

## SEVEN

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### Developing Appropriate Human Resources for Public Relations

The quality of human resources an organisation possesses oftentimes determine the extent to which it can accomplish its corporate goals. In a profession such as public relations, the calibre of its practitioners, the type of training and background, the codes of ethics and the general comportment of its members, have direct bearings on its status. In a situation where "relations" is the ruling terminology, a well-defined training and professionalised institute is a *sine qua non* towards achieving the lofty height of people-centred profession. Indeed, the days of flamboyant public relations executives are gone and the intellectual, corporate, management science and result-oriented public relations executives are here. Today, the challenges are enormous and the training and developmental opportunities within the institute are crucial to the future of the profession.

Training, a human resource development strategy, aims at improving the skills of an individual such that day-to-day tasks could be performed more efficiently. It also enables him to acquire enough knowledge to perform certain specialised duties. At other times, training becomes necessary when a staff member is deployed to another section, as a result of either restructuring or possession of additional facilities or qualifications. Education is the bedrock of all knowledge and its acquisition determines the level and position on which a person can effectively work. To be a professional, specialised education is needed and this is always done in several ways for different specialties.

Everyone is familiar with on-the-job training whereby an individual acquires the necessary skills that make him more proficient in his duties, using special periods off-duty, sandwich courses as well as routine practical training. On-the-job training could also entail formal and informal training, built into the routine job with every care to ensure that the new skills are worked into the existing schedules in order to ensure continuity and smooth operations.

The concern here is multifaceted, embracing the usual training for those who are employed and that which is relevant to those who seek entrance into the public relations profession through the acquisition of necessary training in the appropriate training institutions. Just as doctors must go through the medical school and later serve their internship before practising, so also do people in other professions require training and periods of apprenticeship, before being regarded as professionals. However, the training and early experience of public relations executives are not as rigidly formalised as in medicine, law or architecture. This may be necessary as time goes on when the profession matures. What we have in mind is a comprehensive training programme for the intending public relations practitioner to sharpen his professional skills. Training, therefore, is concerned with cultivating the emerging professionals that would constitute the core of public relations resources in the future. In the past decade, successive leadership in the institute have taken the matter of training and retraining of members most seriously. This is to underscore the need for public relations education being geared towards the needs of the society and the survival of the profession. The result is evident in the increased visibility of the institute and, of course, the standard of practice has greatly improved.

## **Training Institutions**

If we take it that a public relations executive can have a mass communication background, then we can advance further an argument that the first tertiary institution in Nigeria to have

included "public relations" in its curriculum was the Jackson School of Journalism, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Later, the University of Lagos introduced a degree in Mass Communication in 1967 through accident of the civil war when students from other parts of Nigeria were caught in the raging civil war and needed to continue their programme elsewhere. Most public relations practitioners of the eighties and nineties are products of these two universities. Some journalism institutes offer courses in public relations at certificate, diploma and postgraduate diploma levels. With the promulgation of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations Decree 16 of 1990, the institute began a professional diploma/certificate examinations that qualify its graduates to practise public relations. The NIPR Decree made it mandatory for all practitioners to belong to the institute, which is empowered to regulate the practice in the country. The first series of examinations were held in the last quarter of 1990. Successful candidates were awarded either the Certificate or Diploma in Public Relations.

The commencement of the NIPR examinations is the first comprehensive attempt at making public relations assume the status of a truly professional body in the country. Hitherto, the declared standard entry qualifications into the profession had not been strictly adhered to. Several instances of ill-equipped and unqualified people abound with full membership status. In some cases, they have actually become fellows due to long experience in practice. What obtained was a situation whereby anyone who had the flair for writing or speech-making instantly became a public relations celebrity. Sometimes, people just opt for public relations because they were not good elsewhere. The end-result is a profession practised by many non-professionals. The decree has, however, made it illegal for non-registered persons to practise the profession. In this regard, both the non-registered employee and his employer are subject to actionable process according to the law.

The NIPR has six (6) categories of membership for practitioners as highlighted in figure below.

**FELLOW**

This is reserved for distinguished practitioners in the field of *public Relations* who would have made significant contributions to the Profession. Such high-flyers are usually honoured with the title "Fellow of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations" (FNIPR).

