



The Stockholm Accords

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Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management

Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management • c/o USI Università della Svizzera italiana
via Giuseppe Buffi 13 CH-6900 Lugano • Switzerland phone +41 58 666 47 72 • fax +41 58 666 47 39
e-mail info@globalalliancepr.org • website www.globalalliancepr.org

A CALL TO ACTION FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATION IN A GLOBAL SOCIETY

These accords are the product of a collaboration between public relations and communication management industry leaders on every continent, endorsed by the World Public Relations Forum in Stockholm, Sweden, on June 15, 2010

The Editorial Board of the Global Alliance
formed by
Ylva Skoogh (Sweden), Gary McCormick (USA) and Toni Muzi Falconi (Italy)
wrote the final version of the Stockholm Accords

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Section 1

The Stockholm Accords¹² enhance and affirm the central role of Public Relations and Communication Management in organizational success, and are a

CALL TO ACTION³

by **Public Relations Professionals** (associations, managers, consultants, educators, researchers and students) to administer its principles on a sustained basis and to affirm them throughout the profession, as well as to management and other relevant stakeholder groups-

¹ and are, so far, the result of a collaborative effort of 59 leaders of the global public relations profession from 20 countries.

² for all underlined words, please refer to the Stockholm Accords Glossary: Section 5

³ For directions related to the implementation of the Stockholm Accords, please refer to Section 4 of this document

Section 2

The Societal and Organizational Value of Public Relations and Communication Management

Sustainability

The organization's *sustainability* relies on balancing today's demands with the ability to meet future needs based on economic, social and environmental dimensions.

The communicative organization assumes leadership by interpreting sustainability as a transformational opportunity to improve its position within, and contribution to, society by pursuing and constantly reporting on the achievement of its policies and actions across the economic, social and environmental "triple bottom line".

Public relations and communication management professionals:

- Involve and engage key stakeholders in the organization's sustainability policies and programs.
- Interpret societal expectations for sound economic, social and environmental commitments that yield a return to the organization and society.
- Ensure stakeholder participation to identify information that should be regularly, transparently and authentically reported.
- Promote and support efforts to reach an ongoing integrated reporting of financial, social, economic and environmental.

Governance

Organizations operating under the stakeholder governance model empower their board members, elected officials and non-profit organization leaders, to be directly responsible for deciding and implementing stakeholder relationship policies.

The communicative organization requires timely information, knowledge and understanding of economic, social, environmental and legal developments, as well as of its stakeholders' expectations.

This to promptly identify and deal with the opportunities and risks that can impact the organization's direction, action and communication.

Public relations and communication management professionals:

- Participate in defining organizational values, principles, strategies, policies and processes.
- Apply appropriate communication and research skills to interpret stakeholders' and society's expectations as a basis for decision making.
- Deliver timely analysis and recommendations for an effective governance of stakeholder relationships by enhancing transparency, trustworthy behaviour, authentic and verifiable representation, thus sustaining the organization's "licence to operate".
- Create an internal listening culture, an open system that allows the organization to anticipate, adapt and respond.

Management

In today's accelerating, globally competitive network society, the quality and effectiveness of an organization's decisions are increasingly determined by the speed of and context within which they implement those decisions.

The communicative organization is managed on the principle that it in the organization's interest to be sensitive to the wider expectations of society and to the legitimate claims of all its stakeholders. This task involves complex prioritization, decision making and requires detailed research and listening before strategic and operational decisions are made.

Public relations and communication management professionals:

- Inform and shape the organization's overall two-way communication processes and capabilities;
- Act as a conduit and interpreter of intelligence about trends and developments in society;
- Identify and help to solve issues that are generated by changes in society and specifically those that relate to stakeholder relationships and organisational reputation;
- Communicate the value of the organisations products/services and relationships with stakeholders, thereby creating, consolidating and developing its financial, legal, social and reputational capital;
-

Section 3

The Operational Value of Public Relations and Communication Management

Internal Communication

Organizational internal communication enhances recruitment, retention, development of common interests, and commitment to organizational goals by an increasingly diverse, extended and segmented set of "internal" publics.

For the communicative organization, internal communication is vital in the development and sustenance of the organization, fostering trust, commitment, purpose and shared goals among all internal stakeholders including all employee tiers, contractors, consultants, suppliers, volunteers and others required to fulfill the organization's purpose.

