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The public relations function in high-tech organizations of Silicon Valley

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THE PUBLIC RELATIONS FUNCTION IN HIGH-TECH
ORGANIZATIONS OF SILICON VALLEY

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Journalism and Mass Communications

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

by

Madhupa Bakshi

December 2000

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A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Ken Plowman", written over a horizontal line.

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ABSTRACT

THE PUBLIC RELATIONS FUNCTION IN HIGH-TECH ORGANIZATIONS OF SILICON VALLEY

by Madhupa Bakshi

This thesis is about the practice of public relations in high-tech organizations of Silicon Valley. It examines the model of communication, the roles of public relations professionals in these organizations, their scope of participation in strategic decision making, and the presence of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) and the position of public relations in that mix.

The research methodology was multiple case study and data was collected through interviews, documentation, and archival records. Research revealed that the organizations followed the asymmetric model of communication under a symmetric philosophy, participation in strategic decision making was marginal, with the role being mainly that of expert prescriber. In the IMC process, public relations was simply another component often used primarily for press relations.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Silicon Valley serves as a catalyst in the economic and technological growth of the San Francisco Bay Area. Nestled between California's Santa Cruz Mountains and the Diablo Mountains, it holds 385 of the Bay Area's largest public companies (Lashinsky, 1999). The saga of Silicon Valley began with a Stanford class project that David Packard designed for a new kind of audio oscillator, and with the help of a classmate he launched Hewlett-Packard in 1938. A couple of Palo Alto natives--Lee de Forest, whose invention of the vacuum tube in 1906 marks the cornerstone of television history, and William Shockley, who launched a company to make semiconductors out of germanium--also contributed to the Valley's high-tech ambience. Eight Shockley engineers, however, thought silicon would be a better material and left to launch their own company, Fairchild Semiconductor. Fairchild also begat Intel, Advanced Micro Devices, Monolithic Memories, and National Semiconductor. These companies in turn begat other spin-offs. With the establishment of Stanford Industrial Park in the mid '50s, the very character of Silicon Valley as a conglomeration of interrelated, interbred technology companies took hold (McCormick, 1999). In 1971, Intel introduced the microprocessor, and that launched another major segment of the Valley's economy. In the early history of the personal computer the Homebrew Computer Club, a user group, served as training ground for many of the most important figures. It was in front of the Homebrew club audience

that Steve Wozniak and Steve Jobs unveiled the Apple I. Today Silicon Valley boasts hundreds of successful start ups and companies that are leading the web-revolution.

Much of this success of Silicon Valley companies has been attributed to their different work culture. Silicon Valley's pioneers explicitly sought to avoid the hierarchical structures of East Coast companies (Saxenian, 1994). William Hewlett and David Packard, and later Intel's Robert Noyce, pioneered management styles based on teamwork and participation in which communication between the various constituents is open and straightforward. It is this nontraditional management-style that provoked an examination of the direction of the flow of communication in such organizations.

This brings in the role of public relations, which since the early twentieth century has been responsible for communication within and outside the organization. James E. Grunig and Todd Hunt describe it as the "management of communications between an organization and its publics" (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p.6). As outlined by K. Sriramesh, James Grunig, and Jody Buffington (1992) public relations professionals play the ideal boundary spanner role as defined by the open systems of systems theory. They play a crucial role in managing an organization's interdependence with its environment. However, according to Grunig (1992), the effectiveness of this role depends on the culture and type of organization. He researched four types of organizations, traditional, mechanical, organic, and mixed mechanical organizations. The mixed mechanical organizations and organic organizations best describe the Silicon Valley organizations because they all have highly skilled laborers, are highly

complex, and are either small or large in scale. Of the four types of organizations only in mixed mechanical organizations, which are large in scale and high in complexity, is there a combination of persuasive and cooperative communication. Therefore, it was hypothesized that as boundary spanners the public relations professionals will be more effective if high-tech organizations are mixed mechanical organizations.

Two basic forms of organizational culture, authoritarian and participative, has been identified by David Dozier, Larissa Grunig, and James Grunig (1995) as affecting the practice of public relations in organizations. In participative culture, organizations are open to outside ideas, value teamwork, and favor adaptation over tradition and domination. Silicon Valley organizations as described in the existing literature demonstrate the traits of participative culture. They are also different in their work culture from traditional organizations because they experiment with flexible organizational building blocks designed to address tasks, “kaleidoscopic” change, and continuous innovation (Bahrami, 1992). In this context it was necessary to explore how the nontraditional management styles and different work cultures of the organization affect the practice of public relations.

However, the public relations function is dependent on the model of public relations followed by the organizations. Four models of public relations have been outlined by Grunig and Hunt (1984)--press agentry, public information, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical models. For this study the two-way symmetrical and the two-way asymmetrical have been considered as more important because Silicon Valley organizations, as discussed, favor participative culture where

two-way communication is given preference. It was hypothesized that the mixed motive model of public relations, which uses short term asymmetrical practices within the context of broad symmetrical philosophy, is suitable for high-tech organizations, because they are constantly changing to meet the needs of the various stake-holders. This study examined whether this model is pursued by high-tech organizations or not.

Research by Dozier, Grunig, and Grunig (1995) has shown that whatever the model of public relations, the public relations professionals are more effective in an organization if they are part of the strategic management process. Strategic management has been defined as the management of the relationship of the organizational mission coincident with managing the relationship of the organization to its environment. Therefore, by definition, strategic management lays emphasis on managing the external environment, which lies within the purview of public relations. This study explored the question of whether the high-tech organizations provide a scope of strategic management to the profession of public relations.

The public relations professional's participation in the organization depends upon the role he/she plays in the organization. Role in an organization depends upon role expectations. Based on the role expectations, the public relations professional fulfills different functions ranging from that of a strategic planner to a technician. This study reviewed the various roles and tried to match them with the expectations of high-tech companies. The literature on expectations of high-tech companies show that they demand technically savvy people with managerial expertise. As James Kador (1991) stated, firms specializing in high-tech industries seek new hires who have

public relations acumen along with a bent on technology. However, the focus is often on cost-cutting and sophisticated management of the communication process, which favors new trends like Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC). IMC seeks to amalgamate public relations, advertising, and promotion within an organization. The question that becomes crucial is what role does the public relations function play in the process? It can be reduced to a technical role if it simply disseminates information. On the other hand it can help IMC by providing a global understanding of how impressions are created by promoting brand and company image, and it can also act as a catalyst of change by influencing the management of relationships and motivation. Thus the final question posed by this study was what is the status of public relations within the IMC process.

To examine these questions the researcher chose the qualitative method of case study because the various theoretical propositions did not lend themselves to quantitative analysis. Multiple case studies were carried out as they gave greater scope of exploration. Four organizations were selected from the high-tech organizations of Silicon Valley, which were classified into small, medium, and large based on the number of employees. The classification of the organizations followed the San Jose Mercury News' (1999, April 18) identification of top 20 employers in Silicon Valley based on the number of employees. The top 20 have from 124,000 to 7,800 employees and have been categorized as large organizations, companies with 7,500 to 5,000 employees have been categorized as medium, and below 5,000 employees as small organizations.

Value of the Study

The literature does not reveal any studies on this subject. Therefore, this study provides knowledge about what is practiced as public relations in high-tech firms in Silicon Valley. In exploring the role theory of public relations, the particular functions of the public relations professionals shows whether their technical expertise is more in demand or whether they are encouraged to think more strategically. This will help the aspiring public relations professionals to mold their expertise to suit the needs of Silicon Valley high-tech organizations.

By way of theoretical contribution the research demonstrates what model of public relations is favored by the high-tech organizations, which do not follow the structure of traditional organizations. Exploration of the strategic role of the public relation profession in Silicon Valley shows whether in nontraditional high-tech organizations public relations is effective only when it is a part of the strategic management team.

So far there has been no research regarding the position of public relations in the IMC process in high-tech organizations. This research helps to reveal whether the practice of public relations is being reduced to a technical function or contributing to the whole process by shaping the direction of the process. The status of public relations in the IMC process shows what public relations professionals should expect if they are part of such a process.

