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The 7 Principles of Public Life are: selflessness (acting solely in the public interest); integrity (individual should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation which may unduly influence them); objectivity (in carrying out their duties); accountability (willing to submit themselves to any scrutiny relating to their office); openness (about their decisions and actions, given reasons); transparency (restricting information when the wider public interest is at stake); honesty (acknowledging any private interests and resolving any resultant conflicts); and leadership (inspiring and supporting the principles through leadership and example). For more information see [www.public-standards.org.uk/About/The\\_7\\_Principles.html](http://www.public-standards.org.uk/About/The_7_Principles.html).

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## 9 Enacting the role

### Introduction

This chapter discusses how public relations leaders behave. It links to Chapter 5 which touched on the subject of roles, which will be developed more here. It also leads on from Chapter 3 on leadership. Our belief is that behaviours, along with skills and knowledge lie at the heart of professional credibility. Indeed, there is an argument that behaviours are even more important than knowledge and skills. We know quite senior leaders whose knowledge and skills appear flaky, but they certainly know how to behave and what language to use in senior circles.

Understanding the contribution public relations can make to the organisation, an ability to plan and make strategic interventions based on knowledge and skill, and having the requisite repertoire of behaviours are the three cornerstones of this book. The importance of behaviours cannot be overstated. Our phrase is ‘enacting the role’.

The chapter covers three areas:

- Organisational roles: how they are defined and the roles of senior public relations leaders; why these leaders are not as senior as they think they should be; what chief executive officers (CEOs) want from their public relations leaders; how respect is gained
- Knowledge and skills: the basic toolkit
- Behaviours: why they are important and the behavioural priorities

### The roles people play

As mentioned in Chapter 5, roles are determined by the organisation; by what senior managers perceive they should be and the value they place on them. Ultimately it is the CEO and the board to determine who will be in the ‘top team’ and there is ample evidence that other ‘C suite’ executives take their cue from the CEO.<sup>1</sup>

Kim Harrison<sup>2</sup> cites four factors that affect the roles public relations leaders play:

- ‘people’ factor: the personal credibility and standing of professionals with senior management (more on this later);

- top management understanding and expectations of public relations (more on how this can be enhanced later);
- organisational and industry context: where an organisation operates in the fast-moving and highly competitive context, the value of public relations is normally appreciated more;
- the nature of the strategy-making process: public relations has to demonstrate its essential contribution to developing strategy and organisational outcomes, not just its ability to communicate strategy.

Turning to the individual, it would be a mistake to believe that successful public relations practitioners have a typical background and career path: there are many routes to the top.<sup>3</sup> It would also be a mistake to think that every professional has the requisite capabilities to reach the top.<sup>4</sup> To be a public relations leader requires a complex mix of knowledge, skills and abilities. These include *personal attributes and characteristics*, including professional experience, gender, personality and charisma, combined with the *organisational factors* mentioned above.<sup>5</sup> It is the amalgamation and enactment of these that leads to particular behaviours by individuals. Acceptable behaviours at work are not purely intuitive. Organisations have expectations about how individuals enact a particular role. Competencies are the behavioural repertoires or sets of behaviours that leaders are expected to perform so that the organisation can meet its objectives.<sup>6</sup> They are how knowledge and skills are used and applied and how personal attributes are enlisted to achieve the task.

While this chapter concentrates on behaviours, the book as a whole is about leadership. So, without covering the ground that Chapter 3 already has, a number of points have to be made to set the context for what follows:

- Leaders communicate their values in behaviour and the outcomes of those behaviours are crucially important.<sup>7</sup> They influence the culture of the organisation and the attitudes and priorities of those they lead (see also Chapter 8 on ethics).
- In a national survey of US public relations professionals,<sup>8</sup> two related positive leadership styles were found: transformational and inclusive. Transformational leaders inspire followers through communication, and inclusive leaders actively seek the participation of others. In combination the styles positively affect the strategy and outcomes of public relations.
- Characteristics of positive leaders include strong ethical orientation, vision, communication, decision-making skills, empathy and concern for organisational colleagues and other stakeholders.<sup>9</sup>
- 'Leadership requires a steady hand, good insights, inspiring vision and a superior understanding of the world.'<sup>10</sup>

With this in mind, it is appropriate to look at the roles senior communicators undertake which have been uncovered through extensive research over the last 30 years.

The earlier research,<sup>11</sup> drawing on the consulting literature, identified two major roles for practitioners:

- the *communication technician*: who does not make organisational decisions, but carries out public relations programmes in line with the instructions of others;
- the *communication manager*: who counsels management, makes communication policy, and manages public relations programmes.

