# Public Relations Trends in Bulgaria: Role Enactment and Cultural Specifics of Bulgarian Public Relations Practitioners

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**AUTHOR: GALENA IVANOVA**

APEIRON
COMMUNICATION

**APEIRON ACADEMY**, ACCREDITED CENTRE OF THE CHARTERED INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS (CIPR)

www.apeironcommunication.com

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## INTRODUCTION

The strategic meaning that Public Relations (PR) can have for organisational management is closely related to its communication functions. Many academics refer to systems theory to explain the structure and operation of organisations and their interaction with the environment. Systems theory provides a useful theoretical underpinning for thinking about the role of PR because it stipulates that an organisation's well-being is dependent on establishing relationships both within itself and with its environment. The role of PR is to develop and maintain these relationships thus helping organisations to adapt to the political, economic and societal dynamism of their environment. This paper is based on the assumption that the role of PR experts within an organisation is dependent on practitioners' ability to demonstrate better their professional value. Therefore, it is important to understand the way in which Bulgarian PR practitioners influence organisational effectiveness and how practitioners themselves understand their role in such a process.

In order to understand the attitude that the PR industry in Bulgaria has regarding its role in organisational management, this study will look into the concept of managerial/technician role dichotomy and its connection with Grunig's (1984) four professional PR models. This correlation is clearly manifested by the existing empirical linkages between press agentry/public information model and PR technician role; such a correlation also exists between two-way asymmetrical/two-way symmetrical model and PR manager role.

This study argues that Bulgarian PR has become a necessary tool for strategic management since 1999 when the last study on PR models practiced in the country was conducted. In other words, Bulgarian practitioners are now supposed to enact more managerial functions than they were approximately 10 years ago. One additional professional model, personal influence model, will be measured in the present survey with the assumption that it is practiced to a great extent by Bulgarian PR experts.

Building upon a previous study on Bulgarian PR roles, it is also necessary to consider one additional dimension of Bulgarian PR practice and this is the cultural perspective. Cultural factors influencing work-related values of Bulgarian PR practitioners will be measured through Vasquez and Taylor's (1994) analytical instrument. Vasquez and Taylor explored the interrelation between Grunig's four models and four essential cultural variables - masculinity/femininity, uncertainty avoidance, power distance and individualism/collectivism. The main assumption here is that high power distance, high collectivism, masculinity and less tolerance of uncertainty are related to the authoritarian (as opposed to the participatory) organisational culture where symmetrical PR practices hardly exist and vice versa. Thus, the cultural dimensions that are unique to Bulgaria and the generic characteristics of authoritarian and participatory culture are studied and compared to get more profound understanding of PR practice in the country.

To achieve the aforementioned goals, this study analyses PR practitioners from all kinds of Bulgarian organisations and institutions. In order to do this, a quantitative survey is developed which asks respondents to grade how strongly they agree/disagree with various statements.

Through discussion of the academic literature of PR roles, the PR models theory and Vasquez and Taylor's observations as well as the survey results, this paper suggests that cultural circumstances in Bulgarian society can either foster or hinder the process of change underway of PR practitioners' status within organisational hierarchy.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Research into PR practitioners' roles represents one of the main themes in the profession's literature (e.g. Broom & Dozier, 1986; Dozier, 1987, 1990; Dozier & Broom, 1995; Moss, Newman & DeSanto, 2004, etc.). Practitioner roles are essential to understanding the function of PR and how it is regarded within organisations. Grunig and Hunt (1984) say that PR can be seen as valued when the function is within the *dominant coalition*, thus taking part of the strategic management. Toth et al. (1998) and Moss et al. (2000) (cited in Gregory, 2006) identified an alternative senior position, that of the *senior advisor* – someone not actually on the board of companies but directly responsible to CEOs and who advise on PR matters at the highest level.

The struggle to define the role of PR experts is not just an academic debate. The strategic meaning that PR people can have for clients and organisations is related to their communication functions. Systems theory provides a thorough explanation about the structure and the operation of organisations and their interaction with the environment, thus offering a useful theoretical underpinning for thinking about the role of PR. Systems theory stipulates that an organisation's well-being is dependent on establishing relationships both within itself and with its environment and this is precisely where the role of PR experts is central. Developing and maintaining such relationships helps organisations to adapt to the political, economic and societal dynamism of their environment. Therefore, PR practitioners need this professional debate in order to be able to demonstrate better their value to the employing organisations or clients.

Dominant perception in PR roles theory is the *management – technician division* introduced by David Dozier (1984). In Dozier's view, as a communication manager a PR practitioner must participate in the governance of organisations. Participation can involve a role of facilitating processes whereby the *dominant coalition* (including PR management) makes decisions about PR issues. Participation can take the form of a communication liaison role, i.e. the practitioner creates opportunities for management and key publics to communicate with each other. Participation can also take the form of expert prescription; the practitioner makes policy decisions about the organisation's PR programs and is held accountable for their implementation (Dozier and Broom, 1995). The communication technicians are often highly skilled individuals who carry out communication programmes and activities such as writing news releases, editing internal newsletters, etc. They will not be involved in organisational decision-making because implementation is their focus. A key difference in these two roles is that the manager is likely to be in the organisation's management body and will participate in the decision-making process, whereas the technician will not be part of this *dominant coalition* and will implement decisions made by others. Grunig and Grunig (1992) used similar division to describe the main differences in PR practice dividing the four professional models[1] into craft and professional ones. According to Grunig and Grunig (1992) press agentry and public information are craft PR which mean one-way communication ranging from propaganda (press agentry) to journalism (public information). Craft PR focuses on the technician role in which the effective use of communication techniques is seen as worthwhile in itself. Professional PR is practiced in two-way models which range from persuasion (two-way asymmetrical) to conflict management (two-way symmetrical). Professional PR is a more

