannot be expected to speak for all Christian non-profit groups in Europe, much less non-profits in general. Nor did it look at public relations outside of the context of Europe.

One weakness of the study stems from the fact that respondents were self-selecting, as only those who responded positively, or had time available, were interviewed. Furthermore, this study only includes countries where the groups studied are recognized legal entities, as opposed to countries that do not allow such groups to exist.

Finally, the study only dabbled in the fascinating field of generic-specific theory, regarding the communication of multi-national non-profits over a broad range of cultures. This field of research provides a rich vein of information to be mined by future studies.

One very useful approach that could be taken would be to compare public relations in the corporate world, the Christian non-profit world, and NGOs doing humanitarian aid work – such as the International Red Cross. The Red Cross, in particular, would make an excellent subject, as they are headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, they fit the profile of a global multi-national organization, and they have an excellent public relations program. Currently, the top leadership all come from the communication side of the organization (D. Verčič, 2011).

Despite the limitations, this study gives insight into the practice of public relations in the Christian non-profit environment in Europe. The findings should prove invaluable
to the organizations studied, and to similar organizations, by providing guidance on how to better present themselves to stakeholders.

Indeed, practitioners would benefit from understanding and applying theory from the EBOK dimensions. Theory indicates, and anecdotal evidence corroborates, that a small amount of time and resources put into Educational and Reflective dimensional activities would pay significant dividends.

Such awareness and application of theory would lead to an increased level of public-relations professionalism, thus lending credibility to these organizations and their message.

In advocacy organizations like these, which advocate the Christian message as a solution to both individual and societal problems, public relations is crucial. The organization must have a good relationship with its various publics, and there must be mutual understanding and respect. Lacking this, donations can dry up, staff members may leave, and the audience may be slow to respond. As one respondent put it, “public relations is painting the background picture, a little at a time, so that when a problem occurs, people already know the organization.”
Appendix A – List of Countries Represented

A total of 13 countries were represented. Following is the list of countries represented together with the number of people falling into the categories of “management” and “practitioner.” For the purposes of this study, “management” is defined as people in an executive leadership role, who would supervise a communications/public-relations department. “Practitioner” would include people working in a communications or public-relations department, even if the person is director of the department.

Thesis Respondents
Hungary
• One person in management
• One practitioner
Romania
• Two practitioners
Switzerland
• Two practitioners
Netherlands
• One person in management
• One practitioner
Germany
• One person in management
• One practitioner
Spain
• One person in management
United Kingdom
• One practitioner

Pilot Interview Respondents
Netherlands
• One person in management
• Two practitioners

Estonia
• One person in management
• One practitioner

France
• One practitioner

United Kingdom
• One practitioner

Ireland
• One person in management

Portugal
• One practitioner
Appendix B: The publics of a Christian non-profit organization

A Christian non-profit has a complex set of “publics” with which to communicate. According to the respondents, internal publics include:

- Local staff members, who do the work on the field
- Members of the European leadership team consisting of National Directors and strategy coordinators.
- The global organization, which includes many people who want information from Europe

External publics include:

- Donors
- The Christian press
- Individual Christians and churches
- The secular press
- The “audience” or unchurched Europeans.

All of these publics can be subdivided in several ways, most obviously by country and language. Different publics need different messages and different strategies. Also, the topic came up that communications teams are tiny, with limited resources. As a result, several countries concentrate on only one aspect.
Appendix C: Code Book

Code Book

Question 1 – The different responsibilities each receive their own code, as follows:
Q1B - Responsibilities of PR people
Q1A - your responsibilities

Q1 – Write and edit
Q1 – Websites
Q1 – Visit conferences
Q1 – Translation
Q1 – Training
Q1 – Social media
Q1 – Recruiting
Q1 – Press relations
Q1 – Networking/ personal communication
Q1 – Manage mailing lists
Q1 – Make known our products
Q1 – Fund raising
Q1 – Stimulate a European conversation
Q1 – Coordinate all communications efforts
Q1 – Church relations
Q1 – Advise (both European leadership and national ministries)

The next group of questions relates to the way public relations is translated, and the implications of the terms
Q2– Translation of PR
Q3– Meaning of PR
Q3– Implications of PR - Local term
Q3– Implications of PR - English term

Question 4 relates to roles, of which there are many. Each role is assigned its own code:
Q4 – Role of PR (all quotes)
Q4 – PR Roles - Recruiting
Q4 – PR Roles - Motivate people to give go pray
Q4 – PR Roles - Inform
Q4 – PR Roles - Define who we are
Q4 – PR Roles - Word of mouth
Q4 – PR Roles - Voice of ministry
Q4 – PR Roles - Training
Q4 – PR Roles - Relationships
Q4 – PR Roles - Raise profile
Q4 – PR Roles - Make known what we have to offer
Q4 – PR Roles - Internal connections
Q4 – PR Roles - Helping people at national level
Q4 – PR Roles - Donor relations
Q4 – PR Roles - Credibility
Q4 – PR Roles - Cast vision
Q4 – PR Roles - Advise

