



The Role of Public Relations in Strategic Planning and Crisis Preparedness

A report by the Institute of Directors (IoD) and the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR)

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CIPR

CHARTERED INSTITUTE
OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

Foreword



Sarah Waddington CBE

IoD Ambassador, CIPR Past President
and Director, Wadds Inc.



The UK is experiencing one of its most testing times in recent history.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, war in Ukraine, rising energy prices, the climate crisis, an overheated talent market, and a cost of living crisis are just some of the big issues facing business.

The situation in the UK has been exacerbated by changes to our political leadership and monarchy, global trade wars and an impending recession.

We are living in a period of radical uncertainty in which political, cultural, and economic norms are being challenged. It means that business resilience is more critical than ever. The good news is that there is plenty of help at hand.

In this report, the Institute of Directors (IoD) has joined forces with the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) to look at ways in which organisations can best employ public relations to ride market turbulence and ensure they are fit for the future.

You'll find the results of our recent survey which showcases how UK directors see and use public relations. You'll also find a raft of practical ways in which your business can utilise PR and each chapter has five top tips to get you started.

It's my belief that public relations, with its ability to aid decision-making and engage stakeholders, is integral to influential leadership and organisational success. I hope you find this report useful and a mechanism for better understanding PR and putting this important management function to good use wherever you work.

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Introduction

The role of public relations within organisations

The Institute of Directors (IoD) has joined forces with the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) to help directors better understand the strategic value that public relations (PR) can bring to organisations.

Public relations is often poorly understood, but when employed as a management function, it can help businesses not just navigate economic and political turbulence, but also thrive and grow.

Within this report, you'll find the results of a survey which sheds light into directors' current understanding and use of public relations; a definition of what public relations actually is; and a number of practical ways in which you can employ PR now to improve organisational resilience.

We've also included a guide to best practice in PR procurement for those who would like to build their resources in this area.





Jonathan Geldart
Director General, Institute of Directors (IoD)



We are delighted to have worked with the Chartered Institute of Public Relations on this important report.

Public relations has a significant role to play in organisational decision-making, promoting awareness and protecting reputation. I would encourage all boardrooms to consider how best to invest in this important management function.

In addition to providing an analysis of how the SME marketplace understands and uses PR, this report offers practical guidance for UK directors. I would encourage business leaders to read it to understand how PR can be used to promote and protect their business.



Alastair McCapra
CEO, Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR)



Every organisation, no matter how large or small, ultimately depends on its reputation for its survival and success. Perceptions drive decisions about whether the organisations we come into contact with are ones we want to work with, work for, shop with, and support.

Public relations is the management function responsible for influencing those decisions by communicating a business's purpose and managing relationships with stakeholders. As this guide brilliantly demonstrates, it is a wide-ranging and ever-evolving management discipline. I want to thank all the contributors who helped put this together and for sharing their insight and expertise. Not only does it provide useful advice, but it might also just make you rethink how you are using, or plan to use, PR for your organisation.

I want to thank the Institute of Directors for their support. This partnership is timely and important. There is no doubt that in times of uncertainty, when businesses face operational and reputational risk, the need to communicate with diverse audiences across fragmented channels, having PR and senior business leaders working together will only be for the benefit of the businesses they work for. This report will only strengthen that relationship for the benefit of our members, the industries we work across and represent, and ultimately society.

Survey results

In November and December 2022, we asked UK directors to complete a short survey on public relations to gain insights into how they view and value this important management discipline.

The questions were designed to gather insight into directors' current understanding and usage of PR; how often public relations professionals are drawn upon to support key management activities; and which activities are most closely associated with the public relations function.

More than 100 responses were received in response to a direct appeal to IoD members, plus open calls on social media and within management related and non-executive director groups. Data gathering took place over five weeks.

The survey showed some interesting results. Around 17% of respondents say their organisation has no public relations support, either internally or externally. Those that do are more likely to have the person ultimately responsible for the public relations function of the organisation at board level.

Contrasting with the definition below, the majority of UK directors associated public relations with media relations as well as more short-term focused PR programmes and campaigns. Fewer than half say their PR teams are involved in risk assessment and crisis preparedness.

When asked how public relations has helped to navigate a crisis situation, the most common response was the COVID-19 pandemic.

17%

of respondents say their organisation has no public relations support.

What is public relations?

According to the CIPR's definition:

"Public relations is about reputation — the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you.

Public relations is the discipline which looks after reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behaviour. It is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics."

Question 1: Which of the below best describes the industry you work in?

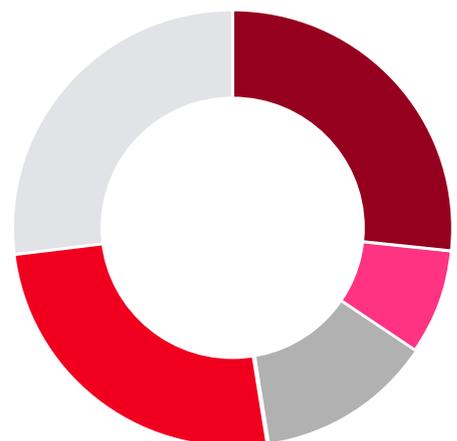
Total responses: 101

Total	Total %
	101
Other services (please specify)	20.79
Professional and technical	15.84
Manufacturing	9.90
Health and social care	8.91
Education	7.92
Financial services	6.93
IT and communications	6.93
Public sector and defence	5.94
Construction	3.96
Retail and wholesale	2.97
Accommodation and food	1.98
Arts, entertainment and recreation	1.98
Transport	1.98
Admin and support	0.99
Agriculture	0.99
Real estate activities	0.99
Utilities	0.99
Mining and quarrying	0

Question 2: How many employees does your organisation have?

Total responses: 101

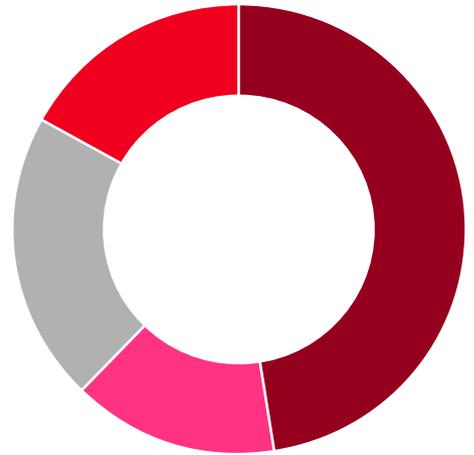
Response	%
● 1-9	26.73
● 10-19	7.92
● 20-49	12.87
● 50-249	25.74
● 250+	26.73



Question 4: What public relations support does your organisation have?

