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## Commentary: What's in a name? Everything. The appropriateness of 'public relations' needs further debate.

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*It is sometimes said that the debate about 'public relations' versus 'communication management' and/or any other terminology for our role has been had, past tense. But whether a debate has been properly conducted or not, the naming issues for public relations are not resolved. The profession's own reputation remains a major concern with serious implications for practitioners, scholars, and therefore also for clients and businesses who use public relations services. Has public relations become a term misunderstood beyond redemption, its use tarnishing not only those who practise it or study it, but also those who purchase it? If so, what are the alternatives? This article suggests that, although idealistic, some more aspirational and prescriptive alternatives might be worth considering.*

Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland, former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and founder of 'Realizing Rights: The Ethical Globalisation Initiative', has been touring the world recently talking to businesses about the importance of their reputation. Among other things, she commented that:

Business is very sensitive to its reputation, particularly in our modern world, where a good deal of business is knowledge-based and in sectors that want to recruit highly skilled employees, and those employees are influenced by companies that are known to have a good record in human rights. Also, a company that falls below an acceptable standard can find that its brand is damaged almost overnight. We've seen that with Nike and it was a problem with

Gap until it joined the Business Leaders' Initiative on Human Rights. So there's more opportunity for scrutiny by civil society groups and journalists, and there are valuable websites such as business-humanrights.org. (cited in Watkin, 2005, p.13)

No-one who works in public relations would dispute Robinson's comments on the importance and fragility of reputation. Yet ironically, as a profession, public relations still struggles badly to address its own reputation. All the factors Robinson alludes to (recruitment, retention, status, and justifiable criticism from interest groups) apply to 'public relations' as a brand, to the extent that in pessimistic moments I (and I suspect many others) wonder whether despite our best efforts the term and associated brand of our profession and our discipline are irreparably damaged by the wrongs that have been done in public relations' name. The managing partner of one of New Zealand's top communication consultancies said recently during a meeting that they 'never use public relations' to describe what they do. Ever. It's effectively a banned term. I don't blame them, given the instant negative effects I've observed when mentioning the 'p' word in a whole range of contexts, from boardrooms, to classrooms, to business seminars.

The name 'public relations' is firstly (and, of all its drawbacks perhaps most problematically) a recruitment barrier to proper training. Before educators can even begin to recruit the brightest and best entry-level students to what is actually one of the most mentally (not to mention morally) challenging roles in business, we need to overcome all kinds of negative stereotypes, from the idea that public relations is brainless,

glamorous party-going—along the lines of loveable airheads Edina and Patsy in the television comedy *Absolutely Fabulous* (Plowman, Saunders, & French, 1992-2003)—to the notion that it is soulless, evilly corrupt, image-manipulation—as portrayed in another comedy series, *Absolute Power* (Plowman, Schlesinger, & Morton, 2003). Properly trained, highly-motivated people are crucial in this all-important role, precisely because they have to both overcome and resist such stereotypes on a daily basis: yet attracting them to see themselves in ‘PR’ is sometimes an uphill battle.

The name public relations also appears to be a significant and growing barrier to credibility in communication. Nothing tarnishes a statement faster than the suggestion that it has its source in ‘PR’. Yet credible communication is obviously fundamental and crucial to the role’s effectiveness. We can try to re-educate (almost) everyone about what public relations really means, but it’s possible that the name itself will always defeat us. The ‘public’ term in public relations is problematic because it implies a public/private binary. It suggests that the public relations person only tells the information that an organisation doesn’t want to keep private: not the whole truth. Why specify ‘public relations’ if there is not also a ‘private relations’? Otherwise the public relations officer could just be called the ‘relations officer’. (I did toy with this for a while as a possible new name for public relations, given it more accurately reflects what we do, but as it also sounds like a bad *double entendre* from an Eddie Murphy movie it’s probably not the best choice in new monikers for a profession with reputation problems!)

