

## Public Relations in Management

Public relations practitioners have always expressed the desirability of recognising the profession as a management function. Given the crucial roles expected of the public relations executives in the pursuit of achieving corporate goals, it is proper to ensure that management gives public relations its due. In this way, the organisation would be able to derive maximum benefits from it. Management is, however, a specialised task within organisations, and public relations practitioners should know how it impinges on their functions and how best to use its strategies to achieve organisational goals.

Managing organisations has increasingly become complex in today's society such that the erstwhile random adoption of various management models through trial and error cannot withstand present day challenges. Management by objective (MBO) system is so well-known among managers that the present standard of organisational management and behaviour would make anybody wonder if these principles are put to use at all. Management by objective can be defined as:

A process whereby the superior managers jointly identify the organisation's common goals, define each individual's major areas of responsibility in terms of results expected, and use these measures as guides for operating the unit and assessing the contribution of each member.

It is the responsibility of communicators to make it known to the leaders that the “*command and control*” model of statecraft has begun yielding ground to the more acceptable and modern “*inspire and communicate*” leadership model. Leaders should be encouraged through definite information methods and metaphors with their implicit message of force and violence to be more civil. Such expression as “with immediate effect” should give way to inclusive decision-making that promotes creativity and gives pride of place to morality agenda which are pursued over time. Of all the definitions of public relations, Rax Harlow’s (1990) seems to capture the elements of management in relation to public relations better. For this reason, it would be used as a reference for the discussion in this chapter.

Public relations is a distinctive management function which helps to establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organisation and its publics; involves the management of problems and issues, helps management to keep informed on the responsive to public opinion, defines and emphasises the responsibility of management to serve public interest, helps management to keep abreast of and effectively utilise change; serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends and uses research and sound ethical communication techniques as its principal tool.

The operational concepts in this chapter are “management” and “public relations”. Indeed, they are very related in the sense that all organisations operate on the basis of objectives that are agreed upon, understood and supported by all concerned.

### **Management by Objective (MBO)**

The main aim of MBO is to ensure that organisations define their aims and objectives before embarking on any given programme. From the outset, it is important to differentiate between aims and objectives. Often, they are used interchangeably thereby leading

to confusion. For one thing, an aim is really an intention or a direction in which progress is to be made. On the other hand, an objective is a specific point, which is to be reached. Wherever possible, activities should be geared towards quantified objectives rather than broad aims. In order to achieve the aims and objectives of an organisation, four guiding principles (*Bittel and Bittel, 1978*) may be followed.

These are:

- (a) Develop quantified objectives for a year or two.
- (b) Have detailed aims for years two and three.
- (c) Outline aims to cover possible issues.
- (d) Have broad aims to cover alternative issues that might arise beyond five years.

Some questions naturally come to mind when one is setting these objectives, such as What is the issue? How might it affect the organisation? What is our stance on this? What are the existing external attitude? Whom do we wish to influence? What new attitudes do we wish to develop? How can we achieve this? What are the messages we need to project? When will these changes be produced? How will they be monitored and measured? It is only when public relations practitioners know the goals and objectives of their principals that they can, as societal technicians, advise on attitudes and actions essential to achieve the agreed goals with the target publics.

Management by objective starts at the top of the organisation, where strategic policies are formulated and regular reviews of implementation carried out. Sir John Harvey-Jones supports this view when he avowed that the main activities of CEOs should be public relations and strategic planning, (*S. Black, 1993*). It is usual to base such plans on a two-year cyclical calendar of events. Below are some steps to be taken in setting strategic objectives as developed by Bittel and Bittel:

- (a) Strategic objectives should be stated in advance of budgetary decisions.
- (b) Strategic objectives should define strengths, weaknesses, problems, threats, risks and opportunities.
- (c) Strategic objectives should note trends and missions and define options, including consequences of each option.
- (d) Good strategic objectives will answer the question, "are we doing the right things?" In contrast to the operational objectives which define "how to do things right."

If strategic objectives are not stated in advance, measurable operational objectives may not be valid. In this case, "the organisation may simply be running a well-run bankruptcy". An example of MBO Strategic Planning Cycle (June-July) is shown below:

Date	Event	Comments/ responsibilities
September	Prepare annual edition of the 3/5 years perspective plan and review prior year's 5-year plan.	Responsibility of the top management and all major functional (staff) heads, assembled by administration department.
December	Submit budget to the schedule officer (for the following year).	Submissions from all units.
January	Review, revise, and approve final budget figures.	Executive committee.
January to March	Start the new budget year; release resources.	Issue detailed, approved financial targets in final form.

