A global and cooperative professional/academic effort to advocate the value of public relations to organizations and society

How the global alliance is changing the future of the public relations profession

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Introduction

In the fall of 1964, aged 23, the author of this chapter[1] found himself at a 3M Company HQ meeting in Saint Paul (Minnesota) with some ten other international relations professionals.

An elderly and just retired William McKnight, legendary founder of what even today is an evergreen success story of a truly 'communicative' global company (can the reader think of any other major multinational that has survived and blossomed for a century without going through at least one major crisis?), walks in the room unannounced and amicably mutters:

'*Hey John, who are all these people in the room?*'.

John (Verstraete, at the time senior vice president for public relations) stands up and says:

'*Bill, these are your public relations people from around the world*'.

McKnight shakes his head, raises hand to chin, searches in his beard and suggests:

'*Yeah! Sure… Though maybe, before improving our image, they should worry about improving the image of their profession!*'.

In October 2006, in New Delhi (India), Harold Burson addressed the ICCO[2] Conference in New Delhi (India) (Icco is the global umbrella organization of national agency associations) and expressed utmost urgence for a public relations program for public relations.

[1] an Italian national, then in his very first days at work in public relations for the 3M Company in Italy, following a two year employee communication job at Stanic, a joint venture between the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey
[2] The international association of national public relations consulting company associations (http://www.iccopr.com/)

It’s like the cobblers children, he said[3].

Helas!

An ongoing challenge each of us -seasoned professionals or scholars- have faced hundreds of times, in schools, colleges, universities, society at large, companies, governments, non profits…

In 2002, 16 national associations of professionals in public relations formed the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management[4].

As of this writing -December 2010- the member associations have since become 68, representing some 180 thousand professionals, a bare 5-7% of the estimated total number of professionals in the world.

Yet, no other single organization has more global representation of the profession.

In November 2009, the Global Alliance Executive Board met in Lugano (Switzerland) and, on proposal by its current Chair, John Paluszek, approved and actively contributed to the project of a collaborative process designed to prepare, draft and subsequently discuss at the June 2010 World Public Relations Forum in Stockholm, a ‘brief’ to the global public relations profession for a two-year advocacy program to argue -with locally selected and more relevant stakeholder groups in every part of the world- the areas of most value that public relations brings to organisation and to society.

This, of course, bearing well in mind the ‘generic principles and specific applications’ paradigm which implies an inescapable correlation between the two poles of that paradigm, and a very detailed analysis of the communicative infrastructure of each specific territory[5].

Thus: a public relations program for public relations, as well as an update of the 1978 Mexico Statement.[6]

A response to Harold Burson’s call or to William McKnight’s earlier suggestion…..

The ‘brief’[7] highlights in a succinct document those areas in which public relations contribute today most value to organizations and society -accompanied by all the necessary supporting materials and by a suggested method to evaluate and measure the effectiveness of the effort.

[3] http://haroldburson.com/pdf/2006-10-05%20The%20Cobblers%20Children.pdf
[4] http://www.globalalliancepr.org/content/1/1/homepage
[5] http://www.prconversations.com/index.php/2008/11/facing-this-historic-discontinuity-two-recently-developed-certainties-for-out-profession-generic-principles-and-specific-applications-and-stakeholder-relationship-management/
[6] It is the art and social science of analysing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organizational leaders & implementing programmes of action which will serve both the organization's and the public interest (1978)
[7] http://www.globalalliancepr.org/content/1/495/with-accords-moves-into-the-future/ and http://www.globalalliancepr.org/content/1/493/global-alliance-endorses-stockholm-accords-world-forum/

The assignment to coordinate the effort was given to this author, one of the founders of the GA and its first Chair (2002/2003).

After six months and with the active contribution of some 120 senior global professionals and academics from more than 30 countries, the brief was approved by the 400 plus participants from more than 20 nations and by another 400 participants that closely followed the video streaming service and twittered all the way through the two day discussion at the Forum in Stockholm on June 14 and 15 2010[8].