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1 Grunig and Hunt (1984) developed 4 models of PR practice - press agentry/publicity (one-way asymmetrical), public information (one-way symmetrical), two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical, based on the direction and purpose of communication behaviour.

strategic function whereby communication is used to resolve conflicts and manage relationships with publics aiming to achieve asymmetrical or mutual problem solving within a context where both organisations and publics are liable to change.

In the last ten years in Bulgaria, progress has undoubtedly been made towards PR professionals' aspirations to occupy a leading position in organisational hierarchy. Now, most of the big Bulgarian companies and organisations have PR departments. With rapid economic changes and the rise of a middle class consumer market over the last ten years, there was a shift in the level of importance and nature of PR in Bulgaria. With the ongoing development of the democratic societal system, professional PR agencies are gaining strength. In such a competitive election-driven political environment, candidates and political parties rely more and more on PR agencies to help them build positive images and conduct successful election campaigns[2]. Hundreds of demonstrations and petition activities have occurred in the last decade[3] which has positively influenced PR practice in the country. As Wu, Taylor and Chen (2001) suggested: "[the] societal levels of tolerance for citizen activism are important for shaping PR development". Unpopular government legislation and pressure from different interest groups have increased the demand for crisis communication. Nowadays PR serves not only as a crisis management function but also supports marketing efforts. The trends of internationalisation and globalisation have played a significant role in shaping the field of Bulgarian PR over the last decade. International companies brought big PR budgets to the Bulgarian market and this money attracted multinational PR agencies[4]. At the same time, local consultancies also sprung up to serve some local industries with smaller budgets or regional specifics.

In observing these social trends, it can be suggested that the Bulgarian PR function is gradually obtaining higher status within organisations' hierarchy. Respectively, PR experts are moving from technical to more strategic tasks. However, existing academic criticism of manager-technician framework makes us cautious about further generalisations.

The classification into manager and technician roles presumes that there is a clear division between the two concepts, so this typology may be inappropriate considering the inherent dynamism of the PR profession. In other words, although some practitioners might hold management positions, they also perform tasks that would classify them as technicians. Many academics have questioned the adequacy of Dozier's classification from this point of view. The criticisms concern the potential overlap of the manager and technician role and the potential diversity of the practitioner's role taking behaviour. Culberston (1991, p. 62) emphasized the need for a more dynamic, process perspective of role enactment rather than treating roles as static categories into which practitioners are *pigeonholed*. Another approach proposes that roles are a function of a social system made up of role senders and role receivers (Katz and Kahn, 1978). Thus, the role performed by the PR practitioner, at least in part, depends on the expectations of senior management which are communicated to the practitioner through *role sending*. Katz and Kahn (1978) also noted that the practitioner is not

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2 During the last election campaign in 2007 all leading political parties in Bulgaria used professional services of PR agencies. Available at http://www.yvox.net/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=2381&mode=thread&order=0&thold=0

3 One example of activism in Bulgaria is the environmental movement for protection of the Natura 2000 Network areas.

4 For instance, United Partners PR agency was established in the beginning of 1997 and a few months later it became an affiliate and part of the global family of the U.S. company Manning Selvage & Lee. The agency has high profile clients in Bulgaria including Procter & Gamble, Shell, IBM, Philips, United Distillers and Vintners, and Master Foods. Available at http://www.sofiaecho.com/article/uniting-foreign-companies-with-local-pr/id_2633/catid_23

simply the passive recipient of roles sent, but actively constructs his/her own role. Moss, Warnaby and Newman (cited in Moss, Newman and De Santo, 2004) added that in the case of PR roles research, the emphasis was almost exclusively placed on identifying the reported tasks that constitute the manager's role rather than investigating the manager's work – in terms of observing their activities.

In fact, professional literature is replete with examples that practitioners change their roles in organisations. PR function is subject of considerable role ambiguity which makes the investigation of roles performance difficult. Such ambiguity is characteristic for the everyday work of Bulgarian practitioners. Regardless of the clear evidence for positive trends of change of the Bulgarian PR industry, it is still difficult to say which role – technician or managerial, better defines the behaviour of PR practitioners. It is the intention of the present study to get a more in-depth understanding of this phenomenon which is essential for the evolution of PR profession in the country.

It may be difficult to measure the role enactment of practitioners because of the dynamic character of their tasks and functions. Nevertheless, there are clear empirical linkages between practitioner roles and Grunig's (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) four models of PR. Dozier (1992) suggests that roles research operates at the micro (practitioner) level of analysis; the four models of PR seek to analyse the PR function at the meso (organisational) level. In other words, roles research studies individual practitioners and their work activities, Grunig's models of PR delineate ways the function is performed by the organisation as a whole.