Delimitations

Since the case study methodology was adopted, there was scope for researcher bias because in this particular methodology the researcher's convictions can influence the directions of findings and observations. As Robert Yin (1994) elaborates that "too many times, the case study investigator has been sloppy and has allowed equivocal evidence or biased views to influence the direction of the findings and conclusions" (p.9). This researcher consciously tried to avoid personal bias by reporting the exact findings. Bias can also occur if the respondents withheld or gave misleading information. The problem was countered by asking the same questions to the respondents. A major source of bias and one of the weakness of this study was that the respondents supplied documentation and archival records of their own choice. The researcher had no scope of choosing these records. The results of the study cannot be generalized to populations, however, as Yin (1994) points out, the goal of the case study is to expand and generalize theories and not enumerate frequencies. As for the criticism that case studies result in massive documents, efforts had been made to make this particular research less lengthy by narrowing down the subject and time frame of the study. Any error due to inexperience of the researcher was accounted for in the review process of this thesis.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Conceptualization

The literature review was conceptualized through the discussion of systems theory, particularly the open systems and boundary spanning. The effectiveness of the boundary spanner role of public relations in organizations depends upon the type of organization. Therefore, it led to a discussion of how the type of organization influences the practice of public relations. However, the practice of public relations is not only dependent on the type of the organization but also on the culture of an organization. Therefore, this study also explored the theories related to the culture of organizations and model of public relations followed by the organizations. To see how this applies to Silicon Valley organizations the study reviewed the relevant literature on the culture of high-tech organizations. Since the model of public relations and culture of the organization determine whether public relations would be part of strategic management, this study examined the roles a public relations professional needs to be in if he is to be a part of the strategic management team. It is followed by a review of the literature on what role the high-tech industry demands from public relations professionals. Often public relations is a part of IMC, which necessitated a discussion of the same.

Systems Theory

Systems theory asserts that every system is composed of a number of separate and interdependent parts or subsystems. Each subsystem simultaneously influences the

other subsystems and the larger system. Each subsystem monitors information provided by the actions of other subsystems, processes that information, changing in some way, and then acts on its interpretations of that information. The interdependence within a given organization's operating culture is equated to Daniel Katz and Robert Kahn's (1978) open system rather than a closed system perspective. Organizations in open systems are dependent on other organizations or groups in their environment. They cannot depend only on internal processes or interactions as in a closed system. Gerald Goldhaber (1993) said that an organization is an open system because of its constant interaction with its environment. He described a systems loop, the loop being input from the environment, throughput, and output with feedback coming back through the loop to re-input in the organization. This feedback represents the effects of other organizations and leads it to adapt or change to coexist better with its environment.

Open organizations either have a large number of boundary role elements, people who maintain communication with outsiders, or a small number of active boundary role elements. Charles Conrad (1994) outlines four crucial roles played by boundary spanners: (a) Providing employees with information about the organizational environment; (b) obtaining strategic information about the organization's input (raw materials, personnel and so on) and output (changes in consumer tastes, competitors' pricing or advertising strategies, and so on); (c) controlling dissemination of information throughout the organization, protecting people inside the organization from outsiders who would like to influence their behavior; (d) representing the

organization to others by providing outsiders with evidence that the organization is trying to meet the outsiders' needs, and also influencing the activities and attitudes of outsiders through carefully planned and executed persuasive communication (p. 131). As boundary spanners, public relations practitioners have one foot in the organization and the other in the environment, constantly interacting within and outside the organization (Sriramesh, Grunig, & Buffington, 1992, p. 578). Information gathering, information buffering, diffusion, and image management all are interrelated elements of the boundary spanner's organizational role. This role is outlined as the ideal role of the public relations professional. Practitioners, therefore, play a crucial role in managing an organization's interdependence with its environment.

Type and Culture of an Organization

The effectiveness of the boundary spanner role of public relations professionals depends on both the type and culture of the organization. Research has shown that the type and culture of organizations dictate the nature of public relations for organizations. L.Grunig (1992) researched four types of organizations based on Hage and Hull's classification of organizations into traditional or craft, mechanical, organic, and mixed mechanical/organic organizations. Traditional or craft organizations are small-scale operations with low complexity. Mechanical organizations are large-scale, low complexity structures that employ many people. Organic organizations are small scale, but high in complexity with highly skilled workers. Mixed mechanical/organic organizations are large in scale, and high in complexity. L. Grunig's research found that only for the mixed mechanical/organic organizations organizational type was a

strong predictor of public relations behavior. For the other three types of organizations this typology was useful only in indicating how organizations should decide what kind of public relations they should practice, rather than what they actually tend to do.

Mixed mechanical organizations and public relations.

Grunig found that in mixed mechanical organizations there is a combination of persuasive and cooperative communication and public relations activity is more emphasized than in any of the other organizational types. Public relations staff are expected to communicate with a greater number of diverse outside audiences. This fits the description of boundary spanners. Also the high-tech organizations of Silicon Valley match the descriptions of the last two types of organizations. Thus it follows that if they are mixed mechanical organizations, then they will place emphasis on the boundary spanner role of public relations.

Again the Hage and Hull typology has been used to predict the model of public relations (which has been described in detail later in this chapter) followed by organizations. J. Grunig had theorized that craft organizations would practice press agency, the mechanical organizations would practice public information, the organic organization would practice both the two-way symmetric, and the mixed organization would practice both two-way models (David Dozier & Larissa Grunig, 1992, p. 404). However, later studies have not confirmed these theories. While four studies (D. Fabiszak, 1985; S. McMillan, 1984; E. Pollack, 1984; R. Pollack 1986) found consistently small and statistically insignificant relationships Schneider's (aka L. Grunig, 1985) study found that the Hage and Hull typology can account for some of

the variance in the model of public relations practiced in organizations. However, the theory is insufficient to adequately describe why public relations is practiced as it is in most organizations (Dozier, et al. 1992). Therefore, while type of organization can indicate the boundary spanning role and the model of public relations it cannot be the sole pointer of the nature of public relations practiced by organizations

Authoritarian and participative culture and public relations.

Therefore, it is necessary to look into the relationship of organization culture and public relations. This interdependence of organization culture and public relations as explained by Sriramesh, et al. (1992) is that organizational culture consists of the sum total of shared values, symbols, meanings, beliefs, assumptions, and expectations that organize and integrate a group of people who work together. It is this shared belief that influences presuppositions about public relations in an organization. Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig (1995) identified two basic forms of organization culture, authoritarian and participative, in their Excellence Survey of 4,600 employees who were not CEOs or top communicators of various organizations in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom (p.138). In organizations with participative culture, employees are infused with shared values and inspired as a team to accomplish a common mission. Open to outside ideas, these organizations value teamwork, and favor innovation and adaptation over tradition and domination. In contrast, authoritarian organizations are closed to outside ideas and cohesiveness. They place little value on public relations and communication management. Therefore, it can be

said that the culture of a high-tech Silicon Valley organization will affect its practice of public relations.

Silicon Valley Perspective

Since the present discussion relates to organizations of Silicon Valley one needs to examine the culture fostered by these organizations to determine how it affects the practice of public relations. It has already been noted that high-tech companies have a different work culture where communication is open and straightforward. The following discussion reviews that culture as it is presented in the existing literature.

First, what stands for high-tech industry must be defined. According to Everett Rogers (1984) it is characterized by (a) highly skilled employees, many of whom are scientists and engineers; (b) a fast rate of growth; (c) a high ratio of R&D expenditures to sales; and (d) a worldwide market for its products. Electronics is not the only high-tech industry today; genetic engineering is another, as are aerospace, pharmaceuticals, and instrumentation. A survey of the top 150 companies in Silicon Valley by the San Jose Mercury News showed that computers and semiconductor manufacturing are the two biggest industries of this region (Lashinsky, 1999). The success of Silicon Valley has been attributed to its network-based industrial system (Saxenian, 1994). The region's dense social networks and open labor market encourage entrepreneurship and experimentation. Companies compete intensely while learning from one another about changing markets and technologies through informal communication and collaboration. In a network-based system, the organizational boundaries within

companies are porous, as are the boundaries between companies themselves and between local institutions such as trade associations and universities. The advantage of a network-based industrial system is demonstrated in the following example. During the '80s Sun Microsystems, which is Silicon Valley-based, and Apollo Computers, which was Boston-based, competed fiercely in the field of workstation engineering. While Apollo adopted proprietary rights of its workstation design and made its products incompatible with other machines, Sun pioneered open systems. Sun adopted the Unix operating systems and made the specifications for its systems widely available to suppliers and competitors. This allowed Sun to focus on designing the hardware and software for workstations and to limit manufacturing, choosing instead to purchase virtually all components off the shelf from external vendors. The result was Sun's workstations were less expensive to produce and priced lower than the Apollo systems. Sun grew into a multi-billion-dollar industry, while Hewlett-Packard bought Apollo. Apollo's closed culture did not enable it to gain prominence as many start ups do in Silicon Valley. Saxenian (1994) contrasts Sun Microsystems' success with Apollo Computers to show that local economies with industrial systems built on regional networks are more flexible and technologically dynamic than those in which learning is confined to individual companies. Similarly, within Silicon Valley, an inward-looking, closed culture at one stage virtually spelled the doom of Apple Inc. The original Mac was under-powered and literally closed to non-Apple technology. It took the removal of Steve Jobs by John Sculley to open the Mac up. But Sculley, like Michael Spindler who followed him, could not persuade the technologists to go further

and license the Mac operating system. Had Apple done so, it might have dominated the computer market around the world. However, in Silicon Valley such examples of a closed culture are few. It is home to hundreds of high-tech companies that adjust to one another's needs through shifting patterns of competition and collaboration.