Public relations and communication management professionals:

- Seek constant feedback for a mutual understanding of
- How the internal community comprehends, accepts, communicates and achieves the organization's strategy.
- How – and how well – organizational leaders and internal influencers collaborate and communicate with stakeholders.
- How knowledge and policy are being shared.
- How processes and structures are identified, developed and enhanced.
- and, most importantly,
- How the organization's reputation depends largely on the actions taken by internal stakeholders.

External Communication

As the expansion of the network society accelerates, organizations must review and adjust their policies, actions and communicative behavior to improve their relationships with increasingly influential stakeholders, as well as with society at large.

The communicative organization develops skills to continually nurture its relationships with customers, investors, communities, governments, active citizen groups, industry alliances, mainstream and digital media and other situational stakeholders.

Public relations and communication management professionals:

- Bring the organization's "voice" and interests into stakeholder deliberations and decisions.

- Assist all organizational functions in crafting and delivering effective communication, fostering understanding and building and sustaining relationships.
- Contribute to the development and promotion of products, services or processes that strengthen brand loyalty and equity.
- Advocate for stakeholder groups within the organization and sustain an appropriate dialogue in order to maintain social and reputational capital.

Alignment of Internal and External Communication

Organizational communication today is a complex, multi-dimensional, multi-stakeholder enterprise involving concurrent engagement across diverse *value networks* and legal frameworks.

The communicative organization endeavors to share a consistent global story. In doing so, it must balance transparency, finite resources and time sensitive demands against rapid change plus emerging and resolving conflicts of interests within its operational environment. This necessitates that organizational communication with all stakeholders is coherent, coordinated and aligned with its mission, vision, values, actions and behaviors.

Public relations and communication management professionals':

- Oversee the development and implementation of internal and external communications to assure open listening, consistency of content and accurate presentation of the organization's identity.
- Research, develop, monitor and adjust the organization's communicative behavior.
- Create and nurture a knowledge base that includes social and psychological sciences.
- Manage and apply research to implement evaluation and measurement programs for continued improvement.

Section 4

We are:

This third draft of the Stockholm Accords is the result of the collective work and knowledge of some 500 senior professionals, researchers and educators from 20 different countries and 6 continents (59 participated in the videoconferences, 30 commented on the Forum website, some 315 participated in workshops and public discussions of the drafts).

Here⁴ are the names of the videoconference participants and commenters before May 31 2010..

This draft is the final outcome of:

- a) two synchronous video conference workshops held through the Webex-Cisco-Connexia platform on February 16 and March 9 2010 which lasted for a total of four hours and of two weeks of exchanges, in between the workshops, amongst those participants, divided in six working groups and led by these six coordinators;
- b) the comments, suggestions and criticisms which were posted in these recent weeks on the World Public Relations Forum's website (www.wprf2010.se) .

Our Objective:

The Stockholm Accords, in its final text to be approved by participants to the World Public Relations Forum in Stockholm on June 14 and 15 2010- intends to be an operative framework for every willing professional, educator, student, leader of professional association, employee or manager of any public, private and social organization around the world.

The Global Alliance invites each of you to freely join and lead -within your specific professional environment- a two year (2010-2012) advocacy program by flexibly drawing from and adapting the Accords' contents in a conscious and planned effort to argue the value of public relations.

⁴ Argentina: Juan Iramain; Australia: Julian Polachek; Brasil: Mateus Furlaneto, Paulo Nassar; Bulgaria: Nelly Benova, Maria Gergova; Canada: Terry Flynn, Annette Martell, Dan Tisch, Jean Valin; China: Flora Hung; Germany: Thorsten; Luetzler, Holger Sievert; Holland: Henrik Killander; Italy: Giampaolo Azzoni, Emanuele Invernizzi, Toni Muzi Falconi, Amanda Succi; Malaysia: Shameem Abdul Jalil; Mexico: Marco Herrera; New Zealand: Catherine Arrow, Paul Dryden, Tim Marshall; Nigeria: Sunday Odedele; Portugal: Joao Duarte; Romania: Rares Petrisor; Slovenia: Dejan Vercic; South Africa: Amanda Hamilton Attwell, Estelle De Beer, Ronel Rensburg, Gustav Puth, Benita Steyn; Sweden: Sven Hamrefors, Peder Jonsson, Sylvia Nylin, Jerry Silfwers, Neeltje du Plessis; Turkey: Serra Gorpe; UK: David Bailey, Anne Gregory, Richard Linning, Sandra McLeod, Paul Seaman, Sue Wolstenholme, Heather Yaxley; USA: Amanda Chapel, Rob Flaherty, Robert Grupp, William Murray, Tom Nicholson, Brad Rawlins, Judy Van Slyke Turk, Edward O'Meara, Frank Ovaitt, John Paluszek, Sean Williams

⁵ Anne Gregory, Estelle de Beer, Peder Jonsson, Annette Martell, Dan Tisch, Joao Duarte

In short, a two year global public relations program for the public relations profession!