As Dozier (1992) further illustrates:

"Practitioners in organisations practicing the press agentry and public information models of PR will engage in few activities that define the PR manager role. Practitioners in organisations practicing the two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical models of PR are more likely to play the PR manager role." (Dozier, 1992, p. 345)

Therefore, to get a more detailed understanding about practitioners' role performance, it is adequate to probe further into the models practiced by Bulgarian PR experts using Grunig's models – press agentry, public information, two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical. Grunig and Grunig (1992) showed evidence that the four models can be reliably measured, that they are valid and that they do exist in real organisations. Grunig and Grunig admitted that:

 "Organisations often do not practice the models purely. Many use different models for different situations and different programs." (Grunig and Grunig, 1992, p. 297)

Therefore, we can expect that all of the four models are used by Bulgarian PR practitioners in their work but some of the models will be applied predominantly and with more frequency. Grunig and Grunig (1992) also claim that the PR departments that contribute most to organisational effectiveness, practice on the two-way models and emphasize the symmetrical model more than the asymmetrical model. According to Grunig and Grunig, these are the main factors that characterise *excellent* PR practice. Excellence in PR presupposes participative rather than authoritarian organisational culture and a PR senior expert who has power in or with the *dominant coalition.*

Since this theoretical concept evolved in the USA, an important question arises out of its geographically restricted origin. The question is whether and to what extent it is applicable in other parts of the world, particularly in Bulgaria. Importing western theories into other countries may not always be appropriate but the author of the present research is inclined to believe that Bulgarian PR practitioners are strongly influenced by western models and practices. There are several reasons to corroborate this. Firstly, many western companies gained a foothold in the Bulgarian market by setting up a country office and introducing parent company know-how, including PR knowledge and practices. Secondly, professional PR education centres in Bulgaria are also developing their programmes considering primarily, western knowledge and theories[5]. Furthermore, an earlier research on the relationship between PR models and job satisfaction in Bulgaria provided additional reasons to believe so. Karadjov, Kim & Karavasilev's (1999) study was designed according to Grunig's four-model theory and focused on investigating the status of PR in Bulgaria. The study showed that Bulgarian practitioners were relying on both press agentry/publicity and the two-way asymmetrical model but ideally they aspired to practice only the two-way asymmetrical model and the two-way symmetrical model.

Although several studies (Wu, Taylor, Chen, 2001; Raman, Karan, 2006; Huang, 1990; Lyra, 1991; Sriramesh, 1991; Penteado, 1996; etc.) have focused on the practice of two-way symmetrical communication in a country-specific context trying to demonstrate the universal use and adaptability of Grunig's models, there is also general acceptance in the academic literature that theories developed in the United States need more cultural consideration before applying to other countries. In Sriramesh's view (cited in Kim & Hon, 1996) "PR practice can be linked with a society's cultural idiosyncrasies". Researchers have challenged the direct application of Grunig's models to international research settings. Huang (1990), Lyra (1991), Sriramesh (1991) and Penteado (1996) (cited in Kim & Hon, 1996) applied the four models to Taiwan, Greece, India, and Brazil respectively. Huang (1990) insisted that "social gathering nature", "drinking or eating nature," or "tempting, enticing nature" could be other activities related to PR activities.

This outcome is closely related with the *personal influence model* identified by Lyra and Sriramesh, which focuses on personal relationship with key figures in the media, government, or political and activist groups. This international model of PR describes practitioners cultivating good relationships with external publics to restrict government regulation, secure government approval and ensure positive press coverage. Taking into consideration Wu, Taylor and Chen's (2001) suggestion that in many developing countries practitioners tend to focus specifically on journalists and government officials as key publics seeking to perform *personal influence* relations, it is interesting to examine the role of this model in Bulgaria. Hence, this study will also investigate to what extent *personal influence model* is enacted by Bulgarian practitioners.

The aforementioned observations suggest that we can add to our conceptualisation of PR and professional models by underlying the cultural-specific conditions. Cultural elements do influence the interaction between organisations and their publics. As Verčič, Grunig, L.A. and Grunig, J.E. (1996) say:

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5 Such centres are London School of PR, CIPR and M3 Communications College

"We believe that culture matters in the way that organisations and their PR departments function, even as those PR departments employ generic principles of PR". (Verčič, Grunig and Grunig, 1996, pp. 31-65)

To better understand the link between PR and culture, Vasquez and Taylor (1994) explored the quantitative relationship of Hofstede's dimensions of culture to Grunig's four models of PR. Hofstede (1980) identified four key cultural dimensions:

- *individualism/collectivism[6];*
- *power distance[7];*
- *uncertainty avoidance[8];*
- *masculinity/femininity[9].*

These four variables are present in all cultures and the degree of their presence will influence the functioning of any organisation. In Vasquez and Taylor's view:

"For PR, Hofstede's variables affect the assumptions of communication and practice of PR both in the organisation and in societal culture. When combined with Grunig's models of PR, Hofstede's variables bring a cultural and international perspective to PR research and practice." (Vasquez and Taylor, 1994, p. 9)

They also suggest:

"Hofstede's variables allow for an examination of the behaviours and work-related attitudes of PR in association with each of Grunig's models"; "If Hofstede's cultural variables and Grunig's models of PR practice are combined, then scholars may have a means to examine cultural variations in the models of PR and in the PR practice of any one country." (Vasquez and Taylor, 1994, p. 12)

Based on the extension of Hofstede's variables to Grunig's models, Vasquez and Taylor developed a quantitative instrument that explicates the work-related cultural behaviours of PR practitioners. This paper aims to study Bulgarian PR practice in terms of Hofstede's classification of culture using an adapted version of Vasquez and Taylor's analytical tool.

