Improving Nonprofit Accountability through the Incorporation of Public Relations in Nonprofit Administration

by

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ABSTRACT

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Communication, especially in the form of public relations, is a useful tool for nonprofit administrators to ensure their organization's accountability, and ultimately its viability. Even so, this topic has been neglected in the scholarship and the teaching of nonprofit administration.

This thesis demonstrates the importance of understanding and using public relations as a tool for ensuring accountability in nonprofit organizations. It also shows the public relations tool as a framework to take in information from stakeholders and integrate this information into the organization's strategic planning. Regardless of the type of nonprofit organization – for example, a social service, environmental, membership-based, policy advocacy, religious institution, or others -- knowing the best way to interact with one's stakeholders is crucial in assisting the organization to remain viable.

The foundation of this thesis is based on a review of literature in both the communication and public administration fields. Four case studies are then utilized to illustrate each of James Grunig's four models of public relations. These studies demonstrate the usefulness effective public relations can bring to an organization, as well the problems that poor usage of these models can cause.

Based on the analysis of the case studies, and a review of pertinent literature in both the communication and public administration fields, it is concluded that a public administrator's use of public relations as a tool for ensuring accountability of their nonprofit organization will bring about a mutually beneficial relationship. As well, it demonstrates how different models of public relations can be tailored to the specific needs of individual nonprofit organizations. To better prepare current and future nonprofit administrators, this type of research and analysis should be systematically incorporated into the scholarship and teaching on non-profit organizations.

AUTHOR BIOSKETCH

Georgette Dumont is completing the MPA program at Bridgewater State College. In the Fall of 2005, she will be pursuing a PhD in Political Science at Northern Illinois University. She has co-authored an article concerning the competition between online self-help communities in American Review of Public Administration.

Georgette is currently the coordinator of Taunton High School's Senior Internship Program. Her professional experience prior to public education has been in the nonprofit sector at the United Way of Rhode Island and Taunton Area School to Career.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my parents, Joe and Doreen, for all they have done and for rooting me on for the last 31 years. They have gone through a lot with me, and I admire their strength and appreciate their patience. I would also like to express thanks to my brother for all his advice, Curious George literature, and second-hand furniture. I especially want to thank Kevin, my roommate and best friend, for proof reading my papers for the last three years on subjects he was not interested in, pouring me wine when I was stressed, listening to me babble while playing catch to clear my head, and attempting to clean the house when I felt overwhelmed.

In addition, I send my gratitude and best wished to all the other students in the MPA program who have taken classes with me and have gone out after class to discuss our futures, dreams, life as it is, and what it has the potential to be. I especially would like to thank Kara, who made the journey through thesis land less lonely, and much more humorous.

Finally, I want to send my appreciation to my committee, both the formal members – Drs. Haynes, Mozaffar, and Lamonica – and the informal members – Drs. Candler and Garnett – for their insight, comments, and ideas on how to get this paper to where it is. It would not be the piece it is with out you.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis demonstrates the importance of understanding and using public relations as a tool for ensuring accountability in nonprofit organizations. It also shows the public relations tool used as a framework to take in information from stakeholders and integrate this information into the organization's strategic planning. Regardless of the type of nonprofit organization – for example, a social service, environmental, membership-based, policy advocacy, religious institution, or others – knowing the best way to communicate with one's stakeholders is crucial in assisting the organization to remain viable.

The view Americans have of the private and nonprofit sectors has been changing (Hall & Reed 1998, Salamon 1997, 41). A significant number of people in the contemporary political climate see government as inefficient and untrustworthy, and accountable to no one. Likewise, Salamon's (1995) "myth of pure virtue" – the implicit assumption that nonprofit organizations *are* efficient, trustworthy and accountable – for nonprofits has recently been punctured, and these organizations have faced increased criticism. Whatever the truth of these beliefs, public and nonprofit organizations can battle this negative view through organizational transparency and improved interaction and communication with their stakeholders.

For roughly the past forty years, government has devolved services it once provided to nonprofit and private organizations. This has contributed to the growth of the third sector. In the 1960s, there were approximately 300,000 nonprofit organizations in the US

(Hall 1994); at the turn of the twenty-first century, the number doubled to over 600,000 and continues to grow (Hall 2000). Devolution, coupled with financial constraints, has greatly increased competition among the organizations in the sector (Gronbjerg and Salamon 2002; Young and Salamon 2002). The increased competition has also lead to an increased need for organizations to be accountable to their stakeholders for survival.
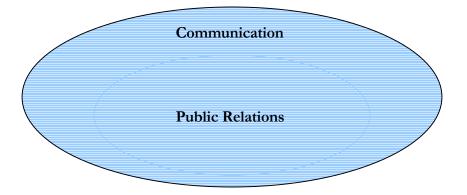
The importance of nonprofit accountability is intrinsic to the sector. Nonprofit organizations are able to solicit funds from the public to provide services for the public's greater good, and it is assumed these services are being provided as effectively as possible (Herman 1994, 197). Inherent in the structure and decision making of nonprofit service provision is accountability. Nonprofit organizations need to look at to whom they are accountable (Brown and Moore 2001), and for what they are being held accountable (Cutt 1982; Kearns 1996). The concept of accountability presents significant challenges to many of these organizations. These challenges range from knowing who all the organization's stakeholders are and knowing how to inform these stakeholders about the organization's programs, services, and finances, to taking in information from these stakeholders to allow the organization to grow and develop.

Given that the scope of accountability can be challenging for a nonprofit organization, *effectively* communicating to its stakeholders what the organization has done with its resources, and its future plans, can prove to be cumbersome. The awkwardness and difficulty of having to communicate different messages to different stakeholders can be assuaged by framing this communication. One tool to accomplish this is public relations.

First, a number of clarifications and definitions are in order. A clear understanding of the differences between public relations and communication needs to be addressed. Although they are closely related, and many times overlap, they are different. According to Pride and Ferrell, public relations is "a broad set of communication activities used to create and maintain favorable relations between the organization and its stakeholders, such as customers, employees, stakeholders, government officials, and society in general" (2000, G-13), also known as the development of mutually beneficial relationships.

All public relations involves communication, but not all communication involves public relations (see Figure 1). Communication is practiced by all organizations and individuals to varying degrees. Generally, communication involves a sender, a message, and a receiver. For the purpose of this paper, communication is the broader sphere in which public relations exists; public relations is a sub set in the communication discipline.

Figure 1 – The Communication Sphere

Another distinction that needs to be made is between the phrases public relations, organizational communication, and administrative communication. Where organizational communication has been mainly used to describe the communication within organizations or with their internal stakeholders (Grunig 1992, 5), public relations looks at communication with an organization's internal and external stakeholders. Public relations is one of the tools that comprise administrative communication. Where public administrators need to utilize administrative communication to administer their agencies or organizations, not all communication utilized by administrators is public relations. Nonetheless, it is an important part.

Effective public relations activities are vital to all organizations, regardless of the sector they are in. One distinction between the sectors is the terminology used to denote who it is the organization is communicating with. In the private sector, the organization communicates with its publics; in the public and nonprofit sector, the organization communicates with its stakeholders. Both publics and stakeholders are "people who are somehow mutually involved or interdependent with an organization" (Cutlip, Center and Broom 2000, 2). The communication with them is public relations.

Having the ability to effectively communicate with stakeholders is one of the foremost obligations of a nonprofit administrator. Public relations is the "management of communication between an organization and its publics" (Grunig and Hunt 1984, 6). In addition, public relations describes "the overall planning, execution, and evaluation of an organization's communication with both external and internal stakeholders" (Grunig 1992, 4). As Grunig et al. (1995) note "public relations is a major force in organizational

communication" (164). By using public relations, nonprofit organizations incorporate feedback into their strategic planning when needed, enabling them to have positive communication with stakeholders.