This document is **not** set in stone and simply describes different key societal and organizational developments. For each of these developments the document identifies where and how the public relations and communication management profession adds value to the organization.

The end result of this effort is to enhance and reinforce the value proposition of our profession to society and organizations, thus improving our licence to operate on both a global and a local level.

Evaluation and Measurement

The Global Alliance will hub⁶ the global implementation of this program by monitoring and reporting on activities and results which will follow from the single actor's activity over the next two years (June 2010- June 2012).

The results will feature an evaluation of the dynamics of the profession's perceived reputation index related to each different territory and selected stakeholder group where the program, however flexibly, will be implemented.

This of course needs to be done by the single actor from day zero and repeated on an annual basis (see here⁷).

Also, we strongly suggest that the actor, again from day zero and on an annual basis, measure amongst selected stakeholder groups of at least these three indicators: credibility of the source, credibility of the content and familiarity of the content (see here⁸).

How we came to this decision

In these last 10/20 years the global body of knowledge, as well as the actual practices of the public relations profession in every corner of the world, have performed quantum leaps that need to be collected, understood and interpreted so that, what has in the meantime become a global professional community, may apply the framework to enrich mutually beneficial organizational and societal relationships.

⁶ tonimuzi@tin.it

⁷ This implies a situational research effort with a sample of a stakeholder group's universe aimed at identifying the zero base level of reputation of the public relations profession focussed on its perceived value to the organization. A specific questionnaire will be supplied to the individual actor by the hub.

⁸ This implies a situational research effort with a sample of a stakeholder group's universe aimed at identifying the zero based level of perception of the individual actors credibility, the specific content credibility as well as familiarity. A specific questionnaire will be provided to the individual actor by the hub.

What YOU can do NOW

You can help shape the future of our profession.

You can:

- read and ponder this final draft;
- seriously consider the invitation to become an actor -when the final text will be approved in mid June in Stockholm- by deciding to flexibly devise an action program aimed at advocating to any selected stakeholder group in your territory, at least some of the arguments which you find more convincing and related to the specific public relations infrastructure of your environment
- report to the hub⁹ (the global alliance) on your decision and provide regular updates so that the hub may keep all other actors informed and these may, in turn, benefit from your specific experience

A specific example

Let's imagine that in country X the Association of Public Relations, or the leader of a consultancy, or an educator, a student, or a public relations manager, or a solo consultant decide to become an Actor.

These actors select one or more of the themes to develop an advocacy campaign over the next two years and one or more stakeholder groups with whom to do this with.

The association might decide to select the governance and/or the management theme, the consultancy might decide to select the alignment and/or the sustainability theme, the educator might opt for external communication, the manager the alignment and the solo consultant the internal communication.....

The association might prefer to focus on its own members and on the media; the consultancy might select its client and potential client base; the educator might opt for colleagues or students; the manager might decide to advocate with department employees as well as middle and top management; the solo consultant its relationship and client network. Of course no single actor has territorial exclusivity on a specific theme or stakeholder group.

Clearly, if coherent, the more overlapping the better.

Each actor then decides on how to develop a zero base starting point by flexibly adopting the suggested evaluation and measurement program, and how to frame the two year program by developing appropriate contents, initiatives, events, documents and communication channels which appear to be effectively supporting the program objectives.

Each actor reports the plan to the hub where it will be accessible to other actors and reports on changes, interim results and reactions received by the selected stakeholder group(s).

⁹ tonimuzi@fin.it

Section 5

Stockholm Accords Glossary

*Note

The following text is an attempt by Toni Muzi Falconi to specify the intended meaning of some of the terms included in the Stockholm Accords draft. In no way do they purport to be considered normative. They simply try to describe, in the author's view, the drafters' intentions.

