

The growth of public relations practice

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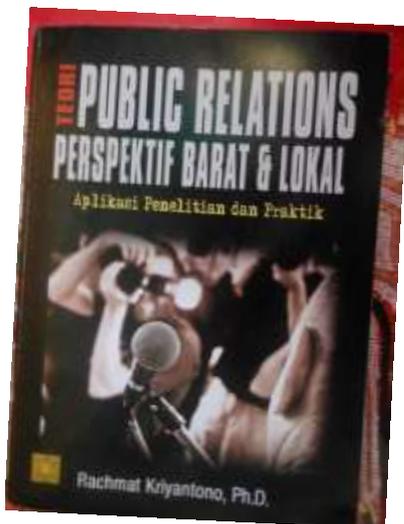
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The function of theory in public relations practice

In public relations practice, theory has several functions. Generally, theory is needed to guide the practitioners in decision making process in particular situation. In addition, there is a causal relations between theory and practice. Theory can be applied to plan a program and an successful or failure program can be used to revise theory (Culbertson, Jeffers, Stone, & Terrell, 1993). Johansson (2007) stated that practitioners today face multiaspects of problems that involve communication, build good relations with the public, and the growth of technology with its social impacts.

From the work of Carl H. Botan & Vincent Hazleton, Jr (1989), there are at least four functions of theory for public relations practitioners: description; understanding; prediction &

control; heuristic. Description means that theory provides vocabularies to explain public relations concepts and variables, such as boundary spanning, dominant coalition or active public. Understanding function means that theory give detail information to understand public relations, such as why boundary spanning is needed and how to apply it.

Theory is to predict and control means that theory has ability to predict and anticipate the possibilities of applying its concepts. For example, if the organization does not apply boundary spanning, it can be predicted that it will affect the quality of the relation with its public. Heuristic means that one theory connect to other theories so practitioners are suggested to collaborate some theories in order to gain deep understanding to solve problems. For example, the concept of boundary spanning can be conducted effectively if public relations provides two way symmetrical channel of communication.

The growth of public relations profession

As social activities, public relations had gone hand in hand with human activities in the earth. In order to fulfil the needs, people interacted each other. They bartered and cooperated to survive, build relations, and reproduce. All the activities needed communication ability to negotiate. Such ability is simple form of public relations. In other words, public relations practice is actually always done by people so the practice is always present in daily life. Suzanne Horsley (2009) calles “ubiquitous nature of public relations”. “The principles of public relations have been known, studied, and practiced for centuries.” (Leahigh, 1993, p. 24). Public relations is as old as civilization because its activities are persuasive effort. Many persuasive tactics today are applied by society leaders for thousand years. (Newsom, Scott & Turk, 1993). These statements are linked to L’Etang’s (2004) idea that the growth of public relations as activity as old as journalistic since Greece and Roman era. yaitu mulai ada sejak era Yunani dan Romawi. As a result, public relations study relates with rethoric, persuasion, and *sophistry*¹

Public relations grew rapidly in industrial era after industrial revolution in Europe and sprayed all over the world, such as US and Asia. The growth of industry Perkembangan dunia industry also connected with some aspects of social life. Therefore, public relations practice

¹ Sophistry is method of argument which looks scientific but consists of a false statement made with the intention of deceiving.

widen and connected with other areas, such as business, political science, psychology, mass communication, anthropology, sociology, marketing, and governmental affairs. As a consequence, those areas have been influencing public relations theories and research. Some literature, such as Botan & Hazleton (1989), Greenwood (2010), Grunig & Hunt (1984), Grunig (1989), Hallahan (1999), Ihlen & van Ruler (2009), and Sisco, Collin, & Zoch (2011) mention that public relations as multidiscipline social science. Furthermore, Edward Bernays and Edward Robinson (Culbertson, 1993; Grunig & Hunt, 1984) called that public relations applied social and behavior sciences due to the integration of theoretical and practical elements.

In addition, public relations grew in organizational context. Ivy Leedbetter promoted “*tell the truth*” to deal with a crisis in Pennsylvania, railroad company in early 20 century. The principle could be done, according to Cutlip (1994), because Lee was the first practitioner who was at management level. Lee focused on management policy: “*good policy makes good Public Relations*” which defined public relations as the activity that involved in expressing organization’s ideas or policies (Lamme & Russell, 2010). The expressing ideas meant that the public must be informed which stimulated Grunig & Hunt to promote public information model. Lee’s idea was assumed modern public relations (Grunig & Hunt, 1984), and Lee was called “the father of Public Relations.” (Newsom, et al, 1993, p.43). Generally, US is assumed the place of public relations growth, the profession and academic study (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Horsley, 2009; L’Etang, 2008; Raaz & Wehmeier, 2011), in the same time with the study of public opinion (Podnar & Golob, 2009). However, some literatur mentioned that Europe also gave important contribution (L’Etang, 2004; Raaz & Wehmeier, 2011), as a result of idustrial revolution.

Another developpment phase was described by Edward Bernays, a pioneer of public relations study in early 20th century. Bernays came from psychology. The popular Bernays’ ideas was about public relations counsel: practitioner as management councilor. The idea developed public relations as the activity to help management to interpret public and help public to interpret management. Bernays argued that his concept was to respond increasing negative and manipulative propaganda and put professional communication in public relations practice. Previously, public relations was known as press-agentry and direct publicity. At the end, Bernays introduced “new propaganda”, a balance manipulation by paying attention to public agreement, doing research and focusing ethical aspect through two way interpretation (Culbertson, et al, 1993; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Lamme & Russell, 2010).

Grunig & Hunt (1984) introduced four model of public relations from the phase of public relations practice: press-agentry, public information, two-way asymmetric, and two-way symmetric. At the beginning, public relations was information provider only for mass media (press-agentry). Then, it became information provider for public (public information). At last, public relations started to open two way communication channels, both asymmetric or symmetric).

From descriptions above, public relations grew hand in hand with human activities, however, public relations profession was relatively new (Horsley, 2009; Leahigh, 1993). Concept of public relations was born in 1913 at Electric Railway Journal when a discussion about publicity and public opinion. Public relations profession grew when a profession organization was born: Public Relations Society of America in 1940 (Horsley, 2009). The matureness era had occurred up to 1979 when public relations was included as a part of management fuction (Newsom, et al, 1993).

From Sriramesh & Vercic's (2003) study about the growth of public relations in five continents, it was found that public relations profession increased in democracy and technology era in 20th century. Democracy stimulated public communication in which public relations approach was needed. Technology made the countries grew up with idustrial power so it created global trade and communication. In 1980's, according to Newsom, et al (1993), public relations principles have been used in internasional level.