The structure of this thesis is as follows. After a brief discussion of the design of the study, there will be a review of the appropriate literature in public administration, organizational communication and public relations, with an emphasis on Grunig's four models of public relations. This will be followed by two introductory case studies that will be used to demonstrate the importance of communication for nonprofit organizations. After four illustrative case studies displaying the different types of public relations models, the thesis will conclude with some implications for nonprofit administration, and suggestions for future research.
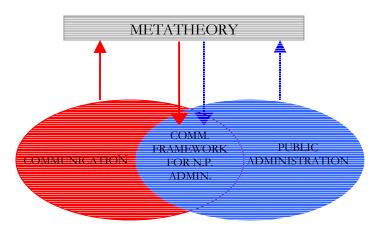
METHODOLOGY

Bernays viewed public relations as "an art applied to a science – the art of communication applied to social science" (Bates 2002, 11). This thesis uses meta-theoretical analysis to contribute to the development of a theory of communication for nonprofit organizations by applying the art of communication to the science of nonprofit administration. By merging concepts in the communication literature with the public administration and nonprofit literatures, this thesis will build a case for why public relations is important to nonprofit organizations and the important role public relations plays in ensuring and demonstrating the organization's accountability to its stakeholders.

Although other forms of social science research methods could have been used, the purpose of this thesis is to make the conceptual case for the importance of public relations for nonprofit organizations. As a result, the author has chosen to utilize meta-theoretical analysis.

Public administration scholars currently use meta-analysis to "review a large body of [studies] and integrates its findings" (O'Sullivan, Rassel and Berner 2003, 45). Similarly this technique is utilized for meta-theoretical analysis. Meta-theory is a theory devised to analyze theoretical systems (see Figure 2). According to Wiseman (1980), meta-theory can be evaluated according to four criteria, including whether "the metatheory facilitate[s] the comparison of substantive theories" (33). Here the substantive theoretical literature of public and nonprofit administration is incorporated into Grunig's four models of public

relations. Through a meta-theoretical approach, appropriate theories from the two disciplines will be brought together to better develop a conceptual framework that should assist in the application of public relations in nonprofit administration.

Figure 2 - Metatheory

Organization of this paper

      This thesis begins with an analysis of the public and nonprofit administration literatures. Materials that mentioned communication and accountability were noted. Then there was an analysis of the communication literature. The scope of the communication literature was narrowed to the public relations literature, specifically Grunig's four models of public relations. Then the research results were merged together to demonstrate the need for nonprofit organizations to utilize the public relations tool.

      Next, to illustrate the need for nonprofit organizations to better understand the public relations tool, case studies of nonprofit organizations demonstrating public relations

were researched. Since no organization uses only one model all of the time, different events pertaining to the nonprofit organizations were used.

This paper concludes by showing that public relations is important for effective nonprofit administration, and it should be incorporated into nonprofit scholarship and teaching. The effectiveness is derived from the use of public relations as a tool for nonprofit organizations to ensure their accountability to stakeholders. Understanding what public relations is, and the four public relations models, will increase the nonprofit administrator's effectiveness, thereby improving the nonprofit organization for which they work.

LITERATURE REVIEW

P u b l i c   A d m i n i s t r a t i o n

Since Woodrow Wilson inaugurated the systematic study of public administration in the United States, a great emphasis has been placed within the public sector on making "its business less unbusinesslike" (1887, 201). Leonard White agreed saying "public administration is then the execution of the public business" (1926, 3). The push to have public administrators run their departments and organizations more like a business has come to mean the desire to "maximize effectiveness, efficiency and economy" (Rosenbloom and Kravchuk 2002, 17). Many of the tools used by the private sector to increase effectiveness and its overall bottom line have not, however, been readily transferable to the public sector.

More recently, the adoption of private sector techniques has been evident in government's move to rely more heavily on nonprofit organizations to provide services government once provided. The continued devolution of services to the third sector, has created competition among nonprofit providers, thereby introducing market mechanisms into the delivery of these services (Boris 1999, 16). To continue receiving government funds, nonprofit organizations need to demonstrate their accountability through the efficiency and the effectiveness of their programs. Nonprofit contractors, therefore, need to focus on communicating their accomplishments in order to compete successfully for government business, and well as for private grants.

The current environment in which nonprofit organizations survive in calls for a greater level of accountability. In an influential series of recent pieces, Paul Light (see 1997 and 2000) has identified four "tides" of reform, two of which have strong communication and accountability implications for the nonprofit sector: the "watchful eye" and "liberation management." The Watchful Eye tide calls for organizations to make their performance and financial information visible to create more efficiency through transparency. The Liberation Management calls for more of a focus on results and for organizations to be more entrepreneurial. Both tides are closely related to the need for increased communication between an organization and its stakeholders; whether it is financial information, performance outcomes, or program results, all must be communicated effectively to stakeholders. A tool to accomplish this is public relations.

The term "public relations" has a negative connotation for many people. It is not surprising that the popular view of public relations is of an organization attempting to persuade others to its will, since persuasive speaking has been the "cornerstone of communications" since Aristotle wrote *Rhetoric* in the 4th century B.C. (Neff 1989, 161). Persuasive speaking has been defined as "symbolic; sometimes but not always indirectly coercive; seeking to change, foster, or reinforce attitudinal and behavioral responses; and relies on the twin, albeit overlapping avenues, of logic and emotional appeals to achieve its aims" (Miller 1989, 53). It has only been through the last century that the theoretical focus has shifted to attempting to build relationships with an organization's public, due to the critical role of publics for the survival of organizations. Good public relations help organizations communicate more effectively.

Recently there have been a number of works that have systematically addressed the importance of communication in public administration. For instance, there is a literature regarding "internal communication": communicating an organization's culture (Rainey 1996, 156-159), and communicating within organizations (Henry 2001, 78-84). How an organization communicates to its public, known as "external communication", is also discussed: the use of rhetoric (Maynard-Moody and Kelly 1993, 71-90), and information exchange negotiating (Garvey 1997, 236-239). In addition to internal and external communication, Berkley discusses the "craft" of communicating with both formal and informal stakeholders (1975, 217-253; see also Maynard-Moody 1993:75; Barnard 1938). As well, there has been some literature pertaining directly to how public administrators use communication (Garnett 1996, 665-681; Rainey 1996, 151-166; Stivers 1994; see also Starling 1998:377-383; Hummel 1991:31-41; Goodsell 1990: 495-512).

It can be argued that public communication is much of what public and nonprofit administrators do. Even as far back as 1887, before either the communication or public administration disciplines existed, Wilson notes the inclusion of public relations in the public sector:

Whoever would effect change in a modern constitutional government must first educate his fellow-citizens to want some change. That done, he must pursue them to want the particular change he wants. He must first make public opinion willing to listen and then to see to it that it listened to the

right things. He must stir up to search for an opinion, and then manage to

put the right opinion in its way (208).

Even so, despite the sources identified above, the argument for a better

understanding of the need for communication in public administration scholarship and

teaching has only recently been brought to the forefront, predominantly by Garnett and

Kouzmin, the editors the *Handbook of Administrative Communication* (1997). Garnett and

Kouzmin note the following:

Despite significant, even revolutionary, changes in the way individuals,

organizations, and nations communicate and despite extensive treatment of

political communication, rhetorical and speech communication, and other

branches of communication, administrative communication has lacked the

scholarly and practical attention it deserves (1997:v).

Perhaps most important, Garnett and Kouzmin present a number of chapters that address

theoretical issues involving administrative communication. Even so, the pioneering

conceptual work of Garnett has not been matched in public administration teaching.

Despite its importance to public and nonprofit administration, as indicated above,

public relations is typically overlooked in public and nonprofit administration scholarship

and teaching. Garnett and Kouzmin's (1997) handbook present the importance of

administrative communication to the discipline and the practice of public administration;

they make the case for the need to integrate communication into public administration. Nonetheless, the integration has yet to be systematically incorporated into public administration teaching and scholarship, even though themes with direct relevance to communication are central throughout the core studies of public administration (i.e. organization theory, public management, public personnel, policy evaluation, and non-profit management).

Prominent persons in both the public administration and public relations fields have noted the need for communication, yet beyond Garnett's efforts, little has been done to flesh it out in the teaching or literature. Furthermore, given contemporary calls for increased accountability from both the public and nonprofit sectors, third sector organizations need to communicate their performance to their stakeholders. As Ingstrup and Crookall observe, "for well-performing organizations, communication is the never-ending story" (1998, 122).