Organizational Culture in Silicon Valley

This atmosphere of collaboration suggests that high-tech organizations are probably more flexible than the traditional organizations. Bahrami (1992) found that high-tech organizations in Silicon Valley experimented with flexible organizational building blocks, designed to address tasks, “kaleidoscopic” change, and continuous innovation. These changes pointed to a somewhat radical reshaping of the traditional organizational landscape. He has contrasted the organizational attributes of the traditional model with the emerging model in the following manner: (a) single center versus multiple centers, (b) self contained versus steeples of expertise, (c) independent versus interdependent units, (d) vertical integration versus multiple alliances, (e) uniform versus diverse structures, (f) parochial versus cosmopolitan mindset, (g) and emphasis on efficiency versus emphasis on flexibility.

The key organizational challenge facing many high-tech firms is balancing several opposing tensions: (a) selling and servicing existing products while developing and bringing new ones on board; (b) remaining disciplined, focused, and frugal, while continuously learning, experimenting, and re-calibrating; (c) generating consensus, yet ensuring timely decisions; (d) balancing individual contribution and teamwork; and (e) ensuring short-term profitability in the context of a long-term vision. Companies

manage this difficult balance by being both centralized and decentralized. The resulting organization can best be characterized as both centralized and decentralized. It is centralized because top management teams are a critical force behind charting the strategic direction and defining the boundaries for individual and team initiatives. It is decentralized because front-line personnel can exercise discretion in dealing with new imperatives as they arise, within broad, yet well-defined, strategic, and cultural parameters. The critical catalyst in creating this alignment is reliance on formal and informal bridging mechanisms, which establish direct communication channels between the leaders and the doers. These include electronic-based communication, planning sessions and review meetings, informal opportunities for interaction, educational forums, and open access protocols. Regular communication ensures that impending changes in market realities and strategic priorities can be quickly discussed, evaluated, and implemented (Bahrami, 1992).

Models of Public Relations

The discussion has so far indicated that culture and type of organization determine the public relations behavior of organizations. In the case of Silicon Valley organizations the discussion indicated that they were typically organic or mixed mechanical/organic organizations, whose culture is characterized by open communication and different constituents are encouraged to express their opinions. It is now necessary to see what model of public relations will be followed by these organizations because the culture and type of organization determine the models of public relations followed by organizations.

A model is an abstraction, a “map” of reality that captures the important features but leaves out much of the detail (Dozier, et al. 1995). Four models of public relations have been identified: they are publicity/press agency, public information, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical models. The press agency model of public relations emphasizes efforts to attract or divert public opinion without any regard to public feelings or attitudes. Though it was at its height in the mid-19th century, Scott Cutlip, Alan Center, and Glen Broom (1994) say that elements of press agency are found in many public relations programs today. The public information model of public relations emerged at the beginning of 20th century as a reaction to attacks on large organizations and government agencies by muckraking journalists. These corporations hired journalists as public relations practitioners who wrote press handouts explaining their company’s actions. Since these two models concentrate on getting coverage or support with various publics without taking into consideration the results of such information dissemination, they do not describe the model of public relations practiced by Silicon Valley high-tech organizations. Instead the culture of high-tech companies favor the idea of two-way communication, which is also more suitable to the boundary spanner role.

The idea of two-way asymmetrical communication came into being when Edward Bernays coined the term “to engineer consent.” Here the communicator gathers information from target publics to create messages that try to manipulate or persuade the publics to comply with company objectives of achieving marketing success. The two-way flow is indicated by the feedback that is taken from the target

publics. On the other hand, two-way symmetrical public relations departments use bargaining, negotiating, and conflict-resolution strategies to bring symbiotic changes in the ideas, attitudes, and behaviors of both the organization and its publics. However, Dozier, et al. (1995) suggested that the two-way symmetrical model and the two-way asymmetrical model actually make up a single mixed motive model. Both the symmetrical and asymmetrical models of public relations are best represented when communicators try to persuade the publics toward the organization's position and also try to move the dominant coalition toward the public's position. Thus, the mixed motive model involves the short-term use of asymmetrical practices within the context of broad symmetrical philosophy.

The mixed motive model of public relations seems suitable for high-tech organizations because these organizations mold themselves as the need arises. Their emphasis is on flexibility to survive in a market of everyday change, managing high caliber, culturally diverse employees, and consolidating company position by constant innovation. The mixed motive model of public relations would best suit their purpose because it attempts to find a win-win zone between the organization and its various stakeholders.

But the public relations professional can only play a crucial role in finding this win-win zone if he/she is part of the strategic management team. Research by Dozier, et al. (1995) showed that public relations is more effective in organizations if the practitioners participate in the strategic management team. In high-tech organizations it is these teams that set the overall goals of the company. According to Grunig (1992)

whatever the public relations model followed, the public relations professional can only serve the flow of communication if he/she is a member of this strategic management team.

If public relations makes organizations more effective by building long-term relationships with strategic constituencies, it is only a small logical jump to deduce that public relations must participate in the organization's strategic planning and that communication programs must be strategically managed to have that effect (Grunig, 1992, p.117).

The following section provides a review of the concepts of strategic management and how they can apply to high-tech companies.

Strategic Management

The strategic part of strategic management means to accomplish goals and solve problems. Laurie Wilson (1997) said, "Strategy is a well-coordinated approach to reaching an overall goal " (p. 2). James Grunig and Fred Repper (1992, p.119) states Higgins' definition of strategic management as the process of managing the relationship of the organizational mission coincident with managing the relationship of the organization to its environment. According to G. Steiner, J. Miner, and E. Gray as quoted in Grunig, et al. (1992), "strategic management can be distinguished from 'operational management' by the growing significance of environmental impacts on organizations and the need for top managers to react appropriately to them" (p.119).

Grunig, et al. (1992) further argued that the emphasis of the theories of strategic management on monitoring the external environment and adjusting the organization's mission to it suggests a crucial role for public relations. They maintain that public relations must be involved in the process in two ways for it to contribute to

organizational effectiveness. First, it must be part of the strategic management of the total organization--in surveying the environment and in helping to define the mission, goals, and objectives of the organization. Second, public relations also should manage its own programs strategically.

Strategic management is better served in its strategic planning function by strategic public relations. Here strategic planning implies that the top communicator is involved in determining an organization's mission, developing an organization's profile, assessing the external environment, matching the organizational profile with environmental opportunities, identifying best options consistent with the mission, choosing long-term goals, developing short-term objectives, implementing programs, and evaluating success or failure (Dozier, et al., 1995). When public relations is part of the organization's strategic planning function, it is also more likely to manage communication programs strategically. The senior public relations manager helps to identify the stakeholders of the organization by participating in central strategic management. Strategic public relations begins when communication practitioners identify potential problems in the relationship with organization's stakeholders. After identifying the problems, related issues, and publics, strategic public relations identifies objectives for communicating programs and uses these objectives to plan communication programs.

Dozier, et al. (1995) explained the role of the top communicator as a strategic manager in the following way, "Communicators provide two-way channels of communication from dominant coalitions to publics and back again. Such feedback

loops from publics to dominant coalitions are crucial to dominant coalition assessment of organizational environments and appropriate responses to them” (p. 85). Here they explain dominant coalition as the group of individuals within an organization with the power to affect the structure of the organization, define its mission, and set its course through the strategic choices that the coalition makes. A public relations manager could be a part of the dominant coalition and take part in the strategic decision making process or he/she could enjoy its support and influence strategic decision making without actually taking part in the process.

To know whether public relations professionals in high-tech organizations are effective boundary spanners it is necessary to know whether they are part of the decision making process or the dominant coalition and whether they undertake strategic management and planning. However, often their practice is decided by the role they are assigned within the organization, which leads to a discussion of the role theory in public relations.

Organizational Roles of Public Relations

David Dozier (1992) defined roles as abstractions of behavior patterns of individuals in organizations. Roles guide actions of individuals, such that actions mesh with repetitive activities of others to yield predictable outcomes (Katz & Kahn, 1978, p.189). Practitioner roles are key to understanding public relations and organizational communication. Katz and Kahn (1978) gave the role concept a central position in their theory of organization (p.186). The starting point is the office, which an individual occupies as a space in the network of relationships that make up an organization.

Organization members have role expectations of the holders of offices. Role expectations are communicated to the focal office holder through role sending. Role sending comes from members of the role set, people within and outside the organization whose expectations are relevant to the focal person. The focal person's perception of these role sending messages constitutes the received role. The received role is mediated by the attributes of the focal person, as well as by relations between the focal person and the role set. Public relations and organizational communication, some argue, lack strong professional role expectations (Dozier, 1992, p. 328). Caroline Cline, et al. (1986) according to Dozier relegated public relations and organizational communication to the status of semi-professions (p.328).

