THE ROLE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS

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ABSTRACT

FLORIDE HAWKINS CARPENTER: The Role of Public Relations in Socially Responsible Business
(Under the direction of Pat Curtin)

Public relations professionals need to understand their role in order to contribute, participate and potentially help shape the future of business through corporate social responsibility. This study examines how public relations is practiced in a socially responsible organization through a case study of a senior public relations manager working in a socially responsible company.

The basic premise of this study is that public relations in a socially responsible organization will exhibit characteristics of "excellence" as defined by Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier (2002). Specifically this includes the organizational role enacted by the public relations professional and the model of practice employed by the public relations professional.

This thesis is dedicated to my grandmother, Floride Hawkins Carpenter.
It is also submitted in honor of my grandfather, Ernest W. Carpenter,
and a very special human being, Lorene “Katy” Kennedy.

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INTRODUCTION

Corporate reputation is at an all-time low, which spells trouble for business leaders who generally believe reputation is a critical factor in business performance. Proponents of corporate social responsibility claim that one of the benefits of being responsible is the positive impact on corporate reputation and therefore business success. While public relations is generally accepted as having responsibility for corporate reputation, there is some debate surrounding the role public relations should play in managing and executing corporate social responsibility programs. Existing research on public relations roles in organizations offers some clues on the role public relations should play in a socially responsible corporation. The focus of this study is to test these theories through a case study of a public relations manager in a socially responsible organization.

The Current State of Corporate Reputation

In the past five years, the actions of corporations and company leaders have received a great deal of attention and criticism. From the dot-com collapse and scandals involving Enron, WorldCom, Tyco, and HealthSouth to the federal investigation of Halliburton's Iraq contracts, Wal-Mart's labor practices, and the latest verdict on Merck's handling of Vioxx, the public's trust in today's corporations is on the decline. A June 2005 Gallup Poll (Saad, 2005) showed that public trust in institutions is at an all-time low. Only 22% of respondents reported “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in big business, down seven points from 2000. Big business’ lowest ever score was 21% in 1995. In the most recent Reputation Quotient survey, administered by Harris Interactive and the Reputation Institute, 68% of respondents graded the reputations of U.S. business as "not good" or "terrible" – only a slightly better outlook than last year’s 74% (Alsop, 2004). This paints a troubling picture for business leaders who generally believe that reputation is critical to bottom-line performance. In the Corporate Reputation Watch survey of U.S. CEOs, 94% of respondents agree that reputation affects an organization’s ability to achieve business objectives (Hoog, 2001).

The Case for Corporate Social Responsibility

Not surprisingly, the past five years have also brought greater focus to the concept of corporate social responsibility and its close correlates: business ethics, corporate citizenship, corporate governance, corporate accountability, and sustainability. For example, a key word search for the phrase “corporate social responsibility” on Factiva yielded 5,812 articles in the past year. The same search for the year 2000 produced only 654 articles.

According to Business for Social Responsibility (2003), a membership and consulting organization, corporate social responsibility is “achieving commercial success in ways that honor ethical values and respect people, communities, and the natural environment . . . a comprehensive set of policies, practices and programs that are integrated into business operations, supply chains, and decision-making processes throughout the company” (p. 1). The Council on Economic Priorities’ *Corporate Report Card* (1998) defines corporate social responsibility by measuring corporate performance in seven areas that together make up a company’s social responsibility “report card.” These are environmental responsibility, women's advancement, minority advancement, charitable giving, community outreach, family benefits, workplace issues, and disclosure of information.

Corporate social responsibility grew up as a concept during the consumer and ecology movements of the 1960s and 1970s, significant as a time of increased environmental and social activism, severe corporate environmental and social crises, as well as landmark legislation to regulate worker health and safety, product safety, and pollution. The resurgence of interest may be a business backlash in response to the anti-corporate campaigns and anti-globalization protests in the late 1990s, according to the *Economist*'s David Ian (2005). Ian claims companies view corporate social responsibility as "a means to avoid Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) and reputational flak, and to mitigate the rougher edges and consequences of capitalism" (para. 17). Indeed, corporations appear to have been less concerned with corporate social responsibility pre-Enron. Walsh in 1999 argued that "the current language of business does not seem to allow for talk rooted in notions of compassion and caring" (p. 8).

Corporate social responsibility is based on a set of competing ideologies regarding the role of business in society. On one side of the debate is economist Milton Friedman (1970) who argues that "there is only one social responsibility of business – to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits" (p. 91). On the other side is Hawken (1993) who claimed, "The ultimate purpose of business is not, or should not be, simply to make money. Nor is it merely a system of making and selling things. The promise of business is to increase the general well-being of humankind" (p. 1). As the concept has evolved, researchers on both sides have criticized the concept both from an economic perspective (for example D. Henderson, 2001) and an activist perspective (for example, Blowfield & Frynas; 2005; Mander, 1992; Newell, 2005). Still others maintain that corporate social responsibility, if carefully implemented, can be a valid management approach that not only benefits society, but makes good business sense (for example, Bendell, 2005; "Finding strategic," 2004; Gillis & Spring, 2001; Hatcher, 2003; J. Henderson, 2000; Utting, 2005).

Proponents of corporate social responsibility claim that socially responsible companies will reap many benefits. Rodbourne, Dercks, and Ross (2000) argued that "ever-stronger signals are telling global corporations that to do well, they should do good" (p. D10). The authors cited a survey conducted by *The Wall Street Journal* International, in which 55% of U.S. respondents said they always take into account a company's ethics and values when purchasing products and services. Increased sales is one of the four main benefits of corporate social responsibility cited in a special report from the European Business Forum (cited in Alfonso & Sharma, 2005). The other benefits include corporate reputation, employee retention and recruitment, and operational efficiency. Burnishing reputation and attracting employees are frequently mentioned by those struggling to establish the corporate social responsibility return on investment, including *Business Week* in a recent investigation by Grow, Hamm, and Lee (2005). The fact that *Fortune* magazine uses social responsibility as one criterion to measure and create its popular list of "Most Admired" companies suggests that corporate social responsibility is indeed a key factor in maintaining a positive reputation. Clearly business leaders who make corporate social responsibility a priority view it as an investment that yields positive returns, and one of the biggest returns is a positive corporate reputation. Even companies like GE are stepping up efforts to become what current CEO Jeffrey Immelt calls "virtuous," according to research on that company, which is "known for hard-driving management and delivering market-beating shareholder returns" (Gunther, 2004, para. 2). Apparently decisions on what type of corporate social responsibility activities to engage in depends on a sort of "business calculus" that helps to measure whether or not the activity will benefit the company's reputation. The key for most business leaders is that the strong reputational impact of corporate social responsibility is good for business. In the words of Immelt, "if this wasn't good for business, we probably wouldn't do it" (Gunther, 2004, para. 24).

The Role of Public Relations in Corporate Social Responsibility

It is widely accepted that "the profession of public relations is designed to manage the reputation of organizations" (Eisenberg & Goodall, 1997, p. 312). In a recent survey of CEOs, 85% responded that public relations handles corporate reputation ("Wrestling with rules," 2003). That is because "public relations" in business circles today is generally synonymous with "corporate communications" and, according to Richard Edelman (2004), president and chief executive officer of Edelman Public Relations, "strong corporate reputation is built through continuous communication with interdependent stakeholders, including employees, media, investors, consumers, regulators, academics and retailers" (p. 128).

Many public relations professionals believe there is a strong connection between public relations and corporate social responsibility, and that public relations professionals play a big role in making this a priority for business. Bennett Freeman, former U.S. deputy assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor, and now managing director for corporate responsibility at Burson-Marsteller, claims that, "In this new era of scrutiny, corporate reputation and corporate responsibility are inseparable" ("Corporate responsibility," 2005, para. 9). Perhaps the discovery of this link is why corporate social responsibility appears to be reaching the top of the priority list for public relations professionals. In a *PR Week* Op-Ed, Wes Pedersen (2005), director of corporate communications and public relations at the Public Affairs Council, implores public relations managers to "emphasize corporate social responsibility's value in '05." This echoes the words of Harold Burson, founding chairman at global public relations agency, Burson-Marsteller, who in a 1996 speech wrote, "In planning for social change, the role of the public relations executive is critical" (p. 18).

But are these expectations realistic? Does the public relations function in organizations have influence on the organization's *actions* in addition to its *communications* – all of which influence its reputation? Conventional wisdom tells us that the way public relations managers approach corporate reputation management is all about "spin" –some may even all it propaganda. Many believe these one-way communications, such as news releases, executive speeches, brochures, and websites, are designed to manipulate the public. Indeed, one of the criticisms of corporate social responsibility is that management of corporate social responsibility initiatives is too closely linked to the public relations department: "though playing an important tactical role, such departments are often geared towards rebutting criticism, and tend to operate at a distance from strategic decision-making within the company" (Ian, 2005, para. 23).

In summary, corporate reputation is at an all-time low, which spells trouble for business leaders who generally believe reputation is a critical factor in business performance. Proponents of corporate social responsibility claim that one of the benefits of being responsible is the positive impact on corporate reputation and therefore business success. While public relations is generally accepted as the having responsibility for corporate reputation, there is some debate surrounding the role public relations should play in managing and executing corporate social responsibility programs.

The Purpose of This Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the role of public relations in a socially responsible corporation to determine its influence and opportunities. There is a long history of research on public relations models and roles but very little that connects these theories and practices to corporate social responsibility. Given continued trends of globalization, heightened government and public scrutiny of business, and the litigious leanings of today's society, the focus on corporate social responsible is arguably greater now than it has been since its origins in the 1970s. The issue has certainly gained importance and visibility within the past five years. Public relations professionals need to understand their role in order to contribute, participate and potentially help shape the future of business through corporate social responsibility. This study seeks to test and examine existing theories within the framework of a professional working in a socially responsible company.

Specifically, it will examine how public relations is practiced in a socially responsible organization through a case study of a senior public relations manager during the development and implementation of a community relations program. The subject of the study is the director of corporate communications at Benjamin Moore & Co., a leading manufacturer of architectural coatings. As a member of the National Paint and Coatings Association, Benjamin Moore chose to follow the operating guidelines put forth in the industry's code of responsibility, Coatings Care®. To fulfill requirements outlined in the code, Benjamin Moore held an open house at its manufacturing facility in Mesquite, Texas. The planning, preparation, and execution of this event provided a unique opportunity to study how a senior public relations manager enacts certain roles. The method of analysis included participant-observation, interviews, and a review of related documents. The basic proposition is that the public relations manager involved in a corporate social responsibility initiative will exhibit characteristics of "excellence" as defined by Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier (2002).

The following chapter provides a review of literature on public relations models of practice and public relations roles, as well as literature on the convergence of the public relations and corporate social responsibility agendas. Chapter 3 outlines the case study method, Chapter 4 assesses the case study results, and Chapter 5 presents the conclusions of this research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Public relations and corporate social responsibility are separate, independent fields of study each comprising its own theories, models, and processes. While each originated and evolved separately, they share some common principles. This chapter reviews literature to provide insight into the role of public relations in corporate social responsibility to determine its influence and opportunities. The first part provides an overview of public relations literature related to models of practice and practitioner roles. This will provide a foundation of knowledge regarding the function of public relations and the role that public relations professionals can play in an organization. The second part of this chapter introduces key concepts of corporate social responsibility and explores further the convergence of the corporate social responsibility and public relations agendas.

Public Relations: Models of Practice and Organizational Roles

To understand how public relations may be practiced differently in a socially responsible corporation, one must first understand how public relations is generally practiced in organizations. This study finds its theoretical foundation in two important areas of public relations research: models of public relations practice and public relations roles. Drawing on organizational and communication theory, these interdependent areas of research help to describe and legitimize the profession and practice of public relations.

Public Relations Models

Grunig and Hunt's (1984) four models of public relations describe the ways public relations has historically been practiced within the framework of communication theory. The four models are: press agentry, public information, two-way asymmetric and two-way symmetric.

One-way communication refers to messages that flow in one direction—source, message, and receiver. Two of the models, press agentry and public information, are both one-way communication models. The differences between the two are found by examining the manner in which the communication is delivered. Press agentry is likened to propaganda while public information is generally favorable, yet accurate, balanced and fair—in the tradition of true journalism. In both one-way models, the purpose of the communication is generally persuasive and the public relations practitioner disseminating the information serves as an advocate for the organization. While public relations may employ one-way communication tactics on occasion, public relations scholars generally agree that one-way models alone are insufficient for guiding public relations practice. According to the *Managers Guide to Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management* (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995), one of the three critical factors in achieving communication excellence is the knowledge of two-way communication practices.

Two-way communication includes feedback to complete the communication loop from source to receiver and back to source. Grunig and Hunt divide two-way communication practices into two categories: two-way asymmetric and two-way symmetric. The two-way asymmetric model involves gathering data from target publics and using the information to control the communications environment and effect change in public perceptions, attitudes, or behaviors. Even though gathering inputs from outside the organization is part of this model, the information gathered is not used to change senior management's thinking, behavior, or position about a particular policy or issue. Instead, the "excellence" handbook shows that, "two-way asymmetrical communication can help organizations persuade publics to think and behave as the organization desires." Communication within this model is viewed as inherently persuasive and manipulative.

Criticisms of this model include Grunig and White (1992), who argued that "the asymmetrical worldview steers public relations practitioners toward actions that are unethical, socially irresponsible, and ineffective" (p. 40). Dozier and Ehling (1992) used theories on mass communication effects (domino effect, agenda setting, uses and gratifications) to further prove the ineffectiveness of the asymmetrical model. Ultimately, they reject the notion that public relations "is essentially manipulative" (p. 176) and advocate symmetrical communication practices that involve conflict resolution and negotiation—rather than persuasion and media effects.

Public relations professionals using two-way symmetric communication act as a channel through which the public can communicate with and have influence on organizational decision-making. The theory suggests that the function of two-way symmetrical communication is negotiation and compromise with the public relations professional playing the role of mediator. The purpose of the communication according to this model is developing 'win-win' solutions to conflicts between organizations and publics.

Many researchers equate the two-way symmetrical communication model with ethical public relations practice. It has been positioned as a way for public relations to contribute value to the organization it represents and to society by helping the organization fulfill a "moral obligation to balance the interests of an organization with the interests of publics with which it interacts in society" (J. Grunig, 2000, p. 306).

However, purists like Martinson (1994) contend that, "one genuinely concerned about building understanding and negotiating conflicts must, by definition, reject self-interest, even the enlightened variety, as an ethical baseline" (p. 107). Truly symmetrical communication has been criticized as an unrealistic "utopian" idea for two reasons. The first reason is that public relations professionals have an allegiance to the organization, their employers, and must act in the organization's best interests, which may make it difficult to serve the publics' interests or behave ethically. The second reason is that corporations are believed to be powerful, and in many cases are more powerful than their publics. This raises questions about whether or not it's possible to achieve true symmetry between organizations and publics, and what ethical framework best supports public relations practices.

Murphy (1991) filled a gap in the literature by introducing the "mixed-motives" model based on game theory. It provides a more accurate picture of how two-way symmetrical public relations is practiced in the real world. The logic is as follows: In a competitive zero-sum game there is a clear winner and a clear loser. This win-lose scenario is likened to persuasive public relations that manipulates the public so that the corporation's needs are met at the expense of the public good. In contrast, games of pure cooperation involve equal participants seeking a mutually agreeable outcome – in other words "symmetry." However, Murphy argues that total congruency can also lead to inefficient outcomes, in other words, a lose-lose situation. The mixed-motive model exists between these two extremes: "Each side retains a strong sense of its own interests, yet each is motivated to cooperate in a limited fashion in order to attain at least some resolution of conflict" (p. 125).

