Communication Management : the role of management in communication professionals

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Introduction

Those who are involved with communication study would understand that some important questions exist in this field. For example, what would be the most effective ways to communicate to specific target groups? How do target audiences react-and possibly society as a whole-after they receive messages sent in the form of printed media, electronic media, and other types of media widely used in our everyday lives. In the past few decades, communication scholars have been conducting thousands of research projects in order to find the answers to those questions.

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These research questions have been tested and retested for better understanding and advancement of communication studies. Until now, researchers have taken tremendous interest in media research on questions pertaining to effectiveness and impact upon audiences. Fields of study, therefore, are naturally categorized into areas such as media-based research on television, radio, and journalism, or professional-based areas such as public relations and advertising. For media-based research, questions that challenge us are mostly about the power of television or radio and how they impact viewers and listeners.

However, when digital technology was introduced to the media consumers market, research areas have adapted gradually to these change. Some researchers turn to newer and more interesting topics such as internet usage and surfing behaviors, or cell-phone usage among younger generations. Moreover, with the advent of media convergence-for example, radio and television exposure combined on the internet-communication scholars have had to change their mindsets about research topics and focuses.

This change in technology affects both research topics and curriculum design for new communication students. In today's educational world, communication students are facing new terminology that confuses them about the subject matter they will choose to study.

In the year 2002, the *Bachelor's Program in Communication Management (English Program)* at the Faculty of Communication Arts, Chulalongkorn University was initiated. The program was reviewed by a group of communication scholars who kept asking for the meaning of the term "communication management."

When classes were offered for the first time in 2004, some applicants asked questions pertaining to the areas of study and the kind of work graduates from this program will have a chance to get. A lot of people worried that graduates might not get offered work in advertising agencies or in public relations departments in government offices or private companies. Some thought of management jobs as having to be in administrative positions within media organizations. And others did not seem to have idea about the term "communication management" at all. As the Program Director and now Dean of the Faculty of Communication Arts, I owe it to my communication students and colleagues to explain the meaning and the logic behind the term "communication management."

During the last three decades, students in Thailand have paid more and more attention to careers in mass communication fields. Journalism, Broadcasting, Public Relations, and Advertising have attracted attention from the younger generations. Quite a large number of students have shown interest in taking courses or getting into undergraduate or graduate programs in such areas. When the term "communication management" was introduced for the first time in the Thai academic curricular, prospective students were concerned about the relationship among Journalism, Broadcasting, Public Relations and Advertising.

Could these broad communication fields neatly fit into one general term, communication management? What kind of jobs could prospective students really get after graduation?

An overview of current communication professionals

In Thailand, as well as in many other countries around the world, the duties of professionals in public relations, advertising, journalism, and broadcasting have been changing quickly. Many organizations use the term "corporate communication" to identify old public relations jobs, which has now extended to cover corporate image building jobs. Others sometimes combine public relations and advertising positions into a marketing communication department. The terms "public relations" and "advertising" are currently been viewed as only several of tools available in marketing communication functions.

Nowadays, the boundary line between public relations and advertising is getting much thinner. They are not completely separate from each other, and practitioners are forced to understand both in order to perform them interchangeably. Public relations and advertising personnel are forced to pay more attention to an organizational vision and strategic moves that would propel an organization in the desirable direction as well as continue to promote selling of products. Employees are forced to be involved with organizational strategies and tactics used in planning. In many cases, they need to interact with the marketing function of their company as well.

The case of journalism and broadcasting seem to follow the same pattern. At present, reporters work for newspapers, radio, or television-even all of them at the same time. News reporting can be in the form of printing or broadcasting through radio, television, internet, or even through one's cell-phone. Specialization of media duties has gradually been replaced by media convergence in this decade.

Many other works exist in communications apart from public relations, advertising or journalism: namely, media research, consumer research, media planning, media design and production. Although these jobs are still very important, the terms used to describe these jobs seem to be ever-changing. The time has come when we realize that using terms that refer to certain jobs or career functions may not accurately cope well with the change. We need new terms that reflect the current core concept of research and practice. These jobs require specific expertise plus the knowledge and skills of management in order to achieve all the tasks faced by communication professionals. The term "communication management" answers our need.

The role of management in communication professionals

Communication professionals can work in broadcasting industries such as radio and television stations, or newspapers offices. Communication graduates can also be part of news or entertainment program teams such as reporters, anchor persons, show hosts, or producers. They can also work in the communication department as part of a public relations or advertising team, or work directly for advertising or public relations agencies. Apart from this, they can be involved with entertainment industries as film makers, film script writers, or celebrities' publicists. Communication graduates can also be involved with communication campaigns to advocate for political and public policies. All of these jobs require management knowledge and expertise. Below is a list of fields that scholars and practitioners agree that management skills are crucial for success.

Public relations

Grunig and Hunt (1984) described how management can help the works of public relations practitioners.

> *"...Public relations is the distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, acceptance and cooperation between an organization and its public; involves the management to keep informed on and responsive to public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilize change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and sound and ethical communication techniques as its principal tools".*

Grunig and Hunt conclude that "In one way or another, however, each of these public relations activities is **part of the management of communication between an organization and its publics...**"

After a series of research funded by the International Business Communicators (IABC) in 1985, research articles were published in a book edited by Grunig himself under the title *"Excellence Public Relations and Communication Management."* In this book, a number of articles mentioned the improvement of public relations practices and the new association among public relations, communication, and management. As summarized by Grunig in the introduction chapter of the book:

> *"Communication is a behavior of individuals, groups, or organizations. People communicate when they move messages to or from other people. Public Relations professionals communicate not just for themselves; they manage, plan and execute communication for the organization as a whole. They manage the movement of messages into the organization, for example, when conducting research on the knowledge, attitudes and behaviors of publics and then using the message to counsel managers on organization policies or action."*

Advertising

Graduates who work in the advertising field also need basic knowledge and skills in management of communication. Batra, R., Myers, J.G. and Aaker, D.A. (1996) emphasize the necessity of management in advertising jobs. In their book Advertising Management, they focus on advertising campaigns, the planning of air time and space, the association of products or services, and the brands advertisers need to know and promote with their management skills.

