

Teacher's Guide to International/Global Public Relations

Lessons from the Arthur W. Page Center for Ethics and Integrity in Public Communication

Rationale and Overview

As organizations have become globalized, international public relations has also become a major concern of practitioners. In particular, public relations practitioners face many challenges caused by cultural, political, and economical differences among nations and regions. Thus, it is essential for students to recognize the importance of international public relations and develop an understanding of other countries.

Module Format

Students will watch video clips from public relations practitioners on international/global public relations and then answer a series of questions based on those clips. The remaining activities for this module involve reading two articles and answering the questions provided. Under Module Activities is content you can use for grading or to aid with class discussion.

Learning Objectives

This module aims to facilitate understanding of the challenges and opportunities involved in international public relations. The lesson is designed to help students:

- Reflect on how their own cultural perspectives impact how they think about communication;
- Determine the best ways to balance “thinking locally” and “thinking globally”;
- Contemplate how to apply general principles of good public relations in any setting.

Module Activity: Watch Video Clips

The following video clips are portions of interviews with public relations practitioners commenting on subjects related to international public relations. These video clips are available on the website of the Arthur W. Page Center for Integrity in Public Communication. First, students will need to visit the Center's [website](#), and then go to the [Oral History Collection](#). On that page, they can see the [index](#) where they can easily access material within and across

interviews organized by topic or issue. Among the various topics, students should click [International/Global PR](#), and then they can access video clips of interviews with:

1. Jim Murphy	4. Richard Edelman	7. Jack Felton
2. Peter Debreceeny	5. Harold Burson	8. Helen Ostrowski
3. John Reed	6. Jon Iwata	9. John Reed on Global PR

Module Activity: Video Clip Questions

The following discussion questions are designed to encourage critical thinking on international/global public relations. After watching the video clips, please answer the following questions. You can use the additional information provided to help with grading or facilitating discussion.

1. Why is international public relations becoming important?

For teachers:

Public relations practitioners are facing more complex and diversified interest groups as the world today “is splitting into smaller and smaller discrete and very nationalistic factions.” Public relations practitioners have to think out of the box by understanding foreign cultures and customs in order to effectively reach a target audience. (See the video clips of [John Reed](#) and [John Reed on Global Public Relations](#))

International public relations helps with global business expansion and with conveying a message around the world. (See the video clip of [Harold Burson](#))

2. What are the benefits or opportunities when practicing international public relations?

For teachers:

From John Reed’s personal experiences, the benefits of international public relations include engaging different publics with tailored needs such as linguistic, historical, and cultural elements. He gives the example of “manipulating” three cultural factors (music, soccer, and religion) when practicing PR in Portugal. What he suggests is that practitioners need to be

culturally sensitive and apply cultural elements to relate to a local audience. (See [John Reed on Global Public Relations](#))

The most important advantage of international public relations is that it can help a corporation expand its local business into a global enterprise. (See the video clip of [Jack Felton](#))

International public relations will facilitate good practice if it exchanges and shares ideas, as illustrated in the case of Harold Burson's PR firm. By creating a large databank of cases made available to local offices, Burson's PR firm avoids reinventing wheels and establishes uniformity. (See the video clip of [Harold Burson](#))

3. What are the qualities a PR practitioner should have?

For teachers:

Public relations practitioners should be able to persuade people by personally taking action and devising creative ways to solve a problem. They should be able to speak local languages, even dialects, and be able to find and get local help. It is essential to learn the culture they are going to interact with; and finally, to tell truth. (See the video clip of [John Reed](#))

4. The greatest mistake made by practitioners in international public relations is implementing American standards in global settings. What are the problems caused by taking this action?

For teachers:

John Reed talks about how complex and diversified the world is. International public relations practitioners cannot apply American standards to other countries and regions because of differences in cultural, political, economic, and social values and practices. Problems such as failing to effectively appeal to local audiences can damage your corporation's image. As illustrated by Jack Felton, if McCormick follows American standards, they may end up selling the wrong spice at the wrong time (not taking into account local religion, tradition, and culture,) thus damaging the company's image. (See the video clip of [Jack Felton](#))

In another case, according to Helen Ostrowski, if implementing American standards, great ideas may be ignored, and thus the corporation may end up failing to engage the local

customers, as she mentioned in her account of a program for a global drug launch. (See the video clip of [Helen Ostrowski](#))

5. In terms of ethics, do you think we can apply Americanized codes of ethics in foreign markets because ethics is universally common, or do they need to be modified?