This paper intends to:

a) describe the process adopted to draft and approve the 'brief';
b) explain the contents of the 'brief';
c) elaborate and update on the implementation of the program, whose assessment is based on an agreed upon evaluation and measurement mechanism.

As the program is currently in process, its actual results will be reported at the next World Public Relations Forum, to be held in October 2012 in Melbourne (Australia). Yet an ongoing reporting of its day to day progress in all areas of the world can be monitored and commented on an ad hoc hub, here: www.stockholmaccords.org.

The rationale

A 2005 paper[9] by this author, published by the Institute for Public Relations, reported that in the world there are anywhere from 2.5 to 4 million professionals employing more than 50% of their time in assisting private, public and social organizations to improve of the quality of relationships with their stakeholders.

The number varies significantly according to the different interpretations of that definition.

As public relations is mostly a labour intensive activity -rather than a mostly capital intensive activity such as, for example, advertising- that paper argued that its economic impact would better be measured by adapting suggested guidelines normally related to other professions, instead of simply mirroring the traditional methods used by the advertising industry.

This implies, in a given territory, a) an estimate of the number of practicing professionals; b) the attribution of a gross annual cost to the organization for each; c) the adoption of an added value multiplier anywhere between a 1.5 to 3.0, according to the actual value perceived.

[8] http://www.wprf2010.se/
[9] http://www.instituteforpr.org/research_single/how_big_is_public_relations/

By enlarge, that paper indicated an annual 400 billion dollars economic impact of the public relations profession worldwide.

In September 2008 Euprera[10] (the European Association for Education and Research in Public Relations) sanctioned, in its annual congress in Milano, the ongoing and accelerated institutionalization of the public relations function in organizations world wide[11].

The annual GAP[12] study by USC's Annenberg School of Communication in the USA, and the annual European Communication Monitor[13] conducted by Euprera and the EACD[14] (European Association of Communication Directors), have recently confirmed and consolidated that public relations have become more and more relevant to the success of any organization.

For this simple reason – and well beyond its growing practices, believed by many critics to be ethically questionable- the profession is increasingly scrutinised by social, economic, political, media, and management groups, and its inherent ambiguity (opacity?) draws growing activist and regulatory concerns, mostly since the public at large is rarely made aware of its methods and processes, as these mostly refer to stakeholder relationships and to third party (opinion leaders, media) endorsement practices.

Furthermore, while a 1946-1996 study of how public relations was perceived in American popular culture concluded that public relators were generally portrayed as 'nice to have' but substantially irrelevant[15]; a similar 1996-2006 study indicated to the contrary that public relators are portrayed as mean, powerful and mostly operating in support of the interests of huge and sometime 'shady' organizations[16].

The paradox is that as the profession attracts a growing number of young people, while organizations increasingly value its contribution to their success, societal criticism intensifies.

Thus, the need for a re conceptualization and a call to action for the more aware and concerned members of the global professional and academic community to argue and advocate their profession's societal and organizational value.

Yes, a public relations program for public relations.

[10] http://www.euprera.org/
[11] http://www.prconversations.com/index.php/2010/06/free-book-download-institutionalising-public-relations-and-corporate-communication/
[12] http://annenberg.usc.edu/CentersandPrograms/ResearchCenters/SPRC/PrevGAP.aspx
[13] http://www.communicationmonitor.eu/
[14] http://www.eacd-online.eu/
[15] K Miller, PR in Film and Fiction, 1930 -- 1995, from the Journal of Public Relations Research, 11 (1) 3 - 28.
[16] Carol Ames, PR Goes to the Movies: Public Relations in Selected Flims, 1996 to 2008 Public Relations Reviewbased in Amsterdam

Twenty years into the global discontinuity fuelled by the abrupt change of the concepts of time and space in society, require that this re conceptualization address new concepts and adopt sustainable processes related to how organizations -private, public and social- seek to create value and enhance their license to operate.

The process

The first thoughts for this effort -which has never been attempted (as far as the author knows) by any other profession on a world wide scale- went to some the more recent developments supplied by the global body of knowledge.

a- Prof. Mervyn King -a South African corporate lawyer turned Supreme Court Justice, corporate governance counsel to the World Bank and the United Nations, Professor at the University of Pretoria and more recently Chair of the Global Reporting Initiative[17], had just issued his King 3 Report that immediately attracted the attention of the corporate governance community worldwide.