Therefore, this paper contributes to existing research about PR practice in Bulgarian context. Its purpose is to build on Karadjov's et al. (1999) research which explicated the Bulgarian perspective of PR but at the same time, to go further by exploring some additional factors influencing the Bulgarian PR field. The first section of the study offers a quantitative

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6 Individualistic cultures value personal time, challenge, material rewards at work, profess the ideologies of self-realisation. Collectivist cultures value training, physical conditions, skills; they profess the ideologies of harmony, consensus and equality.

7 High PD countries tend to have centralised political power and exhibit tall hierarchies in organisations with large differences in salary and status. Low PD countries tend to view subordinates and supervisors as closer together and interchangeable, with flatter hierarchies in organisations and less difference in salaries and status.

8 UA refers to the extent to which a society can tolerate ambiguity. Businesses in cultures with high UA may have more formal rules, require longer career commitments, and focus on tactical operations rather than strategy. People expect structure in organisations, institutions, and relationships to help make events clearly interpretable and predictable. In low UA cultures businesses may be more informal and focus more on long-range strategic matters than day-to-day operations.

9 In masculine cultures, the traditional distinctions are strongly maintained, while feminine cultures tend to collapse the distinctions and overlap gender roles.

assessment of actual PR practices in the country. To do this, Grunig's four-model theory is applied as it has proved useful in the measurement of practiced models of PR in different countries. This chosen approach will also give a base for comparison with Karadjov's et al. earlier findings. Furthermore, it will make possible the analysis of the correlation between Grunig's four models and Hofstede's four cultural dimensions using Vasquez and Taylor's (1994) theoretical ground.

**METHODOLOGY**

The main aim of this study is to identify whether PR practitioners in Bulgarian organisations enact technical, managerial or other roles. In particular, the research addresses whether professional PR models are practiced more now than in 1999. Its aim is also to get a deeper insight into the cultural specifics determining the role enactment of Bulgarian PR practitioners. The research objectives to achieve these aims are:

(1)     To identify which models of PR are practiced in Bulgaria.
(2)     To investigate whether *personal influence model* is practiced by Bulgarian PR practitioners.
(3)     To explore how cultural values influence Bulgarian PR practitioners.

The literature reviewed earlier in this paper enabled an appropriate conceptual framework to be identified that helped focus the inquiry. Primary data was collected to satisfy the research objectives.

Surveys were distributed in December 2007. The questionnaires were e-mailed to more than 500 respondents. The total number of questionnaires collected was 62. Surveys were checked for completion and all but 3 were deemed valid responses.

The sample was obtained from several types of organisations: 19 respondents were from different companies; 18 respondents worked for governmental/municipal institutions; 16 respondents represented different PR agencies; 5 were from non-profit organisations and 1 participant was from the PR department of a private university. Finally, a group of 6 were from other kinds of organisations: a political party, freelancers and a consultant in an international PR agency in Bulgaria. The goal of this diversified sample was to understand how different types of organisations in Bulgaria practice PR.

An English questionnaire, based on Grunig's four models of PR and Hofstede's cultural variables, was translated into Bulgarian. The questionnaire had two parts including close-ended quantitative questions and demographic information. From 41 questions in the quantitative part, the first 22 questions were derived from the four models of PR (Grunig and Hunt, 1984) and the excellent theory (Grunig, 1992) explained in the literature review. Four questions that represented the *personal influence model* were operationalised using as a base Wu's et al. (2001) study of societal and cultural influences on Taiwanese PR. Finally, 15 questions measuring the practitioners' cultural values were adopted from Vasquez and Taylor (1994) to assess four cultural dimensions: uncertainty avoidance, power distance, femininity/masculinity and individualism/collectivism. Five-point Likert-type scales from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) measured all of the 41 items. The high scores of the responses indicated a stronger level of agreement with the attitude in question and vice versa. SPSS for Windows was used for the statistical analysis.

## DISCUSSION

The data for this study is based on fifty nine respondents (N=59) from different types of organisations. Forty two (71%) of them were female and seventeen were male. The majority of the respondents were 25 – 40 years old (68%). Approximately 100% of the respondents had completed either a bachelors or masters degree, of which the largest part – 37% had majored in journalism. Nineteen (32%) of the respondents had never studied communication in their professional life. Approximately 63% of the respondents had a previous career in journalism before gaining positions in PR. Most of the respondents reported that their organisational PR units consisted of a director and up to five PR employees (49%) or a director and more than five employees (22%); 29% of the total group were the only PR specialists at their organisation. In more than a half of the organisational PR units worked both men and women and just ten (or 17%) have ethnically mixed personnel.