Within this manager category, there are three main types of role. The *expert prescriber*, who researches and defines public relations problems, develops programmes and implements them, sometimes with the assistance of others. The *communication facilitator*, who acts as a liaison person, facilitating two-way communication between the organisation and its stakeholders. This person acts as interpreter and mediator. The *problem-solving process facilitator*, who helps others in the organisation solve their communication problems. This person acts as a counsellor/adviser on the planning and implementation of programmes. It is a role often fulfilled by specialist consultancies. Researchers also identified a 'senior adviser' role at the senior level: someone who acts as a high-level counsellor, constantly advising the CEO or chair of the board. They have a wide ranging remit, but are essentially charged with spotting issues for the individual with whom they work and advising them on how to respond.

Scandinavian researchers<sup>12</sup> discovered three key roles for senior public relations executives. The first is as *organisational leader* who has responsibility with other senior managers for all strategic decisions. Second, the *communication leader* whose responsibility covers communication strategy and issues. And finally, the *communication manager* who is responsible for communication, but is not a member of the senior management group.

A European study of public relations roles<sup>13</sup> points to four characteristics which defines the contribution that professionals make to organisations. These are given in Table 9.1.

Work undertaken in the UK and US by Danny Moss and colleagues<sup>14</sup> isolated five elements to the communication/public relations manager role. One was undertaking high-level technical work, with the other four managerial roles being:

- *monitor and evaluator*: describes the responsibilities that practitioners have for organising, controlling and monitoring the work of their departments both internally and externally;
- *key policy and strategy adviser*: concerns the relationship senior practitioners should have with their senior management although the researchers found that this was more of an expectation than a reality;
- *issues management expert*: here the practitioner's role is identifying and responding to external threats and interpreting them;

Table 9.1 The four characteristics of European communication/public relations

<i>REFLECTIVE</i> Analysing changing standards, values and standpoints in society and discussing these with members of the organisation in order to adjust the standard, values/standpoint of the organisation accordingly. Concerned with organisational standards, values and views and aimed at the development of mission and organisational standards.	<i>MANAGERIAL</i> Developing plans to communicate and maintain relationships with public groups in order to gain public trust and/or mutual understanding. Concerned with commercial and other (internal and external) public groups and with public opinion as a whole, and is aimed at the execution of the organisation's mission and strategies.
<i>OPERATIONAL</i> Preparing the means of communication for the organisation (and its members) in order to help the organisation formulate its communications. Concerned with services and aimed at implementation of communication plans developed by others.	<i>EDUCATIONAL</i> Helping all members of the organisation to become communicatively competent in order to respond to societal demands. Concerned with the thinking and behaviour of organisational members and aimed at internal publics.

- *troubleshooting/problem solver*: this relates to the practitioner reacting to and dealing with internal and external challenges, threats and crises, and they are recognised as the person nominated to do so. The difference between this and issues management is that whereas the former is a predictive and advisory role, this latter role is focused on the day-to-day operational.

The fact that there are so many articulations of the roles of senior public relations practitioners indicates a challenge. Their roles are extremely broad and variable, highly dependent on the specific contexts and difficult to describe. Given this, it is hard to gain clarity on even the levels of skills and knowledge that are required to underpin these roles, let alone describe the behaviours needed to enact them.

A good starting point, however, given the roles are defined by senior managers and especially the CEO, is to look at the expectations and they have. This was alluded to briefly in Chapter 5, but is explored more thoroughly here. There have been several studies<sup>15</sup> on what CEOs require from their senior practitioners. Drawing these together yields the following list:

- detailed knowledge of the business;
- detailed knowledge of the external environment;
- extensive internal networks and relationships;
- a broad and varied public relations background;
- credibility with senior managers;
- a team player;
- an educator and coach;
- an individual on top of the issues and able to advise on them;
- an ability to engage in multiple stakeholder relationships with a mature and long-term perspective (authentic rather than purely transactional);

- a strong ethical base and personal integrity;
- an individual who will tell the CEO 'how it is' and provide honest feedback from stakeholders;
- good understanding of the brand and an ability to promote and defend it;
- an ability to develop both business and public relations strategies.

Before moving on to what successful public relations leaders do in detail, it is worth considering briefly two issues that constantly arise in discussions that we have with senior practitioners. The first is why public relations is not valued as much as it should be, and, second, how that can be rectified.