Amongst other substantial innovations, the King 3 Report[18] dedicates a specific chapter (chapter 8) to the governance of stakeholder relationships, and affirms that the Board of elected officials of any public, private or social organization is ultimately and directly responsible for developing and implementing policies and programs aimed at sustaining planned and effective relationships with the organization's principal stakeholder groups.

As a consequence, board decisions related to which stakeholder interests the organizations should privilege when in conflict, need to be 'situational' and to become a permanent topic of every board meeting.

Clearly, this implies the adoption of a full stakeholder governance model and substantially modifies the role of the organization's public relator… the manager normally in the best condition to listen to stakeholder groups, understand their expectations and interpret them, so that the Board may make informed decisions for implementation by management .

b- Prof. Sven Hamrefors from Sweden's Malarden University, has recently completed and published a comprehensive five year research effort[19] into Sweden's most effective organizations on behalf of the Swedish Public Relations Association[20].

The results were collected under the 'business effective communication' report which elaborates on the concept of the 'communicative organization'.

[17] http://www.globalreporting.org/Home the globally recognized standards authority for non financial reporting
[18] http://www.auditor.co.za/Portals/23/king%20111%20saica.pdf
[19] http://www.sverigesinformationsforening.se/in-english/research-statistics/business-effective-communication.aspx
[20] http://www.sverigesinformationsforening.se/in-english/

This refers to the accelerating global network society and to the ‘value network’ concept that describes how organizational value is found in the quality of the relationships exchanged between members of many fuzzy and immaterial networks (internal and external), as well as in the quality of the relationships between the different value networks.

Thus, contrary to (or in extension of) the traditional concept of the value chain -elaborated in the late seventies of the 20th century by Harvard Professor Michael Porter, where value is created in a linear and mostly material process- this more recent, Scandinavian, line of thought attributes the creation of value mostly to the quality of relationships.

This implies two strategic roles for the public relator:

1) a ‘political’ (Prof. Hamrefors defines it ‘ideological’) role of sustaining, supporting and inspiring organizational leadership in the effort to reinforce its ‘licence to operate’ vis-à-vis both value networks and society at large ;
2) a ‘contextual’ role of ensuring that all of the organization’s value networks be enabled to improve the quality of their relationships, thus increasing value creation.

These two more recent developments -coupled with other recent contributions from the Arthur Page Society[21], the PRSA[22], the Institute for Public Relations[23]; plus the global stakeholder relationship governance[24] integration with the generic principles and specific applications paradigm[25] - led to a very first and early outline, accompanied by a statement of intentions signed by the Chair of the Global Alliance, that was sent to some 120 professionals, scholars, educators from 42 countries, inviting them to participate in a two phase cooperative process by adopting the Cisco Webex Connexia synchronous video conferencing platform, which were set for February 10 and for March 8 2010.

In the two week interval between the two video conferences, participants were separated in six working groups, focussed on selected areas of interest, to continue the discussion and complete a redraft of the first outline; validate the redraft during the second videoconference and then, finally, approve a first draft of the document to be posted for comments and suggestions on the World Public Relations Forum website.

[21] http://www.awpagesociety.com/images/uploads/2007AuthenticEnterprise.pdf
[22] http://www.prsa.org/Intelligence/BusinessCase/?utm_source=home_page&utm_medium=left_nav&utm_campaign=businesscase
[23] http://www.instituteforpr.com/
[24] http://www.instituteforpr.org/ipr_info/global_stakeholder_relationship_governance/
[25] http://www.prconversations.com/index.php/2008/11/facing-this-historic-discontinuity-two-recently-developed-certainties-for-out-profession-generic-principles-and-specific-applications-and-stakeholder-relationship-management/

The selection of the invitees followed three indicators:

- half professionals (from companies and agencies) and half scholars and educators;
- representativeness of as many countries as possible and all continents;
- individuals expected to be reactive, interested and available for the effort.