A minimum of ten years of meritorious service is a condition for this honour.

**MEMBERS (MNIPR)**

This is open to seasoned public relations practitioners who have met the entry conditions into the profession. In addition to the basic educational requirements, they are expected to have worked in a public relations environment for at least five (5) years.

**ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP (AMNIPR)**

The new entrants into the profession are admitted either through examinations or through having obtained related qualifications in the humanities. Associate members must have put in a minimum of two years postgraduation

**GRADUATE MEMBERS**

These members are fresh graduates with relevant degree in communication, humanities especially in the field of Public Relations even if it is a course.

**AFFILIATE MEMBERS**

This is for beginners with little or no experience. Sometimes foreign professionals are so identified. This category of membership is being phased out.

**STUDENT MEMBERS**

The membership is open to students who are training in the tertiary institutions and are desirous of becoming public relations practitioners. The institute also admits graduates in allied fields, to enrol as students in order to be properly trained in *Public Relations*.

Fig. 7.1: A Pyramidal Representation of the Various Grades of Membership of the NIPR

However, the institute's council, by virtue of the decree establishing it, could from time to time invest respected members of the public with the "Honorary Fellow" of the institute as a mark of recognition for contributions made to the growth of public relations.

Although several universities and polytechnics teach public relations as part of their degree or diploma programmes, they do not award public relations certificate. The Nigerian Institute of Public Relations in 1992 broke new grounds through the endowment of a Master's Degree chair in Public Relations at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. This indeed is the beginning of greater training opportunities for practitioners. The location of this programme in the Marketing Department at UNN Nsukka was feared as capable of sending wrong signals on the true status of public relations profession. This situation may need to be corrected as the Institute plans to introduce similar programmes in three other universities. The Institute should not subjugate public relations to marketing with its own funds when in actual fact, marketing is virtually a different field of study, with complementary roles wherever they exist side by side. The decision to endow a masters programme was hinged on the nature of public relations which requires that professionals be as broad-based in all fields of human endeavour as possible. The institute plans to endow similar public relations courses at the Bayero University and the University of Lagos.

With time, many of the institutions may commence first degree programmes and postgraduate diplomas, as the profession develops. There is need for the Institute to harmonise all the training programmes in order to ascertain its content, quality, scope and at the same time, ensure very high standard. In fact, the current deluge of training schools and trainers must be checked because not all the people involved are qualified. The institute must approve, supervise and make inputs into all training programmes at the level of preparing guidelines, syllabus and manuals, for all to follow. The Institute is trying to develop

training manuals for all its certificate and diploma examinations now that it is clear that public relations books, journals and training materials are very inadequate and not readily available in the market.

A byelaw on this issue is very necessary to ensure quality performance from the various institutions. The plethora of seminars, conferences and workshops by non-public relations outfits need to be curbed. Just who decides what is to be taught? The present situation where groups of advertisers, marketers, and management consultants of untested and unknown competence, organise public relations training programmes, need to be checked. It is a fact that not all who pretend to be public relations persons have the credentials to practise, talkless of training others. The moment people are given certificates that cannot secure them good jobs, doubt would be cast on the entire membership of the Institute. Also, the institute may in time consider the introduction of *Mandatory Continuing Professional Education (MCPE)* programme for all categories of its members. Public relations is in need of an intellectual base in order to meet the challenges of the new information order of the internet and the superhighway. The "grandfather clause" which exempts old practitioners from new educational requirements should not apply in this case. Every grade of membership should have statutory academic and experiential requirements to be fulfilled by members in research, publication and creative contributions to the profession. In this way, the non-professionals would be dropped by the way side.