Total responses: 101

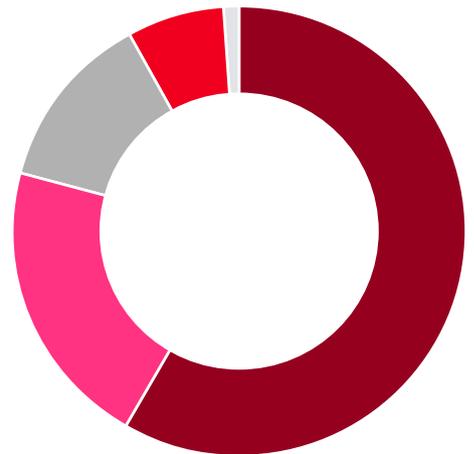
Response	%
● Inhouse support	47.52
● Agency support	14.85
● Inhouse and agency support	20.79
● None of the above	16.83



Question 5: Who within your organisation has the authority to commission public relations services?

Total responses: 101

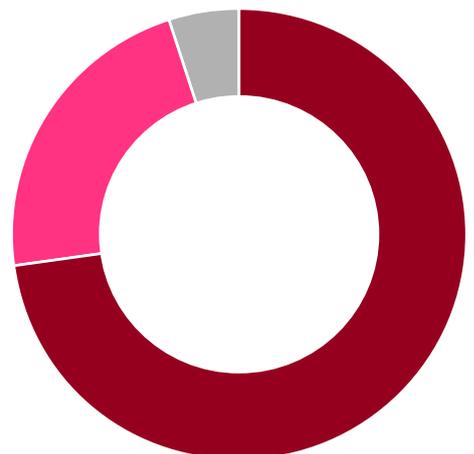
Response	%
● You	58.42
● Fellow director	20.79
● Another colleague	12.87
● We don't use public relations services	6.93
● Don't know	0.99



Question 6: If you have public relations support, does the person responsible for this sit on Board or report directly to the management team?

Total responses: 100

Response	%
● Yes	73
● No	22
● Don't know	5



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**Question 7: Which activities do you most closely associate with the public relations function?
Please tick all that apply. Total responses: 100**

Activity	%
Media relations	89
PR programmes / campaigns	89
Social media relations	70
Crisis management	64
Stakeholder mapping and engagement	57
Public affairs / lobbying	55
Copywriting and editing	52
Internal / employee communications	50
Marketing	49
Digital marketing (excluding social media)	46
Strategic planning	45
Risk assessment and crisis preparedness	42
Event organisation	39
Influencer relations	39
Research, evaluation, measurement	39
Defining mission / values, corporate governance	37
Horizon scanning (market intelligence and data gathering)	29
Financial / investor relations	28
Project, account, client management	17
Management of people, resources	16
Don't know	0

Question 8: Which of these management activities do you involve your public relations team in – please tick all that apply. Total responses: 100

Activity	%
Strategic planning	57
Stakeholder mapping and engagement	54
Crisis management	54
Internal communications	52
Public affairs and lobbying	52
Risk assessment and crisis preparedness	46
Horizon scanning (market intelligence and data gathering)	39
Don't know	10



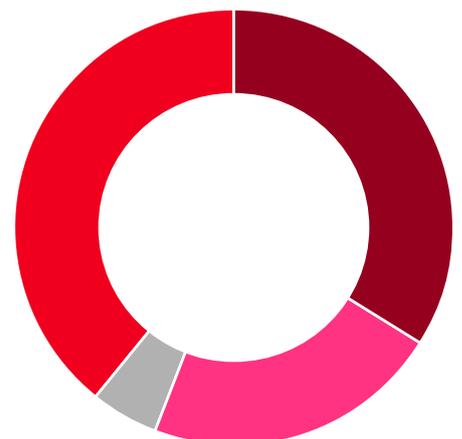
Question 9: Respondents were asked what they perceive the role of public relations in organisational resilience is.



Question 10: Has public relations ever helped your organisation navigate a crisis?

Total responses: 100

Response	%
● No	34
● Not applicable	22
● Don't know	5
● Yes	39



So how can public relations help?

Despite being associated most frequently in the survey with media relations, public relations is a multi-faceted management function which can aid leaders with better decision-making, strategic planning and stakeholder engagement.

In the following section, you'll find contributions from some of the PR industry's foremost experts which spell out the role of the public relation practitioner in:

- Strategic planning
- Stakeholder mapping and engagement
- Risk assessment
- Crisis preparedness and management
- Internal communication
- Public affairs and lobbying
- Horizon scanning (market intelligence and data gathering)
- Measurement and board reporting

Each of these chapters ends with five top tips to work on now so you can put public relations to good and effective use in your business. You'll also find a guide to procuring a public relations specialist.



The role of public relations in strategic planning

Building resilience and helping business through economic and political turbulence

By Dr Jon White

We are living in what has been described as a period of radical uncertainty, one in which the old order is crumbling and the assumptions on which we have based our approaches to business, international trade and relations, and social questions no longer hold.

For some time now we have realised that leaders — political and business leaders, and leaders in civil society — do not have easy answers to the problems we face, for example in management of national economies in the aftermath of a worldwide pandemic and emerging international conflict. Simply, leaders need more help and advice in dealing with uncertainty and complexity, now more keenly felt.

Among the advisers they can call on are public relations practitioners, who bring an unusual perspective to the challenges they face. Their perspective is of the social landscape in which organisations operate and of organisations in context. There is a view of the world which asks questions about the support organisations can call on, the understanding and concerns of key groups, and the issues that motivate them.

It is a perspective that needs to be drawn into high level decision-making, strategic planning and realised in action, to win the support of key groups, to mitigate opposition and to respond to developing concerns among groups important to the organisation and its success.

Incorporating this perspective deals with limitations in decision-making highlighted in studies of the financial crisis of 2007-2008. It improves decision-making, planning and management capability — and in doing this, builds resilience and abilities to respond to economic and political turbulence.

There is nothing superficial about public relations

Large claims perhaps and often difficult to establish in practice because of misunderstandings of, or prejudice against public relations. Public relations is still often seen by many as a superficial practice concerned with presentation, with attempts to obscure or mislead, and with processes of communication seen as obvious and aimed at developing or changing perceptions, images or reputations of organisations.

Communication is central in public relations practice, but it is a means of influence used in relationships of importance as well as a back channel through which concerns can be heard, the interests of groups understood, and as an important driver of change in the organisation as this is necessary.

Studies by the Tomorrow's Company business think tank have emphasised the value to be realised from close attention to the interests of important groups. Attended to and managed, relationships are recognised as a source of value — along with reputation among the intangible assets available to any organisation.

Using communication to influence, public relations contributes to building relationships vital to organisational success.

Listening to important groups is a means of monitoring opinions, attitudes, sentiment and concern — the social environment outside (and inside) the organisation. This picture of the environment fed in to decision-making improves it and alerts decision-makers to emerging issues and risks — at an early stage in their development.

Limitations in decision-making are alleviated in a number of ways as the perspective

offered by public relations is brought in. Senior decision-making groups have been criticised over recent years for being drawn from limited pools, of social background, qualifications and career paths.

