**Relazioni Pubbliche e Responsabilità Sociale**

**delle organizzazioni**

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Questo testo ha aperto una intensa discussione internazionale sul ruolo del relatore pubblico nel determinare, comunicare e valutare i programmi di responsabilità sociale delle organizzazioni.

This intense corporate social responsibility fad which is pervading our profession, our employer/clients, our research and education communities in every developed country is certainly welcome because it adds value to our day to day activities and, more so, because it raises in ourselves, as well as in our stakeholders, the fundamental consciousness of the inextricable liason between organisational behaviour and a sustainable concept of public relations, as it becomes increasingly clear that we communicate behaviours and not manipulate expectations...

Even more, this fad also has a forceful impact in distinctly clarifying the difference between the diverse roles of our function: whether it be technical, managerial or strategic - the latter, both in its reflective and educational declinations.

Yet…at the same time, this csr mania carries along, as many blessings often do, a couple of relevant risks which we should be very much aware of and alerted to:

1. a stereotype ‘*csr is only a pr exercise...*’ is growing inside (i.e. other corporate functions) and outside organisations (ngo’s and media), thus trivialising its very concept as if it was an instrumental reaction to that increasingly visible growing anger against organisational bigness, as well as reinforcing a negative connotation of our profession in the public arena.

It is neither a success nor a consolation the fact that many newcomer ‘me-too’ organisations allocate responsibility of csr programs to the pr function, rather than to the Ceo, which is the only way to fully guarantee the direct involvement in csr of all corporate functions. To the contrary, this growing trend reinforces the ‘golden ghetto’ of the pr department as ‘separate’ from the rest of management. It would, instead, seem tactically more relevant if the pr function strongly advocated the dominant coalition to ensure that csr policy responsibility be firmly allocated at the ceo level, while retaining the full role of communicating csr policies and programs to all stakeholders.

As much as this may seem assigning to the pr function only a technical role, it nevertheless guarantees full access and participation to the dominant coalition, as it forces the pr director to ‘educate’ other corporate functions to the concept and practice of stakeholder relationships and to ‘reflect’, interpret and represent, within that same dominant coalition, stakeholder expectations before policies are decided.

1. csr theorists, many ceo’s as well as a huge number of professionals -unfortunately unaware of the dramatic need to depollute today’s overcrowded, intolerable, inefficient and ineffective communication environment - tend to simply replace the term ‘public relations’ (in its ‘relations with publics’ definition) with ‘stakeholder relations’: as if all publics of an organisation were stakeholders because, clearly, the term sounds better and is more ‘trendy’.

But this is a serious mistake, as well as a lost opportunity. In fact, it is not true that an organisation’s publics are all stakeholders, because ‘to hold a stake’ implies subjects which are conscious and interested in a relationship with the organisation - be it neutral, conflictual or collaborative.

It is the stakeholder who decides to be one, and not the organisation, who may even, as sometime happens, refuse that relationship.

Influencers (or influential publics or opinion leaders on specific issues) are, instead, subjects who are neither necessarily conscious nor interested in creating a relationship with the organisation, but in this case it is the latter who thinks these have the capacity of orienting opinions, behaviours, decisions on a variable influencing the outcome of its objective.

Of course there are many overlaps between the two groups, but there is no doubt that stakeholders are not necessarily all influentials as well as that many influentials are not all stakeholders.

From an operative viewpoint, stakeholder relations should be activated once the organisation has defined its ‘fundamentals’ (i.e. mission, vision, values and strategy) and feels ready to decide which specific objectives should be pursued to transform the mission into the vision by an appropriate strategy.

Any professional can easily understand that these relationships can be direct, to the point and simplified in terms of channels and contents (i.e. less expensive) and, in order to be effective, need to be fully two way and as symmetric as possible.

Relationships with influencers on a specific issue, instead, should be activated once the organisation, after having carefully listened to its stakeholders and subsequently decided which objectives are to be pursued, begins their implementation.

It is clear that, in its need to attract the attention of influencers and enroll them in support or try to reduce their resistance (they are, we said, neither conscious nor necessarily interested), the organisation needs to deploy rhetorical practices and gradually induce them into considering the general benefits for society of the pursued objective (i.e. this practice is obviously more expensive than the first).

Where stakeholder relations are dealt with a symmetrical, two-way and pull approach before defining specific objectives and influencer relations are dealt with a quasi-symmetrical, two-way, pull-push approach in the first phase of implementation of any specific objective… there is, finally, a third, usually much larger but highly relevant public which, in a second phase of implementation, requires a somewhat lesser symmetrical, but always two-way, push-pull approach.

This public is formed by the final receivers of the product/service the organisation aims to supply.

In relating to this public, to adopt a lesser symmetrical, but again maintain a two-way communication approach by always supplying to the receiver, and even in erga omnes advertising, a visible and easy access to an effective feedback mechanism, seems to be a reasonable approach.

This, in some ways, explains why organisations may well decide to adopt different models according to the different publics with which it relates.

A conscious application of this complex approach, allows the organisation to rationalise its communicative processes, avoiding unnecessary communicative pollution and ensuring more effectiveness to its efforts.

Finally - remembering that the Oxford Dictionary defines as ‘corporate’ any form of organisation and that therefore the csr concept also fully applies to the public and the social sector as well as the business one - public relations professionals are called to soberly ‘ride’ this csr wave, with a critical approach, thus truly benefiting from this unexpected blessing to enhance our capabilities, our reputation and gain justified access and adequate inches to the table of organisational dominant coalitions.

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***What about social responsibility and Public Relations?***

***For a sober and critical approach to a pervasive opportunity for our profession.***