Data examined the existence of Grunig's four models of PR and additionally the practice of *personal influence model*. Appendix 1 shows the mean scores on the four models of PR from the sample. In the present study, the two-way symmetrical model (M = 4.11) is the most favoured, which indicates a greater dependence on the PR person in the decision-making process and management issues. The public information model (M = 3.05) scored very low. The two-way asymmetrical model (M = 3.67) is used moderately. Finally, the press agentry model (M = 3.87) is often used. Based on these figures it is evident that PR practitioners are largely adopting the two-way models although not excluding in their practice the press agentry model. These are further discussed in the following section.

Appendix 2 provides the operationalisations that were used to explore the *personal influence model*. The respondents reported a mean of 4.17.

### Press Agentry/Publicity

This model shows the practice of organisations of spreading favourable information about themselves with only moderate concern for its accuracy. Another determinant of the model is that it mostly attempts to get favourable publicity about the organisation into the media and keeps unfavourable publicity out. The survey results showed that Bulgarian practitioners thought publicity was an important part of PR. There is a similarity between the mean scores for the press agentry model in Karadjov's (1999) and the present survey which indicates that media relations is still one of practitioners' principal activities. According to Karadjov's research, press agentry was the most favoured of the four Grunig's models in 1999. The present study showed it was still one of the two most practiced models but it was no longer the leading model in Bulgarian PR. Although the majority of the respondents in 2007 admitted that their main duty was to get favourable publicity into the media and keep unfavourable publicity out (85% stated this), they also suggested that the effect of their media relations practices was not the only criteria for their effectiveness (just 32% said they were measuring their effectiveness through keeping news clipping files).

### Public Information

The survey results showed that this model scored a mean of 3.05 which is the lowest amongst the four models. The same tendency was shown in 1999 research and it illustrates the belief of respondents that they are doing more than just giving out news releases. They believe that accurate information could be given without volunteering unfavourable facts about their

organisation/client. These observations suggest that protecting organisations/clients' interests is a leading principle for Bulgarian PR practitioners which may cause an inherent tension between providing professional opinion in crisis situations with a desire to omit negative facts about their organisation/client.

**Two-way Asymmetrical**

This model allows collecting feedback from the relevant publics and using it for manipulation of the behaviour of the publics. In the present research, it had the third highest score amongst the models. A look at the two-way asymmetrical items in the questionnaire reveals very high results on the item measuring the desire of respondents to persuade their publics to behave as the organisation wants to (M=3.93). There are also relatively high scores on the items measuring PR practice of carrying out research before and after the start of a PR programme (M=3.56; 3.72). This fact illustrated important changes in comparison to the situation in 1999 which was characterised by lower average results on research items.
Looking at the scores on the two-way symmetrical model, however, showed that less than half of the respondents (47%) were used to carrying out research to find out to what extent the organisation/client and its public understand each other. Apparently, Bulgarian PR practitioners are more inclined to carry out research in order to facilitate the change of the attitude of the publics rather than to smooth the communication process between the organisation/client and its public.

**Two-way Symmetrical**

The two-way symmetrical model of PR seeks mutual understanding between the organisation and its publics. It is considered by J. Grunig to be the most ethical model. The present research showed that Bulgarian PR practitioners had more preference for this model compared to the rest of the four Grunig's models. This model scored the highest results and had been a subject of significant changes since 1999. Looking at the average scores, it is evident that respondents have become more conscious about their role of communication facilitators and mediators than they were eight years ago. Respondents stated that the *dominant coalition* (management body) of their organisation/client actively sought their professional opinion in the decision-making process. Supplementary questions based on Grunig's excellence study operationalised by the author of this research, revealed that the majority (59%) of Bulgarian PR specialists were considered to be managerial experts rather than technical experts.

Additionally, the results suggested that more than half of the respondents in this study (56%) recognised that as a PR specialist they should put the good of the public before that of the organisation. Nevertheless, only 46% of the interviewees admitted that their organisation had yielded to public pressure at least once. This is supported by the fact that respondents are more likely to carry out research in order to facilitate the change of attitude of the publics rather than to smooth the symmetrical communication between organisation/client and publics. The item related to conducting PR researches as part of the two-way symmetrical practice showed comparatively low scores (M=3.30) which leads to the conclusion that even though PR practitioners believe they practice the two-way symmetrical model to some extent, most of them are not using the actual skills and strategy characteristics of this model.
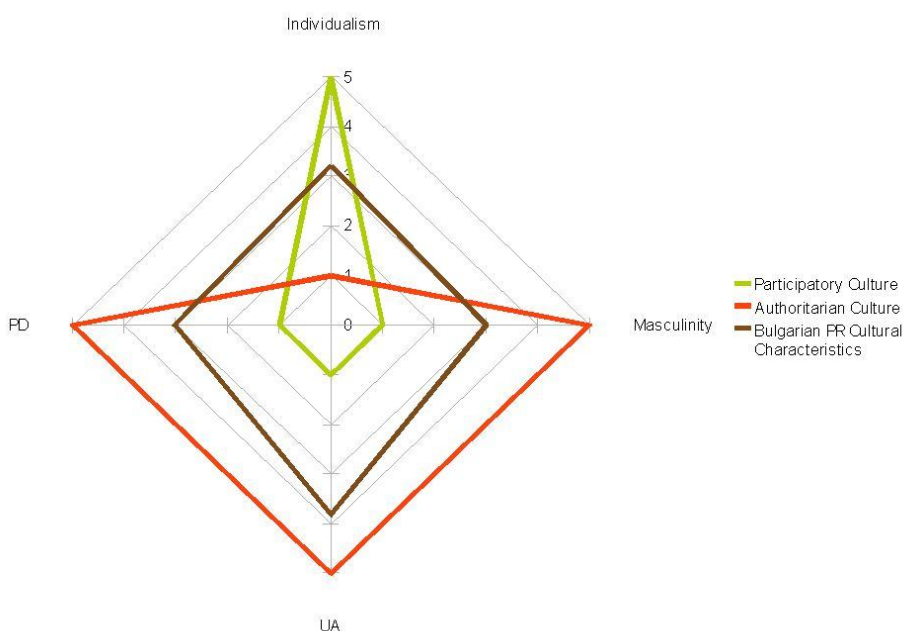
**Personal Influence**