In response to criticism and as a deepening of the theory of excellence, Larissa Grunig, James Grunig, and David Dozier (2002) asserted in their most recent book that

> We never have defined the symmetrical model as the accommodation of a public's interest at the expense of the organization's self-interest. In fact, the concept of symmetry directly implies a balance of the organization's and the public's interest. Total accommodation of the public's interest would be as asymmetrical as unbridled advocacy of the organization's interests. (p. 314)

Instead, they assert that public relations creates opportunities for the organization and its publics to engage in a dialogue. As the facilitator of that discussion, the public relations practitioner's activities would include making an argument or advocating on behalf of the organization, as well as listening to the concerns and interests of publics, with openness to the fact that the organization may be in the wrong. According to the excellence researchers

> Symmetrical public relations occurs in situations where groups come together to protect and enhance their self-interest. Argumentation, debate, and persuasion take place. But dialogue, listening, understanding, and relationship building also happen because they are more effective in resolving conflict than are one-way attempts at compliance gaining. (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002, p. 321)

The above provides a thorough description of the functions and activities involved in two-way symmetrical communications (argumentation, debate, dialogue, listening, relationship building), as well as the purpose of those activities (to resolve conflict). The researchers further contend that the theory of excellence is not purely a normative model that describes how public relations should be practiced. It is also a positive theory describing how public relations is practiced in some organizations.

In the original conceptualization of excellence, Dozier, Grunig, and Grunig (1995) point to three spheres of influence that make it possible for public relations to follow the two-way symmetrical model—knowledge base, shared expectations and organizational culture. The first sphere, knowledge base, relates to whether the individuals responsible for public relations in the organization have the professional expertise to manage an excellent public relations/communication program. According to Dozier, Grunig, and Grunig (1995), "The knowledge that distinguishes excellent from less-than-excellent communication programs involves two-way communication."

The second sphere of communication excellence, shared expectations, relates to roles theory. The researchers categorized the ability to play the manager role as one of the core competencies of the knowledge base—they did not specify that public relations needed to have a specific place on the organizational chart. Regardless of title, however, they found that a strong relationship between the communication department and management was essential for excellent public relations to occur. "In organizations with excellent communication programs, dominant coalitions[1] value communicators for their input before decisions are made" (p. 14). Empirical research by Plowman (2005) showed that knowledge of and experience in public relations as a two-way practice encompassing mixed motives is essential if public relations is to be included in the dominant coalition, although it does not guarantee public relations' place at the management table. Plowman ultimately concluded that while knowledge is critical, the worldview of the dominant coalition dictates whether or not public relations is practiced in the two-way symmetric model.

[1] The phrase dominant coalitions comes from management science and organizational theory, identifying that group of people with the power to set directions and affect structure in organizations. (from Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995)

It's clear from the above that roles and role relationships help define what model of practice is followed. The theory of excellence also takes into account the roles public relations practitioners play within organizations – the role of the public relations function as well as the individual activities that constitute the role. The following is a review of roles research in public relations and a discussion of how roles relates to models of practice.

Public Relations Roles

The concept of roles is rooted in structural-functionalist theory and refers both to the acts performed by people in certain positions within an organization as well as their relationships with people in other roles (Bivins, 1989). Research on the role of public relations is well developed and has a long history. In a review of roles research in public relations, Dozier (1992) proposed that "practitioner roles are key to understanding the function of public relations and organizational communication" (p. 328).

Broom and Smith (1979) originally conceptualized the following four practitioner roles in public relations:

> (1) expert prescriber—an informed practitioner who dispenses advice to management who passively follows the directions
>
> (2) communication facilitator—a "go-between" or liaison who manages information flow between management and its publics
>
> (3) problem-solving facilitator—practitioner who involve management in a systematic process to solve communication problems
>
> (4) communication technician—a skilled service provider who provides communication asked for by management

Dozier (1983) later rearticulated the activities of public relations practitioners as two basic organizational roles: the communication manager and the communication technician

> Although conceptual differences can be drawn of expert prescription, problem-solving process facilitation, and communication facilitation, these activities commonly are performed interchangeably by the same practitioner, as part of a common underlying role [the communication manager]. (p. 331)

Empirical studies examining public relations models and practitioner roles showed that the manager role correlates most closely with the two-way symmetric and asymmetric models of public relations (Dozier, 1983). These findings are consistent with the theory of excellence, which proposes that having the knowledge to play the manager role is a critical factor in achieving excellence (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995).

The knowledge or expertise needed to play the manager role was further defined through an in-depth continuation of study on public relations excellence. Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier (2002) reevaluated role enactment taking into account three perspectives: participants' self-reported key areas of expertise or knowledge, participants' self-reported most frequent activities, and the dominant coalition's self-reported expectations of public relations managers. From these data, four new role variations were developed: manager, senior advisor, media relations, internal technician (see Table 1).

Table 1:

Activities of four distinct roles of communication managers

Manager - expert at solving public relations problems - responsible for public relations program success/failure - accountable for public relations program - makes communication policy decisions	**Media relations** - uses journalistic skills to find newsworthy material - keeps others informed of media coverage - maintains media contacts - responsible for placing news releases
Senior advisor - provides senior counsel to top decision makers - creates opportunities for management to hear publics - represents organization at events and meetings - suggests public relations policy (but does not make decisions)	**Internal technician** - edits others' writing for grammar and spelling - writes communication materials - produces brochures, pamphlets, and other materials - develops photos and graphics for materials

Looking more closely at the expertise needed to enact roles, the researchers were surprised to find that technician role expertise correlated strongly with many characteristics of excellence. They concluded that both technical expertise and managerial expertise are necessary for public relations excellence. For example, "media relations is one of the things that top communicators do in their role as managers" (p. 235). This supports earlier findings by Leichty and Springston (1996) who demonstrated that public relations practitioners perform multiple roles simultaneously. Expanding on Broom and Smith's findings using factor and cluster analysis, they found that most professionals are involved in technical activities while simultaneously engaged in activities more closely aligned with the manager role.

Two distinct types of manager role enactment also emerged from the 2002 excellence study: administrative manager and strategic manager. The administrative manager is skilled in developing goals, objectives, and strategies as well as managing budgets and people. The strategic manager is skilled at conducting evaluation research, performing environmental scanning, and using research to segment publics. The knowledge and expertise to enact the strategic manager role would appear to be the nexus between roles and the two-way models of public relations practice

> Whereas administrative expertise involves the day-to-day operations of a well-run department (regardless of the four public relations models used), strategic expertise is closely tied to a set of strategic tools a communication department needs to use the two-way models (both symmetrical and asymmetrical) and contribute to the organization's strategic planning process. (p. 228)

The final list of manager role enactment activities according to the excellence study includes the following: provides senior counsel to top decision makers, makes communication policy decisions, is accountable for public relations program, is responsible for public relations program success/failure, is expert at solving public relations problems, keeps others informed of media coverage, creates opportunities for management to hear publics, and represents organization at events and meetings. In addition to describing the function of public relations in helping an organization interact with its environment, these role descriptions provide guidance also on the necessary role relationships between public relations professionals and others inside the organization – particularly management. Most public relations roles research focuses on the relationship between the public relations professional and management as an indicator of the role that public relations ultimately plays within the organization. These findings create a partial picture of an excellent public relations professional's skill set and regular activities.

Connecting Public Relations Roles and Models

There is a noticeable gap however when trying to link roles to communication models. The excellence researchers state, in order to be excellent, a public relations professional must enact the manager role and apply two-way communication models. The studies conclude that the empirically derived manager role enactment "involves facilitating communication between publics and the dominant coalition, as well as facilitating problem solving" (p. 237)—activities closely related to the two-way symmetrical communications model. However, these activities are not specifically addressed in the description of the manager role derived from the 2002 study. Rather, this type of behavior appears to be implied, at most, by more limited activities, such as "creates opportunities for management to hear publics" and "represents organization at events and meetings." It would appear that a better description of the role and function of a public relations professional applying the two-way symmetric communication model is needed.

One reason for this gap may be that roles research does not sufficiently address the purpose of public relations, as suggested by Bivins (1989) who stated that “role and function do not necessarily imply purpose. Purpose, however, may determine role and function” (p. 67). The purpose of the communication according to the two-way symmetric model is developing ‘win-win’ solutions to conflicts between organizations and publics. Research suggests that the professional would act as a channel through which the public can communicate with and have influence on organizational decision-making. Public relations would also serve as negotiator and mediator between the organization and its publics. This line of inquiry highlights the close correlation between the public relations function and “boundary spanning,” which describes how an organization interacts with its environment (Jemison, 1984).

Leichty and Springston (1996) stated “a boundary spanner interacts with people outside his or her own group . . . . and conveys information and influence between one’s primary group and outside groups” (p. 468). They also pointed out that the literature separates boundary spanning activities into two separate types of interactions. One, whereby the practitioner represents the views of management to stakeholders, is similar to Bivin’s (1989) description of public relations professional as “advocate” for the organization. The other, whereby the practitioner informs management of the perceptions, expectations, and ideas of publics, is similar to Bivin’s description of the public relations professional as “counselor” to the organization. Boundary spanning research offers a concise description of the likely activities of a professional applying the two-way symmetric communication model. It further helps to clarify that the role of the public relations professional is inextricably linked to the purpose of the communication with its various publics, both internal and external. It suggests that to implement a two-way symmetrical model of communications, the professional must be prepared and qualified to wear more than one hat. However, as discussed, research has shown that none of these activities can be performed unless the dominant coalition has a shared understanding of the purpose of public relations and an expectation that public relations will function in this way.

Therefore a more complete definition of the role of public relations may be a professional who, with support and permission of the dominant coalition, functions as a strategic counselor, engaging in a variety of boundary spanning activities that facilitate two-way communications between an organization and its publics, and who is motivated by a desire to serve the best interests of the organization and the interests of its publics, with a goal of achieving symmetry, or mutually agreeable outcomes.

Building on this foundation of research, the following section includes a review of literature that explores the convergence of corporate social responsibility and public relations and offers insight into public relations opportunities and influence.

Public Relations and Corporate Social Responsibility: Opportunities And Influence

The public relations literature contains several examples of exploration into the connection between corporate social responsibility and public relations. Some researchers are motivated by the desire to find "ways in which the American public relations practitioner may contribute to the development of a better society" (Wright, 1976). Others focus on how involvement in corporate social responsibility can help public relations achieve more credibility in organizations (Judd, 1989). Most studies focus on how the public relations function can apply unique skills to help further the corporate social responsibility agenda and support a company's corporate social responsibility efforts. The following introduces key corporate social responsibility concepts and reviews literature focused on identifying and understanding the opportunities for public relations practitioners to participate in and influence corporate social responsibility.

Corporate Social Responsibility Origins and Key Concepts

In spite of more than 30 years of research, a clear and widely accepted definition of corporate social responsibility is difficult to come by. Some researchers have found it more effective to define what makes a company "irresponsible" than responsible (Hicks, Wan, & Pfau, 1999). The idea of corporate social responsibility first appeared around the turn of the century and fully developed during the 1960s and 1970s. The impetus for corporate social responsibility as a concept is believed to be a series of corporate crises during the 1960s and 1970s that gave rise to the consumer and ecology movements and subsequent legislation regulating worker health and safety, product safety, and pollution. It was in this climate of social activism that "Corporate social responsibility, or lack thereof, became not just an interesting if arcane topic of study, but a subject of vital interest to corporate survival and managerial survival" (Wood, 1991b, p. 383). By applying the basic premise that business and society are inextricably linked, the corporate social responsibility discussion shifted in the 1980s from the idea that corporations should be responsible to how businesses behave and respond in relation to social issues (Clark, 2000).

Previous studies on corporate social responsibility, social issues management, and social responsiveness were combined by Wood (1991b) into one model of corporate social performance. The corporate social performance model offers a framework of three key principles, three processes, and three outcomes (see Table 2). The second part of the model, processes of corporate social responsiveness, allow for principles of social responsibility to be acted out. Clark (2000) highlighted the three processes as the unifying factor between corporate social responsibility and public relations by comparing them to Cutlip and Center's four-step management process. Wood's three processes of social responsiveness are (1) environmental assessment, (2) stakeholder management, and (3) issues management. These provide a useful framework within which to explore public relations' opportunities and influence within corporate social responsibility.

Table 2:

Wood’s Corporate Social Performance Model

Principles of corporate social responsibility
- Institutional principle: legitimacy
- Organizational principle: public responsibility
- Individual principle: managerial discretion

Processes of corporate social responsiveness
- Environmental assessment
- Stakeholder management
- Issues management

Outcomes of corporate behavior
- Social impacts
- Social programs
- Social policies

Environmental Assessment

In the corporate social performance model, environmental assessment refers to the "information component of responsiveness" – where organizations gain knowledge about the environment through environmental scanning and analysis in order to respond or adapt to it. Many public relations scholars have explored public relations' contribution and role related to environmental assessment. For some, technology holds promise for helping companies assess the environment more effectively (Badaracco, 1998) such as by using the Internet to monitor public opinion and gather feedback from key publics. However, Esrock and Leichty (1998) found that corporate Web sites are more often used to build a positive corporate image by communicating the company's good deeds rather than collecting information about the environment. They concluded, "when used to disseminate information about a corporation's good citizenship activities, the medium [World Wide Web] becomes the embodiment of an image building approach to social responsibility" (p. 11).

Environmental scanning has been identified as one of three ways that public relations can influence corporate social responsibility. Heath and Ryan (1989) proposed that public relations should be involved in monitoring various publics to develop codes of corporate conduct based on their particular interests. They also hypothesized five possible ways public relations practitioners can impact the development of behavioral codes in organizations – three of which relate to the benefits of environmental scanning: "make companies aware of prevailing ethical standards," "help companies refine their concepts of social responsibility," "help officials develop codes of behavior that apply community standards to planning and operating decisions" (p. 23-24). The findings were mixed related to monitoring key publics and making companies aware of prevailing ethical standards. All respondents indicated that data collection techniques were useful, such as public opinion surveys, external focus groups, internal focus groups, and networking with industry professionals. However, respondents who indicated the most involvement in setting corporate social responsibility policy or organizational codes of conduct were oriented to internal publics more than external. Also the practice of monitoring was not found to be universal to all respondents. The researchers held strongly to the notion, however, that "Boundary spanners can play a vital role in achieving the consensus needed to help a corporation understand when company activities are triggering an external response that must be given attention" (Heath & Ryan, 1989, p. 35).

Clark (2000) views environmental scanning as a public relations function – it is the foundation of her "communication management approach." Pointing to the organization's need to conduct analysis of stakeholder needs and wants, Clark claims that public relations adds value by being able to provide a thorough record and analysis of the previous communication and interactions between the organization and those stakeholders on any given issue. It is the combination of a stakeholder analysis (presumably not conducted by public relations) and the communication analysis (which is conducted by public relations) that make up the first two steps of Clark's approach. By involving public relations in the analysis process, the organization combines "the knowledge of identifying stakeholder groups and a corporation's responsibility to them with the ability to strengthen those relationships through effective communication" (p. 373).

Environmental scanning is also described as "value attuned public relations" (in Black & Härtel, 2004, referring to Swanson, 1999). Value attuned public relations refers to the organization's ability to "detect and transmit information to guide executive decision-making" (p. 130) and was identified as a key capability of socially responsive organizations.

