EXPLORING AN ALTERNATIVE PUBLIC RELATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR THE
PUBLIC SECTOR

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Graduate Faculty of The University of Akron

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Andrea M. Ferraro
May, 2015
ABSTRACT

Public relations is a critical function of a democracy as government must create policies and programs, generate awareness, inform, encourage input and engagement, solicit support, and measure results. Furthermore, government has a responsibility to protect and promote public interest. Thus, public administrators must practice public relations. However, existing models developed in the corporate context make practicing public relations in government challenging.

This study examines the differences between the public and private sectors and advocates a new public relations framework, allowing government to practice public relations more effectively. Although research has discovered differences between the two sectors, there has been little attempt to create an alternative model of public relations for government use. This is important research since new models of governance and administration have engaged citizenship at the root of their practice and public administrators are tasked with increasing public participation in environments characterized by cynicism and distrust. Today, public relations must be able to assist administrators with the task of establishing and maintaining relationships with citizens.

Based on the review of literature in both the communication and public administration disciplines and findings from this study, which utilized interviews with practicing public communicators in city and county government in the state of Ohio, the
author proposes an alternative framework of public relations for the public sector. This new model, entitled the Government-Citizen Relationship Framework, recognizes the differences between the public and private sectors, assimilates the study findings, and incorporates an endogenic tradition by utilizing both the relationship dimensions in the relational theory of public relations and public participation decision making to help establish relationships with citizens and build community.

This study attempts to fill the gap in the research, contribute to theory building in the communication and public administration disciplines, and offer praxis to public administrators so they can accomplish both pragmatic and democratic public relations.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIST OF FIGURES</th>
<th>ix</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinctions Between the Public and Private Sectors</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Frameworks</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of Study</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of Public Relations</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations Regarding the History of Public Relations</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining Public Relations</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of Public Relations in Government</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences Between the Public and Private Sectors</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Participation</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Relational Theory of Public Relations</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. RESEARCH DESIGN</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative Approach in an Interpretative Paradigm</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Step: Purposeful Sampling of Study Population</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Survey</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Step: Face-to-Face Semi-Structured Interviews</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Step: Exploring an Alternative Public Relations Framework for the Public Sector</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. RESULTS</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Survey Findings</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of the Interviews</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. EMERGENT ALTERNATIVE PUBLIC RELATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR THE PUBLIC SECTOR: THE GOVERNMENT-CITIZEN RELATIONSHIP FRAMEWORK</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Government-Citizen Relationship Framework</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of the New Framework</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary and Review of Central Themes</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations and Implications for Future Studies</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX A. THOMAS’ (1995) PUBLIC PARTICIPATION EFFECTIVE
DECISION MODEL INTEGRATED WITH GRUNIG & HUNT’S (1984)
FOUR INDICES TO MEASURE PUBLIC RELATIONS MODELS (AS
PROPOSED BY THE AUTHOR)…………………………………………………..176

APPENDIX B. HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL FROM THE
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD, OFFICE OF RESEARCH
ADMINISTRATION, THE UNIVERSITY OF AKRON…………………………..178
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>The government-citizen relationship framework of public relations</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Communication is a critical component for government. For a democracy to survive, public information must be available (Garnett, 1992; Wilcox & Cameron, 2012). It is the role of government, at the federal, state, and local levels, to communicate in an attempt to create policies and programs, generate awareness, inform, educate, solicit support, and measure results (Wilcox & Cameron, 2012). Public administrators and elected officials must utilize communication to help develop, implement, and monitor policies, programs, and legislation (Garnett, 1992). It is also the responsibility of government to seek feedback from its citizens so it can gauge public opinion and support and adjust programs and services accordingly. Citizens, in turn, must be able to interact with and respond to their government and communication is the key to active citizen engagement. Whether it is writing letters to elected officials, attending public meetings, or getting involved in local grass-roots causes, it is important for citizens to be able to influence and judge the role of government in their lives (Wilcox & Cameron, 2010).

Developing effective communication programs for both internal and external audiences is often referred to as public relations. Communication is an activity of public relations and has been central to both the study and practice of public relations (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000). Public relations practitioners develop and manage
communication between their organizations and important stakeholders/target publics (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). At the heart of public relations is creating and maintaining beneficial relationships with employees, consumers, government, the community, the media, and other special publics (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

Public relations practices and theories have been largely embraced by corporations and non-profit organizations in the private sector, yielding successful results (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Wilcox & Cameron, 2012; Broom & Sha, 2103). Public relations has also been employed by government and continues to be utilized by the public sector. As early as the beginning of the twentieth century, the Bureau of City Betterment was established for the purpose of attaining more efficient management and operation of the city of New York, and it used publicity to help achieve that (Stivers, 2000). Publicity was also exercised by the New York Bureau of Municipal Research to reveal to citizens inefficiency, waste, and poor living conditions, especially amongst the immigrant populations, resulting in public outcry that led to support for municipal reform (Stivers, 2000). President Wilson appointed George Creel, a journalist, as chairman of the Committee on Public Information, which would help build support by the American people for World War I efforts through advocacy and publicity, including the Four-Minute Men community volunteers and the publishing of a daily newspaper about the war efforts (Fleming, 2003).

Lee (1998) notes that public relations was presented as a responsibility of public administrators in early public administration textbooks from the 1920s through the 1950s and two important functions it served was to advertise the services of government
agencies and create support for policy. Dimock (1937) asserted that public administration needs to be concerned with responsiveness. He wrote in 1934, “The most neglected aspect of public administration is salesmanship – what is usually called, in the broader sense, public relations” (p. 660). White’s *Introduction to the Study of Public Administration* (1947) advises administrative agencies to be concerned with executing policy and its public relations endeavors “directed solely to facilitating the achievement of predetermined ends” (p. 227). Millet in the early 1950s affirmed that public relations in public service could not be “overemphasized” since it was to be used to learn about the desires of citizens, advise the citizens, ensure contact between citizens and government officials, and inform citizens about the actions of government (Lee, 1998, p. 516). Pimlott (1951) presented two arguments for government public relations: (1) Reportorial argument: A democratic government must report to its people; and (2) Administrative argument: programs may not succeed unless the people are informed about their rights and duties and this may require persuasion to gain voluntary cooperation (p. 76). He writes, “Those who hold that the public relations specialist should take part in formulating policy agree that his skill in the arts of communication is important, but maintain that he will not be effective unless he is a good deal more – in particular unless he is an expert in interpreting the public to his employers and in advising his employers how to shape their policies in order to enlist public support” (Pimlott, 1951, p. 54).

By the 1970s, however, coverage of both communication and public relations was being condensed or excluded from leading public administration textbooks and courses, and Lee (1998) notes that the public administration textbooks of the 1980s and the early
1990s rarely mentioned the topic of public relations for public administrators. The subject of public relations also accounted for very little research in the discipline in these decades.

Yet, by the late 1990s, the topic of public relations was gaining renewed interest by public administrators, as evident by several handbooks for public administrators that featured comprehensive coverage of communication and public relations (Lee, 1998). Most notably was Garnett’s and Kouzim’s (1997) edited 822-page *Handbook of Administrative Communication* that examines and analyzes communication in theory, management, and practice in government organizations. Renowned public relations researcher Grunig contributed one chapter to the handbook, entitled *Public Relations in Government and Business*.

The subject of public relations also received renewed interest due to proposed new frameworks of public administration. Both the New Public Service (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2002 & 2012) and New Public Choice Theory (Moore, 1997; Benington & Moore, 2011) emphasize communication with constituents to increase civic participation, engagement, dialogue, and public value – areas that are ripe for exploration by public relations. Lee (2009) notes that not only is the subject of public relations making a comeback in the college curriculums of public administration as more students are interested in learning how to communicate effectively with their constituents, but it is also beginning to be researched by the public administration discipline.

Recent texts, such as the *Media Relations Handbook for Government, Associations, Nonprofits, and Elected Officials* (Fitch & Holt, 2012), *Political Public
Relations (Stromback & Kiousis, 2011), and The Practice of Government Public Relations (Lee, Neeley & Stewart, 2012), suggest the utilization of public relations by government officials in the public sector. The advances in technology also present vast opportunities for government administrators and elected officials to communicate with constituents. A recent study found that 67 percent of respondents felt it was very important for government to provide information to the public on its website and allow people to contact the agency through its website (Pew Research Center, 2009).

Public relations encompasses many disciplinary fields, including business, communication, media studies, political science, and psychology. Most of the theories and models used by public relations practitioners to communicate with their target publics are based on contemporary public relations, which has its roots in the management theory of communication. However, the private sector and public sector represent very different kinds of contexts. This begs the research question: Can today’s public relations practices, developed, cultivated, and practiced extensively in the private sector, be used effectively in the public sector to help achieve strategic government communication objectives? Problematic is the adoption of the private-sector mentality of client to governmental organizations (Viteritti, 1997). Allison (1979) wrote, “I conclude that public and private management are at least as different as they are similar and that the differences are more important than the similarities” (p. 408). Thus, these distinctions play an important part in how government administrators communicate externally with their constituents.
Distinctions Between the Public and Private Sectors

For close to 100 years, there has been great debate whether government can operate in the same manner as organizations in the private sector. The heart of this debate lies in the value systems of these sectors. Since the structure of an organization supports its values and both its structure and values will affect and influence its practice (Cox, Buck & Morgan, 2011), this is an important debate. Menzel (2007) writes that government exists to produce and provide public goods to citizens, such as justice, safety, transportation, and air and water quality. Thus, they must survive in environments that are characterized by pressure and influence from citizens, elected officials, the judiciary, interest groups, and private organizations (O’Leary, 2006). Researchers and scholars in the public administration discipline have identified distinctions between the public sector and the private sector, including organizational setting and environmental factors. Many note that one of the main differences is that government’s mission is public service based on public values, whereas private sector organizations’ mission is profit-driven (Dimock, 1937; Appleby, 1945; Rainey, Backoff & Levine, 1976; Allison, 1979; Kernaghan & Langford, 1990; Viteritti, 1997; Cox, Buck & Morgan, 2011; Gueras & Garofalo, 2011). Indeed, public administrators have a public responsibility and government exists to ensure protecting and promoting the public interest of society and its citizens (Appleby, 1945). Many public administration scholars propose that public organizations involved in public service to citizens must operate in accordance with democratic governance principles, such as representativeness, responsiveness, equity, legitimacy, community, and liberty (Dimock, 1937; Appleby 1945; Rainey, Backoff & Levine, 1976; Allison,
1979; Kernaghan & Langford, 1990; Viteritti, 1997; Cox et al., 2011; Gueras & Garofalo, 2011). Even though private organizations may share some of these values, public sector agencies must embrace them all. Public employees at the federal, state, and local levels typically take an oath to uphold the values of the Constitution, as well as their department’s mission (Kernaghan & Langford, 1990; Menzel, 2007; Geuras & Garofalo, 2011). They also face a greater public scrutiny of their actions, as well as a greater expectation that they act with more fairness, responsiveness, accountability, and honesty (Rainey et al., 1976; Viteritti, 1997).

Since public administrators must make decisions on behalf of citizens, they have to represent societal values. Waldo (1980) presents twelve ethical obligations of a public servant and these include an obligation to the Constitution, the law, the nation, democracy, the public interest/general welfare of man, and humanity. The Council for Excellence in Government (1992-1993) instructs every government employee to serve the public interest and perform with integrity (Menzel, 2007). Since many public employees are in direct and daily contact with citizens, they also serve as agents of social jurisdiction in which they must consider values that affect individual lives (Garnett, 1992). McCamy wrote in 1939, “Every meeting between “the government” and the citizen is an episode in the complex flow of public relations” (p. vii). Levy concurs, writing in 1943, “… an agency’s relations with outsiders are of so many kinds that every contact with anyone may be considered to involve a “public” relation” (p. 9).

New Public Management theory became popular in the early 1990s with the release of Osborne and Gaebler’s Reinventing Government best-seller, and it supports the
premise that government should run like a business and practice profit-driven business principles to increase efficiency and effectiveness. The citizen is to be treated as a “customer” and government is to provide a variety of service choices for the individual based on practical and proven business practices, such as competition, entrepreneurship, enterprise, and market-driven solutions (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). In an attempt to embrace and practice these principles, local and state governments privatized government services and programs. Many studies found, however, that privatizing government services and programs produced mixed results and the savings and benefit from such programs, on average, were minimal. There are also conflicts between values related to accountability and values associated with inventiveness, originality, and risk-taking (Behn, 2001). Problematic for the New Public Management framework is that private organizations answer to ownership whereas government must answer to society. Furthermore, citizens can be both clients and non-clients of government services and programs as well as active or non-active political constituents (Grunig, 1997; Viteritti, 1997), resulting in no simple linear transaction relationship between government and citizens. Private firms do not have to justify their products (unless issues of harm or safety arise) whereas government must continually justify its existence and activities and show that it is operating in the public interest (Geuras & Garofalo, 2011). Garnett (1992) notes that citizens regard it as their right to know what government does since it is the “public’s business” (p. 17). One seasoned federal government employee summed it up with these words, “Our job is to tell the U.S. taxpayer how their tax dollars are being spent” (Fitch & Holt, 2012, p. 218).
The structure of the public sector also embraces political and legal tendencies and constraints (Goodnow, 1900; Dimock, 1937; Appleby, 1945; Pimlott, 1951; Kaufman, 1969; Rainey, Backoff & Levine, 1976; Sayre, 1978; Allison, 1979; Rosenbloom, 1983; Liu & Horsely, 2007; Cox et al., 2011; Geuras & Garofalo, 2011). Viteritti writes that public organizations have to be politically responsible by representing the various interests of society so, “Meaningful communication between government and the people is not merely a managerial practicality. It is a political, albeit moral, obligation that originates from the basic covenant that exists between the government and the people” (1997, p. 82). Allison calls this significant difference between public and private management “a fundamental constitutional difference” (2011, p. 403). He points out that management in private organizations is centralized in the Chief Executive Officer with authority corresponding with responsibility whereas in the United States government, management functions are constitutionally shared among the executive branch, Congress, and the courts. This major difference between the public and private sectors is based on the concept of separation of powers that the fathers of the Constitution endorsed.

