PEARSON NEW INTERNATIONAL EDITION

THINK Public Relations

Wilcox Cameron Reber Shin

Second Edition



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Communication: THE THIRD STEP

The four essential steps of effective public relations are research, planning, communication, and measurement. In this chapter, we discuss the third and fourth steps of this process—communication and measurement.

The third step in the public relations process, after research and planning, is communication. Communication is also sometimes referred to as execution. In a public relations program, communication is the process and the means by which objectives are achieved. A program's strategies and tactics may take the form of news releases, news conferences, special events, brochures, viral marketing, speeches, dedicated Twitter, Facebook or YouTube accounts, bumper stickers, newsletters, webcasts, blogs, rallies, posters, and the like.

Kirk Hallahan of Colorado State University makes the point that today's communication revolution has given public relations professionals a full range of communication tools and media, and the traditional approach of simply obtaining publicity through the mass media—newspapers, magazines, radio, and television—is no longer sufficient, if it ever was:

> PR program planners need to reexamine their traditional approaches to the practice and think about media broadly and strategically. PR media planners must now address some of the same questions that confront advertisers. What media best meet a program's objectives? How can media be combined to enhance program effectiveness? What media are most efficient to reach key audiences?

The Goals of Communication

The goals of communication are to inform, persuade, motivate, or achieve mutual understanding.

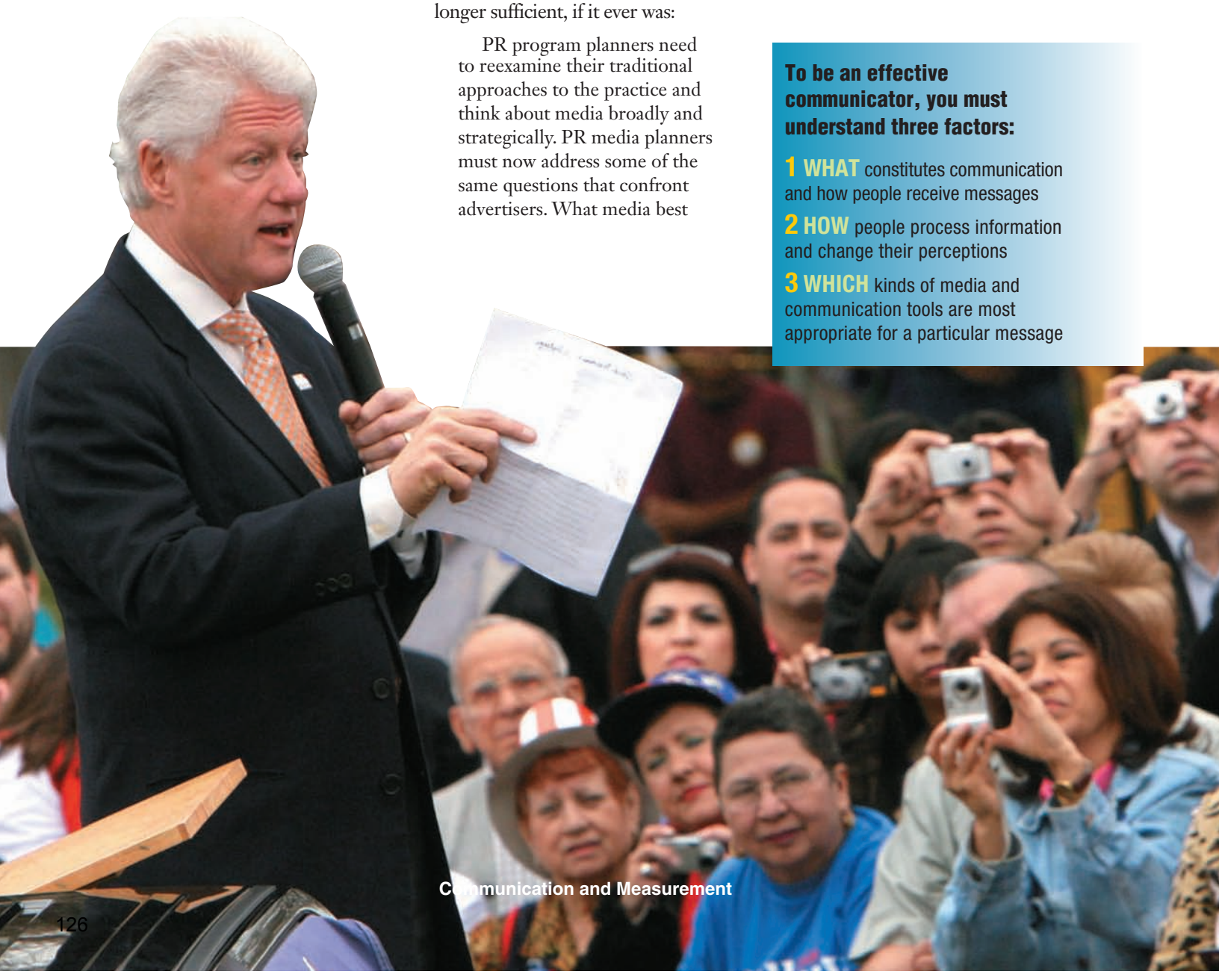
When planning a message on behalf of an employer or client, public relations professionals must