Researchers found that while it is a necessary capability of a responsive organization, it is not necessarily a factor for differentiating between responsive and non-responsive organizations. This suggests that all organizations participate in some form of environmental assessment—it's how the information is used that determines the level of responsiveness.

In Wood's model, the information is used to manage relationships with stakeholders, which is the second process in her corporate social performance model.

Stakeholder Management

One of the central themes in corporate social responsibility research involves the term "stakeholder," which originated in Freeman's 1984 book, *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*. Stakeholders are groups who affect and/or are affected by the company and its activities, either directly—such as employees, customers, shareholders, communities, investors, and local and national regulators—or indirectly—including suppliers, employees' families, nongovernmental organizations (BSR, 2003). Stakeholder management is based on the principle that business is accountable to society and must take into account the needs and interests of stakeholders (Heath, 1997). According to Wood (1991b):

> A great deal of social issues management research can be classified as dealing with the processes by which corporations understand and assess their stakeholder environments, manage their stakeholder relations, deal with stakeholder demands and expectations and try to improve their own positions of power and influence within stakeholder networks. (p. 392)

Stakeholder management is at the very core of corporate social responsibility. It has been said that corporate social responsibility "arises in the day to day interactions in relationships between firms and their stakeholders" (Black & Härtel, 2003, p. 140). And yet, the role and importance of communication in managing stakeholder relationships is not well defined.

Clark (2000) claims this connection represents an opportunity for public relations: "It seems obvious that communication is at the very heart of managing relationships, yet corporate social responsibility research largely overlooks this fundamental aspect" (p. 371).

For example, research on sustainable development, a branch of corporate social responsibility research, shows that in order to be sustainable, an organization must be able to effectively negotiate, collaborate, and reach compromises with stakeholder groups (Simanis, 2000; Standish, 1998). It is not clear, however, where within the organization the skill to conduct these communications activities would come from. Similarly, dialogue was found to be a critical differentiating capability of a socially responsive organization. Dialogue has been defined as the "conscious and respectful effort to share power in a discourse" (Black & Härtel, p. 130), and yet it remains unclear which department within the organization is responsible for leading the dialogue on behalf of the organization. One may assume that, in many cases, the negotiation and dialogue takes place without the benefit of assistance from skilled communicators.

However, empirical research by L'Etang (1996) led her to the conclude that "corporate social responsibility is often managed by public relations practitioners for public relations ends and therefore corporate social responsibility is seen as part of the public relations portfolio" (p. 113). L'Etang and others have criticized communication from the position that organizations are so much more powerful than their stakeholders. Organizations, in a sense, control the terms of the dialogue so that ultimately the communication is a persuasive act while it may not appear to be (Cheney & Vibbert, 1987). Apparently, persuasion, can be intended, as with communications designed to manipulate (as in the press agentry or two-way asymmetrical communications models), or implied, as with a dialogue in an imbalance of power. It's unclear whether persuasion, in either form, has a role in stakeholder management. Because stakeholder management is about relationships, some would argue that true "communication—not persuasion—is the platform on which relationships are built" (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998, p. 2).

Most agree that communication is central to relationship management, this is clearly an opportunity for public relations. The role of public relations in helping to manage this process depends largely on the professional's ability to negotiate, collaborate, reach comprise and facilitate dialogue—and not the ability to persuade. However, the role changes when organizations are faced with specific issues, as addressed in Wood's third process, issues management.

Issues Management

In any relationship, issues arise that need to be managed. "Issues are focal points in public discourse that never get 'solved' in the sense of absolute termination of discussion, but they do become 'resolved' or 'managed'" (Cheney & Vibbert, 1987, p. 175). Issues management relates to Heath and Ryan's (1989) thinking that one role of public relations in corporate social responsibility is to "help executives avoid crises that can cause serious damage." A crisis has been defined by Richard C. Hyde, Executive Vice President and leader of Hill & Knowlton's crisis communications practice, as "a problem that gets out of control, is harmful, threatens the reputation of the organization, or a brand, and takes an inordinate amount of executive time" (personal communication, October 11, 2005). Public relations is often called on to assist management in dealing with crises once they have developed. But an arguably more important role for public relations, according to Kitto (1998), is to "serve as an early warning system to the organization" and head off threatening situations (p. 4).

The period before the crisis is the realm of issues management. Kitto (1989) contends that public concerns over corporate ethics and social performance create a climate where issues management is essential. Managing issues includes "responding to public concerns in an effective organized manner" (p. 1). This includes informing the public about corporate actions related to satisfying public interests. Social reporting gained importance when congress enacted the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act of 1986 requiring environmental compliance reporting (White, 1999). According to White, "This milestone legislation, which was inspired in large measure by the Bhopal tragedy, fundamentally redefined the reporting landscape" (p. 5). Numerous accountability standards and reporting initiatives have been established in the past decade such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) in 1997; AccountAbility in 1999; and the United Nations Global Compact in 2000 (BSR, 2003).

Because public relations has intimate knowledge of what's happening inside and outside the organization, it is uniquely positioned to help identify issues. Because of its role in organizational communication, it can also be involved with social reporting. Often, if public relations is not connected to the dominant coalition, practitioners are not involved until the situation is elevated to crisis-level proportions. Then public relations is called upon to use further monitoring and communications skills to effectively respond. Kitto (1989) contends that the first step in an effective issues management program is establishing a "social philosophy of management that places the interests of people first in all matters pertaining to the conduct of the organization" (p. 3).

In issues management, when an organization faces a potential conflict with stakeholders, communication takes on a more critical role in the eyes of management. In contrast to day-to-day stakeholder management, the need for public relations increases. Continuous monitoring of issues and involvement in social reporting are ways that public relations professionals can help detect and manage issues before they become crises. However, management expectations of public relations in issues management focus on using communication skills to influence stakeholders' perceptions. Ultimately, the role of public relations depends on management's perceptions of what constitutes effective communications and what public relations can contribute.

Implications for Public Relations

The common theme of the corporate social responsibility and public relations literature is relationships. Two types of relationships are critical—public relations' relationship to management and public relations' ability to manage relationships with stakeholders.

Like Kitto (1989) above, Wood (1991a) points to findings by Miles (1987) that show responsiveness is dependent on external affairs strategy and design, but those are dependent on top management philosophy. Just as in the discussion of public relations models and roles, there is an important link between public relations' ability to influence corporate social responsibility and the expectations of the dominant coalition. Public relations professionals cannot affect the behavior of organizations without the full support and cooperation of management. Heath and Ryan (1989) concluded that "the impetus for codes of corporate behavior typically comes from the highest corporate officials, and not from public affairs practitioners" (p. 34). While Wright's study attempted to explore ways public relations could affect social responsibility, the results show that social responsibility is inextricably tied to the organizational culture as determined by top management. Wright's multi-step theory of social responsibility in public relations proposed that where public relations enjoys high respect from management, a low degree of supervision, an active decision making role, and full professional status, the degree of social responsibility will be high.

Heath and Ryan also hypothesized that public relations could help refine concepts of responsibility by helping develop codes of behavior that apply community standards to planning and operating decisions. However, only 54 out of 82 respondents were somewhat to very involved in creating codes of conduct. Judd (1989) found that those practitioners who frequently recommended socially responsible actions also participated in policy decisions more frequently. Those participating in management decisions were more likely to recommend actions that put the needs and interests of society ahead of their employer or client company. In comparison with Wright's theory of social responsibility, Judd stated, "if participation in policy decisions is an indicator of the credibility of public relations with management, then the results could be interpreted as a link between public relations credibility and social responsibility" (p. 38).

Based on these findings, there appears to be a "chicken and egg" dilemma—public relations' ability to influence management affects to what degree public relations can influence corporate social responsibility. And yet, involvement in corporate social responsibility may help public relations gain greater influence with management. Either way, the relationship with management is critical, which directly relates to Grunig's contention that public relations should play a management role in organizations in order for public relations to be "excellent."

It's clear that being "responsive" involves multiple communications activities designed to build, sustain or enhance relationships with stakeholders. First through environmental scanning, the organization learns about the perceptions and needs of its stakeholders and other factors affecting its environment presumably indirectly through research. Second, the organization interacts with stakeholders directly, through continuous interaction or dialogue where stakeholders and organizations share information on topics of mutual interest. Activities include one-way communication as well as negotiation, collaboration, and compromise. Third, issues management arises through a combination of scanning, and dialogue, when issues are identified that require special attention. From there, activities such as communication, negotiation, and collaboration are equally important, but ultimately management must make a change in policy or procedures in order to resolve the issue.

Wood (1991a) agrees that, "The three facets of responsiveness are theoretically and pragmatically interlocked. Stakeholders are involved in issues, issues involve stakeholders and their interests; and information about the environment is necessary for responses to be made" (p. 706). By replacing the word "stakeholder" with "public," it's easy to see the striking resemblance to Wood's responsiveness model and Grunig's two-way symmetrical communications model. In spite of the fact that corporate social responsibility literature largely overlooks public relations' role in corporate social responsibility, others have shown that public relations and corporate social responsibility have similar objectives and that public relations can contribute greatly to meeting those objectives.

Research Questions

The above review of literature highlights the validity of Grunig's (2002) findings that "we can describe excellent public relations in its simplest expression, therefore, as strategic, symmetrical communication management" (p. 306). Given the correlation between research on the excellence theory and public relations' role in corporate social responsibility as shown above, the basic premise of this study is that public relations in a socially responsible organization will exhibit characteristics of "excellence" as defined by Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier (2002). Through a case study of a corporate public relations manager, two key theories from the "excellence" study will be tested:

RQ1: What is the role of public relations in a socially responsible company?

Supporting questions include:

(a) What behaviors characterize the relationship between public relations and management?

(b) What knowledge, skill sets, or behaviors helped establish that relationship?

RQ2: What model of practice best defines public relations in a socially responsible company?

Supporting questions include:

(a) What activities characterize two-way symmetrical and mixed-motives communication practices?

(b) What types of knowledge, skill sets, or behaviors does the public relations professional contribute?

This study expands these theories by providing a more practical description of how public relations plays this role.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

To address these questions, a case study employing the method of participant observation was used. Existing roles research and the excellence studies have utilized quantitative methods extensively. Qualitative methods also have been used, but to a lesser degree. Earlier studies suggest that public relations can play a managerial role, employing symmetrical communication. Therefore, it was decided that a more significant contribution to this research at this juncture would be to understand the complex process of *how* the public relations professional enacts the manager role and implements symmetrical communication to support a company's corporate social responsibility goals.

Sampling Strategy

This case study collected data using participant observation methods and analyzed the data with ethnographic content analysis (Altheide, 1996). A case study is appropriate for many reasons. First, it offers a window on the actual behaviors and relationships of public relations and others involved in an organization's corporate social responsibility efforts—as opposed to the company's stated position on the subject. Qualitative methods are useful for research on informal and unstructured linkages and processes in organizations and on real, as opposed to stated, organizational goals (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). It is also appropriate for "studying processes, relationships among people and events, the organization of people and events" (Jorgensen, 1989, p. 12).

Second, developing a more complete picture of the conditions and drivers that help or hinder public relations in a socially responsible organization represents a new application and extension of the "excellence" theory into the field of corporate social responsibility. Yin (2003) argued that case studies should be used to "expand and generalize theories (analytic generalization) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization)" (p. 8). Likewise, Altheide (1996) recommended the use of ethnographic content analysis for data analysis "to check and supplement as well as supplant prior theoretical claims" (p. 17).

Third, the case provides an opportunity to observe a public relations professional in action within the organizational environment. Marshall and Rossman (1999) state that "human actions are significantly influenced by the setting in which they occur; thus one should study that behavior in real-life situations" (p. 57). A benefit of case study research is that "it seeks to capture people as they experience their natural, everyday circumstances," which means, "it can offer a researcher empirical and theoretical gains in understanding larger social complexes of actors, actions and motives" (Orum, Feagin, & Sjoberg, 1991, p. 8).

Studying a single case is also appropriate in this case. The use of single case studies has a long history in social psychology where the ability to understand complex behaviors is paramount, which makes it an appropriate method for identifying and explaining behaviors of a public relations professional in a socially responsible organization. Yin (2003) found that one case is sufficient if it is a critical case—a single case that meets all the conditions for testing the theory. This case was chosen based on the company's record of social responsibility and the public relations manager's involvement in those efforts, as discussed in detail later in this chapter. Opportunity also played a big role in choosing this case. The company is currently implementing a new community responsibility code by holding open houses at many of its facilities. This provided a significant window of opportunity to observe its corporate social responsibility efforts and the involvement of the director of corporate communications. The researcher had a well-established relationship with the company having served as public relations consultant for 17 months, which gave her entrée to the director of corporate communications. Location and the company's willingness to cooperate with the investigator were also factors in choosing the subject. Approval for the observation was granted by the subject and a member of senior management with oversight over the company's manufacturing and distribution operations.

Finally, a case study fills a gap in the existing research. A search for "Social Responsibility of Business" (the accepted Library of Congress subject indexing term) and "case study" using electronic databases (limits = only peer reviewed and scholarly journals) revealed that few case studies have been conducted on the role of public relations in social responsibility – particularly in the United States. Table 3 illustrates the lack of case study research on the role of public relations in corporate social responsibility.

Table 3:

Search for Case Study Research on Public Relations Roles and Corporate Social Responsibility

Source	**Total citations**	**Citations on Public Relations roles and CSR**	**Notes**
Business Source Premier / EBSCOhost	88	0	Articles retrieved from 1969 to the present were largely international in scope. Topics included specific issues: financial aspects / costs, management / leadership strategies, ethics / corporate governance, measurement / evaluation, philanthropy, environment, information technology, human resources, CSR education, and social reporting techniques. Three titles addressed a subset of public relations – corporate reputation / crisis management – but did not address the public relations organizational role.
Academic Search Premier / EBSCOhost	19	0	Articles fell into similar categories of content as Business Source Premier with many overlapping titles.
General BusinessFile ASAP / Thompson Gale Group	7	0	Topics included environmental marketing, Brent Spar, gambling, environment, investor activism, charitable giving, and an interview with Chairman of Stride Rite.
UMI ProQuest Digital Dissertations	47	0	Topics included corporate governance, service-learning, volunteerism, and religion. The unit of analysis ranged from educational, community, activist and government organizations, to corporations in various industries: oil, manufacturing, mining, financial institutions, auto, cosmetics, media, health care (hospitals, HMOs).
Communication & Mass Media Complete	0	0	
TOTAL	161	0	

Method

The participant observation was conducted at Benjamin Moore's manufacturing facility in Mesquite, Texas, on February 1, 2005, March 23, 2005, and April 15, 2005. Continuous assessment over time is one of the criteria for a single-case design (Kazdin, 1982). The researcher spent an average of five hours per day at the facility. Because the researcher spent 17 months as a consultant, coordinating the development and preparations for the event and participated in three previous events at other facilities, she was already familiar with the project goals, objectives, roles, and responsibilities, so it was possible to begin gathering data immediately. The person observed was the director of corporate communications.

Choosing from Jorgensen's participant roles, the researcher had an insider role. The researcher had a well-established, ongoing relationship with the director of corporate communications having served the company as a communications consultant for nearly two years prior to this event. In fact, the researcher had participated as a consultant in three similar company events. Her presence was expected, encouraged, and appreciated by the director of corporate communications and others. This afforded sufficient access to the facility and proximity to the director of corporate communications' activities, which were the focus of the study. In contrast to previous events, the researcher was not compensated for participating in this event. Her customary event management responsibilities and duties were reassigned to others so that she could observe and take notes.