According to Rosenbloom (1983), politics is inherent in public administration because public administrators make rules, implement rules, and arbitrate rules. As a result, he points out that public administrators are involved in both administrative and constitutional law. Garnett (1992), like Rosenbloom, observes the political realities that affect public sector communication. He writes that public officials in government agencies face intervention from political parties, legislators, interest groups, and other political and legal agents that most private employees in private organizations do not
have to contend with (p. 16). In legal and formal constraints, Rainey et al. (1976) found that public organizations have more constraints on procedures and operations and more external sources of formal influence, characterized by greater fragmentation, than do private organizations. They note that public organizations are under great and diverse intensity by external influences on decisions, such as public opinion and interest groups, and thus have a greater need for support. Regarding internal structures and processes, they found that public organizations possess a greater multiplicity and diversity of objectives, greater vagueness and intangibility of objectives, and a greater tendency of conflicting goals. They also discovered public administrators experience less decision-making autonomy, so their performance is characterized by greater cautiousness, rigidity, and less innovativeness.

Public administrators must also operate with information disclosure laws and policies. Not surprisingly, one study found that public administrators tend to focus more on internal communications rather than external “because of a greater complexity and uncertainty involved in communication with multiple stakeholders in increasingly turbulent environments” (Pandey & Garnett, 2006, p. 45). Paradoxically, government effectiveness and satisfaction is largely determined by citizens and other constituencies in the external environment. Dunlop presents some contrasts of public and private managers and found that the former are exposed to more public scrutiny and more open processes, have more contact with the press and the media, experience greater scrutiny of actions by legislative oversight groups and judicial orders, and operate with no clear
bottom line whereas the bottom line for private managers is profit, market performance, and survival (Allison, 1979).

Another important difference that scholars have noted between the public sector and private sector is the sheer scope and breadth of government, as well as its impact (Appleby, 1945; Rainey, Backoff & Levine, 1976; Gueras & Garofalo, 2011). Appleby notes, “No other enterprise has such equal appeal or concern for everyone, is so equally dependent on everyone, or deals so vitally with those psychological intangibles which reflect popular economic needs and social aspirations” (1945, p. 7). The decisions of private organizations, even large international companies, typically do not have such far-reaching consequences and implications as the actions of government.

Another significant difference between the public sector and private sector is the nature of the relationship with the media, sometimes referred to as “Fourth Estate.” Even though both public sector and private sector organizations must deal effectively with the media, public employees are under great scrutiny by media since the media acts as the watchdog of government and protector of public interest (Appleby, 1945; Garnett, 1992; Viteritti, 1997; Stromback & Kiousis, 2011; Fitch & Holt, 2012; Lee, 2012). The nature of this relationship tends to be more adversarial as a result, with reporters expressing cynicism about the operation and performance of government by its officials (Orren, 1997; Viteritti, 1997; Sadow, 2012). The media/press obtained its watchdog privilege from the founding fathers of the constitution in the Bill of Rights, containing the First Amendment, which allows the freedom of speech, religion, and the press (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1971). Today’s media operates under the social responsibility
theory and several of its functions include: “(1) servicing the political system by providing information, discussion, and debate on public affairs; (2) enlightening the public so as to make it capable of self-government; [and] (3) safeguarding the rights of individuals by serving as a watchdog against government” (Siebert et al., 1971, p. 74).

Appleby wrote in the mid-1940s that individuals new to the public administration field are stunned by the way the press takes such an intent interest in their position, conduct, and life. The same holds true today. This preoccupation of the press can prove daunting and as already discussed, many public administrators are fearful of investigation, litigation, and backlash. However, the media’s presence is vital in a democratic society.

Employees in the public sector also face an environment of eroding public trust and satisfaction (Nye, 1997; Mansbridge, 1997; Putnam, 2001; Clawson & Oxley, 2008). Mansbridge points out that sociocultural changes have produced rising expectations for governments, causing government “overload” – a situation in which citizens ask the government to solve problems it cannot solve, ask the government to do more things (and more incompatible things) than it can do, and ask governments to solve problems without being willing to sustain taxation adequate to finance the efforts that would produce a solution” (1997, pp. 133-134). She notes that as governments make hard decisions that produce unpopular costs for citizens so that popular benefits can be generated, government respect can deteriorate, causing citizens to question if public officials are acting in the public interest.

Recent studies have begun to examine the use of private sector public relations and marketing techniques by government. Branding of neighborhoods became a popular
tool in the 2000s and the marketing of places became an activity in the public sector to entice investment and increase population and tourism in cities and states (Kotler, Haider & Rein, 1993; Mohan, 2009; Mohan, 2011). However, according to Rose (2010), public agencies’ use of private sector practices from the marketing and public relations industries to create brands and identities for cities and states may lead to serious repercussions for both government and citizens. He points to the emphasis of visual over verbal, eliciting emotions which branding achieves, as dangerous to democracy since advertising does not solicit dialogue. It becomes easier for states to alter perceptions through branding rather than actually changing the social and economic conditions of their citizens, leading to the compromising of real reform measures. Hence, the promotion of symbolic value over intrinsic value does not serve democratic principles (Rose, 2010).

Zvattaro (2010) also examines the public relations (PR) and marketing firms metaphor that many cities/municipalities are using to promote and brand themselves through images and messages. She points out that this metaphor has roots in the New Public Management with its focus on market-based techniques and in post-modernism with its reliance on images. This model uses one-way communication, thereby limiting public participation, and presents the danger of public relations becoming propaganda, as well as a reliance on images at the cost of issues and problem identification (Zvattaro, 2010).

In summary, public organizations and private organizations have unique differences. Public officials operate in an environment characterized by legal, ethical,
and political constraints, and poor public perception. Public officials have to be cognizant of the principles of democracy – accountability, transparency, separation of powers, citizen participation, and the media as a public watchdog – in their daily actions. This environment is very different from the one that employees in private organizations operate in. Thus, an alternative framework of public relations that acknowledges and adopts the unique characteristics of the public sector while emphasizing citizen participation/engagement and ethical integrity is critical.

Theoretical Frameworks

As presented earlier, the majority of theories and models used by public relations practitioners to communicate internally and externally are based on contemporary public relations with roots in the organizational theory of communication. However, the private sector and public sector represent two different kinds of contexts as seen from the brief review of literature above. Much of the organizational theory literature has focused on the private sector and adapting it to the public sector may be inadequate (Viteritti, 1997). Attempts to develop a specific public relations model for the public sector have been rare. Liu and Horsley (2007) point out the differences in the public sector, including legal constraints, federalism, politics, and poor public perception, which make the current public relations models for government insufficient, and they propose a government communication model that instructs administrators on what types of communication to utilize in the different types of microenvironments government faces. This model, however, does not provide direction beyond communication selection and it does not differentiate between elected officials and non-elected public administrators. The heavy
reliance on communication and management theories has also led to recent debate about “theoretical black holes” in the public relations discipline (McKie & Munshi, 2009, p. 61).

The public relations discipline does not encompass one grand theory, although most scholars view public relations as part of the management subsystem of an organization system (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Grunig and Hunt (1984) proposed four models of public relations: Press Agent/Publicity Model, Public Information Model, Two-Way Asymmetrical Model, and Two-Way Symmetrical Model. Although these models were constructed in specific timeframes to represent the practice of communicating with an organization’s various target publics, each model can still be seen in practice today.

The Press Agent/Publicity Model, which was characteristic of the 1800s, involves generating publicity for an organization (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). The use of hype promoted in mass media channels is the main feature in this one-way communication model as the public relations practitioner aims to generate publicity by entertaining, shocking, or amazing their publics and is not overly concerned with truth and accuracy (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). The communication programs developed in this model are not based on research or strategic planning and they employ a monologue (Grunig, 1997).

The Public Information Model, which gained prominence in the early 1900s as journalists began entering the public relations field, focuses on delivering truthful and accurate information to target publics through mass media channels (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). This one-way communication model emphasizes transparency, objectivity, and
honesty but typically does not contain persuasive elements as the attitudes and dispositions of the target publics are not sought out (Wilcox et al., 2010). The communication programs also developed in this model are not based on research or strategic planning and employ a monologue (Grunig, 1997).

The Two-Way Asymmetric Model involves public relations practitioners delivering accurate information to target publics with an emphasis on developing messages based on scientific persuasion with the intent on motivating target publics (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). This model goes beyond disseminating information in mass media channels to targeted publics as it also solicits feedback, which is used to enhance scientific persuasive messages (Wilcox et al., 2010). A dialogue with target publics is strived for but it is controlled mostly by the organization, which aims to change the target public (Grunig, 1997).

The fourth model of public relations is known as the Two-Way Symmetric Model in which the public relations practitioner strives for balanced, two-way communication with the target publics using both mass media and interpersonal communication (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). There is a strong emphasis on generating feedback to gain mutual understanding and help build relationships with target publics to better improve communication efforts (Wilcox et al., 2010). The Two-Way Symmetric Model is the ideal framework for public relations practitioners because it utilizes negotiation and compromise in its dialogue (Grunig, 1997). Grunig (1997) points out that the two-way symmetrical process also identifies ethics as a process rather than an outcome of public relations practice so it is not centered on ethical relativism.
In studies that looked at government’s use of public relations models, it was found that the public information model was the most employed (Turk, 1985; Grunig, 1997). One study found that government administrators were more experienced in using the press agentry and public information models rather than the two-way models (Wetherell, 1989). Indeed, the best-selling textbook for college students studying public relations reveals, “The public relations functions of government agencies consist primarily of disseminating information” (Wilcox & Cameron, 2012, p. 496). This is not surprising since Congress forbids federal agencies from persuading publics, and as a result, the emphasis is placed on disseminating information (Grunig, 1997; Wilcox & Cameron, 2012).

Some studies have shown that the dominant use of the press agentry, public information, and two-way asymmetric models of public relations are not effective (Grunig, 1997). Many state agencies, while having a dominant model influenced by the agency’s organizational characteristics and environmental conditions, also incorporate a combination of the other models depending on particular circumstances at a given time (Turk, 1985).

However, the dissemination of the information may not be the end goal – in most cases, it is to get people to act or support something, “Thus, information merges into persuasion” (Pimlott, 1951, p. 80). In the late 1930s, Alfred Stedman, assistant administrator of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, explained that the AAA had to go beyond dissemination of objective facts to stimulate participation in their programs amongst farmers and this involved selecting certain information over other information
with the goal of cooperative action (Pimlott, 1951, p. 83). According to Stedman, the communication tools of public administrators contain “personal and official philosophy, argument, defense, and also at times, viewpoints attacking or disputing the reasoning or citation of facts by critics” (Pimlott, 1951, p. 94). Indeed, White (1948) writes that public administrators must appeal to public interest so citizens can be persuaded to adopt government programs. Lee (2009) suggests two purposes for governmental public relations: pragmatic, which is concerned with communicating the public agency’s purpose, and democratic, which uses communication as an outreach to promote the principles of democracy.

The public relations process involves a linear series of actions, as defined by the RACE acronym: research, action, communication, and evaluation (Marston, 1963). The diffusion of innovation theory is used in the communication stage, as this theory proposes five stages of communicating social change to members of a social system: awareness, interest, evaluation, trial, and adoption (Rogers, 2003). The RACE method continues to be employed today by public relations practitioners and is taught in universities to students in academic public relations programs. However, recent critics have pointed out that this process presumes that change, both organizational and social, can be controlled and the outcomes acknowledged (Opt, 2008). The RACE process, along with the first three models of public relations, supports the exogenic tradition of knowledge. The exogenic tradition is part of the modernistic approach that views knowledge as being part of the real world and the belief that the use of manipulation, control, and prediction can be utilized to find that knowledge (Gergen, 2002). Exogenic approaches run contrary to
the democratic principles public officials uphold and these approaches cannot recognize
the unique factors of the public environment. Thus, the RACE process, which is learned
and practiced by the majority of public relations practitioners in the field, may be
problematic for the public sector domain.

The endogenic tradition, which is part of the postmodern approach, maintains that
knowledge is constructed socially by individuals (Gergen, 2002). In this approach, public
relations practitioners use intervention through social interaction to encourage dialogue,
mutual understanding, and collaboration with their target publics to find knowledge
(Gordan & Pellegrin, 2008). A Two-Way Symmetrical Model with dialectic and
rhetorical communication theories best encompasses this approach. The endogenic
tradition is also more in line with the democratic principles and unique environment that
public officials operate in. Rhetoric focuses on collective and socially responsible
discourse, thus contributing to a more fully functioning society (Heath, 2009, p. 2). Heath
believes that rhetorical strategies “are inseparable from views on the nature of society,
collective decisions, and the roles of government and business” (2009, p. 8).

Public sector communication plays a critical role in public policy. In the
punctuated-equilibrium theory, one of the four factors for policy to be able to move to a
macropolitical system includes the attention brought about by the media and the broader
publics (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). In the four models of public relations, presented
earlier, we can see that the role of the media is extremely important as public sector
communication requires channels in which information can be disseminated to the target
publics. Hence, establishing and maintaining positive media relations becomes a crucial activity for public officials practicing public relations.

Public policy is also affected by public opinion, which is in part, shaped by the media (Rushefsky, 2008). The first step of the policy process, problem identification, involves citizens attempting to get government to see that there is a problem that has to be fixed or a need that has to be realized (Rushefsky, 2008). Thus, the role of two-way communication becomes significant as public officials must create conducive environments where citizens can be heard and feedback is sought and analyzed in an attempt to create better government services and programs. One study found that organizations practicing two-way symmetrical communication were able to influence the news media, resulting in less inconsistency in news coverage (Theus, 1988).

The second step of the policy process, agenda building, is of great importance to public officials, as well, since this stage examines certain streams of how an issue becomes a part of policy agenda (Rushefsky, 2008). The political stream is influenced by changes in public opinion, swings in national mood, and special interest groups (Rushefsky, 2008). These changes can be presented and promoted by public officials using media relations, revealing the power of the agenda-setting theory. The essence of the theory is that the media, acting as “technocrats,” sets the public agenda by focusing on select issues and news happenings, thus influencing what citizens think about and what they deliberate on (Baran & Davis, 2009). Agenda-setting theory asserts that the public will perceive issues that the media covers as more important than issues that do
not receive media exposure or that receive limited exposure (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993).

Once issues are presented on the public agenda, two-way public sector communication once again becomes paramount. In fact, without it, today’s democracy is threatened because “the losers are the citizens, whose voices have been squeezed out of the public dialogue by the polarizing voices of professional activists” (Hogan, Andrews, Andrews & Williams, 2008, p. 4). To be successful and remain viable, government must utilize a public relations model that embraces the endogenic tradition of two-way communication.