First the good news. There are a number of surveys<sup>16</sup> asking where the most senior public relations professional is located in the organisational hierarchy, and although the figures provide inconsistent results, it is clear that the trend is upward with more having board positions and about 50 per cent of those surveyed now reporting to the CEO, chair or chief operating officer. So what is preventing the other half of senior communicators progressing to these heights? The problem is largely with public relations people themselves and the solution is largely in their hands. While there is still some prejudice against public relations as a discipline, most CEOs and chairs interviewed in the studies indicated earlier do understand its importance and wish to employ very senior and skilled practitioners. Their problem is that they find it difficult to recruit individuals with the right capabilities. The main issues are:

- a lack of broad industry and general business knowledge which is required in all board level directors, including legal, financial and strategic understanding and capability;<sup>17</sup>
- an inability or lack of experience in dealing with organisational politics and power relations;<sup>18</sup>
- over-reliance on technical skills such as how to handle social media, run complex events and liaise with stakeholders – financial directors rarely talk about the technicalities of the balance sheet although they can do in detail when required to;
- gaps in knowledge in their own subject, for example being able to explain the science of public relations rather than relying on experience;<sup>19</sup>
- gaps in general business capabilities such as leadership and coaching, an ability to work at all levels and general networking skills;<sup>20</sup>
- a lack of some personal attributes, for example self-insight, assertiveness, an ability to make difficult decisions, confidence, flexibility and energy.<sup>21</sup>

It is apparent therefore that addressing these issues will begin to position senior public relations professionals for higher level roles, but there are four other factors that gain respect and organisational influence.

The first is excellent performance in the current role and that includes technical proficiency (see Chapter 12). Promotion is often based on personal

credibility and senior managers' confidence that a contribution can be made at a higher level.

Second, it is vital to attach to the CEO's agenda. CEOs appreciate problem solvers and proactive managers who provide solutions to the issues they are dealing with.

Third, board-level aspirants have to hone their influencing skills<sup>22</sup> and use them astutely. Taking opportunities to influence and potentially change senior managers' opinions of the role by demonstrating value and an ability to contribute more widely is not just self-serving; it will be seen to benefit the whole organisation. There is nothing unethical about being influential. Linked to this point is that it is essential to learn the organisational language and behaviours. Senior managers, like all other groups, have their own recurring themes and vocabulary and ways of behaving; a familiarity with this ensures there is no barrier into strategic conversations and joining the group. A note of caution here though – mirroring language and behaviours uncritically is potentially dangerous. The public relations leader has to maintain something of the 'outsider' to retain objectivity and to discharge their ethical guardian and activist responsibilities (more on this in Chapter 11).

The fourth factor is to learn the skill of being a trusted adviser, an adept internal consultant. David Nadler<sup>23</sup> has written extensively on this from an external adviser point of view, but there are many lessons for the internal adviser. These include understanding what it is like to be a CEO in today's challenging environment, the importance of listening, the ability to synthesise information, to summarise problems succinctly and provide viable options. This is solid advice and has skills, knowledge and behaviour at its heart.

While it is quite legitimate for senior practitioners to aspire to be at the board table, or a formal member of the decision-making elite – the dominant coalition – it is not necessary to have this position to be of such importance.<sup>24</sup> The senior adviser role mentioned earlier is a powerful and influential position. The crucial issues are ready access to the elite, credibility, assurance that the public relations leader's opinion counts and that the public relations contribution is championed by an informed senior manager when decisions are made. A useful personal exercise is for leaders to analyse who they spend time with, what the nature of the interactions are and whether the agendas of senior people are being addressed through these interactions.

Given that competencies or behavioural repertoires are knowledge and skills in action it is now worth summarising these before focusing on behaviours.

### **The knowledge and skills set of senior communicators**

It is helpful here to provide a definition of terms: *knowledge* is what practitioners need to *know* in order to undertake their role competently; *skills* are what practitioners need to be able to *do* to undertake their role competently.

There are different approaches to identifying knowledge and skills. An interesting take on this is that of the Swedish Public Relations Association.<sup>25</sup> Its research identified four areas where the practitioner needs to develop knowledge:

- *Processes* create working reality and communicate. Practitioners need to know about organisational design because this creates both opportunities and weaknesses which in turn create communication issues.
- *Structure* includes both physical and mental elements and transparency in both is needed if a holistic view of the organisation is to be communicated.
- *Social interaction* of people in the organisation can be either negative and used as a basis for power plays, or positive with free knowledge sharing, but both affect communicative ability.
- *Organisation-wide relationships* refers to the relationships the organisation has with others in its environment, clearly important for communications.

There are also four skills related to these areas of knowledge (for more on this see also Chapter 11):

- *System designer*: the senior practitioner needs to be involved in processes and structures, to facilitate good communication flows which are organisational enablers.
- *Mediator*: not primarily to defuse potential conflicts, but to create shared understandings and perceptions or 'meaning' within the organisation, a highly skilled and varied contribution.
- *Coach*: to develop the communication skills of others.
- *Influencer*: facilitating conceptual changes in the minds of those in the organisation. This is profoundly bound up in the development of organisational culture. Of course there are deep ethical implications in this role.