The very first outline of the accords included six areas of value creation:

governance, management, sustainability, marketing, internal and external communication.

42 of the initial invitees participated to the first two hour videoconference, half of them spoke directly by commenting and suggesting changes and/or other approaches.

Towards the end of this first effort six volunteer group coordinators[26] were indicated and each participant volunteered to be included in at least one of the six working groups for the following two weeks. The role of the groups was to exchange comments, materials and information and redraft the brief related to that area. Some 80 exchanges between group coordinators and participants were concluded in the allocated time.

The coordinator then drafted a text which was sent to all selected invitees, including those who had not replied to the first call, requiring them to comment and inviting them to participate to the second videoconference call…..

There was general agreement that while the section devoted to marketing, which participants acknowledge is going through a radical conceptual overhaul, had not been able to produce significant added value more than what is generally and commonly understood.

To the contrary, the issue of the alignment of internal and external communication, instead, was believed to merit a section on its own.

Also, a lively discussion dwelled on whether the governance and management areas should not be integrated into one, and subsequently, if also the sustainability area should not also join that group. At the end (of the whole effort) it was decided to keep sustainability, governance and management (in that order) under the first half of the brief illustrating the societal and organizational value of public relations; while the internal, the external communication and the alignment of the two were to belong to the other half of the brief, illustrating the operational value of public relations.

[26] Dan Tisch (Canada), Estelle De Beer (South Africa), Anne Gregory (UK), Peder Jonnson (Sweden), Annette Martelle (Canada), Joao Duarte (Portugal)

The second video conference call saw the participation of 52 invitees, half of whom were new, while the other half had also participated to the earlier one.

After another two hours of lively discussion, agreement was reached that the coordinator would edit a first draft of the document, send it to all participants to either of the two sessions and ask them to respond with variations and suggestions in the following week.

During this first phase some 80 modifications where introduced, roughly half of linguistic nature and the other half more of content nature… as much as the two may differ...

In the meantime all cases, studies, links, papers referred to during the discussion were collected and added to the accompanying materials.

The coordinator also prepared a glossary describing, to the best of his knowledge and interpretation, the intended sense of some of the more relevant and relatively new concepts being used in the brief.

The reactions to the first draft by its early contributors were critical for the language more than for the contents.

Possibly the most significant innovation focussed on the actual format of each of the six selected areas: a quick statement of the situation, a quick statement of how the communicative organization acts in that situation , followed by call to action to the public relations professional succinctly enumerating the ways s/he brings value to the organization and society.

The first draft of the Stockholm Accords at this point was ready to be posted for the global professional community to comment on the World Public Relations Forum website for an open and non moderated discussion.

In the period between end March and end May, some 60 comments were registered and led to the editing and subsequent posting of a second draft in early June.

Once more, in this first round of ‘open comments’, many indulged on the language aspect, but this time from two different perspectives, a purely linguistic one, as before; but also a more intellectual reference to concepts which were either believed by some to be irrelevant, or even counterproductive.

A few of these comments –the discussion in the meantime had also naturally migrated to other blogs which, in turn, generated further interesting and enriching points of view- were explicitly critical, even violently so, while all others were instead positive and in full support.

As much as numbers may seem relevant in this case, some 5 were critical and the other 55 generally or very specifically supportive.

For example, a relevant discussion emerged because the first posted draft included a drawing of a pyramid dividing the five themes from top to bottom in separate layers, with the sixth theme ('sustainability') running vertically in parallel with the pyramid from top to bottom.

By clicking, for example, on 'governance' (top layer of pyramid) or, in sequence, 'management' or 'external communication' or 'internal communication', 'alignment', or by clicking on the vertical and parallel area of 'sustainability', the related text would appear.

The idea of the pyramid was entirely the responsibility of the coordinator, and clearly a blatant contradiction with the whole concept of the network society and of the fuzzy and immaterial value networks on which the whole 'brief' was based..

As soon as Norwegian scholar Peggy Bronn submitted this remark, the coordinator immediately realised his blunder -caused by an early (?) manifestation of 'senile dementia'- and the pyramid was promptly removed and thus acknowledged in the blog.

