

Introduction

Public relations (PR), having enjoyed steady growth in the UK since 1945, has experienced a rapid expansion since the 1980s. This growth has been evident across the corporate private sector, the communications activities of central and local government and other public organisations, as well as the many and distinctive organisations that constitute the voluntary sector (Deacon, 1996). PR has expanded in terms of the number and size of consultancies, their revenues and profitability (Miller and Dinan, 2000), the burgeoning numbers of practitioners employed in public relations activities (Davis, 2002; Franklin, 1988, 2004), the growth in university provision for their education and training, alongside their professional organisation in bodies such as the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR), initially formed as the Institute of Public Relations in 1948 (Fedorcio et al., 1991; Michie, 1998).

This rapid expansion has generated both advocates and detractors, with PR receiving a bad press from at least three quarters. Journalists, for example, have typically harboured a dislike of PR practitioners (Baskin and Aronoff, 1992; L'Etang, 2004). This may reflect little more than the superior salaries and working conditions that PR practitioners have increasingly come to enjoy compared to their journalistic colleagues. But journalists' antipathy more likely reflects their grudging acknowledgement of the growing reliance of news media on PR copy which increasingly helps to shape and inform journalists' editorial (Davis, 2008; Lewis et al., 2008a, 2008b). A decade ago, the Editor of *PR Week* estimated that a minimum 50 per cent of broadsheet newspapers' copy and 'more for tabloids' is now written and provided by PR practitioners who now 'do a lot of journalists thinking for them' (Franklin, 1997: 20). Many journalists, PR practitioners and academic researchers claim that this reliance on PR materials has grown (Fletcher, 2006; White and Hobsbawm, 2007; Williams and Franklin, 2007). Distinguished scholar Jurgen Habermas has even suggested that 'public relations ... techniques have come to dominate the public sphere' (1989: 193), while McNair (1996), Schlesinger (1990) and Miller (1998) have also criticised the implications of PR for citizen access to the public sphere.

Public as well as academic discourses have similarly been critical of PR, most notably because of the increasing public association of PR with propaganda, spin and spin doctors; and to a degree which involves more than

the cynical and ill informed tendency, noted by Harrison, of believing PR to be merely ‘putting a gloss on things’ (1995: 1). As well as being ill informed, such criticisms are poorly targeted since ‘media relations is only a small part of the public relations brief’ (Fawkes, 2001: 6). However, since the mid 1980s, and especially during Alastair Campbell’s tenure of the post of Director of Communications for New Labour, public scepticism about spin and a distrust of spin doctors has developed apace. Campbell’s dispute with the BBC over coverage of the Iraq war, public and media discussions of the so called ‘Dodgy dossier’ and ultimately the tragic death of Dr David Kelly, were considered by the Phillis inquiry which reported a ‘three-way breakdown in trust’ between the government and its spin doctors, the news media and the public (Phillis, 2004; Barnett, 2005).

There is a discernible irony about these criticisms since a key element in the many and sometimes conflicting understandings of PR is stressed by the Institute of Public Relations’ (IPR) definition, framed in 1987, which suggested that ‘public relations practice is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and understanding between an organisation and its publics’ (Fawkes, 2001: 7).

A consideration of the plethora of definitions of PR is the focus for the following section of this Introduction to *Key Concepts in Public Relations*. Subsequent sections deal in turn with the growth and development of the PR industry and PR practice, along with developments within PR education and training. Taken together, these provide a context for the final section which sets out the aims and objectives of *Key Concepts in Public Relations*.

WHAT IS PUBLIC RELATIONS?

Attempts at reaching a precise definition typically prove frustrating. What seems self-evident and simple can confound. As if to illustrate the point, definitions of PR abound and vary between those which are so general as to potentially embrace almost anything, to more proscriptive definitions that fail to capture the range and complexity of PR practices and ambitions. Somewhere near the ‘general’ end of this spectrum, PR is understood as ‘a complex and hybrid subject’ which ‘draws on theories and practices from many different fields’ including ‘management, media, communication and psychology’ (Fawkes, 2001: 3). With a sharper definitional focus, some genealogists of the professions claim ‘public relations is the child of journalism’ (White and Hobsbawm, 2007: 283), while others identify different familial connections suggesting PR ‘is the younger sibling of its competitor promotional industries of advertising and marketing’ (Miller and Dinan,

2000: 5); Harrison (1995: 4–7) and Fawkes (2001: 5–8) however are at pains to distinguish PR from both marketing and advertising.