The more typical inventories list the main areas of work undertaken by practitioners along with the knowledge and skills needed to underpin these. Many professional associations have such matrices<sup>26</sup> and organisations such as the Universal Accreditation Board (UAP) and International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) have transnational accreditation schemes which also describe required knowledge, skills and abilities. Most of these frameworks have a combination of what are called domain specific (i.e. pertaining specifically to public relations) and general business knowledge and skills<sup>27</sup> and often break them into levels depending on the seniority of the practitioner.<sup>28</sup> The enhanced UAB<sup>29</sup> list shown in Table 9.2 provides 12 common work categories and 10 associated knowledge, skills and ability areas.

How knowledge, skills and abilities are used in performance comprises the set of behaviours or competencies practitioners enact, and it is to this that the chapter now turns.

## 90 Preoccupations of public relations leaders

**Table 9.2** The UAL work categories and knowledge, skills and abilities which underpin practitioner competence

Work categories	
Account/client management	Strategic planning
Public relations programme planning	Project management
Media relations	Social media relations
Stakeholder relations	Issues management
Crisis management	Internal relations and employee communications
Special events, conferences and meetings	Community relations
Knowledge, skills and abilities	
Researching, planning, implementing and evaluating programmes	Ethics and law
Communication models and theories	Business literacy
Management skills and issues	Crisis communication management
Media relations	Using information technology efficiently
History of and current issues in public relations	Advanced communication skills

## The behaviours of public relations leaders

The research underpinning the behavioural work now outlined was funded by the UK Department of Health and became part of the larger project which generated the model outlined in Chapter 5.<sup>30</sup> It is the first systematic study<sup>31</sup> of behaviours in public relations and was undertaken by trained occupational psychologists using a globally validated method<sup>32</sup> in a research project directed by one of us. The research investigated board-level communicators in the public and private sectors to discover if they had a specific and identifiable set of behaviours and whether there were differences between the sectors.

The methodology used produces a unique set of competencies for each group it is applied to and the results given in Tables 9.3 and 9.4 are an aggregate for the private and public sectors respectively. Hence, each individual in the group displays all the behaviours, but the balance of behaviours differs from individual to individual and is dependent on the situations they face. The order in which they are presented is not prioritised.

The research confirms and adds to the conclusions of some of the earlier studies. Senior practitioners based in the private sector in particular fulfil the

**Table 9.3** The ten competency titles, descriptions and behavioural indicators for private-sector communicators

Competency title	Description	Behavioural indicators
<b>Strategic/Long-term View</b>	Provides direction, advice and coaching to individuals or teams. Supports and encourages others. Fosters openness and information sharing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides others with a clear direction</li> <li>• Elevates insights to the board</li> <li>• Builds a strong team of talented individuals</li> <li>• Gives advice and coaches others</li> <li>• Demonstrates commitment to the development of staff</li> <li>• Delegates work appropriately to others</li> <li>• Offers challenging opportunities to staff</li> <li>• Acknowledges the contribution of others through formal or informal recognition</li> <li>• Maintains confidences</li> <li>• Creates an open culture of information sharing</li> </ul>
<b>Leading and Supporting</b>	Provides direction, advice and coaching to individuals or teams. Supports and encourages others. Fosters openness and information sharing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weighs up the positive and negative outcomes of a decision</li> <li>• Makes tough decisions</li> <li>• Identifies urgent decisions</li> <li>• Makes unpopular decisions</li> <li>• Suggests various courses of action</li> <li>• Decides upon a course of action quickly</li> <li>• Takes calculated risks on the basis of adequate analysis</li> <li>• Uses facts and figures when making decisions</li> <li>• Acts with confidence when executing decisions</li> <li>• Makes things happen</li> <li>• Implements solutions</li> </ul>
<b>Making Decisions and Acting</b>	Willing to make tough decisions quickly based on the information available. Successfully generates activity and shows confidence in the chosen course of action.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Looks for positive outcomes and remains optimistic</li> <li>• Communicates messages of hope</li> <li>• Uses humour</li> <li>• Shows awareness of the differences between setback and failure</li> <li>• Deals with ambiguity, making positive use of the opportunities it presents</li> <li>• Keeps emotions under control during difficult situations</li> <li>• Works productively in a pressurised environment</li> <li>• Remains buoyant in emotional or difficult situations</li> <li>• Remains emotionally stable in challenging circumstances</li> </ul>
<b>Maintaining a Positive Outlook</b>	Responds positively to changes or setbacks. Remains calm and in control of own emotions, manages pressure well.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeks opportunities to interact with people at all levels</li> <li>• Builds relationships with 'gatekeepers'</li> <li>• Consults with subject-matter experts</li> <li>• Talks to people regularly</li> <li>• Canvases suggestions and options</li> <li>• Builds relationships across functions</li> <li>• Seeks to build relationships with key individuals</li> <li>• Builds relationships externally</li> <li>• Develops an extended network via team</li> <li>• Imparts knowledge and expertise to others</li> <li>• Makes themselves visible throughout organisation</li> </ul>
<b>Networking</b>	Talks easily to people at all levels both internally and externally. Canvases opinions widely and builds strong infrastructures to receive and disseminate information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeks opportunities to interact with people at all levels</li> <li>• Builds relationships with 'gatekeepers'</li> <li>• Consults with subject-matter experts</li> <li>• Talks to people regularly</li> <li>• Canvases suggestions and options</li> <li>• Builds relationships across functions</li> <li>• Seeks to build relationships with key individuals</li> <li>• Builds relationships externally</li> <li>• Develops an extended network via team</li> <li>• Imparts knowledge and expertise to others</li> <li>• Makes themselves visible throughout organisation</li> </ul>