It is simply not widely or well understood that public relations people don’t just deal with ‘the general public’ and that the term ‘publics’ also includes internal publics such as employees, management, or shareholders. This seems a fundamental flaw in our profession’s name. What other profession has to explain that one of the key terms in its name does not mean what it means in every other layperson’s context before even beginning to explain what we do?

The name ‘public relations’ is also a barrier to employee recruitment, as I notice by the lack of enthusiastic response among job-seeking graduates to positions with ‘PR’ in the title, even if they’ve just spent the last three years learning how to do excellent, ethical public relations. And conversely, those who are attracted to public relations are sometimes attracted for the wrong reasons. A New Zealand magazine editor and political commentator, describing a loss of idealism among journalists, cited economic pressures as a key force driving graduates into public relations: “Nowadays, journalism is for suckers. You go into public relations as soon as you can; it’s the only way to make a living these days and pay off your student loan. So, it’s a different world” (Trotter, cited in Peacock & Brown, 2004b). It’s unfortunate, but not uncommon, that public relations is seen as the pragmatic money-oriented option, not as a way for the earnest graduate to ‘make a difference’.

Most deterred by public relations’ ‘sell-your-soul’ taint are those with an idealistic streak, a ‘change-the-world’, ‘inequality-is-wrong’ kind of glint in their eye: the young Mary Robinsons in the making. Yet these are precisely the kinds of graduates we need to retain in the profession, because actually, in public relations, I believe (revealing, of course, my own idealistic streak) they can make a difference. As Robinson acknowledges, the global capitalism leviathan isn’t about to stop steaming or to sink anytime soon. But if each component of that leviathan has its own moral tugboat hauling it in the direction of greater responsiveness, greater awareness, more insistent ethics, and greater social responsibility, I believe the leviathan can change direction. And although some will scoff, I believe it is public relations’ role to be that tugboat.

If you are an optimist, you may agree with me that the moral realignment has already begun to happen, although to a debatable degree. Small victories perhaps, but who would have thought, ten or even five years ago, that McDonald’s would embrace selling salads or that Nike would itself publish unflattering details of its suppliers’ manufacturing conditions on its own website (Nike publishes details, 2005)? If only a

good public relations person had told them to do it a lot earlier, perhaps McDonald's might have avoided the world's longest-running libel case (McSpotlight, n.d.), and Nike might still be synonymous only with doing it, rather than with sweating it. But perhaps, if a public relations person did speak out earlier, they couldn't get the credibility they needed to have traction and initiate change. Because they were, after all, 'just' the public relations person.

At present, the role of global capitalism's conscience seems to be largely falling to organisations such as Realizing Rights, Robinson's Ethical Globalisation Initiative, which is working to expose unfair practices and encourage a 'value-led' globalisation. Admirable and crucial though such organisations are, however, they can only do so much from the outside. Business needs to develop its own internal conscience to be effectively and thoroughly responsible, and public relations has in theory, if perhaps less in practice, long understood itself as performing that role. Who other than the most sanguine public relations educator, however, would believe it? As we who teach it are only too aware, public relations is more likely to be understood by the outside world, including by some clients seeking public relations services, as the opposite, as one of the most unethical aspects of business, involved in cover-ups and fakery. A student forwarded me an email recently in which public relations was (quite cleverly and damningly) compared to prostitution on a ten-point comparison list: 'Do you charge by the hour for making your clients feel special?' and so on. You get the idea. I've lost count of the number of times I've seen public relations represented in the media as 'smoke and mirrors' or, according to one Australian journalist, a "black art [in which] accountability begins and ends with the client" (West, 2002, p. 28).