There is an idea of requisite variety needed in decision-making, where decision-making groups need to contain within themselves a variety of viewpoints that will be sufficiently varied to understand the complexity of the world in which they have to make decisions. Public relations, practiced by knowledgeable, capable and credible practitioners, will bring this to decision-making — if allowed to do so.

Their work can counter the dangers of group think, where members of a group may believe they have the answers and draw solely on information within and acceptable to the group. In decision-making groups, public relations advisers may be there as challengers — welcome challengers — to prevailing views.

A view over the horizon

Another aspect of the public relations perspective is that it is future-oriented, asking questions about how relationships should develop over time, against organisational objectives.

It involves anticipation of what might happen to disrupt relationships — opportunities creating new possibilities, or trends or events that might disturb and change relationships. In practice, this combining with the horizon-scanning required in practice leads into issues and crisis management.

Decisions on approaches to issues and building capability to anticipate, prepare for and manage crises improve leadership and management practice. They generate discussions of practical approaches to handling risk and build resilience.

Leaders and managers have much to gain from looking again at what they should

expect from their public relations advisers. They should expect advice of the highest standard, informed by research where resources allow, which will have clear benefits in terms of organisational progress and abilities to deal with environmental uncertainty.

Five steps to take now:

- 1. Review the extent to which the public relations perspective — on the importance and management of relationships on which the organisation depends for success — is currently drawn into strategic planning and decision-making. Where it is not, take steps to incorporate it into planning and decision-making.**
- 2. Ensure that your public relations advisers are qualified and delivering relevant, timely advice through participation in discussions about strategic decisions and planning work.**
- 3. Remove barriers that may exist to receiving their advice, either arising from prejudice against public relations within the management team or from indirect reporting relationships.**
- 4. Be prepared to be open to their advice, to accept that their advice may seem to add difficulty to what may already be difficult decisions.**
- 5. Also be prepared to act promptly on advice, especially where advice relates to issues or crisis management or to deal with developing coverage in traditional or social media.**

Dr Jon White is chartered psychologist and a chartered member and Honorary Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations. He began his career in communication roles with the Government of Alberta, Canada, progressing through university positions in Canada and the UK to independent consultancy for organisations including corporations and international government organisations. Author of two books on public relations, he has a PhD in psychology from the London School of Economics and Political Science and is a visiting professor at Henley Business School, University of Reading and honorary professor, Cardiff University School of Journalism, Media and Culture.

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The role of public relations in stakeholder mapping and engagement

Combining the interests of stakeholders with the interests of your organisation

By Professor Anne Gregory

In his 2022 letter to CEOs, Larry Fink, CEO of Blackrock, one of the world's largest asset management companies, claims that the COVID-19 pandemic turbo-charged an evolution in the relationship between companies, their employees, and society. In fact, he asserts, it has been redefined.

This shift to 'stakeholder capitalism' now dominates the corporate agenda. Increasing demands from investment companies and other stakeholders, including customers, means companies have to define their purpose and articulate their Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) credentials. The business imperative is clear: do this or your 'licence to operate' is under threat.

Furthermore, 'ordinary people', empowered by digital channels of communication, are asserting their power to change how companies do things. 'Society' is demanding that companies demonstrate their contribution and behave in ways that are socially progressive.

Consider how Diversity, Inclusion and Equality are now front and centre in the battle for talent. 'Brands taking stands' on social issues seems commonplace and almost a necessity: employees are demanding it.

It's about stakeholder relationships

Stakeholder capitalism is NOT about trading off shareholder return and value to keep other stakeholders happy. What is in the interests of stakeholders, whether they be employees, customers, suppliers and the local community, will also yield value for shareholders, as financial analysts have proved.

Fink defines stakeholder capitalism as "not woke. It is capitalism, driven by mutually beneficial relationships between you and the employees, customers, suppliers, and communities your company relies on to prosper".

So, the questions facing boards and senior executives now are: who are our current and future stakeholders? What is the nature of their stake — supportive or unsupportive? And how do we build relationships with them for mutual benefit?

These questions are so important that expert help is needed. Most organisations have public relations or strategic communication departments and these professionals are trained in stakeholder identification, mapping, prioritisation and engagement.

It's a highly sophisticated job requiring incisive analysis of data, detailed knowledge of the dynamic, complex and treacherous company environment and expertise in communication based on the latest understanding of psychology and behavioural insight.

Stakeholders and their stakes are constantly in flux. They move in and out of relationships with organisations, they become critics or advocates apparently at a whim. They exert their power at speed on the issues that they feel passionately about and this is amplified by their ability to influence and mobilise others of like mind.

This is the realm of 'wicked problems', because stakeholders are as complex as humanity itself and their ability to scrutinise and hold companies to account over a whole range of issues has never been greater.

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Public relations professionals bring contextual intelligence

So how can public relations professionals help? First, they will be the people who are in tune with what is happening in the business environment and its potential impact. This 'contextual intelligence' is essential to their work because their knowledge here helps them predict what affects stakeholders and how they will react.

They are also the professionals who will know most about stakeholders. It is their responsibility to have oversight of these relationships, take a holistic perspective of them and advise and co-ordinate the corporate response — bearing in mind that stakeholders will have different and sometimes conflicting agendas. These interactions become the corporate narrative: they are the substance of the stories stakeholders tell about the organisations they engage with.

Public relations professionals have a range of techniques to research both context and stakeholders. Using AI tools such as social listening and web analytics to scrutinise real time conversations on-line, and using more traditional research methods to do the same for off-line conversations, public relations professionals can identify key topics of