Yet, only to prove the validity of that old stereotype on how an image can often be more powerful than many words, it was critically referred to during the Stockholm Forum many weeks later, by one of the keynote speakers, even though it had been removed since three weeks…

Ah, the collateral effects of the Long Tail…

The most explicitly critical comments came from a couple of professionals who actually questioned the two initial concepts of the exercise:

1- the stakeholder governance model of the organization and its implications for public relations;
2- the communicative organization's role in today's network society and value networks.

Their arguments, occasionally supported by brilliant rhetoric, were not fully integrated into the final outcome, as the vast majority of contributions clearly supported those two inceptions of the process…. if not in the relevant sense of attributing to the entire process the role of a proper and operational 'brief', rather than the appearance of a 'manifesto' as if sculpted in stone.

The point here is the speed of change and the likelihood that any statement, no matter how valid, may not be sustainable in a couple of years, when the next world public relations forum is due to take place.

So, the fiercest criticisms -where intelligently thought out- actually became, according to the coordinator, pivotal in devising an ongoing and rewarding outreach program[27] for the Global Alliance and its members: the Stockholm Accords would need to be revisited, reconceptualised, reformulated every two years, so that the global public relations community may look forward to an ongoing framework and a periodical brief for advocating its value to organizations and society to its stakeholders in every corner of the world.

It is in no way ironic, but only consequential to the very concepts they criticised, that in listening-to, understanding and interpreting active stakeholder expectations, the Global Alliance assumed full responsibility of not ‘giving in’ to the more conceptual denials and proceeding in the process, thus proving that ‘stakeholder relationship governance’ only enhances the quality of the decision… to the point that even its fiercest critics actually and positively contributed to the creation of the innovative idea of a ‘brief’ rather than to a ‘lofty’ manifesto or statement.

Amongst the many comments and discussions it was somewhat surprising to register that none were related to the section dedicated to the evaluation and measurement of the effort.

This was surprising for at least two reasons:

a) for many years now this issue has been at the top of the agenda of many of the more senior professionals and scholars, but in this case attracted no comments;
b) the whole ‘brief’ is clearly based on a paradigm which not only explicitly indicates in its very contents that public relations professionals need always to evaluate and measure the effectiveness of their activities, but -even more so- in the accompanying documents, they clearly spell out a suggested research approach to be applied by each adopter in the Accords’ implementation process.

It is not easy to rationally explain this exclusion of the suggested before-and-after evaluation research from the discussion.

According to the this author, there are at least two possible options:

a) the suggested research method is unclear, or was simply ignored by contributors as embarrassingly inconsistent;

[27] This of course is only an idea of the coordinator which will require discussion and decision by the Global Alliance Board…

b) research is evidently not, as often claimed (lip service?), a real priority for the profession even at its highest levels of expression.

In the hope that the first option is the correct one, this author will now try to better explain the suggested method.

The method indicates that each would-be-actor should keep in mind the following major performance indicators:

a) the quality of the contents of the Accords and of its source (the actor);
b) the relative dynamic of stakeholder perceptions of the profession compared to those of other management functions and professions;
c) the growth in integration of public relations (or similar expressions) into management university curricula;
d) the appointment of public relations professionals into organizational dominant coalitions;
e) the improved portrayal of the profession in business and general mainstream and digital media.

The last three indicators mostly imply desk analysis comparing the situation in a given territory before and after the process and can be directly performed by the actor. The first three instead necessarily need an active listening, before, during and after, of samples of the selected stakeholder groups the actor decides to advocate during the process.

As for the quality of the contents, prevailing literature agrees that at least three sub-indicators may be used to assess the effectiveness of a given communicative content: the credibility of the source, the credibility of the content, the familiarity of the content.

As for the relevant dynamics of stakeholder perceptions of the profession, it seems coherent to the whole advocacy effort to compare the dynamics of the reputation of public relations vis-a-vis other professions (legal, accounting, medical..) as well as other management functions (human resources, marketing, finance…).