Communication is a part of what public and nonprofit administrators do. For instance public administrators are taught proper financial accounting techniques to both the funding sources and the public (Anthony and Young 1994). Similarly there is literature on the best techniques and theories of how an administrator can frame the organization since the "same situation can be viewed in at least four ways" (Bolman and Deal 2003, xvii), set up internal communication with her/his staff (Selznick 1949), and effectively report evaluation results (Hendricks 1994). Each of these themes has a communication component in it, but there is no systematic understanding of communication processes. As Bryson and Crosby

note, "all social practices involve communication" (1993, 328), and yet communication has been largely overlooked in public and nonprofit administration scholarship.

Although there has been scholarly work pertaining to the need for communication in public organizations, there is only a small amount of literature pertaining to communication in nonprofit administration. The need for communication in the third sector was brought to light in 1979 when Bernays, who is regarded as the father of public relations (Bates 2002), noted the need for nonprofit organizations to incorporate public relations. He wrote how "[voluntary service organizations] must function on a two-way street, interpreting publics to the organization and interpreting the organization to the public" (Bernays 1979, 23).

The weak state of communication in the nonprofit administration literature is also evident in the major journals in the field. For instance, a search of *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* from March 1999 to March 2005 produced only eight articles that contained the word "communication" in the title or abstract. One of the eight also mentioned accountability. Similarly, a search of *Voluntas* (International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations) produced zero articles, and a search in *Nonprofit Management & Leadership* from 1998 produced five articles with communication in the title or abstract. In comparison, a search of *Public Administration Review* produced seventy-three articles with communication in the title since 1966. This works out to be approximately two articles per year in *Public Administration Review*, while one per year in the two nonprofit journals combined.

In addition to journal articles, other areas where nonprofit administration is also lacking in the acknowledgement of communication is in book literature and teaching of communication. In the Jossey-Bass *Handbook of Nonprofit Leadership and Management* (Herman 1994), there are no chapters on communication. In regard to teaching, NASPAA's recommendations for nonprofit concentrations do not include communication in its four main areas, although it is part of "component topics, not necessarily courses" recommendations (NASPAA 2005). The importance of the practical use of public relations is evident in a paper presented at NASPAA's 2004 Annual Conference. The paper's topic was what former graduates of nonprofit management master's degree programs feel they could have had more training in, of which 32 percent noted they needed more skills in public relations (Fletcher 2004).

As can be seen, the literature regarding communication in nonprofit administration is even lower than the low level of literature on communication in pubic administration indicated by Garnett. Effective communication is an important tool for nonprofit organizations in acknowledging and demonstrating accountability to their stakeholders.

The question of accountability has recently become prominent in the public, private and nonprofit sectors. In the private sector, companies like Enron, WorldCom and Tyco have come under fire for their lack of corporate responsibility and governance (Economist 2001; Economist 2002; Economist 2004). In the public sector, Romzek explained accountability relationships in regard to sating the public's expectations of public sector performance (1996, 97-114). Similarly, Mulgan "analyzes the relentless ramification of accountability" (2000, 556) and views accountability as becoming too extended, reaching beyond its formal context of "authority and control" to encompass other realms, mainly internal accountability, which he argues falls under responsibility, not accountability (570; Behn 2001, Roberts 2002).

Kearns has brought the issue of nonprofit accountability to the forefront in his book *Managing for Accountability* (1996; see also Salamon 1997 & 1999, Salamon and Anheier 1997, Hall 1994, Hall and Reed 1998). It goes without saying that third sector organizations should be accountable to their stakeholders. Though the nonprofit accountability literature often focuses on finances (Keating and Frumkin 2003, Anthony and Young 1994), the literature has also identified a range of stakeholders to whom nonprofits should be accountable for a range of other issues as well (Brown and Moore 2001; Candler and Dumont 2004; Kearns 1994; Kearns 1996; Najam 1996; Ebrahim 2003; Romzek and Dubnick 1987).

Diaz notes the "two important questions that should be addressed when discussing accountability is accountability for what and to whom" (2002, 524). Cutt (1982) distinguishes between procedural and consequential accountability. Consequential accountability involves relatively simple performance accounting: "the relationship between inputs and outputs" (1982, 313). Procedural accountability is more complex though, involving perceptions of propriety in the processes that led to the performance. As a result, nonprofit organizations have to be accountable not only for the funds they receive and the services they provide (Keating and Frumkin 2003, Anthony and Young 1994), but for the conduct of their operations, the people they serve, their volunteers, and other stakeholders as well. Most important: accountability must be communicated, and that communication is achieved through public relations.

The framework for this paper is provided by Grunig's (1989; 1992) four public relation models: press agentry/publicity, public information, two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical. The models follow the development of public relations over time, and like Paul Light's *Tides of Reform* (1997), are not meant as mutually exclusive models, but rather are often linked. This development is portrayed in Figure 3. As can be seen, after a new model has been developed, the previous ones continue to be in use. Understanding these models help administrators to conceptualize, formulate and practice communication management/public relations. In other words, the models can help the administrator, as sender of a message, to effectively relay the message to the stakeholder, as receiver of the message, thus contributing to the development of accountable, mutually beneficial relationships.

Figure 3 – Time Lime of Public Relations Development

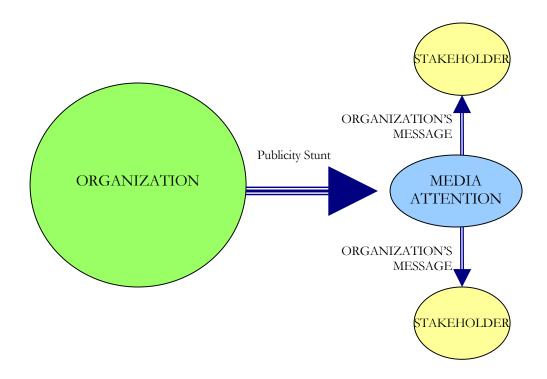| 1850	1902	1930	1950
Press Agentry/ Publicity →	Public Information →	Two-way asymmetrical →	Two-way symmetrical →

Derived from Cutlip, Center , and Broom 2000, 111

PRESS AGENTRY / PUBLICITY

Press agentry / publicity "describes propagandistic public relations that seeks media attention in almost any way possible" (Grunig 1989, 29). It is applied when the purpose of an organization's communication is to receive favorable publicity, mainly through mass media (Grunig 1992, 18). This model was best utilized by Phineas T. Barnum with the publicity stunts he used to promote "The Greatest Show on Earth" in the late 1800's. These publicity stunts were able to gain media attention and in turn, captured the public's interest and enticed them to go to the show. After companies saw the success of this model, they utilized it whenever the public's attention was needed.

The press agentry/publicity model is a one-way communication model, with the message flowing only from the organization to the public, and not vice versa. As is portrayed in Figure 4, an organization initiates a publicity stunt to gain the attention of the media to promote the organization's agenda. The media in turn, relays the message to the public. Through this process, the organization influences public opinion.

Figure 4 - Press Agentry/ Publicity Model

STAKEHOLDER

ORGANIZATION'S
MESSAGE

Publicity Stunt

ORGANIZATION
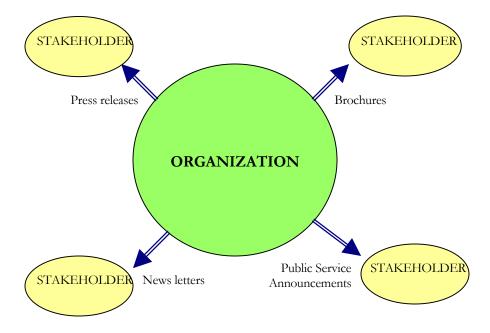
MEDIA
ATTENTION

ORGANIZATION'S
MESSAGE

STAKEHOLDER

Even though there are nonprofit organizations that utilize this model at times, such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and Greenpeace to name a few, over reliance on the model by some organizations has helped perpetuate the negative view the public has of public relations as an Orwellian, manipulative process. The media has also become aware of the manipulation inherent in the press agentry / publicity model, and have become increasingly skeptical about any event that can be perceived as promotional exploitation (Bates 2002). The greatest use of this model is for the promotion of an organization's events.