Stakeholder governance model

It implies that a corporation's board of directors, or the elected leadership of a social or public sector organization, in the case of conflicts between contrasting stakeholder group expectancies decides which of them needs to be taken more into account, on the basis of a thorough listening of their diverse expectations. This implies that it is up to the board to implicitly decide which stakeholder group is more equal. The shareholder model instead -even when it recognizes that other interests beyond those of the shareholders need to be taken into account- tends to privilege, in the case of conflicting expectations, the latter.

Value network

In the network society, the traditional and consolidated strategic planning process of the late seventies of the 20th century, based on Michael Porter's value chain model, mostly linear and material, is either replaced or at least integrated by another planning process based on value networks. This recognizes that much of the value created by the organization stems today from fuzzy (not linear) and immaterial networks that normally disrupt the distinction between internal and external publics, as their components play specific and value added roles defined by their relationships rather than by their position. The value in itself is based on the quality of the relationships existing between the various components of each network and on the quality of the relationships which exist between the various networks.

Communicative organization

A communicative organization recognizes that even the most empowered public relations director cannot realistically hope to directly monitor more than 10% of its organization's communicative behaviour.

Therefore the communication leader of the organization plays two fundamental and strategic roles:

- a 'political' role in supporting and providing the organization's leadership with the necessary, timely and relevant information which allows it to effectively govern the value networks as well as an intelligent, constant and conscious effort to understand the relevant dynamics of society at large;

- a 'contextual' role which implies the constant delivery of communicative skills, competencies and tools to the components of its value networks so that they may improve their relationships amongst each other and with the other value networks.

License to operate

To reach its stated objectives every organization needs to constantly nurture and improve its 'licence to operate' by improving relationships with its stakeholder groups and society at large, on whose opinions, attitudes, behaviours and decisions the achievement of organizational objectives rely. And, of course, the 'licence to operate' stems from the organization's legality, the demand for its services and the willingness of people to deal with it.

Boundary spanning and/or issue management

Beyond its direct and indirect relationships with active or potential stakeholder groups, the organization needs to identify and analyse those economic, political, social, technological issues whose dynamics impact on the achievement of its strategic and tactical objectives.

In doing this, and in prioritizing those issues through a careful importance/possibility-to-influence analysis, the organization must identify those subjects who either directly or indirectly impact on those dynamics and dialogue with them to con-vince them to either reduce their hostility or increase their support for the organization's objectives.

Communicative and relationship value

The value of communication for the organization can be assessed by measuring source credibility, content familiarity and content credibility -before and after the conversation with stakeholder groups; as well as by measuring -before and after the conversation with stakeholder groups- the satisfaction, commitment, trust and power balance of each relationship.

Sustainability

This term (once also defined as corporate social responsibility or CSR) is used to indicate those policies and programs which ensure the economic, environmental and social existence of the organization well beyond the short and medium term, and is directly connected to its licence to operate, the quality of its stakeholder relationships as well as the concern for societal and presumed future generations expectations.

Transformational opportunity

Sustainability policies and programs, even more than external consequences for the organization that are highly significant, represent a relevant leverage for its leadership to stimulate and facilitate cultural change and transformation. When these policies value risk taking and innovation, then sustainability is not an essence of organizational conservatism.

Stakeholders

Are those active publics that are aware and interested in dialogue with the organization because its activities bear consequences on them and/or whose activities bear consequences on the organization.

Potential stakeholders are instead those publics that, if made aware of the organizations strategic or tactical objectives, would be interested in dialogue with the organization.

The prevalent communicative mode with the first is pull and for the second, at least initially, is push.

Falling boundaries between internal and external communication

With every individual potentially being a globally accessible medium and with the constant decline in credibility of institutions and authorities, traditional internal publics are increasingly being considered as the most trusted sources of information from the organization.

Vice versa, and for the same reasons, any customer or supplier or competitor opinion on the organization is immediately accessible by traditional internal publics.

What is more, border publics such as shareholders, consultants, agents and partners are considered highly credible subject by both traditional internal and external publics.

Most boundaries between publics are tumbling down.

Leadership communication

Organizations increasingly define and attempt to implement policies and programs which imply coherent and cross functional leadership styles. This is a core and natural role for public relations professionals operating inside or working for the organization.

Knowledge sharing

The sharing of knowledge inside and increasingly also outside the organization is considered one of the more precious immaterial assets in and amongst value networks.