Purpose of Study

Since this study will examine the role of public relations in the public sector, the research questions set forth are:

R₁: How is public relations practiced by public administrators in the public sector?

R₂: Do the differences between the public and private sectors affect the way public relations is practiced by public administrators?

To answer these questions and determine recurring themes, the author will in the next chapter review the literature on public relations, exploring the following key topics: history of public relations, limitations on the history of public relations, defining public relations, the role of public relations in government, differences between the public and private sectors, and the importance of public participation in a democracy.
The review of literature will confirm that much of the history of public relations is presented through a business paradigm that utilizes public relations to influence behavior and attitudes of target publics that help support the organization so it can survive and thrive in the marketplace. This reality is different from the public sector, and the review of literature presents how government does indeed differ significantly from the private sector, especially in relation to democratic principles. As a result, current theories of public relations, entrenched in the corporate domain, are challenging for the public sector. Lee (2009) points out that if the argument supporting public sector management as being different from business management in the private and non-profit sectors is true, then “… the communications and information activities of public relations in public administration would, by necessity, be different from the practice of public relations in the management of organizations in the other two sectors” (p. 524).

The review of literature examines why the term public relations is problematic for government administrators. Since Congress authorized the Gillet Amendment in 1913 that prohibits federal agencies from spending money on publicity, the term public relations has been disfavored in government. As a result, public relations activities as practiced by public administrators have been given other labels, such as public information, which focuses on one-way communication, and public affairs. Definitions are important because they help shape reality and suggest certain frameworks.

The third chapter presents the research design of the study. Since the review of literature does reveal important differences between the public and private sectors, it was critical to investigate how public administrators currently practice public relations with
their constituencies. By performing a qualitative study that utilized grounded theory and interviews with public administrators who practice public relations in municipal and county governments in Ohio, the author was able to ensure that the data could explore the research questions.

The fourth chapter examines and analyzes the findings from these interviews, answering the research questions. The findings from the review of literature and the interviews with the public administrators were used to develop an alternative framework of public relations for the government/public sector.

In the fifth chapter, the author proposes the alternative framework, entitled the Government-Citizen Relationship Framework. The model utilizes the relational theory of public relations and the public participation decision making model to successfully embrace democratic values and ideals. Not only does it offer guidance to public administrators, but it also contributes to theory building.

The sixth and final chapter summarizes the project and findings, reviews the central themes, presents the limitations of the study, suggests future research, and concludes the project.

This is an important study as public administrators are tasked daily with communicating effectively with both internal and external stakeholders. Garnett writes, “No other communicator matches government for the quantity, variety, and importance of communications” (1992, p. 15). Today, the United States government is the world’s largest information collector and information disseminator (Wilcox & Hunt, 2012). Public administrators must attempt to use this information to communicate with citizens.
in an environment fraught with serious challenges, including growing distrust of
government, declining social capital, and citizen detachment from the policymaking
process (Clawson & Oxley, 2008). Yet today’s public administrator must succeed as
evident in a recent International City/County Management Association Guide for
managing local government services that lists the functions of marketing and public
relations as competencies for public managers in the twenty-first century (2007). Also,
the new frameworks of public administration, which examine public activity in relation to
the goals of society, call for administrators to incorporate public service and public value
by creating awareness, encouraging dialogue, and building advocacy.

The field of public administration continues to utilize theory to generate
understanding, especially since there is no generally accepted paradigm that guides the
discipline. So how we go about applying theory and gaining knowledge is critical
because this very knowledge will help us to better structure our discipline, manage,
motivate, and lead our employees, and help us deal with the unique political and
administrative dichotomy that characterizes our practice (Cox, Buck & Morgan, 2011).

According to Hummel (2006), information becomes knowledge only when
someone can put it to use. The ancient Greeks referred to this concept as praxis in which
theory and practice work together. So theory must assist us in improving what we do and
how we do it in the public administration practice. Thus, this study contributes
significantly to the public administration literature as it fulfills a need for a public
relations framework that recognizes and accommodates the unique differences the public
sector has from the private sector. An alternative framework of public relations, which
also recognizes and embraces the unique characteristics of the public sector, will allow public officials the ability to go beyond disseminating information, as in pragmatic public relations, to fully engaging citizens in public dialogue and thus achieving democratic public relations. An alternative framework also adds to theory building in both the public administration and communication disciplines.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter will explore the literature pertaining to public relations and the public sector. In particular, the following topics will be explored: history of public relations, the definition of public relations, the role of public relations in government, and differences between the public and private sectors.

Since public relations encompasses many disciplinary fields, including business, communication, media studies, political science, and psychology, it is important to understand its history. Examining the evolution of public relations will present insight into its purposes, techniques, strengths, limitations, and opportunities. As Broom and Sha (2013) write, “… understanding public relations’ historic role underpins today’s practice” (p. 74). It is also imperative to study the use of public relations in government to determine its influence and impact in the public sector.

Looking at the definitions of public relations is important as the development of definitions of words, practices, and ideas are social progressions that influence behavior and help shape reality and our understanding of the world (Schiappa, 1993). Different definitions of public relations imply different practices and techniques.

And finally, it is imperative to study the differences between the public and private sectors as this will provide justification for an alternative framework of public
relations for government/public sector that recognizes its unique differences, values, and ideologies.

History of Public Relations

Newsom, Turk, and Kruckeberg (2013) write, “Because the effort to persuade underlies all public relations activity, we can say that the general endeavor of public relations is as old as civilization itself” (p. 25). Throughout the centuries, public relations has employed the use of rhetoric, symbols, and slogans (Newsom et al., 2013). Farm bulletins dating back to 1800 B.C. in Iraq and the use of persuasion in Chinese politics as early as 770 B.C. are just some examples of early forms of communication used to influence and persuade (Broom & Sha, 2013). Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, written in the fourth century B.C. and containing a treatise on the art of persuasion, can be considered one of the earlier works on techniques of public relations (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Julius Ceasar established parades after victories (Wilcox & Cameron, 2012), and the apostles used speeches, letters, and events to spread Christianity (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Newsom et al., 2013). Many scholars see the Renaissance period with its emphasis on the humanistic approach and the use of public opinion as critical to the growth of fostering and cultivating public relationships (Bernays, 1952; Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Gutenberg’s creation of the printing press at the start of the Renaissance made it easier for people and organizations to communicate and persuade the public (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Wilcox & Cameron, 2012; Broom & Sha, 2013; Newsom et al., 2013).

The use of public relations was used in colonial America as pamphlets and brochures were utilized to sell land and help raise funds to build universities (Wilcox &
Cameron, 2012; Broom & Sha, 2013). Sustained public relations campaigns and tactics, however, were cultivated during the American Revolution and used by such public opinion molders as Samuel Adams, Thomas Pain, and Thomas Jefferson. Davidson (1941) contends that in a more democratic society, propaganda plays an important role since public opinion must be aroused for change and the use of propaganda was effectively employed by the patriots, the Tories, and the Whigs during the American Revolution. Davidson defines propaganda as “… an attempt to control the actions of people indirectly by controlling their attitudes” (1941, p. xiii) and notes that in the American Revolution, there were both intentional propagandists and unintentional propagandists. The anti-British patriots utilized propaganda tools, such as newspaper articles, pamphlets, posters, and sermons, as well as events to arouse public opinion, such as the Boston Tea Party staged by Adams in 1773 in resistance to the British Tea Act. This incident, close to 230 years later, would be voted as “the greatest and best-known publicity stunts of all time” (PRWeek, 2002). Samuel Adams is credited with shaping public relations techniques today by his use of symbols, slogans, staged events, message dissemination to the press, and a sustained saturation campaign (Broom & Sha, 2013).

After the Revolution, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay published The Federalist Paper that contained 85 letters written to newspapers in support of the United States Constitution, and this political campaign positively influenced the ratification of the Constitution (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Broom & Sha, 2013). This collection of letters, in which the authors refute opposing views and supply accurate information to dispel fears and ignorance, is one of the best historical examples of public
relations (Mitchell, 1957). Newsom et al. (2013) refer to the 1600s through 1799, characterized by the colonization and the American Revolution, as the preliminary period of public relations in the United States (p. 28). They write that in this period, the channels of communication were being explored and cultivated and public relations practices included publicity, promotion, and press agentry. Press agentry dominated in the 1800s and Phineas Taylor Barnum, the great circus promoter, utilized it to the fullest. Spurred by the penny press newspapers that required an endless supply of “news,” the press agentry model of public relations, which is still around today, is characterized by hype and exaggeration to secure publicity through press and media coverage (Newsom et al., 2013).

A relationship can be seen between the early growth of public relations and the “**power struggles evoked by political reform movements**” (Broom & Sha, 2013, p. 77). In the 1800s, these reform movements included abolition, suffrage, and prohibition and the organizers of these causes used publicity to help sway public opinion (Wilcox & Cameron, 2013). Amos Kendall, serving in the capacity of presidential press secretary to Andrew Jackson in the 1830s, honed political public relations techniques, such as speech writing, writing pamphlets and articles for the party-sponsored newspaper, reprinting positive articles about Jackson, publicizing the president, conducting polls, and serving as a close advisor to the president (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Wilcox & Cameron, 2012; Broom & Sha, 2013; Newsom et al., 2013). Stivers (2000) writes that settlement women in the late 1800s and early 1900s utilized publicity and public opinion to help build constituencies and develop alliances to negotiate and compromise with government to
achieve a larger public purpose. Chicago’s Hull House founder, Jane Addams, used surveys to uncover inefficiency and fraud and publicized the findings to shepherd social change. Newsom et al. (2013) refer to this public relations stage as “communicating and initiating” in which publicists, press agents, promoters, and propagandists operated in a period influenced by the Civil War, the Industrial Revolution, and the Western expansion in the United States (p. 28).

At the turn of the 20th century, muckraking investigative journalists, bent on exposing scandal in government and business, and government’s distrust of big business that prompted anti-trust laws, led private industry to hire public relations specialists to generate public support (Newsom et al., 2013). This era was reflective of an emerging social consciousness and the rapid development of industries and utilities helped usher in the “Reaction/Responding” period in which writers were retained by organizations and special interest groups as company spokespeople, reacting to public concerns (Newsom et al., 2013, p. 28). Many public relations scholars note that the practice of public relations began during this era of muckraking journalists as businesses found themselves having to defend their operations to the public (Bernays, 1928; Cutlip, 1994; Coombs & Holladay, 2007). Since newspapers were the dominant advertising medium and organizations were being assailed in the newspapers by muckraking reporters, organizations turned to journalists to serve as their public relations agents and represent their interests (Cutlip, 1988; Newsom et al., 2013). In fact by the 1950s, most public relations professionals in government had journalism backgrounds (Pimlott, 1951).
The Publicity Bureau in Boston was the first established publicity firm, boasting Harvard and several railroads as clients, and in 1905, journalist Ivy Lee, along with his partner George Parker, opened up the first public relations agency, which included the Pennsylvania Railroad as a client (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Cutlip, 1988; Wilcox & Cameron, 2012; Broom & Sha, 2013; Newsom et al., 2013). Lee would later represent John D. Rockefeller Jr. during the strike-breaking Ludlow Massacre that occurred at the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company owned by Rockefeller (Wilcox and Cameron, 2012). Lee, referred to as the “Father of Public Relations,” utilized a variety of public relations techniques, including informational bulletins, letter-writing campaigns, and personal visits by Rockefeller to the miners and their families in Ludlow that helped curb efforts by the United Mine Workers (Wilcox & Cameron, 2012). Lee represents the Public Information model which consists of businesses using the mass media to disseminate accurate information to the public (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Wilcox & Cameron, 2012; Broom & Sha, 2013; Newsom et al., 2013).

While Lee was disseminating information for corporations, a Progressive reformer named William Harvey Allen was utilizing publicity and public information to solve societal problems and help make government more efficient. As the director of the New York branch of the Association for Improving the Conditions of the Poor (AICP) at the turn of the century, Allen conducted a successful public information campaign on public baths in which 20,000 impoverished children were taken to the baths and shown how to wash themselves, resulting in savings in the operation of the bathhouse (Stivers, 2000). This led to the AICP boasting that it could manage a public bathhouse for 30
percent less than the Tammany politicians (Stivers, 2000). In 1907, Allen wrote Efficient Democracy in which he applied knowledge he gained from his work in charitable organizations to government reform. Stivers (2000) writes, “Allen recommended that the dedicated few devote themselves to finding and publishing facts about governmental performance that would “enlighten and convince public opinion”” (p. 34). In that same year, Allen helped co-direct the newly established New York Bureau of Research, a non-government and privately-funded organization that operated on the foundation that citizens had a right and an obligation to know the activities of government, as well as the performance of these efforts (Mosher, 1982; Stivers, 2000).

Allen served as the Bureau’s advocate, giving “statistics flesh and blood,” and coordinating all publicity efforts, including writing and distributing stories to the press about its findings (Stivers, 2000, pp. 31 & 145). Publicity was an important function of the Bureau as one of the objectives outlined in its articles of incorporation was “to secure constructive publicity in matters pertaining to municipal problems” although the members did not see themselves as muckrakers (Stivers, 2000, p. 31). The Bureau “…from its origin invoked a sense of citizen responsibility and participation entirely foreign to the scientific management movement in private business” (Mosher, 1982, pp. 77-78). However, Allen’s zeal for publicity and public information would find himself at odds with one of the Bureau’s largest donors, John D. Rockefeller. Rockefeller was dubious of publicity and wanted the Bureau to halt several endeavors, including the weekly distribution of postcards that were used to educate the public about the Bureau’s activities (Stivers, 2000). Interestingly enough, this was around the same time that
Rockefeller was dealing with the Ludlow riots occurring in Colorado. Not wanting to lose Rockefeller’s support, the other directors of the Bureau were willing to concede to Rockefeller’s demands, so Allen resigned from the New York Bureau of Research in October of 1914 (Stivers, 2000).

Many large businesses at this time were creating public relations departments, practicing the public information model of public relations, and these included Westinghouse, American Telephone & Telegraph Co. (AT&T), the Ford Motor Company, and the Mutual Life Insurance Company (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Broom & Sha, 2013; Newsom et al., 2013). Arthur Page, vice president of the American Telephone & Telegraph Co. in the late 1920s, believed that a company’s performance dictates public approval and he was instrumental in developing standard practices for corporate public relations, which are still practiced today (Wilcox & Cameron, 2012).

