Managing the Trust Portfolio for Public Communication of S&T

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Current practice often emphasizes a one-dimensional role for public affairs

Two prevailing models of public information/public affairs practice:

• The in-house journalist

• The quasi-scientist
But public engagement in science requires a new paradigm

Management of the Trust Portfolio
Elements of Trust

- Competence (or Credibility)
- Integrity
- Dependability
Do your publics believe you have the expertise and the sophistication to deliver what you promise?
Do your publics believe that you will do the “right” thing by the public? Is your research program/university viewed as fair and just?
Dependability

Do your publics believe that you will *always* do the “right” thing? Will your university or research program do what it says it will do – even if faced with political pressure?
Typical institutional practice violates all three elements of trust

- Competence – the least credible person tells the story to the publics.
Typical institutional practice violates all three elements of trust

- Integrity – scientists do not always agree with the public about what the “right” thing is. They communicate what they believe is the “right” thing scientifically.
Typical institutional practice violates all three elements of trust

- Dependability – Publics generally lack confidence that institutional forces will support doing the “right” thing.
The most stable, positive relationships exist when organizations and publics have some degree of control over the other.
Types of Relationships

• Exchange Relationships

• Communal Relationships
Managing for an Exchange Relationship

One party gives benefits to the other only because the other has provided benefits in the past or is expected to do so in the future.

Expectation of benefits of comparable value.
Managing for a Communal Relationship

Both parties provide benefits to the other because they are concerned for the welfare of the other or of the scientific enterprise – not because they expect something in return.
Trust Relationships with the media

DESIRED RELATIONSHIP OUTCOME:

a trusting, communal relationship between research performers (the university or agency) and the media.
Media believe that PIOs want to control what they write; do not believe (generally) that PIOs are trustworthy news sources; and do not feel that PIOs are committed to a relationship of helping journalists cover science.
Research Management often does not trust journalists; they believe the media are out to “get” them and have no commitment to the welfare of the university; often feel PIOs have lost control of their reputation.
Trust Relationships with the media

Management desires a **control** relationship based on exchange

Media desire a **communal** relationship based on trust
Trust Relationships with the media

- Mutual awareness
- Communications accuracy
- Understanding
- Agreement (at least on what the public wants)
- Symbiotic behavior = control mutuality
Empowering the public affairs function

- Institutional public affairs must be the manager of the trust portfolio – with press, with policy makers, with the local and regional community

- Public affairs must have the full authority to manage the portfolio
For more information on metrics:

Guidelines for Formative and Evaluative Research in Public Affairs

Grunig and Grunig

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