If one imagines, for example, a professional association deciding to implement the accords, it is important to:

a) analyse the current levels of integration of public relations into management university curricula,
b) identify the number of public relations belonging to organizational dominant coalitions (from private, public, and social sectors)

c) interpret the current portrayal of the profession in business and general mainstream and digital media
d) select, on the basis of the specific knowledge of its own territory, which of the six themes of the accords can best be the subject of positive advocacy in a two year period, and with which of the many potential stakeholder groups this effort is best to be directed through a conscious and planned advocacy program.

Again as an example, in country X the internal, external and alignment themes (those claiming the operational value of public relations to the organization and society) may appear to be more mature. In another region of the world instead the association might prefer to argue the more organizational and societal values contained in the sustainability, governance and management themes. Or, in a third, it could well be a combination of the both groups, or all of the themes together.

Similarly, association A might wish to direct efforts towards its own members as well as potential members, or to the media and the business community; whereas association B might prefer to work with the public policy process or with the cultural and educational elites; while association C instead decides to apply the entire Stockholm accords advocacy program to all of its stakeholders.

Whichever the case, once this is decided, the first step implies that the actor endeavour, as one always should in professional practice, a first research/listening effort to evaluate and measure:

- the credibility of the source (the association), the credibility of the selected contents, and their familiarity amongst different samples of selected stakeholder groups;
- the perceived level of reputation of the profession compared both to other professions and other management functions, amongst the same samples of selected stakeholder groups.

This overall 'base research' allows to set specific quantitative objectives to be achieved in the two year period item per item and stakeholder group per stakeholder group. Which of course implies a 'second research', similar, but with different composition of the samples (to avoid distortions originated by the base research), to be implemented at the end of the effort so that its overall effectiveness may be measured.

As the prevailing mantra says, research <u>is</u> important and effective public relations <u>is</u> based on research.

According to the substance of the Stockholm accords, listening to stakeholders before organizational decisions are taken is, by itself, a highly relevant part of communication: if only one stops to ponder the etymology of the term.

In this specific case, but also in many others, it is likely that some of Accords arguments could reveal much too low (or too high) familiarity; much too low (or too high) credibility of the source (the association); or even of its contents… to rationally justify an all-out advocacy effort.

Another merit of early research might well suggest to either change the selected theme, its actual contents, or even the chosen stakeholder groups.

So… the application of the suggested research method is situational and bends itself to the 'specific applications' and the 'specific public relations infrastructure' of the territory in which the association operates.

The contents

There many underlying and (relatively new) themes in all accords areas which require careful horizontal analysis.

1.
The accords acknowledge that the mere speed of organizational and societal change across the globe is such that no single conceptual framework may appropriately highlight how, when and where public relations brings more value to society and to organizations of all sorts, if not for a short time frame of maximum 2/3 years. Then the situation will need to be revisited and adjourned accordingly.

2.
The accords acknowledge that research for any effective public relations program is essential before, during and after. This has always been true, but now more than ever.

Research also implies that any form of effective communication program include listening as its structural component, which means gathering, understanding and interpreting overall and specific social, economic and political environments in which the organization operates; as well as understanding, dialoguing-with and interpreting expectancies of specific organizational stakeholder groups before management decisions are taken.

From this perspective, listening therefore is a strategic skill for public relators and communication in a continued alternation, when not in a full overlap, between listening and narrative.

If listening is a strategic skill then it is urgent that both at a university level, as well as in ongoing professional education, programs supply specific competencies to enable professionals to learn how to listen at least as much as to learn how to narrate. Today the latter is dominant while the former is practically nil (except for research, yet usually interpreted as a technical tool).

3.
The accords acknowledge that the consolidated, linear, material, hierarchic and mostly shareholder oriented organizational governance and management structure -although still very present in every corner of the world- is being increasingly contaminated by 21st century paradigms such as the network society and fuzzy value networks, thus significantly modifying strategic planning processes used to identify and quantify the creation of value –such as the value chain, in large parts materially and linearly oriented. Fuzzy and immaterial value networks instead create value based on the quality of relationships amongst network members and amongst different networks.