PUBLIC INFORMATION

The public information model "disseminates what is generally accurate information about the organization, but does not volunteer negative information" (Grunig 1989, 29). This information is generated by "in house journalists" who write press releases, brochures, newsletters, and other forms of often printed information about the organization. During the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, companies began to utilize this model to attract more customers from their competitors. Companies were able to accomplish this by disseminating positive information about themselves and negative information about their competitors (Bates 2002).

The public information model is often used by government organizations to disseminate information to the public in the form of pamphlets, newsletters, and public service announcements (Grunig 1989, 30). It is a one-way communication model as well, with no information from the organization's stakeholders being heard (see Figure 5). One-way communication models do not integrate research based on the needs of stakeholders into the message sent to stakeholders or in strategic planning (Grunig 1992, 18). Nonprofit
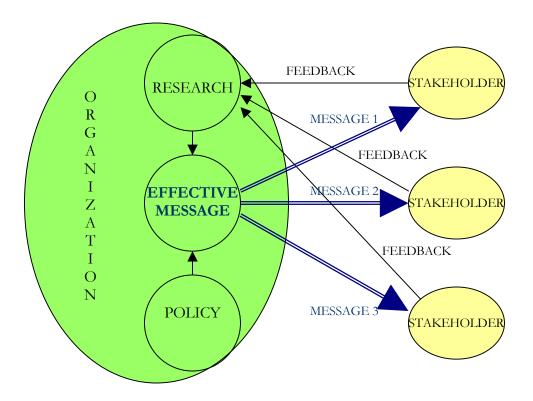
Figure 5 - Public Information Model

organizations use this model to inform stakeholders and potential stakeholders, about the organization's mission, successes, programs, and events.

TWO-WAY ASYMMETRICAL

The two-way asymmetrical model uses "research to identify the messages most likely to produce the support of publics without having to change the behavior of the organization" (ibid, 29). Unlike the previous two models, this is a two-way communication model where the information flows both into and out of the organization. However, the information is not used to format the organization's policies to better serve *the public*.

Instead, the goal of the two-way asymmetrical model is to develop the most effective message to gain public support to serve *the organization*.

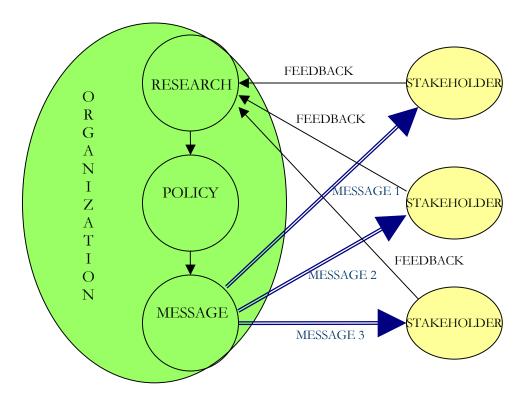**Figure 6 - Two-way Asymmetrical Model**

As can be seen in Figure 6, the feedback the organization receives from its stakeholders is brought into the organization, but it does not affect the organization's policies. Instead, it is utilized by the organization to produce the most effective message to persuade the public to agree with its policy position. This model also shows that not all two-

way communication is mutually beneficial. When used only to get the desired effect from an organization's public without regard for their needs or best interests, the two-way asymmetrical communication is seen as a form of manipulation (Grunig 1992). This model is often used when the organization believes it knows what is best for its stakeholders.

TWO-WAY SYMMETRICAL

The two-way symmetrical model is a two-way communication model as well. In this model, the information that flows into the organization is used to "bring about symbiotic changes in the ideas, attitudes, and behaviors of both the organization and its publics" through the use of bargaining, negotiation and conflict resolution (Grunig 1992, 29). This is not to say that every organization that utilizes this model has to make drastic, constant changes as a result of information gleaned through this communication. But to remain viable, the organization needs to know the needs and desires of its stakeholders to better serve them. This model creates the mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its stakeholders, inherent in Pride and Ferrell's earlier definition of public relations.

Figure 7 - Two-way Symmetrical Model

The flow of information in the two-way symmetrical model is demonstrated in Figure 7. Feedback from the organization's stakeholders is taken into the organization and used to help formulate or change its policy. The organization then sends out its messages to its stakeholders on its policy stance. The two-way symmetrical model has been found to be the most effective public relations model for an organization to use (Grunig and Grunig 1992), but as Grunig and White (1992) note it is mostly a normative theory (idealistic), and as mentioned above, is never the sole model utilized by an organization.

Public relations can be viewed from at least two different perspectives. It is either seen as something organizations do, or as a tool organizations use for planning and managing. In regards to the flow of information, one way models (press agentry/publicity and public information) represent the craft of public relations. The two way models (two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical) reflect the professionalism of public relations (Grunig, Grunig, Sriramesh, Huang and Lyra 1995). All four models are "a major force in organizational communication" (ibid, 164).

Finally, the suitability of the four models for use by an administrator in different circumstances is especially evident when the level of accountability of each is considered. As can be seen in Table 1 below, each model offers a different level of accountability. No organization uses only one; the model is chosen by the message that needs to be relayed, and who it needs to be relayed to. As can be seen, the organization concerned about maximizing accountability in a particular instance would be well advised to adopt a two-way symmetrical model; while occasions in which some privacy is in order, or in which accountability is not as critical, the press agentry/publicity, or public information model is perfectly appropriate.

Table 1 – Accountability Levels of Public Relation Models

PR Model	Level of Accountability
Press agentry / publicity	none / low
Public Information	low
Two-way asymmetrical	low / medium
Two-way symmetrical	high

Derived from Grunig (1989, 29)

As will be displayed in the vignettes that follow, nonprofit organizations are always accountable to at least one of their stakeholders, but many times at the expense of their others. As noted previously, organizations need to be accountable to a multitude of stakeholders. Even though organizations can show little accountability to their stakeholders and still be viable, with the changing tides of available funds and heightened public scrutiny, that luxury will not exist much longer.

INTRODUCTORY VIGNETTES

The importance of communication in nonprofit accountability is perhaps best illustrated through best and worst-case examples: the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, and the Catholic Church's clergy sex abuse scandal. The International Campaign to Ban Landmines case illustrates how an organization can successfully achieve its goals and mission when clear communication is used. Conversely, the Catholic Church's clergy sex abuse scandal effectively illustrates the negative consequences of not utilizing open communication.

International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL)

All across the world, unexploded landmines lay in the earth where wars once were fought. About 800 people die every month due to landmine related injuries and approximately 15,000 – 25,000 people are maimed or killed every year (Walsh and Walsh 2003). People affected not only suffer physical injuries, but psychological and social damage as well. In 1991, a coalition of six nonprofit organizations wanted to educate the world about the need to ban landmines and the devastation they bring. The International Campaign to Ban Landmines was born.

The International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) was originally a coalition of Handicap International in France, Mines Advisory Group in Britain, Human Rights Watch in New York, Medico International in Germany, Physicians for Human Rights in Boston,

and the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation (VVAF). Each of these organizations had worked on issues pertaining to land mines. Together, they formed the steering committee that was the genesis of today's ICBL. They lobbied the international community for:

1. An international ban on the use of, production, stockpiling, and sale, transfer or export of anti-personal mines;
2. Increased resources for demining and landmine awareness programs;
3. Increased resources for victim assistance and rehabilitation programs (ICBL 2005a).

Just two years after the coalition was formed, over 350 supporting organizations had joined (Hubert 2000, 8). Currently, there is a network of more then 1,400 nongovernmental organizations in 90 countries working together to ban landmines (ICBL 2005b).

As indicated, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines was a loose coalition of six nonprofit organizations that started in October 1992 to draw public attention to the pervasiveness of anti-personnel landmines, and to ban them. Though the organization admits that the global environment was ideal for starting this organization, its quick success is still remarkable (Williams 2000). With no central office or clear-cut bureaucratic design, clear communication was critical to its success.