The institute may have to consider more dynamic ways of sustaining the interest of its entire membership currently put at over seven thousand located nationwide. Since the members are drawn from all sectors of the economy – banking, oil and gas, government, telecommunication, manufacturing, armed forces, health, education and many more, there is need to promote sectoral groupings such as is the case in the banking sector. Association of Corporate Affairs Managers of Banks (ACAMB)

in order that members will derive greater benefits from the profession. Such groupings are known to provide more focused attention on matters of common interest mentoring and more avenues for shared experiences. All that is required is for the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations to coordinate and network all these groups including the consultant group, the Public Relations Consultant Association of Nigeria (PRCAN) to achieve better cohesion and effectiveness for the profession. It may interest the readers that the Public Relations Society of America, the largest professional organisation for public relations professionals has had to organise its 20,000 members into 116 Chapters and 17 professional interest sections. The interest sections represent business and industry, counselling firms, sole practitioners, military, government, associations, hospitals, schools, professional service firms and non-profit organisations.

## **Job Opportunities**

There is no doubt that job opportunities for professional public relations practitioners keep on expanding, especially now that the Nigerian economy has embraced privatisation and commercialisation as a vehicle for economic growth and development. Interestingly, where there is competition among manufacturers and service providers, more emphasis would be placed on public relations. Although salesmanship will cultivate customers for a product or service, public relations will try to sustain these customer's interest, on whose patronage the existence of the organisation will depend.

Most financial and manufacturing establishments have public relations departments where corporate publicity, and customer/community relations activities are carried out. Over the years, many government parastatals like the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, National Electric Power Authority now (PHCN) and the Nigerian Telecommunications Limited, have had large public relations outfits. These parastatals have compelling

need for public relations because of the nature of the services they render to the public.

In spite of this, the organisations have no choice but to continue communicating as they aspire to render better services. Incidentally, the consumers of these services are largely literate and enlightened. They would insist on getting quality service for their money. Consequently, for the fact that they are literate, they are also accommodating and considerate when appropriate public relations strategies are employed to present their operational problems to the public.

Public relations got a boost and its scopes expanded in 1989 when the federal government in its civil service reforms upgraded the status of professionals in its employment, to "Assistant Director" grade (see Appendix IX). Later, when government rationalised departments within the civil service structure, only eight departments survived and public relations was one of them. This however, is not to say that public relations has attained the ultimate in official recognition but it is evident that the profession has come a long way at establishing a place for itself. With more qualified hands, the sky is the limit for seasoned practitioners in securing appointment with government, business, non-governmental, voluntary and international agencies.

### **The Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR)**

The Nigerian Institute of Public Relations has firmly established itself as a relevant professional body in the competitive media terrain of Nigeria. Over a decade ago, many people might have rightly asked what the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations stood for. However, the impressive showing and impact of the addition to Nigeria's growing professional bodies would revolutionise the act of reputation management at the individual and corporate levels, given its present thrust and deep commitment of *professionalism and excellence*. The Nigerian Institute of Public Relations came into being in 1984 and was backed by law through

Decree 16 of 1990. It has its origin in the Colonial Nigerian Information Service (1954) and Nigerian Press Club which later metamorphosed to Public Relations Association of Nigeria (PRAN) in 1963. The history of public relations in Nigeria has, therefore, spanned a modest period of more than four decades, during which a lot has been achieved. The erstwhile image of the public relations personnel as an errand boy of the CEO and a buffer for the management, is gradually being tackled as more professionally qualified and trained practitioners find themselves in organisations' corporate boardrooms. Given the definition of public relations as:

The art and social science of analysing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organisation leaders and implementing planned programmes of action which will serve both the organisation's and the public interest,

the practitioners cannot afford to be uninformed about boardroom politics, philosophy and orientation of their organisation. Hence, the clamour for the recognition of public relations as an essential part of management.

The importance an organisation accords its public relations department will depend on the calibre and output of the personnel, rather than a generalised group claim to management status. Basically, public relations employs the media of communication such as newspapers, magazines, radio and television to disseminate messages that project the image of the organisation (or client) to the target publics. To this end, public relations executives could be regarded as having a basic minimal professional training such as the NIPR Certificate/Diploma, the Communication, Advertising and Marketing Certificate/Diploma. The National Diploma in Communication, first degree in Journalism/Mass Communication, Language Arts, Communication Arts, Social Sciences, Humanities and relevant postgraduate diploma/degree in these courses are also necessary

prerequisites. If a public relations practitioner has any of these qualifications, then all that is needed is the relevant exposure through regular refresher practical courses at seminars and workshops. An exceedingly tasking job, under a front runner in a reputable organisation – a period of *apprenticeship* is also necessary.