This is enhanced by smooth and productive relationships amongst network components and the public relations professional in appropriately performing her 'contextual' role can be instrumental.

Decision making processes

Effective and timely decision making process are essential to the success of the organization.

By professionally listening to, understanding and interpreting stakeholder expectations before decisions are made by management, the public relations professional allows leadership to improve the quality of those decisions, to accelerate the time of their implementation and, in those recurring circumstances in which decisions are not adapted to include a specific stakeholder group expectancies, allows the organization to better anticipate and prepare to deal with potentially disrupting actions by that stakeholder group.

Processes and structure

Ever changing processes and structures inside and amongst value networks are constantly framing change management programs of the organization.

Change management, if and when it really works, mostly relies on sound and realistic objectives and effective relationships, which in turn are driven by good communication involving both internal and external partners of the organization.

Stakeholder groups

These are individuals and organizations who are aware and interested in developing a relationship with the organization because the organization's actions bear consequences on them or through their actions they bear consequences on the organization.

Not necessarily a favourable relationship.

These stakeholder groups are not chosen by the organization, but decide by themselves to be and act as stakeholders.

It is clearly up to the organization to decide on acknowledging them and to responsibly involve and/or engage with them..

Situational stakeholders

Stakeholder groups may also be situational as they form and dissolve according to social and organizational dynamics which need to be carefully monitored by the public relations professional.

Brand loyalty

This is an established marketing term which has grown to include the quality, the trust, the commitment and the power balance of the relationship that a specific customer or any other stakeholder group engages with the organization.

Brand equity

This is one of the immaterial values attributed to an organization's overall capitalization. Often expressed in monetary terms, this value is calculated by conventions amongst peers which relate monetary value to immaterial indicators.

Dialogue, participation

An organization's stakeholder relationships may be differently segmented according to their acknowledgement, involvement, engagement, separation, divorce programs.

A relationship begins with the two subjects acknowledging each other; then proceeds when the organization stimulates its stakeholder groups to access the information they believe stakeholder groups require to keep abreast on their relationship and are enabled to provide feedback (involvement); the organization may also sometime decide that in order to more effectively achieve its objectives to engage some of its stakeholder groups in direct dialogue and conversation on specific issues in order to find mutually beneficial outcomes (engagement): sometimes this does not work, and there is a period of time between separation and divorce in which the organization can attempt to maintain at least their involvement.

Success, evaluation and measurement

The most important measure of success for public relations professionals -beyond the visible and tangible achievement of the organization's specific objectives within a given time frame and a given amount of financial and human resources- is achievable by one or more evaluation or measurement tools which today are abundant and certainly no fewer than those available to other management functions. Evaluation implies the prevalent use of qualitative tools while measurement implies a prevalent use of quantitative tools.

The new frontier, as is happening in other management functions, relies on the integration of evaluation with measurement.

Communicative issue

A communicative issue is one which implies and requires an above average focus on stakeholder relationships and effective communication.

Multifaceted, multi stakeholder, inter relational

The concepts of network society, value networks and communicative organizations imply that issues are often multifaceted (they provide different perspectives and angles according to the single stakeholder group perspective), multi stakeholder (individuals and organizations increasingly belong to parallel stakeholder groups who may even have conflicting interests, for example shareholders, employees and sometimes even suppliers...), and inter relational as members of value may in parallel belong to others and perform different roles.... which implies that relationships amongst value network members may also be in conflict.

Networks

Networks are today, in our global 24/7 connectivity, the core components of contemporary society, as well as of single public, social, private or mixed organizations.

Mission, vision, values, strategy

The mission describes the organization's identity. The vision describes the organization's aspiration to be in a defined time frame. The values are related to the defined behaviour the organization intends to abide to in migrating from mission to vision. The strategy is the path the organization decides to pursue in its migration from mission to vision; while the business plan defines the operative steps the organization plans to implement to pursue that strategy.

Section 6

Stockholm Accords References

References

Most of these resources were suggested by members of the working group who cooperated in the first draft of the Accords. We very much welcome any addition or suggestion.

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Governance

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Sustainability

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Global Alliance Center

Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management

c/o USI Università della Svizzera Italiana • via Giuseppe Buffi 13 • CH-6900 Lugano • Switzerland

phone +41 58 666 47 72 • fax +41 58 666 47 39

info@globalalliancepr.org • www.globalalliancepr.org