Every president of the United States utilized public relations techniques to influence public opinion by utilizing media: Washington leaked his Farewell Address to a loyal publisher, Jefferson hired a newspaper reporter to create a party newspaper, Lincoln used newspaper editors to support his positions, Theodore Roosevelt used trusted reporters to test out new ideas before relaying them to the public, Wilson created the first formal press conference, and Franklin Roosevelt harnessed radio to create his successful “fireside chats” (Newsom et al., 2013). Theodore Roosevelt was not only instrumental in developing public relations tools in both political and social crusades, but he was also the first president to use the White House as the “bully pulpit” to discredit his opponents (Cutlip, 1994).
In 1913, Congress passed the Gillett Amendment, which states that appropriated funds may not be used to pay a publicity expert unless specifically appropriated for that purpose. Grunig and Hunt (1984) indicate that this legislation was in response to government agencies utilizing publicists to inform citizens and sway legislation. Ponder (1990) points to the aggressiveness of the United States Forest Services, which established the first federal government press bureau in 1905, as influencing Congress’ action. Congress was distrustful of the federal agency’s use of persuasion/propaganda to change the minds of citizens, whom Congress represented, to influence public opinion (McCamy, 1939; Pimlott, 1951). Four years after the Gillett Amendment, President Woodrow Wilson would launch one of the largest public relations and propaganda endeavors to date – the Committee on Public Information (also known as The Creel Committee) for the purpose of generating support for the war efforts by using mass persuasion to influence public opinion through advertising, public relations, and the mass media (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). The Creel Committee, headed by former newspaper journalist George Creel, was very successful in its efforts and although the members were using the typical tools of disseminating public information, they were also incorporating the psychological principles of mass persuasion, known as propaganda techniques (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Harold Lasswell, one of the members, insisted that not only was propaganda a part of everyday life, but that democracies must learn to deal with it (West & Turner, 2007). He is credited with developing propaganda theory, based on behaviorism and Freudianism, which holds that propaganda is “the result of the vulnerable state of mind of average people” (Baran & Davis, 2009, p. 81). Cutlip (1994)
writes that propaganda techniques had a profound effect on the newly emerging field of public relations and inadvertently propelled the word *propaganda* to take on a new, negative connotation, thus resulting in its disappearance from the public relations and advertising vernacular after the war.

Many members of The Creel Committee would go on to influence the communication and public relations fields. Walter Lippmann writing about public opinion in his 1927 book, *The Phantom Public*, asserted that a democratic government is not ruled by its people because the common man does not have the time or the resources to become educated about every aspect of his government, thus he is not a contributing force to how government is operated. He scoffed at the idea that the public was represented by individuals who come together to affect the decisions of their government, calling it a “phantom public” (p. 77). He writes, “... the citizen, the sovereign, is apparently expected to yield an unlimited quantity of public spirit, interest, curiosity and effort” (p. 24), but the citizen has little time to devote to public affairs and furthermore, is not really interested in the facts of civic duty. In fact, Lippmann believed the false ideal of people governing can lead to “disillusionment and to meddlesome tyranny” (p. 155). Nevertheless, after World War I, businesses became interested in public opinion research so they could utilize findings and polls to influence it (Newsom et al., 2013).

Edward Bernays, referred to as the “Father of Modern Public Relations,” also served on the Creel Committee. In his 1923 book, *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, Bernays presented a new approach to public opinion that he termed the counsel on public relations. In this counsel of public relations, he proposed that industries act with
understanding of their relationships to government, businesses, labor, financial shareholders, and the public. Manipulation, through the use of propaganda, is acceptable, Bernays believed, because of the herd instinct in society in which individuals are easily swayed to forsake their own innate tendency for that of the group. Thus, according to Bernays, who was also the nephew of Sigmund Freud, society is prone to a mob mentality, so manipulation is required. In his 1928 book, Propaganda, Bernays writes, “The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country” (Bernays, 1928, p. 1). The Gallup Poll, introduced in the 1930s, helped advance this model of public relations, the Two-Way Asymmetric Model, characterized by scientific persuasion and advocacy with a feedback loop. However, the feedback, typically polled or surveyed, is primarily used to determine better ways to persuade the target public to act on the organization’s message (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Gordon and Pellegrin (2008) affirm that Bernays saw public opinion existing as fact, which could be modified by supplying more or different information and persuasive factors to achieve the objective of the company/client. Even though the asymmetrical model employs two-way communication, the feedback is not used to achieve mutual understanding, so it relies on the exogenic tradition that utilizes manipulation, control, and prediction (Gergen, 2002). Bernays, along with his wife Doris Fleischman, created dozens of successful public relations campaigns, such as the Lights Golden Jubilee, and worked with many national clients, including Proctor & Gamble, Dodge Motors, General
Electric, and the American Tobacco Company. Bernays also wrote many articles about the practice and taught the first university public relations course in 1923, thus, influencing the profession throughout his long career.

The successful use of mass persuasion by the Creel Committee for World War I efforts, along with the successes of the Anti-Saloon League’s national prohibition campaign and the Woman’s Suffrage Movement, proved that publicity was a powerful instrument (Cutlip, 1994). Early publicists and publicity agents would later become the first public relations counselors. However, the potential of public relations after the war was acknowledged more by the business, education, social work, and philanthropy fields than government (Cutlip, 1994). During the Depression years, informed public support became the focus of much public relations (Broom & Sha, 2013). While Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal with its massive social welfare emphasis required awareness and support, businesses were using public relations techniques to surmount challenges brought on by the Depression, such as public distrust, strict government regulations, and a dissatisfied and restless labor force (Newsom et al., 2013). Several professional public relations and publicity organizations formed in the 1930s and when the American Council on Public Relations merged with the National Association of Public Relations Counsel in 1948, the Public Relations Society of America was formed and it continues to be the dominant public relations professional organization today.

Once again facing entry into another world war, the government established the Office of War Information (OWI) in 1942, headed by Elmer Davis, a former CBS radio newscaster, with the sole purpose of disseminating information. The War Advertising
Council was also established at the same time so government could place paid advertising in the mass media that supported the publicity and informational war campaigns. Both the OWI and the War Advertising Council were successful in securing cooperation and assistance from industry and labor and eliciting support for the war efforts amongst citizens by getting them to ration, recycle, buy war bonds, and serve in the armed forces (Broom & Sha, 2013; Newsom et al., 2013). According to Newsom et al. (2013) the commission of Davis and the establishment of the War Advertising Council were two important events that would influence the practice of public relations. This period of public relations, which also includes the beginning of the Cold War and growing consumerism due to a booming United States economy after the war, is known as the “planning and preventing” stage in which public relations becomes established and starts to be incorporated into the management function of corporate culture (Newsom et al., 2013).

Broom and Sha (2013) note that World War II trained close to 75,000 persons in the practice of public relations. After the war ended, these people entered corporations and industries, utilizing public relations to deal with the challenges and opportunities of a post-industrial world and post-war booming economy. New technologies were also being developed that public relations could harness, including television – a medium that exploded in growth after the war.

The 1960s and 1970s were a period of social unrest that created major social changes in the United States. This also marked the beginning of the decline of confidence in government (Nye, 1997). Peace efforts to end the Vietnam War, civil and women’s
rights efforts to end desegregation and promote equality, and environmental efforts to end pollution all required a different type of public relations. Political, social, and environmental activists formed grass-roots campaigns to educate and expose citizens to government and industry injustices and abuses. These activists not only attacked companies, but raised support amongst key stakeholders which they, in turn, utilized to apply pressure to organizations to change. Thus, public relations had to learn how to deal with these types of activist campaigns and in doing so, practitioners began adjusting and adapting (Broom & Sha, 2013). In 1965, Congress passed President Lyndon Johnson’s domestic “Great Society” policy initiatives designed to diminish poverty and end racial inequality. Newsom et al. (2013) point out that public relations practitioners in this era needed additional skills, such as a broad understanding of social sciences and the management functions of business. They write, “… nonmarketing problems received new emphasis, more attention was given to the worldwide consumer movement, corporate-government relationships were scrutinized, PR people gained increasing responsibility within the corporate structure, a more demanding role emerged for PR in multinational companies, and cries for help came from all sectors in dealing with dissident youth and minorities” (Newsome et al., 2013, p. 40). A new model of public relations began to take shape, known as the two-way symmetrical communication model, characterized by using research to learn key stakeholder stances, evaluating perceived consequences of company policies and actions on key stakeholders, and utilizing feedback and dialogue to build relationships with key stakeholders (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).
Acquisitions resulting in large public relations agencies merging with advertising agencies in the 1980s led to a more integrated communication approach in which public relations worked closely with marketing, advertising, and sales (Newsom et al., 2013). The rapid rise of technology and the development of the World Wide Web in the 1990s increased global communication and international relations, which further expanded the practice of public relations. New electronic and digital media also created opportunities for practitioners to communicate directly with key stakeholders, bypassing media gatekeepers. This stage of public relations, which started in 1980 and continues to the present day, is referred to as the “professionalism” stage (Newsom et al., 2013, p. 28).

Limitations Regarding the History of Public Relations

As presented earlier, public relations tactics have been practiced in ancient civilizations yet public relations as a practice did not come into existence in the United States until the early twentieth century. The practice has been and continues to be influenced by political, social, economical, and technological factors. However, the history of a discipline affects practice, so context is very defining. Some scholars believe that the linear interpretation of the history of public relations provides a very limited picture of public relations. Lamme and Russell (2010) found five reoccurring themes in the history of public relations – profit, recruitment, legitimacy, agitation, and advocacy with each requiring specific public relations strategies and tactics to accomplish the user’s objectives – and they suggest the themes be examined to better understand the history and practice of public relations rather than a linear progression of events and occurrences.
Vos (2011) alleges that most public relations textbooks present the history of corporate public relations using a functionalist logic by placing the origin of public relations in the early 1900s in response to the muckraker’s attacks on big business. However, Vos contends, this functionalist logic has shortcomings. First, it presents limitations in methodology and theory building since it presents the outcome as a cause rather than an effect. Secondly, it presents a tautological argument and fails to provide evidence of a satisfying selective. Third, it is ahistorical since it supposes certain social functions are necessary in all cultures and at the same time. The functionalist logic assumes that businesses were unequipped to handle the growing public corporate scandals brought about by the muckrakers so they had to turn to public relations practitioners (an outcome that was an effect, not a cause). Yet, as Vos (2011) points out, there were less than ten public relations agencies established in the United States after muckraking activities began to ebb. He also notes that by using the functionalist lens, any figure throughout history who utilized publicity or staged events can be classified as practicing public relations.

Furthermore, the majority of public relations history is presented in the dominant business history paradigm, so the theories and models of public relations are entrenched in the corporate context, and this is problematic for government institutions practicing public relations. Miller (2000) attests that the history of public relations is characterized by a dominant business history paradigm based on the works of Alfred Chandler, Jr., who studied the histories of businesses to explain the rise of corporate America. She writes, “In short, Chandler concluded, the visible hand of management replaced the invisible
hand of the market on the supply side of the economic equation” (2000, p. 382). This
dominant business history paradigm has affected the way the history of public relations
has been studied and Miller (2000) points out that most scholars studying public relations
history utilize this “Chandlerian lens” (p. 383) placing public relations in the context of
corporate business. For support, she presents the views of Gras, Raucher, and Tedlow,
who developed histories of corporate public relations based on the shifting role of
business in society. According to Gras, between the 12th and 18th centuries, business
public relations was dependent on the public so businesses could operate freely in the
society, but by the 18th and 19th centuries, businesses preferred to operate on their own
without public interference (Miller, 2000). From 1901 to 1945, Gras records another
shift in the role of business in society in which the policy of big business was to please
the public yet fool the public and disseminate information (Miller, 2000). Raucher
believes that public relations does not employ two-way communication with the public,
and Miller (2000) summarizes Raucher’s view of corporate public relations at the
beginning of the 1900s as “…simply a business strategy rooted in industry’s effort to
cope with the size and social complexity of bigness and the new methods of
communication” (p. 383). Miller (2000) also includes Tedlow’s view of public relations
as a “managerial strategy” that started in the 1880s with big business (p. 384). In fact,
Clark and Blankenburg (1973) write, “The sturdiest obstacles to “ideal” public relations
are economics and human nature. The plain fact is that managers are hired to make
money for owners, and that a conscience can cost money” (p. 175).
Thus, this corporate business model is problematic when public relations practices are utilized by government agencies since there are significant differences between the public and private sectors. This is an important finding as it helps provide justification for an alternative framework of public relations for government.

Defining Public Relations

Even though public relations tactics are ancient, the term public relations is relatively new. As presented earlier, the practice of publicity was known as “press agentry” until the turn of the twentieth century (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Wilcox & Cameron, 2012; Broom & Sha, 2013; Newsom, Turk & Kruckeberg, 2013). The term “public relations” was first used in an address to law students by a lawyer in 1882 (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Yet it was the railroads that began to use the term “public relations” in their correspondences, such as in their annual American Association of Railroads’ year book of 1897 (Broom & Sha, 2013). In 1908, the American Telephone & Telegraph Company used the term in a title in their annual report (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) and The Railway Gazette urged “better public relations” in an editorial written in 1909 (Broom & Sha, 2013, p. 80). However, it was Bernays who in 1923 first coined the phrase “public relations counsel” in the first book about the public relations industry, Crystallizing Public Opinion, to describe the public relations practitioner. Since then, there have been many definitions of public relations, reflecting the time’s political, business, social, and technological factors.

Pimlott (1951) observes that the activities of public relations can go by other names, such as information, publicity, and education. He points out that these different
references have caused confusion since the term public relations “… is a portmanteau
description of the activities of those who describe what they do as public relations. It does
not necessarily follow that these activities are connected with “public relations” in the
other senses, or that they are exclusively concerned with it in those senses” (1951, p. 4).

Definitions are important because they assert certain paradigms and frameworks. Harlow (1976) compiled a list of close to 500 definitions of public relations and then
developed his own rather lengthy definition, based on common concepts the definitions
shared: “Public relations is the distinctive management function which helps establish
and maintain mutual lines of communication, acceptance and cooperation between an
organization and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps
management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and
emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps
management keep abreast of and effectively utilize change, serving as an early warning
system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and sound and ethical communication
techniques as its principal tools” (p. 36).