In addition, he should possess the personal qualities of having very good personage, confidence, polite, cheerful, sociable, intelligent and creative ability. It is pertinent here to say that effective public relations practice is not a condition dependent on the ability to write, edit and publish. It takes much more. After all, not everybody that can write is regarded as a journalist. The problem with such wrong notion is that a public relations practitioner joining an organisation would be confronted with a management that expects him to carry out all its public relations functions in newsrooms – media relations. They can save themselves the trouble and hire a publicity officer, if that is what is desired. Apparently, people misconstrue publicity as the whole of public relations. Indeed, publicity constitutes a part of public relations only as a part and may therefore not affect the real act of public relations which could be executed deftly without too much reference to the press. The targets that public relations campaigns are directed differ and, most times, transcend the few urban elites that read the newspapers and watch television. The rural, semi-literate, illiterate, poor petty traders, farmers, artisans and others who, as a result of their great numbers, collectively constitute strong economic, political and strategic groups, need more attention. This is why public relations uses a multimedia approach in many of its campaign programmes. By this, we mean the selective use of appropriate media that fit the message and the targets being addressed. Sometimes, traditional mode of communication may be better to reach a particular audience, if the subject concerns the rural people. A campaign for oral rehydration therapy (ORT) for example, is targeted at women and children population mostly in the rural areas, and so the use

of radio or any other modern media can only be complementary to the town criers, opinion leaders and face-to-face communication.

The Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) used to be the Public Relations Association of Nigeria (PRAN). The late Sam Epelle, author of *Handbook for Public Information* (1969) was the chief mover of the formation of PRAN, which he led from 1963-1968 when Chief Kanu Offonry took over from him from 1968-1971. In all, there were seven active pioneer members as recounted by Ogbuefi Alex Nwokedi, former General Manager, Public Affairs, NNPC. They include: Sam Epelle, Alex Nwokedi, Kunle Ojora, Theo Awobogu, Aduke Alakija, Dan Agbakoba, and Walton Hugh (an expatriate).

Other Presidents of NIPR after Sam Epelle were

- Tonye Willie Young-Harry (1972-76),
- Alhaji Ikhaz Yakubu (1976-80),
- Chief Bob Ogbuagu (1980-84),
- Chief Alex Akinyele (1984-85) (former Minister of Information),
- Mike Okereke (1988-1992),
- Alhaji Sabo Mohammed (1992-1998),
- Chief Jibade Oyekan (1998-2000),
- Sofiri Bobo-Brown (2000-2005), and
- Professor Ike Nwosu (2005-

## **Managing Human Resources**

In view of the universal acceptance of the role and importance of manpower in any endeavour, the concept of human management is generally centred around using human resources to achieve organisational objectives. The complex nature of man makes public relations methods a necessity in human administration, especially in areas of industrial or labour relations. From the production process point of view, conflict usually exists between

the employer and labour because labour wants to earn maximum payments while the employer wants to pay what it considers economically right so that he can maximise his profit. Conflict in all its ramifications can only be resolved, to a large extent, if there is communication. And herein lies the importance of public relations in human resources management. If we take it that public relations is planned and sustained effort aimed at ensuring smooth working relations between the organisation and its various publics, of course the employees are the most important internal public that requires effective and efficient communication strategies.

Public relations is all about ensuring that the publics of any organisation understand its behaviour all the time. This is, however, not easily achieved because of the inherent dynamism of individuals, which are quite difficult to predict, or pin down to a particular worldview, as many staff members in an organisation may require different methods of handling their problems. All that good public relations practitioners strive tirelessly to achieve is harmony between organisational objectives and members' preferences within reasonable limits, and which ensures that both sides would have satisfaction.

It is imperative to work from within to without, in developing and maintaining good reputation for an organisation. Where members of staff are overlooked in public relations planning and programmes, there would most probably be inconsistencies between the publicised and actual organisational behaviours. Public relations approach can be used to improve or enhance human resources, especially as it relates to organisational behaviour and public perception. Public relations recognises employee as the most important public in an organisation. This is due to the fact that every other aspect about the life and health of an organisation depends on the individual and collective behaviour of the members. Although there are several specialised management functions – administration, finance, audit, personnel, training, operations, legal, etc – which are devoted to managing

human resources, public relations enables the personnel to appreciate public expectations of its organisation's role in the society and possibly cultivate the necessary behaviours to maintain excellent relations with the publics.

