

activities the public relations function will be involved in commonly include (but this is not the complete list):

- constructing communication programmes and activities to support delivery of organisational priorities;
- advising management and delivering campaigns of different types depending on the requirements of the stakeholder group involved, for example social-marketing programmes for behaviour change (e.g. childhood obesity), mass-media campaigns for information dissemination (e.g. new online services to support more traditional retail services), personalised/one-to-one engagement (e.g. with regulators or key delivery partners);
- using recognised business disciplines to design effective communication plans which also embrace the full range of communication techniques, including social marketing and online;
- moving seamlessly between reactive, proactive and interactive roles depending on the relationship with the stakeholder involved;
- evaluating programmes and communication activities for effectiveness.

At this level, a great deal of time is spent on putting together public relations plans of different types depending on the needs of the stakeholder groups involved. Hence, social-marketing programmes may be needed to encourage behavioural change in society as a whole, for example adopting healthy lifestyles; marketing campaigns will be aimed at potential customers to help product sales; lobbying campaigns targeted at MPs individually will be mounted to influence voting intentions; and so on.

Each plan will be different depending on its purpose, who is involved, their communication channel-use habits, the timing of the campaign, and so on. However, the disciplines behind the planning process are the same and Chapter 10 covers the bases on this.

The point of going through the strategic levels at which public relations can make a contribution is to:

- generate a better understanding of organisational strategy and how this might be conceptualised for PR practitioners;
- clarify the types of input that public relations can make to the organisation as a whole, including its input to organisational decision-making;
- demonstrate that public relations contributes more to an organisation than just programmes and campaigns – it can make a strategic input at all levels;
- show that programmes and campaigns have to be seen within a broader context and ensure all programmes are aligned to societal, corporate and/or stakeholder objectives;
- enable the practitioner to articulate and move between the various roles that they must play within the organisation.

The four attributes: DNA strands

Having looked at the four levels of strategic accountability where communication can make a significant contribution, it is now appropriate to examine the four attributes that characterise good communication.

An excellent understanding of the brand

Brands often operate at two levels which we will call background and foreground brands. There are some brands that are internationally known such as Singapore Airlines, Apple, Pepsi-Cola, McKinsey & Co, Toyota, AstraZeneca and the US Army. The 'general public' will have a perception of those brands, even though they may never have experienced them. Much of that perception will be coloured by the industry sector it operates in, the country in which it is headquartered and the public opinion that prevails about it. These brands are very powerful and intersect with and shape our lives and society. Some private-sector brands such as Google and Coca-Cola are financially larger than many country economies and it is salutary to reflect that modern life would be very different without powerful search engines. Foreground brands are those that are personally experienced and to which there is more or less emotional or utilitarian attachment. Background and foreground brands can be combined. A good example is the UK NHS. The service and the values it seeks to represent are a virtual proxy for British values as a whole: respect, fairness, compassion for those unable to help themselves and embodying an ideal held since the inception of the NHS in 1948, that good healthcare should be available to all, regardless of wealth.⁸ There is a strong emotional attachment between British people and the NHS; indeed a former Chancellor of the Exchequer, Nigel Lawson, stated that the NHS is 'the nearest thing the UK has to a national religion'.⁹ It is a source of national pride and the British people have a strong sense that it is theirs – they own it and are connected with it literally from cradle to grave. It is associated with matters of essential importance and with key rites of passage such as birth, parenthood and death. Against this national background and sentiment, it is at the local level that most people experience the NHS through visits to their family doctors and local hospitals. The national and the local are, however, indivisible and the brand concept has to take this into account.

The concepts of brands and branding are enormously complex.¹⁰ We would contend that the NHS is among the most complex brands. The NHS's simple white logo on a solid light-blue rectangular background is instantly recognised by 98 per cent of the UK's population¹¹ and evokes a deep and complex response. The essence of the brand is defined in the NHS Constitution,¹² which describes its purpose, principles and values alongside the rights and responsibilities that drive it.

A deep understanding of that brand and what it means to the wide range of stakeholders who associate with it and believe they own it is essential for communicators to undertake their role effectively. Their task is to demonstrate