Role expectations of the organizations is important because it determines what the received role would be. Dozier (1992) stated that Glen Broom conceptualized four theoretical roles for communication and public relations professionals. The expert prescriber role was identified in the practitioner's literature as the informed practitioner. Such practitioners are regarded as experts on public relations, best informed about public relations issues, and best qualified to answer public relations questions. Like the doctor-patient relationship, the expert prescribes and the management obeys. According to F. Steele, this dependency is "seductive" because the relationship is gratifying to the consultant and reassuring to management (Dozier, 1992, p. 330). Dozier concluded following Grunig and Hunt that this role can be logically linked to the two-way asymmetric model of the practice.

The second role, that of communication facilitator, was conceptualized by Broom as that of a “go between,” facilitating communication. The role concerns process, the quality, and quantity of information flow between management and publics. This micro-level role is reflected in the public information and two-way symmetric models of the practice (Dozier, 1992, p. 330). The third role conceptualized by Broom is that of problem-solving process facilitator as practitioners helping management systematically think through organizational communication and providing solutions to problems. Whereas the expert prescriber role leads to passive management involvement, the problem-solving process facilitator works carefully with management to solve problems in a step-by-step manner. Dozier stated that according to Grunig and Hunt the problem-solving process facilitator role is essential in organizations practicing the two-way symmetric model.

The fourth role conceptualized by Broom was that of the communication technician, who is a technical service provider. The dominant coalition makes strategic decisions, specifying organizational actions and designating the communications directed at publics about such actions. The communication technician is then retained to provide those mandated communication services. Grunig and Hunt found that practitioners playing this role are essential players in organizations where the press agency/publicity and public information models are practiced (Dozier, 1992, p. 331).

In addition to these theoretical roles, Dozier (1992) found the public relations manager role that included attributes of problem-solving process facilitation, expert

prescription, and communication facilitation as interchangeable conceptual components of the same empirical role. Managers make policy decisions and are held accountable for public relations program outcomes. They view themselves and are viewed by others as public relations and communication experts. They facilitate communication between management and publics and guide management through what practitioners describe as a “rational problem-solving process ” (p. 333).

Similar to Broom’s communication technician role, Dozier (1992) found a public relations technician role. These technicians do not participate in management decision making but carry out the low-level mechanics of generating communication products that implement policy decision made by others. Two other roles found by Dozier were that of media relations specialist and communication liaison. The former role is similar to a technician’s in salary and organizational status. These practitioners are specialists in external media relations rather than internal communication production activities. The second role was similar to managers in salary and status but was excluded from management decision making. They liaison between management and key publics.

Tom Jordan (1992), late professor of Advertising, San Jose State University, found that public relations has two distinct roles in high-tech organizations. Public relations was either made responsible for product publicity or technical functions or it was part of corporate communications. As part of corporate communications public relations has more scope to participate in the strategic planner role.

Roles are useful as descriptions of practitioners in organizations. For high-tech organizations these roles will determine whether practitioners are part of the strategic management team or whether they are playing a technician role. The roles will also be indicators of the model of public relations followed. Since the roles are often dictated by the role expectations, role sending, and role set of an organization, a review of the expectations of the high-tech industry from public relations professionals will show what role they are expected to play.

Expectations of High-tech Industry

“Public relations acumen along with a bent on technology, or at least a ‘comfort zone’ in communicating about it, are critical skills sought in new hires by firms specializing in high-tech today” (Kador, 1991). Margaret Duffy (1994), in advising public relations professionals about high-tech public relations, writes that:

The intelligent and thoughtful communicators will have prepared a portfolio of skills, will be ready to advise their organizations on all manner of related issues, and will intimately understand the changing constituencies and publics critical to the success of their organizations. They will have the technological prowess allowing them to use innovations to their best advantage. (Duffy, 1994, p.28).

Therefore, according to the practitioners cited above, public relations professionals can succeed in high-tech organizations by a combination of managerial as well as technician skills. Since high-tech organizations have flatter hierarchies and open lines of communication, it can be hypothesized that public relations professionals in these organizations will have access to the dominant coalition and can exercise influence on the strategic decision making process. Robert Stayton, executive

vice-president and director of advanced technology. Hill Knowlton, said, “Communication is going to be the next really important discipline to assert itself in top management at high-tech companies” (Eilts, 1990). Though communication becomes crucial as the bottom line acquires more importance than other factors, in a fast-changing market, the companies are going to look for ways to cut costs, yet achieve maximum benefits through their communication programs.

While public relations can play a crucial role in strategic management for cost efficiency and time issues, it has to come to terms with new trends in communication management. At present the trend is toward IMC, and the high-tech companies open to innovation and cost-cutting methods will find IMC very attractive. Therefore, it is necessary to look at what IMC is and how it can affect the practice of public relations.

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC)

As the organizations grapple with the growth of technology and the “information highway,” and have more diverse publics to cater to they are going to look for ways to develop relationships that stand the test of time. As Don Schultz, Stanley Tannenbaum, and Robert Lauterborn (1993) point out, what most marketers face today is a parity marketplace in which the only true differentiating features are either logistics or communications. Increasingly, there has been a demand to bring the communication programs under one common banner. IMC is the amalgamation of such practices as public relations, marketing, advertising, and promotion. Schultz, et al. (1993) defined IMC as a means of talking to people who buy or don’t buy based on what they see, hear, feel, etc. It means eliciting a response, not just conducting a

monologue. And it means being accountable for results, not just readership scores or day-after recall, and delivering a return on investment, not just spending a budget. They argue that the basic reason for IMC is that marketing communication will be the only sustainable competitive advantage of marketing organizations in the 1990s and into the 21st century. The critical issue for most marketers is how to control the input of information that consumers use to build, adjust, and maintain the product/service/brand concepts in the marketer's category. Marketers don't have control over what competitors say, investigative reporters report, or friends and relatives describe. IMC is the only way through which marketers can keep control over this information flow (Schultz, et al. 1993).

The question that arises is what is the role of public relations in IMC. James Tierney (1993) found that IMC sublimates the public relations function to marketing and imposes a marketing-orientation on its role in the organizations. William Ehling, Jon White, and James Grunig (1992) maintain that marketing and public relations serve different functions and that public relations cannot be excellent if it is subjugated to the marketing function. They assert that when an organization makes public relations a marketing function, practitioners are reduced to the technician role, and the organization loses a valuable mechanism for managing its interdependence with strategic publics. However, Sandra Moriarty (1994) wrote that public relations is particularly aligned with the focus and objectives of IMC and has much to contribute as well as benefit from IMC thinking. Since IMC is focused on the total corporate or brand image, it is important to turn to public relations for a more global understanding

of how impressions are created. Organizational communication factors such as relationships, motivation, and involvement are often addressed by public relations programs and public relations practitioners may be the people in an organization who are most competent to function as change agents--a critical task in creating and managing IMC programs.

Therefore, for high-tech companies practicing IMC it would be interesting to explore whether public relations professionals play a technician role or whether they have the power to influence the total IMC campaign.

Research Questions

The literature review began with the discussion of the open systems of organizations, which led to the boundary spanner role of public relations. The effectiveness of this role was found to be dependent on the culture of the organizations. Since the research is concerned with high-tech organizations of Silicon Valley, it was hypothesized that the flexible culture of these organizations would favor the mixed motive model of public relations. To be effective the mixed motive model required that public relations should be part of strategic decision making. The role in which the professional served the department was an indicator of whether he participated in the strategic decision making. This led to a discussion of the role theory and the enumeration of the roles of public relations as found empirically and theoretically. A survey of the requirements of public relations professionals for high-tech industry demonstrated that they demand both management and technical skills. This led to the discussion of a new development, IMC, which requires that public relations be a part

of a total communication program including marketing and advertising. The consideration of all these factors resulted in the following research questions:

1. Do public relations practitioners in high-tech organizations perform the role of boundary spanning and take part in strategic decision making?
2. What model of communication do the high-tech organizations pursue and what is the role played by the public relations professionals in such organizations?
3. Is public relations a part of IMC in high-tech organizations and is it subordinated to the process or does it give direction to it?

Chapter Three

Method

The researcher chose the method of qualitative research as opposed to quantitative research. In qualitative research the researcher is concerned with the study of socially situated human action and artifacts (Lindlof, 1994). Since the study took into consideration organizational situation and the public relations function in that perspective it did not lend itself to quantitative analysis. Quantitative analysis was inadequate in explaining in-depth the answers to the questions posed. The variables that have been considered would have been difficult to quantify, which would not have produced satisfactory results.

Case Study Strategy

Since this research was focused on exploring the question of how the public relations function is practiced in high-tech organizations, an exploratory case study was best suited as a research strategy. Yin (1994) mentions three conditions that should justify the adoption of research strategy: (a) the type of research question posed, (b) the extent of control an investigator has over actual behavioral events, and (c) the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events. As the research was not focused on the question of where, how many, and how much, the strategies of survey and archival analysis were not applicable. According to Yin (1994) “how” and “why” questions are more explanatory and likely to lead to the use of case studies, histories, and experiments as the preferred research strategies. The researcher could not use history as a method of research because relevant data regarding this particular

topic was virtually nonexistent. This subject also did not lend itself to experimentation, for experiment requires control over behavioral events and that was difficult to achieve in this particular research. Here the research question posed is “how” the public relations function can be defined in high-tech organizations, and given that the investigator had no control over the actual events and the subject is contemporary, exploratory case study was the most appropriate research strategy.