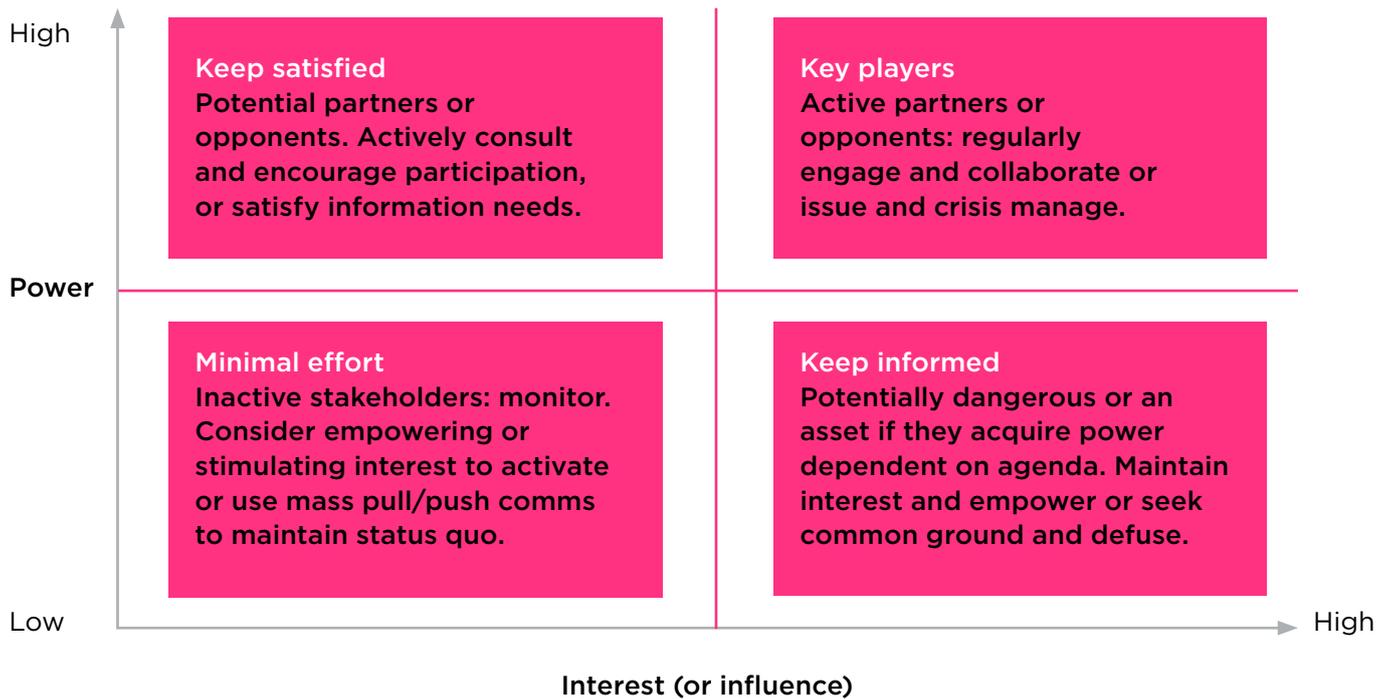
interest to stakeholders, as well as who the key drivers and influencers are (including journalists) and their networks of influence.

They are also able to build profiles of stakeholders including their demographic details, who they listen to, their passions and belief systems, how they share information and, using predictive analytics, what their likely actions will be.

From this research, accurate and dynamic maps can be built showing how stakeholders currently exert their power and influence and how they will react into the future on any topic or issue that is important to them.

Using similar technologies 'lists' of potential advocates or opponents can be generated by identifying individuals and groups who are passionate about actual and potential initiatives organisations are associated with. These technologies also reveal the gaps and opportunities for leadership in areas that are just emerging onto the public agenda. They can identify who, where, when, through what channels and on what topics stakeholders can be engaged, down to the granular level and audiences of one.





Mapping tools can help

Familiar stakeholder mapping techniques such as Johnson and Scholes¹ influence grid are often used to identify the kinds of stakeholder engagement strategies that will be effective as the diagram above illustrates.

The point of stakeholder engagement is to secure support. This involves deep listening, responding and sometimes changing as a result of listening. Gone are the days when telling loud and often works. Organisations have to be empathetic and agile in their relationships with stakeholders.



The point of stakeholder engagement is to secure support. This involves deep listening, responding and sometimes changing as a result of listening.

Monitoring is an ongoing process

Constant monitoring of the temperature of stakeholder relationships and vigilance about their ongoing health is imperative. This again, is a task for the public relations department who have a range of techniques and technologies to do this effectively. It is not enough to rely on anecdotal evidence, or the perspectives of one or two people. Solid evidence has to be collected. Its analysis, along with the addition of the human dimensions of communication, will facilitate nuanced, dynamic and robust relationships to be built over time.

All this does not mean that public relations departments corral relationships with stakeholders: this is clearly a distributed responsibility. It is obviously appropriate that CEOs, senior executives and Board members take responsibility for relationships with other senior stakeholders. But just as financial expertise is called on for financial matters, then relationship expertise is needed for developing key relationships.

Guidance and coaching from experts versed in the art and science of effective stakeholder management is a must in the new stakeholder driven world.

¹ Johnson, G.R., Whittington, R., Scholes, K., Angwin, D. & Regner, P. (2017). Exploring Corporate Strategy, 11th edn. London: Pearson Education.

Five steps to take now:

- 1. Ensure you have an exhaustive and prioritised list of stakeholders.**
- 2. List what you know about these stakeholders: their priorities, pressures and passions.**
- 3. Detail the nature of your relationship with them and where they would place you on their stakeholder map.**
- 4. Consider how aligned you are with their agendas and document any issues you anticipate.**
- 5. Take professional advice on building effective and mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders.**

Professor Emeritus Anne Gregory of the University of Huddersfield is one of the UK's leading public relations academics. She is currently a board member of Practix Ltd and the CIPR, has Chaired two NGO boards, and served on the boards of three NHS Hospital Trusts. She is a reviewer of Government Communication, appointed by the Cabinet Office.

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The role of public relations in risk assessment, crisis preparedness and management

Preparing your organisation to face a crisis and the role of strategic PR consultancy in crisis preparation and management

By Kate Hartley

A breaking crisis can be the biggest challenge of a director's working life. It can feel chaotic, uncontrollable and stressful. And it can be career-defining. In the worst cases, it can have a serious negative impact on your company's ability to operate, its revenue or valuation, and its reputation. If handled badly, it can result in a change in leadership. The stakes are high.

The key to successfully navigating a crisis is effective preparation: preparing for the crisis itself; and preparing the business to be more resilient to the inevitable onslaught. This should be done in 'peacetime', ahead of the crisis.

It can be hard to find the time to prepare for a crisis. There's always a more pressing, urgent task. But it's the job you should never put off. Think of it like insurance. No-one wants to spend the money on it, but if your house burns down, you're glad you did.

"Greater investment in preparation and rehearsal, and in risk monitoring, such that management is better informed, earlier, is no longer a luxury and will bring rewards when crisis strikes." So said Dr Deborah Petty, founding director of Pentland Analytics, in 2018.

Her research, *Reputation Risks in the Cyber Age* (in conjunction with insurance company, Aeon), finds that, on average, a company loses five percent of its shareholder value in the year following a major crisis event. But her research also shows there is a significant difference across firms in their ability to recover value following a reputation crisis. She categorises companies into two groups: winners and losers from a crisis. The winners outperform pre-crisis expectations

and gain an average of 20 percent in value the year after the crisis. The losers drop, on average, close to 30 percent of their value.

To emerge a 'winner' from a crisis takes good preparation.

Crisis preparation and risk assessment

To prepare effectively, you must plan what you're preparing for. With your crisis agency or consultant, channel your inner creative pessimist to imagine scenarios your company could face that could negatively impact its reputation. (Some of this crisis scenario forecasting might have been done as part of your business continuity planning; what you're focusing on here is reputation damage.)

