ANALYTICAL AND CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS
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Summary

This article presents reasons why analytical and critical thinking skills should be essential part of public relations. Generally, it is considered that the analytical and critical thinking skills are part of public relations, as well as creative thinking, but they should be considered separately and given the codes of ethics of the profession used as initial criteria.

For the purpose of the study, in this article is presented the result of the survey in which determine importance of using analytical and critical thinking skills in the implementation of public relations projects. The second aim in the survey was to identify the target audience and how they react to the placed information.

Keywords: public relations, thinking skills, critical thinking, analytical thinking, marketing, interpersonal relations, mass media
Introduction

Public relations practitioners are being challenged to explain technical processes and issues to audiences who may be disinterested, uninformed, misinformed, or hostile. Such situation require careful analysis and judgment in regard to what is said and how. A critical question to use in estimating the quality of the explanation of technical issues is this: If the audience believed the statements, would it be misinformed on the issues? Therefore, being analytical or critical is a fundamental element of not becoming a victim of groupthink, psychological phenomena these days, which suppresses people expressing points of view and emphasizing their importance. Being aware of the effect of groupthink can lead to smarter organizational decision-making. Critiquing can identify positives as well as negatives. More importantly, a superb critique will determine why something is a positive or a negative, allowing the public relations practitioners to address the root cause of any issues or, if it is a positive attitude, leverage it to add even better value. This might mean extracting greater benefits from the situation being examined, or applying the insights to other organizational activities to improve them.

Definition

Modern public relations offer a new critical and analytical approach to public relations practitioners and suggest that public relations should be freed from its narrow definition as organizational communication management. Public relations can contribute to grassroots communication through honest, truthful and candid approach. It's important that public relations practitioners participate in dialogue between any organization and their audience, helping to develop important perspective. PR practitioners also utilize existing perspectives as the source of the values, assumptions, and themes to support their conclusions.¹

This kind of tactic is much potent because modern public relations strategies should be based on analytical and critical thinking skills platform.

By definition, critical thinking skill is the process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information to reach an answer or conclusion.² Practically speaking, being critical involves two things: a) A skeptical attitude, which encourages you to question and challenge any information presented to you; b) The technique that allows you to ask the right question and evaluate the outcomes. It is all about dealing with both, the positive and negative aspects, of a situation and thus arrives at an objective solution.
From other side, analytical skill is the ability to visualize, articulate, and solve both complex and uncomplicated problems and concepts and make decisions that are sensible and based on available information. Analytical thinking leads to a methodical step-by-step approach to breakdown complex problems or processes into their constituent parts identify causes and analyze problems to arrive at an appropriate solution. It is more about finding logical solutions for a problem rather than analyzing the problems in such a way that will lead to further questions. It attempts to find out the most suited solution to a problem whereas critical thinking does not limit itself to just one answer; but a lot of answers by asking questions on all aspects of a problem.

At the end, this implies that creative thinking, as the most useable method in public relations is a component of analytical and critical thinking rather than a separate, though related, thinking process with its own standards of excellence.

Context

The movement to the information age has focused attention on good thinking as an important element of business success. These changing conditions require new outcomes, such as analytical and critical thinking skills, to be included as a focus of planning communication. It's well known that public relations generally transpire on behalf organizations trying to inform and influence other organizations or key audiences. As such, public relations activities range from general publicity and media to those required to foster policy relationship with stakeholders.

Therefore, it is important to planning communication based on analytical and critical thinking so that it can be compared or contrasted with other forms of thinking skills in public relations (non-critical thinking). For example, non-critical thinking can take the form of habitual thinking (thinking based on past practices without considering current data); brainstorming (saying whatever comes to mind without evaluation), creative thinking (putting facts, concepts and principles together in new and original ways), prejudicial thinking (gathering evidence to support a particular position without questioning the position itself) or emotive thinking (responding to the emotion of a message rather than the content). Each of these types of thinking skills may have advantages and disadvantages relative to a particular context.
There are situations when each might be more appropriate while the other types would be less appropriate. But, new trends in public relations is then available as either necessary corrective action is taken to guide action toward the desired goal based on beliefs or a new situation presents itself that requires additional analytical and critical thinking skills.