Multiple Case Study

The researcher used multiple case studies versus a single case study because the method gave greater scope of exploration and also the subject studied was not rare or revelatory. The multiple case study method as outlined by Yin (1994) has the advantage of being more compelling and therefore more robust (p. 47). The cases were carefully chosen so that they followed the replication logic of either producing a similar result or contrasting results. Four case studies were conducted so that organizations of different sizes got represented. The classification of the organizations was done on the basis of the number of employees, following the San Jose Mercury News's (1999, April 18) classification of the companies into the largest employers by size. The top 20 have from 124,000 to 7,800 employees and have been categorized as large organizations, and companies with 7,500 to 5,000 employees have been categorized as medium, and below 5,000 as small organizations. Companies on which the case studies were conducted were:

Seagate Technology-the largest manufacturer of disc drives, magnetic discs and read-write heads, and innovator in tape drives, employing 60,000 world wide.

Headquarters: Scotts Valley.

Amdahl Corporation-employing about 10,000 people, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Fujitsu Limited, it develops and deploys systems, services, and support for computer-intensive corporations. Headquarters: Sunnyvale.

Electronic Arts-one of the leading independent interactive entertainment software companies, developing, publishing, and distributing products for personal computers and advanced systems such as-Playstation and Nintendo 64, it employs about 2,500 worldwide. Headquarters: Redwood City.

E-Color Inc-a pre-initial public offering (IPO) company providing electronic color matching in multiple applications including e-retailing , computer displays, printer and graphic cards employing 40 people. Headquarters: San Francisco.

Interviews

The research was conducted using one primary source of evidence, interviews, and two secondary sources, documentation and archival records. Interviews with the hierarchically most senior communicator was the primary focus of this research. His/her views gave direct commentary on how public relations was being practiced by the organization. As corroborative evidence, opinion was sought from a member of the department. The researcher expected, as stated by Lindlof (1994), that the special nature of what the interviewees have experienced to result in special articulation: words that can be expressed only by someone who has “been there.” The interviewer’s

goal was to verify the specific theoretical propositions that apply to the respondent's realm of work. Two respondents were interviewed from each organization in a fashion that one was immediately above the other in the hierarchic order (See Appendix B).

The researcher adopted focussed interviews as opposed to open-ended interviews. Focussed interviews as defined by Yin (1994) are ones that "may still remain open-ended and assume a conversational manner, but you are more likely to be following a certain set of questions" (p. 85). A list of specific questions was adhered to so that every participant had the opportunity to comment on the same topic area, and comments were studied and systematized for similarities and dissimilarities. The questions were designed to elicit information about the theoretical propositions put forward in the literature review (See Appendix A).

These interviews were taped, and the tapes have been used to derive direct quotes. The use of interviews as sources of information, as pointed out by Yin (1994), give data about how individuals perceive the organization not about the organization itself. Therefore, to collect information about each case and to corroborate what has been said about the organization the researcher examined documents and archival records.

Documentation and Archival Records

Documentation and archival records have been used as a secondary source to help provide concrete examples of the information obtained from the interview. Yin (1994) emphasized the importance of both these research methods, but also warned that most documentation and archival records "were produced for specific purpose and

a specific audience ... and these conditions must be fully appreciated in order to interpret their usefulness ” (p. 84). Documentation such as newsletters, annual reports, web sites, memoranda, agendas, minutes of meetings, administrative documents, proposals, and progress reports, provided information about the model of public relations. The strength of such data is that they are stable, unobtrusive, exact, and give broad coverage. Archival records such as the organization chart, list of clients, and survey data show how the flow of information operates. Archival records have the same weakness as the documentation method, that of being biased and access to them being limited.

Triangulation

According to Yin (1994) the most important advantage of using multiple sources of evidence is that it helps in development of convergent lines of inquiry, a process of triangulation which makes any finding or conclusion more convincing and accurate. While the interviews provided a perception of the model of the public relations practiced, the role of the public relations functionaries, and whether IMC is practiced, the documents and archival records were collected either to corroborate them or to prove otherwise. The documents and archival records provided a validity check of the interviews. Thus triangulation was easier and made the final conclusions more precise.

One of the problems of case study research is that it involves bias. Bias can be on the part of the researcher and also on the part of the respondents. The researcher avoided bias by being true to the facts and avoiding presumptions. According to Yin

(1994) interviews are subject to bias, poor recall, and poor or incorrect articulation. Any bias on the part of the respondents was countered by asking same questions to two interviewees in the same organization. The researcher solved the problem of poor recall by recording the interviews. Documents and archival materials also served to corroborate interview data. However, their accessibility also depended on the interviewees.

Timeline

As required by the research methodology, the researcher conducted the case studies within a definite time frame. Contact was made with the organizations at the beginning of the spring semester 2000. Contact and approval of the four organizations was obtained by middle of March and by middle of April the interviews were completed.

Analysis

After all interviews were completed and documentation and archival records collected, the discussion and analysis of the research began. Yin (1994) outlines two analytic data collecting strategies, relying on theoretical propositions and developing a case description. The researcher chose the one based on theoretical proposition, because, as Yin (1994) points out, the answers to the questions how and why can be best obtained by this method (p.104). The specific analytical strategy adopted for each case study was pattern matching logic. The pattern had already been established by the literature review, and analysis of the data involved a comparison with the theoretical propositions made in the literature review. The first level of analysis involved an

analysis of each case study on the basis of the theoretical propositions. The second level involved a cross case analysis to establish the validity or negation of the replication logic. The case studies are not presented in the traditional narrative form but in a question/answer format. Each answer contained all the relevant evidence. This enabled the researcher to do cross case analysis by following the same question across all the cases.

Chapter Four

Findings

Major patterns evolved from the analysis of the data collected from interviews, documentation and archival records. Following the pattern matching logic it emerged that three out of the four organizations followed asymmetric communication though they professed symmetric communication. Strategic decision making on the part of the public relations professional was virtually absent and the majority of them played the expert prescriber role. As for IMC, though its elements were present in various forms, it was not very cohesive and except in one case public relations never directed the process. The patterns emerged following a case-by-case analysis and then a cross-case comparison.

Seagate Technology

The vice-president of communication of the disk drive company said that previously the company had practiced the asymmetric model of communication but now it was moving toward two-way symmetric communication. She explained that change was due to a need to provide the employees the best environment to work. As an example of asymmetric communication she cited that her department found that the employees were getting most of their information from newsletters, while they wanted the management to give them the news. So they helped the management team develop messages, set up regular communication cycles, provided them with presentation materials, and video tapes. As a result communication sessions between management

and employees were more regular, and the information they provided was what the employees wanted to hear.

However, the communications director felt that the communication model was a combination of both two-way symmetrical and asymmetrical communication. In his view the company inclined more toward symmetrical communication. As an example he cited that when there were holes in any product plans or communication strategies, feedback was taken from various parties in the company, which not only sometimes changed the product but also altered strategic planning.

The vice-president of corporate communications directly reported to the CEO and she said that she was a part of the top policy making body. She said she did not participate in such strategic decisions such as whether the company should go private or not, or whether there should be a lay off. But whenever a decision was made her department was given the whole responsibility for deciding “how we do it, when we do it, what do we do.”

The director felt that their department had “pretty strong” influence at the top level. According to him the CEO often used the department as a sounding board for his strategies and they provided him with their counsel, and often translated the strategies into key messages. Both the CEO and the executive management informed them about the strategies to be undertaken, new initiatives to be pursued, and new markets that were targeted, and they tried to align them with the needs of successful communication.

The roles are indicative of the professional's power to participate in the decision making process and also of the model of communication. The vice-president said that the role was more that of an expert prescriber. According to her, the CEO "does look to us for counsel and he certainly looks to this department as the knowledge base." In the recent company preparations for going public the CEO had sought counsel and direction from her department in every communication aspect of the project.

The director also said that their department played more of an expert prescriber role than any other, however there was also a combination of all the roles depending on the situation and need. As communication experts they made strategic communication plans combining the needs of the audience and the core competencies of the business. In the recent privatization the company went through the department was involved from the beginning and according to him "served as experts and helped to change what initially were thought of as what the key messages would be from management and other parties involved." But they also played the role of technicians when they carried out the mundane jobs.