continued...

Table 9.3 continued

Communicating Communicates verbally and in writing clearly, consistently and convincingly both internally and externally.	Investigating and analysing Gathers, probes and tests information. Shows evidence of clear analytical thinking. Gets to the heart of complex problems and issues.	Taking Responsibility for High Standards Behaves consistently with clear personal values that support those of the organisation. Takes responsibility for the standard of organisational communication and for their own and team's actions	Preparing Thoroughly Spends time understanding tasks and objectives. Prepares carefully and thoroughly for situations that may occur and cause difficulties. Prepares for formal events and meetings.	Understanding Others Remains open minded when taking into account individual views and needs. Demonstrates interest in others and is empathetic to their concerns. Works towards solutions of mutual benefit.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicates clearly and concisely to all interested parties</li> <li>• Sends a consistent message to all</li> <li>• Adapts communication to the needs of the audience</li> <li>• Uses probing questions to challenge views</li> <li>• Speaks with conviction</li> <li>• Support arguments with facts and figures</li> <li>• Articulates the reasons behind actions</li> <li>• Communicates internally in an open and direct way</li> <li>• Confronts senior people with difficult issues</li> <li>• Clarifies that a shared understanding has been received</li> <li>• Writes clearly and engagingly</li> <li>• Make use of contemporary channels of communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gathers information from a wide variety of source</li> <li>• Seeks out different situations to find new information</li> <li>• Uses personal experience to help understand problems</li> <li>• Probes for further information to clarify vague or confusing issues</li> <li>• Breaks information into component parts and relationships</li> <li>• Distinguishes the core issues from peripheral issues of a situation</li> <li>• Identifies similarities between situations</li> <li>• Rapidly grasps the key facts of a situation</li> <li>• Identifies and highlights key facts and figures</li> <li>• Uses numbers and statistics when analysing information</li> <li>• Analyses the potential outcomes of a situation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sets high goals and standards</li> <li>• Behaves consistently in line with organisational values</li> <li>• Clearly defines boundaries for information sharing</li> <li>• Takes responsibility for the team's actions</li> <li>• Accepts that mistakes are made</li> <li>• Admits own mistakes</li> <li>• Handles criticism well and learns from it</li> <li>• Acts quickly to overcome errors</li> <li>• Seeks help from others when required</li> <li>• Stops communication if necessary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plans how objectives can be achieved</li> <li>• Involves team in planning process</li> <li>• Develops plans that take account of potential changing or difficult circumstances</li> <li>• Monitors situations carefully</li> <li>• Maintains a constant awareness of issues helping or hindering progress</li> <li>• Prepares thoroughly for meetings and interviews</li> <li>• Rehearses arguments</li> <li>• Writes agendas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understands the objectives of all parties</li> <li>• Works towards a win-win situation</li> <li>• Asks questions around individual's own issues</li> <li>• Works to understand the motivations of others</li> <li>• Keeps an open mind when others are expressing their views</li> <li>• Tolerates differing needs and viewpoints</li> <li>• Picks up on verbal/non-verbal cues</li> <li>• Considers the impact of action on other people</li> <li>• Shows respect and sensitivity to individual needs and cultural differences</li> <li>• Shows an interest in people</li> <li>• Responds with sympathy</li> </ul>

senior adviser role.<sup>33</sup> It is also apparent that for all senior practitioners technical implementation roles cannot be escaped.

Turning to the private-sector group, the evidence indicates that the *understanding others* behaviour is slightly more prominent than others. This competency not only involves understanding the views of those inside and outside the organisation, but a profound understanding of their motivations and aspirations. This is important in determining the requirements for and the contents of public relations programmes. These senior practitioners are able to form a holistic view of all the different points of view expressed and are able to negotiate positions to develop win-win solutions.

