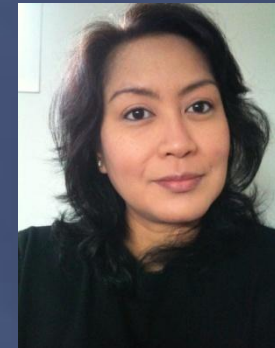


THE ART AND SCIENCE OF DIALOGUE IN PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE



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Key assumption of our research

Public Relations theory does not satisfactorily describe “dialogue” and its practice, so we assumed that this lack of clarity would spill over into practice.

So far, we have found that:

- Practitioners are willing to engage in dialogue and believe in its value.
- *But* “dialogue” means different things to different practitioners and this appears to result in inconsistent views and practices.



Having the right qualities

To engage in dialogue, we need:

- Commitment to the process
- To share responsibility with stakeholders
- To be willing to participate
- To engage with participants as human beings
- To understand that all parties can affect each other

*Our research shows that practitioners
have the right qualities*



What do practitioners say about dialogue?

“...dialogue is the communication between two people...so where the dialogue is media based, and it's.... general media talking AT individuals, or it's...in other two-way communication, like social media, where there's more of a back and forward – it's inherently biased dialogue, and I think that's really where the public relations industry lies.” – NZg2M01

- Dialogue is seen as a conversation between two people
- Dialogue can be both ethical and unethical
- Dialogue has advantages and disadvantages
- Dialogue can be risky
- Dialogue is not always the preferred form of communication



The myth about dialogue...

1. Dialogue is the most desirable and ethical form of communication
2. Dialogue creates harmony and balance
3. Dialogue is *the* solution to all problems

Although survey respondents generally agreed that dialogue leads to harmony and balance, many interviewee respondents disagreed that dialogue was more ethical than persuasion.



The myth busted...

Dialogue can lead disagreement

"It is...a double-edged sword, use it wisely and positive outcomes all round; use it unwisely and negative outcomes results." –
SGg5F01

Dialogue can be abused

"...party B assumes that party A is being honest and open with them, but they're not, and if they're only disclosing information...to influence party B, that's obviously unethical..."
- NZg2M01

Dialogue is not always ideal

"Stakeholders may tend to...steer away from the real problem. The main issue may get blindsided. If it is not properly contained, the discussion may be out-of-control." –
SAGg4F01



The question of control...

Positive control

Required or relevant control

- ✓ Control the environment or place for dialogue
- ✓ Control over disclosure (transparency)
- ✓ Control over intent

Negative control

Control that negates dialogue

- × Trying to achieve a *specific* outcome (e.g. getting stakeholders to agree to a deal)
- × Control over the content of the discussion



Practical considerations

- Include as many stakeholders as possible
- Build trust and support
- Focus on both listening and speaking
- Construct situations that allow participants to speak from the heart
- Establish practices that facilitate the organization-stakeholder dialogue



In conclusion

Dialogue is both an art and a science...

“...dialogue takes time and patience...one needs to be in the right frame of mind...” - SGg6F02



Thank you for your time

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