As far as IMC was concerned this organization displayed the ideal situation. Here all the elements of IMC, that is public relations, advertising, internal communication, and marketing were present under one umbrella. And public relations seemed to be the driving engine behind the whole effort. The vice-president of corporate communications described the corporate communications department as acting as an agency to the corporation as a whole. She went on to elaborate that,

We are really a marketing function. We are helping the external audience market disk drive and storage devices, and we are helping the executive staff market the business model and business strategy to the external audiences and present and potential stockholders. We are helping market new policies and procedures and the corporate goal of being the employer of choice to the employee population... so we are seeing a huge marketing communication element coming into our program.

Though there was a marketing communications department, the vice-president said that it was geared mainly toward customers. And she considered corporate communications was more involved with marketing communications because it was targeting media which had been traditionally identified as marketing channels like internet, presentations, and videos. In fact, the communications department, rather than the marketing department, was helping human resources to design its advertising. The corporate communications department was also responsible for product communications. Interestingly here internal communications was moving from human resources to public relations and the vice president said that corporate communications was hiring someone to help human resources deal with their communication. She predicted that it was going to be a trend in Silicon Valley.

According to the director of public relations, who reported to the vice-president, Seagate was different from others in that corporate communications did not report to a marketing vice-president. The product public relations people, who reported to the director, worked in tandem with the product marketing staff at the different product sites, planning product marketing, tracking ongoing projects, and providing communications counsel to the product marketing people. He clarified that the marketing communications was responsible for advertising, sales promotion, direct

marketing, and product promotion. Corporate communications was not directly involved in these, but pulled together marketing communications, channel marketing, product marketing, and provided brand counsel to the different product groups.

Amdahl Corporation

Amdahl Corporation, with four independent divisions of products, services, software, is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Fujitsu Corporation. The divisions each had public relations personnel who were independent in their activities except for publishing, for which they had to go to corporate communications. As described by the senior marketing communications manager the organization was decentralized, however, the recent change of company ownership was pushing it towards centralization. The Japanese style of management made the decision making very slow as everything needed to be cleared by the higher echelons.

Here the vice-president of Image Marketing was in charge of the corporate communications. When symmetric and asymmetric communications was explained to him he said that the company adapted its offering, which according to him was the umbrella term for hardware, software, and services, to suit customer needs. He implied that the company was inclined toward symmetric communication depending on the product or service that was being offered.

With the senior manager the question/answer session also began with the explanation of the symmetric and asymmetric model of communication. She felt that there were more two-way symmetrical practices with some asymmetrical practices. Typically, information was taken from publics about issues like brand recognition and

then changes were made to the messages so that company views got reflected. Here she elaborated that Amdahl was not interested in the typical buyer of its products but more in the clients that enabled its businesses. As for two-way symmetrical communication, which she interpreted as “feedback back and forth,” she said that for some top customers the company held seminars where there was “information sharing and caring.” In these seminars the customers were surveyed about the company, and about the company’s performance in the market place. This survey, according to the senior manager, was “taken to heart” and the ideas implemented. As far as product changes were necessary to satisfy customer need it did not come under the purview of Amdahl’s corporate communications. However, solutions to customer needs were provided by the four divisions in a way that the products were molded to satisfy the particular customer needs

As for strategic decision making, the vice-president described himself as a “heavy influencer” of business strategies and for marketing strategy he was the decision maker. However, by the time the interview process started and ended, within a period of three months, the vice-president of marketing had changed twice. This was confirmed by the senior manager who said that in six years she had had as many as 13 bosses. The senior manager also said that there was a strategic team the company and she was a part of that. However, due to the Japanese style of working, decision making was suffering. As to having a voice in decision making, it suffered due to the delay in decision taking.

The vice-president said he played all the roles except the technician role. He assumed a problem solver role with the responsibility of bearing the cost of his decision. He explained that if he decided to fire the public relations agency, the decision “would be in my mind a problem solving activity, the ownership of the results will be with me as well.” The senior manager confirmed that all the roles were present in the activities they undertook. Of course she did not enjoy arbitrary decision making but she would be approached with things like “this is coming out we have got to do it now” and she had the power to convince the company about the right time for publishing the news release. Her vice-president, who was also the marketing head, gave her enough freedom to make her own decisions like handling the communication of company takeovers.

In Amdahl the elements of IMC were present under one umbrella and the vice-president said that its goal was to create awareness and credibility of the company and its products and services. He outlined the various elements as advertising, public relations, analyst relations, financial analysts, internal communications, and the Web. While enumerating the components he clarified that advertising created awareness and not credibility and though “PR stands for public relations but I am not sure that in this context it is not press relations.” Thus public relations was related to product publicity, company strategy or solutions but it was certainly directed to press not the public. According to him, ideally the company attempted to integrate all these elements horizontally as well as vertically across the four divisions that were under the parent

company. The responsibility of keeping all these elements together fell on corporate marketing of which he was the head.

: The senior manager agreed that the elements of IMC came under corporate communications. The departments that she mentioned were public relations, trade shows, advertising, branding, and analyst relations. Product marketing came under each division and she said that each had a subset of “what you would classically call marketing communications.” According to her, public relations played the most dominant role in corporate communications because “public relations touches more people with less money.” The public relations activity she highlighted was that it gave the company almost “10 thousand dollars worth of free editorial space” every month. As far as internal communications was concerned it was not under public relations but human resources. She felt that she got a lot of support for public relations “like everybody is looking out for public relations. I get a lot of support from upper management.”

Electronic Arts

Here three departments were responsible for public relations. While corporate communications was responsible for brand issues and financial press, there were separate entities for entertainment public relations and sports public relations. Sports public relations dealt with public relations for sports software games like Nascar, Tiger Woods games. Entertainment public relations dealt with software games like James Bond, Xena.

The director of sports public relations did not think that the company followed any specific model of communication. However, she said her department presented to the outside audience what the marketing department gave them and sometimes manipulated it in a way that it was what the publics wanted. She cited the example of putting the information that Tiger Woods loved video games, and that people could play along with Tiger in the video game in KNBR radio during the morning commute hour. This was, according to her, an example of taking the information from the marketing people and serving it to the audience in the most exciting manner.

The senior public relations specialist in the same organization was of the view that the company practiced the two-way symmetrical model. According to him, because the company was high-tech it received feedback from the consumer through the Internet and through user groups. The developers of the products were fairly responsive to this, and as public relations people they tried to push the “consumer hot buttons.” They worked with the production people, who made the games, in fact “educated and policed them ” to ensure the products had features consumers desired.

There had been a change of the reporting structure at the time of the interview and the director of sports public relations mentioned that she was unaware of the exact look of the organization chart. However, she mentioned that she had had five bosses in a year. Her new boss had the designation of Vice-President of North American publishing and marketing. As to having access to the strategic decision making team, she said that she was more concerned with getting media coverage for her products.

The senior specialist was also not sure that the director had access to strategic decision making.

The director also felt that she performed all the roles. She gave examples of problem solving like a product pull of a golf game software, of counseling by briefing the executives about the issues of violence in software games, and of being an expert by training senior executives how to be media savvy. The senior specialist preferred to describe the people of his department as experts. “We are experts on our products. We are experts on the technology involved in our product, the nuances of the sport, as well as what we bring to the table as far as captions and the video games.”

In Electronic Arts the elements of IMC were present, but they were not under one umbrella as the director described the organization as a matrix with the public relations department acting as an agency to the golf, basketball, or hockey teams. However, both sports public relations and entertainment public relations reported to the marketing vice-president and corporate communications was in a different department. Altogether each worked in tandem with the other but none were dominant. According to the director, the elements of IMC were “pretty integrated.” She gave the example of working with promotions and marketing people to promote a Nascar game. There was point of sale of the product at Wal-Mart. The promotion effort was to get kids to sign on to play the game at Daytona through a radio program, and the public relations hook was to get kids of actual drivers to play the game in the Wal-Mart as their dads. These kids were playing against those who had signed up through the radio program. The cooperation among the different elements of IMC was corroborated by the senior

specialist who said that every department was equal. However, he thought that the sports public relations department looked for guidance to two departments, “corporate communications for maintaining the overall company’s message and to marketing for specific product information, worked very little with advertising and were kept in a loop with promotions.”

E-Color

In this company public relations function came under the purview of the director of marketing communications. In the course of this research the company hired a public relations firm to handle the complexities of becoming an IPO. The public relations activities undertaken by the marketing department were press and analyst tours, creating collateral materials and participating in trade shows.

The vice-president of Product and Marketing said that the model of communications was symmetric both within and outside the organization. Feedback was taken from the customers to satisfy their needs. To him this was more suitable as the organization needed to be flexible to the changing needs of the market and employees. The director of Marketing Communications agreed. The company was very responsive to customer need. As for the information given to the employees from her department it was industry news and news about different product promotion dates and public relations efforts

The director said that she was party to strategic decision making, however, she did not explain her involvement in such meetings. The vice-president said that he

presented inputs both from the public relations firm and marketing department to the strategic decision making team.