Look honestly at your business and its weakest points. Categorise those threats not by type, but by potential impact on your business. A data breach that impacts all your customers should not sit in the same risk category as a data breach that only impacts a handful, for example. I prefer a workshop approach to this — you will be more creative in a group, and it gives you permission to imagine worst-case scenarios.

There will always be something you haven't planned for — an out-of-the-blue corporate scandal, or legislation you didn't see coming, for example — and you shouldn't expect your plan to cover every eventuality. But if you think in terms of what the impact could be on the company, and grade those threats (a simple numbered or traffic light system works just fine), you can agree the type of action you'd need to take for each threat level.



You might even be able to spot crises you could avoid altogether by taking decisive business action, for example, reviewing your supply chain, or doing an environmental audit of your business.

Create a basic plan for each level of threat, including escalation processes, decision-making processes (more on making good decisions, later), approval processes, guidelines on communications structure and styles, who to contact and when, background materials, checklists and detailed action plans for the first 24 hours of the crisis.

Testing your plans

Then take a lesson from the military. Run crisis exercises to build resilience into your teams, and train them in how to communicate if the worst was to happen. Simulation exercises will test your team's ability to cope in a crisis, spot weak points in the company's resilience, find gaps in processes, and lock in learning.

When I run crisis exercises for organisations, I see how quickly cracks appear within even the best teams. Pressure does funny things to people — it activates our fight, flight or freeze mode — which impacts their ability to cope. A good leader will recognise the need to rehearse, to override a team's natural instincts and build resilience and confidence in their ability to manage a situation under pressure.

The role of a director in a crisis: setting the strategic intent

The job of a director in a crisis is to make difficult decisions (often without all the facts); to bring clarity to chaos; to set the course for recovery; and to set the standards and an example to the rest of the organisation.

But before all of that, the leader should define what Jonathan Hemus, a crisis expert and founder of crisis management consultancy, Insignia, calls the 'strategic intent' of the crisis. This is the outcome you want to achieve through the actions you take in response to the crisis. The strategic intent focuses you on the long-term, rather than taking the easiest (but potentially damaging) course of action in the short term.

Probably the most famous example of a leader setting their organisation's strategic intent during a crisis is that of James Burke, chairman of Johnson & Johnson in 1982. That year, one of its brands, Tylenol, was the victim of a deliberate contamination plot.

Seven people in the Chicago area had died after taking Tylenol capsules, which had been laced with potassium cyanide. Burke ordered a nationwide product recall — something many people believed couldn't be done — removing Tylenol from every hospital, store and pharmacy in the United States. It

was unprecedented in its scale. He stopped production and advertising of Tylenol capsules and alerted consumers to the risk. He had decided immediately that the company should put safety ahead of profit. It was a decision that cost millions of dollars in the short-term, but in the long-term won back the trust of consumers, and saved the brand's reputation.

Not only was the company open and transparent about what was happening, but it took decisive action to ensure the tampering couldn't be repeated, designing and producing new, tamper-proof containers — which prompted other drug manufacturers to follow suit. It even put up a reward to find the person or people behind the contamination (although no-one was ever prosecuted for the murders).

Its action saved the company. Tylenol recovered its market share and survived the crisis. It is still available in pharmacies and stores across the US today.

Burke's intent was clear: no-one would ever die from taking Tylenol again. Setting that intent isn't easy. It can be costly in the short-term. But long-term thinking can save your organisation from catastrophe. It will certainly test your values.

Most leaders will get straight into the 'doing' at the start of a crisis. They may focus on what the media will want, how to get through a tough interview on the Today programme, what a Select Committee will grill them on. Those concerns can distract them from the early, important decisions.

Making tough decisions in a crisis

Decisive action, like that taken by James Burke for Tylenol, can make or break a company in a crisis. I've seen many leaders put off making a decision because they don't have all the facts they need. But in a crisis, you're unlikely to have all the information you need (by the time you do, the crisis has probably been resolved one way or the other). I think of it like a jigsaw: you hope to have enough of the big picture to be able to make critical decisions, but there will always be pieces missing.

One of the most common mistakes I see is leaders prevaricating or postponing a decision until they have more information. Sometimes



There can be a tendency among leaders to confine decision making to the board, but that can miss important input from people who could be closest to those affected by the crisis.

they leave it too late, and the crisis has run away from them. When I was writing my book on crisis communications, I interviewed Mark Fritz, an author, coach and speaker on leadership, to find out how leaders should approach making decisions in a crisis. He says the key is to develop options as quickly as possible. And if you only have one option, you're forced into thinking it's a good one.

To get those options as quickly as possible means getting the right people in the room and asking them the right questions. There can be a tendency among leaders to confine decision making to the board, but that can miss important input from people who could be closest to those affected by the crisis. That could mean getting customer service people into the decision-making process, for example, to bring the perspective of customers; or supply chain managers who know the relationships you have with suppliers.

It should also mean bringing in a third party, a strategic and trusted PR consultant who specialises in crisis management and crisis communications, who will bring an objective perspective to the issue, and who will have the benefit of having advised companies in crisis before.

You want someone who will challenge you, advise you on key decisions, and tell you hard truths. I've had to have some tough conversations with leaders on issues that their own team would have found difficult to address with them, including (more than once) that they have the wrong team in place to manage the crisis, or that they're about to make a decision that will damage the reputation of their company.

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The Role of Public Relations in Strategic Planning and Crisis Preparedness

An outsider, who ultimately doesn't rely on you for their salary, will find it much easier to give you the hard-to-hear but critically important advice. They're on your side, but they don't have a vested interest in telling you you're right. They'll help you make decisions to safeguard the reputation of your company, and they are as critical as a good reputation lawyer.

A good consultant will help you make those decisions. They can help you develop 'decision trees' (if X happens within Y timeframe, then the decision is to do Z). They can keep bringing you back to that strategic intent, ensuring everything you do is in line with your values and your objectives.

During times of uncertainty, whether it's of your own making or the wider economic or political landscape, that clear vision of what you want to achieve is what will see you successfully through the crisis.

Five steps to take now:

- 1. Work with a strategic PR consultant to assess your risk and audit your crisis plans.**
- 2. Appoint your crisis team, including representatives from across the business, and including a crisis leader and co-ordinator.**
- 3. Hold a workshop to plan your worst-case scenarios, and categorise them by their potential impact on the business.**
- 4. Create a plan for each level of threat.**
- 5. Test your organisation's resilience with a simulation exercise that will lock in learning and find gaps in process.**

Kate Hartley is a crisis communications consultant and trainer, and the author of 'Communicate in a Crisis', a book that explores the changing way people behave in crisis situations. She is the co-founder of Polpeo, a crisis simulation company that helps some of the biggest brands in the world prepare for a crisis, and a visiting lecturer for various universities. She is a member of the CIPR and a Fellow of the PRCA, and was named in PProvoke Media's Innovator 25 EMEA list in 2021.