In 1978, the First World Assembly of Public Relations Associations defined the
public relations practice as “the art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their
consequences, counseling organizational leaders, and implementing planned programs of
action which will serve both the organization and the public interest” (Newsom et al.,
2013, p. 3). Four years later and based on a panel of public relations professionals in
business and academics, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) adopted a
conceptual definition, entitled “Official Statement of Public Relations;“ that included
activities, results, and knowledge requirements (Broom & Sha, 2013). Believing that the existing definitions of public relations focused too much on effects and practices, Grunig and Hunt (1984) presented a much more concise definition of public relations:

“management of communication between an organization and its publics” (p. 6). In 2012, PRSA took a public vote amongst its members to establish a new definition for public relations and the following definition was selected: “Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics” (PRSA Website).

If we use the public relations definition as defined by PRSA, we can see that government does indeed practice strategic communication in an attempt to build mutually beneficial relationships with its constituents. However, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and universities, typically use the term “public affairs” or “public information” to refer to public relations activities, implying the dissemination of information rather than the use of persuasion (Wilcox & Cameron, 2012). Broom & Sha (2013) write, “… public affairs practitioners vehemently believe their expanded responsibility performed under statutory restrictions justifies a distinction in name from their counterparts practicing public relations” (p. 349). Government’s reluctance to use the word public relations may date back to the 1913 Gillet Amendment that prohibits federal agencies from spending money for publicity unless authorized by Congress (Broom & Sha, 2013). McCamy (1939) noted that a consequence of this act was that the function of publicity by public administrators was “disguised” not only in job titles, but in record-keeping as well (p. 7). Levy supports this as he wrote in 1943 in regard to the
title of the chief of public relations employed at the Pennsylvania Department of Public Assistance, “Noteworthy also in relation to the job is the open use of the title, “chief of public relations,” in contrast with euphemisms sometimes employed by government offices to mask public relations personnel: such, for instance, as technical assistant, publications editor, supervisor of information research, assistant to administrator, or others” (p. 56).

The Public Law 93-50, Section 305, which was voted into legislation in 1973, prohibits government from spending funds on “publicity or propaganda purposes designed to support or defeat legislation pending before Congress” (Broom & Sha, 2013. p. 11). As a result, the public relations activities in government and the public sector today may go by many names, including public information officer, press secretary, administrative aide, external affairs director, community affairs director, communications officer, community liaison, or government program analyst (Swann, 2010; Broom & Sha, 2013).

There are two types of public affairs: the first involves an organization’s relationship with government officials and elected politicians in which the company attempts to influence legislation that is favorable to its operations and success (Swann, 2010). The second type, and which this study is concerned with, involves government’s relationship with its publics as it attempts to inform about programs and services, respond to inquiries, and assess public opinion (Swann, 2010). Broom & Sha (2013) define public affairs as “… the specialized part of public relations that builds and maintains organizational relationships with governmental agencies and community stakeholder
groups to influence public policy” (p. 11). Most federal agencies, such as the US Department of Defense, Health and Human Services, and the Centers for Disease Control, have a public affairs director, and many elected officials also employ a public affairs person (Swann, 2010).

However, the actual term public affairs remains one that is surrounded by ambiguity and misunderstanding (McGrath, Moss & Harris, 2010). Even though it appears that public affairs may be suffering an identity crisis, there is some agreement regarding the practice of public affairs. The most common functions of public affairs in government include the following: creating and disseminating messages to internal and external stakeholders to keep them informed, building awareness, soliciting public support, and performing media relations (Swann, 2010; Broom & Sha, 2013). Media coverage in public affairs is very important as it can affect public awareness and support of an issue or program, as well influence civic engagement. Another function of public affairs includes collecting feedback from internal and external target publics. Public affairs directors in government agencies have been criticized of doing a better job of disseminating information to their internal and external stakeholders than soliciting and processing feedback from these same stakeholders (Pandey & Garnett, 2006). Factors negatively impacting effective external communications with constituents include greater complexity, uncertainty, turbulent environment, and hyper-interest advocacy (Pandey & Garnett, 2006). Problems with information received being filtered and processed in pieces, rather than as a whole, have also been cited (Frederickson & Smith, 2003).
Broom and Sha (2013) list seven goals of government public affairs: informing constituents, ensuring active cooperation in government programs, fostering citizen support for established policies and programs, serving as the public’s advocate to government administrators, managing information internally, facilitating media relations, and building community and nation (p. 350). The authors point out that the diversity of skills, goals, and activities required in government public affairs are greater than those required in traditional public relations. The latter goal is especially important as Broom and Sha (2013) point out that public affairs is required in democratic governments to communicate its activities and dealings to citizens so citizens can become engaged and participate in their government. Without proper feedback and shareholder participation, communication is a one-way process. Citizens become angry, frustrated, and disenchanted when they believe their government is not listening to them. So, the feedback and participation functions of government public affairs are very crucial since they can adversely affect citizen engagement and participation.

Whatever term public relations goes by, it is important in a democratic society. Cutlip (1994) writes, “The social justification for public relations in a free society is to ethically and effectively plead the cause of a client or organization in the free-wheeling forum of public debate” (p. xii).

The Role of Public Relations in Government

After McKinley died from an infection from his gunshot wounds by an assassin in 1901, Vice President Theodore Roosevelt was sworn in as the 26th President of the United States, thus ending the advantageous relationship big business had with
government (Cutlip, 1994). This signaled the phase in which business had to seek public approval, prompting “the publicity business” (Cutlip, 1994, p. 4) with publicity agents. Publicity was also starting at this time to support marketing and advertising efforts. Thus, publicity and persuasion efforts dominated the first half of the twentieth century with most of the publicity agents coming from the pool of newspaper journalists.

Government was also utilizing publicity and persuasion to reach its constituents. The 1939 Government Publicity text demonstrated to public administrators how to analyze audiences, develop the administrative publicity program, coordinate with other agencies, and choose select media (McCamy, 1939). Although the text focuses mainly on federal administrative publicity, the author does acknowledge publicity as a part of public relations and he writes, “With most contemporary students of public administration I share the realization that work in public relations is just as essential as any other government function” (McCamy, 1939, p. 5).

Merton (1946) in Mass Persuasion examines the persuasive and manipulative factors that led to the sale of $39 million of war bonds in 18 hours in 1943 by the Columbia Broadcasting System and its radio star, Kate Smith. He concluded, “Mass persuasion is not manipulative when it provides access to the pertinent facts; it is manipulative when the appeal to sentiment is used to the exclusion of pertinent information” (p. 186).

In a rare case study of public relations in government, Levy (1943) examines the use of public relations in the Pennsylvania Department of Public Assistance from 1937 through 1942. What makes this study unique is that it was one of the first published texts
that looked at public relations as a complete program, encompassing objectives, problems, methods, and experiences. The administrative leadership of the Pennsylvania Department of Public Assistance, which included a chief of Public Relations, recognized the impact of public opinion and political attacks on relief, so its public relations program focused on promoting cordial relations between public and agency and going beyond mere dissemination of public information. Levy mentions that this use of two-way communication by a government agency at that time is worth noting (p. 50). The case study also revealed the many different target publics the agency dealt with, including assistance applicants and recipients, relatives, friends, and families of the recipients, public officials, including doctors and lawyers, social workers, service clubs, and taxpayers (p. 51). Levy (1943) writes, “Public relations responsibilities devolve upon every member of the staff and board – and especially upon workers in county assistance offices – but leadership and direction of a public relations program is the business of a trained director of public relations” (p. 52). This research serves as a foundation for Levy’s 1956 text *Public Relations for Social Agencies* in which he notes that although current public relations practices were built on foundations earlier in the century by innovators in the social welfare field, the public relations practices “did not take” in this field (p. 1).

In 1949, the Association of Municipal Public Relations Officers (AMPRO) was founded as a professional association to promote and advance the practice of public relations in municipal government. It grew out of a column focusing on public relations, entitled “The City Tells It Story,” in *The American City* monthly municipal manager
journal (Lee, 2008). Lee (2008) points out that at this time, public relations was misunderstood as many viewed it as a wasteful expenditure, a type of propaganda, and highly political. The organization sought to dispel these notions and add legitimacy to the new field of public relations in the public sector. A year later, the name was changed to the Government Public Relations Association (GPRA) so it could include all levels of government, not just municipal (Lee, 2008). Due to internal organization problems, such as leadership, and lackluster membership, however, the association ended in 1958. Lee (2008) contends that its failure “likely reflects the tenuous status of the overt practice of public relations in the U.S. public sector” (p. 279). He also notes that the GPRA foreshadowed the Institute for Government Public Information Research (IGPIR), which was in existence from 1978 to 1981.

Pimlott’s *Public Relations and the American Democracy* (1951) was the first in-depth text to explore the relationship between government and public relations. Pimlott reveals how the term is very ambiguous and that there is no agreement to what public relations means. He defines it as, “… one of the methods by which society adjusts to changing circumstances, and resolves clashes between conflicting attitudes, ideas, institutions, and personalities” (p. 243). He believes that although there has been a lack of a definite policy for government public relations and “no meeting of the minds” between administrators and legislators regarding it (p. 88), public relations is a “tool of policy” (p. 243). His argument for the advancement of government public relations is that a democratic government must report to its people since an informed public is at the root of democracy and information must do more than inform, as it times it must help get
citizens to act. Discarding the administration-politics dichotomy, he sees administration merging into politics through public relations, and he quotes Stedman (1939) to support this: “the speeches, letters, and public statements of the executives are recognized by everyone as being expressions of policy … They contain personal and official philosophy, argument, defense, and also at times, viewpoints attacking or disputing the reasoning or citation of facts by critics … while they are clearly persuasive, that is almost never taken as grounds for criticism of these expressions of policy” (Pimlott, p. 94).

Pimlott did note that the use of publicity as a political instrument and as an administrative aid could at times be blurred, resulting in the difficulties of public relations in the federal government.

Papers presented at the 1964 National Conference of Public Administration focused on public opinion, public administration, and public relations. At that time, Cutlip (1964a) observed that more effective communication between government and citizens was being done by public relations programs and practitioners and that the function of public relations had grown and matured in both state and federal governments. He writes, “Full and imaginative use of public relations tools can provide today’s citizen with the knowledge he needs to decide wisely on the public issues that confront him in growing number and complexity” (Cutlip, 1964a, p. 2). At the same conference, McCamy (1964) asserted that the public administrator is an advocate as he determines what changes are needed and works to promote those changes. He revealed that the suspicion of the use of public relations in government has decreased so that agencies can practice it “with less fear of attack” (p. 5) although he notes that Congress
still exhibits some antagonism to the practice. Cutlip (1964b) concurred with the latter, believing Congress’ fear of public relations prevents government agencies from recognizing its full potential. McCamy (1964) lamented that the administrator finds little instruction on how to communicate with his target publics while the political candidate finds ample. He wrote, “Government public relations, practiced by executive agents, has always been part of the American political process. It involves the publics, the interest groups, legislators, alliances, competition of propaganda – all the practices of pluralism in which the government agent is part of a swirling system of force and counter-force that flows out finally in a resolution” (McCamy, 1964, p. 7). Cutlip (1964b) agreed, writing that administrators must wield public relations tools to “persuade and prod public opinion to gain their objectives” (p. 11).

As Lee (1998) notes, the study and use of public relations in the government sector fell to the wayside by the 1970s and it was not until the 1990s that the subject was revisited by several scholars and practitioners. The 1990s saw many public administrators embracing the Reinventing Government model that features efficiency through the utilization of successful entrepreneurial business practices in the private sector, including contracting out, privatization, treating citizens like customers, and using markets for leverage (Osborne & Gaebler, 1993). It is no surprise that public relations, as practiced by corporate management, would receive renewed interest by public administrators utilizing the public administrative models of Reinventing Government and New Public Management.
In the forward to Garnett’s 1992 *Communicating for Results in Government*, Waldo notes that public administration “pathbreakers,” such as Gulick in the 1930s and 1940s, stressed communication but that the emphasis was later lacking in the field of public administration. Garnett explains why communication is vital in public administration, and he applies a strategic model to government communication while also providing strategies for communicating with key audiences. It is interesting to note, though, that he does not use the term public relations in the text. However, five years later in his and Kouzim’s *Handbook of Administrative Communication*, Garnett includes a chapter on public relations in government and business, written by one of the renowned public relations researcher in the communication field, James Grunig. Grunig (1997) writes that due to the complications of strategic management in government, public relations is more important than in the business and nonprofit sector since, “There are more constituencies with which to establish relationships and more communication needed between the agency, legislative bodies, and other agencies” (p. 253).

Recognizing that press secretaries, public affairs officers, public information officers, and government public relations directors may not always know how to deal with the media effectively, Fitch (2004) wrote a handbook on media relations specifically for government, associations, nonprofits, and elected officials and in 2012, along with Holt, released a second edition. In *The Practice of Government Public Relations*, Lee, Neeley, and Stewart (2012) write that modern day government administrators require new tools to tackle the changing communication contexts of government and since civic life is dominated by media coverage, public administration is becoming more of an act of
communication. They also acknowledge that the context of public administration is what sets it apart from business and non-profit management (p. xi). The text includes the following threefold typology explaining how the purposes of government and public relations fit together: Mandatory (democratic purposes of government public relations, such as media relations, public reporting, and responsiveness to citizens), Optional (pragmatic purposes of government relations, such as responsiveness to the public as customers and clients, increasing the utilization of services and products, public education and public service campaigns, seeking voluntary public compliance with laws and regulations, and using the public as the eyes and ears of an agency), and Dangerous but Powerful (political purposes of government public relations, such as increasing public support), (Lee et al., 2012, pp. 12-13). The authors devote only two pages to linking practice to theory and beyond explaining the Transtheoretical Model, the authors merely list different communication theories in one paragraph with no explication on how to tie them to practice.

Even though these above texts focus on public relations in the public sector, the majority of strategies and practices that they suggest are still rooted in traditional public relations practices, utilizing the corporate business model.

There have been several recent studies regarding government public communicators. One study showed that government communicators develop and edit content for their websites, respond to media inquiries, write news releases, and network, although only 5 percent prioritize internal communications (Liu, Horsley & Levenshus, 2010). Other studies reveal that government communicators are not satisfied with the
availability of resources, including funding, and claim that such small budgets prevent creativity (Liu & Levenshus, 2008; Liu, Horsley & Levenshus, 2010). Broom and Sha (2013) assert that the diversity of skills, goals, and activities required in government public affairs are greater than those required in traditional public relations.