The *strategic/long-term view* competency has special relevance to commercial, 'bottom line' impacts. This competency relates closely to the *investigating and analysing*, and *preparing thoroughly* and *making decisions and acting* competencies. These are linked to a good understanding of the industry, the business and business strategy. They underline an ability to handle, use and interpret information and business intelligence and a willingness to take tough, evidence-based decisions which lead to decisive actions. These competencies clearly demonstrate the abilities deemed essential by chief executives.

Other competencies worth special mention are *taking responsibility for high standards*, with its implications of personal values and ethics, and *maintaining a positive outlook*, with its links to personal attributes such as positivity, flexibility and remaining calm under pressure. Deeper questioning in this area revealed that senior communicators were very aware that their behaviour at times of crisis and extreme pressure was of great organisational value and gained them significant professional credibility.

In the public sector, the *building strong relations* and *consulting and involving* competencies were regarded as more important. It is certainly the case that government demands consultation by many public-sector organisations, but this commitment goes beyond these requirements. A feature of those practitioners working in the public sector is that they are not primarily motivated by power or a desire to make money. They are in the service because they want to make a difference to society. This commitment is very strong and permeates thinking and behaviour. The desire to 'build community' infuses much of their day-to-day activity.

Slightly behind these two competencies came *taking action* and *upholding the reputation of the service*. These leaders frequently work in localities where there are contested issues and many divergent and opposing viewpoints. They are clear and transparent in decision-making and a defined ethical framework guides the decisions they take, with duty to the public being a displayed value. The heavy emphasis on 'people' is noticeable and this demands collaborative, consensual working both internally (with political as well as officer colleagues) and externally. Skilled persuasion and delicate, sensitive mediation involving negotiated positions between stakeholders is an essential requirement of the role.

Table 9.4 The ten competency titles, descriptions and behavioural indicators for public-sector communicators

<i>Understanding the bigger picture</i> Demonstrates a comprehensive understanding of the impact of organisational strategy on own responsibilities.	<i>Taking Action</i> Makes prompt and clear decisions, empowers others to do the same.	<i>Consulting and Involving</i> Works with staff, patients and the wider community to ensure successful consultation and support.	<i>Presenting and Communicating</i> Ensures audience understanding through the use of an appropriate and interactive communication style.	<i>Creating and Innovating</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understands how organisational strategies relate to the bigger picture</li> <li>• Considers the impact of organisational strategies on others</li> <li>• Ensures plans are aligned to organisational development</li> <li>• Puts communication at the heart of organisational development</li> <li>• Prioritises resources and projects according to organisational needs</li> <li>• Recognises when it is appropriate to alter plans when strategies change</li> <li>• Takes account of a wide range of issues across, and related to, the organisation</li> <li>• Understands the pros and cons of a solution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Makes prompt and clear decisions when dealing with contentious issues</li> <li>• Takes responsibility for people and projects</li> <li>• Delivers on promises</li> <li>• Involves relevant people in the decision-making process</li> <li>• Empowers others to make decisions where appropriate</li> <li>• Escalates issues when necessary</li> <li>• Takes initiative and works under own direction</li> <li>• Gives direction to the decision-making of others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listens to the views of others</li> <li>• Encourages others to contribute</li> <li>• Encourages effective team-working</li> <li>• Brings people with the right skills into a project</li> <li>• Shows an awareness of the diverse views of others</li> <li>• Works with people to build acceptable solutions</li> <li>• Develops the skill of individuals and teams</li> <li>• Consults and involves others to gain their support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicates clearly and succinctly, both orally and in writing</li> <li>• Translates complex messages into communication that is relevant for the audience</li> <li>• Adapts communication style according to individual needs</li> <li>• Develops communication that meet the requirements of the particular situation</li> <li>• Projects credibility when presenting information to others</li> <li>• Provides others with the information they need to present a convincing case</li> <li>• Finds new ways to present information to maintain the interest of the audience</li> <li>• Uses an open and interactive communication style</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finds ways to innovate</li> <li>• Looks for new solutions to old problems</li> <li>• Seeks out opportunities to change things</li> <li>• Looks for alternatives</li> <li>• Introduces change sensitively, but firmly</li> </ul>