Complete set of analytical and critical thinking skills will successfully deal with each of the components in any PR projects. As stated previously, the most appropriate methods are possibly different for each component. For example, if one is most interested in impacting declarative knowledge (facts, concepts, principles), the most appropriate method is probably some form of didactic, explicit, or direct communication. Public relations practice involves management of any organization's reputation by identifying perceptions that are held of the organization and working to inform all relevant audiences about organizational performance.

It's concerned with developing a deserved reputation for an organization on that is based on solid performance not hollow hype. From a process perspective public relations, like any business activity, should always possess a healthy, but not debilitating, sense of doubt. Decisions need to be considered from different perspectives. Only the most sophisticated business leaders or organizations understand the value of critical public relations.

Research

The survey was conducted in October 2014. The aim of this study was to determine the extent to which the Agencies for Public relations in Croatia use analytical and critical thinking skills in the implementation of their PR projects. The second aim was to identify the target audience and how they react to the placed information based on the arguments or to the information based on storytelling. The study included 30 Agencies for Public Relations, which offer their services to the public institutions or private companies in the following sectors:

- Politics or Public Services
- Economy
- Business
- Science
- IT industry
- Fashion and Beauty Industry
- Culture
- Sport

None of the Agencies participated in the survey do not represent Science Company or Science Institution.

![Figure 1. Do you think that the analytical and critical thinking skills important for the implementation of the PR project?](source)

93% of respondents in the survey respondents stated that they believed analytical and critical thinking skills are important in PR projects. Only 7 % of respondents think differently.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition and diagnosis steps</th>
<th>Precentegs</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clients Information</td>
<td>58,00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal reaserch</td>
<td>57,33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press Clipping</td>
<td>31,33%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consultation with a proffesion</td>
<td>24,00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice from a colleagues</td>
<td>29,33%</td>
</tr>
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Source: Own materials.
Of the total number of respondents, 77% believe that the experience is the most important criterion to define “nice to” and “need to” elements in PR project, while 13% of respondents believe that they are their own research and 10% of respondents that is perception about PR projects.

Figure 3. Do you think is important to avoid key messages toward targeted audiences that are true, but does not leave a good impression on target audiences?
33% of the respondents think it's not important to avoid key messages toward targeted audiences that are true, but does not leave a good impression on target audiences.

Figure 4. By your opinion which element of the communication toward targeted audiences, public mostly perceived?

![Diagram showing that 80% of respondents perceived key messages, 3% perceived the entire content, and 17% perceived facts and arguments.]

Source: Own materials.

Only 3% of respondents in the survey find that the public perceived the overall content of the communication, 17% of the respondents consider that these are the facts and arguments, while 80% of respondents believe that the public perceives only the key messages.

Figure 5. Do you think that PR strategy influence on changes of the opinion or views in certain audiences about a particular topic?

![Diagram showing 83% of respondents believe PR strategy influences changes of opinion, and 17% do not.]

Source: Own materials.
83% of survey respondents considered that PR strategy affect the change of opinion or attitude in the target audience while 17% is held to not so.

Figure 6. By your opinion what do you think more influence the creation of attitudes in target audiences?

Source: Own materials.

All respondents in the survey (100%) believe that only storytelling influence on the creation of attitudes and opinions among target audiences.

Conclusion

One reason why analytical and critical thinking skills become widely important is because they are embedded into stories that are told by public relations practitioners and over trough interpersonal relations and mass media. Much of the discourse use by public relations practitioners relies on narrative — telling the stories. Mention of stories in this context is appropriate, but could be problematic as most of the critics on public relations believe that public relations practitioners do not anything but tell “stories”. In that sense, stories are relevant as type of narrative, but narrative need not to be false. Public relations exhibit a narrative quality when it recounts facts and arguments, and put them into context. This form of communication based on analytical and critical thinking skills led to the stories that not only gives the perspective to the facts, but also provides values that allows receivers of the message to judge those facts and draw conclusion.
Bibliography


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