Differences Between the Public and Private Sectors

Organizations in the early twentieth century were practicing classical organizational theory that maintains that the purpose of organizations is to produce goods and services to achieve economic goals and that the actions of both people and organizations are in agreement with economic principles (Shafritz, Russell & Borick, 2007). Classical organization theory also embraces tenants of Scientific Management: there is one best way for production, discovered through systematic and scientific investigation, and production can be maximized through specialization and division of labor amongst workers (Shafritz et al., 2007). So in its infancy, public administration in the United States borrowed heavily from the fields of science and business and reformers and corporate capitalists worked together to gain control (Stivers, 2000). The bureau men of the New York Bureau of Municipal Research focused on expert scientists, objectivity, efficiency, and systematic business practices to manage cities and rid corruption and waste (Stivers, 2000). It was to be through efficient and logical procedures, focusing on the respected fields of business and science, that public administration would reform corrupt municipal agencies. This is important because the Bureau would establish training schools for public service four years later, thus diffusing and influencing the practice of public administration well beyond the state of New York. Stivers (2000) notes
this reliance on scientific and business methods was at the expense of purpose, thus the newly emerging field of public administration left behind its social work offshoot that Progressive reformers had fought so hard for out in the field as they cleaned up slum areas, fed the poor, and educated immigrants.

So for much of the formative years of public administration, which was rooted in the business and political science disciplines, it was believed that government should be run like a business and be separate from politics, thereby practicing a politics-administration dichotomy. However, beginning in the 1930s, the classical organizational theory was being questioned and the mammoth New Deal government undertakings, along with World War II in the 1940s, further eroded the support of the politic-administration dichotomy (Shafritz & Hyde, 2012).

In 1945, Paul Appleby wrote *Big Democracy*, claiming that a apolitical government does not support democracy and that politics plays an important role in public administration as it serves as a checks and balance system. Appleby was one of the early public administration researchers to emphasize that government is different from business, alleging, “Government is different because government is politics.” (p. 9).

In the book’s first chapter, entitled *Government is Different*, Appleby writes, “It is exceedingly difficult clearly to identify the factors which make government different from every other activity in society. Yet this difference is a fact and I believe it to be so big a difference that the dissimilarity between government and all other forms of social action is greater than any dissimilarity among those other forms themselves. Without a willingness to recognize this fact, no one can even begin to discuss public affairs to any
good profit or serious purpose.” (1945, p.1). He goes on to introduce unique characteristics that make government different from business: breadth, scope, and impact of operation, public accountability, and political character (p. 6). He writes, “Governments exist precisely for the reason that there is a need to have special persons in a society charged with the function of promoting and protecting the public interest” (p. 5). He also hints at the importance of public relations in government as he notes, “Government, dealing in one way or another with almost everything, requires in its highest officials special competence in handling relationships among all the varied and powerful forces, activities, and elements in the country” (p. 9). Shafritz and Hyde (2012) claim that Appleby’s Big Democracy was “the obituary for the politics-administration dichotomy” (p. 74).

Rainey, Backoff, and Levine (1976) summarize the important differences between public and private organizations in regard to environmental factors, organization-environment transactions, and internal structures and processes, gleaned from a review of the literature (pp. 236-237). Environmental factors include degree of market exposure, legal and formal constraints, and political influences. In degree of market exposure, the researchers found that public organizations have less market exposure which results in less of the following: incentive cost reduction, operating efficiency, effective performance, allocational efficiency, and availability of market indicators and information. In legal and formal constraints, Rainey et al. found that public organizations have more constraints on procedures and operations and more external sources of formal influence, characterized by greater fragmentation. Regarding political influences, Rainey
et al. found that public organizations are under great and diverse intensity by external influences on decisions, such as public opinion and interest groups, and have a greater need for support of constituencies.

In organizational-environment transactions, Rainey et al. looked at coerciveness, breath of impact, public scrutiny, and unique public expectations. They found that participation in consumption and financing services for public organizations are unavoidable or mandatory and that public organizations have broader impact and greater symbolic significance regarding public administrators’ actions. In addition, they found that public officials face a greater public scrutiny of their actions, as well as a greater expectation that they act with more fairness, responsiveness, accountability, and honesty, supporting Appleby’s earlier findings.

Regarding internal structures and processes, Rainey et al. discovered that public organizations possess a greater multiplicity and diversity of objectives, greater vagueness and intangibility of objectives, and a greater tendency of conflicting goals. In addition, they found public administrators experience less decision-making autonomy and exibility and their performance is characterized by greater cautiousness, rigidity, and less innovativeness. The public sector is also characterized by issue networks or policy subsystems – relationships between government bureaucracies, legislative committees, and interest group – often referred to as the “iron triangle” (Viteritti, 1997, p. 86).

Much of organizational theory for the private sector has focused on adapting to fluctuations in the external environment to survive, but in the public sector, survival is not as significant since government must embrace representativeness, responsiveness,
and equity (Viteritti, 1979). Furthermore, effectiveness and efficiency cannot be solely used to determine accountability as public agencies must recognize the diverse interests and values of their citizens. Another difference between the public sector and private sector is the relationship of the client to the organization. In the private sector, clients pay for goods and services. However, their relationship in acquiring government resources is more complex, indirect, and passive as in many instances, citizens do not pay an agency for their services (Viteritti, 1997). In the private sector, a client is typically a constituent (currency is used as power), but in the public sector, clients may not be constituents and constituents may not be clients (Viteritti, 1997). Public sector agencies must also deal with citizens, who can be clients or constituents, but Viteritti (1997) points out that citizens, as an unorganized entity, without the attributes of constituents, represent a latent force (p. 84). He defines them as “the mass of potential voters who are neither direct-service clients nor active political constituents of a particular administrative agency under discussion” but which still need to be kept informed by government (p.85).

Dunlop (1979) presents the following ten contrasts of public and private managers: time perspective, duration, measurement of performance, personnel constraints, equity and efficiency, public scrutiny of processes, the role of the press and media, persuasion and direction, legislative and judicial impact, and the bottom line (Allison, 2012, pp. 399-400). Key findings about public administrators from Dunlop’s research include: greater tendency to be under the control of both internal and external department staffs, greater emphasis placed on providing equity among different constituencies, exposure to more public scrutiny and more open processes, more contact
with the press and the media, greater scrutiny of actions by legislative oversight groups and judicial orders, and operating with no clear bottom line whereas the bottom line for private managers is profit, market performance, and survival.

Allison examined the above studies, along with Neustadt’s findings on the six differences between the president of the United States and a Chief Executive Officer of a major corporation, and discovered the most significant difference between public and private management – “a fundamental constitutional difference” (Allison, 2012, p. 403). He points out that in private organizations, management is centralized in the Chief Executive Officer with authority corresponding with responsibility whereas in the United States government, management functions “are constitutionally spread among competing institutions: the executive, two houses of Congress, and the courts” (p. 403). This main difference is based on the concept of separation of powers that the fathers of the Constitution endorsed.

Rosenbloom (2012) further expands on this by revealing the values, structures, and the roles of public administrators in three approaches established by the separation of powers in the Constitution. The first method, known as the Managerial Approach, grew out of the civil service reform and focuses on running the business of government (p. 442). The values associated with this framework are effectiveness, efficiency, and economy, practiced in specialized, hierarchical systems (pp. 442-443). This method’s perspective of the individual, whether it be employee or citizen, is very impersonal, often dehumanizing (p. 443). Rosenbloom points out that in this approach, supported by Wilson and Taylor, the public administrator’s attention is on implementing the laws.
The Political Approach, as represented by Sayre and Appleby, grew out of the belief that public administration is not disconnected from politics (Rosenbloom, 2012, p. 444). Since this approach considers public administration as a political undertaking, its values and structures are very different from the Managerial Approach. The values that this framework emphasizes are representativeness, responsiveness, and accountability, practiced in political pluralistic structures (pp. 444-445). Whereas the perspective of the individual is restricted in the Managerial Approach, the Political Approach sees the role of the individual as very significant since representativeness and responsiveness deal directly with citizens (p. 445). Rosenbloom does point out, however, that the individual in the Political Approach is only considered as a part of the collective group, not outside of the group as an individual. The public administrator’s focus in this approach is making rules (p. 449).

Rosenbloom notes that the third approach, respected but not widely recognized in the discipline, is known as the Legal Approach, which emphasizes law as being part of public administration. He shows how this approach is comprised of three sources that give it structure: (1) administrative law, (2) “judicialization” of public administration, and (3) constitutional law (p. 446). Based on this adversary-type of structure, the values associated with this approach are fairness and equity, and the individual is viewed as “a unique person in a unique set of circumstances” rather than as part of a collective group (p. 448). Since fair and equal treatment of all individuals is the purpose, the public administrator’s focus in this approach is the arbitration involved with applying and executing the rules (p. 449).
Rosenbloom shows how these theoretical approaches, based on core differences in values and philosophies, divide up the work of the public administrator, thus, contributing to the separation of powers and resulting in “inertia and inflexibility” (p. 449). However, he appears to justify this inertia by writing, “Overall, the government was designed to be responsive slowly to relatively long-term public demands and to require the development of relatively broad agreement among the electorate prior to taking action” (p. 449).

Ethical factors also represent another area where public organizations and private organizations differ. Public administrators must make decisions on behalf of citizens so they have to represent the values established in the Constitution. Every public official takes an oath to uphold the values of the Constitution, as well as their department’s mission. Geuras and Garofalo (2011) refer to this as the “stewardship capacity” in which the public employee must consider more than just profitability but also the values of society and is thus considered a steward of the public whereas the private employee is a steward of private interest and private values (pp. 18-19). The authors contend that private firms do not have to justify their products (unless issues of harm or safety arise) whereas government must continually justify its existence and activities and show that it is operating in the public interest. Appleby (1945) acknowledges that it is usually not in the business of the corporate world to consider the public interest but government must consider the “public-interest aspects of everything people do, whether individually or in groups” (p. 76). Garnett (1992) reveals that citizens regard it is their right to know what government does since it is the “public’s business” (p. 17). Geuras et al. (2011) point out,
“public agencies generally exist only because they provide a service that the public at large considers worthy” (p. 20) and as a result, they face two kinds of pressure: external and internal (p. 23).

Garnett (1992), like Rosenbloom, observes the political realities that affect public sector communication. Public officials in government agencies face intervention from political parties, legislators, interest groups, and other political and legal agents that most private employees in private organizations do not have to contend with (Garnett, 1992, p. 16). In addition to these political pressures and interventions, Garnett (1992) cites the following as why public sector communication is different from private sector communication: greater quantity and frequency of communication, more diverse and demanding audiences, legal and rigid procedural factors, and greater public scrutiny of communication. He notes that government communication is not only different from business communication but also more important as it can influence the lives of people.

Many public employees are in direct and daily contact with citizens, serving as agents of social jurisdiction in which they must consider values that affect individual lives. Lipsky (1980) defines public service employees that interact directly with citizens and possess considerable judgment and freedom in executing policy as street-level bureaucrats (p. 3). He indicates that these public officials are part of public controversy because of “the immediacy of their interactions with citizens and their impact on peoples’ lives” (p. 8). An important factor of this work environment, Lipsky points out, is that street-level bureaucrats must contend with the personal reactions from citizens regarding their decisions. Even though private employees may be in daily contact with members
from their target publics, the interaction mostly involves the product or service rather than policy, governed by legal and procedural factors that affect the everyday lives of these members.

A recent survey found that public relations practitioners in the public sector and private sector have different challenges and opportunities (Liu, Horsley & Levenshus, 2010). The researchers surveyed close to 1,000 government and corporate communicators to detect similarities and differences between communication practices and test a new model of government communication. They found differences in budgets, political influence, communication frequency, public pressure, interaction with other organizations, media coverage frequency, media coverage evaluation, and impact of legal frameworks (Liu, Horsley & Levenshus, 2010, p. 189). In particular, two areas showed a difference that was statistically significant: the impact of external legal frameworks and politics. These two factors had a higher impact in the public sector than the private. The authors challenge the assumption of current dominant public relations theories that consider the public sector and private sector as identical.

Liu and Horsley (2007) also found that there is a devaluation of communication by management in the public sector. They point out that when budget cuts are necessary, the public relations positions are typically the first positions to go, thus, leaving duties to individuals not skilled in public communication and public relations. Many qualified individuals depart government to seek employment in the private sector where communication is valued and salaries are higher (Garnett, 1997; Liu & Horsley, 2007).
The external societal environment is important to government public relations as
government effectiveness is also determined by the external environment. As a result,
public administrators have to be aware of economical, technological, social, and political
factors that can influence the relationships with their target publics. Grunig (1997)
acknowledges that government differs from corporations in that it has to deal with more
stakeholders, as well as conflicting stakeholders.

Another significant difference between the public and private sectors is the nature
of the relationship with the media. Public agencies and employees are under great media
scrutiny since the media serves as the liaison between government and citizens with
duties to protect the public interest and keep citizens informed of the operation of their
government (Appleby, 1945; Garnett, 1992; Viteritti, 1997; Stromback & Kiousis, 2011;
Fitch & Holt, 2012; Lee, 2012). Over the years, the nature of this relationship has grown
more adversarial and confronting, with reporters expressing cynicism about the operation
and performance of government by its officials (Orren, 1997; Viteritti, 1997; Sadow,
2012). According to Sabato (1991) there have been three periods of journalism in relation
to politics and government: “lapdog” journalism (1941 – 1966) in which journalists did
not question politicians and reported the information as given to them, “watchdog”
journalism (1966-1967) in which journalists began to question and challenge politicians,
brought about by the social unrest of the 1960s, the Vietnam war, and Watergate, and
“junk-yard-dog” journalism (since 1974) where reporting is characterized by abrasive
and intrusive reporting focusing more on the privates lives of officials, gossips, and
rumors rather than substantial reporting of issues and the mechanisms of government work (pp. 25-26).

The emergence of new media, supported by electronic and digital technology, also presents challenges for the public sector. Since its emergence in the early 2000s, social media has become the magical buzzword in a variety of disciplines. Public relations practitioners continue to incorporate and embrace these new technologies and platforms so they can inform, entertain, inspire, engage, and collaborate with their various stakeholders. Public administrators have also been encouraged to not only utilize their organization’s website, but also to post, send, and respond to citizens by using such platforms as Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube. Mergel and Greeves (2013) examine how social media practices can tie in with theories of administration, governance, and information management and they presents examples, case studies, best practices, and applicable strategies and policies for the public administrator interested in utilizing social media. Many public information and public affairs practitioners in cities and municipalities, including school systems and police forces, have successfully incorporated these platforms to inform and engage their citizens. Recent research from the University of California Humanities Research Institute found that youths who utilize the Internet and social media are more apt to become politically involved and more open to differing political views from their own (Bridges, Appel & Grossklags, 2012).