To be an effective communicator, you must understand three factors:

1 **WHAT** constitutes communication and how people receive messages

2 **HOW** people process information and change their perceptions

3 **WHICH** kinds of media and communication tools are most appropriate for a particular message



consider a number of variables. In addition to examining proposed content, a successful communicator determines exactly which objective is being targeted through the communication. James Grunig, emeritus professor of public relations at the University of Maryland, cites five key objectives for communication:

1 **Message Exposure.** Public relations personnel provide materials to the mass media and disseminate other messages through controlled media such as newsletters and brochures. Intended audiences are exposed to the message in various forms.

2 **Accurate Dissemination of the Message.** The basic information, often filtered by media gatekeepers, remains intact as it is transmitted through various media.

3 **Acceptance of the Message.** Based on its view of reality, the audience not only retains the message, but also accepts it as valid.

4 **Attitude Change.** The audience not only believes the message, but also makes a verbal or mental commitment to change behavior as a result of the message.

5 **Change in Overt Behavior.** Members of the audience actually change their current behavior or purchase the product and use it.

An Integrated Public Relations Media Model

The variety and scope of media and communication tools available to public relations professionals runs the gamut from mass media (public media) to one-on-one communication (interpersonal communication). Here, in chart form, is a concept developed by Professor Kirk Hallahan at Colorado State University.

← **MASS COMMUNICATION**
High Tech
Perceptually Based
Low Social Presence
Asynchronous

PERSONALIZED COMMUNICATION →
Low Tech
Experientially Based
High Social Presence
Synchronous

Public Media	Controlled Media	Interactive Media	Events	One-on-One
Key Uses in a Communication Program				
Build awareness; Enhance credibility	Promotion; Provide detailed information	Respond to queries; Exchange information; Engage users	Motivate participants; Reinforce existing beliefs, attitudes	Obtain commitments; Negotiation; Resolution of problems
Principal Examples of Media				
Publicity/advertising/ advertorials/product placements in: Newspapers Magazines Radio Television *Paid advertising* Transit media Out-of-home media (Billboards, posters, electronic displays) Directories Venue signage Movie theater trailers, advertising	Brochures Newsletters Sponsored magazines Annual reports Books Direct mail Exhibits and displays Point-of-purchase support DVDs/Video brochures Statement inserts Other collateral or printed ephemera Advertising specialties	E-mail, instant, text and microblog messages E-newsletters, e-zines Automated telephone call systems Web sites, blogs Vodcasts/podcasts Games Web conferences, Webinars, webcasts Information kiosks Internets and extranets Social networking sites Forums (chats, groups) Media-sharing sites Paid text/display click-through advertising	Meetings/conferences Speeches/presentations Government or judicial testimony Trade shows, exhibitions Demonstrations/rallies Sponsored events Observances/anniversaries Contests/sweepstakes Recognition award programs (Often supported with multimedia presentations)	Personal visits/lobbying Correspondence Telephone calls