For teachers:

According to Jon Iwata, “Every company should be ethical; every company should not break the law; every company should do the right thing. But great companies not only do all of those, which I believe are table stakes, but great companies are also unique in some way.” Mr. Iwata implied in his interview that because companies do not value the same thing, public relations practitioners should factor characteristics of foreign markets into the complete picture. So the answer to this question is we cannot apply Americanized codes of ethics in foreign markets blindly; rather, we need to tweak and adjust local situations in order to effectively execute our strategic goals. (See the video clip of [Jon Iwata](#))

Module Activity: Reading and Questions

To be successful in the global marketplace, it is important to apply the generic principles of public relations differently, according to specific characteristics of the international market. Students will use this [link](#) and read the article titled “International Public Relations: An American Perspective” from Khamis and Toth. After reading the article, they will answer the following questions.

6. What are the nine principles for effective public relations practices.

For teachers:

The nine principles are: (1) Involvement of Public Relations in Strategic Management; (2) Empowerment of Public Relations in the Dominant Coalition or a Direct Reporting Relationship to Senior Management; (3) Integrated Public Relations Function; (4) Public Relations as a Management Function Separate from Other Functions; (5) The Role of the Public Relations

Practitioner; (6) Two-Way Symmetrical Model of Public Relations; (7) A Symmetrical System of Internal Communication; (8) Knowledge Potential for Managerial Role and Symmetrical Public Relations; and (9) Diversity Embodied in All Roles.

7. Are these generic principles of excellence applicable anywhere?

For teachers:

The applicability of the nine principles has been challenged in the arena of international public relations, as there are multiple factors such as political and economic systems, different cultures and philosophies affecting the practice of international public relations. Therefore, we need to consider applying five contextual variables as illustrated in the next question.

8. What are the five contextual variables to be considered in the application of the principles?

For teachers:

The Political-Economic System. Consider the nature of a country's political and economic system, i.e. authoritarian, libertarian, etc. and how different political and economic systems of various countries hinder or facilitate international public relations practice.

Level of Development. The level of development usually functions as a determinant for how public relations will be used. In other words, public relations may be used as a tool for market competition in developed countries whereas public relations may function as a tool for the government of a developing country to rally its citizens.

Culture. International public relations practitioners have to be culturally sensitive which means they should be aware of what is the underlying culture in a certain country, i.e. individualism or collectivism, the knowledge of power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and the prevalence of masculinity or femininity.

Extent of Activism. Because multinational organizations face more stakeholders than domestic organizations, international public relations practitioners need to take into account of more complicated situations in a cross-culture setting as the form and extent of activism varies widely across national boundaries.

Media Systems. International public relations practitioner need to be proficient in using media systems of different countries to perform effectively and communicate to their target publics effectively.

As an added variable to the abovementioned five, language difference should also be taken into account when practicing international public relations. (See Khamis & Toth, pp. 36-38)

9. From the video clips on the Page Center website, please find the cases that integrate those generic principles and specific variables strategically.

For teachers:

In the case of Burson and Marsteller, the firm excelled by hiring local and having local offices managed by local professionals trained by the mother company. (See the video clip of [Harold Burson](#))

In the case of McCormick, the company always hired a native of a particular culture to lead the local office, so that McCormick was culturally sensitive and did not make any cultural mistakes. At the same time, McCormick had an American as the No. 2 guy in the local office to make sure the local office implemented McCormick's ethics and financial policy. (See the video clip of [Jack Felton](#))

In the case of John Reed, when he was involved in delivering a daily information paper to the Koreans, he was culturally sensitive enough to use the Korean language and the local mail delivery system, which proved to be effective in Korean villages. The message or propaganda was effectively delivered. (See the video clip of [John Reed](#))