Issue management

Grunig and Hunt (1984) also explained that the term and concept of "public issues management" was introduced around the year 1975. Companies started to become aware of public issues, and their importance and impact upon companies' direction. It was companies' decision to act rather than react to government or public policy that affect them. Buchholz (1982) stated that companies need to accurately analyze their situation, identify the agenda they would have to face, and then decide how to constructively cope with it. Chase (1984) defined the term "issues management as *"...a tool which*

companies could use to identify, analyze, and manage emerging issues and respond to them before they became public knowledge."

Risk management

Grunig and Hunt (1984) also define risk as possible negative occurrences that organizations foresee and assess. Companies must prepare themselves to prevent or cope with that specific occurrence. Risk management is the program companies plan to prevent foreseeable damage that may in short or long term ruin organizations' assets or reputations. Management of risk is the process that organizations analyze, identify, plan and implement into documents as guideline for appropriate reactions.

Stakeholder/customer relationship management

Grunig and Hunt (1984) not only emphasized the importance of issues management, they also added that organizations need to be aware of outsiders who are considered having a stake with them. Stakeholders are defined as "a group whose collective behavior can directly affect the organization's future, but which is not the under the organization's control."

Management of stakeholders is a concept that was introduced to organizational communication studies during the 1970's. Organizations not only identify issues that will be important, but they also use stakeholder management by learning about their stakeholders in order to work out agreeable strategies to deal with them. The concept also applied to marketing area when marketers pay more attention to customers and after sales services that will please customers better. Nowadays, customer relationship marketing frequently is practiced as part of marketing communication programs.

Conflict and crisis management

Crisis is a negative occurrence that organizations accidentally or unfortunately might encounter. Crisis in an organization could cause short-term or long-term serious damage. Organizations always want a crisis to end as soon as possible since it can hurt not only an organization and people who work there but also those who do not but were part of the incident. Kathleen Fearn-Banks (2002) defined crisis management as *"a process of strategic planning for a crisis or negative turning points, a process that removes some of the risk and uncertainty from the negative occurrence and thereby allows the organization to be in greater control of its own destiny"*

Effective organizations should be well-prepared by planning to cope with possible crises or conflicts ahead of time.

Change management

It is well accepted that changes occur all the time in our lives; they are inevitable. However, resistance to change is a normal habit among us. People usually hate to move out of a familiar neighborhood or hate to relocate to a new office. More seriously, they hate to change the way they do their job. People resist change because they feel more comfortable about their way of doing things and knowing that they will have to put a lot of effort into learning new ways. But change is sometimes necessary because it will improve, or increase productivity of our work or create the

betterment of our society. Because resistance to change is often found, communication plays big role in smoothing the change. The term 'planned change' was used in the early stage when communicators understand that change can be successfully introduced to organizations or to a society. The term became known as "change management" when change agents realize that with good help from communication management, resistance to change will be softened and adjustments could be possible.

Image and reputation management

In 1984, Fortune magazine for the first time announced "America's Most Admired Companies" which was the result of executives and corporate analysts' ratings of 500 companies on eight differences aspects (Dowling, G., 2001). This means that reputation or having a good name is one of most desirable outcomes in doing business. Obviously, either business or government organizations need to be thought of as having competency, honesty, generosity, good governance, and social responsibility. But the public has no way of knowing all these excellent characteristics unless we communicate with them about what we have done as evidenced by good deeds. This concept is strongly accepted in almost all modern corporations. Modern companies, therefore, include corporate social responsibility as part of their strategic plan apart from other normally implemented public relations activities.

Communication management as the term for the changing of views and practices in communication professionals

Thus far, it is obvious that the science of management has been merged into the practices in communication professionals. In his 1992 book *Excellence Public Relations and Communication Management,* Grunig interchangeably used the terms "public relations" and "communication management." He admits that his definition equates public relations and communication management, and some practitioners may not agree with that. For some public relations workers and scholars, the term "communication" means more than just using public relations techniques for one's organization. For some scholars, communication is a broader term than public relations. This group of communication scholars views public relations as tools practitioners uses to perform publicity, for promotion, or for marketing purposes. For them, communication covers the wide range of activities when shared meaning and understanding occur between two or more parties. Considering this meaning, communication management would cover much more than public relations. It refers to the idea that communicators try their best in using communication to serve corporate, business, marketing as well as social and public issues.

Conclusion

The term "communication management" is more appropriate when we want to refer to communication in a broader sense. In a new era when media and communication professionals have merged and intertwined, it is hard for us to view them separately. Communicators who study how to improve and bring about better results of communication may have to look at many different tools. Print media was widely used before electronic media came into almost every home in the 20th century. Now the internet rapidly invades households around the world. With the invention of new

technological gadgets, news and information are sent to us through internet and cell-phones and who knows what else in the near future. Management, although not the core essentials of the work, plays many important roles in the lives of communication professionals. Successful work in communication relies on the expertise of sound management.

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