The director implied that the role was more of an information exchanger and expert prescriber. The director was responsible for gauging consumer needs and then informing the company about it, and also she would advise the company on how to get press coverage about products and other corporate issues. The vice-president had a different opinion. He saw himself more in the role of a problem solver.

The vice-president of marketing was unaware of the concept of IMC; when it was explained, he gave equal importance to advertising and public relations. However, the director of marketing described public relations as the most important component of communication, though all the elements of IMC were not present, for example advertisements were not issued by the company. In her view public relations was a part of marketing. She explained, "consumers and customers tend to trust more what they read written by an editorial third party more so than they do an advertisement." However, she did not think that public relations could direct IMC.

Documentation and Archival Records

Documents and archival records such as annual reports, newsletters, news releases, agendas, and organization chart, were collected from the four organizations. The newsletters from the Seagate showed that the company wanted its employee population to know they were always in focus, not only that the newsletter wanted employee participation on its Intranet discussion forums. The annual reports were geared toward the external publics and the management explained at length the

company's performance and future aspirations. The documents made available by Electronic Arts were trade journals, and they only revealed how the organization promoted its products. However, its web site provided the opportunity for customer feedback.

In E-Color's minutes of meeting for marketing communications there were elements of marketing, like proposals for sales opportunity, advertisement schedules for print and banner ads, trade show schedules, web site update, press release updates, and speaking opportunities under consideration. The organization chart showed that under the vice-president of Product and Marketing, who was interviewed, was the Marketing Communications director. The director had on her team a client marketing manager, an advertising manager, an image and visibility evangelist, and an events coordinator. The press releases of this organization were being handled by its advertising agency.

Cross Case Analysis

The second level of analysis involves a comparison of the patterns that evolved from the individual case studies. The cross case analysis will help in establishing patterns through replication logic. As Yin (1994) points out that the logic underlying the use of multiple case studies is the same, each case must be carefully selected so that either (a) predicts similar results (a literal replication) or (b) produces contrasting results but for predictable reasons (a theoretical replication).

Symmetric and Asymmetric Communication

The model of communication in all the organizations had elements of asymmetric communication. In Seagate Corporation the vice-president said that the company was moving towards symmetric communication, but did not rule out asymmetric communication. In fact the department's handling of the recent privatization of the company was an example of asymmetric communication. In Amdahl the senior marketing manager clearly stated that the company practiced asymmetric communication. The fact that the company was using survey information about brand recognition and other issues to make changes to its messages so that the company got presented was a clear example of asymmetric communication. In Electronic Arts the element of asymmetric communication persisted. Though the interviewees of this organization gave emphasis on customer feedback they did not provide any examples of how the company was modifying its messages to suit the needs of both. For E-Color also customer satisfaction was priority but the idea of adapting the company to the needs of its publics was absent. This was evident as both the vice-president and the director of marketing seemed to be oblivious of two-way communication.

All the organizations professed that they practiced two-way symmetric communication. While the respondents at Seagate and Amdahl gave concrete examples of two-way symmetric communication, respondents at Electronic Arts and E-Color did not have any. However, the respondents in the last two organizations believed that the company followed two-way symmetric communication. Therefore,

all the organizations demonstrated the pattern of mixed motive philosophy by which asymmetric practices are carried out within a broad symmetric philosophy. Moreover, apart from Seagate and Electronic Arts the top communicator had a marketing designation, which by theory is an indicator of asymmetric communication.

Participation in Strategic Decision Making

In Seagate Corporation the vice-president had access to CEO and by virtue of it had some say in decision making. In Amdahl the vice-president of Image Marketing considered himself as an integral part of the strategic team. Also the senior manager sat on a strategic committee of the company. In E-Color the vice-president was part of the decision making team. However, for Electronic Arts the sports director did not have any access to decision making. And she reported to a marketing vice-president. Therefore, in all organizations except Seagate there was no representation of the public relations people in the decision making body, because all the representatives to the strategic team had marketing titles.

Role of the Professionals

In Seagate Corporation the vice-president when asked about her role said that she could say that she played all the roles. The public relations director of Electronic Arts also preferred the same. However, her senior public relations specialist said that they were treated as experts in their field. In fact the particular work content and the decision making power of the respondents gave evidence of the expert prescriber role. For example while in Amdahl the senior manager's counsel was sought in deciding the best time for coming out with a press release, in Electronic Arts the director counseled

on product pull, the use of video news releases, and the training of senior personnel for media appearance. In E-Color the director's opinion was sought in deciding time of news release, assessing public opinion about the company. And in Seagate during the recent privatization the vice-president and her department had played the role of experts in helping the strategic team tackle the issue. Therefore, in all the cases the dominant role played by the professionals was that of expert prescriber.

Position of Public Relations

The position of public relations in the IMC process depended on what functions were being performed under the name of public relations. In Amdahl, Electronic Arts, and E-Color public relations was more of press relations. The Amdahl vice-president clearly stated that all public relations activity was directed towards press and the senior manager said that successful public relations meant generating a great amount of column space. In Electronic Arts though the director said every element of IMC worked in tandem, the activities she highlighted were geared towards creating product publicity. In E-Color the director thought that public relations was the most important component of IMC because it generated maximum publicity at least cost. The same thought was echoed by the Amdahl senior manager. Therefore public relations as a component of IMC in these organizations was reduced to press relations.

As for public relations directing the whole process of IMC it was not present in any of the above mentioned companies. While the director of E-Color clearly stated that public relations could not lead the IMC process, in Electronic Arts it was not possible because of the matrix nature of the organization. The exception among all

these companies was Seagate. Here the components of IMC came under corporate communications and the public relations personnel were directing the whole marketing communication process. Therefore, in all organizations except Seagate public relations remained subordinated to IMC.

Results

The major patterns that evolved related to the three research questions were:

1) The model of communication in these organizations was mostly asymmetric. In all the organizations the product or message was manipulated to reflect company need. The marketing background of the departments and the role played by the professionals showed that they followed asymmetric form of communication. However, all the organizations said that they also followed symmetric communication. It can be said that though they aimed at symmetric philosophy the programs remained asymmetric. Therefore there was evidence of mixed motive form of communication.

2) Participation in strategic decision making of the public relations professional was absent except in Seagate. Since the rest of the top communicators were heads of marketing, the public relations input was not deemed as important.

3) The dominant role was that of expert prescriber, though there was evidence of a combination of all the roles and this established the trend of asymmetric communication.

4) IMC was not present in its textbook definition and except for Seagate public relations was just another component of the IMC process, mainly being responsible for press relations.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

The framework of analysis was established in the literature review and the research questions, and this chapter involves the comparison of the findings to theoretical propositions made in the literature review. Such comparison helped in establishing the theories the study supported or negated.

Model of Communication

Most of the interviewees did not have any idea about two-way asymmetric or symmetric communication. When the models of communication were explained, all the respondents tried to convey that their organization followed the two-way symmetrical model. However, almost all the organizations had both asymmetric and symmetric communication. The classic case was that of Amdahl where the company followed symmetric communication for the top twenty-five customers but was asymmetric with the rest of them. For Seagate the company was moving toward the symmetric model by focussing on making a compromise between company policies and customer and employee needs. In Electronic Arts as far as the handling of products was concerned the company was symmetric and consumer opinion was given the highest priority. The same was true for E-Color Inc, where as far as product handling was concerned symmetric communication was given the highest priority. In the literature review it had been said that both symmetrical and asymmetrical models of public relations are best presented when communicators try to persuade the publics toward the organization's position and also try to move the dominant coalition toward

the public's position. Dozier, et al. (1995) suggest that the two-way symmetrical model and the two-way asymmetrical model actually make up a single mixed motive model. Thus the mixed motive model involves the short-term use of asymmetrical practices within the context of broad symmetrical philosophy. While Seagate displayed this philosophy the other organizations were more interested in symmetric communication for their consumers or customers. As the Amdahl vice-president explained, the company made changes in its "offerings" so that customer needs were satisfied, however in other aspects it was the company view that got priority.

Strategic Decision Making.

The top communicator was part of the decision making process in all the organizations. Except for Seagate all were the head of marketing communications, implying that they followed asymmetric communication, because marketing by nature is asymmetric. In the literature review it was said that strategic public relations identifies objectives for communicating programs and uses these objectives to plan communication programs. Dozier, et al. (1995) explained the role of the top communicator as a strategic manager in the following way, "Communicators provide two-way channels of communication from dominant coalitions to publics and back again. Such feedback loops from publics to dominant coalitions are crucial to dominant coalition assessment of organizational environments and appropriate responses to them" (p. 85). Only Seagate displayed this ideal situation. Here the top communicator was not only reporting to the CEO and therefore receiving access to the dominant coalition, she also conveyed to them the concerns of the constituents of the

company on various issues. In Amdahl though the top communicator was part of decision making, but there was not much evidence that he made an attempt to reconcile various constituent interest with decision making. In E-color the vice-president was part of the decision making process but his clout seemed to be effective only for marketing decisions. The director of sports public relations in Electronic Arts did not give any indication that she was part of the decision making. Throughout the interview the work she discussed evidenced that she was mainly involved with product publicity.

