

# Public Relations In Higher Education: A Confirmatory Analysis Of Grunig's Excellence Theory

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## **Abstract**

In the literature of Public Relations (PR), Grunig's Excellence Theory remained as widely used and an accepted model for excellence in PR and in organizational management. This confirmatory study is focused on the PR and communication management of four state universities and colleges (SUCs) in Caraga region. Specifically, the research delves on the confirmatory analysis of the four SUCs' PR management practices in accord with that of Grunig's Excellence Theory. Principal component analysis (PCA) revealed that the four SUCs in Caraga region, namely: ASSCAT, CSU, SSCT, and SDSSU practiced the Excellence Theory although they are not fully aware of it. Withal, findings of the study can be used as basis for these institutions in knowing the value of PR to an organization, and the value of building positive relationships with both the inside and the outside publics.

**Keywords:** Public Relations Practices, Grunig's Excellence Theory, Principal Component Analysis.

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

In today's globalized media driven world, communication has become more significant, exciting and spectacular. The study of communication has always been fascinating because communication is something people do (Chu and Schramm, 2004). It is used in all aspects of our lives. We "cannot not" communicate or we are all in trouble. We basically need to communicate to be understood, to understand and to carry out our normal function at home, in the workplace and in the community where we live. Through communication, we can persuade or dissuade, express or provoke, be influenced or influence. Effective communication goes hand in hand with PR; and PR is anchored on effective communication. PR is the way organizations, companies and individuals communicate with the public and the media. The International Public Relations Organization of United Kingdom states that a PR specialist communicates with the target audience directly

or indirectly through media with an aim to create and maintain a positive image and create a strong relationship with the audience. Examples include press releases, newsletters, public appearances, interviews, social media and other forms of digital communication.

On top of that, PR is the discipline which looks after reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behavior (Chartered Institute of Public Relations [CIPR] & Public Relations Society of America [PRSA], 2012). It is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its publics. It is strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationship between organizations and their publics (Bruce, 2015).

However, the modern day father of PR, James E. Grunig with Todd Hunt produced a more focused definition of PR as the management of communication between the organization and its publics. Cutlip, Center and Blooms (2002)

defined PR as a management function that identifies, establishes, and maintains, mutually beneficial relationship between an organization and its various publics on whom its success and failure depends. The two last definitions embed PR as part of an organizational management. Nonetheless, the study anchors on the definition of Grunig and Hunt.

The study delved on the PR practices of SUCs in the Caraga region. Significantly, the research sought to answer the question: Are the PR practices of SUCs in the Caraga region that of Grunig's Excellence Theory?

Withal, the Excellence Theory is a general theory of PR developed into practice by James E. Grunig. It is a study of the best practices in communication management funded by the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) Research Foundation. It produced several books from the research (J. Grunig, 1992; Dozier et al, and L. Grunig et al, 2002).

The Excellence Theory include a number of other theories: theories of publics, PR, models of PR, evaluation of PR, employee communication, PR roles, gender, diversity, power, ethics, strategic management, social responsibility, activism and global PR.

The theory was tested in different countries all over the world (US, United Kingdom and Canada) through research surveys of different PR heads and Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) in more than 300 associations, corporations, government agencies and other non-profit organizations. The survey research was followed by qualitative interviews with a multicultural and multidimensional heads of PR and other PR practitioners.

According to James E. Grunig, the Excellence Theory first explained the value of PR to the organization and society based on the social responsibility of managerial decisions and the quality of relationships with stakeholder publics. The theory states that for an organization to be effective, it must behave in ways that solve the problems and satisfy the goals of stakeholders as well as of the management. To behave in socially acceptable ways, organizations must scan their

environment to identify publics who are affected by potential organizational decisions or who want organizations to make decisions to solve problems that affect them. Finally, organizations must communicate symmetrically with the public with due regards to the interests of both in order to nourish high-quality and long term relationships. Interviews with CEOs and other PR officers reveal that good relationships are valuable to an organization because it lessen negative publicity caused by poor relationships, costs on litigation, legislation, regulation; diminish the risk of arriving at decisions that affect the stakeholders; or intensify revenue by providing products and services needed by the stakeholders.

To maximize this value, the research indicates that involvement in strategic management is a critical characteristic of excellent PR. PR executives play a strategic managerial role as well as administrative manager role. A PR is empowered by having access to key organizational decision-makers (Grunig, 2006; Toth, 2007). Furthermore, excellent PR function is integrated. An excellent PR function must work with other management function to help them build relationships with relevant stakeholders.

The Excellence study (Grunig, 2014) shows that a symmetrical system of internal communication increase employee's job satisfaction and being with the organization. Emphasis on gender also leads to the inclusion of diversity of race and ethnicity as the fifth part of the Excellence Theory (Grunig et al, 1998). Addition of ethics to the Excellence Theory is also another component. Excellence theory is generic to many contexts especially when applied to different contextual variables.

Grunig's Excellence Study identified numerous variables that contribute to organizational effectiveness. Grunig and the Excellence Study's researchers distilled the most important variables for public relations to make an organization effective. The variables were distilled through qualitative and quantitative research. The variables that emerged from the data did not vary across cultures or national

boundaries, or by size of organization, or industry, therefore they were termed generic principles of excellence.

The Excellence Study team, which was headed by Dr. Grunig, identified 10 generic principles of excellent PR (Vercic and Grunig, 1996): (1) Involvement of PR in strategic management; (2) Empowerment of PR in the dominant coalition or a direct reporting to senior management; (3) Integrated PR function; (4) PR as a management function, separate from other functions; (5) PR unit headed by a manager rather than a technician; (6) Two-way symmetrical (mixed-motive) model of PR; (7) Department with the knowledge needed to practice the managerial role in symmetrical PR; (8) Symmetrical system of internal communication; (9) Diversity embodied in all roles; (10) Ethics and integrity. These principles can be used to design the PR function in an organization to structure its inner action with management and the rest of the organization, and to staff the PR office in a way that predisposes it toward effectiveness.