In New Zealand the name 'public relations' seems, by comparison with Australia where I have also taught and practised public relations, even more tarnished. This is possibly because it appears almost universally misunderstood by the media in this country as synonymous with media relations. There is widespread evidence

of this misunderstanding in media coverage, but by way of particular example, I point to a segment on Radio National's Media Watch program in May, 2004, in which a range of interviewees argued overwhelmingly that journalism experience was not just advantageous but crucial to successful public relations. The interviewees without exception understood public relations as "telling stories" about an organisation to just one audience, the media, and said that only ex-journalists knew how to find and present such stories (Peacock & Brown, 2004). Nobody mentioned that there might be more to public relations than its limited media aspect, nor that an organisation might have more important stakeholders than the media, yet those interviewed were described as including some of the 'top' public relations people in New Zealand. I have no doubt they are top of their field and highly skilled, but their field, as they described it, was media relations, not public relations. The difference between those two, as I have described elsewhere, is that:

Public relations (PR) is communication management and aims to make organisations transparent and responsive.... public relations as a three-step process ensures firstly, that organisations listen to and understand public expectations for reasonable behaviour, secondly, that organisations' behaviour matches those expectations and finally, that they are publicly recognised as responsible. Media relations (MR), on the other hand is a specialised sub-branch of public relations dealing primarily with step three of the process — recognition. (Tilley, 2005, p. 145).

For media relations specialists to persistently misname themselves public relations specialists actually makes me quite angry, as I believe it devalues and damages both specialisms. Journalists make great media relations officers, but any organisation that thinks all its public relations needs can be met by someone trained in media, as opposed to someone trained in

broad communication expertise, risks missing a large part of the communication puzzle.

Perhaps to counter the widespread conflation of all public relations with media relations, most non-media or strategic public relations specialists in New Zealand call themselves 'communication managers', particularly those in government communication roles. Yet the name 'communication manager' is not really a workable alternative to public relations.

Some public relations textbooks (see for example Tymson, Lazar, & Lazar, 2002, although I don't mean to single this text out in particular, as there are others) still suggest that communication can be encapsulated in Shannon and Weaver's outdated 1950s-vintage sender-noise-receiver model. This model implies a) that communication happens in one direction, and b) that if you control the sent message and the noise you control the impact on the receiver. However, communication scholars now understand communication to be more complex than simple stimulus-response behaviourism. Communication is now understood to be by nature and definition interactive, not accomplished by unidirectional broadcasting. Audiences are autonomous, and messages are not the only influences on audiences. Messages are now conceived as more akin to chemical catalysts added to a complex and often unpredictable cocktail of beliefs, attitudes, prior information, affiliations, and influences held by and located around audiences, than to the old models of bullet or needle. From which we can deduce that while senders may manage the catalysts, they most certainly do not manage the myriad individual reactions and adaptations that result in the process of sense-making. In other words, senders do not manage 'communication' itself. The term 'communication management' is misleading. Audiences are not sheep, and public relations people do not have 'absolute power' to 'manage' the communication process.

If you're not convinced that the 'communication manager' title can be problematic, maybe even offensive to autonomous audiences, consider the related term 'media manager'. Many journalists, I think rightly, take exception to that term. They may be 'media' but that 'media manager' sure as hell

isn't their manager, and they are going to write what they like, not be 'managed'. Nor do they like the idea that the flow of information to them will be 'managed'. The term 'management' implies that information will be filtered, controlled, perhaps not fully disclosed, and that is anathema (again, rightly) to good journalists. The 'manager' title can inadvertently put media relations off on a bad foot before the so-called 'media manager', who may in fact be a consummate professional with no intention of trying to manage anything and every intent to facilitate open and honest information exchange, has even opened their mouth.

Yet in organisational hierarchy terms, the communication manager is a manager. It's just that what they manage isn't communication, but only their organisation's part of any communication. There is a difference. So let's call the role a name that reflects what it actually is that is managed. I do think that the 'manager' term is important to retain. If the public relations person is to have any actual operational impact on their organisation and not just fiddle with the window dressing, they need to be taken seriously at a strategic managerial level. But what is it they actually manage? Not 'relations' or 'relationships' (which are multi-party intangibles that cannot ever be 'managed' by any one party, unless that party is Svengali or a hypnotist) and not 'communication' (ditto). Ethical and consensual relationships and communication are by definition participated in and mutually negotiated, not 'managed' by either side.