Roles of Public Relations

The decision making capacity of the professionals imply the particular role they play in the organization. Several roles had been identified in the literature review, namely expert prescriber, problem solving process facilitator, and communication technician as possible roles for the public relations professionals in high-tech industry. Most of the interviewees claimed that they performed all the roles. For example, the vice-president of Seagate said that all the roles were present but the examples she gave showed that she was more that of an expert prescriber. In Amdahl the senior manager chose the role of problem-solving process facilitator, but the inputs given by the director implied that she had the role of an expert prescriber. At Electronic Arts the public relations people served as experts in presenting the product to the consumers and were also experts in telling the developers the needs of the consumers. What was interesting here was that the director said that she had been hired because of her background in sports public relations. Therefore the role sending given to her by her organization was that she was an expert in her field. For the IPO the director was an

expert in advising the company about public relations efforts. Thus the predominance of the expert prescriber role among the organizations shows that the asymmetric model of communication was more in practice.

Public Relations and IMC

In the literature review IMC had been defined as an amalgamation of such practices as public relations, marketing, advertising, and promotion. All the four organizations had elements of IMC, however the amount of integration varied. While in Seagate marketing, product publicity, and promotions seemed to be driven by corporate communications, which was really a public relations department, in other organizations the marketing department was at the helm. For example, in Amdahl the vice-president of marketing regarded public relations simply as press relations and corporate communications had no role to play in internal communications. In fact to both the interviewees of this organization public relations was essentially press relations. In Electronic Arts there was coordination among the different elements of IMC, but public relations did not seem to be in the driver's seat. The vice-president of E-Color was unaware of the concept of IMC but when it was explained gave highest priority to marketing. The director also considered public relations to be primarily press relations.

Summary

The study cannot claim to be reflective of the trends of the high-tech industry as a whole but it is certainly indicative of what is being practiced in this valley. The two-way symmetric model of communication was virtually absent. However, the respondents were aware that ideally it should be two-way symmetric communication; therefore, the mixed motive model of communication became more appropriate.

Moreover public relations had more value as press relations and as a way of keeping customers happy. Therefore, the idea of symmetric communication had only limited application. The public relations experts remained just the experts of communication and had no significant role to play in the decision making process. Their views were sought on tactical issues like when news releases should come out but not on strategic issues like when there should be company mergers. So the public relations professionals remained at best expert prescribers or problem solvers.

The trend toward IMC has certainly entered Silicon Valley. However, the position of public relations in that setup is not yet clear. The respondents in this study reduced it to a mere technical function. They are unaware of how public relations can manage the IMC process. However, the one organization (Seagate) where public relations was more in its true form it was evident that given a chance it could play a strategic role and direct the whole marketing communications process.

Implications for Current Practice and Theory

This study explored the theoretical models pursued by the public relations departments of high-tech organizations of Silicon Valley. It had hypothesized that the

organizations would practice symmetric, asymmetric or mixed motive model of communication. The case studies repeatedly established that mixed-motive was the dominant form of communication model. Therefore the study established that the mixed motive model of public relations is suitable for high-tech organizations which emphasize flexibility to survive in a market which is always changing because of everyday change.

As for following the mixed motive model the public relations professional ideally needs to be a part of the strategic communication. Research by Dozier, et al. (1995) has shown that public relations is more effective in organizations if the practitioners participate in the strategic management team. This study corroborated that theory. In all but one organization the top communicator was a marketing person thereby reducing public relations to mere press relations.

The strategic role of the public relations professional is also dependent on the role played in the organization. Of the four roles identified, the expert prescriber role is the one that prescribes and the management obeys and it supports an asymmetric form of communication. This study supported the finding that the expert prescriber role follows from asymmetric communication and vice-versa. The expert prescribers advised the company about the time of the news releases but were not the content creators of these news releases.

Schultz, Tannenbaum, and Lauterborn (1993) said that in a parity marketplace the only true differentiating features are logistics and communications. They argue that IMC, which combines public relations, advertising, and sales promotions would

give competitive edge to organizations which would look for ways of controlling the flow of information. This study found that organizations in Silicon Valley had elements of IMC, in their marketing program. As to public relations directing the whole program, except for one organization there was no evidence of that. However, in that particular public relations proved to be capable enough of directing the process.

Limitations of this Study

Some practical problems that arose during the conduct of the case study became its limitations. The researcher in all organizations tried to interview the person in charge of corporate public relations but in one organization they were concerned with product publicity. During the question/answer session most of the technical terms had to be explained to the respondents and often it seemed they had their own interpretations. As for access to and collection of documentation and archival records was concerned the researcher had to depend totally on the respondent's wishes.

There were certain drawbacks of this study related to the research strategy. The researcher tried to avoid the drawback of personal bias by trying to be truthful in all reporting. The second disadvantage of the case study is that it cannot be generalized to populations, which the researcher has not attempted. However, as Yin (1994) points out, the goal of a case study is to expand and generalize theories not to enumerate frequencies. The third disadvantage of a case study is that it results in massive documents. This particular research was less lengthy because it narrowed down the subject and was conducted within a definite time frame. However, since the researcher

conducted multiple case studies for the first time, there could be errors due to inexperience, which was countered by the guidance of experienced professors.

Scope of Future Research

This research tried to find out how public relations is practiced in Silicon Valley. It only partly shed light on exactly what functions are performed by the public relations personnel. This involves an investigation of whether organizations see public relations as a tactical tool or a strategic function, and as a strategic function how it can be advantageous to the organization or add to its communication excellence.

This study found that most of the top communicators had a marketing background. A survey of the public relations professionals in Silicon Valley can reveal whether the public relations practitioners have the background to do justice to the profession of public relations.

All the respondents of this study agreed that high-tech organizations were very fluid, with bosses changing up to five times within a year. In fact one of the respondents said that this was necessary to make the organization nimble. The question that becomes crucial is that with such change of personnel how the practice retains its momentum. Is it that bosses change and the technical worker continues in the same position thereby maintaining the flow of work?

Since all the respondents acknowledged that IMC was becoming the trend in Silicon Valley it would be interesting to know whether such knowledge is expected in recruits. So far all research has been confined to finding what qualifications public relations professionals need to succeed in high-tech organizations. There is no

research regarding the attitudes they face in high-tech organizations regarding their profession, whether they are regarded as communication experts or just called upon when the situation demands. Though the literature indicates that high-tech firms expect technical knowledge, it is not clear what actually constitutes technical knowledge. Whether it is knowledge of desktop publishing, or web page designing, or knowledge of translating technical data into simple English, what the technology firms are actually looking for in their public relations professionals is not clear.

Finally, this research was focused on finding whether or not public relations was directing the IMC program. However, it would have been more appropriate if research was conducted in finding out how public relations can maintain its identity and become the guiding force of the IMC process. IMC is still in its infancy and if public relations people can define a path for successfully carrying it out and justify their leadership, then the glory would be theirs.

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Appendix A

Questions for the Research

(A) Does public relations in high-tech organizations perform the role of boundary spanning and take part in strategic decision making?

1. Is the head of the public relations department present in policy making meetings?
2. Is his/her advice sought in the decision making process?

(B) What model of communication does the high-tech organization pursue and what is the role played by the public relations professionals in such organizations?

1. How would you describe the model of public relations followed by your organization?
2. Do you take feedback from your audiences about company activities and policies?
3. Do you try to make the company responsive to what the audience is saying?
4. What role do you play in the organization?
 - i. expert prescriber that is whether your opinions are valued as an expert in the field and subsequently followed?
 - ii. communication facilitator that is you serve as the information exchanger between publics and the organization?

- iii. problem solving process facilitator, whether you help the management to systematically think through organizational communication and providing solutions to problems?
- iv. communication technician role that is you carry out the designated communications set by management?
- v. whether you are involved in product publicity?
- vi. whether you are part of corporate communications?

(C) Whether public relations is made a part of IMC and whether it is subordinated to the process or gives direction to it?

1. Does your organization pursue an IMC program?
2. Is public relations a part of the IMC program?
3. What role does it play in the IMC program?
4. Do you think IMC works for high-tech organizations?
5. Should public relations direct the program or play a subservient role?

Appendix B

List of Respondents

Seagate Technology-Julie A. Still, Vice-President of Corporate Communications and Woody Monroe, Director of Communications reporting to above.

Amdahl Corporation-Larry Rosenberg, Vice-President of Image Marketing and Patricia Davis, Senior Manager Marketing Communications reporting to the above.

Electronic Arts-Robin Carr, Sports PR Director, and Scott Gamel, Senior Public Relations Specialist reporting to the above.

E-Color Inc.-Peter Bernard, Vice-President Marketing and Lisa Rubenstein, Director Marketing Communications reporting to the above.