The definition agreed by the World Assembly of Public Relations at its convention in Mexico in 1978, underlined the multidisciplinary character of PR practice and education. On this account, PR is ‘the art and social science of analysing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organisation leaders and implementing planned programmes of action which will serve both the organisation’s and the public interest’ (cited in Harrison, 1995: 2). The reference to both ‘arts’ and ‘social sciences’ highlights the distinction between understandings of PR as a rigorous, positivistic, quantitative, science-based discipline, which deploys specific communication tools and models for the analysis of communication situations, and the ‘affection’ which some practitioners retain for ‘the looser more creative aspects of the work’ (Fawkes, 2001: 4). The USA leans more than the UK to the social science based view of PR. This definition by PR practitioners highlights another key feature of PR, namely that successful outcomes serve both the interests of the ‘organisation’ and the ‘public’ with no necessary antipathy between the two.

Rex Harlow, in his classic article in *Public Relations Review* (1976: 36), identified 472 definitions of PR before formulating his own composite version based on these various accounts. PR, he suggests:

Is the distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, acceptance and cooperation between an organisation and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasises the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilise change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and sound and ethical communication techniques as its principal tools.

While Harlow’s formulation lacks the merit of brevity, it does describe ‘what public relations is and what public relations people do’ (Harrison, 1995: 3). It also affirms unequivocally that a key purpose of public relations is to serve the public interest. Additionally, the definition introduces the notion of ethical practice which is central to contemporary PR.

A more recent account by PR academic Jacquie L’Etang stresses the representational role of public relations. Hence PR is ‘the practice of presenting the public face of an organisation [be it a company, educational institutions, hospital or government] or individual, the articulation of its aims and

objectives and the official organisational view on issues of relevance to it'. To fulfil this role successfully, PR must 'target publics to engage sympathetically at emotional and intellectual levels with the organisation to encourage publics to take on board the organisations point of view' (L'Etang, 2004: 2). It is interesting to note that L'Etang, like Harlow, discusses 'publics' rather than a single 'public' signifying the reality of a plurality of communities rather than a single uniform public, as well as the potentially fissured and competing interests and objectives which these communities might pursue.

(AQ): cross-reference to be completed later?

If you turn to page XXX??, you will find that in this respect L'Etang's account is in concordance with the understanding of PR offered here. Again there is an emphasis on 'publics'. 'According to the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR)', we suggest that:

Public relations is about reputation – the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you.' It is also 'the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics'. (<http://www.cipr.co.uk>)

Key to understanding this definition is that the word 'publics' is plural. All organisations have a series of publics, or stakeholders, on whom their success depends. These publics are divided in many different ways, but Haywood's division into six categories is widely accepted. These are: (1) customers (past, present and future); (2) staff (past, present and future); (3) investors (past, present and future); (4) politicians and regulators; (5) neighbours and (6) business partners (distributors, suppliers, etc.).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

In the USA, PR began to emerge as a distinctive professional practice towards the end of the 19th century. Harrison suggests that 'public relations' was first used in 1882 by Dorman Eaton in a lecture, delivered at Yale University, titled 'The Public Relations and Duties of the Legal Profession', to signify 'looking out for the welfare of the public' (1995: 14). But in these early days, PR has largely been interpreted as a defensive response to the emerging investigative ('muckraker') journalism that generated a good deal of hostile and critical probing and reporting of contemporary business practices, a series of corporate scandals and industry responses to a succession of industrial disputes and strikes (White and

Hobsbawm, 2007: 283). According to PR scholar Scott Cutlip, 'these attacks created the need for institutions and industries under attack to defend themselves in the court of public opinion' (1994: 3). Historians critical of PR interpreted its emergence as 'the growth of corporate propaganda as a means of protecting corporate power against democracy' (Carey, 1995: 18; Stauber and Rampton 1995).

Early PR pioneer Ivy Ledbetter Lee was initially a business journalist who came to realise that the best way for business to defend itself against these press attacks alleging dishonesty and corruption was a more open, less furtive, approach to public information and the news media. Goldman suggests that the activities of muckraking journalists gave Lee an 'exciting idea'. He began to question whether the 'business policy of secrecy really a wise one? If publicity was being used so effectively to smear business, could it not be used with equal effectiveness to explain and defend business?' (1948; 6, cited in Harrison, 1995: 17). Lee opened a PR agency in 1904 and two years later set out the principles guiding his new project; the principles capture neatly much of the media relations aspects of PR. 'In brief', Lee claimed:

our plan is frankly and openly, on behalf of the business concerns and public institutions, to supply the press and the public of the United States prompt and accurate information concerning subjects which it is of value and interest to the public to know about. Corporations and public institutions give out much information in which the news point is lost to view. Nevertheless, it is quite important to the public to have this news as it is to the establishments themselves to give it currency. I send out only matter every detail of which I am willing to assist any editor in verifying for himself. (Cited in Heibert, 1966: 48)

In the UK a different impetus stimulated the growth of PR. It was the need for government and other public bodies, locally and centrally, to promote and explain policy, especially during and immediately after the Second World War, which triggered the development of PR (Franklin, 1988: 1–14, 2004: 96–118; Miller and Dinan, 2000: 8; White and Hobsbawm, 2007: 283).