As it was pointed out in the Literature Review section, *personal influence model* of PR exists in some nations where practitioners cultivate relationships with journalists and government officials to achieve organisational goals. In reviewing the practitioner responses to the *personal influence model,* it became evident that relationship-building was very important for Bulgarian PR practice. Appendix 2 shows the high mean scores on the questions about personal relationships inside and outside the organisation. This data showed that for the majority of the Bulgarian practitioners gaining publicity for clients was very important for short-term goals; they also recognised that long-term relationships, both with colleagues and important publics, were imperative for effective PR.

**Public Relations and Culture**

The final quantitative assessment in this survey examined the work-related cultural dimensions experienced by PR practitioners in their organisations. Appendix 3 reports the data on Hofstede's measures. The practitioners in this study appear to be exactly on the middle of the *power distance* index (M= 3.02) and *masculinity/femininity* (M=3.00), a little higher than average on *individualism/collectivism* (M=3.22) and moderately high on *uncertainty avoidance* (M = 3.81).

The current paper is based on Vasquez's (1994) observations about the relationship between PR practice and culture. This section gives descriptive analysis of the work-related cultural specifics of Bulgarian PR practitioners and the possible correlation with the models practiced by them. The main preposition used for the analysis is Sriramesh and White's (1992) suggestion that high power distance, high collectivism, masculinity and less tolerance of uncertainty are related to the *authoritarian organisational culture* where PR excellence hardly exists. *Participatory organisational culture* which possesses low power distance, less collectivism and high level of femininity is a favourable environment for symmetrical communication models to flourish. If *authoritarian organisational culture* and *participatory organisational culture* are both theoretical models which do not exist in real-life situations, they are nevertheless useful to lay down the opposite poles of the authoritarian-participatory continuum of organisational culture. The Bulgarian PR organisational culture is situated somewhere in between of these, which can be shown pictorially by the following diagram.

From the diagram we can come to a conclusion that in order to change organisations' cultural characteristics towards participatory culture, Bulgarian PR practitioners should endeavour to decrease the levels of power distance, masculinity and uncertainty avoidance.

Power distance shows to what extent an organisation has tall, hierarchical structures and restricted upward communication. The index offers insight into the type of the communication structure, centralised or decentralised, prevalent within an organisation. Masculinity indicates to what level traditional gender distinctions are strongly maintained within an organisation. Survey results on PD and masculinity/femininity indices are indicative of the remarkable transformations that Bulgarian society has gone through since the democratic changes in 1989; at the same time, the results show that in the societal culture there are still remains from the past communist period.

In fact, organisational culture is closely related with the larger societal culture. In Verčič, Grunig and Grunig's (1996) view, the attributes of the larger societal culture may foster some qualities of excellence PR while impeding others. The rapid political, economic and social changes in Bulgaria fostered a strong need for senior managers to think strategically about long-term relationships. At the same time, authoritarian values inherited from the past totalitarian period may block the symmetrical communication practices necessary for organisations to adapt to the change. The results on power distance and masculinity items in this survey supported this observation. According to the research findings, excellence PR has become possible in Bulgaria due to the favourable societal transformations but at the same time it may be hindered by some cultural characteristics. However, according to Sriramesh and White (1992), organisations operating in societies with a non-participatory culture may have excellent PR if powerful individuals there foster participative organisational culture. Such agents of transformation in Bulgarian society could become PR practitioners who have senior positions at their organisations.

Another striking feature of the organisational culture in Bulgaria suggested by the relatively high scores on the uncertainty avoidance items is its intolerance to *risky* or untried solutions to communication problems. This may be the reason why the press agentry model which is a conventional modus operandi for PR practitioners scored one of the highest results in the 2007 study, repeating the results of the 1999 research. Cultures that avoid uncertainty reduce ambiguity by enforcing many formal rules and do not tolerate deviant views. Dozier and Grunig (1995) suggest that:

"Cultures that tolerate deviant views will foster organisations that negotiate more successfully with external publics, seeking long-term relationships with those whose views differ from those in dominant coalitions" (Dozier and Grunig, 1995, p. 174).

According to the survey data, Bulgarian organisations are less likely to stimulate innovations and support new ideas; they are not acting but usually reacting to changes in their business environment which influences PR practice negatively. Bulgarian PR personnel do not solve organisational problems by seeking to develop strategic long-term communication channels with related publics; in crisis situations they would rather rely on useful interpersonal relations with key figures (as it is suggested by the scores on *personal influence model*).