In these modern days, several channels of communication are employed to resolve conflicts and create awareness among employees. Such strategies include the publication of bulletins, newsletters, chief executive's memo, circular letters,, departmental meetings, general staff meetings, management and staff parley, end-of-year parties and several other avenues such as web centre. In particular, it is of note that effective communication strategies can only be achieved within organisations if free flow of information is allowed from the lower cadre staffers, through the middle level officers, to management staff and finally, to the Board of Directors. Information from the board should be allowed to get to the junior officers with minimum interference or distortions from other cadres in between. In this case, organisational objectives are better achieved with the two-way symmetrical communications model.

Peer information sharing at the middle level is usually very strong and it is worth encouraging as it is this group that constitutes a strategic pool of operational staff. Peers could be found at other levels and good communication helps to promote excellent inter-relationships. In many organisations, there is a tendency to ignore the junior staff of the cleaner, messenger, driver and watchmen cadres. Whereas they are of "less importance", they constitute the strategic frontline officers for any organisation's programmes to succeed. This is because they usually constitute the first line of contact between the organisation and its various publics. If they are polite, welcoming, helpful and decent in handling visitors to the company, then the customers would have been convinced that they made a good choice to do business with an organisation that recognises them. On the other hand, if they are not well received, the managers may have less and less clients to work for, as a result of not paying attention to these very

important workers. Therefore, every staff member, no matter his duties, is essential in the achievement of the corporate objectives. Succinctly put, people matter more than things.

## **Employee Relations**

While public relations reaches out to its external publics or stakeholders, no effort should be spared to ensure that 'charity begins at home'. This is effectively done through a system commonly referred to as employee relations which is directed at the internal public. This is crucial to whatever the organisation is doing to project itself to the outside publics. The public perception of an organisation is a function of the efficiency of the internal cohesion among the staff. A disenchanted, disoriented, ill-motivated, neglected and ill-equipped workforce cannot produce quality goods and services that can earn the respect of the consumers, just as they would most likely be busy running down the organisation. It is therefore very important for organisations to pay special attention to issues relating to the welfare and motivation of their workforce in the manner it is concerned with the other special publics.

Employee relations is rapidly being developed in the business world as a specialised skill just as customers relations is emerging. They are all part of public relations and the following explanations are intended to emphasise the importance of employee in the achievement of corporate goals in all businesses as already postulated.

The performance of the employees on their duties would depend largely on the efficacy of the management's public relations strategies, in the following areas, to:

- (a) facilitating free flow of downward, horizontal and upward communication;
- (b) encouraging dialogue, counselling, discussion and consultation as means of solving problems;
- (c) promoting formal and informal interaction between all

- categories of staff, while still ensuring the hierarchical structure;
- (d) specifically ensuring regular meetings at unit and departmental levels, and occasional general meetings; and
  - (e) providing adequate motivation for staff through ensuring job satisfaction, training commensurate with job schedules, generous remuneration and welfare provisions.

With such an arrangement as explained above, employees would most likely empathise strongly with organisational goals and work towards their attainment. The image of the worker is inseparable from that of the organisation. That is why when an employee misbehaves, he is publicly disclaimed so that the smeared image may not be associated with that of the organisation he is serving. Conversely, a productive, creative, and diligent employee becomes an instant celebrity and is projected as a role model for other staff members. This also explains, in part, why organisations sponsor their staff to contest leadership positions in strategic social and professional associations. Such earned reputation boosting activities are achievements worthy of more than several pages of advertisements in newspapers and electronic media broadcast. The discerning publics are more likely to accept such indices as a correct reflection of the organisation's performance than most other sponsored and paid-for statements of success. For instance, the Chevron Corporation, USA, has exemplified the need for good employee relations when it named one of its oil vessels *Chevron Employee Pride*. Commitment and excellent service are rewards Chevron would get from this unique way of recognising its most important resource – the employees.