The growth in local government PR formally began when Kingsley Wood used the term 'public relations' to describe the job he had offered to Stephen Tallents at the GPO (West, 1963: 6). The publication of the 1945 *Report on Relations Between Local Government and the Community*, the establishment of a Consultative Committee on Publicity for Local

Government, and the 1962 report of the Association of Municipal Authorities (AMA) titled *Local Government Publicity* which recommended the establishment of a local government publicity officer, were each landmarks in the early development of UK public sector public relations (Franklin, 1988: 1–8). But it was the reorganisation of local government in 1974 and the creation of the larger Metropolitan County Councils and their need to create an identity, communicate with their respective publics and improve the image of local government, which was too frequently perceived as boring, expensive, remote and bureaucratic, that triggered a change in the pace of growth for local government PR (Society of County and Regional Public Relations Officers, 1985: 310). Significantly, PR was also to be better resourced than previously. The West Yorkshire Metropolitan County Council in its first year of operation appointed five specialist staff and allocated a budget of £106,440 for PR. Sheffield City Council had a full-time staff of 10 PR specialists and one of the largest PR budgets amounting to £161,000 (*Yorkshire Post*, 2 February 1974). Perhaps ironically, it was the campaign to prevent the abolition of the new Metropolitan Counties a decade later which witnessed another spurt in local government PR staffs (Franklin, 1987a, 1987b).

Sustained growth across the 1980s enabled the IPR Local Government Group's report *Beyond The Horizons* to claim that 'a thousand public relations professionals work in local government, producing 60,000 items of publicity a year and spending £250 millions; they generate over a 100,000 news releases annually with coverage running into miles of print' (Harrison, 1995: 151). By the new millennium, a survey by the Local Government Association of all 410 authorities in England and Wales revealed that 85 per cent of all authorities employ one or more PR practitioners while 25 per cent employ five or more PR staff; in the larger authorities the average staff size is 13 PR practitioners. Budgets for PR vary considerably reflecting the size of the authority as well as its commitment to PR, but in 2001/2 across 142 local authorities, the budgets for PR varied between £17,000 to £3,945,500 in a large London borough; the average budget for a London borough was £713,250, for a county council £400,000, for a metropolitan borough £467,750 and £229,000 for a unitary authority (Vasterman and Sykes, 2001, cited in Franklin, 2004: 103–5).

In UK central government developments in PR similarly postdate the Second World War. The Central Office of Information (COI) was established on 1 April 1946 as successor to the overtly propagandist wartime Ministry of Information. For broadcaster Michael Cockerell, the COI

constitutes the 'heart of the government information machine' (Cockerell et al., 1984: 57). It is home to 'the technicians of the machine' – the journalists, press officers, PR advisers, producers, editors, film makers and web designers who assist the government in communicating information to the public. Establishing the COI in 1946, Attlee claimed that 'it is essential to a good administration under a democratic system that the public shall be adequately informed about the many matters in which government's action directly impinges on their daily lives' (HC Debates, 17 December 1945, col. 916). During Attlee's post-war administration, the nationalisation of major industries such as coal, electricity and gas, as well as the establishment of national health and social welfare systems, required much explanation to citizens and voters and consequently PR staffing and budgets grew accordingly (Wildy, 1985). Nationalisation of industries and services also triggered an early spurt of growth in private sector PR to respond to this political pressure towards nationalisation (Miller and Dinan, 2000: 8). Paradoxically, the flurry of privatisation legislation during the Thatcher administrations of 1979 to 1990, which returned many of these nationalised industries to private ownership, provided the engine for further substantial growth in public and private sector PR (Franklin, 2004: 77–80; Miller and Dinan, 2000: 10–23). The election of New Labour with its emphasis on image, presentation, spin and news management encouraged notable increases in COI budgets from £110.7 m in 1997 to £173.4 m in 1998, £199.9 m in 1999 to reach an unprecedented £295.4 m in 2000/1 (COI Annual Report and Accounts, cited in Franklin, 2004: 79).