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The role of public relations in internal communications

Building resilient organisations through effective internal communication

By Ann-Marie Blake

There is no doubt there are challenging times ahead. Just as many businesses are starting to emerge from the pandemic, high energy prices, inflation at its highest level in 40 years and ongoing global uncertainty are leading us into recession.

To survive the challenging economic road ahead and emerge stronger, businesses should prioritise internal communication to build trust and engagement with an anxious employee base worried about the spiralling cost of living and job security.

Internal communications, when done well, has a positive impact on financial performance. Research by Willis Towers Watson shows that companies with above average engagement achieve profit margins five points higher than their sectors' typical results.

What I've found in my 25+ years working in communications is that when times are tough internal communications budgets are amongst the first casualties when it comes to cutting budget. This may be partly because as a leader you don't see the ROI and, to be fair, historically internal communications leaders haven't been great at demonstrating their value.

Invest in rather than cut the comms budget

People are the most valuable asset your organisation has so now is not the time to drastically cut the comms budget. Employees have a critical role to play, especially in tough times. It's the skills, knowledge and expertise of your people that will drive performance and profitability. Your people are the ones providing goods and services to customers, developing new products and meeting business objectives.

Engaged employees are more likely to be productive and less likely to leave if they feel valued and understand their role in the organisation's success. Recruiting and retraining cost the company in revenue and time to hire. Additionally new employees will initially have a lower productivity period.

So how do you work with internal communications to engage your workforce and build resilience?

The first thing is to ensure your employees understand your business strategy and financial performance, and how they contribute to success. Use storytelling to illustrate the link between the work people do every day and your strategic objectives.

Employees want to hear that you have a clear action plan, where the business is going and how they can contribute. Your communications partner will support you with developing clear and honest messaging.



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Secondly, employees are looking to you to guide them through these difficult times and silence leads to rumour filling the communications gap. Work with your comms team on clear content that keeps employees updated on the current state of the business. If you remain quiet then the business soon becomes distracted by rumour and speculation.

Improve performance through listening carefully

The next step is organisational listening. This is a process that involves understanding any concerns your team has and getting their ideas on working more effectively. Done well, it can help prevent employee turnover, build trust and improve organisational communication.

Organisations that invest time in using data from listening to employees in business decisions benefit from increased operational performance. Work with your internal communications team to implement a strategy that gathers regular and frequent feedback from your employees.

The following stage is to communicate early, openly and transparently.

One in four employees says that financial worries coupled with the worry of potential redundancies are impacting their ability to do their job.

Whatever decisions you'll be making in your business over the coming months these should be explained to employees in a way that engages them and motivates them to contribute.

While redundancies may sometimes be inevitable you need to proceed with consideration for both the leaving and remaining employees. Engage your communications team early so

they can help you plan clear and honest communication so that is respectful to both leaving and remaining employees.

Finally, always use a professional who is skilled in internal communication.

In tough times it's more important than ever your communications team are at the heart of the business, getting information and decisions early and being part of the leadership team so that communications are prioritised as much as any other business process.

Internal communications also have a vital role in upskilling managers and leaders to deliver your organisational messages consistently and clearly.

Five steps to take now:

- 1. Communicate strategy and financial performance in a way that everyone can understand.**
- 2. Communicate regularly and often.**
- 3. Implement a listening strategy.**
- 4. Engage your communications team early if you need to communicate redundancies.**
- 5. Place a professional communicator at the heart of your business.**

Ann-Marie Blake is a business communication strategist, trainer, and mentor with over 25 years' experience leading communications and advising leaders in complex multi-nationals. She holds Chartered PR status and sits on the International Executive Board of International Association of Business Communicators.

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The role of public relations in public affairs and lobbying

Factoring political and regulatory risk into strategic decision-making

By Iain Anderson

Politics is just too interesting these days. Far too interesting. Like markets and digital — it has become a rather crazy merry go round which is easy to dismiss. To ignore.

In the early days of my business, one FTSE 100 CEO client told me: ‘If you ever put me in front of a Select Committee, you are sacked’. I smiled.

Within a year the same CEO was in front of the Treasury Select Committee answering questions about his strategy and — of course — his pay. I wasn’t sacked and after that experience the same CEO hugged my counsel tighter than ever before.

It had been easy for many boards to conclude ‘we can’t dabble in politics’ and to have an ostrich-like reaction to policymakers. To want to hide away. To not engage. But the last 15 years has seen a sea change in attitudes. Many businesses — especially highly regulated ones — need to be able to evidence they are factoring in political and regulatory risk into their strategic decisions.

Beyond that, the growth in ESG investing and the kinds of questions that customers and investors are now asking of business, mean that the idea ‘we don’t comment on politics’ is no longer a good enough answer.

In this period of continued immense political and economic uncertainty — which is not going to change anytime soon — how should Boards go about navigating all this?

Start with ‘always on’

Firstly organisations need to ensure they have an ‘always on’ political and regulatory radar.

No surprises is the watchword of most CEOs I know. So how can you possibly understand and decode public policy dynamics unless you have a good intelligence feed that’s always adapting to circumstances. Think of this as your politics CRM.

Relationships are important in any business so why ignore your political stakeholders?

Too often organisations ‘pop up’ only when they want something from politicians. This is a particular modus operandi problem among some institutional investors who only want to move the dial on their investment by getting a political win.

Like any relationship, if you are totally transactional — dare I say it sociopathic in your approach — the political classes can see this a mile off. Responsible business spends time getting to know all shades of responsible political opinion.

Don’t leave it until the last moment to get to know the next government. The herd mentality pervades many organisations’ approach towards political engagement. When parties are in power many businesses flock to the annual party conference and leave the opposition out in the cold. Only when a tipping point



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is reached in the opinion polls which heavily favours the opposition party do businesses engage. By then it is too late.

Don't be part of the herd — engage all the time and don't be shy to give a well organised opposition party some great ideas.

Factor in risk

Make sure you can evidence you are factoring in political risk all the time. You should have your company secretary or governance team and your communications team working hand in glove on this all the time.

In smaller organisations make sure you are looking to future proof your strategy against political change. That can be hard to do.

But on — eg fiscal policy — a sudden change in the Budget can up end your investment plans. Keep close to the emerging political thinking.

Finally, work out what you think before you are asked. These days policymakers — media, customers, investors — are constantly bombarding you with the 'what do you think' question. It's too late to work it out when you are being asked the question.

This requires some time and strategic planning to work through the top political and regulatory risk questions which might affect your business. Use a well qualified public relations practitioner with the relevant expertise to do this work. Recruit some non-executive directors who might be able to help you navigate all this too.

Politics eh! It could make or break your business.