Despite being a coalition of numerous organizations with no central office, the ICBL was able to achieve its mission largely through effective communication among the constituent members of the coalition, and especially with the broader public. It had the ability to get a clear and simple message out with a concrete plan of action. It was up to each individual coalition member to decide how it could best help the coalition's campaign

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to achieve its goal. This ability assisted the coalition politically in achieving the backing needed for the ban (Williams 2000).

The ICBL created an environment in which all coalition members were able to speak with authority on the issues and efforts pertaining to the coalition. The coalition members got their messages out though a variety of media: faxes, e-mail, telephone, and in-person. In addition, the cause gained even more credibility due to the air time it received in news reports and newsmagazine shows. As a result, no part of the coalition felt isolated. In addition, its ability to communicate clearly also made it an information center that built confidence between the coalition and governments (Williams 2000).

Even though the ICBL was working with other organizations, its coordinator, Jody Williams, wanted the process to move along at a faster pace. Instead of waiting for the UN's resolution to eventually end landmines, she forged ahead and had her own conference to bring the potential international ban of landmines to the table with no major backing. These conferences were the start of the process for getting the needed backing for the Ottawa Mine Ban Treaty.

The 1997 Ottawa Mine Ban Treaty was a culminating event for the nonprofit organization International Campaign to Ban Landmines, which is largely credited with bringing the treaty about (Kingman 2000). It requires that countries:

1. Ban the use, production, transfer and stockpiling of anti-personnel landmines;
2. Destroy existing stockpiles within four years of the convention coming into force;
3. Clear minefields within ten years unless they can justify an extension; and
4. Co-operate with a compliance regime (ICBL 2005a).

In addition to the treaty, the organization also received a Nobel Peace Prize that year.

Although the treaty was passed and over 125 countries have ratified it, there are still approximately 50 countries that have yet to do so, and mine laying has still been taking place on a "massive scale" world-wide (*The Lancet* 2002). Though the outcome in terms of the ICBL's ultimate mission of landmine reduction has yet to be fully realized, the widespread ratification of the treaty was an enormous achievement of the ICBL's intermediate goal of a land mine treaty ban. This was made possible in large part by open dialog with governments, non-governmental organizations and its stakeholders.

Catholic Church

While the ICBL can be characterized as an enormous nonprofit success story, with effective communication significantly responsible for this, the Catholic Church's handling of its clergy sex abuse problems can be seen as an enormous communications failure. When Gilbert Gauthe, a Catholic priest in Los Angeles, California pled guilty to 11 counts of molestation of boys in 1985, it proved to be the first of numerous subsequent scandals that have rocked the church, and made clergy sexual abuse a national issue. The issue arose in the Boston Archdiocese in 1992 and 1993 with the accusation of child molestation in five different states against Father James Porter. Shortly after, a torrent of stories poured forth, accusing Catholic priests of pedophilia in the 1960's and 1970's. The case with greatest notoriety, which opened the flood gates of allegations against Catholic Priests, was in 2002 when now defrocked priest John Geoghan was exposed as having preyed for decades on

young boys in a half-dozen Boston-area parishes (*Boston Globe* 2005a). The boys who were accusing the priests were now adults, and they were willing to talk.

The Catholic Church is a nonprofit organization that has been in existence at least symbolically for two-thousand years. It has international prominence and a membership base in the hundreds of millions. The mission of the Catholic Church is to spread the word of the Bible, and help people to understand the meanings of its teachings. The Church's structure is hierarchal, with few people in the position to make decisions without approval from a person in a higher authority.

The Church's reaction to the clergy sex abuse scandal has subsequently shaken the Catholic Church to its core, and bankrupted some of the affected dioceses. After the *Boston Globe* began reporting on the extent of the abuses by Geoghan, the church's cover-up of past allegations and the decisions behind them began to unfold. Soon the numerous reported allegations against priests in different parishes became common knowledge. The church issued money for settlements to keep the issue quiet and reassigned accused priests to new parishes. In almost all the cases, church officials had had reports of abuse against the priests, but did not remove them from the environment in which the alleged abuse occurred (*Boston Globe* 2005b). The news media also disclosed the treatment facilities the diocese was sending the priests to and the amount of money invested in their treatments (Barry 2002). What was obvious to the public was the amount of knowledge the bishops of these diocese had regarding the abuses, and their decision not to report the priests to the authorities or communicate with stakeholders regarding the problem.

The impact on the church from this communication failure has been profound. Donations have decreased, an environment of mistrust has developed, and with continued abuse allegations the Archdiocese of Boston alone is expected to pay out over $100 million in court cases regarding this issue. To put it in perspective, over 12,000 priests nationwide have had allegations of abuse reported against them. The case against Geoghan alone cost the church $10 million to settle with 86 victims (*Boston Globe* 2005c).

In June 2002, a 'Zero Tolerance" national policy on abuse was instituted by the Church, requiring priests to report any allegations of abuse to the appropriate authorities. In addition, all prior allegations were also to be reported to prosecutors so authorities could investigate them (*Boston Globe* 2005d). This initiative was the start of the changes in how the church is now responding to its stakeholders. Even though the crisis has not ended, and the church continues to pay out large amounts of money to victims, it has started to take a different approach on how to inform its stakeholders.

The church is no longer reluctant to be open with the public about the extent of the problem (Paulson 2005). It is still not as open as other nonprofit organizations, but has become more open since it lost millions of dollars, some dioceses have filed for bankruptcy, and some of its members have been permanently disillusioned. The US Conference of Catholic Bishops will also be releasing an annual report to keep the public informed as to the number of new complaints made and the total amount of money the Church is paying out in regard to these suits.

The Church's closed communication model contributed to the difficulty the church had in resolving the clergy abuse scandal in a timely or satisfactory way. The John Geoghan

case initiated a torrent of accusations about the organization and internal machinations of the Catholic Church in America. Their actions ran starkly counter to their mission. With respect to abuse in the Catholic Church, the organization displayed a low level of accountability. It was accountable to, or defended, its employees, but no other stakeholders. This low level of accountability displays what can happen when an organization does not communicate with all of its stakeholders and attempts to cover-up information that stakeholders are entitled to know.

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The ICBL and the Catholic Church sex abuse scandal vignettes demonstrate the need for nonprofit organizations to practice effective public relations skills. Good public relations strategies enhance the organization and its mission; poor public relation strategies cause severe problems, even bankruptcy, for even the best known organizations.

The church believed it could continue to hide the allegations and internally handle a matter in which the public was an integral part. Once the story broke and the allegations continued, the church realized its mistake and the momentous monetary and steep reputational price it would pay. An open communication structure would have provided a good hedge against bad policy. If the church had been as open as it is now at the time of the allegations, their stakeholders would have put a stop to the church's policy of having the accused priest resume duties involving children after they had undergone counseling, as they did when the information was finally made available.

In contrast, the ICBL had open lines of communication and a loose bureaucratic structure. All members of the coalition were able to back up the campaign's mission and

message with strong visual images to reinforce the message (ICBL 2005b). This organizational structure helped it in communicating with its many stakeholders to achieve its mission. In order to formulate and maintain its message, the ICBL also had to have clear communication with nongovernmental organizations, the Red Cross and the United Nations. Without their help, the ICBL would not have made the progress it did (Hubert 2000).

FOUR ILLUSTRATIVE CASE STUDIES

Nonprofit organizations utilize the different public relations models to assist them in achieving their mission. The discussion that follows is summarized in Table 2. The table presents the four models and the event in which the nonprofit organizations used a specific model. The four organizations and the models they use will be discussed by way of case studies.