PR growth was also evident in the increasing numbers of press and PR officers employed by the government information service, which grew from approximately 1200 in the mid 1990s to 2300 a decade later (Franklin, 2004; Jones, 2006). In specific departments the growth was striking. Between 1979 and 1999, for example, the Department of Health and Social Security (DHSS) increased the number of information officers it employed by 488 per cent (from 24 to 141). At the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) the growth was 77 per cent (22 to 39), at the Department of Transport (DoT) 185 per cent (13 to 37) (Davis, 2002: 21). However, the decade between 1997 and 2006 has witnessed even more rapid expansion with growth in press and PR at the Ministry of Defence (MoD) rising by 389 per cent (from 47 in 1997 to 230 in 2006), 36 per cent at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) (30 to 41), 100 per cent at the Prime Minister's office (12 to 24) and 106 per cent at the Treasury (16–31) (Davis, 2008). In summary, the

development of a mediatized politics, where perception management, presentation, political marketing and advertising have become more prominent, has provided a congenial environment for the growth and development of public sector PR.

The private sector of UK PR has also flourished and expanded. Globally, the PR industry is characterised by the prominence of a few large companies such as Hill and Knowlton, Weber Shandwick and Burson-Marsteller, mostly based in the US or the UK. The UK hosts the second largest PR industry measured by the twin indicators of income for the industry as a whole and the fee income of the 10 largest companies. Perhaps unsurprisingly, America stands in pole position with Japan in third place.

To suggest that in the UK, 'public relations is a growth industry', risks challenge for understatement, since during 'the 1980s and again in the mid 1990s, growth rates for medium and large British consultancies typically reached 20–40 per cent per annum' (Miller and Dinan, 2000: 5). Growth has developed apace, especially during the 1980s. Almost half the members of the Public Relations Consultants Association came into existence in the 1980s with as many PR consultancies formed in the decade as in the previous two decades combined. The 46 PR firms listed in the *Hollis* trade directory in 1967 had become 2230 by 1994, while the growth in practitioners was similarly striking. By the late 1990s, the 3318 practitioners employed in the top 114 PR consultancies had grown to 6578 in the top 150 consultancies. Income and revenues have grown to reflect this expansion in PR activity. The fee income of the 150 largest consultancies rose from £15 m in 1979 to a remarkable £383 m by 1998. Miller and Dinan conclude that 'the biggest consultancies show that the sector seems to have expanded by a factor of 31 between 1979 and 1998; this represents an 11-fold real terms increase and illustrates the very marked increase in the size of the consultancy sector in Britain since the end of the 1970s' (2000: 11–12).

Growth has been sustained into the new millennium, with Key Note's (2007) Review of the Public Relations Industry commenting that 'the PR industry is certainly very vibrant and 2006 saw growth in practically all sectors and all global markets'. Summarising the striking growth in numbers of agencies, practitioners employed and income and profits in UK PR across sectors up to 2005, Davis concludes 'that there are 2,500 agencies and 47,800 people working in the public relations profession in the UK. This figure excludes the 125,000 people working in the associated advertising and marketing industries, those working in PR support industries

(e.g., press cutting, media evaluation, news distribution services), and the many professionals who have had media training. The estimated total turnover of the industry in 2005, consultancy and In-house, was £6.6 billions' (Davis, 2008: 76). PR, moreover, is spreading beyond the public and private sectors into the voluntary sector where a host of disparate organisations ranging from universities, trade unions, media organisations and charities from Save the Children and NSPCC to Stonewall and Greenpeace all employ substantive and growing numbers of PR practitioners to handle their media relations. Deacon's survey, for example, concluded that 31 per cent (57 per cent of the largest) of voluntary organisation employed press/publicity officers while 43 per cent (81 per cent of the largest organisations) employed external agencies to top up in house PR expertise (Deacon, 1996).

PUBLIC RELATIONS: EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Twenty years ago no university in the UK offered a degree-level course in PR – now 25 universities offer courses approved by the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR). Several offer more than one pathway, and there are degrees in political communications, financial PR and other specialist disciplines. Like journalism, however, PR has only made minor inroads into the older universities. Of the pre-1992 universities only two – Cardiff and Stirling – teach PR and only a handful such as Cardiff, City, Newcastle, Sheffield and Stirling teach journalism. Cardiff remains the only university in the elite Russell Group which offers PR degrees. PR, moreover, is making only limited gains in being accepted as part of curricula offered by business schools. This remains a core objective of the CIPR and for the PRSA – the situation is similar in the USA. MBAs and other business courses continue to take the outdated view that PR is somehow 'part of marketing'. This is despite evidence from the Burson Marsteller/*PR Week* survey that CEOs spend more time dealing with reputation than with any other issue – finance included.