Q5 – Is PR Internal or external

Q6 – this question asks for a rating of various statements, a code was assigned to each statement – one for the rating, one for the comment

Statement F – Respond to feedback - ratings
Statement F – Respond to feedback - comments
Statement E – Communicate the org message - ratings
Statement E – Communicate the org message - comments
Statement D – Implementing strategies - comments
Statement D – Implementing strategies - rating
Statement C – Helping staff communicate - examples
Statement C – Help staff communicate - rating
Statement C – Help staff communicate - comments
Statement B – Within society - rating
Statement B – Within society - comments
Statement A – Manage communication - rating
Statement A – Manage communication – comments

Q7 - Percent of time spent on each item
Q8 - most important statement

Question 9 dealt with what would be done with more resources, so a code was assigned to each different answer
Q9 – more resources - stronger corporate identity
Q9 – more resources - more stories in local papers
Q9 – more resources - more social media
Q9 – more resources - more recruiting
Q9 – more resources - evaluate effectiveness
Q9 – more resources - networking
Q9 – more resources - more web
Q9 – more resources - more strategic and proactive
Q9 – more resources - more materials
The remaining questions were assigned one code each:
Q10 – What do you expect PR to do within the broader movement
Q11 – Are your efforts effective
Q12 – How to improve PR
Q13 – Differences between Europe and North America
Q14 – Government attitude
Q15 – Differences between PR in Christian NGO and corporate world

Appendix D – The Interview Protocol

The interview protocol (Creswell, 2009) for the depth interviews included the following questions, which were designed to uncover the responsibilities and opinions of the respondent regarding public relations. Each of the sub points under question 5 relates to one of the dimensions of the EBOK project, and seeks to find out how the respondent’s perspective fits into the EBOK framework.

Specific questions include:

1. 1A - What are your responsibilities? Do your responsibilities include public relations type work?
   1B - What are the responsibilities of the communications/public relations practitioners in your country?
2. How is the term “public relations” translated in your country? Or is another term used altogether?
3. What are the connotations, or implications, of the term in your language?
4. What do you see as the role of public relations, or communications, in your country?
5. Would you say that public relations is more externally focused, or more internally focused? Or are both of equal importance?

6. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being highest, how would you rate the following statements:

   a. Public relations within your organization is all about managing communication with different audiences in order to gain trust and/or mutual understanding.

   b. Public relations within your organization involves talking about it within society, in order to communicate its values and the sense that it has a legitimate role to play.

   c. Public relations within your organization involves helping staff members better communicate “who we are” both to donors and to those with whom they work.

   d. Public relations within your organization is primarily about implementing communication strategies.

   e. The public relations person’s job is primarily to communicate the organization’s message.

   f. Public relations people within your organization should respond to feedback and help the organization adjust its approach to better align with the needs/desires of the audience.

7. What percentage of your time is given to each of the points in question 5? Can you give an example of something you have done in each area?
a. Note on coding – these answers are linked to the Statements (for example – Statement 1, managing communication, percentage)

8. Which of the points in question 5 is most important in the context of a Christian non-profit organization?

9. If you had more personnel and budget available, would you change your priorities? If so, how?

10. What do you expect public relations/communication to accomplish within the broader movement of your organization?

11. Have your current public relations efforts been effective?

12. How could your organization improve its public relations, in the context of a European-wide movement?

13. What differences would you see between how your organization does public relations in Europe vs. how it would be done in North America?

14. What is the government’s opinion of non-profit agencies, especially Christian ones, and does that affect how you do Public Relations?

15. How is public relations different in the Christian environment vs. the corporate world?

References


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Vita

Originally from Michigan, Bill Sundstrom began writing full time while working with Paragon Experience, producer of Christian multi-media shows.

The next stop on his journalistic journey was Miami, where he worked as Latin American correspondent for Worldwide Challenge magazine. During this period he traveled throughout the continent, from the Andes of Ecuador to the jungles of Panama, reporting on such topics as how Christianity connected with college kids in Bolivia, peasant villages in Guatemala, and communist guerrillas in El Salvador.

Six years later Bill transferred to the magazine’s home office. As international correspondent, he traveled the globe, writing stories from such places as Jordan, Taiwan and India, and winning a “Charlie” award (first-place) at the Florida Magazine Association for an article on the war in Bosnia. Eventually he became editor of Worldwide Challenge, where he used his expertise to train fledgling writers.

Nine years later Bill was invited to help Agape Europe develop a communications department. He has visited 73 countries and currently lives with his wife and youngest son in the Black Forest of Germany.