

understanding of the brand; leadership; public relations as a core organisational competence; and excellence in planning, managing and evaluating public relations.

We have called this the four-by-four model because we find it to be rigorous: it is a comprehensive methodology that allows careful examination of any type of organisation. It is transportable: it can be applied to any organisation irrespective of country context, and we have tested it in Europe, Australasia and Scandinavia. It is robust: it works in times of economic and political stability or instability.

We will now explore the levels and DNA strands in more detail.

The contribution of public relations at four strategic levels

Each of the layers of the pyramid represent different levels at which the organisation has obligations and opportunities involving different types of decision-making and different types of stakeholders.

Societal level

At the societal level, an organisation seeks to obtain legitimacy for itself by trying to gain and maintain overall support from society as a whole. Its place, standing and reputation in society determine whether its 'licence to operate' is granted and supported by public opinion. Here the values (see Chapter 7 for more on values) on which the organisation is based are tested and are either found true or found wanting. Its purpose and direction are also put to the same test.

Public relations should play a central role in helping to clarify the organisation's values and mission, as well as monitoring the way it goes about achieving those to determine whether they are acceptable to society generally. The organisation's reputation – that is, the associations people carry around in their heads about a particular company, public-sector body or cause – with the general public is an indicator of current societal approval or, indeed, disapproval. The public relation's function, then, acts as the organisational antennae by undertaking the boundary-spanning role indicated earlier in this book: constantly monitoring the external environment and public opinion, to bring essential intelligence into the organisation so that its management can act accordingly. The public relations function collects evidence about and makes judgements on how society perceives the organisation and identifies any action that may be required if there are issues to be addressed. It also promotes the organisation by the clear communication of its values and purpose and demonstrating consistency of performance against them.

As is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6 this role requires high levels of contextual intelligence as the public relations practitioner helps the organisation's leaders to make sense of an external environment that is in a permanent state of flux.

Corporate level

At the corporate level, organisations largely focus on financial and business goals. This is the level at which the resources of the organisation are marshalled and the precise scope and nature of the organisation is framed so that it can achieve its mission. Here hard questions are asked because this is where choices have to be made. Even in times of organisational plenty, resources have to be used wisely and effectively for it to maintain societal and stakeholder approval and to ensure it is operating effectively and efficiently. Apart from the more obvious resources that have to be in place such as financial, human, technological, estate and so on, as Laurati argues, the cognitive and behavioural resources of the organisation also have to be secured to ensure success.⁷ There are three elements to this.

First, the organisation has to ask if it has the reputation it needs in order to achieve what it aspires to do. For example, a local company with a reputation for ignoring local community concerns will not be believed if it wants to position itself as an exemplar of social responsibility. It will have to build local reputational capital in community responsibility first, or it could well find itself exposed to ridicule and opposition.

Second, the organisation will need to ensure it has the relationships that it needs to achieve its objectives. For example, a hospital may have a good reputation, but unless it has spent time building relationships with the organisations that fund and commission its services, it will not be able to gain the necessary support for the changes it feels it should make to the services it delivers.

Third, unless the culture of the organisation internally is aligned to what it wishes to promote externally, again it will not succeed. For example, if a company is presenting itself as customer-friendly and the experience of those contacting the organisation is that staff are slow and generally unhelpful, then it will lose all credibility. It will need to ensure staff are trained and 'bought-in' culturally to the customer-service ethos before it attempts to promote this value externally.

Arguing a case based on what reputational, relational and cultural resources are required for the organisation to succeed positions the public relations function in quite a different place: as a corporate-level discipline and peer with other disciplines recognised as having corporate significance. This kind of approach is very different from asking for resources to mount an online campaign aimed at the local community, which will be a purely tactical discussion. It could well be that to build the reputational and relational capital needed for an organisation to meet its objectives requires an online campaign aimed at the local community, but the starting point for the discussion is entirely different: it is corporate and strategic, not operational and tactical. Using the language and disciplines of business at corporate level is important. The HR director will argue for the human assets required to deliver the organisational vision and the business unit director will make a case for their operational area in similar terms. Public relations should be no exception.