In another case from Mr. Reed's personal experience, he talked about how to integrate the general principles of public relations and contextual variables, such as language and culture when designing a message. One such example is when he used something of great significance to the Portuguese people, by incorporating the three F's – Fado, Football and Fatema, which translates to music, soccer, and religion, to his message. He found it resonated with the local people. Reed also talked about his rich life experiences when working in Asia, where he successfully applied language and local cultures to persuade the indigenous population. (See [John Reed on Global Public Relations](#))

Module Activity: Second Reading and Additional Questions

Students can access the Public Relations Resource Center by selecting this [link](#). Under Referred Journal Articles, they should download Grunig's [article](#), "Paradigms of Global Relations in an Age of Digitalisation". They will then be asked to apply the generic principles of public relations to a historical case, as if it was happening today with the use of digital/social media available. Suggested historical cases may include Coca Cola in Belgium, the effect of the Exxon-Valdez spill on Canada, and the Bhopal disaster. Student will answer the following questions.

10. Are these generic principles practical? Explain why or why not.
11. How can they be applied?

For teachers:

When applying the generic principles to a historical case such as the Coca Cola crisis in Belgium, using social media, the principles of public relations are still practical but practitioners need to take the changed media environment into consideration. For example, the principles of symmetrical communication and involving public relations in strategic communication (Grunig, 2009), would be more effective and efficient. As Grunig suggested in this article, in the age of Web 2.0, information is being sent, shared, exchanged, digested, and communicated instantly; there is no point in trying to control information, especially when a crisis happens. The best practice for public relations practitioners should be taking the initiative to communicate promptly yet strategically with the public about what happened, and conduct that communication in a responsible manner. For example, if the Coca Cola recall crisis happened today, the best thing to do would be to inform the public about the incident and offer the company's decision and actions regarding the matter. With the aid of blogs and twitter, the company could manage the scope of the negative opinions by constantly exchanging messages with the public, including consumers who were affected by the problematic drinks, consumers not affected by the matter, the local government, consumers and governments of other countries and regions.

Public relations following the Exxon Valdez oil spill serves as an example of an unsuccessful strategy during a crisis. If Exxon had applied the generic principles, the crisis would have been managed in a much better way. This strategy would have been very practical,

by involving public relations in strategic management and using two-way and symmetrical communication. If applying these principles in today's situation with social media available, Exxon would be able to, first, use social media networks, such as Twitter, to express its attitude toward the incident in a timely manner; second, use social media to disseminate the company's decisions and plan of action, i.e. cleanup, compensation, etc. to the affected community, the American public, and the international public.

Additional Readings

- Ford, R. L. (2006). Understanding the implications of multiculturalism is critical for PR programming. *Public Relations Tactics*, 13(2), 6.
- Grunig, J. E., Grunig, L. A., Sriramesh, K., Huang, Y., & Lyra, A. (1995). Models of public relations in an international setting. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 7(3), 163-186.
- Zaharna, R. S. (2000). Intercultural communication and international public relations: Exploring parallels. *Communication Quarterly*, 48(3), 85-100.
- Valentini, C. (2007) Global versus cultural approaches in public relationship management: The case of the European Union. *Journal of Communication Management*, 11(2), 117-133.

Additional Resources

- Arthur W. Page Society Case Studies: Google: Entrance into the Chinese Market and Government Censorship ([link](#))
- Arthur W. Page Society Case Studies: Euronext N.V.: The Fight for LIFFE ([link](#))
- Regester, M., & Larkin, J. (2005). Case Study: Coca-Cola, Lessons it might have learnt from history, *Risk Issues and Crisis Management in Public Relations*, 160-162. ([link](#))
- Buffalo State University Case Studies: Exxon Valdez Oil Spill ([link](#))
- Johnson, V., & Peppas, S. C. (2003). Crisis management in Belgium: the case of Coca-Cola, *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 8(1), 18-22.

References

- Grunig, J. (2009). Paradigms of global public relations in an age of digitalisation. *PRism* 6(2), 1-19.

Khamis, S., & Toth, E. L. (2009). International public relations: An American perspective.
Trípodos, 24, 31-40.