Five steps to take now:

- 1. Have an always ON political radar.**
- 2. Don't do 'pop up' political engagement.**
- 3. Don't leave it to the last moment to meet the next government.**
- 4. Future proof your strategy against politics.**
- 5. Work out what you think before you are asked.**

Iain Anderson is co-founder and executive chairman at H/Advisors Cicero and focuses on public policy and corporate communications strategy supporting many global FTSE and Fortune 500 blue chip organisations. He is a non-executive director of Innovate Finance, the member body for the global fintech sector, and for the Court of the University of St Andrews. Iain is one of the Financial Times Global 100 LGBTQ Executives and is immensely proud to be a Stonewall Chair.

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The role of public relations in horizon scanning (market intelligence and data gathering)

Taking a data and insight led approach to communication

By Farzana Baduel

Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher, is quoted as saying “change is the only constant in life”. Now more than ever does this ring true.

We live in interesting times as organisations have to pivot whilst navigating economic and political turbulence.

Change in itself is not new, but what is relatively recent is the speed of change. The pace of change is driven by how globally interconnected we are through supply chains and the speed of mass communication.

Communication technology has resulted in a plethora of channels including social media platforms, message boards, podcasts and blogs to name a few. Simultaneously, the barriers to mass communication have come tumbling down resulting in everyone with a smartphone and access to the internet becoming a publisher in their own right.

With billions of people online, stakeholders now have a voice. Reputations built over years can be decimated in minutes if left unchecked.

Introduce a data-led approach

How prepared is your business to deal with this? If you're not, engage a PR professional to help you monitor for tone, trends, issues and sentiment, among other metrics. They can scan social media and other channels to ensure you are taking a data and insight led approach to communication, are not tone deaf or likely to fall foul of cancel culture or the other nuances in comms navigating generational and cultural divides on hot button issues.

Another reason to engage with PR practitioners is to protect the company from misinformation and disinformation, which is increasingly becoming an effective tool used by detractors.

As the saying goes, a lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes. Listening tools enable PR practitioners to track variances in sentiment which can signal potential crises and enable time to prepare and mitigate the impact.

Humans evolved to scan environments for threats and opportunities. A failure in this key skill could have had fatal consequences for our ancestors. In today's corporate world, horizon scanning is a critical component for strategic future thinking directors.

Directors need to know what is happening in their company, competitor landscape, communities, supply chain, customer base and countries they operate in, as well as have the ability to read wider geo-political and economic winds. Following the news is not enough. Working with PR professionals strategically to devise a horizon scanning strategy is the first step to systematically adopt horizon scanning as a competitive edge to mitigate risk and harness opportunities.

An external view can yield dividends

An advantage of working with PR professionals is that they bring an external perspective that is often difficult to muster when you work in the organisation.

Your organisational reality may be disconnected from the external perceptions and this gap



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is one area that PRs can identify through the analysis of social media, media coverage, message boards as well as stakeholder interviews. Stakeholders often speak more freely to an external partner, especially a PR honed with strong empathy-led interview techniques.

The common misconception about working with PR professionals is that they are a conduit to one way communication between your organisation and its stakeholders. The untapped value is two way communication where they are able to feed back to the organisation the perceptions, sentiment and issues arising from your stakeholder base – which may not otherwise become apparent to you until it's too late. Seeking out information proactively serves to reduce risks and leverage opportunities before the competition does.

Emergent technologies often result in the dramatic disruption across industries resulting in the sharp decline of organisations. PR professionals work closely with journalists who are often at the forefront of news of nascent technologies. Identifying such technologies early on can secure opportunities in the form of acquisition or the chance to cultivate similar technologies in-house, rather than being blind sided and knocked off your market position by a start up.

Where would you rather be? Use your public relations team as effectively as you can, as soon as you can.

Five steps to take now:

- 1. Employ a public relations professional to embed horizon scanning into organisational processes. Enable them to bring in a regular reporting system, customised dashboard and a quarterly deep dive on the findings and action points with key colleagues in attendance.**
- 2. Keep an eye on the competition. Subscribe to a digital listening tool with alerts on competitor organisations – preferably one with a dashboard allowing benchmarking with each other and your organisation to identify potential lags.**
- 3. Work with internal comms to devise pulse checks and opportunities for deeper conversations as key information regarding opportunities and threats often lies in the minds of internal stakeholders.**
- 4. Allow your public relations team to assemble a horizon scanning taskforce from across the organisation, ensuring the presence of all levels of seniority and functions to avoid groupthink and bring in diverse perspectives around opportunities and threats.**
- 5. Change your mindset. It is natural to shy away from potential problems, but left unchecked they get bigger, seek out the unpleasant news and embrace the experience as an opportunity to fix rather than a threat.**

Farzana Baduel is the CEO of Curzon PR, which she co-founded in 2009, having previously run an accountancy firm and serving as Vice-Chair of Business Relations for the UK Conservative Party. She is a PR expert working across government, corporate, consumer and cultural issues. An experienced mentor and tutor, she is resident public relations expert and ambassador for the Oxford Foundry, the University of Oxford's entrepreneurship centre and a trustee of the British Asian Trust.

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The role of public relations in measurement and board reporting

Securing media intelligence to aid with business planning and the measurement of outcomes

By Steph Bridgeman

Members of the International Association for the Measurement and Evaluation of Communication (AMEC) include media monitoring companies, evaluation specialists, social listening providers, PR and marketing agencies and in-house communications departments.

Together, these organisations support SMEs, multinationals, government agencies, NGOs, CEOs and boards to make more informed communications and business decisions.

Media intelligence, measurement and evaluation have a part to play in this decision-making process.

Strategies include:

- 1. Looking beyond the organisation to anticipate risk**
- 2. Using stakeholder insight to inform organisational decisions or business development**
- 3. Articulating performance against objectives, demonstrating organisational outcomes**
- 4. Integrating internal and external data signals for a holistic view**
- 5. Comms teams using the language of the boardroom**

With turbulent times ahead economically, politically, and socially, your organisation's PR function may hold the keys to the data and skill sets which could help inform and guide your organisation through choppy waters.

Looking beyond the organisation to anticipate risk

An organisation which does not monitor media mentions is ignoring reputational risk. This can include earned media (newspapers, magazines, blogs, podcasts etc) and social media chatter (what your staff, suppliers, customers or adversaries might be saying about you).

How people search for your organisation, product or cause online can also be an important indicator of awareness, interest and even sentiment. Search behaviour and social chatter can often be an early warning sign of a crisis.

It is important to look beyond your sphere of influence when anticipating and managing risk. What do you know of your competitors' activities? What legislation is looming which might impact future business performance? How are employee reviews impacting recruitment? Are consumers using slang or derogatory words about your products or services? Why does a particular reporter always take a negative stance when all our other media relationships are so fruitful?

Media monitoring and horizon scanning can help inform the organisation about:

- Mergers and acquisitions
- New product launches which may impact market share
- Key influencers involved in legislative or regulatory change
- Stakeholder attitudes and awareness – what they see (news and social content) and think (how they search or what they post on social networks)

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Using stakeholder insight to inform organisational decisions or business development

Stakeholder insight has traditionally involved qualitative market research which can be both costly and slow. Media intelligence can provide business insight in a more cost effective and timely way and is increasingly being used to inform business decision making.