<i>Persuading and Influencing</i> Gains clear agreement and commitment to an agreed course of action through effective persuasion and negotiation.	<i>Upholding the reputation of the Service</i> Behaves consistently with clear personal values which complement those of the organisation and wider community.	<i>Building Strong Relationships</i> Relates well to a broad range of people, building and maintaining an extensive network of contacts.	<i>Managing Under Pressure</i> Finds ways to enable self and others to cope with difficult challenges, demonstrates clear thinking and keeps problems in perspective.	<i>Formulating Strategies and Concepts</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Persuades others to agree course of action</li> <li>• Helps others to understand different viewpoints and find common ground</li> <li>• Guides conversations to a desired endpoint</li> <li>• Manages conflict sensitively and diplomatically</li> <li>• Makes a strong personal impression on others</li> <li>• Influences the agendas of everyone</li> <li>• Takes account of the internal and external political climate when persuading others</li> <li>• Closes discussion with clear commitment to action from both sides</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Upholds the ethics and values of the service</li> <li>• Demonstrates integrity by acting openly and honestly</li> <li>• Promotes and defends equal opportunities</li> <li>• Builds diverse teams that reflect the wider community</li> <li>• Deals sensitively with personal information</li> <li>• Takes pride in delivering a service to the community</li> <li>• Gains the respect and trust of others</li> <li>• Gives honest and objective advice to others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Builds rapport quickly and makes people feel at ease</li> <li>• Establishes strong relationships with people from all backgrounds</li> <li>• Establishes strong working relationships with people at all levels of the organisation</li> <li>• Builds and maintains strong people networks</li> <li>• Knows who to speak to when particular information is required</li> <li>• Gathers perceptions to increase understanding of underlying organisational issues</li> <li>• Uses humour appropriately to build relationships</li> <li>• Creates a safe environment that encourages others to share information with them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keeps emotions under control in difficult times</li> <li>• Balances the demands of work and personal life</li> <li>• Finds ways to cope with the pressure and expectations that they face</li> <li>• Draws on personal experiences to help self and others through difficult situations</li> <li>• Keeps difficult challenges in perspective</li> <li>• Copes with a changing environment and helps others to feel comfortable with it</li> <li>• Demonstrates clear and realistic thinking when faced with difficult issues</li> <li>• Focuses energy on the most important and relevant issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thinks broadly</li> <li>• Able to identify the important organisational imperatives</li> <li>• Approaches work strategically</li> <li>• Sets and develops communications strategy</li> <li>• Establishes a vision for the communication department</li> <li>• Is able to conceptualise difficult issues clearly and come up with solutions</li> </ul>

in behaviours, but also shows some differences. The comparisons are summarised in Table 9.5.

A number of the competencies can be seen to be almost directly equivalent and are paired at the top of Table 9.5. The *leading and supporting* and *understanding others* competencies from the private sector and *consulting and involving* from the public sector are overlapping. However, there is a slightly different emphasis in each. For the public sector the competency focuses on the importance of consultation and involvement with the community, whereas for the private sector, this was found to be more internally focused. Again, this can be partly explained by the driving purpose of public-sector work, building and working with communities, whereas for the private sector this was focused on engaging internal colleagues in the pursuit of organisational objectives. *Taking responsibility for high standards* in the private sector and *upholding the reputation of the service* in the public sector can also be seen to be similar. For the private sector the emphasis was on the personal standards of the senior communicator, whereas for the public sector the ethics and conduct of the whole organisation to perform for the public good was the concern. A possible explanation here is that private-sector public relations leaders may regard themselves as exemplars of ethical standards within their organisations and this lends credibility to their role as the 'ethical guardian' for the whole organisation.

Table 9.5 A comparison of private- and public-sector competencies

Private Sector	Public Sector
Strategic/Long-term View	Understanding the Bigger Picture
Leading and Supporting Understanding others	Consulting and Involving
Maintaining a Positive Outlook	Managing Under Pressure
Taking Responsibility for High Standards	Upholding the Reputation of the Service
Communicating	Presenting and Communicating
Making Decisions and Acting	Taking Action
Networking	Building Strong Relationships
Investigating and Analysing	
Preparing Thoroughly	Formulating Strategies and Concepts
	Persuading and Influencing
	Creating and Innovating

There are some competencies in the private sector which are not apparent in the public sector and vice versa. *Investigating and analysing* does not appear in the public sector list. This could be because this type of work is completed by less senior colleagues or by specialist departments in the public sector. In addition, public relations leaders in the public sector appear to be more involved in technical implementation work with a significant amount being reactive, especially media relations. This may mean they have less time for considered investigation and analysis. On the other hand, the market imperatives of the private sector and a competitive external environment require constant updating and analysis of information. A more turbulent environment requires more proactive external analysis. That is not to say that turbulence is not a factor in the public sector, but it is of a different nature, often driven by political rather than market imperatives with the required change being to clear and fixed ends. Thus, environmental analysis for external change is not required as much in the public sector.

The absence of the *preparing thoroughly* competence in the public sector is rather more difficult to explain. Close scrutiny revealed that public-sector professionals appear to be under more work pressure than their private-sector colleagues and it could well be that public-sector professionals simply do not have the time to devote to careful preparation and have no support to delegate these activities too.