Reactions to the researcher were minimal. The researcher was familiar to all those involved in coordinating the event due to her involvement in several previous events. Some employees demonstrated interest in the research and offered encouragement. Most seemed to take no notice, rather, the presence of the researcher was expected and considered normal.

Prior experiences with the company made it possible for the researcher to be treated as "part of the team." At times, the director of corporate communications seemed aware and somewhat uncomfortable being observed—especially when the researcher was seen making notes in the journal. The subject's primary concern seemed to be whether the researcher was able to gather the information needed. The subject seemed most comfortable when conversations slipped back into the customary roles of consultant-client. To minimize this disruption, the researcher tended to make mental observations and stepped away to record them. To protect confidentiality, no names were used in the notes or the analysis, and the director of communications was assigned a pseudonym.

The researcher's prior experiences with the company had been positive for the most part. Traveling to three other facilities provided the opportunity to observe the people, personalities, and culture of the organization. Developing the materials for the open house event knowledgeable about the company's operations, policies, and procedures. Through this involvement, the researcher developed a great deal of respect and admiration for the company and its director of corporate communications. At the same time, close proximity to the day-to-day operation also revealed the company's weaknesses and challenges. Having seen both "the good, the bad, and the ugly," the researcher was able to enter the observation period with a fairly clear and balanced view of the company and its director of corporate communications.

Juggling the roles of researcher and consultant was a challenge. In the two years working together, however, the subject and researcher had developed mutual respect for each other as professionals, rather than simply as client and consultant. The researcher spent a great deal of time before the observation period explaining the purpose of the study and research procedures. Because the subject was supportive of the research process and comfortable with being studied, the researcher felt she had sufficient buy-in from the subject to proceed without fear of jeopardizing the client-consultant relationship. Participating in the event without being compensated was also a critical factor to distinguish this experience from previous events and allow for an honest, objective assessment. Further, the researcher waited several weeks before analyzing the data gathered from the observation. Coming back to the notes with a fresh perspective helped achieve greater objectivity in the analysis.

"Making notes, keeping records, and creating data files are among the most important aspects of participant observation" (Jorgensen, 1989, p. 96). A formal journal was the primary note taking method. To facilitate note-taking, the journal created for the observation had two columns – a checklist of questions from the protocol (see below) and space for comments and analysis (see Appendix). Each entry included a date and time. The notes included the director of corporate communications' actions, activities, speeches, and casual conversations. Also recorded were the roles and responsibilities of the people with whom she interacted, the general subject nature of the conversation, her mannerisms, and tone of voice. Direct casual conversations between the researcher and the subject helped to amplify and clarify the observations. Notes were taken at the facility and more details were added after the observation period.

Jorgensen (1989) said that participant observation can include other strategies in addition to mere observation. Yin (2003) also encouraged case study researchers to draw on multiple sources of evidence. During the study, the researcher collected documents, such as memoranda and email correspondence as well as communications materials used, including press releases, guest lists, information panels, fact sheets, training handouts, and invitations.

Background materials on the company including the corporate Web site and past media coverage were collected and referenced to a lesser extent.

Following the observation period, two additional interviews with the director of corporate communications were conducted on August 24, 2005 and on September 28, 2005. Additional information and insights were gathered on the subject's background, expertise, values, and opinions--information difficult to ascertain through observation. The interviews also provided a self-report of the subject's perceived role within the organization and her approach to public relations to compare and contrast with the findings gathered through observation.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Altheide's (1996) method of ethnographic content analysis. The approach permits the researcher to investigate using as a protocol "a list of questions, items, categories, or variables that guide data collection" (p. 26). This was a logical choice given the many theories that exist on public relations roles, models, and corporate social responsibility. Instead of "starting over," the researcher chose to look for the variables others have suggested would be present. This highly reflexive and interactive approach also is useful for discovering "emergent patterns, emphases and themes" and to "help delineate patterns of human action" (p. 13). In the spirit of qualitative inquiry, the method allows for new ideas to emerge while helping to verify existing ideas. Altheide (1996) said that "categories and variables initially guide the study, but others are allowed and expected to emerge throughout the study" (p. 16).

The protocol for this study contained three broad categories, each comprising specific questions based on Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier's (2002) study of excellent public relations and Wood's (1991b) model of corporate social performance.

The first category, roles, comprised specific questions related to the enactment of the manager role based on the findings of Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier (2002):

1. Does the subject provide senior counsel to top decision makers?
2. Does the subject make communication policy decisions?
3. Is the subject responsible for public relations programs?
4. Is the subject accountable for public relations program success/failure?
5. Is the subject expert at solving public relations problems?
6. Does the subject keep others informed of media coverage?
7. Does the subject create opportunities for management to hear publics?
8. Does the subject represent organization at events and meetings?

The second category, models, contained questions grounded in the concept of two-way symmetrical and mixed-motives communication models:

9. Does the subject exhibit values that reflect a moral obligation to balance the interests of an organization with the interests of publics with which it interacts in society?
10. Does the subject value negotiation and compromise, and seek ways to develop 'win-win' solutions for conflicts between the corporation and its publics?
11. Does the subject exhibit strong skills in mediation and interpersonal communication?
12. Does the subject use a research-based approach to communications planning?

13. Does the subject use words like listening, responding, collaborating, sharing intelligence, openness, dialogue, to describe their approach to communicating with publics?

The third category, social responsiveness, comprised a single question derived from Wood's (1991b) processes of corporate social responsiveness:

14. Does the subject engage in activities that support the organization's ability to conduct environmental scanning, stakeholder management, or issues management?

This protocol was incorporated into the format of the participant observation journal as described above.

Following Altheide's (1996) recommended data analysis process, the documents and notes collected were subjected to extensive reading, sorting, and searching. All of the notes were then compiled into two primary source documents: (1) the journal, a comprehensive chronological narrative derived from the compilation of observation notes, documents and informal conversations; and (2) the interview, compiled from notes from direct question and answer sessions with the subject. Each of these were reviewed extensively and further sorted by category, with an eye for identifying any additional categories, key words, or topics not covered in the protocol. Next, the data were compared within categories. Finally a summary was prepared for each category supported by examples and quotes where appropriate. This separation of "the data and examples from more general conclusions on which they are based" highlights one of the benefits of Altheide's approach (p. 44).

To provide context for the analysis, the rest of this chapter offers background on Benjamin Moore & Co., the director of corporate communications, and the community responsibility day events.

Case Study

Benjamin Moore & Co. is a leading manufacturer of architectural coatings with a history of being socially responsible, particularly in relation to manufacturing practices and products. For example, the company has been proactive in helping the paint industry develop and implement codes of responsibility. Benjamin Moore's director of corporate communications has been with the company for 10 years. During her tenure, she has developed and implemented significant social programs for the company, including "Community Responsibility Days"—the centerpiece of this case. Benjamin Moore was chosen for this study because it is well known as socially responsible which made it possible to study the role of public relations in corporate social responsibility.

The following provides an overview of company policies and practices, a detailed description of the recently implemented community outreach program, and additional background on the director of corporate communications. This overview is based on a review of materials including corporate web sites, company materials, and media coverage—the company materials were gathered during the course of the participant observation. The Web content and media coverage was collected independently after the observation period.

Benjamin Moore & Co.

Benjamin Moore Paints was founded in 1883, in Brooklyn, New York by Benjamin Moore and his brother. It was acquired by Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway company in 2001. The company employs more than 2,500 employees in the United States and Canada. All of its paints and coatings are manufactured in seven manufacturing plants (Montreal, Quebec; Burlington, Ontario; Mesquite, Texas; Milford, Massachusetts; Pell City, Alabama;

Johnstown, New York; Newark, New Jersey). The company headquarters and research and development facilities are in Montvale and Flanders, New Jersey, respectively. Products are distributed via 16 distribution centers, which utilize both contracted and company-owned trucks. Benjamin Moore products are sold exclusively through a network of more than 4,000 independently owned paint and decorating retailers throughout North America. Benjamin Moore is well known throughout the industry as a socially proactive and responsible company.

Environmental responsibility

Benjamin Moore's environmental policy states the company's commitment to "managing all phases of its business in a manner which minimizes any adverse effects of its products and operations on the environment." The company follows the guidelines set forth by Coatings Care®, the National Paint & Coatings Association's environmental, health and safety management program (see Coatings Care® section below). Practices include state-of-the-art protection systems in manufacturing facilities such as spill containment and drainage systems, loading and unloading pads, storm-water containment systems, tank-farm canopies and fire extinguishing systems for flammable materials. Benjamin Moore conducts annual spill response drills in partnership with local first responders and its emergency response plan is filed with local authorities. Beginning in 2003, the company began implementing STOP® (safety training and observation program). This program requires facility managers to systematically audit all areas of the facility, detect unsafe conditions or behaviors, supportively address issues with employees, and reinforce safe behaviors and conditions. The company has had very few environmental incidents. A Factiva® search for Benjamin

Moore (in the headline and lead paragraph for all dates) uncovered only two spills. In 1999, latex entered the city water system in Richmond, VA, due to a malfunctioning valve. The valve was quickly replaced and the water quality restored. In 1988, toxic solvents overflowed a drain pipe due to employee error in Toronto. Fire fighters and provincial environment ministry officials supervised the clean up and concluded that there was no environmental damage.

Benjamin Moore's hazardous and non-hazardous waste disposal decreased dramatically from 2002 to 2003. Air releases and offsite transfers of SARA 313 chemicals declined as a result of producing larger batches, decreasing use of solvents, and implementing control technology including special tank lids and vapor recovery systems. Waste reduction programs included an employee-conceived system for recycling water used to clean tanks (called "wash water"). As a result, the company re-uses close to 100% of water and solvents used in the process. Paper packaging, wooden pallets and tinplated steel paint cans are recycled. Energy conservation initiatives not yet implemented in every facility include reducing electricity with motion-sensor lighting fixtures that turn off when there is no activity in the area.

The company demonstrates its commitment to environmental stewardship through a proactive and innovative approach to product development. For example, the company removed lead from paint nearly a decade before the federal requirement, and removed mercury more than 20 years before the federal requirement. Benjamin Moore has developed environmentally friendly products such as Pristine® Eco-Spec®, a coating certified by GREENGUARD Environmental Institute and Green Seal for its low volume of volatile organic compounds (VOCs). Green Seal is a non-profit organization devoted to developing environmentally friendly specifications for a number of consumer products. Its specifications for paint include the absence of certain toxic compounds as well as limiting VOC content, and performance testing for washability, scrubability and hiding power. Only coatings that pass its stringent tests are approved for use. Various organizations such as the Department of Defense, the State of Pennsylvania's Department of Transportation and the Aberdeen Proving Ground (APG) in Maryland have adopted Green Seal coating specifications for various coating categories. The APG lists five Benjamin Moore exterior flat product lines with a VOC content less than 100 g/l. Benjamin Moore's product innovations also include Waterborne Satin Impervo®. This water-based enamel is an effective alternative to the company's popular solvent-based Satin Impervo® products.

Health and safety

Human dignity is the cornerstone of the company's values. The values statement further reads, "We are committed to ensuring a safe and healthy workplace." Benjamin Moore's health and safety policy states in part that "working safely is a condition of employment." Practices are further guided by the principle that "all injuries are preventable." The company's safety system includes comprehensive employee training, internal audits, regular local assessments, and tracking and measurement. Measurement includes reportable injuries as required by the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration, as well as incidents, near misses, and unsafe acts.

Company level safety objectives are tied to goal setting and performance rewards at the facility and individual levels. The company continually works to reduce employee exposure to powders and liquids by replacing manual handling procedures with hard piping and valving. To further protect employees, much of the manufacturing process is automated with equipment such as the can "depalletizer" that eliminates the need for manual loading of empty cans onto filling lines. Results of the company's safety system include ongoing replacement and addition of safety guards on equipment. In fact, Benjamin Moore employees conceived and submitted a safety guard design for the automated labeling and bailing machines, which has been adopted universally by the equipment manufacturer.

Continuous evaluation, assessment and improvement is the backbone of the safety plan. A dedicated team of environmental, health and safety experts manage safety from a corporate level. An experienced environmental, health and safety representative works in each facility. Also at each facility, there is a cross-functional employee safety team that meets monthly. Safety communication takes place through ongoing training, staff meetings, workplace signs, and posters. Standard operating procedures include formulating coatings with safety in mind, and exercising care in the selection of ingredients and raw materials.

The company has won numerous awards for outstanding safety over the years from the National Paint & Coatings Association—awarded on a facility by facility basis. The company's recordable injury incidence rate in 2002 dropped to 4.35 as compared to the paint and coatings industry average of 4.7 (based on occurrence among 100 full-time workers in one year). The rate increased to 6.24 in 2003 which has resulted in more aggressive safety evaluation and awareness efforts like STOP® as described above.

Charitable giving

Philanthropy is a tradition at Benjamin Moore & Co. Today, the company donates approximately $2M in funds to charitable organizations each year. The areas of focus are historic preservation, environmental conservation, pediatric well care, and color and design education. Charitable giving is focused both nationally and locally. As the national paint sponsor, Benjamin Moore provides both financial and in-kind support to Ronald McDonald Houses throughout North America. Funds are also directed to public health education programs to raise awareness and help protect children from lead poisoning. Recipients include CLEARCorps and “Lead Free is Best For Me” (see community outreach section below). The company’s commitment to environmental conservation its demonstrated through support of organizations like the Audubon Society and The Raptor Trust, a leader in the field of avian rehabilitation. Additionally, Benjamin Moore has donated funds and property to the Wildlife Habitat Council, dedicated to sustaining and reclaiming wildlife habitats on corporate, private, and public lands. Nearly 150 acres of Benjamin Moore land has been certified by the Wildlife Habitat Council as protected wildlife habitat. On a local level, each facility has a budget for charitable donations. Recipients vary by community and range from the fire and police departments, children’s sports teams and school projects, to shelters, city/county pollution reduction efforts, and historic restoration projects. The company has helped to restore many national historic landmarks including Gracie Mansion in New York, and The Mount, Edith Wharton’s Lennox, Massachusetts, home.

Community outreach

Benjamin Moore & Co. demonstrates its commitment to the community through educational programs such as “Lead Free Is Best For Me.” This multi-city outreach and awareness program was created in 2000 and continues to be supported by Benjamin Moore. The program facilitates collaboration between local public health professionals and educators to serve those living in neighborhoods with a high risk and/or incidence of childhood lead poisoning. Through this program, the company has developed collaborative relationships with government agencies including local departments of health, state departments for environmental protection, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Benjamin Moore also serves on the board of CLEARCorps, a national service organization committed to protecting children from lead poisoning. Through CLEARCorps' community-based approach, Benjamin Moore reaches families and property owners to help them eliminate lead hazards from their homes, in partnership with community organizations, universities, government agencies and other industry representatives.

In addition, Benjamin Moore invests in community outreach related to helping people make decisions about using paint and color in the home. Educational tools for the public include color cards, color chips, Color Samples® (paint sold in small amounts to enable testing of a color before committing to a larger order), and the Color Preview®, a software that allows consumers to "paint" their home virtually before deciding on colors, finishes and paint types. Benjamin Moore & Co. also produces publications like the annual *Color* magazine and the *Interior Style* and *Exterior Style* books. These feature examples of paint and color as employed by top architects and interior designers, as well as tips on application. The company also provides tips on proper handling, and disposal, of paint. This information is provided on every can, in the above-mentioned publications, brochures and pamphlets available at retail stores, and on its website. In partnership with the Product Stewardship Institute and also with Rutgers Univeristy, Benjamin Moore further supports research and educational outreach on post-consumer paint recycling.