Finally, individualism-collectivism has been recognized and studied by many theorists as a dimension affecting inter-group processes. Individualistic cultures stress individual goals,

value personal time, freedom, challenge and material rewards at work. Collectivism points to the belief that the needs of a group are more valued than the needs of an individual. Vasquez and Taylor (1994) posited that collectivism would be related to the two-way symmetrical model of PR because the characteristics of collectivism include cooperation, helping others, and contributing to the success of the organisation. Organisational culture in Bulgaria resulted to be a little higher than average on individualism/collectivism which means individualistic values are prevailing. This is an indication that PR practitioners in the country profess the ideologies of self-realisation a little bit more than the ideologies of harmony, consensus and equality. This could be a positive sign for their attitude towards personal professional status and self-actualisation but at the same time it may influence the effectiveness and productivity of organisational PR units if their members are not inclined to cooperate and are weak team players.

**CONCLUSION**

This study has looked at the issue of role enactment of PR practitioners in Bulgaria.

The review of the literature in this paper explored the way in which current academic researches contested the concept of PR practitioner roles. It explained the dominant perception of *management/technician division* in PR roles theory and additionally provided some competing theoretical observations regarding the adequacy of the leading academic approach.

Due to the inherent dynamism of the function of PR practitioners, the literature review mainly concentrated on the way in which PR roles can be reliably measured and studied. The analytical method suggested by this paper is based on Dozier's (1992) presupposition that roles research studies individual practitioners and their work activities whereas Grunig's four models of PR delineate ways the function is performed by the organisation as a whole. Based on this assumption, it is inferred that to get profound understanding about role performance of practitioners, it was necessary to examine which of Grunig's four models prevailed within Bulgarian PR practice. Grunig's methodology for professional models research seems generally accepted and used in the measurement of PR models in different countries, including Bulgaria. Bearing in mind the observations made in 1999 when the last survey on professional PR models in Bulgaria was conducted, the review of literature advocated that essential socio-economic changes had taken place in the country since then. Therefore, this paper was aimed to gain a baseline of current PR practices in the country.

Furthermore, the literature review showed evidence of some critical voices which claimed that PR models developed in the United States needed more cultural consideration before applying to other countries. As the world becomes more and more interdependent, there is a growing acceptance among PR researchers that societal culture influences the interaction between organisations and their publics. Admitting this, the present paper looked to make the first steps in exploring the relationship between existing organisational culture in Bulgaria and the models of PR. The review of literature presented Vasquez and Taylor's (1994) analytical tool, developed to examine this correlation, thus bringing a cultural and international perspective to PR research and practice.

Based on the observations on the dynamic social and economic transformations in Bulgarian society during the last 10 years and the theoretical underpinning reviewed for this paper, a hypothesis was generated that there would be a move from one-way (craft) to two-way (professional) models of PR and from emphasizing knowledge and persuasion to relation building. It was intended not just to identify which was the prevalent model of PR but also to get more in-depth understanding of local communication needs and culturally derived procedures.

The survey asked a total set of 51 questions divided in close-ended quantitative questions and demographic questions. The first group of questions were measuring the practice of Grunig's four models of PR and one additional model: the personal influence model. The second group was measuring four sets of cultural values: uncertainty avoidance, power distance, femininity/masculinity and individualism/collectivism. Fifty nine responses from different types of organisations were received. This was a relatively low number of responses and must be borne in mind when seeking to draw conclusions from the data presented.

According to the research findings, Bulgarian PR practitioners are adopting largely the two-way models as it was predicted by the hypothesis. Nevertheless, the press agentry model is still one of the two most practiced models although it is no longer the leading one. Two-way symmetrical model scored the highest results and had been a subject of significant changes since 1999. This study showed that PR experts in Bulgaria had become more conscious about their role of communication facilitators than they were eight years ago. The majority of respondents also stated that they were considered to be managerial experts rather than technical experts. Although PR has become a vital function for Bulgarian organisations, there is still room for doubting whether professional standards in the country fully correspond with the *excellent* PR practice, i.e. it is important to investigate to what extent Bulgarian practitioners use the actual skills and strategy characteristics of two-way symmetrical model.

This question was transformed to a secondary hypothesis which was submitted to analysis using the additional data reported by the respondents on the set of questions regarding work related cultural values of Bulgarian PR practitioners. That part of the study used as a starting point the assumption that participatory organisational culture, unlike the authoritarian one, is a favourable environment for symmetrical communication models. Bulgarian organisational culture is situated between the participatory/authoritarian opposition. The study showed that rapid socio-economic changes in Bulgaria had fostered a strong need for senior managers to think strategically about long-term relationships. However, inherited cultural values may block the symmetrical communication practices necessary for organisations to adapt to changes. Relatively high scores on uncertainty avoidance items revealed the lack of tolerance for untried solutions to communication problems which also may hinder the implementation of the two-way symmetrical model encouraging the use of the traditional press agentry model.

Because of the relatively small sample used in this study its results do not have to be overly generalised. A larger, more random sample could build on this study and increase the reliability of its findings. The data collection focused on the Sofia region which is the economic and political centre of Bulgaria. Hence, further studies should survey the other parts of the country to better define Bulgarian PR practice. However, given these limitations, the research could be useful to both practitioners and scholars alike.