My personal belief is that the three most important things that the public relations role manages (or ought to manage, this idea being, like much other public relations theory, a normative dream rather than a current reality) are an organisation's transparency, consistency, and responsiveness. I suggest (in full anticipation of eye-rolling from many quarters, but I'm going to say it anyway, because I think this debate is too important to let slide) that we therefore need to rename the public relations role in organisations the Transparency, Consistency, and Responsiveness Manager (TCRM) if it is to reflect and inspire our most

important functions. And further, that management of transparency, consistency, and responsiveness should be considered an integral part of all organisations' systematic risk management procedures. In other words, "It should form part of the culture of the organisation, with an effective policy and programme led by top management with clear responsibilities laid down for every manager and employee to be involved in the management of risk" (IRM, 2003, ¶. 4). Systematised risk management (and in Australia and New Zealand there is a comprehensive standard available which identifies best practice systems, something that public relations is sorely lacking) "supports accountability, performance measurement, and reward, thus promoting efficiency at all levels" (IRM, 2003, ¶. 4).

Let me explain what I mean by 'transparency management'. First, I mean the obvious, which is making organisations open to external scrutiny, opening the doors, freely providing information and access to the media, building communication channels with all external groups (boundary spanning with the emphasis on enabling stakeholders to look in, rather than jamming the communication channels with messages being sent out), and not only being unafraid if interest groups want to look over your operations and publicly voice their opinions, but actively inviting such inspection. For example, it seems Nike has just decided, after a decade of what appears to be mainly a non-transparency approach, to try transparency. Perhaps adopting the old adage that a problem can't hit you if you're hugging it, they've embraced suppliers' manufacturing conditions as part of their core responsibility and posted reports of conditions in their manufacturers' factories on the Internet. So far, the response from former Nike critics has been cautiously optimistic. The media quoted Michael Posner, executive director of Human Rights First, as saying the report was "an important step forward" (Nike publishes details, 2005, ¶. 7) and indicated he praised Nike "for its transparency" (Nike publishes details, 2005, ¶. 7).

By transparency management, however, I also mean the less obvious, which is ensuring that an organisation is *ready* for transparency.

By this I do NOT mean cosmetically prettying anything unfavourable up, hiding anything, or restricting access, but quite the opposite: ensuring that an organisation actually has nothing to hide and nothing to fear from scrutiny. The TCRM function needs to have access to all areas, operational leverage, and strategic credibility. The TCRM office needs to be the place where disgruntled employees go, because they know action and change will result. The TCRM office needs to be the place where the most disgruntled customers, who have exhausted their patience with customer service platitudes, turn, because they know something will actually happen. A kind of in-house official advance auditing and whistleblower team. The TCRM needs to know everything, hear everything, and be in a position to change anything that needs changing.

Which brings us to the second term, consistency. The most important thing that the TCRM will need to monitor in order to make sure the organisation will benefit from its newfound love affair with transparency, is its consistency. This means making sure all communication from the organisation tells the same story. We all know that you can't say one thing to customers, another to shareholders, something else to staff, and a fourth thing to the media, because inevitably these groups share information (or are the same people). Yet in practice, how effectively are segment outputs cross-checked and aligned? How often do internal communications match external communications? How often are communication audits conducted organisation-wide across internal and external communication to ensure consistency? How often do advertising and public relations departments even swap campaign schedules as the buzz-concept of integrated marketing communication (IMC) insists they should? Where is our industry-developed and accepted standard for consistency auditing? (If risk management can develop a standard that's universally applicable no matter what the client or organisation, then so can public relations.) At present, who's managing all this in organisations? It should be the public relations department, but if public relations is seen as media relations, then it's probably

nobody. Certainly that was the admission I received from several managers of both large and small organisations attending a business seminar recently. They were highly sceptical of my proposal that public relations should be the high-level communication co-ordination function within their organisations. So I asked them, 'Well who's doing it now, then?'. The answer was 'no-one'.