The company's values highlight the company's commitment to care for the communities in which it operates. Facility managers make in-kind and cash donations to the charities of their choice. Many Benjamin Moore employees volunteer for local charities and civic organizations. Through its recently implemented "community responsibility day" open house events, the company invites neighbors and community leaders into the facility to meet personnel, see the manufacturing operation, and learn about the process of making, selling and using paint (see community responsibility day section below). The company further supports local communities through its commitment to independent retailers. As local small business owners, Benjamin Moore retailers are part of the fabric of the community—serving residents, contributing to the economy, and providing jobs. Typical Benjamin Moore paint and decorating retailers have been in business for more than 40 years. Benjamin Moore is dedicated to the independent store channel—its products cannot be purchased at "big box" retailers such as Wal-Mart, Lowe's or Home Depot.

Employee benefits, women's and minority advancement

The people of Benjamin Moore represent various genders, ethnicities, sexual preferences, nationalities, regions, socio-economic levels, and languages. In 1997, Benjamin Moore & Co. received a humanitarian award from the Anti-Defamation League's Paints, Chemicals and Wallcoverings Industries Division. The senior leadership group and facility operations management team are both approximately 13% women. The researcher is not aware of any specific programs designed to promote the advancement of women or minorities. This is an area where Benjamin Moore & Co. maintains accepted standards but is not exceptional.

According to the director of human resources, Benjamin Moore strives "to ensure that our employee-related programs and practices reflect the fundamental value of respect for the individual and maximize opportunities for employees to make a difference." The company's code of ethics and human resources policies, as stated in the employee handbook, provides for a non-discriminatory and harassment-free workplace, with special statements to clarify certain inappropriate behaviors, with a goal of preventing sexual harassment, substance abuse and violence in the workplace. The company offers an employee assistance program and a 24-hour confidential help line for reporting breaches of this code. The handbook further outlines the company's principles and guidelines for protecting workers. Among others, these include, equal employment, diversity, workers with disabilities, and an open-door policy.

Benjamin Moore's benefits package is standard and includes holidays, sick days, paid time off, plus health and retirement plans. One unique benefit is that the company provides lunch at no cost to all salaried employees—a tradition begun by the company's founder. Employees may also purchase paint at a discount. There are numerous individual examples where the company has demonstrated caring and generosity to employees, particularly those with health problems or special family circumstances. In a recent internal company-wide survey, 89% of respondents reported that Benjamin Moore is an excellent place to work. The average tenure for employees in manufacturing facilities is 11.8 years.

Disclosure

Benjamin Moore & Co. published its first sustainability report last year. This report does not follow the Global Reporting Initiative guidelines, but it represents an important step toward greater transparency. Before 2000, the company published an annual report, however financial reporting now is handled by parent company, Berkshire Hathaway. Benjamin Moore's financial information is reported as part of Berkshire's building products division, which is a subset of the manufacturing, service, and retail division. Building products includes Benjamin Moore & Co., ACME building brands, Johns Manville and MiTek. This division generated $4.3 billion in revenue in 2004. Berkshire Hathaway does not break out Benjamin Moore & Co.'s financial performance separately.

In addition to the recently implemented "community responsibility days" at facilities (see community responsibility day section below), the best example of Benjamin Moore's openness and transparency is its approach to media relations. The company strives to be a resource to journalists. It is estimated that the company receives more than 50 inquiries from reporters each week. Its policy is to respond within 24 hours to any media request. Approved Benjamin Moore spokespersons are regularly available for interviews or to provide information on various topics, including paint formulation, production, and application, as well as environmental issues (lead, volatile organic compounds, etc.). During both of the spills described in the environmental section above, company executives were available for comment and fully cooperated with the media and local authorities. In fact, journalists and other stakeholders in Richmond were invited to witness the replacement of the broken valve.

National Paint & Coatings Association and Coatings Care®

Chemical manufacturing companies like DuPont pioneered many of the environmental health and safety procedures and processes that have helped to set the standard for codes in various industries. Paint production is a subset of chemical manufacturing that over the past decade has begun to develop its own set of responsibility codes aligned with Responsible Care® and ISO 14000, the existing codes for the chemical industry.

Coatings Care® is the paint and coatings industry's health, safety and environmental program created by the industry, for the industry, by the National Paint & Coatings Association. It is a globally recognized program designed to assist industry companies in managing their health, safety, and environmental responsibilities. The program teaches companies how to effectively integrate these requirements while maintaining profitability. Participants are acknowledged by governmental and environmental agencies as conscientious, responsible, and among the top environmental performers in industry.

Coatings Care® is an example of industry self-regulation to help protect worker and community health, safety, and the environment. The program emphasizes sustainability, safe selection, handling, use and disposal of chemical components in paint products, as well as consideration for environmental protection in new product development. The program has five codes of management practices to direct companies on the health, safety and environmental aspects in five critical areas: transportation and distribution, product stewardship, manufacturing management, community responsibility, and security.

Benjamin Moore & Co. played an integral role in the development of Coatings Care® codes on the health, safety and environmental aspects of product manufacturing and distribution listed in National Paint & Coatings Association's Transportation and Distribution Guide, Product Stewardship Guide, Manufacturing Management (Volumes 1-3) Guide. When the association completed its fourth code in 2003, the Community Responsibility Guide, Benjamin Moore's director of corporate communications partnered with the manager of environmental health & safety to begin planning implementation. This code focuses on emergency response and alert procedures, employee education and training, and community being a good community liaison.

Benjamin Moore's "Community Responsibility Days"

"Community responsibility days" were developed as part of the implementation of the Coatings Care® community responsibility guide. As a way of increasing the company's efforts at transparency and proactive communication with the community, the director of corporate communications recommended, and it was decided, that Benjamin Moore would proactively invite the community into its manufacturing facilities so that local residents, neighboring businesses, and community leaders could learn about the company's operations and meet company personnel. In consultation with senior leaders including the general counsel and vice president of supply chain, it was further decided that the open house would be by invitation only and take place on Fridays. Managing the guest list helped to ease management's concerns about security and liability (no person under 18 would be admitted). Holding events on Fridays (a slow day for manufacturing) would ensure availability of operations personnel and minimize business disruption. The objectives of the community responsibility days were: (1) to fulfill the requirements of the Coatings Care® community responsibility code, (2) inform the public about the company's operating procedures, policies and safety standards, and (3) strengthen the company's relationships with community members.

In developing the community responsibility day concept, the director of corporate communications decided to structure the community event as an "information exchange." The information exchange was created and utilized by the Center for Risk Communication, a research and consulting organization, to help chemical companies implement Responsible Care® guidelines. Responsible Care® is the global performance initiative for the chemical industry, introduced to the United States in 1988. Research on risk communications defines a risk as "a real or perceived threat to that which we value" (Covello, 2003, slide 2). Vincent Covello, director of the Center for Risk Communication, defines risk communication as, "a science-based approach for communicating effectively in high-concern, high stress, emotionally charged, or controversial situations" (Covello, 2003, slide 3). While the community responsibility day event itself represented a low-concern situation, personal health, safety, and the environment, are typically sources of high concern for most people. Therefore the principles of risk communication and the information exchange format were used as a way to enhance the event experience for the public, and promote mutual understanding between the company and the community.

In a typical public forum, the public sits auditorium-style facing the presenters; presentations are given, and attendees ask questions by stepping up to a microphone. In a traditional open house, visitors stop by at their leisure, look around, socialize and depart. The information exchange combines the educational aspect of a forum with the informality and interactivity of an open house. At the information exchange, material on selected subjects or issues was presented at six poster stations arranged in a semi-circle. A person knowledgeable about each subject (a Benjamin Moore employee from that facility) stood beside each station to talk with attendees and answer any questions. A table positioned next to the station held copies of the full content of information presented on the posters, plus any other relevant handouts, pamphlets, or demonstration materials. For example, Benjamin Moore distributed brochures provided by the National Paint and Coatings Association and the Environmental Protection Agency on the proper disposal of unused paint and reducing lead hazards in the home. Sample raw ingredients and finished paint products were also on display. Participants were free to come and go at their convenience, and self-select the poster stations that interested them most, rather than listening to a series of presentations that may or may not have been relevant. In addition, Benjamin Moore & Co. served food and refreshments, catered locally, and offered tours of the facility so guests could see first-hand the paint manufacturing process.

Each poster station featured three panels of information formatted so that a person standing back 20 feet could see the "headline" or key message on that topic in large type. At 10 feet, a person could see more detailed information accompanied by graphs or pictures. If a guest stepped closer, he or she could discuss the material with the knowledgeable employee on that subject area. This format promotes relationship building between community members and company personnel as they interact, share information, and listen to each other. Benjamin Moore developed six poster stations. The topics included (1) environment, (2) health and safety, (3) retail, (4) in the public interest (featuring local community involvement and donations), and (5) what's in a can of paint. The sixth poster station focused on first responders. These were developed in partnership with local fire and police departments who were invited to participate.

The text for each poster station was developed through the process of "message mapping." A message map is a means of organizing and delivering detailed or complex information "within a clear, concise, transparent, and accessible framework" (Covello, 2002, p. 1). The process involves bringing communicators, subject matter experts and members of management together to identify stakeholders, anticipate concerns and questions, and prioritize and organize information into a hierarchical structure aligned with stakeholder needs. Benjamin Moore's message mapping sessions were facilitated by consultants from the Center for Risk Communication and Hill & Knowlton. Participants included the director of corporate communications, and members of the environmental, health, and safety department. Other department representatives who participated and/or were consulted as needed included operations, color technology, marketing, retail, and human resources. All text was reviewed and approved by the legal department.

Benjamin Moore & Co. provided extensive communications training to all personnel involved in the community responsibility day events. An initial two-day training session was conducted in March 2004 for the environmental, health, and safety department, and facility managers. The training session included an overview of risk communication principles and techniques for delivering information, handling questions, and initiating dialogue. A significant portion of the session was devoted to the explanation of Coatings Care® and the community responsibility day initiative. Also, prior to each community responsibility day event, a half-day training was conducted at each facility for employees who would be participating, as poster station representatives and tour guides, on community responsibility day.

In addition to creating the poster stations and conducting training, preparations included developing a guest list, producing and mailing invitations, and conducting outreach to encourage attendance. The invitees included the following: employee families; nearby residents and neighboring businesses; local, state and federal government officials (such as the mayor, city council, senators, and representatives); community leaders (such as the chamber of commerce, local civic organizations and clubs, and school principals); regulators (such as the departments of environmental conservation, public health, and transportation, as well as OSHA); first responders; vendors and suppliers; local Benjamin Moore retailers; customers (contractors, architects, and designers); and local media outlets.

To date, Benjamin Moore has hosted community responsibility days at five out of seven manufacturing facilities. Approximately 100 guests attended each event, including the mayor of each city, state senators, local assemblymen, city council and chamber of commerce members, vendors and suppliers, independent paint and decorating retailers, and employee family members. The response from attendees was positive. Several guests commented that the poster stations were an effective way to share information and learn more about Benjamin Moore. In some cases, information was further transmitted through local newspapers reporting on the event. Facility managers reported that the event enhanced existing relationships with neighbors and community members, and helped them establish new relationships with key stakeholders. Employees also exhibited an increased sense of pride. The success of the event was measured by the number of attendees and anecdotal examples of improved relationships and positive feedback. No formal assessment of the program has been conducted to date.

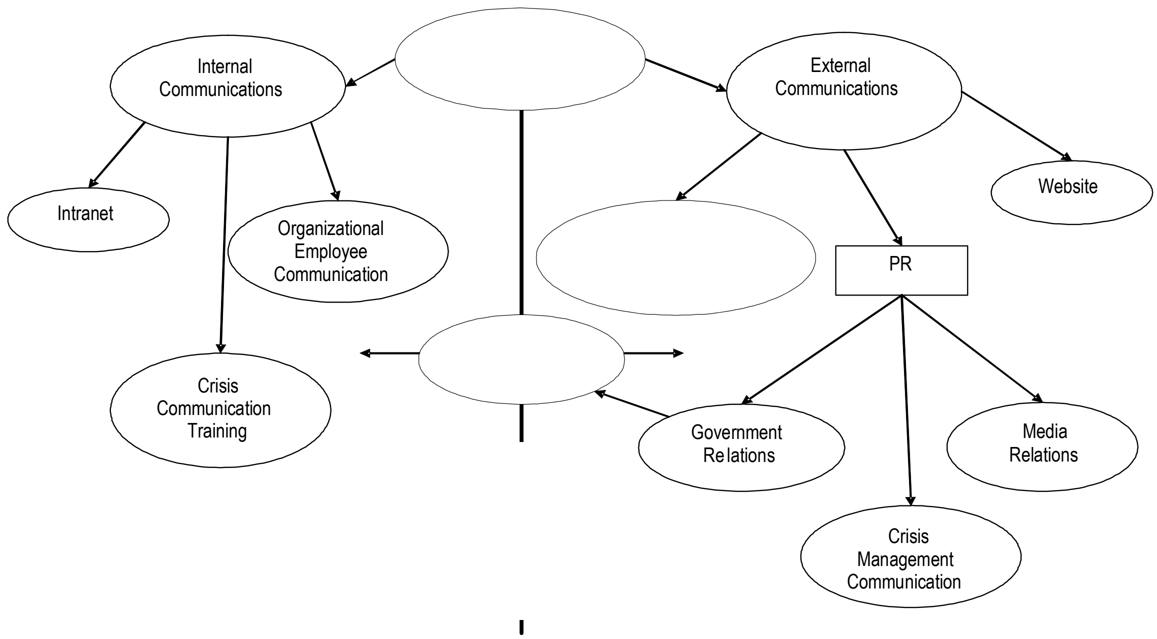
<u>Benjamin Moore's Director of Corporate Communications</u>

The director of corporate communications was the subject of this study (referred to as "Haley" through the remainder of this document). In this position, Haley was responsible for all internal and external communications for the company (excluding advertising). Included are public, government and media relations, issue and crisis management, and web site content oversight. Figure 1 shows the various aspects of public relations managed in this role, as drawn by Haley. (Public relations, by Haley's definition, means traditional public affairs and media relations, while many other aspects of public relations she refers to as corporate communications.). The position reports to the chief operating officer. Haley has served in this role for more than 10 years. Haley's background includes many years experience as a vice president in a mid-size, independent public relations firm, prior to which, she spent time as public relations manager in a Fortune 100 company. Haley received a BA from Hunter College, New York, New York, and an MBA from Stern School of Business at New York University.

The next chapter presents the results of the participant observation.

Figure 1:

Director of corporate communications responsibilities



CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter outlines the findings according to the three categories delineated in the research protocol—roles, models, and social responsiveness. It also includes a summary of additional themes that emerged during the course of the study. These findings are based on the results of participant observation over three days, as well as interviews with the subject, the director of corporate communications.

Roles

1. Does the subject provide senior counsel to top decision makers?

When the community responsibility code from Coatings Care® was introduced, company executives turned to Haley for counsel on implementation. Community relations traditionally had been a communications area of responsibility. She conceived and recommended the community responsibility day approach. She negotiated with senior leaders such as the chief executive officer, vice president of supply chain, and general counsel to gain consensus, approval and support for the initiative and for her recommended approach. Haley maintained the role of liaison with senior management throughout the process. For example, she provided updates on planning, results, and timing, and invited them to attend.