The more these factors are present in a PR function, the more excellent that function should be. Another important consideration is that the CEO, the university or college president must be aware of the contributions that PR and communication in general can make toward the effectiveness of the overall organization. He or she is probably aware of how reputation can impact the bottom line of the organization, and that reputation can be enhanced and protected by the PR function.

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research utilized the descriptive survey method. Using an instrument patterned on Grunig's Excellence Theory, quantitative approach was applied to answer the research question. Cronbach's alpha of 0.954 guaranteed the reliability of the mentioned instrument. Researchers collected a random sample of 150 respondents. Moreover, PCA was employed in determining significant components that described the PR practices among the four SUCs in Caraga region.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 below shows the level of PR practices vis-a-vis that of Grunig's Excellence Theory. It can be seen that respondents agreed in all items describing such practices as supported by the respective mean responses. In effect, the overall mean score 4.22 demonstrated that most of the respondents agreed on the attributes considered vis-a-vis of Grunig's Excellence Theory. It can be gleaned from the same table that the respondents believed that PR is vital in an organization as evidenced by the highest mean score of 4.47. On the other hand, a lesser mean response of 3.75 is shown on the item which describes that in PR, accurate information should be disseminated but unfavorable information must not be volunteered. These observed higher mean responses only showed that PR practices among these SUCs were aligned to the instrument used in the study that was exactly patterned in the Excellence Theory of Grunig.

Furthermore, PCA revealed a variance of 45.12% in the first component, while the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> components contributed 11.66% and 10.11%, respectively. Cumulatively, these three components explained almost 66.89% of respondents' PR practices. Surprisingly, the data showed that there is uni-dimensionality among attributes as evidenced by the fact that 17 out of 20 attributes formed the 1<sup>st</sup> principal component. These findings derived from PCA substantiated the mean responses discussed in the first paragraph revealing that PR practices among respondents were aligned with the pattern in the Excellence Theory of Grunig.

In its entirety, the result exhibited that all four SUCs adapted Grunig's excellence theory and PR practices though they were not completely informed of it. It manifested that the respondents' believed the impact of PR in the achievement of an institutions vision, mission, goals and objectives.

**Table 1:** Principal component analysis result on the Public Relations practices vis a vis Grunig's Excellence theory

Attributes	Mean Response	Verbal Description
The purpose of PR is to get publicity for its organization.	3.96 <sup>b</sup>	Agree
In PR, the broad goal is to persuade public as the organization wants them to behave.	3.80 <sup>b</sup>	Agree
In PR, accurate information should be disseminated but unfavorable information must not be volunteered.	3.75 <sup>c</sup>	Agree
The purpose of PR is to develop mutual understanding between the management of the organization and publics that the organization affects.	4.46 <sup>a</sup>	Agree
For an organization to be effective, it must behave in ways that solve problems and satisfy the goals of its stakeholders and its management.	4.44 <sup>a</sup>	Agree
Organizations must communicate symmetrically with the public with due regards to the interest of both in order to nourish high-quality and long term relationship.	4.35 <sup>a</sup>	Agree
PR officers reveal that good relationships are valuable to an organization because it lessens negative publicity caused by poor relationships.	4.23 <sup>a</sup>	Agree
To behave in socially acceptable ways, organizations must scan their environment to identify publics who are affected by potential organizational decision.	4.17 <sup>a</sup>	Agree
A symmetrical system of internal communication can increase employee job satisfaction and being with the organization.	4.16 <sup>a</sup>	Agree
Involvement in strategic management is a critical characteristic of excellent PR.	4.26 <sup>a</sup>	Agree
PR executives play a strategic managerial role as well as administrative manager role.	4.20 <sup>a</sup>	Agree
A PR is empowered by having access to key organizational decision-makers.	4.14 <sup>a</sup>	Agree
Excellent PR must work with other management function to build relationships with relevant stakeholders.	4.35 <sup>a</sup>	Agree
PR is vital in an organization.	4.47 <sup>a</sup>	Agree
PR can help in achieving the vision, mission, goals and objectives of an academic institution.	4.41 <sup>a</sup>	Agree
PR contributes to organizational effectiveness when it helps reconcile the organization's goals with the expectations of its strategic constituencies.	4.26 <sup>a</sup>	Agree
PR contributes to organizational effectiveness by building quality long term relationships with strategic constituencies.	4.31 <sup>a</sup>	Agree
Diversity is embedded in all PR roles.	4.08 <sup>a</sup>	Agree
The organization must empower communication management as a critical management function.	4.22 <sup>a</sup>	Agree
Building relationships, managing interdependence is the essence of public relations.	4.32 <sup>a</sup>	Agree
Overall mean	4.22	Agree

Note: Superscripts a, b and c denote for independent principal components 1, 2 and 3, respectively.

Mean scores: 1.00-1.50: Strongly disagree, 1.51-2.50: Disagree, 2.51-3.50: Undecided, 3.51-4.50: Agree, 4.51- 5.00: Strongly Agree

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

The findings revealed that the practice of PR in these higher institution of learning, specifically that of Agusan del Sur State College of Agricultural Technology (ASSCAT), Caraga State University (CSU), Surigao State College of Technology (SSCT), and Surigao del Sur State University (SDSSU) is anchored on Grunig's Excellence Theory.

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