We know that lack of consistency can be disastrous: an oft-cited example of failure to orchestrate IMC is the top-end car brand that was being slated by motoring writers for an aberrant test-drive incident on the same page as high-priced advertising emphasising the model's safety (McCusker, 2004). In such cases not only is ad money wasted, research suggests it probably actually has a further detrimental effect, increasing the negative impact of the editorial criticism (Jeffries-Fox, n.d.). Actively managing consistency therefore means all-encompassing branding and communication coordination in which not only customers but also staff, shareholders, and communities are all seeing the same picture and singing the same tune. In this respect the TCRM idea takes some principles of IMC but extends them beyond marketing communication to all stakeholders and all communication.

Far more importantly than attending to communication integration at the communication outputs level, however, consistency means making sure that the reason all communication outputs are consistent is because the story they tell is actually the truth. Fully consistent with what is going on. Bottom line. As the United States-based Council of Public Relations Firms suggests (in a quote from one of the key articles in this issue of *PRism*), "The challenge is to sensitively find ways to communicate that are credible and consistent with company action, to walk the talk (CPRF, n.d., p.4, cited in Harrison & Galloway, 2005, p. 4). To go back to public relations basics for a moment, organisations have an image (the perception of what they stand for) and an identity (the reality of what they do) (Fombrun, 1996; Cornelissen, 2004). To have these unaligned is, increasingly in this age of global instant communication and whistleblower

protection legislation, to live with extremely high risk. Fakers, i.e. those who pay more attention to image than to identity, get found out. Hence the concept of public relations as reputational risk management.

There is an argument that "the appearance of ethical behaviour can be as effective as actual ethical behaviour" (Harrison & Galloway, 2005, p. 10), and possibly some organisations may indulge in such short term cynical image manipulation, but this does not acknowledge that any disparity between image and identity creates enormous risk. Carrying risk of any kind is for organisations, as it is for the individuals who work within them, a kind of debilitating strain. It can't be sustained long-term. The health of organisational culture requires proper risk management and risk reduction across the board, including at the level of match between ethical image and ethical identity. No organisation is immune from this risk, and confidentiality conditions on staff do not reduce it, as Mary Robinson's former employer, the United Nations, found out in the wake of legal action over its threatened dismissal of another staff-member, Kiwi whistleblower Andrew Thomson (Stogel, 2004). Thomson and two other UN staff wrote a book about their disillusionment with UN processes, titled *Emergency Sex and Other Desperate Measures* (Cain, Postlewait, & Thomson, 2004). According to Stogel, the book caused a furore inside the UN. He claimed staff "including those on General Secretary Kofi Annan's staff have been working overtime to stop the book's release" (2004, ¶. 8). Ultimately, the book came out anyway, and Thomson was reinstated and promoted, so the UN did learn the value of whistleblowers. If the UN had had a TCRM in the first instance, however, to monitor, detect, and address mismatches between the UN's image and identity, perhaps such allegedly strenuous efforts would never have been needed to stop such a book.

In some client understandings of public relations' role, the public relations person might be seen as only needed after damage occurs, wheeled in to control things after a whistleblowing event. By contrast, in the model I propose for TCRMs, whistleblowers and the so-

called 'damage' they do (which is actually helpful problem identification) would be reconceived as the TCRM's, and an organisation's, best friend. Whistleblowers point out the inconsistencies that might otherwise go undetected and grow into monstrous, fatal flaws. If only Enron had had an earlier whistleblower. Bruijns and McDonald suggest that organisations should encourage whistleblowing as a crisis prevention strategy (2002). I would go even further to say that TCRMs be formally required both to facilitate others' whistleblowing and to themselves be the loudest and most regular whistleblower, telling everything to everyone and, more importantly, having the power and credibility to demand necessary change.