Haley treated the members of the operations department and environmental, health and safety department as equal partners, offering her counsel, and asking for their counsel on specific details, such as which employees would be involved, where to place the poster stations, and what route to use during the tour. However, in all aspects of planning, preparation, and implementation, Haley took the lead and others generally deferred to her opinions. For example, on the first visit to Mesquite, she noticed while walking through the facility that the paint on an outdoor metal structure called a pipe bridge had begun cracking and peeling. She deemed this to be an eyesore to the community and suggested that it be repainted. When the facility manager took issue with the cost for repair, Haley took ownership and used her relationships with other departments to fund the project. A solution was reached when members of the marketing team decided to photograph the repainting using Benjamin Moore products and use the before and after shots in promotional materials. On the same trip, Haley noticed a sign in front of the facility displayed an old version of the logo—a misrepresentation of the Benjamin Moore brand. Similarly, she took ownership for approaching the vice president of supply chain about allocating funds to replace the sign. However, in this case, the cost was prohibitive.

Haley reported in interviews that she spends 50% to 60% of her time "setting strategy and doing business consulting for the company." She serves as in-house counsel to her colleagues within the organization, to help them plan and set communications strategy for various initiatives. In the past, she developed communication plans for her colleagues. Now, she helps them get started, then reviews their plans, provides input, meets with them, offers ideas, and shares her expertise, insight and knowledge of the people (or publics) concerned.

Haley believes there are two kinds of counsel—solicited and unsolicited. For example, she reports that people from all over the organization solicit her advice when planning a program that explicitly involves communication. These may include specific outreach programs to retailers, or consumer marketing campaigns. Sometimes when counsel is solicited, she remains involved in creating the final solution and through implementation. Other times, she is simply part of the initial dialogue to help the project team explore options. Unsolicited counsel comes into play when the project team overlooks or undervalues the role of communication, or determines that communication is not important to the success of the project. In this situation, if Haley believes the decision or initiative will in some way affect the brand, she reaches out to the team (or team member) in a non-confrontational manner, to provide concepts or ideas, and facilitate a dialogue around communications issues related to the project. In some cases, she will offer her opinion to the chief executive officer directly. She explained this by saying, "I tell management what I believe the public needs or wants from Benjamin Moore." Haley maintains that the respect and trust of her colleagues developed over the years makes it possible for her to offer counsel in this way.

2. <u>Does the subject make communication policy decisions?</u>

The areas where Haley appears to have complete autonomy include charitable giving, media relations, crisis communications planning and preparedness, and community relations. She provided final approval on every aspect of the community responsibility days including poster station text, graphics, and design, the guest list, invitation design, food and refreshments served, the overall set up for the event (traffic flow, entrances, and exits), placement of poster stations and food tent, tour route and script, the employees chosen to stand at each poster station, and areas of the facility that needed to be spruced up before the event. She helped the facility manager resolve issues such as how to keep the filling line running while so many employees were occupied at poster stations; how to ensure that finished product would be removed from the loading area in time for the event; and how best to inform guests about the nearby distribution center. Haley made the decision to increase donations to the local fire department. She also made a special trip to Mesquite to view an historic house site and agreed for the company to sponsor the restoration of one of the rooms in the house.

Haley maintains that while she makes decisions related to corporate communications, the chief operating officer and chief executive officer have the power to "veto" her decisions. When it comes to areas of the business not directly related to communications, Haley provides recommendations and counsel but does not have final approval. These include general business strategy, marketing strategy, advertising, product development, government affairs, retailer relations, and employee relations. Her involvement increases when decisions will affect the company's brand or reputation.

3. <u>Is the subject responsible for public relations programs?</u>

Ultimately, the responsibility for the community responsibility day was shared among several departments. The event served many purposes and was not purely a public relations exercise. Even though the departments of communications, operations, and environmental, health and safety shared responsibility, it was clear that everyone perceived Haley to be in charge. On the day of the event, anyone who had a question related to preparation and implementation directed it to her—particularly questions that required a judgment call, such as how best to manage certain guests or fulfill a special request. Logistical questions were also directed to the environmental, health, and safety project manager working with her. The vice president of supply chain asked Haley questions related to the success of the event—how many people attended and if particular guests had arrived. They also discussed ideas for how to make sure all participants felt involved.

Throughout the planning process, employees appeared to defer to Haley's judgment for three reasons:

> (1) out of respect for her knowledge and expertise—as evidenced by her ability to answer questions or make recommendations using real life examples from her own experience or observation;
>
> (2) out of respect for her position as director of corporate communications and a member of the senior leadership group—as evidenced by employee attitudes (polite, courteous, and respectful); and
>
> (3) because of her personality—Haley is very passionate and asserts her opinion strongly on topics she considers important. People, men especially, tended to "back off" when they sensed that she was firm in her position.

Haley reported in interviews that taking responsibility for the success or failure of the organization's communication or public relations program was one of her top three responsibilities (see Table 4). In preparing for the community responsibility days, she exhibited all the characteristics of someone who felt responsible, as did the manager of the facility. Members of the environmental, health, and safety department appeared less concerned with the details. Haley personally invested a great deal of time, energy, and resources to the project. She devoted more than six days of her time to personally visit the facility and meet with the employees there. She allocated funds from her communications budget to cover the costs of the training, community outreach, and gift bags (the remaining costs were absorbed by the facility and the environmental, health, and safety department). In addition, she utilized her relationships with consultants and vendors who provided services needed during implementation. This level of investment may be related to Haley's belief that her job "is to protect the brand" and "look out for the company's best interests." Opening the facility to the public in this way was an opportunity to make an impression on the attendees—it could result in a positive, negative, or neutral perception. Haley wanted to ensure that the event reinforced a positive image of the brand and enhanced the company's reputation.

4. Is the subject accountable for public relations program success/failure?

Overall, accountability was difficult to judge because there was no formal mechanism for measuring the program's success or failure. Benjamin Moore personnel regarded it a success. It probably would have been easier to determine who was accountable if there had been a problem, by virtue of seeing where blame was placed. Employees involved verbally credited Haley for the success of the program by thanking her for her involvement and guidance. The facility manager took care to thank everyone who had contributed. Almost all company personnel involved were willing to offer suggestions for improvement or "up-grades" to the program. All the employees demonstrated great care and concern for how the public views Benjamin Moore—they wanted to make a positive impression. And they viewed Haley as the person who would help them do that. Haley reported in interviews that she has a proven track record at the company and a reputation for getting things done.

As stated above, the vice president of supply chain was interested in the success of the event as measured by how many people attended and if particular community leaders attended. When asked if the community responsibility days were worth doing, he referred to an earlier event at another facility to make a point about the benefits. Previously, that facility received complaints from nearby residents about the noise from the delivery trucks that sometimes arrive late at night or early in the morning for loading. After the event, to which many of these neighbors attended, there were no further complaints. He seemed to believe that company and the neighbors had developed a mutual understanding and a greater sense of trust. He offered his suggestions and opinions directly to Haley. It was unclear whether this was because he believed her to be accountable, or, because he knew she was the person who could "get things done."

5. <u>Is the subject expert at solving public relations problems?</u>

Haley often used story-telling to demonstrate her expertise. At the employee training, in her opening remarks, she told the story of the spill at Colonial Heights, Virginia, to explain the benefits of conducting annual crisis communications preparedness and training, a process she implemented upon joining the company. In 1998, a valve failed and latex was released into the city water system near Richmond. (NB: This facility is now closed.) She described how quickly the situation unfolded and how well the company responded due to being prepared. Within an hour someone from the city water works was at the door because of numerous calls from local businesses asking why the water coming out of the tap was white. Haley was called. She tapped a local sales employee as spokesperson on the ground until an official company spokesperson arrived from headquarters while the facility manager focused on fixing the valve. Haley stayed at headquarters and served as command central along with the director of operations. Richmond television stations featured the incident on all the evening news programs for two days. Immediate action steps included shutting down the system and replacing the valve. Communication action steps included working with the director of public health to get the word out that latex was a benign substance, unless consumed in very large quantities. Haley invited the media to witness and video the new valve being installed. She also took out a full page advertisement in the local newspaper to apologize to the community for the inconvenience and thank them for their patience. This is a good example of crisis or issues management, one of Haley's responsibilities.

Another example of expertise Haley described in interviews was the communication plan template. She developed this template—a series of strategic questions—to help lead colleagues through the communications planning process. Questions include, what is the situation or problem to be solved, what are your communications goals/objectives, what are your messages (she advocates three key messages for clarity based on the principles of risk communication), who are the audiences you want to reach, what types of "media" (channels, vehicles) should be used to reach them, and how will you measure success. The template is just one of the ways that Haley facilitates strategic communications planning and encourages effective communication practices within the organization.

As mentioned in the counseling section, Haley's general communications expertise was evidenced by her role in managing the event planning process, materials development, and communications training for employees.

6. Does the subject keep others informed of media coverage?

During the observation period, the local newspaper printed two articles on Benjamin Moore—one before and one after the event. The first reported on the donation to help restore a local historic house. The second reported on the event itself. In both cases the facility manager spotted the stories first and sent them to Haley. She then disseminated them to members of senior management with a note to provide context. On an ongoing basis, a member of the communications team sends out daily electronic reports received from the clipping service. Articles of significance are usually forwarded to leaders directly by Haley with a note to explain their significance.

7. Does the subject create opportunities for management to hear publics?

In interviews, Haley rated herself as making an average contribution in this area. More often, instead of creating opportunities for management to hear publics directly, Haley serves as the liaison between the public and management. "I tell management what the public needs/wants from Benjamin Moore," she explained.

However, by creating the community responsibility day event, she also provided a significant opportunity for management to hear publics. Members of management present at the event included the vice president of supply chain, general counsel, director of operations, director of color technology, and director of environmental, health, and safety, as well as the managers of the Mesquite manufacturing and distribution facilities. All of these representatives could be seen throughout the day talking with various community members including the mayor of Mesquite, an assistant city manager, a representative from the state senator's office, members of the city council, employees' spouses and parents, as well as representatives from the school district, the local Head Start, social services, and a reporter from *The Mesquite Daily News*. Both facility managers remarked that they established important contacts with people they did not know. Company executives shared information about the company's operations, lead awareness efforts, and other projects. But they also listened to the guests talk about their projects and priorities. Haley was active throughout the day greeting guests and introducing them to company executives.

8. <u>Does the subject represent organization at events and meetings?</u>

In addition to introducing executives to community members, Haley interacted extensively with all the guests during the community responsibility day. She played the host both for day and for the employee training held prior to the event. She paid particular attention to the representatives from the local fire and police departments.

In interviews, Haley reported making an above average contribution to activities such as representing the organization at events and meetings. She indicated that she spends a great deal of time building relationships with people outside the organization, both formally and informally. Her formal connections include serving on the board of directors for CLEARCorps, the Alpha Workshops (a design/arts training organization that supports artisans afflicted with AIDS), and Publicolor (a youth training and counseling organization that brings color and skills to NYC public high school students). She is a member of the advisory council for the Audubon Society's Constitution Marsh Sanctuary and a chair holder for the Color Marketing Group, the global color forecast organization. Haley also represented Benjamin Moore & Co. at a recent summit of public health educators as part of the "Lead Free is Best for Me" program. Informally, she responds to the numerous calls and requests that come to her office from the media and other stakeholders, which she estimates is around 50 inquiries per week. Most media opportunities go to other approved company spokespersons. She herself gives about two media interviews a week.

Haley was observed contributing to all the areas of manager role enactment. The areas where she seemed to contribute most significantly included providing strategic counsel, making policy decisions, using expertise to solve communications problems, providing opportunities for management to hear publics, and representing the organization at events/meetings. There was less evidence during the observation to support being responsible and held accountable for public relations programs, and keeping others informed of media coverage. However Haley's contribution to these role activities were confirmed in interviews. The next section describes findings related to the next set of questions on models of public relations practice.

Table 4:

Subject assessment of contribution to specific role enactment activities

Significant contribution	• I take responsibility for the success or failure of my organization's communication or public relations program
	• I am senior counsel to top decision makers when communication or public relations issues are involved
	• I use my journalistic skills to figure out what the media will consider newsworthy about our organization
Above average contribution	• I represent the organization at events and meetings
	• I maintain media contacts for my organization
	• I make communication policy decisions
	• I keep others in the organization informed of what the media report about organization and important issues
	• I edit or rewrite for grammar and spelling the materials written by others in the organization
	• Because of my experience and training, others consider me the organization's expert in solving communication or public relations problems
Average contribution	• I create opportunities for management to hear the views of various internal and external publics
	• I observe that others in the organization hold me accountable for the success or failure of communication or public relations programs
Below average contribution	• I produce brochures, pamphlets, and other publications
	• I am the person who writes communication materials
	• I do photography and graphics for communication or public relations materials
	• I am responsible for placing news releases
No contribution	• Although I don't make policy decisions, I provide decision makers with suggestions, recommendations, and plans

Models

9. Does the subject exhibit values that reflect a moral obligation to balance the interests of an organization with the interests of publics with which it interacts in society?

Haley refers with great pride to the company values statement, which reads, in part, "we value human dignity above all else." In her opening remarks at the employee training she said, "This company has a long history of doing the right thing, all the time, unequivocally." She also used the outcome of the Colonial Heights latex spill to underscore that all the facilities have great relations with the communities in which they are located. She maintained that by hosting the community responsibility day, Benjamin Moore was acknowledging the public's right to know what was going on inside the walls of the facility, and allowing them decide for themselves whether the plant posed any threat to themselves, their community, or the environment. What Haley wanted to accomplish in educating their neighbors was a mutual understanding about the benefits and risks associated with the manufacturing process. Most of all, she wanted the community to know that human health and safety is the company's number one priority.

Haley demonstrated her strong desire to meet the needs of publics by taking action over the areas where she had the most control. For example, she insisted the fire and police departments be invited to participate in the event. It was devised as a win-win solution: the departments would benefit from the opportunity to promote their activities to the public, while Benjamin Moore would benefit from having the community see the partnership that existed between the facility and first responders. To make sure the departments got something out of it; Haley approved an additional financial contribution to each service. In addition, the facility manager mentioned that a local historic preservation organization recently called asking for support for a new restoration project. Haley made a special trip to visit the site and agreed to sponsor the restoration. As a result, the organization sponsoring the restoration was able to fund another part of the project. Representatives attended the event and expressed their appreciation to Benjamin Moore. All of this attention to meeting the needs of stakeholders helped enhance Benjamin Moore's image in the eyes of the Mesquite community. In interviews Haley stressed, "You have to care enough about the brand/corporate reputation to take the time and understand that responding to people is what's important."

10. Does the subject value negotiation and compromise, and seek ways to develop 'win-win' solutions for conflicts between the corporation and its publics?

The researcher did not witness any active conflicts between the organization and its publics during the observation period. Examples of past conflicts that Haley shared include the spill in Colonial Heights and the public's general concerns about lead hazards and volatile organic compounds. Haley reported in interviews that she actively supports internal initiatives aimed at reformulating products to reduce the use of solvents and other potentially harmful chemicals. The company appears to be committed to minimizing the use of such chemicals in the manufacturing process in order to drastically reduce (and possibly eliminate) any potential risks of adverse effects on employees, neighbors and the environment. When inquiries are made on these topics, Haley provides information on what the company is doing to support the needs of people and protect the environment. This information is also posted on the website. Haley oversees the company's environmental conservation support initiatives and the lead awareness programs. The fact that Haley completed a two-day course at the MIT-Harvard public disputes program taught by Lawrence E. Susskind and based on his 1996 book *Dealing with an angry public: The mutual gains approach to resolving disputes*, further demonstrates the value she places on negotiation and compromise.