4.
The accords acknowledge that every organizational function is increasingly involved and interested in improving skills and competencies in creating, developing and governing stakeholder relationships and therefore those public relations functions that enable, facilitate, supply knowledge and tools in this area of expertise, bring measurable added value to the coherence, enhancement and effectiveness of the organization's licence to operate.

The organization which excels in this strategic contextual function, as well as in the more traditional strategic political function which supports the organization's leadership in reinforcing reputation and stakeholder relationships, can be defined as a communicative organization.

5.
The accords acknowledge that public relations brings substantial and measurable added value by supporting the organization in its:

a) sustainability -interpreted as a transformational opportunity for the organization to align and ensure its very existence with societal and stakeholder expectations;
b) governance -interpreted as a definite option for a stakeholder rather than a shareholder governance model that attributes to the board or elected officials the responsibility of defining stakeholder relationship policies on the basis of a situational selection of priorities;
c) management -interpreted from the perspective that the time of implementation of a decision, has become a strong indicator of the decision's quality, and can be significantly supported by a clear understanding of stakeholder and societal expectations before the decision is taken.

And these are the three areas of the Accords which highlight the organizational and societal value of public relations.

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In parallel, the accords acknowledge that public relations directly contributes to the quality of:

a) internal communication processes -interpreted as relevant to an ever changing group of internal and boundary stakeholder groups;
b) external communication processes -recognizing that all forms of organizational capital can gain or suffer by the quality of communication processes between the organization and its external stakeholders;

and

c) the organization is more than ever involved in aligning internal and external communication processes due to the increasing fading of the boundaries between the two.

The implementation

Following the six month process to their approval through the adoption of the described global and collaborative effort, now comes the time of implementation of the brief, and this is of course at the moment yet unreportable, although a quick visit to hub (www.stockholmaccords.org) will allow sufficient perusal to understand qhat is goingo on in various parts of the world.

But, there are many possible paths that actors (professionals, students, educators, associations, companies, consultancies ..) could follow.

Certainly the <u>least effective</u> is to simply 'translate' the text of the accords and artificially integrate them into day to day practice.

The actors would certainly ensure more effective results by adopting a process which may look something like this:

a) read, understand and interpret the contents
b) evaluate which may be more applicable to the specific stakeholder groups the specific actor believes to be more relevant to the achievement of the overall objectives of the brief which are, on one side, to advocate the areas of organizational activities where public relations create more value and, on the other side, to improve the overall reputation of public relations vis-à-vis other professions and other management functions;

c) create a content platform including arguments from the suggested references but also from other more specific references the actor will want to include, if deemed coherent with the overall contents;
d) having selected the appropriate contents and the relevant stakeholder groups, engage in a desk and direct research effort to establish a base from which to begin implementation program and to set specific objectives. This does not necessarily imply a major effort, but a serious one yes!

For example, limited or no available resources might lead actors to random dialogue or telephone calls with stakeholders. This option may make sense, as long as it is a seriously thought out effort and not lip service or nice to have. The best option is of course that the more scientifically sound the research effort, the more reliable the results. Yet, a non implementation with the alibi that there are no resources to research, may well be worse than an effort based on necessarily insufficient research data;

a) on the basis of the results of this initial research effort and the hypothetical (but realistic) adaptation of the contents, the actor develops and implements a consciously planned public relations program including direct relationships, indirect output and dissemination via all relevant traditional and digital communication channels to develop relationships with selected stakeholder groups;
b) towards the end of the two year period of the exercise, the actor will want to implement a second, control and final research along the same lines of the base one (as already described) and evaluate and measure the effectiveness of the effort.
c) most importantly, from the very beginning, the actor will want to register on the global alliance dedicated digital space[28], constantly report on implementation activities, reactions, experiences, successes and failures, so that all other actors may reciprocally benefit from their and their peer efforts.

Even more importantly, every individual reader of this paper could volunteer to monitor what, if anything, her/his professional association is doing (has done) to implement the Accords, volunteer to contribute to the effort, report to the hub on these activities and -basically- move on to ensure that the public relations profession prove capable of gaining the reputation and licence to operate its more concerned professionals deserve……

[28] www.globalalliancepr.org