Stephanie Ramirez

Professor Leslie Wolcott

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Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review provides public relations practitioners with synthesized information about the ethical issues within the field of public relations. It touches on issues that have been considered and the reasons why as well as the solutions that may have been implemented in order to solve the problems. The review begins with a look at who is a part of the field and why because of the people that are considered to be professional public relations practitioners some of the major problems in the field may arise. It is then followed by a discussion of some of the most prominent solutions that have been proposed. And finally it exposes the results of those solutions and how ineffective they have been at finding a solid solution to the problem at hand.

Who is a part of the field?

Public relations is considered a field that brings different fields such as journalism and publicity together to create a more “refined” form of providing corporations around the world with a way to connect directly with the public it is intended to serve. But who is considered to be a reliable public relations practitioner? It has been brought to the attention of the public and other public relations practitioner that organizations as big as the public relations society of America “admit members without qualifications tests” (Bernays) and the organizations that actually require tests or qualifications in order to accept the members as a part of their organization rely on test such as the APR which carry no legal sanction (Bernays). Simple things like those provide the opportunity for anyone to call themselves a professional public relations practitioner without worrying about the implications that it may bring to the field. Some professionals even go as far as stating that “the problems of public relations have been caused by the inept, the unscrupulous, and the well-intended bunglers” (wylie) which come into the field with no experience or qualifications pretending to understand what the field is all about.

So what’s the solution?

Public relation practitioners have spent years trying to figure out a way to rid the field of public relations from its own bad name. One of the solutions was coming up with “a more strongly worded professional code that clearly assesses the problems faced” (sharpe). Although this has proven to be more challenging than they expected it to be “having a general ethical theory provides a careful and systematic approach to morality which finds parallels in ordinary life and discourse” (DeGeorge).

Like the first solution Bivins agreed that “it is important to establish ethical guidelines for public relations practitioners” but the fact of the matter according to Bivins is that the morale issues don’t begin when the practitioner is faced with a problem once they are already a part of the field, the real issues begin with the education they receive. He urges an integrated approach to teaching ethics, one that includes an ethical theory that the students of public relations can familiarize themselves with before actually having to put it into practice.

Finally, the third solution suggested that “public relations should be split into two separate roles one called the communication manager and the other one called the communication technician” (Dozier). This would be done so that the manager has more responsibility within in the field and thus the manager who would be considered the person with the most experience would be the one having to make more difficult ethical decisions rather that the less experienced technician.

How far have they traveled?

“In our opinion the problem is that along the way in our struggle to raise our craft to the level of professionalism, public relations practitioners lost touch with our roots” (Marken). In fact according to some “if we do better, we may merit greater public confidence, but now, post-Franco, it will take a lot of doing” (Wylie). This doesn’t mean that the field is completely lost in the terrors of its doing it simply encourages public relations practitioners to step away for a moment and analyze what exactly it is that they are doing. For example when you hear thing like “to lie for a client is not acceptable however, to honestly represent a client’s views into the market place of ideas even if the practitioner disagrees with those views poses a different perspective” (Martinson) it is definitely time to take some action and address the issue from a new light so that a solution to the problem can be found.

Conclusion

There has been plenty of talk about ways that the ethical issues in public relations can be solved. There have also been a lot of discussions about guidelines and regulations that can be enforced throughout the field in order to reduce the pressure of the decision making process that the practitioners are faces with on a daily basis. And of course several of the attempts to improve the image of the field have been slightly successful. But where is the research? After reading through an abundant amount of articles of how this issue can be solved it became evident that all of the solutions proposed come from opinions. In order to find a solution to the problem it may be important to find where the source of the problem is. This should be done not simply by discussing the situation but by actually conducting research that leads to a concrete database of answers from the people that are affected by the ethical issues on a daily basis. This research can be done to find out exactly how a representative portion of the public relations population react to certain scenarios and why they react the way they do.

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