

Strategic Communication in Canada

Planning Effective PR Campaigns

Bernard Gauthier

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Sample
(for review purposes only)

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A. Chapter-focused Questions

Introduction

1. Running a business is very different from fighting a war, yet the author argues that a military framework for strategy can help us think strategically about communication. Imagine you have been hired by a new national chain of sporting goods stores. Briefly define the mission, the enemy, the troops, the terrain, and the time (METT-T) with which you would be working as you set out to introduce the new chain of stores and build sales.
2. Think back to your last visit to the doctor's office or hospital. Thinking of Erving Goffman, how did the doctors and nurses who treated you manage their acts, the settings in which you saw them, and the appearance they maintained to create and maintain a professional image?
3. To explain his concept of the *resonance principle*, Tony Schwartz wrote that "the starting point for understanding and creating communication lies in examining the communication environment you are living in at this moment, and the context within which any stimuli you create will be received" (Schwartz, 1973, p. 160). Think back to the last time a federal, provincial, or municipal politician was involved in a scandal, and discuss how the actions of the politician, the media coverage of those actions, and the conversations people around you had about those actions would have shaped the kind of understanding people would have of any communication coming from that politician. How did the words communicated by that politician resonate with voters after the scandal was exposed?
4. Reflect on the uses and gratifications you personally derive from using social media channels like Facebook or Instagram. What are you hoping to "get done" while you are using these apps? Do those uses and gratifications make it easier or harder for an organization like a business or charitable group to reach you using these social media channels? How so?
5. Stuart Hall proposed that the approach an audience takes to decode a message can lead to that audience arriving at either the dominant or intended meaning for the message, the negotiated meaning that involves both the sender's intentions and the audience's own interpretation, or the oppositional position that focuses more on what the receiver makes of a message than what the sender intended. Pick a social media post on a contentious topic or personality, and browse through the range of comments that post has generated. Point to one or two comments that suggest the reader decoded the post using the dominant position, one or two comments that suggest a negotiated position was used to decode the post, and one or two comments that suggest an oppositional position was used.

Chapter One

Identifying the Changes You Seek

1. The author contends that the first element of strategy is change. In the context of strategic communication, define *change*. What kinds of things can strategic communication try to change, and why do these things matter?
2. The author argues, “Any communication campaign or public relations program, after all, is intended to generate some sort of change in the level of awareness, in the attitudes, and [ultimately] in the behaviour of a group of people; those changes are principally why organizations communicate.” Think of a recent strategic communication campaign to which you have been exposed, and use that campaign to illustrate why you agree or disagree with this point.
3. The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) website lists the following as their vision and mission: “Our Vision: Mentally healthy people in a healthy society. Our Mission: As the nationwide leader and champion for mental health, CMHA facilitates access to the resources people require to maintain and improve mental health and community integration, build resilience, and support recovery from mental illness.” What kind of changes do these two statements suggest? What would be an effective starting point for a strategic communication plan for this organization? Who are they hoping to change and in what ways?
4. The action continuum presents five possible points along which people move as they decide on what actions to take and what people and organizations with which they will do business. What are the five stations?
5. Think of a recent major decision you made as a voter, consumer, or volunteer. Discuss the five steps along the action continuum and the role that communication played in your movement across the continuum.

B. Final Exam Questions

This series of questions is designed to test students' understanding of all the concepts covered in the textbook and to integrate the learning from each chapter in a way that allows them to think and plan strategically.

These questions depend on students having access to a case study related to a strategic communication or PR challenge. A recommended case study for this question is Pullen (2011). The case concerns a regional healthcare agency (Eastern Health) and their response to a public relations crisis.

The case study is available online as a PDF document from the *Journal of Professional Communication* at the following link:

<https://mulpress.mcmaster.ca/jpc/article/download/89/44>

You may choose to substitute a different case study and adjust the questions below accordingly. A link to the online version of the case study you select should be provided to the students, and they should start the examination period by reading over the document. They would then answer the following questions:

Please read the case study carefully and reflect on the information within. Use the CARE model to organize your thoughts on this case. Complete the questions below and, as you do, be sure to justify the choices you make. You must convince the reader that your approach is truly strategic. You will be graded both for the quality of what you propose and for the persuasiveness of your argument.

Feel free to point to specific evidence in the case study to support your answers. There is no need, however, to formally cite the document, though you may offer direct quotes if you feel they bolster your answers. Note that your marks will also be influenced by the clarity and correctness of your writing. Your final plan should be a document worthy of being presented to a client.

1. Imagine it is the year 2008 and Eastern Health hires you to plan a communication campaign in response to the challenges outlined in the case study. The organization has been through an ordeal, and now it is time to start repairing relationships with the community. Given the information presented in the case study, identify the key goals and audiences for such a campaign. Be sure to support your answer. (10 points)
2. Assess the resources Eastern Health has at its disposal to undertake such a campaign. What are its key strengths and weaknesses? Assume little has been done yet to change the level of resources. (10 points)

3. Assess the external environment into which your campaign will run. What are the key opportunities and threats with which the organization will need to contend? Assume the external conditions described in the case still apply. (10 points)
4. Given your answers to the questions above, what broad strategic directions do you recommend for the campaign, and why? Note that these directions must be clear and specific, without needing to be as detailed as specific tactics and timelines. (10 points)
5. List up to three PR tactics that you would recommend Eastern Health undertake. Use the tables below to specify the tactic you propose and the audience for which it is intended. Provide a few key points of detail to ensure the reader understands what you propose and why it is strategic, especially in light of your answer to question 4 above. (10 points)

Tactic 1:	Audience:
Details:	
Timing:	Budget:

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