Unfortunately, in the past, organisations have tended to restrict public relations to working on the image, without permitting access to the identity, with the result that there have been some spectacular falls from grace when the image was revealed to be so much hot air. A solid identity but poor image is equally problematic, for different reasons. The TCRM role would therefore encompass constant work to ensure that the organisation's image and identity matched. The TCRM staff would aim to feel confident that there was nothing, all the way along the supply chain from go to whoa, that was harmful, unethical, or irresponsible in their organisation's identity but absent from stakeholder perception.

With a TCRM in the house, for example, it would not be necessary for Robinson's Realizing Rights organisation to expose the inhumane plight of cotton workers in Mali (Realizing Rights, n.d.), because the cotton industry's members would already ensure that consumers of cotton products, producers of cotton goods, and shareholders in cotton industries were fully informed of the harvesting process, and therefore had the option to make educated choices about their consumption or funding of cotton. If you are wearing something cotton at the moment, do you know in what country and under what conditions it was grown and harvested? I doubt it, because this information is not readily made available on product labels, in annual reports, or on corporate

websites. A TCRM would make it available on the principle that it should be, because it, just like all the 'positive' information, is part of any product or organisation's 'story'. The TCRM tells the whole story, including by giving employees in every part of the organisation opportunities to become aware of the implications of other parts of the operation. Wouldn't you, as a consumer or an employee, rather deal with an organisation that was telling you the whole story?

With a TCRM on board, everyone (employees, shareholders, customers, suppliers, the media) would have a department to call for any kind of query. No stakeholder need be in the dark, unless by choice: constant effort would be made to ensure that every stakeholder group's perception (image) of what they were involved with matched the identity. And of course, once the lights are on, any unethical, harmful or irresponsible practices seem unlikely to be able to be sustained for long. At least I hope human nature is such that few stakeholders would consciously choose to support (through consumption, funding, or any other means) clearly unethical practices. The TCRM's activity would remove ignorance as an excuse. Sure, many people would still choose to carry on as before, consuming, funding, and being employed by less-than-perfect organisations. But it would now be their choice, and not because the information wasn't available or was difficult to locate because it was only provided, usually long after the event, by sources not affiliated with the organisation.

Finally, the TCRM would ensure that the organisation prioritised responsiveness. I suggest to my introductory public relations students the idea of an 'ecological mindset', in which they view their organisation not as an isolated entity but as sitting within a giant ecosystem, enmeshed in symbiotic relationships with all its stakeholders and constantly both affecting and affected by those relationships. Then I suggest that responsible public relations is 'outside-in' communication, rather than 'inside-out' communication. By this I mean the simple principle that planning and thinking must start with the ecosystem's needs as a whole, not start from a message that the organisation wants

to spout. This means researching and considering all its stakeholders' needs, all the chain reactions along the ecosystem's links, all the short and long-term repercussions for stakeholders, before taking action. If you think organisations cannot think ecologically at present, perhaps they will in time when they find they have to. Comparisons with short-sighted actual ecological disasters such as introducing rabbits, gorse, or, in Australia, the cane toad, are quite instructive at this point in terms of illustrating that actions within a system inevitably affect the whole system. I tell students that it's all about world view.