More people now enter the profession with PR qualifications, but also more PR practitioners than ever before are studying for qualifications to enhance their career. CIPR offers a successful proprietary diploma – a one-year, part-time course. Within the past two years this has been rolled out for study at a number of overseas centres as well dozens in the UK. The course is ranked at master's level and is open to students with practical PR experience seeking to underpin it with a solid grounding in theory. The CIPR also offers a range of short training courses in practical skills – usually between

half a day and two days in length. This is another growing market and was a major consideration informing the Institute's move to larger and more prestigious premises in 2006. A large number of commercial suppliers offer similar courses and the number seems to grow every year.

Why have education and training grown so strongly? An obvious reason is that the employment market is growing. When PR traditionally recruited journalists in mid-career it was clear that they would enter the profession with a number of key skills already honed in a related field. But such a recruitment path is nowhere near sufficient for the needs of the profession today. It offers neither the numbers that business demands nor the full range of skills. As PR is increasingly accepted at boardroom level, a talent for writing and a nose for a story are no longer sufficient. Clients and employers expect business skills. Increasingly they seek them in people for whom PR was a first choice of career and not a mid-career switch.

PR education will undoubtedly keep growing. In particular, UK universities will attract increasing numbers of overseas students as the premium on PR continues to grow – along with a premium on English as the international business language. Roger Haywood, best selling author and the only person to serve as Chairman of the Chartered Institute of Marketing and President of the (now Chartered) Institute of Public Relations, believes that:

Britain, as much as any country in the world, is setting the standard in PR at the moment. The British 'brand' is respected worldwide. It is no surprise that top British universities are attracting increasing numbers of overseas students. I see that as a trend which will grow. (Haywood, pers. comm.)

These developments in the PR industry and PR education and training during the 20th century, explain the need for a book such as *Key Concepts in Public Relations*.

KEY CONCEPTS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS: THE BOOK IN OUTLINE

Key Concepts in Public Relations offers students of PR, media and communication studies a unique, accessible and authoritative guide to the central concepts informing the expansive field of PR. Written by distinguished PR practitioners and academics working at Cardiff University, a key ambition for the book has been to bring together a rich experience of professional practice and scholarly work to develop

and inform a balanced and complementary account of PR theory and practice.

More specifically, *Key Concepts in Public Relations* provides an extensive and detailed 'reference' or 'source' text for students and others with interests in PR. The book contains an alphabetical listing of the identified key concepts in PR. Each entry is approximately 300–500 words in length, makes use of extensive **cross-references** to related entries and concludes by suggesting further reading to allow readers opportunities to follow up subjects of interest in greater detail.

The book provides students with multi-disciplinary accounts of the wide range of concepts and terms that are central to an understanding of PR, both as a field of academic inquiry and an arena of professional practice. Additionally, we hope that *Key Concepts in Public Relations* might prove helpful to PR practitioners wishing to 'brush up' on the latest developments within their field and provide them with opportunities for reflection on their practice. We are also eager that a more general and lay readership will find something of interest to engage them in the discussions of advertising, celebrity PR, ethics, excellence theory, military PR, news values, propaganda, reputation management, soundbites and spin, which unravel across the pages of the book.

In addition to providing a thoroughgoing understanding of concepts central to PR, the book has a number of other objectives, including the ambition to:

- explore the overlapping concerns of PR and the cognate intellectual disciplines of media, communication, cultural and journalism studies;
- highlight the number and range of theoretical approaches to public relations;
- identify the wide range of methodological tools and approaches appropriate to investigations of PR;
- illustrate the multidisciplinary character of PR and trace its intellectual roots not only in media, communication and journalism studies, but in the social science and humanities disciplines of sociology, politics, economics, history, psychology, as well as business and management studies;
- provide extensive and explicit bibliographical guidance to a wide range of primary and secondary literature to facilitate further study;

- highlight and summarise academics' and journalists' critical assessments of recent developments in PR;
- alert readers to recent debates within PR.

It is perhaps equally important to state what has not been an ambition for this book. *Key Concepts in Public Relations* is *not* intended to deliver definitive or final accounts of particular concepts in PR, but to offer a preliminary overview, informed by up-to-date research and relevant reading, which will hopefully stimulate readers' thinking, prompting them to deliberate further on issues and to pursue additional study. Similar to all books it must be judged as 'work in progress' in a dynamic and changing scholarly and PR environment. We hope that *Key Concepts in Public Relations* will serve as a valuable, informative and engaging starting point for your studies of PR. That was undoubtedly our substantive ambition in writing this book.

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