Her advice on resolving conflicts includes "tell the truth" and "don't be defensive." Her philosophy is that "Most of the time people just want you to listen to what they have to say. And in the end, if you can't give them exactly what they want, it's okay." To illustrate this point, she told the story of a paint retailer from the mid-west who left a voicemail that she received while on vacation. The caller was frustrated and claimed to have been passed around several times. He requested a tour of a manufacturing plant on an upcoming visit to New York, for the purpose of convincing him to carry Benjamin Moore paints instead of a competitor. Haley, who was on vacation, called him back that day saying, "I'm sorry that no one got back to you. I'd like to help you." She asked questions to gain understanding and learned that he had been assigned a sales representative. She suggested a tour of the research and development facility in Flanders, NJ. She offered to make some additional phone calls to set things up, set a timeframe for response, and promised that someone would call back to make arrangements. This resolved the situation and the retailer was satisfied—an example of the type of relationship building and conflict resolution activities that take place on a daily basis.

11. <u>Does the subject exhibit strong skills in mediation and interpersonal communication?</u>

Each time Haley arrived at the Mesquite facility, she was greeted warmly by the employees—many seemed to know her well. She was frequently observed joking and laughing with colleagues and senior managers. People seemed to appreciate her warm, informal manner, and humor.

Haley led a segment of the training focused on interpersonal communications skills. This included role-play exercises to increase employee confidence in serving as company spokesperson. Haley introduced the theme “Embrace – Engage – Enlighten” as a guide. “Embrace” referred to the way employees would welcome neighbors to the facility and greet them warmly, as if they were entertaining someone in their own home. “Engage” referred to how employees were encouraged to initiate conversations with guests by talking about their role at the facility, what they do on a day to day basis, and how it fits into the overall production process. “Enlighten” referred to the technique of continuing the conversation by asking “did you know” and sharing interesting facts about the company. Employees were equipped with a variety of sample facts to share with guests.

The majority of Haley’s time during the event was spent facilitating conversations between guests and employees. Haley met nearly every guest personally, greeting them warmly and thanking them for coming. She asked questions to determine their interests, explained what there was to see and do, and introduced them to another employee who would be able to share information relevant to their needs. She seemed particularly interested in making sure that the police and fire department representatives were happy and went out of her way to make sure they felt involved. This included driving traffic to the first responder poster station, making introductions, engaging them in conversation, encouraging them to take breaks to enjoy lunch and get a tour, and making sure that each one received a gift bag to take home to their families.

12. <u>Does the subject use a research-based approach to communications planning?</u>

The concept of the information exchange that was applied for Benjamin Moore's community responsibility days was based on extensive research conducted by the Center for Risk Communication. However, there was no formal research conducted before or after the community responsibility day event (such as a survey of the community). The only method for gauging the public's perceptions was anecdotal conversations with attendees.

In interviews, Haley rated her contribution to formal, routine and specific research activities as average. Her contribution to informal information gathering was rated as significant. Methods included using contacts with knowledgeable people outside the organization and applying her judgment based on experience. Haley emphasized the importance of knowledge about public perceptions gained directly through regular interpersonal communication with various stakeholders, especially journalists. She referred to herself as a "human temperature gauge" helping the organization to distinguish between hard and soft news. Throughout the study, Haley exhibited a keen knowledge of current events and social issues. She indicated that some formal research and competitive intelligence was provided by the marketing department, as well as feedback gained through the customer call center.

13. <u>Does the subject use words like listening, responding, collaborating, sharing intelligence, openness, dialogue, to describe her approach to communicating with publics</u>?

In interviews, Haley frequently talked about the importance of listening, being responsive, and facilitating dialogue, both internally and externally. "Dialogue" is a word she used often to describe interactions both externally and internally. She often used the word "respect" as in treating people with respect and described the company's relationship with the media as one of "mutual respect." Respect from senior management was also discussed as something she had worked to earn. Similarly, "trust" was something she had worked hard to establish with people both inside and outside the organization. "Facilitate" was used most often to describe interactions with people inside the organization.

The most important words emphasized were "responsiveness" and "listening." She said, "Most of the time people just want you to listen to what they have to say. It takes patience. You have to be willing to really listen—to care enough about the brand/corporate reputation to take the time and understand that it's important (to listen to people)." Haley expressed her strong belief that every call or request should be answered saying, "I always try to call people back the same day." The story of the disgruntled retailer mentioned above is a good example of this. It illustrates Haley's approach to communicating with publics, which is "all about relationships." Her belief is that every person's opinion matters, every person deserves a response, and that listening and making an effort to address a person's needs helps build strong relationships. These principles were reinforced during the employee training prior to the event. In this session, Haley encouraged employees to initiate a "dialogue" with guests. Her suggestions included sharing information about their job and sharing interesting facts about the company.

As expected, Haley exhibited much of the knowledge needed to practice the two-way symmetric model of public relations and mixed motives. Her actions strongly supported her passion for meeting the needs of people, and putting the needs of people before the needs of the company. This was also supported in words like "relationships," "responsiveness," and "listening." Her knowledge and expertise in applying conflict resolution, negotiation, mediation, and interpersonal skills was also evidenced strongly, but more so in interactions with internal publics rather than external. The next section reviews the findings related to Wood's model of corporate social responsiveness.

Social Responsiveness

14. Does the subject engage in activities that support the organization's ability to conduct environmental scanning, stakeholder management, or issues management?

While it was clear that Haley sees herself as the steward of the brand and a watchdog, she did not appear to engage in formal environmental scanning. Her knowledge of public perceptions and issues was derived from personal relationships with stakeholders and the media, as well as her own media consumption. Throughout the study, Haley exhibited a keen knowledge of current events and social issues.

Stakeholder management was an area where Haley played a major role. The responsibility for managing relationships with key stakeholders appears to be divided throughout the company. For some, Haley plays a lead role in managing the relationship. For others, she either shares the responsibility or plays a supporting role. Table 5 shows some of the stakeholder relationships Haley is involvement in managing and indicates whether she plays a leading, shared, or supporting role. For the most part, it appears that Haley's knowledge and expertise are utilized by several departments when it comes to stakeholder management.

When it comes to managing issues, Haley definitely plays a leading role and takes that role very seriously. "My job is to protect the brand," she explained. She sponsors annual crisis communications training for operations personnel, manages public affairs and government relations related to environmental and social issues, and spearheads outreach to communities and community-based organizations. Haley is clearly the “go-to” person at the company for any issues—especially those that involve, or may involve, the media.

The following summarizes the findings related to four additional themes that emerged strongly during the study.

Additional Themes

Internal negotiation, conflict resolution, and mediation

Haley’s mediation and negotiation skills were most evident when dealing with internal publics rather than external. She used a variety of strategies to facilitate the process and to ensure that preparations were carried out according to her desires which resulted in both win-win solutions and compromises. In all of her interactions, assertiveness, persistence, and humor proved to be valuable techniques.

In one example, she and the facility manager reached a compromise. On the site visit, Haley pointed out and requested improvements to the grounds and facility that would enhance the visit for guests, such as landscaping around the employee’s entrance. When she arrived for the event and saw it had not been done, she gently chided the facility manager, and soon convinced him to drive her to a nursery where she chose plants to adorn the entrance. Haley allocated money from her budget to cover the costs.

Table 5:

Communications role in managing stakeholder relationships

Stakeholder Group	**Relationship Management Role**	**Others Responsible**
Regulators	Shared	Operations, product development, environmental, health, and safety
First Responders	Supporting	Facility managers, environmental, health, and safety
Retailers	Supporting	Retail services, sales, distribution, marketing
Employees	Shared	Senior management, human resources, facility managers
Media	Leading	Designated spokespersons in marketing, product development, etc.
Community-based organizations	Leading	Facility managers
Designers and Architects	Shared	Sales, marketing

The pipe bridge situation resulted in a win-win. As mentioned above, while standing out near the loading area, she saw a metal structure connecting the manufacturing and raw material storage facilities (a pipe bridge) in need of a new coat of paint. She pointed out that this could be seen from the road and a nearby housing development, and requested that it be repainted. When the manager balked at the expense, she suggested that they partner with the marketing group specializing in industrial maintenance coatings. Her idea was to use the repainting as a photo opportunity to showcase one of the company's commercial coatings. She promised to work with the manager to see this through, and it was successful.

Haley also created a win-win solution for the distribution facility manager and employees. The Mesquite facility used to house both manufacturing and distribution operations but the distribution operation recently moved to a new building a few miles away. The distribution manager was very proud of this building but it would be difficult to arrange for the community responsibility day guests to see both facilities. The manufacturing facility was chosen as the main site so that guests could see the paint production process (as opposed to loading palettes of product into trucks which is what takes place at the distribution center). Haley was very concerned about finding a way to ensure the involvement of the distribution center employees. She asked that they be allowed to rotate from their jobs for an hour to come to the event. She also arranged for a special poster to showcase the new distribution facility. Haley also made a special trip to tour the distribution facility and meet employees there.

Overall, a wide variety of internal stakeholders came together during the community responsibility day including personnel from the following:

- Departments, environmental, health, and safety, sales, marketing, operations, and product development,
- Locations, Mesquite, Montvale, Flanders, and Pell City, and
- Levels, senior leadership, facility managers, lower level managers, and hourly employees.

The community responsibility day made it possible for employees to have an opportunity to work together and experience something positive. Although others shared responsibility, it was ultimately Haley who orchestrated the program, facilitated the process, and served as the hub that held the spokes of the wheel together. This is where Haley's mediation skills proved to be essential.

<u>Care and concern for internal publics</u>

From the beginning, Haley was intent on making the experience a positive one for local facility personnel. To ensure the facility manager had ample support in preparing for the event, she arranged a visit to Mesquite and meet with him three months before. Also included were the project manager from environmental, health, and safety, the manager of the nearby distribution facility, and the local human resources manager. Local marketing and sales personnel were also involved. Haley wanted all of these people to be involved in the planning because ultimately they all had a "stake" in the event. She facilitated the meeting.

Haley made a special trip later that day to take a tour of the new distribution facility and meet the employees there. She spent a lot of time with the two facility managers and local personnel. She greeted everyone warmly, answered questions, and listened to their concerns and suggestions, to help ease any anxieties they might have about hosting the event.

To further ensure that employees felt comfortable with their role in the event, Haley arranged for a half-day communications training/orientation for all those participating. Many were visibly nervous about being involved and some had worked the night shift. Haley broke the ice by introducing herself and then asking employees to go around the room give their name, work responsibilities, and number of years with Benjamin Moore. She praised the group for their loyalty and contributions, noting that there were hundreds of years of experience in the room. The participants were visibly encouraged by this recognition.

At the community responsibility day event, Haley spent time at each information station talking to employees—especially when there was a lull in the flow of visitors. She said she wanted them to be involved and feel appreciated. The way Haley talked to employees showed that she cared about them. She was personable, and very respectful of each person. She repeatedly emphasized her appreciation for the contribution they made to the community responsibility event, and the contribution they make every day as employees.

<u>The importance of media</u>

While media relations was not a focus during the community responsibility day, Haley emphasized the importance of media frequently in interviews. It was clear that she takes her media responsibilities very seriously. She reported that using journalistic skills was one of the top three significant activities in her role as director of corporate communications. She expressed great respect for the role of the fourth estate in society. “My first responsibility is to the media,” she explained, “because they have the greatest reach and they often ultimately shape what the public thinks.” She expressed great pride in the relationships she has developed with journalists throughout her 15-year career. Longevity and consistency, she believes, are two secrets of her success: “Editors are some of my closest friends. You stay in touch with people as they move through their careers.” Haley described her approach by saying,

> I never pitch—I’m not selling anything. It’s about relationships. I treat them like human beings. A journalist is just a person trying to do their job. It’s about mutual respect. I know my approach works because they keep coming back. We get 50 press calls a week.

She indicated that maintaining these relationships is critical to her ability to represent the views of key publics to management. As discussed above, communications conducts very little formal research on public attitudes and perceptions—“research” consists of direct conversations with stakeholders. Talking to the media represents a critical link to a variety of publics.

Different roles/approach depending on purpose

As indicated by the above discussion of media relations and the diagram in Figure 1, Haley wears many hats and utilizes various types of expertise—including technical expertise. She reported spending about 20% of her time on implementation, saying “I still edit all the writing (it’s hard to find good writers).” Haley uses a variety of consultants to the “legwork” including: Hill & Knowlton for government and public affairs, issues management, crisis management and crisis communications training; Veder+Perman for consumer public relations and special events like the HUE awards, a contest honoring the work of top designers; and the John Smallwood agency for publications like the *Color* magazine and *Interior/Exterior Style* books. Community relations and charitable giving are handled “in-house” by Haley.

When asked to relate her approach to the models of public relations, Haley emphasized the need to utilize different approaches for different purposes. She suggested tailoring the public relations approach to the needs of each audience. Persuasion, in her view, has its place in marketing public relations, where the purpose is to help sell products. Developing mutual understanding between the organization and its publics best reflects her approach for community relations and issues management. "It depends on the need of the audience, and what you're trying to accomplish," she explained. For example, when determining what product to buy, consumers need information related to the strengths of the product – colors available, application techniques, durability – in order to make a decision. Benjamin Moore's consumer public relations efforts are geared to provide that type of information to help them make the decision.

Summary

The public relations manager in this study was observed making a significant contribution to most manager role activities. She also demonstrated strong technical skills and the ability to play multiple roles simultaneously. Activities related to environmental scanning and stakeholder management were also evident. However, these were enacted through informal interactions and general media consumption, rather than formal research. The motivation to balance the needs of the organization with its publics was also clearly evident, and linked to the subject's personal values and the company's values of putting the needs of people first. This orientation to the needs of people, both internally and externally, was further exhibited through the application of facilitation, negotiation and conflict resolution skills—however these skills were most often observed “in action” in relation to internal publics, rather than external.

The following chapter offers a discussion of these findings in light of previous research, including the limitations of this study and ideas for future research.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The following is a discussion of what the results of this study contribute to research in this area, its limitations, possible areas for future study and the researcher's conclusion.

Role Enactment

In answer to the first research question, what is the role of public relations in a socially responsible company, the results of this study are closely aligned with the findings of the excellence researchers (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002) with two exceptions.

Generally, as suggested by the literature, Haley played a management role within the organization, serving as counselor, utilizing both strategic and technical expertise to solve communication problems. This was evidenced during the implementation of the open house in the way that Haley developed an approach and strategy to address the Coatings Care® requirements, and had a strong influence on the planning and implementation, straight through to completion. She facilitated the process of involving representatives from across the company together allocated resources event. Senior and middle managers alike demonstrated respect for her knowledge and expertise, as evidenced by their questions and reliance on her counsel, and for her position, as evidenced by behaving in a polite, courteous, and respectful manner. One characteristic that proved to be an asset in playing this role was

Haley's passion and assertiveness. On matters relating to corporate reputation and the company brand, Haley held firm to her position and argued her case when necessary.