> **To be successful, a message must be received by the intended individual or audience. It must get the audience's attention. It must be understood. It must be believed. It must be remembered. And ultimately, in some fashion, it must be acted upon. Failure to accomplish any of these tasks means the entire message fails.**
>
> **David Therkelsen, executive director of Crisis Connection in St. Paul, Minnesota**

Most public relations experts usually aim to achieve the first two objectives: exposure to the message and accurate dissemination of that message. The first two objectives are easier to accomplish than attitude change. Achieving the last three objectives depends in large part on a mix of variables—predisposition to the message, peer reinforcement, feasibility of the suggested action, and environmental context, to name a few.

Although the communicator cannot always control the outcome of a message, effective dissemination is the beginning of a process that leads to opinion change and adoption of products or services. For these reasons, it is important to review all components of the communication process.

think What are the five primary objectives of an effective public relations campaign?

Making Sure the Audience Receives the Message

Several communication models explain how a message moves from sender to recipient. Some are quite complex, attempting to incorporate an almost infinite number of events, ideas, objects, and people that interact among the message, channel, and receiver. Most communication models, however, focus on only four basic elements. David K. Berlo's classic model is an example. It features a sender/source (encoder), a message, a channel, and a receiver (decoder). A fifth element—feedback from the receiver to the sender—is incorporated into modern models of communication.

> "In the symmetric model, understanding is the principal objective of public relations, rather than persuasion."
>
> **James Grunig**

One-way communication, from sender to receiver, simply disseminates information. This kind of monologue is less effective than two-way communication, which establishes a dialogue between the sender and the receiver. Grunig postulates that the ideal public relations model consists of two-way symmetric communication. In other words, communication should be balanced between the sender and the receiver. In reality, research shows that most organizations have mixed motives when they engage in two-way communication with audiences.

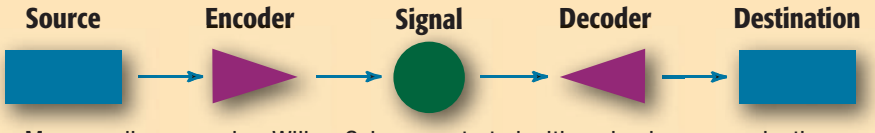
Feedback can also be thought of as two-way communication. Models of communication emphasize the importance of feedback as an integral component of the process. As they implement communication strategies, successful public relations personnel pay careful and constant attention to feedback.

The practice of public relations is dynamic. During any campaign, motives and strategic goals may change depending on a variety of factors. For example, as a public relations practitioner, you may advocate providing a new benefit for employees. In doing so, your motives are mixed: Employees will be pleased with the new benefit, but your real objective is to save the organization money by limiting employee turnover.

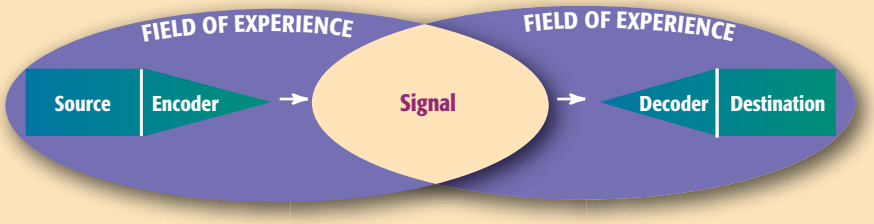
The most effective type of two-way communication, of course, is interpersonal or face-to-face communication between two people. Likewise, small-group discussion is very effective. In both forms, the message is fortified by gestures, facial expressions, intimacy, tone of voice, and immediate feedback. If a listener asks a question or appears puzzled, the speaker has an instant cue and can rephrase the information or amplify a point.