Fig. 10.1: Strategic Planning Cycle Calendar

Fig. 10.1 (Cont'd)

Date	Event	Comments/ responsibilities
March/June/ September	Complete individual operational objectives at all levels. Annual goals conference by managers of departments.	Set standards for managerial performance for the year.
March	Annual goals conference by managers of departments.	To share goals and improve teamwork.
Monthly	Annual message of the president	To give a challenge
	Quarterly reviews of individual results against goals; make adjustments where required.	All managers at all levels.
	Audits-including programme	Staff departments
July	Hold meetings of the executive and finance committee to note exceptions and make corrective moves.	All staff to monitor on-going programmes backed with evaluation.
	Circulate and discuss position papers and note policy committee actions as major issues.	By staff experts or any responsible manager or professional or functional group.
	Repeat the process.	

Source: Adapted from Bittel and Bittel (1978) *Encyclopedia of Professional Management*. McGraw HillBook Company, p.782.

This is a hypothetical situation but it states clearly how an organisation can have a yearly plan, based on its agreed objectives. Using the same method, one can develop strategic objectives of 2, 3 and 5 year cycle.

Management by objective emphasises the need for the superior officers to be supportive in terms of striking a balance between the organisational objectives and the need of the individuals comprising it. It is when the objectives of the organisation are in line with the needs and desires of the individual members (at all levels) that the interest of the organisation can best be served. This is what the principle of "supportive relationships" is all about. Most organisations, be it business, government, industrial or voluntary, operate on this basis. An organisation functions better when it manages the collective interests of its shareholders, suppliers, employees, consumers and even the union. In government service, their objectives must be a satisfactory integration of the needs and desires of its various constituents such as the citizens, executive, legislature, the judiciary and the employees.

Strategic objectives are not static just as the human elements that formulate them are also not. They change continuously, to meet the new challenges of technology, politics, social and economic situations prevalent in the environment of operation. Renis Likert, in *New Patterns of Management*, specifies the following four important processes for modifying individual goals and organisational objectives:

- (a) The objectives of the entire organisation and of its component parts must be in satisfactory harmony with the relevant needs and desires of the great majority (if not all) of the members of the organisation and of the persons served by it.
- (b) The goals and assignments of each member of the organisation must be established in such a way that he is highly motivated to achieve them.

- (c) The methods and procedures used by the organisation and its sub-units to achieve agreed objectives must be developed and adopted in such a way that members are highly motivated to use these methods to their maximum potential.
- (d) The members of the organisation and the persons related to it, must feel that the required system of the organisation – salaries, wages, bonuses, dividends, interest payments – yields them equitable compensation for their efforts and contributions.

## **Public Relations and Management**

As earlier defined, public relations is also about how we are fulfilling our commitments in areas of public interest, by responding positively to society's changing priorities and goals. Adekunle Salu (1993) states the following as the main functions of public relations executives in organisations:

- (a) Counselling based on the understanding of human behaviour
- (b) Analysing the trends of affairs and predicting their consequences for now and the future.
- (c) Researching into public opinion attitudes and expectations.
- (d) Establishing and maintaining two-ways communication based on truth and full information.
- (e) Preventing conflicts and misunderstanding.
- (f) Promoting mutual respect and social responsibility.
- (g) Harmonising private and public interests.
- (h) Promoting goodwill with internal and external publics, such as stakeholders, staff, suppliers, and customers.

- (i) Promoting products and services
- (j) Maximising profits.
- (k) Promoting good employee relations.
- (l) Projecting corporate identity.
- (m) Promoting understanding of democracy.
- (n) Providing support for the marketing efforts of the company, and
- (o) Promoting good government relations.

In performing these functions, public relations could be said to have the following values:

- (a) Public relations is a means of fostering mutual understanding and cooperation between various publics and corporate bodies.
- (b) Public relations interprets the views of target publics to institutions and promotes the correct image of institutions, be it government or industry.
- (c) By stimulating sympathetic considerations of opposing or hostile tendencies, public relations makes it less necessary for bodies to undertake arbitrary or coercive actions.
- (d) Public relations is an essential element in the communication system and it enables individuals and target publics to be fully informed on matters that affect their lives.
- (e) It is through the skills of public relations that the practitioners can help activate the social conscience of organisation.
- (f) Public relations is a universal activity. It functions in all aspects of life. Each member of a public practises

principles of public relations in seeking the acceptance, cooperation, or affection of others. Public relations professional only practise it in a more deliberate and systematic manner.

- (g) It is in the area of specialisation of public relations that practitioners must help bring their organisation into confluence with the hopes and aspiration of the target publics rather than allow them to get into conflicting situation.