Mass media has changed. Journalists and publishers are no longer the gatekeepers to information dissemination. Brands can communicate with their audiences directly.

On social media, some journalists have a stronger reach than the publications they write for. Individual activism can reputationally affect organisations.

Media intelligence can offer insights on a range of stakeholders which can impact performance, productivity, and profitability.

These data are now available cost effectively and can provide unprompted audience insight at scale, sometimes in ‘real time’.

Social media analysis for example can:

- Explore consumer sentiment
- Reveal when localised content output may be needed to match language or cultural sensitivities in international markets
- Identify emerging threats as they unfold – breaking news stories, issue contagion, ability to control the message

Organisations of all shapes and sizes use media intelligence to inform product development, launch into new markets or sectors, adjust communications strategies and manage crises.

Channel	Reveals stakeholder attitudes of:
Print, online, broadcast news	Journalists, media owners, consumers
Financial analyst reports	Investor community
Social media, blogs, forums	Consumers, investors, media, activist groups
Online search	Consumers, local communities, specialised audiences

Articulating performance against objectives and demonstrating organisational outcomes

AMEC’s integrated evaluation framework encourages comms practitioners to pause, reflect, to ask themselves these questions:

What is the purpose of the organisation?	Organisational objective
What specific communications objective are we trying to achieve?	Communications objective
What information do we have about the topic / issue / objective before we start? Who are we aiming to reach?	Inputs – market share data, customer or staff satisfaction, media share of voice, internet search activity Target audience for the comms activity
What should we do to achieve these objectives?	Activities – press releases, paid advertising, social media posts, events, trade shows, political lobbying
What do people see, think and do as a result of our communications?	See – outputs articles, webinars, blog posts, leaflets, video content Think – outtakes what message was conveyed, sentiment, net promoter score, what search terms did they use? Do – outcomes what happened next? Did the target audience click through to a website? Did they search? Did they like, comment, or share social content? Did they advocate for a product or service once they became a customer? Did they register for our event?
What impact did this activity have? Were business and communications objectives met?	Impact – could be sales, share price, market share, behaviour (e.g., recycling, blood donations, activity levels), policy change



This ability to blend multiple inputs into a simple narrative is important for board decision making.



Integrating internal and external data signals for a holistic view

PR professionals are adept at synthesising complex processes and jargon and translating this into clear and simple information.

This ability to blend multiple inputs into a simple narrative is important for board decision making. Media sentiment can impact share price and vice versa; weather patterns can affect sales of ice cream and alcoholic drinks (regardless of how impressive the TV ad campaign was); user reviews can guide travel destination decisions; social media chatter can impact TV ratings or box office takings.

A broad range of internal and external data are often already available across the business. Make sure these are shared with the PR team. The information may sit with different departments, such as investor relations, sales, or operations — but remember it will provide more value to your business in the hands of a professional who can make it meaningful for you.

Five steps to take now:

- 1. Make horizon scanning a core part of business operations**
- 2. Ask your PR team to put media monitoring in place and report on this regularly**
- 3. Ensure your communication objectives are clearly defined against your business objectives**
- 4. Integrate internal and external data for a more holistic viewpoint**
- 5. Ensure data from across the organisation is shared with your public relations department to inform their work and your decision making**

Steph Bridgeman is a PR measurement specialist with nearly 25 years' experience advising government departments, major corporations, NGOs and SMEs in relation to reputation. An IoD brand ambassador and board member at the International Association for the Measurement and Evaluation of Communication (AMEC), Steph leads its academics and educators group, helped co-create AMEC's Foundation Course in Measurement and Evaluation and its newest resource, a self-guided online tutorial for the Integrated Evaluation Framework.

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Procuring public relations

This guide demonstrates the breadth of services and skills public relations can bring to your business. Whether you are looking to hire PR staff or the services of a freelancer or agency, you will want to be confident that you find the right person for your requirements.

For advice and guidance on recruiting public relations staff, the CIPR has produced this guide - '[Recruiting for public relations roles](#)'.

If you have never procured PR services before, the following advice will help you consider defining what you need and how to find the right people to work with.

Before you begin

Have a clear, written statement of what objectives you are trying to achieve. Think in terms of what you want to achieve for your organisation, rather than what activities you want a PR consultant or agency to undertake for you. You will generally get the best value from PR by involving a trained professional at an early stage in planning and development.

Establish your budget and whether this is for professional fees only (with campaign costs additional) or whether it includes both fees and costs. Some clients agree a monthly retainer with their agency for ongoing work at an agreed average number of hours; work above this threshold is billed at an agreed rate. Other clients set a fixed fee for a project or campaign, and the agency delivers an agreed plan of work for that fee.

Fees vary across the sector. The best agency or freelance practitioner for you will depend on the nature and scope of the work you need done, the target publics, and the tactics involved.

Finding the right people to work with

If you are a business looking to recruit a PR role or the services of a freelance public relations practitioner, ask for CIPR membership. Membership demonstrates a commitment to the highest standards of both work and ethics and ensures accountability to the CIPR's Code of Conduct.

The CIPR manages the [Public Relations Register](#) — a publicly searchable list of all current members.

If you are a business looking to work with a public relations agency, the CIPR provides a list of [Corporate Affiliate agency members](#) who are committed to the highest standards of professional development and are equipped to offer tailored and expert PR support.

For further information and advice, download the CIPR's guide - '[A Guide to Selecting PR Agencies and Independent Practitioners](#)'.

The Institute of Directors is a non-party political organisation, founded in 1903, with approximately 20,000 members. Membership includes directors from right across the business spectrum, from media to manufacturing, professional services to the public and voluntary sectors. Members include CEOs of large corporations as well as entrepreneurial directors of start-up companies. The IoD was granted a Royal Charter in 1906, instructing it to “represent the interests of members and of the business community to government and in the public arena, and to encourage and foster a climate favourable to entrepreneurial activity and wealth creation.” The Charter also tasks the Institute with promoting “for the public benefit high levels of skill, knowledge, professional competence and integrity on the part of directors”, which the IoD seeks to achieve through its training courses and publications on corporate governance.

The IoD is an accredited [Good Business Charter](#) organisation.

iod.com



The logo for the Institute of Directors, consisting of the letters 'I', 'D', and 'O' in a stylized, serif font.

About the CIPR

Founded in 1948, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) is the world's only Royal Chartered professional body for public relations practitioners with over 10,000 members.

The CIPR advances professionalism in public relations by making its members accountable to their employers and the public through a code of conduct and searchable public register, setting standards through training, qualifications, awards and the production of best practice and skills guidance, facilitating Continuing Professional Development (CPD), and awarding Chartered Public Relations Practitioner status (Chart.PR).