Barriers to communication multiply in large-group meetings and, ultimately, in the mass media. Via mass media outlets, organizational materials can reach thousands and even millions of people, but the psychological and physical distance between sender and receiver in these types of campaigns is considerable. Communication is less effective because the audience is no longer involved with the source. No immediate feedback is possible, and the message may become distorted as it passes through the various mass media gatekeepers.

SCHRAMM'S ORIGINAL MODEL

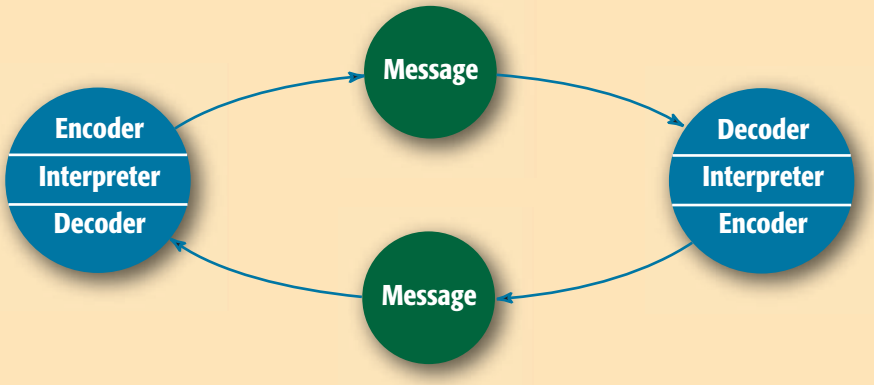


Mass media researcher Wilbur Schramm started with a simple communication model (see figure above), but he later expanded the process to include the concept of shared fields of experience (see figure below).



Shared experience refers to the concept that little or no communication happens unless the sender and the receiver share a common language and an overlapping cultural or educational background. The importance of shared experience is apparent if you think of a highly technical news release about a new computer system that causes a local business editor to shake his or her head in bewilderment. Effective communication can only take place within a sphere of "shared experience" according to Schramm.

SCHRAMM'S EXPANDED MODEL



Schramm's third model (see above) incorporates the idea of continuous feedback. Both the sender and the receiver continually encode, interpret, decode, transmit, and receive information. Communication to internal and external audiences produces feedback that is taken into consideration during research (the first step of the public relations process) and measurement (the fourth step). In this way, messages are continuously refined.

Making Sure the Audience Pays Attention to the Message

Although in public relations, we emphasize the formation and dissemination of messages, this effort is wasted if the audience pays no attention. It is important to remember the axiom of Walt Seifert, a pioneer public relations educator at Ohio State University: "Dissemination does not equal publication, and publication does not equal absorption and action." In other words, "All who receive your message won't publish it, and all who read or hear your message won't understand or act upon it."

Strategy should be based on more than common sense or rote routines. The management of competition and conflict requires a sophisticated understanding of the climate in which an organization operates and the dispositions of its publics on a variety of matters.

Sociologist Harold Lasswell defined the act of communication as "Who says what, in which channel, to whom, with what effect?"

The basic premise of the media uses and gratification theory of communication is that the communication process is interactive. The communicator wants to inform and even persuade; the recipient wants to be entertained, informed, or alerted to opportunities that can fulfill individual needs. This theory assumes that people make highly intelligent choices about which messages require their attention and fulfill their needs. If this is true—and research indicates it is—the public relations communicator must tailor messages that focus on grabbing the audience's attention.

One approach for achieving this goal is to understand the mental state of the intended audience. In *Managing Public Relations*, James Grunig and Todd Hunt suggest that communication strategies be designed to attract the attention of two kinds of audiences: those who actively seek information and those who passively process information.

Passive audiences may initially pay attention to a message only because it is entertaining and offers a diversion. They can be made aware of the message through brief encounters: a billboard glimpsed on the way to work, a radio announcement heard in the car, a television advertisement broadcast before a show begins, or

an informational flyer picked up in a doctor's waiting room.