In conclusion, this study shows that the trends toward social transformation and continued economic growth offer excellent opportunities for PR to develop as a valuable profession and key relationship-building function in Bulgaria but some cultural specifics may delay the process. Bulgarian PR practitioners can use the knowledge presented by the present research to foster desired changes.

# APPENDIX 1

MEAN SCORES FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS MODELS

*Press Agentry/Publicity Model*

| *Items* | *Means* |
|---|---|
| In our organisation, public relations and publicity mean essentially the same thing. | 3.69 |
| The main purpose of my organisation's public relations is to get publicity about my organisation/client. | 4.36 |
| As PR experts we mostly attempt to get favourable publicity into the media and to keep unfavourable publicity out. | 4.10 |
| We determine how successful a program is from the number of people who attend an event or use our products and services. | 3.30 |
| *Total* | 3.87 |

*Public Information Model*

| *Items* | *Means* |
|---|---|
| In my organisation, public relations is more of a neutral disseminator of information than an advocate for the organisation or mediator between management and publics. | 2.55 |
| As public relations specialists, we disseminate accurate information but do not volunteer unfavourable information. | 4.22 |
| Keeping a clipping file is about the only way we have to determine the success of a program. | 2.92 |
| In public relations, nearly everyone is so busy writing news stories or producing publications that there is no time to carry out research. | 2.49 |
| *Total* | 3.05 |

*Two-way Asymmetrical Model*

| *Items* | *Means* |
|---|---|
| Before starting a public relations program, we look at attitude surveys to make sure we describe the organisation in ways which our publics would be most likely to accept. | 3.46 |
| Before starting a program, we carry out research to determine public attitudes toward the organisation and how they might change. | 3.56 |
| After completing a public relations program, we carry out research to determine how effective the program has been in changing people's attitudes. | 3.72 |
| In public relations, our broad goal is to persuade publics to behave as the | 3.93 |

| organisation wants them to behave. | |
|---|---|
| *Total* | 3.67 |

## *Two-way Symmetrical Model*

| *Items* | *Means* |
|---|---|
| In our organisation/agency, public relations should provide mediation for the organisation to smooth the dialogue between the management and related publics. | 4.40 |
| The purpose of public relations is to change the attitudes and behaviour of management as much as it is to change the attitudes and behaviour of publics. | 4.17 |
| Before starting a program, we carry out surveys or informal research to find out how much management and our publics understand each other. | 3.30 |
| The purpose of public relations is to develop mutual understanding between the management of the organisation and the publics the organisation affects. | 4.50 |
| *Total* | 4.11 |

# APPENDIX 2

MEAN SCORES FOR PERSONAL INFLUENCE MODEL

| *Items* | *Means* |
|---|---|
| Having good interpersonal relationships with other employees in my organisation is very important for PR practitioners. | 4.71 |
| Having good interpersonal relationships with important people outside my organisation is essential for PR practitioners. | 4.56 |
| Socializing is one of the most important activities for a PR practitioner. | 4.81 |
| The best way to being successful at PR is to provide benefits to gain influence with personal contacts. | 2.55 |
| *Total* | 4.17 |

# APPENDIX 3

MEAN SCORES FOR HOFSTEDE'S CULTURAL DIMENSIONS

## *Power Distance*

| *Items* | *Means* |
|---|---|
| In my organisation, subordinates are afraid to express disagreement with their superior. | 3.25 |
| My supervisor usually makes decisions on his/her own and then expects the decisions to be carried out loyally and without me/us raising any difficulties. | 2.81 |
| My supervisor usually makes decisions on his/her own but before going ahead, explains the reasons for the decisions and answers any questions. | 2.96 |
| I prefer to work for any type of supervisor except for one who asks me for advice and then announces his/her decision and expects me to loyally implement the decision whether or not it was in accordance with the advice I gave. | 3.18 |
| *Total* | 3.02 |

## *Uncertainty Avoidance*

| *Items* | *Means* |
|---|---|
| It is very important to follow organisational rules even if I think it is in the organisation's best interests if I break the rules. | 3.37 |
| It is important for me to work in a well-designed job situation where the responsibilities and requirements are clear. | 4.56 |
| It is very important for me to have long-term job security. | 4.12 |
| It is very important for me to have little tension and stress on the job. | 3.17 |
| *Total* | 3.81 |

## *Masculinity/Femininity*

| *Items* | *Means* |
|---|---|
| Having training opportunities to improve or learn new skills is more important than having a good working relationship with my direct supervisor. | 3.07 |
| Working in a modem, up-to-date company is more important than working with people who cooperate well with one another. | 2.47 |
| Having an opportunity for high earning is more important than working in a friendly atmosphere. | 3.00 |
| Having an opportunity for advancement to higher level jobs is more | 3.49 |

| important than having good physical working conditions. | |
|---|---|
| *Total* | 3.00 |

## *Individualism/Collectivism*

| *Items* | *Means* |
|---|---|
| Having sufficient time left for my personal or family life is more important than making a real contribution to the success of my organisation. | 2.73 |
| Having challenging tasks to perform, from which I can get a personal sense of accomplishment, is more important than collective activities (such as team building, etc.). | 3.73 |
| Working in a large and prestigious organisation is more important than working in a smaller but desirable organisation. | 3.16 |
| *Total* | 3.22 |

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