The *persuading and influencing* competence is not as pronounced in the private sector. This reinforces the emerging picture that gaining commitment by influencing others is a critical behaviour in the public sector. The task of building consensus particularly when there are political overlays is a complex and difficult task requiring immense skill and particular behaviours.

It is perhaps surprising given that private-sector practitioners plan extensively that the *formulating strategies and concepts* competence is absent in their behaviour set. However, this relates more to formulating operational plans and campaigns and reflects the high level of operational work public-sector practitioners are involved in and the sometimes bureaucratic approvals processes they have to go through. It is also a source of frustration in the public sector because practitioners felt they are capable of being involved in strategic planning at a higher level as policies were being formulated, but are often restricted to tactical implementation.

Finally, the *creating and innovating* competence is present only in the public sector and can be explained by the fact that operational campaigns in the public sector usually have very restricted budgets and are often about long-term social change. Therefore, creativity and innovation in maximising the impact of those campaigns over a sustained period is a stock in trade of the job. While this is true of the private sector too, on the whole this requirement is more apparent in the public sector.

Overall, these results show a great deal of similarity between the private and public sectors with the main points of difference reducing to two areas. First, the more overt business-oriented behaviours of analysis and investigation, thinking

strategically and preparation are more observable in the private sector where a focus on business performance is important. Collaboration, cooperation and involvement characterise the behaviours of those involved in public-sector work and this is driven by an emphasis on societal concerns and a requirement for democratic and transparent working with stakeholders.

Finally, it is important to emphasise that competencies are behaviours required to achieve particular organisational objectives and these will differ from industry to industry and sector to sector. The competencies indicated above are not necessarily the behaviours of those individuals in their private lives or the behaviours they would display for another employer, organisation or sector.

### Summary

What this chapter has sought to demonstrate is that having superior knowledge and consummate skill is not enough to be a public relations leader. Yet the authors have found that even with senior practitioners there is a naive belief that this will suffice and frustration that their careers are not advancing. Serious consideration about how the senior leaders' role is enacted has to be undertaken along with learning of the behavioural repertoires that characterise leaders in the most senior positions in organisations. It is salutary to reflect that senior individuals in every organisation whose skill and knowledge is not enough to enact a role, but they have a profound understanding of how to enact a role, and that other attributes which has gained them their position in the organisation.

### Notes

- 1 See Gregory, A. and Edwards, L. (2004). *Patterns of PR in British Companies*. Report commissioned by Eloqui Public Relations from School, and Sterne, G.D. (2008). Business perceptions of public relations in New Zealand, *Journal of Communication Management*, 12(1), 30–50.
- 2 Harrison, K. (2011). *Strategic Public Relations: A Practical Guide*. Yarra: Palgrave Macmillan.
- 3 See research by Gregory, A. (2008). The competencies of senior public relations leaders in the UK: an initial study, *Public Relations Review*, 34(3), 215–223; Moss, D. and Heyman, W.C (2011). Measuring public relations leadership in the 21st century: a second-order factor model in the dimensional of self-dynamics, *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 5(1), 1–20.
- 4 Berger, B.K., Meng, J. and Heyman, W.C (2009). Role modelling in public relations: the influence of role models and mentor is on leadership beliefs and behaviours, presented at 12th international public relations research conference, Melbourne, Australia.
- 5 Moss, D. and DeSanto, B. (2011). *Public Relations: A Managerial Approach*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- 6 Bartram, D. (2004). *The SHL Competency Framework*, SHL Business Solutions, London: Thames Ditton.
- 7 Schein, L.K. (1985). *Organisational Culture and Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- 8 Werder, K.P. and Holtzhausen, D. (2009). An analysis of the influence of public relations department leadership style on public relations effectiveness. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 21(4), 404–22.

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### Summary

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### Notes

- 1 See Gregory, A. and Edwards, L. (2004). *Patterns of PR in Britain's 'Most Admired' Companies*. Report commissioned by Eloqui Public Relations from Leeds Business School, and Sterne, G.D. (2008). Business perceptions of public relations in New Zealand, *Journal of Communication Management*, 12(1), 30–50.
- 2 Harrison, K. (2011). *Strategic Public Relations: A Practical Guide to Success*. South Yarra: Palgrave Macmillan.
- 3 See research by Gregory, A. (2008). The competencies of senior practitioners in the UK: an initial study, *Public Relations Review*, 34(3), 215–223; Meng, J., Berger, B.K. and Heyman, W.C (2011). Measuring public relations leadership in the trait approach: a second-order factor model in the dimensional of self-dynamics, *Public Relations Journal*, 5(1), 1–20.
- 4 Berger, B.K., Meng, J. and Heyman, W.C (2009). Role modelling in public relations: the influence of role models and mentor is on leadership beliefs and qualities. Paper given at 12th international public relations research conference, Miami, FL. March.
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