People use mass media for a variety of purposes. They use it for surveillance of the environment to find out what is happening, locally or even globally, that has some impact on them; entertainment and diversity; reinforcement of their opinions and predispositions; and to gain information in order to make decisions about buying products or services.



Active audiences seek out information.



Passive audiences use communication channels that can be accessed while they are doing something else.

At any given time, an intended audience contains both **passive** and **active** information seekers. For this reason, **multiple** messages and a **variety** of communication tools should be used in a full-fledged information campaign.

Passive audiences need messages that are stylish and creative. Photos, illustrations, and catchy slogans lure this type of audience into processing the information. Press agentry, dramatic images, celebrity pitches, radio and television announcements, and events featuring entertainment can make passive audiences aware of a message. The objectives of these types of communications are simply exposure to, and accurate dissemination of, messages. In most public relations campaigns, communications are designed to reach primarily passive audiences.

In contrast, a communicator employs a different approach with audiences that actively seek information. These people are already interested in the message and are typically seeking more sophisticated supplemental information. Effective tools for delivering this content may include links to more detailed information on an organization's website, brochures, in-depth newspaper and magazine articles, slide presentations, video presentations, symposiums and conferences, major speeches before key groups, and demonstrations at trade shows.

Making Sure the Message Is Understood

Communication is the act of transmitting information, ideas, and attitudes from one person to another. Communication can take place only if the sender and the receiver have a common understanding of the symbols being used.

The degree to which two people understand each other depends heavily on their common comprehension of words. Anyone who has traveled abroad can readily attest that only limited communication can occur between two people who speak different languages. And even if the sender and the receiver speak the same language and live in the same country, the effectiveness of communication depends on a variety of key factors, such as education, social economic class, regional differences, nationality, and cultural background.

Employee communication specialists are keenly aware of these

differences, as multicultural workforces have become the norm for most organizations. The globalization of the economy has resulted in organizations with operations and employees in many countries as well as the increasingly diverse composition of the American workforce. In light of these trends, communicators need to be informed about cultural differences and conflicting values so that they can establish common ground and build bridges among various groups. The key is to produce messages that appeal, in content and structure, to the characteristics of the audience. One approach is to copy-test all public relations materials on a target audience. This step can help convince management—and communicators—that what they like isn't necessarily what the audience wants, needs, or understands. Another strategy is to apply readability and comprehension formulas to materials before they are produced and disseminated. Learning theory asserts that the simpler the piece of writing, the easier it will be for audiences to understand the message.

Audience background and literacy level are important considerations for any communicator.

The Flesch readability formula assesses average sentence length and the number of one-syllable words per 100 words. If a randomly selected sample of 100 words contains 4.2 sentences and 142 syllables, it is ranked at about the ninth-grade level, which is a common level for mass distributed material.

In the Cloze procedure, copy is tested for comprehension and redundancy by having people read passages in which every fifth or ninth word is removed. Their ability to fill in the missing words determines whether the pattern of words is familiar, which in turn determines where the message is understandable.

btw...

More efficient communication can be achieved if the intended audience is segmented as much as possible. After dividing an audience into segments, a practitioner can select the appropriate communication tools for each group. Even within a public category, demands may be different. For example, factory-line workers don't have the same concerns as senior vice presidents, but they're all employees and should be addressed by employee communications. A good public relations campaign always takes into account the needs of diverse categories within a public.



think Why is it important for a communicator to understand the cultural background of an audience?

Making the Message Credible

Credibility is one key variable in the communication process. Members of the audience must perceive a source as knowledgeable and expert on the subject as well as honest and objective. Audiences, for example, ascribe lower credibility to statements in an advertisement than to the same information in a newsarticle, because news articles are selected by media gatekeepers and are perceived as more objective.

Source credibility is a problem for any organizational spokesperson, because the public already has a bias based on the person's relationship to the organization. The problem of source credibility is the main reason that organizations, whenever possible, use respected outside experts or celebrities as representatives to convey their messages.

Another variable is the context of the message. Action (performance) speaks louder than a stack of news releases. A bank may spend