I'm not using world view to distinguish between symmetrical and asymmetrical worldviews as Grunig and White did (1992). Rather, the ecological mindset relates more to thinking collectively rather than individualistically and thinking long term (across generations) rather than short term. I find this more useful than the symmetric/asymmetric binary because, although Grunig and Hunt (1984) argued for symmetrical communication as the gold standard of public relations, I actually believe public relations needs to be asymmetrical, just not in the direction Grunig and Hunt propose in their asymmetrical model. Public relations actually needs to *listen* to a far greater degree than it talks. The greatest part of our role should be gathering data, processing and seeking to understand it, and thereby giving full attention to what stakeholders, including the societies and communities within which we operate, have to say. Then, we have to act on that information, making sure that the organisation responds. Genuinely responsive action would make most of the talk that goes on at present in the name of public relations redundant. And to be honest, I believe that if public relations doesn't shift organisations to actively responsive behaviours rather than purely symbolic responsiveness, we'll probably find ourselves redundant anyway, given the ever-rising levels of anti-public relations cynicism. So at the basest level, reconceptualising our role is also an act of self-preservation for public relations.

Is the notion of public relations metamorphosing into TCRM wildly idealistic?

Of course: incredibly so. I've never worked in an organisation that has anything even remotely approaching a TCRM. Is it possible? I believe, given the Nike and other examples of the persistence of consumer pressure, particularly using the power of the Internet, not only possible but increasingly probable. (Fair Trade Coffee comes to mind as the next point of likely externally driven change to the capitalist leviathan, given the impetus NGOs are obtaining with awareness campaigning at present.) And my point is merely that it is better to be at the vanguard of responsible business than dragged kicking and screaming to the mat for a showdown with angry stakeholders that will always be lost, in reputation terms, even if it is 'won' (again, see for example, McSpotlight, n.d.).

I don't believe this 'internal conscience' role puts TCRMs in the position of having to choose between public interest and their organisation's interests. From within an ecological mindset, these ought to be seen as the same thing. This is where I think arguments about ethics that see public relations practitioners on the horns of a dilemma choosing between public and corporate interest have it wrong, because it is not a choice. Public interest is organisational interest, and public relations' very *raison d'être* is precisely to keep showing the organisation how and why that is true. It is always already in any organisation's long-term best interests to listen to public opinion, to respond, to be consistent, and to be transparent. The TCRM just needs to be incredibly well equipped to make, and keep making, that case to management. They need not only a solid grounding in the organisational reputation literature in order to demonstrate the bottom line value of doing good, but they also need to be formidably persuasive: not in their dealings with stakeholders as is often taught in marketing and promotional versions of public relations, but in their dealings with management.

Actually, to scholars of public relations, this proposal is nothing new whatsoever, even though the new name and uncompromising way I've described it may make it sound radically so. Everything mentioned here is nothing more than my personal distillation of ideas already widely

present in various forms in the vast and ever-growing public relations literature. TCRM is the direction the public relations role has been moving (theoretically speaking) for several decades now, whether every practitioner or client has embraced and understood it or not. As a profession, however, we have yet to demonstrate on a large and widespread scale that this is our most important role. And although I at one stage thought a 'PR campaign for PR' could re-educate communities and clients to properly understand ethical public relations as the function responsible for managing transparency, consistency, and responsiveness, I now begin to wonder whether our name is a significant and possibly insurmountable part of the barrier to moving in that direction.

Maybe a renaming to reflect the aspirational or excellence aspects of our normative role would help shift things along. Would public relations practitioners be less likely to succumb to managerial pressure for quick-fix problem-solving with the 'easy way out' bit of smoke'n'mirrors as a short term cover-up for a reputation problem if the very name of their professional role demanded otherwise? Perhaps the tarnish on 'PR' has become something of a licence to operate in a tarnished manner – when Stephen Fry quips on *Absolute Power* that one should “never ask a public relations man to tell the truth” (Plowman, Schlesinger, & Morton, 2003, Episode 2), it is only funny in a black kind of way because it is, alas, too recognisable to be entirely untrue. I'm not yet ready, however, to accept that it is too entrenched to be changed. What's in a name? Everything. Names encapsulate, inspire, define, and delineate. So if we who are supposed to be adept at reputational problem-solving can't fix 'public relations' as a moniker, perhaps we need to leave it behind and move on. As an optimist, I hope that the main reason for changing public relations' tarnished name is because it no longer matches our actual identity.

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