Schultz (2013) sees the explosion of social media as both a threat and opportunity for government. This media, he writes, can encourage dialogue and engagement with citizens, but it can also be perilous if governments jump in without a realistic and
appropriate strategy. The differences between organizations in the private sector and the public sector, resulting in certain legal, political, and democratic concerns, do present surmounting challenges for the public administrator trying to integrate this technology into citizen strategies. In 2009, only 14 percent of municipal officials surveyed on the use of interactive media reported that they were utilizing some type of interactive tool to increase public engagement (Mann, 2010). Another survey in that same year found that half of the cities did not have a Facebook presence and only nine percent had a Twitter presence (Mann, 2010). In 2011, the city of Redondo Beach, California, closed its Facebook page due to ambiguity in the law surrounding government sponsored social media platforms (Deamer, 2011; Lidsky, 2011). In particular, records retention under the Public Records Act and posting of inappropriate information under the open meeting laws, proved to be the most problematic for the city (Deamer, 2011; Lidsky, 2011). In 2011, not one state government in the nation included the term social media in their definition of “public record” (Deamer, 2011). If Facebook and Twitter are considered records of public information, then the information on these platforms, along with any external comments or posts, must be maintained as records.

With no clear cut answers, some public administrators have turned to the law for clarification, but unfortunately, legal expertise has been just as befuddling. Lidsky(2011) points out that the use of social media by the government may fall under several categories of public forum doctrine: traditional public forum designated public forum, limited public forum, nonpublic forum, or government speech. Each category has different parameters and legal ramifications, but what remains murky is in what category
a government’s use of social media falls into. Although organizations in the private sector may face several challenges with the use of social media, there is no complexity of legal, political, and administrative challenges that public sector organizations must deal with in administering a government in a democracy. Some of these legal concerns are currently being addressed, such as First Amendment issues, Sunshine laws, copyright issues, and privacy issues (Salkin & Tappendorf, 2013), but many others stand alone, isolated and unexplored – like buried explosives waiting for the public administrator, who is tasked with incorporating social media into citizen participation and engagement strategies, to stumble upon.

Public Participation

Due to democratic principles, public administrators have to involve citizens in many government decisions, especially the formulation of public policy. Since the United States is a “government for the people by the people,” it must encourage public participation and engagement. Forums must be available for citizens to interact directly with their government. This is why the symmetrical model of public relations is important as it provides opportunities for dialogue, discussion, and debate on issues that have competing values.

Gross (1943), in examining agriculture county planning processes in several Iowa counties, found that they were unsuccessful because there was “… no desire created of self-help and no virile attitude toward community problems aroused” (p. 649). Thus, the activities were reduced to procedures instead of an active process, and Gross suggests that public interest must be “aroused, diffused, and molded” (1943, p. 660).
Selznick (1949) further examined political influences on public administration by studying cooptation and the Tennessee Valley Authority. He defines cooptation as “… the process of absorbing new elements into the leadership or policy determining structure of an organization as a means of averting threats to its stability or existence” (p. 13), and he alleges that cooptation is linked to democratic “local participation” as it represents tension between formal authority and social power, which consists of all the factors that influence the “loyalties and potential manipulability of the community” (p. 15). Both Gross’s findings and Selznick’s review of the cooptation process and its results are important because they reveal another difference between the public and private sectors: public administration can influence public participation and deliberation in the policy process.

Arnestein (1969) associates citizen participation with citizen power that allows “the have-not citizens … to be deliberately included in the future” and “share in the benefits of the affluent society” (p. 216). She created a ladder of citizen participation that includes nonparticipation at the lower levels (consisting of manipulation and therapy), degrees of tokenism in the middle (consisting of informing, consultation, and placation), and degrees of citizen power at the top (consisting of partnership, delegated power, and citizen control), (p. 217). It is interesting to note that as an example of manipulation – the lowest rung on the ladder – she uses the federal guidelines for renewal programs that “legitimized” manipulation by using terms such as “information-gathering” and “public relations” as functions of the committees (p. 218). She writes, “Instead of genuine citizen participation, the bottom rung of the ladder signifies the distortion of participation into a
public relations vehicle by powerholders” (p. 218). Arnstein acknowledges that participation without the redistribution of power for the have-not citizens is an empty and frustrating process. Thirty years later, Forester (1999) concurs as he writes that we need to see participatory and deliberative meetings as social and political performances in which values are explored rather than going through insignificant motions that only provide empty forums for dialogue. In participatory and deliberative processes, he reveals that arguments will be generated, eliciting surprising information, in which networks and new organizational forms originate.

According to Thomas (1995), the new public involvement movement in public administration, which began in the 1960s with its focus on citizen participation in policy making, now embraces the participation of citizens in policy implementation. As such, public administrators are tasked with involving the public in many of government functions and Thomas finds this problematic since many administrators are not experienced in knowing how and when to invite and involve their citizens in this process. He writes, “First, contrary to the practice of some public officials, public involvement does not include the option of only consulting the public after a decision is made. Talking with the public at that point does not constitute true involvement; the public is being informed rather than participating in making a decision. Simply informing the public of a decision can be entirely appropriate, but not if disguised as a form of public involvement to imply possible influence” (1995, p. 40). To solve this dilemma, Thomas created the Effective Decision Model of Public Involvement. His contingency model, which fits
public participation into managerial theory, involves five decision-making approaches for public managers:

1). *Autonomous managerial decision.* The manager solves the problem or makes the decision alone without public involvement.

2). *Modified autonomous managerial decision.* The manager seeks information from segments of the public, but decides alone in a manner that may or may not reflect group influence.

3). *Segmented public consultation.* The manager shares the problem separately with segments of the public, getting ideas and suggestions, then makes a decision that reflects group influence.

4). *Unitary public consultation.* The manager shares the problem with the public as a single assembled group, getting ideas and suggestions, then makes a decision that reflects group influence. (This approach requires only that all members of the public have the opportunity to be involved, such as in well-publicized public hearings, not that everyone actually participate.)

5). *Public decision.* The manager shares the problem with the assembled public, and together the manager and the public attempt to reach agreement on a solution. (Thomas, 1995, pp. 39-40).

This model, which contributes to both theory building and practice, is versatile as it can be applied to any contingency, determining if public involvement should be generated and what type should be secured. This is critical as most public managers may not know when the ideal time is to seek out public involvement. Thomas’ model is important as not all government action requires citizen participation.

The Relational Theory of Public Relations

The relational theory of public relations asserts practitioners go beyond using public relations as propaganda and persuasion to creating and maintaining relationships that benefit both the organization and the stakeholder (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000; Ki, Kim & Ledingham, 2015). This systems theory contends that through relationships, the
practice of public relations imparts value to not only organizations and different target publics, but also to society in general (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000; Ki, Kim & Ledingham, 2015). Communication strives for shared meaning and understanding so most public relations practitioners utilize relationship-building techniques with their stakeholders that focus on similarities and common interests at the expense of diversity. However, in government, communication must become the starting point for social action and this includes practicing tolerance. Tinder (1995) explains that tolerance is an active and ethical approach to seeking out others with divergent opinions and ideas to come together to unearth the values of an issue and discover a diverse perspective in which politics can develop a solution based on shared interest. Public administrators need to prize diversity but they cannot do this if tolerance is not practiced. Kruckeberg and Starck (1998) assert that public relations must build community and community is realized “when people are aware of and interested in common ends and regulate their activity in view of those ends” (p. 52). Both tolerance and community are essential processes to public ethics so an alternative public relations framework for the public sector must integrate this and the relational theory of public relations shows the most promise.

Ferguson (1984) first asserted that the relational perspective that focuses on organization-public relationships afforded the best opportunity for the growth and exploration of theory building in public relations. Since then, this perspective has been researched and has proven effective measuring relationship quality. This approach is also helpful in connecting corporate social responsibility to public relations (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000).
Ledingham and Bruning (1998) define organization-public relationships as the “state which exists between an organization and its key publics in which the actions of either entity impact the economical, social, political, and/or cultural well-being of the other entity” (p. 62). Therefore, an organization practicing the relational perspective of public relations must first acknowledge that its actions can affect the lives of its target publics and its target publics must recognize that they too can influence the organization (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999). The two-way government-citizen relationship is inherently reciprocal so the relational theory can be used by the public sector. The second step involves engaging in dialogue (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999). Grunig and Grunig (1992) assert that openness, trust, understanding, negotiation, collaboration, and mediation are important to the dialogue process in the organization-public relationship.

The concepts of openness, trust, involvement, investment, and commitment have thus been used to determine the dimensions of the organization-public relationship (Ledingham, Bruning, Thomlison & Lesko, 1997). However, only two of the terms have been defined. Hon and Grunig (1999) define trust as, ”One party’s level of confidence in and willingness to open oneself to the other party” (p. 3) and commitment as, “The extent to which each party believes and feels that the relationship is worth spending energy to maintain and promote” (p. 3). Ledingham (2001) applied the relationship management approach to government-citizen relationships and found that the above relationship concepts did indeed help assess relationship quality, as well as predict citizen behavior. Thus, the relationship management approach that considers the relationship as the basis of public relations rather than dissemination of information, manipulation, or persuasion,
is the best and most logical broader framework for public sector public relations. Although recent research presents the types of relationship dimensions and scales to measure them, there are few studies that demonstrate how to achieve them. The alternative framework will recognize this weakness and attempt to provide public administrators with a process that can help them achieve the relationship dimensions in government-citizen relationships.

Summary

Even though the history of public relations shows that American government utilized publicity, propaganda, and persuasion techniques throughout its progression, the development of public relations as a professional practice did not start until the early 1900s. Much of the history is viewed through a dominant business paradigm that places public relations in the context of corporate business where it is defined as the practice of establishing relationships with target publics or stakeholders in the hope of influencing behavior and attitudes that are supportive to the successful operation and profitability of the organization. Since paradigms shape our practices, this viewpoint is problematic because it does not capture the unique realities that government and its agencies face in the public sector. Also, Congress’ distrust of the term public relations throughout the twentieth century has affected and influenced the practice of public relations by the public sector.

The review of literature reveals that there are very important differences between the public and private sectors. Public officials operate in an environment that is characterized by political, legal, social, and ethical constraints, as well as constant public
scrutiny, specifically from the media. In addition, public administrators must be
cognizant at all times of value-laden democratic principles, such as transparency,
accountability, and separation of powers. This operating environment is very unique from
the environment of the private business sector. There have been few studies conducted
that have looked at current public relations practices of non-elected public officials. This
study will contribute to the literature as it will examine current public relations practices
by municipal and county government public officials.

The review of literature has revealed the following recurring themes: the recent
history of public relations is greatly influenced by businesses in the private sector, there
are significant differences between the public and private sectors, and the term public
relations is not supported by government so public relations practices go by different
terms, such as public information and public affairs, which may not encompass the entire
definition and functions of public relations.

In order to answer R₁ (How is public relations practiced by public administrators
in the public sector?) and R₂ (Do the differences between the public and private sectors
affect the way public relations is practiced by public administrators?), the author
interviewed Ohio municipal and county government administrators who are responsible
for public communication and public relations efforts. The next chapter presents the
methodology and research design of the survey. The answers to these questions must be
explored since the information is critical for developing an alternative framework of
public relations for the public sector.
CHAPTER III
RESEARCH DESIGN

As we have seen, the study and practice of public relations in government is shrouded in confusion. Due to Congress’ disapproval of public relations, the public sector has not been able to agree upon a term, instead using public information, public affairs, community affairs, and public relations interchangeably. As a result, many current job titles are not accurate descriptions of work performed by the public administrator. In addition, research has shown context does matter and that public officials experience more encroachments while practicing public relations than their counterparts in the private sector. These include legal, political, and democratic constraints, as well as adversarial relationships with the media. Current theories of public relations also fail to address the unique characteristics that government agencies and the public sector face compared to the private sector (Liu et al., 2010).

There are few studies that examine how public relations is being practiced by government agencies outside of political communication. The research that exists focuses mostly on elected officials rather than nonelected public officials (Lee, 2001). Furthermore, there has been little research on theory, principles, and practices of public administration communication (Fairbanks, Plowman & Rawlins, 2007). Since the review of the literature demonstrates the importance of public relations in a democracy, there is a
need to examine how public officials are currently practicing the function of public relations. Thus, this chapter will present the methodology and design of the study, including the choice of paradigm, theory, methods of inquiry, and sampling strategy. This is important because the design must generate data that can answer the two research questions: R1 (How is public relations practiced by public administrators in the public sector?) and R2 (Do the differences between the public and private sectors affect the way public relations is practiced by public administrators?).

Qualitative Approach in an Interpretive Paradigm

Due to the confusing nature, term, job titles, and function of public relations in the public sector and the exploratory nature of this study, the author proposed a qualitative research design in the interpretative paradigm to interview public officials in Ohio who are responsible for the public relations function. Qualitative research is best utilized when the subject matter is not well understood or well defined. Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls and Ormston (2014) write, “Qualitative research is sometimes used as a prelude to statistical enquiry when the subject matter needs to be more clearly understood or defined before it can be measured. However, there are perhaps more circumstances where qualitative research is needed to provide greater understanding of the nature of an issue or problem, but where measurement of its extent is not at that time of interest” (p. 37). The review of the literature has shown that the term public relations is problematic for the public sector and as this study aims to help understand public relations in government, qualitative research methods were most central to the objectives of this study. Qualitative research, unlike quantitative research, can help explain how the ‘macro’ is translated into the
‘micro’ and is thus able to provide more depth and dimension to the phenomena studied
(Barbour, 2008, p.11). Since the findings from this study were used to develop a new
framework of public relations for the public sector, qualitative research was the best
research approach.

Berg (2001) writes, “Qualitative research thus refers to the meanings, concepts,
definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things” (p. 3). It also
involves words and images rather than numbers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Ritchie et al.
(2014) contend that it is also best used when capturing information from people with
specialized roles. They write, “If their views are being sought from the vantage of their
particular positions, then the nature of the information is likely to require exploratory and
responsive questioning” (Ritchie et al., 2014, p. 38). Since this project aimed to discover
how specialized public administrators practice public relations, qualitative research,
which explores “how” questions and uses words and images to best understand
definitions and concepts, was the best method for this study. Silverman (2013) writes,
“…because quantitative research usually has little to say about how professional practice
is enacted, it leaves such practice unexamined and hence unchallenged” (p. 88).
Qualitative research, on the other hand, is concerned with context and since this study
examined both the context and conditions surrounding how public administrators practice
public relations, it was more advantageous than quantitative research. Ritchie et al.
(2014) write that findings from contextual research can help map the range of elements
and dimensions within a social phenomenon, display its nature and features, and identify
and define typologies (pp. 31-32). The qualitative approach also invites questions about
processes, understandings, and beliefs – not outcomes or strengths of association, as do quantitative research methods (Barbour, 2008), so it best fits the data this project gleaned.