Table 2 – Research Design Summary

Public Relation Models	Nonprofit Organization	Illustrative Event
Press Agentry/ Publicity	Greenpeace	Brent Spar campaign
Public Information	Red Cross	Liberty Fund monies
Two-way asymmetrical	AARP	Prescription Drug decision
Two-way symmetrical	United Way	Community Impact Agenda

As an example of the press agentry/public relations model, Greenpeace was able to effectively communicate its concerns challenging Shell Oil's plans for the dismantling of the Brent Spar oil drilling platform in the North Sea in the 1990s. However, through the combination of publicity stunts and at times the presentation of incorrect information, the organization engaged in manipulation of both the media, and of the public. As a result, while Greenpeace remained accountable to those of its members and constituents who favored a win at any cost approach to environmental issues, the organization was not accountable to the general public or other policy actors.

The Red Cross' handling of the post-September 11th Liberty Fund demonstrates the public information model. By providing the public with vague information, the Red Cross was able to raise millions of dollars. But its intentionally vague communication techniques caused the Red Cross to be called to testify before a congressional hearing and harmed the organization's reputation.

The two-way asymmetrical model is demonstrated in AARP's support for the Bush administration's proposed Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement and Modernization bill in 2003. Even though many of its members were against it, the ARRP lobbied for the bill in order to attract a younger membership base. In their attempt to attract new members, their accountability to their previous, and older, members waned.

Finally, the United Way of America's shift in its community participation and allocation of funding will demonstrate the two-way symmetrical model. This shift has allowed the United Way to remain accountable to all its stakeholders by listening to their needs and adjusting the organization accordingly.

Greenpeace is an environmental nonprofit organization that was started in 1971 to witness underground nuclear testing on the small island of Amchitka, off the Alaskan coast. Even though the activists never made it to the area where the testing was being done, they attracted a lot of media attention to their cause, and Greenpeace was born. Today, the organization is based in Amsterdam and has 2.8 million members worldwide and regional offices in 41 countries. Greenpeace brings attention to environmental issues worldwide, which is consistent with the organization's mission:

> Greenpeace is an independent, campaigning organization that uses non-violent, creative confrontation to *expose* [emphasis added] global environmental problems, and force solutions for a green and peaceful future. Greenpeace's goal is to ensure the ability of the Earth to nurture life in all its diversity (Greenpeace 2005).

Many member-based organizations try to inform and educate their members and the public about issues and events pertaining to the organization. Greenpeace is known for getting its members to participate in environmental activities that are bound to draw media attention, giving its cause a sense of legitimacy and the much desired free media time (Motavalli 1995).

The Brent Spar story began in the mid 1990s, when Greenpeace actively campaigned against the disposal of the Brent Spar. The Brent Spar was a 14,500-ton oil

loading and storage platform, located in the North Sea, that the Shell Oil Company was in the process of disposing of. In 1991, the Brent Spar was decommissioned, and the decision was made to have it towed out of the North Sea and disposed of in deep waters. Greenpeace actively campaigned against this. In doing so, it was able to attract media attention through publicity stunts (Barbone 1996). The subsequent publicity helped get Greenpeace's cause and standing on this issue media attention throughout the world.

On Sunday, April 30, 1995, Greenpeace activists manned inflatable speed boats in the North Sea to board the Brent Spar. After successfully evading harbor patrol boats and climbing the side of the platform, a white banner that read "Save the North Sea" was hoisted on the helideck of the rig. Soon journalists from countries bordering the North Sea were calling to know why Greenpeace was there and what they hoped to accomplish (Greenpeace 1995a). With the media attention and television time the organization attracted, international public awareness and concern over the disposal of the Brent Spar escalated.

The morning Greenpeace activists boarded and occupied the Brent Spar, press releases were sent out to neighboring media outlets to ensure media coverage would be achieved (Greenpeace 1995a). The events that followed for the next three months brought about more media coverage, and heightened international public concern about the environment and the disposal of the Brent Spar (Grove-White 1997).
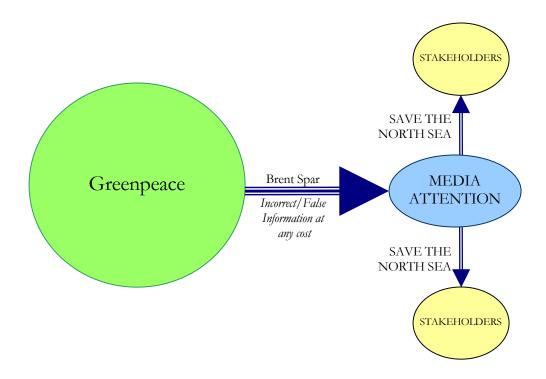
With helicopters flying over the rig for footage on the evening news and reporters going out to the rig to conduct interviews, Greenpeace was able to control the message

(Greenpeace 1995b). On June 20, 1995, Shell Oil had backed down from its plan of deep water disposal of the Brent Spar; Greenpeace had won a great victory.

Even though Greenpeace was able to accomplish its mission, it did so in a way in which it was only accountable to its members and other environmentalists. It did manage to get the Brent Spar disposed of on land, but in doing so, it also received criticism for the figures the organization used to calculate the amount of pollution that deep-water disposal would cause. Greenpeace over estimated the amount of oil on the rig, and some of the organization's critics accused it of playing "fast and loose" with other facts, as well, including the advisability of disposal at land, rather than at sea (Grove-White 1997).

The Brent Spar issue is an excellent example of the press agentry/ publicity model (see Figure 8). Greenpeace had learned about the decommissioning and the disposal plans, researched the issue (although not all facts were correct – they over estimated the amount of oil in the platform), and knew the best way to draw the much needed media attention to educate the public at large garner support for the cause (Motavalli 1995). Greenpeace used any means necessary to attract attention through the occupation of private property, and distorted the decision-making process by offering information it knew to be incorrect. The final results were a change in the Brent Spar's disposal plans and more political leverage on environmental issues.

Figure 8– Greenpeace's Press Agentry / Publicity

Although Greenpeace did accomplish its goal, its accountability level was low. It was accountable to its mission, and its members, but not the general public. Greenpeace could argue that it was being accountable to the environment, and the earth as a whole, but its misrepresentation of the facts made the media outlets who covered the campaign feel manipulated (*Nature* 1995). It is likely that future coverage of Greenpeace events will no doubt be preceded by more careful scrutiny by members of the media.

The International Red Cross was started in 1863 in Geneva through an idea that Henry Dunant had upon seeing the human devastation and needs brought about by war. Its purpose was to provide nonpartisan care for the wounded and sick in times of war. The American Red Cross of today grew out of the original Red Cross idea, but provides help in more than just times of war. This is seen in their mission:

> The American Red Cross, a humanitarian organization led by volunteers, guided by its Congressional Charter and the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross Movement, will provide relief to victims of disasters and help people prevent, prepare for, and respond to emergencies.

Today, the American Red Cross is a well known charity that assists people in need whether the need arises from natural disasters, fires, or human actions in over 67,000 disasters annually (Suarez 2001).

On September 11, 2001 the images of the towers falling and the damage to the Pentagon were all over the news. The sight of people's desperation from the loss of loved ones, and so many more still missing, prompted the public to donate money and blood in record amounts. The public wanted to help those affected by the terrorist attacks. Over 200 charities were attempting to help with no single strategy as to how best to use the
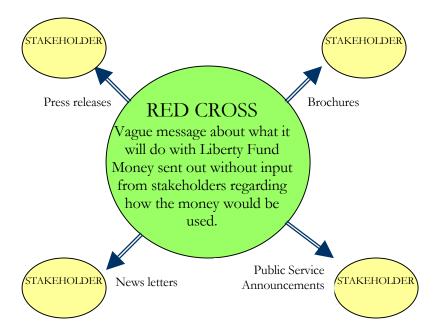
overabundance of funds; they had more money than they could spend on direct aid to the victims of the attack (Byrnes, Henry, Hindo, Zegel, and Starr 2001). The most prominent of these charitable organizations was the Red Cross and its Liberty Fund, which raised $370 million dollars in the first month after the attack (Wilhelm and William 2001). The public response through donations was overwhelming; the final amount donated to the Liberty Fund stood at $543 million (Wilhelm 2001a, Wilhelm 2001b). The question for the Red Cross was what to do with all the donations.