To further make the role of public relations in management clearer and confirm the appropriateness of the above statements, opinions of two great industrialists would be of help. John J. Riccardo, Chairman, Chrysler Corporation who has this to say:

Public relations was once concerned primarily with publicity. It has now progressed to a higher plateau, issues, and working with other members of management to create programmes of action which are prompt, effective and enduring. It is also public relations job to communicate our message in a way, which wins both understanding and acceptance, by demonstrating to the public that our actions are indeed in public interest.

And Thomas A. Murphy, Chairman, General Motors who opines thus:

Public relations, in its broadest terms, plays a key role in how well a corporation fits into the fabric of society to work effectively in the present environment and cope with the future. It is essential to continually monitor public attitudes and opinions, so that management will make decisions, fully informed of the public will.

Wherever organisations take cognisance of the efficacy of MBO and good public relations practice, organisational goals are

achieved in such a way that all concerned would benefit from it. There are many styles of management (management by charisma, default, walkabout, accident and consent) but that which is 'by consent', as supported by Riccardo and Murphy, is best for public relations. In the centre of all these strategies for achieving organisational goals is man. He is the single factor that determines whether our adopted management style would work or not. Therefore, a close look at him is necessary. This is provided by Hill (1969):

Man can be described meaningfully in terms of his consciousness, he is unpredictable, he is an information genitor, he lives in a substantive world; he is rational; he is unique alongside millions of other unique personalities; he can be described in relative (rather than absolute) terms; he must be studied in a holistic manner; he is a potentiality; and he is more than we can ever know about him.

From this "definition", it is clear that man qualifies for being an enigma but he must be understood and appreciated for our management theories and practices to achieve the desired effect.

Public relations can also use the concept of total quality management (TQM) to enhance its contributions to effective corporate governance. Centre and Jackson (1995) have this to say:

.... Many of TQM's premises are based on the same principles as public relations; customer satisfaction, participation and communication. In fact as many organisations begin to question the value of TQM as business management tool, public relations can help salvage TQM as it falters.

Furthermore, Cutlip, Centre and Broom (1994) state that:

Quality is not a fad. It is an international revolution. TQM means near-zero defects in every task performed

and delivery of products and services including public relations and every services, with total customer satisfaction as the goal, the critical role that communication plays in the quest for quality puts public relations squarely in the middle of the revolution, even if it is only a glorified return to the basics of business.

Going by the foregoing expositions, it may look quite easy to use MBO and public relations strategies. Experience has shown that in government service, in particular, and to a lesser extent in private business, management has been poorly attended to. Most times, the systems that are in use cannot be identified. It always seems that there are no agreed upon objectives just as the organisations work without specific goals. This is why most government business interests in banking, manufacturing, industry, etc, are unsuccessful. The more money that is pumped in, the less the result achieved. These agencies are frequently declared bankrupt because of excessive overhead, poor services, political and unprofessional interference, unqualified and ill-fitted personnel, over-establishment, poor products, ill-motivated workforce, fraudulent practices, preference for contract awards over job performances, poor work ethics, unsteady and frequent change of staff, ill-defined and unfocussed policies, and a general lack of direction. Yet the government has the best brains in its employment, who are conversant with and would tell you all about MBO, Performance, Evaluation, Research and Technology (PERT), the psychological theories of Maslow, McGregor (theories X and Y) and Herzberg, etc. That tribunals are regularly set up in Nigeria to try captains of government parastatals who gulped several billions of naira and have nothing but tales of woes and failure to tell speak volumes of how not to manage resources.

## **Corporate Culture**

Corporate culture is a neglected area of management practice. Most organisations seem to take this important issue for granted.

The values, goals and principles, which guide a company's operations, is the perspective from which its various publics would judge its performance. Corporate culture is reflected in various ways – mission statements, and slogans/motto are two prominent methods in use: "KLM, *First in the Air*" and NITEL – *your sure Link to the World*" are good examples.

These statements are attempts to sell organisations to their publics with coded and pungent messages. The slogans usually espouse their corporate philosophy, aims and objectives.

Why then has it been impossible for the people to utilise these working guides? Some people allude the failure to implementation indiscipline, indicating that there are good and well-intentioned programmes but they always get poorly executed. Nonetheless, managers should make use of well-tested concepts, which could help them in achieving corporate goals of their various organisations. Setting objectives is the first step in programming and the ability to work within the plan and in harmony with all the people concerned is what makes a good manager.

In business, the focus most times is on profit, not minding how this is achieved. However, it is a well-known fact that the more conscious an organisation is, in terms of its values, the greater the success it achieves. By the time these guiding principles become a culture, it would have been imbibed by all since it comes so naturally that its effects limit the entire organisation from making bulky policy manuals, organogram and intimidating posters.