The excellence researchers concluded that both technical expertise and managerial expertise are necessary for public relations excellence—particularly media relations expertise. Leichty and Springston (1996) also demonstrated that public relations practitioners perform multiple roles simultaneously. Haley was a perfect example of this. However, the technical expertise she exhibited most was in editing materials rather than in "using journalistic skills to find newsworthy material" or "keeping others informed of media coverage" (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). Haley carefully reviewed and edited all the materials for the event—from poster station content and graphics to press releases and handouts for employees. In this case, media outreach was delegated to a consultant. However, in interviews, Haley revealed that much of her time is spent handling media relationships directly, as suggested by the excellence researchers. The difference found in media relations emphasis may be related to the type of media involved. Haley specializes in national publications including shelter magazines like *House & Garden*, and newspapers like *The New York Times*, that regularly report on trends and issues that are important to Benjamin Moore. She spends less time maintaining relationships with media in smaller markets like Mesquite. In addition, media relations was a low priority for this particular event.

The excellence study also presumed that enacting the manager role would include making management aware of media coverage. In this study, while Haley was somewhat involved in informing management of coverage specific to Benjamin Moore, it was her knowledge of public perceptions on matters of importance to Benjamin Moore as gained from general media coverage that seemed most valuable. With this insight, she could offer context around any specific news articles. Also in lieu of formal research, Haley favored direct contact with stakeholders, as when representing the organization on the board of directors at CLEARCorps, working with the EPA on the "Lead Free is Best for Me" program, and as observed in her dealings with the first responders and charitable organizations in Mesquite. The insight gained from ongoing, informal, direct contact with stakeholders appears in this case to trump the need for formalized research on the views of key publics. In addition, with the exception of the open house, the usual practice at Benjamin Moore appears to be more in favor of mediated communication between some stakeholders and management, rather than creating opportunities for management to hear publics directly. However, based on the positive reaction of the senior managers involved in the open house, facilitating direct communication between management and stakeholders may be a potential opportunity for public relations in this situation.

The following section discusses the findings related to the second research question, what model of practice best defines public relations in a socially responsible company.

Communication Models

Esrock and Leichty (1998) found that separating out the characteristics of boundary spanning was important to understanding public relations roles. (Broom and Smith's (1979) description of the communication facilitator combines both activities into one role.) The boundary spanner fulfills the functions of (1) representing the views of management to stakeholders, and (2) informing management of the perceptions, expectations, and ideas of stakeholders. This, presumably, takes place as a complete, ongoing feedback loop. The results of this study support the need to examine the two sides of the loop as separate areas.

When it comes to representing management's views to the public, this study supports Esrock and Leichty's (1998) contention that more than one communication model can be used by the same public relations professional. In some cases, the role of public relations may be to simply inform stakeholders of some action or change made by the organization in response to their needs. In other cases, the role of public relations may be to reassert the company's position on the matter and try to build understanding, or persuade stakeholders to the organization's point of view. This is in line with Cancel, et al.'s (1997) contingency theory which says that the practice of public relations actually takes place along a continuum of advocacy to accommodation and that different situational factors determine where on the continuum a particular action will fall. For example, the strategy employed for the community responsibility day could be described as a combination of the public information and two-way asymmetric models. It was public information in the sense that one objective of the event was to inform and educate the public about Benjamin Moore's operations in the community. The event provided attendees with a variety of materials, a tour of the facility, and the opportunity to talk with people knowledgeable on various subjects. However, another purpose of the event was to make a positive impression on the public. This was evidenced by the care and time that went into the development of the messages conveyed, using the research-based approach provided by the Center for Risk Communication. It's possible that some observers would perceive these efforts to control the message as a form of manipulation. The difference in this case is that the researcher also observed a strong desire to tell the truth—one of Haley's basic values that guides her approach to public relations. All claims in the materials were severely scrutinized by various subject matter experts. Anything deemed to be more "spin" than fact was removed. It's true that great care was taken to ensure that the materials cast Benjamin Moore in a positive light and that the information provided could be clearly understood by the participants, but all the information provided appeared to be accurate and truthful.

The other side of the boundary spanning model involves informing management of the public's views. This study suggests that public relations does play this role. However, it also showed that some external relationships require the public relations professional to be the mediator or facilitator of the relationship, while others do not. For example, the facility managers at Benjamin Moore and members of the environmental, health, and safety team interact directly with regulators, the sales and marketing teams interact directly with retailers, and the operations team interacts directly with suppliers. Haley was not needed to "facilitate opportunities for management to hear publics" in those cases, as the excellence theory would suggest. She served as a resource or support when needed. Her involvement would increase, however, when something happens to strain the relationship, such as the latex spill into the water system at Colonial Heights when she was called in to facilitate. Many publics, however, do not have direct access to management. For them, the public relations professional is an essential facilitator. In this study, the director of corporate communications shared and supported many stakeholder relationships, such as regulators and consumers, but she was the only link to the company for many community-based and environmental organizations.

According to the boundary spanning and two-way symmetric models, the purpose of communication with stakeholders is to gather information. Therefore, the role of public relations is to listen and understand the needs and interests of stakeholders and transmit information to management. Black and Härtel (2004) found that all organizations participate in some form of environmental scanning, but how the information is used determines responsiveness. This can be interpreted as the need to take action based on the information. When senior management "owns" a stakeholder relationship, the negotiation for mutual understanding and win-win solutions takes place directly. But when public relations "owns" the stakeholder relationship and mediates or facilitates between stakeholders and management, the ability to negotiate with management is critical.

Heath and Ryan (1989) were surprised to find that those public relations professionals most involved in corporate social responsibility were more oriented to internal publics. This study shows that the reason may be that convincing management to take action based on the needs of stakeholders is one of the key roles of public relations in corporate social responsibility. Management appears to be the toughest stakeholder of all, making negotiation and conflict resolution skills more important internally than externally. For example, Haley was very oriented to internal publics. She negotiated with senior leaders such as the chief executive officer, vice president of supply chain, and general counsel to gain consensus, approval, and support for the initiative and for her recommended approach. She demonstrated care and concern for all the employees involved during the process. One of the outcomes, and perhaps another justification, for spending time and effort on internal publics, was that the people involved from Benjamin Moore developed a strong appreciation for the act of opening its doors, interacting with the public, and sharing information with the public. This is significant because the literature tells us that management philosophy is an important determinate to corporate social responsibility. Kitto (1988) said that a philosophy of putting people first is necessary for effective issues management. Judd (1989) corroborated this finding, suggesting that putting the needs and interests of society ahead of the company was part of the formula for a public relations professional involved in corporate social responsibility. In this case, Haley's leadership and involvement in implementing a successful community responsibility day event seemed to help reinforce the management philosophy and organizational culture that is necessary for public relations to be involved in corporate social responsibility in the first place.

Limitations

Obviously, this was a study of one person at one company—the findings are not generalizable to all companies. The selected company is a small- to mid-size business that operates exclusively in North America. Therefore, issues related to globalization, a hot topic in corporate social responsibility research, did not come into play. While providing insight into the role of public relations in smaller companies, the study does not address challenges related to the role of public relations in large companies. Due to the size of the company, the public relations department was also very small—this study does not address challenges of applying public relations roles and models in a large department where roles are responsibilities may be carved out and divided over many people. Further, the observations were limited to a specific set of interactions over a finite period of time. These cannot begin to capture the wide range of interactions with multiple stakeholders that constitute the director of communications full breadth of activity. This captured the activities enacted to implement one project versus the behavior of the director of communications in the everyday environment. There were several members of the dominant coalition that the researcher did not have the opportunity to observe, namely the chief operating officer and the chief executive officer. It is possible that the director of communications' interactions with these individuals could have different characteristics. A longer period of observation in variety of settings would provide a more complete picture and possibly show how activities and approach varies depending on the setting and the people involved.

Areas for Future Research

To clarify and validate the findings of this study, it is recommended that similar studies be conducted in many more organization—of different sizes and from different industries—to compare the activities and techniques used by other public relations professionals to the ones observed here. It would be most beneficial to observe public relations managers in many more socially responsible companies, and compare them, as well as to compare those results to observations of public relations managers in "irresponsible" companies. One continuing challenge to this line of research is establishing reliable criteria to differentiate a responsible company from an irresponsible one. Another challenge is access; not many people and companies are willing to be observed in this way.

It would also be useful to explore how this plays out in a larger organization with many more stakeholder groups, both internally and externally, and determine if there are specific challenges, techniques, and skills, that influence the role of public relations in corporate social responsibility. Questions might include the following: How are responsibilities and activities divided in a larger public relations department? How do public relations managers ensure that everyone in the department follows the same approach? One persistent challenge to continued research is the difficulty in accurately and fairly measuring a company's record of corporate social responsibility. The absence of a universal standard makes it difficult to compare "apples to apples."

Another line of potential research would involve examining the willingness of public relations professionals to participate in corporate social responsibility at all. For example, how many public relations professionals currently want to be involved in corporate social responsibility and see this as part of their role? It's possible that the motivation and approach differs by industry, by company size, or even by gender. Also, how often are the public relations professionals expectations aligned with senior management's expectations? For those that do want the responsibility, it would be interesting to see how many feel that they have the right knowledge and skills for the job, and/or what techniques proved useful in establishing themselves in that role. Finally, for companies that do expect public relations to play this role, the question is whether human resources understands what skills to look for in hiring a qualified public relations manager.

Conclusion

This study showed that public relations professionals must be able to enact a manager role, but technical skills are also extremely important. First, writing and editing is critical for organizations to construct messages that are, simultaneously, understood by publics, truthful and accurate, and help to reinforce a positive corporate image. Second, professionals use their relationships with the media and daily media consumption to provide insight to management on issues, stakeholders, and the environment—rather than simply make management aware of media coverage. These represent two variations on the manager role as described in the theory of excellence (Dozier, Dozier, & Grunig, 2002), and provide additional clarity on the actual activities and behaviors of public relations professionals in enacting the manager role.

In enacting the manager role, the public relations manager in this case also engaged in a variety of boundary spanning activities. Various communication models were applied for different types of communications throughout the boundary spanning process. Essentially, the model used depended on where the interaction took place along the continuum of two-way communication between the organization and its publics. Informing, persuading, and negotiating were all used, depending on the purpose of the communication. This supports Cancel, et al's (1997) contingency theory and shows that this line of research may warrant further study.

In regards to stakeholder management, this study showed that public relations is involved in stakeholder relationship management and, in this case, was the primary contact for some stakeholder groups. Clark (2002) suggested that public relations can support organizations in managing stakeholders, but this study suggests that public relations can be, at least, a full partner and, in some cases, the leader of stakeholder dialogue for the organization. However, as implied by Wood (1991), the study also showed that not all stakeholder relationships will require facilitation by public relations—unless an issue arises.

This case also demonstrated the application of mixed motives (Murphy, 1991). It further showed that the desire to balance the needs of the organization with its publics sometimes requires the public relations professional to advocate for publics to management. While mixed motives (Murphy, 1991), two-way symmetric (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002), and the stakeholder management approach (Freeman, 1984), all emphasize the importance of conflict resolution, mediation, negotiation skills in dealing with publics/stakeholders, this study suggests that these skills are critically important in the relationship between public relations and management—perhaps more than with publics. Further, facilitating collaboration and win-win solutions among internal stakeholders, led to increased appreciation and support for corporate social responsibility, which proved, in this case, to be an effective way to influence perceptions of management. This suggests that Plowman's (2005) research on conflict resolution and power for public relations may warrant further study.

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of public relations in a socially responsible corporation to determine its influence and opportunities. The public relations manager in this case had knowledge and expertise in effective relationship management skills, cared deeply about how an organization managed its stakeholder relationships, and how the health of those relationships affected the company's reputation. Overall, this case demonstrated that public relations and corporate social responsibility advocates within the organization can work together, utilizing a variety of skills, combining action and communication, to effectively manage the organization's relationship with, and reputation in, society.

Like any enterprise change, to be effective, corporate social responsibility has to start at the top and permeate all aspects of the operation until it becomes part of the fabric of the organizational culture. Corporate social responsibility cannot exist as an isolated strategy, someone at the top has to believe in it, see the benefits, and feel passionate that it is "the right thing to do." The philosophy of enlightened self-interest (investing in corporate social responsibility in order to reap benefits such as improved reputation, sales, employee retention, etc.) is the only way to convince others on the management team to support the organization's ability to operate in a socially responsible manner. However, this logic can go too far. Corporate social responsibility has lost some credibility by the prevalence of publicity campaigns designed to divert attention from irresponsible behavior (e.g. Nike) and cause marketing campaigns designed to achieve greater market share (e.g., The Body Shop and Ben & Jerry's).

Meanwhile, public relations still battles its historical association with military propaganda. Many business managers still maintain a narrow view of the function as purely persuasive. That is why it is unrealistic to believe that public relations can function as the leader of corporate social responsibility, or serve as the organizational social conscience as some have suggested; the role simply does not carry that level of credibility within most organizations and many practitioners simply do not wish to play this role. For management to see public relations as a partner in corporate social responsibility, these perceptions of public relations must be changed.

Public relations professionals can be advocates for corporate social responsibility within the organization when this philosophy is supported by top management—as it is at GE. In particular, public relations can help build an argument for how corporate behavior influences corporate reputation, and reputation's impact on so many other aspects of business. Within this argument, it may be possible to draw links between being a successful business while being force for good in society. Public relations can build credibility over time by providing counsel to top management on a one-to-one basis. The more crises an organization experiences and survives, the more value management places on the public relations function—they begin to appreciate the vital problem-solving and facilitation skills that public relations professionals bring to the table.

To be an effective counselor, it is critical for the public relations professional to keep one foot firmly outside of the organization and focus on the needs and interests of publics. This may be easier in larger organizations where the availability of resources makes it possible for top communicators to delegate publicity generating activities. The role also seems to come naturally for the “journalist in residence” style public relations professional who maintains close personal relationships with the media. Outside public relations counsel also tend to enjoy greater credibility in the eyes of management, likely due to their “outside” status. However it is achieved, through formal environmental scanning or through personal relationships, it is the knowledge and insight of the world outside the organization, coupled with the desire and ability to advocate for stakeholders and achieve a balance between organizational and societal interests, are among the greatest contributions to corporate social responsibility that a public relations professional can make.

APPENDIX

Journal Format

<table>
<tr><td>DATE</td><td>TIME</td><td colspan="2">ANALYSIS</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="2">Example of:
Roles
Models
Social responsiveness
Why?</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Social Responsiveness
☐ Environmental scanning
☐ Stakeholder management
☐ Issues management</td><td colspan="2" rowspan="2">Roles
☐ Manager:
☐ expert at solving PR problems?
☐ takes responsibility for PR program success/failure?
☐ held accountable by others for PR programs?
☐ makes communication policy decisions?
☐ senior counselor to top decision makers?
☐ creates opportunities for management to hear publics?
☐ represents org at events and meetings?
☐ Keeps others informed of media coverage?

☐ Other:
☐ Use of journalistic skills to find newsworthy material?
☐ maintain media contacts for the organization?
☐ responsible for placing news releases?
☐ edit for grammar/spelling the writing of others?
☐ write communication materials?
☐ produce brochures pamphlets/ materials?
☐ create photos and graphics for PR materials?</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Two-way Symmetric
☐ Values - moral obligation to balance the org/public interests?
☐ Values - negotiation and compromise, seek ‘win-win’ solutions?
☐ Strong skills in mediation and interpersonal communication?
☐ A research-based approach to planning?
☐ Use words like listening, responding, collaborating, sharing intelligence, openness, dialogue, to describe their approach to communicating with publics</td></tr>
</table>

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