By the end of September 2001, a story broke that the money the Red Cross was collecting was not going only to the victims of September 11; indeed half the money would be used to build up blood supplies, improve the Red Cross's telecommunications capacity, and prepare for possible future terrorist attacks (Suarez 2001). This disclosure prompted a public outcry because many felt deceived. The donors were under the impression their donations would be used to help the victims of the terrorist attack, not used for the organization.

When the Red Cross first announced its fund, the message to the public was vague in that it asked Americans to help the Red Cross provide "life saving assistance." Each Public Service Announcement ended with "Together, we can save a life" (Sontag 2005). It was not stated explicitly that the funds were to be used not only to help those affected by the terrorist attacks, but for other causes as well; however, the timing of the campaign caused many of those donating to think that all the money would go to the victims of the terrorist attacks (see Figure 9). Upon the revelation that the funds would be used to help

current and future victims of terrorism as well as for administrative expenses, the trust the public once had in the organization was compromised.
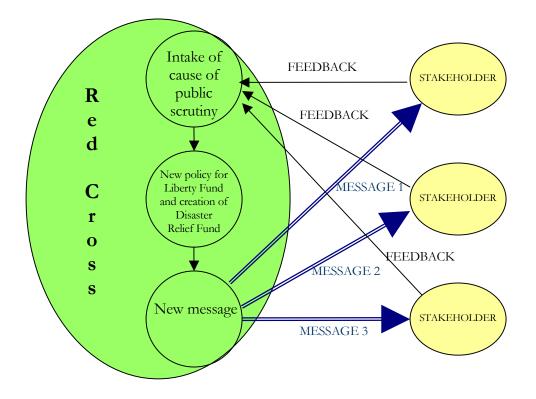
Figure 9 - Red Cross' Public Information

On October 31, 2001, the American Red Cross stopped soliciting donations for the Liberty Fund (American Red Cross 2002, Levine 2001). Even though the organization reversed its decision not to use all the money for the victims of the September 11 terrorist attacks, the organization still faced scrutiny about its fundraising practices (Wilhelm 2001c). The handling of the money in the Liberty Fund not only resulted in a public outcry, but also forced the resignation of the president and CEO of the Red Cross, Dr. Bernadine Healy,

and prompted a congressional investigation as well. These monies were what led to Congress's demand to know if the public had been misled (Levine 2001).

One technique used to assuage the concerns that prompted the scrutiny from the public and congress was to inform future donors that all the money in the Liberty Fund would go to the victims of September 11 (Wilhelm 2001b). Donors were told that any further donations collected after October 31, 2001 would go to the Disaster Relief Fund. By taking information in from its stakeholders, the Red Cross moved to a two-way symmetrical model to overcome the problems that arose from its misleading message to the public (see Figure 10).

Figure 10 - Red Cross' Corrective Model: Two-way Symmetrical

As a second component of its efforts to rebuild its reputation, the Red Cross ran advertisements across the country explaining how all the money in the Liberty Fund would be used for the victims of September 11 as well as offering any unsatisfied donors the opportunity to have their donations refunded to them (Wilhelm 2001b). In addition, it also revised its fundraising techniques. The new fund-raising practice, known as Donor DIRECT (Donor Intent Recognition, Confirmation, and Trust), puts in place a process where by donors are repeatedly asked about where they want their donations to go to ensure that donors are fully informed (Wilhelm 2001d). In taking these steps, the Red Cross opened itself up to increased public scrutiny in order to rebuild the public's trust.

The Red Cross's handling of its Liberty Fund provides an example of the public information model. Dr. Healy, President of the American Red Cross during this situation, initially believed there was no need for "her to explain herself to the public" (Sontag 2005). As in the case of Greenpeace, the organization sought to provide only information it deemed pertinent to the public, but did not divulge information that would present the organization in a bad light. The risk of this strategy is obvious: the eventual exposure of the negative information leads to criticism both for the negative practices that the organization sought to hide, and for the act of misleading, itself. But unlike Greenpeace, the Red Cross did not use publicity stunts to gain media attention or deliberately distort the facts. Instead, once the issue of how the Liberty Fund money would be used surfaced, the Red Cross sought to clarify and alter its approach.

The AARP is a member-based nonprofit organization for people over the age of 50, which provides numerous benefits and services, and helps to shape government policy in the interest of its members. The AARP is:

Dedicated to enhancing quality of life for all as we age. [It] lead[s] positive

social change and delivers value to members through information, advocacy

and service (AARP 2005).

It has a hierarchal structure, with the main office at the federal level and different offices at the state level. While the state offices largely serve member service functions, the main, federal office also carries out research into policies that effect members. Its Public Policy Institute is a mechanism that the AARP uses to gather broader information on issues of importance to its members, and to survey member attitudes and preferences themselves. In doing this, it is able to better shape its message to attract more members.

On November 21, 2003, seniors in Florida and California gathered around open fires. Disgusted at the state of the country's prescription drug policy, they were about to demonstrate to the AARP, which they thought would fight for their needs, that it was not listening to them as stakeholders. The seniors then went ahead and burned their AARP
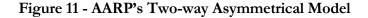
membership cards while talking about prescription drug coverage and going to Canada for their needs (Corrigan 2003).
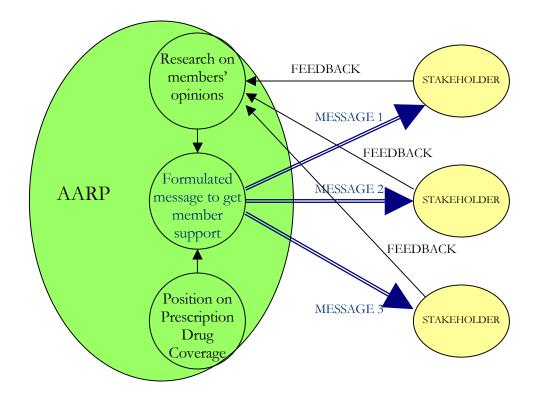
In addition to burning their AARP cards, hundreds of seniors called and e-mailed the organization to voice their concerns about its decision. Others posted angry messages on AARP's website (Noonan and Carmichael 2003). Some seniors even boarded a bus and burned their AARP cards outside AARP's Washington D.C. headquarters. After the AARP had thrown its weight behind the proposed Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement and Modernization Act of 2003, approximately 1,000 AARP members canceled their membership (Miller and Eversley 2003). Although that was not a lot for this multi-million member organization, the cancellations had great symbolic impact, and reflected broader dissatisfaction with AARP's decision. This event gave the organization a public relations black eye, causing some to conclude that AARP was out of touch with its members (Noonan and Carmichael 2003).

The controversy surrounding the AARP's support for the 2003 prescription drug bill grew in part out of a desire of the organization to appeal to the younger – 50-65 year old– portion of its constituency. In addition to an aggressive information outreach program, featuring as many as three different monthly magazines and the ubiquitous television advertisements, the organization decided to support the Bush administration's 2003 prescription drug bill (Noonan and Carmichael 2003). The new bill would make the most sweeping changes to Medicare since it was created in 1965. It included a new prescription drug benefit and a plan to give incentives to private insurance companies that serve Medicare patients (Hopper and Bernstein 2003).

The AARP threw its support behind the new Republican-led legislation which included a prescription drug benefit for recipients of Medicare at the cost of $400 billion (Florian 2003). Although the bill was promoted as a help for those seniors needing prescription drugs, critics raised a number of concerns. First, the bill would prohibit the importation of cheaper drugs from Canada, an option that had become popular among many senior individually, and was being considered by a number of state and local governments.

Other critics thought the legislation would lead to an inadequate drug benefit that must be purchased privately (Corrigan 2003, Miller and Eversley 2003). Many seniors therefore saw the proposed coverage as inadequate, and so were especially angry with AARP's decision to support the legislation (Florian 2003). The AARP did not adjust its policy stance (see Figure 11), instead, it simply attempted to inform those against the bill why they should support it.

Figure 11 - AARP's Two-way Asymmetrical Model

Some people saw the AARP as out of touch with its older members because the organization was attempting to attract new members in their fifties. By shifting its message to attract these potential new members, it lost touch with its older members. The art and challenge for the AARP is attracting new, younger members without alienating its older members. Its stance on prescription drug coverage did not achieve that. The AARP example differs from the two previous vignettes in two important respects. First, note that the AARP operates an extensive research institute, which provides policy analysis and survey research, with the latter aimed at broader surveys of the population, as well as at

surveys of membership. Rather than just putting information out, as Greenpeace did, the AARP also takes information in. Second, despite this capability, the AARP apparently neglected to ascertain member views, and so failed to take these on board when determining its position on the Bush administration's prescription drug benefit.

The AARP stands behind its earlier support of the bill.

The United Way of America started as the American Association for Community Organizations. This group initially coordinated the services and fundraising efforts of Community Chests, which were made up of different community agencies in the early twentieth century. In 1963 the Community Chest organizations changed their name to the United Way. Today, there are approximately 1,400 community based organizations whose mission is "to improve people's lives by mobilizing the caring power of communities" (United Way 2005). Each organization is independent and governed by local volunteers who serve on its board of directors. Even so, they all pay dues to the national United Way, which assists in marketing and development.
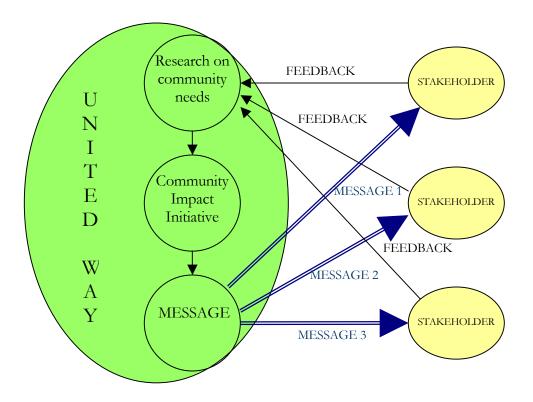
From its inception, the United Way has been an organization that raises money for other organizations; it can be seen as a conduit for nonprofit donations. Although this model has been effective for years, the organization has had to implement some changes into its structure. After the resignation of the United Way of America's president and CEO William Aramony in 1992 (Cipalla 1992), the organization underwent changes to better adapt to not only the public mistrust this scandal evoked, but also to the changing social environment in which the organization exists (Gashurov 2000; Santoro 1993). One way it did this was by introducing Donor Choice into its campaigns. This allowed donors to choose which nonprofit organizations would receive their money, rather than the United Way making the allocation decision.

In the late 1990's, local United Ways were not taking in enough non-restricted money to provide the needed funds to their member agencies. Although the gross amount of money raised in their annual campaigns was increasing every year, more of the donations were being sent out to other nonprofit agencies not affiliated with the United Way through Donor Choice (Sennott 2003).   The United Way had become more of a funnel through which money went to other nonprofit organizations and less of a community-base problem solver.

To assist in overcoming this problem, the United Way had some of the affiliate organizations test the Community Care Initiative, a new approach to determine how best to identify and meet community needs. Through market research and best practices, the organization was once again able to change with its environment. Instead of just acting as a conduit for donations from donors to organizations, the local chapters were creating programs of their own (Gashurov 2000).

In making this change, the organization has been able to show donors that their money was making a difference, and also to strengthen the United Way's partnership with local organizations and community leaders. This change has been a large step in keeping the United Way a viable organization for the twenty-first century (*Business Week* 2002).

Figure 12 - United Way's Symmetrical Model

The United Way's adoption of Donor Choice and its Community Care Initiative, reflect the use of a two-way symmetrical model of communication (see Figure 12). The United Way takes information in regarding its stakeholders and changes the organization and its policies accordingly. Like the AARP, it does extensive two-way communication through this research. Both organizations take information in. But in the case of AAPR's decision to support the Bush administration's prescription drug benefit bill, the organization decided to overlook what a segment of its stakeholders wanted. Instead, AARP chose to focus its external communication regarding the decision toward gaining support of potential

members. The AARP made no effort to lobby for improvement of the bill to address its members concerns, nor did it threaten to withdraw support for the bill if its members' concerns were not addressed. When the United Way recognized its stakeholders' concerns, it adjusted itself to address the concerns.

CONCLUSION

The preceding discussion illustrates the importance of an understanding of communication in nonprofit administration. This study has shown that communication, specifically public relations, is weak in nonprofit scholarship and teaching, and furthermore, that public relations is important for effective nonprofit administration. Clearly, public relations should be incorporated into nonprofit scholarship and teaching. The usefulness of public relations as a tool for nonprofit accountability can be readily seen in the four illustrative case studies.

The public relations tool is used not only to effectively communicate their accountability to stakeholders, but also as a framework to take in information from stakeholders and integrate this information into the organization's strategic planning. By understanding the structure and usage of the four models of public relations, nonprofit administrators can select the model that meets their organization's particular needs in certain circumstances.

The key lessons in each vignette are laid out in Table 3. By using the press agentry/ publicity model, Greenpeace was able to accomplish its mission of stopping the deep sea disposal of the Brent Spar at any cost. The Red Cross' communication regarding the Liberty Fund earned it a fair amount of criticism, but was later corrected by clearer communication to its stakeholders. Both organizations decided not to release information to the public they felt would have a negative impact on the organization, which led to a loss of their credibility

once stakeholders found out. This type of closed communication may be justified for reasons of confidentiality and privacy, but as a general operating procedure it lacks the oversight conferred by transparency, and also runs the risk of negative publicity if the organization appears to be manipulating the public. As a result, whatever short term gains result from this manipulation and deceit, it comes at the risk of long term harm.

Table 3 – Key Lessons

Public Relation Model	Nonprofit Organization	Lessons
Press Agentry/Publicity	Greenpeace	Open communication with stakeholders; avoid covering up mistakes or miscalculations
Public Information	Red Cross	Open communication with stakeholders; communication should be clear and not vague.
Two-way Asymmetrical	AARP	Organization should be accountable to all its stakeholders, not just new or potential members.
Two-way Symmetrical	United Way	Organizations that evolve with their stakeholders remain viable and legitimate.

The AARP and the United Way both utilized a two-way communication stream with its stakeholders, but in regard to the Bush administration's prescription drug coverage bill, the AARP knew their older members were against it, but supported the legislation nevertheless to attract a young membership base. The United Way, on the other hand, took in information from stakeholders and reacted to it. Reacting to the need of stakeholders can lead to the mutually beneficial relationships that both contribute to an organization's long

term viability, and are consistent with the high ethical standards that nonprofit organizations profess.

Understanding the four public relation models, as well as a broader understanding of communication theory, will make nonprofit administrators more effective, and improve the organization they work for. Although all of the nonprofits studied here – American Red Cross, United Way of America, AARP, and Greenpeace – faced tough public relations situations, all were able to weather them. Even though the organizations discussed in the case studies are all large nonprofit organizations, the same principle applies to smaller third sector organizations which make up the majority of organizations in the sector.

Future research might seek to overcome the small sample limitation of this exploratory, conceptual treatment of the topic, and do a larger sample analysis of communication methods used in a random sample of nonprofit organizations. Quantitatively delving further into the connection between communication, accountability, and ultimately an organization's viability, will show whether or not there is a correlation between the usage of the different communication models and the successfulness of an organization. A second topic for future research would be to address the ethical implications of the four models in the nonprofit context. This will show whether or not there is a correlation between ethics, and the usage of specific models in regard to their previously noted level of accountability (see Table 1).

An especially interesting, and unexpected, lesson of this study lies in the relationship between networks and positive communication in developing mutually beneficial relationships between NPOs and their stakeholders. In both the ICBL and the United Way

cases, the subjects of the analysis were integrated into dense networks. These networks imply a need for coordination and communication, as well as a need for open, two-way communication to demonstrate accountability to contribute to the trust that allows networks to cohere. Castells (2005, see also Heclo 2005) notes that recent trends toward devolution have created a "network state", as governance is exercised through networks of government and nonprofit providers. As this network state develops, the need for effective communication will increase as well. This can be achieved by teaching public relations techniques to future nonprofit administrators.

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