Silverman (2010) notes that qualitative researchers find detail in the precise particulars of people’s understanding and interactions because they employ a non-positivist model of reality (p. 104). Qualitative research also focuses on human interpretation of the social world and this interpretation is part of the interpretivism tradition (Ritchie et al., 2014), embracing constructionism which sees knowledge as being socially constructed by individuals (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Research employing an interpretive paradigm begs questions that seek to answer what kinds of things people do, how they perform them, and what purposes the activities serve (Bailey, 2007). Since this study examined how public administrators practice public relations, an interpretive paradigm was the best fit for this qualitative research project.

Theory

As was presented in the review of literature, there is no one guiding theory for public relations. Many exist, including critical, cultural, contingency, functional, organizational, rhetorical, and postmodern, and they are utilized in a wide range of public relations contexts. However, the four models of public relations developed by Grunig and Hunt – Press Agentry/Publicity Model, Public Information Model, Two-Way Asymmetrical Model, and Two-Way Symmetrical Model – provide the most utilized frameworks for the nature of communication in the practice of public relations (Okay & Okay, 2008).
Qualitative research is an iterative process in which elements of the research design may emerge, influencing the methods, tools, and research questions and permitting the testing of emergent ‘hypotheses’ or explanations (Barbour, 2008, p. 31). Qualitative research is also more conducive to multiple realities and allows theory to materialize from the data since the research design emerges rather than being imposed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Multiple realities are important as this study also served as a meta-analysis to ascertain patterns in phenomena (public relations) that are scattered across several discipline fields.

Since qualitative research can help unearth new problems for theory, assist in theoretical innovation, or cultivate existing theory (Berg, 2001), it was a critical research design for this study as the goal of this project was to develop a new framework of public relations for the public sector. Grounded theory was used as a method of inquiry to analyze the data so theory could be constructed. Strauss and Corbin (1994) define grounded theory as “a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed. Theory evolves during actual research, and it does this through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection” (p. 273).

Grounded theory researchers are interested in patterns and processes of action and interaction amongst the actors involved in the research. Saldaña (2011) writes that classic grounded theory aims to identify a core or central category from small data units that becomes the foundation for generating a theory about the processes being researched (pp. 7 & 116). Thus, grounded theory was a significant methodology for this project since a new framework of public relations, which recognizes and incorporates the differences
between the public and private sectors, was developed by the researcher for use by public administrators.

Research Design

This study utilized a three-step research design. The first step was to locate public officials practicing public communications and public relations in city and county government in Ohio by conducting a purposeful survey (permission from the University of Akron Institutional Research Department was granted). The second step involved conducting 12 face-to-face interviews and one phone interview with public officials to determine how the function of public relations is being practiced by public administrators in municipal and county governments in the state of Ohio. The author then employed the third and last step of the methodology – developing a new framework for public relations, based on the interviews, the findings from the review of the literature, and public relations theory, which will be presented in the fifth chapter.

First Step: Purposeful Sampling of the Study Population

The first critical step was to locate those public officials that are involved in practicing the function and activities of public communication and public relations. As the review of literature reveals, the titles of these public officials oftentimes do not contain the term public relations. The author located the names and email addresses of public information officers, public affairs directors, community relations directors, communication managers, publicity officers, and public relations directors in municipal governments (whose constituencies are represented by at least 15,000 constituents) and county governments (whose constituencies are represented by at least 50,000 constituents).
constituents) in the state of Ohio. Cities and counties with less than 15,000 and 50,000 constituents, respectively, were not chosen since the public relations efforts would be minimal due to the smaller citizen bases. Municipal and county governments were chosen as few studies have been undertaken that examine the use of public relations in these types of government. Most of the existing literature about public relations in government is at the federal level although much of the interaction between government and citizen is actually on the local government level. Differences and similarities regarding the practice of public relations was also explored between municipal and county governments since the goal of qualitative research is not to generate a representative sample but to reflect diversity in the sample and provide the potential to make comparisons (Barbour, 2008). Ohio was chosen since the author is a resident of that state.

The author visited the government websites of 47 counties with a population of 50,000 or more and 116 cities with a population of 15,000 or more to collect email addresses.

County Governments

Out of the 47 Ohio county websites, only five sites included a communication department or communication contact name on the site. Thus, the author made individual phone calls to the remaining 42 county governments, asking for the individual who handles the county’s public communication and public relations duties. Eleven counties did not have a designated person who handles the overall communication efforts for the county. In addition, 17 counties did not return the author’s first and second phone attempts to locate the county communication person. The author was able to generate a
total of 17 email addresses. Some of these email addresses were for administrative assistants who assured the author that they would forward the survey to the person who handles the county public communication and public relations efforts.

City Governments

Out of the 116 Ohio city websites, 17 sites included a communication department or communication contact name on the actual site. The author made individual phone calls to the remaining 99 city governments, asking for the individual who handles the city’s public communication and public relations duties. Ten cities did not have a designated person who handles the overall communication efforts for the city. In addition, 13 cities did not return the author’s first and second phone attempts to locate the city communication person. The author was able to generate a total of 93 email addresses for individuals handling the city public communication and public relations efforts. Out of that total, several administrative assistants promised to forward the survey to the individual who handles the city public communication efforts.

The Survey

The online survey, used to locate public administrators interested in being interviewed, was developed using The University of Akron’s Qualtrics program. The 110 public administrator email addresses the author collected were placed into a server list and the survey was emailed to those addresses. The email first introduced the author, the research project, and the final outcome (to introduce a new framework for public communication as practiced by the public sector). It should be noted that since the Review of Literature showed that public relations is not a term typically used by
government, the author used the term “public communication” throughout the email letter. The face-to-face interviews were indicated in the letter and The University of Akron’s Institutional Review Board’s approval of the research project was noted.

There were ten questions that the survey explored, including area of government employed in (city or county), department, job title, experience/training, prior positions (public sector, private sector, or both), education, gender, and age. The survey questions were selected since it was important for the study to locate those public administrators who are practicing public communication/public relations functions. At the conclusion of the survey, the respondent could indicate if he or she was receptive to a future face-to-face interview with the researcher. A total of 34 surveys were completed.

Second Step: Face-to-Face Semi-Structured Interviews

The last question of the survey, regarding a voluntary future face-to-face interview, produced 12 public officials (from those respondents who had responded by the first week of December) who were interested in a qualitative semi-structured face-to-face interview with the researcher. Semi-structured interviews involve the researcher utilizing a general topic guide with suggested questions rather than following a fixed order and exact wording of questions (Bailey, 2007; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; Packer, 2011; Ritchie et al., 2014). Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were selected as the method of questioning since they are not only favored by qualitative researchers (Barbour, 2008; Silverman, 2010), but also because they encourage greater latitude in scope and length of topics and questions discussed (Packer, 2011). This type of interviewing compliments the interpretive paradigm as participants are encouraged to
engage in dialogue rather than just answer questions. Since the definition of public relations is ambiguous in the public sector, this type of interview will help the researcher navigate the dimensions of the phenomenon, including its nature, features, and processes.

Kvale and Brinkman (2009) point out that “the research interview is an interpersonal situation, a conversation between two partners about a theme of mutual interest” (p. 123). The semi-structured interview afforded flexibility but allowed the author to explore ten themes. The semi-structured format was important as this type of interview “seeks to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena” (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009).

The author visited the administrator’s office or a location nearby, chosen by the administrator, and started each interview with a briefing that included the nature of the study, the purpose for it, appreciation for allowing the interview, and permission to tape record the interview. There was only one interview that the author decided not to record because it took place in a public eatery where noise and close proximity with other diners had to be considered. Another interview was conducted in a public eatery due to a temporary shut-down of the administrative offices, but a small room, with a closed door, in the eatery was used so privacy and taping could be accommodated. In addition to the tape recording, the author also took brief notes during the interviews.

The interview guide (or script) contained ten topics that the author wished to explore and the questions strived for both a thematic and dynamic element. The purpose of thematic questions is to establish knowledge while dynamic questions aid in establishing a good rapport between interviewer and interviewee (Kvale & Brinkman,
Again, since this study was one of the first to explore in a qualitative fashion the positions of public administrators who practice public communication and public relations, it was important that the interviews produce rich descriptions and examples. Types of questions asked included introductory, follow-up, probing, direct, indirect, structuring, and interpreting.

The first few questions dealt with introductory subjects, such as the respondent’s educational background, prior job experience, and current position. Once an interpersonal rapport was established, the author explored such subjects as when public relations is used and what models are practiced. Tools used for public relations were also explored at some length, as well as working with other government departments (internal lateral relationships). The author also examined the use of internal public relations and evaluation, as well as the importance of public relations in the government agency that the interviewee was employed in. After these questions were explored, the author continued to probe the differences, barriers, and challenges to practicing public relations in government. It was important to see if this study unearthed the differences between the public and private sectors that the review of literature revealed. The final question looked at professional organization membership and before the interview ended, the author did a short debriefing, inquiring if the respondent had more to say or had any questions, and she revealed the next step, which was determining common themes in the interviews, which would help lead to an alternative framework of public relations for the public sector. Most of the interviews lasted no more than one hour, although one interview, which included three county agency communication directors, lasted close to two hours.
An additional interview, making the total 13, was done by telephone in late January as the respondent had taken the survey in January.

Transcribing

The author applied rigor in developing appropriate coding frames to analyze concepts, processes, patterns, and themes found in the face-to-face interviews since these would further guide her in developing theory. Kvale and Brinkman (2009) suggest that the transcription process is interpretative since oral language is being translated into written language at a later time. So it was important for the author to transcribe the audio tapes while the interview experiences were still fresh in her memory. All interviews were transcribed by the author less than two weeks after the physical interviews had taken place. Meloy (2002) writes, “The researcher as human instrument is a methodologist, analyst, writer, thinker, interpreter, inquirer – an individual human being capable of and responsible for some kind of final, organized presentation of the interaction of experience in context” (p. 157). The author assumed the task with this in mind and transcribed as accurately as possible and most of the time, she took down verbatim descriptions. Final transcribed notes were not sent to the respondents for review. Ethical issues were also taken into consideration as the audio tapes were placed in a secure location (locked filing cabinet in the author’s home) and at no time were the identities of the respondents revealed in this project.

Once all the audio tapes were transcribed, the researcher went through each of the transcriptions very carefully and began placing information into themes and categories. A total of 15 themes/categories were identified and they included the following:
background, professional organization membership, public relations responsibilities, 
public relations models, evaluation and survey research, internal public relations, 
traditional media, website, miscellaneous media, social media, social media vehicles, 
challenges associated with the use of social and digital media, internal lateral 
relationships, differences between city and county government, and challenges in 
practicing public relations in government/public sector.

Third Step: Exploring an Alternative Public Relations Framework for the Public Sector

The third step of the research design involved the author utilizing the information 
gleaned from the review of literature, the findings from the interviews, and 
organization/management theory to explore an alternative public relations framework for 
the public sector that recognizes and accommodates the unique differences between the 
public and private sectors. One of the goals of the study was to offer praxis to public 
administrators responsible for practicing public relations with their constituents. The 
alternative framework is presented in the fifth chapter.

Summary

The methodology was important because the study’s design had to generate data 
that could answer the research questions: R₁ (How is public relations practiced by public 
administrators in the public sector?) and R₂ (Do the differences between the public and 
private sectors affect the way public relations is practiced by public administrators?). The 
author chose a qualitative approach in an interpretive paradigm and the tools of surveying 
and face-to-face interviews because they were the best approaches for answering the 
research questions. It was also critical for the selected research design to be able to
provide data that could contribute to theory building in both the communication and public administration disciplines.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

This chapter contains the results of the online survey and an analysis of the face-to-face and phone interviews of the public administrators who handle the public communication/public relations for their city or county government. The results are very important to this study as they were used to answer the following research questions:

R_1: How is public relations practiced by public administrators in the public sector?

R_2: Do the differences between the public and private sectors affect the way public relations is practiced by public administrators?

Appleby (1945) wrote that government officials need “special competence in handling relationships among all the varied and powerful forces, activities, and elements in the county” (p. 9). Thus, public relations needs to be an integral part of government. However, as the review of literature revealed, there have been few studies that have examined this. This project is somewhat unique because the author interviewed public administrators to understand how the differences between the public and private sectors affect the daily practice of public communication and public relations for the public administrator. So the author could draw interpretations that would aid her in creating the
alternative framework for public relations, rich descriptions were critical and the interviews provided this relevant and insightful data.

The online survey was emailed to 110 public administrator email addresses that were collected by the author by either reviewing government websites or by calling actual governments to discern the public communication or public relations officer. The ten-question survey was developed using The University of Akron’s Qualtrics program and it explored the area of government employed in (city or county), department, job title, experience/training, prior positions (public sector, private sector, or both), education, gender, and age. The survey was utilized to locate public administrators in the state of Ohio who are practicing public relations efforts with constituents.

Online Survey Findings

The survey was emailed the second week of November and one reminder email was sent two weeks after the initial delivery to solicit additional responses. A total of 34 completed surveys, reflecting a return response rate of 31 percent, were received within a 45-day period from initial delivery. The findings are below.

Demographic Information

Out of the 34 received surveys, 27 were completed by public administrators in city government while seven were completed by those in county government. In city government, the respondents worked in the mayor’s office or the city manager’s office and several respondents indicated specific departments, such as Communications, Public Affairs, Business and Community Relations, Parks and Recreation, Development, and Engineering. In county government, respondents revealed areas in which they were
employed, including the Commissioner’s Office, Metro Parks, Children’s Service, Auditor’s Office, and Clerk of Courts.

An overwhelming majority was female (25 respondents). The two age categories, 41 to 50 and 51 and over, represented more than half of the respondents’ ages (11 respondents respectively). Six respondents were below the age of 30 while five were between the ages of 30 and 40. Only two respondents had some college but had not graduated compared to 21 respondents who hold a bachelor’s degree. Interestingly, 13 public administrators had obtained a graduate degree.

Experience/Training

When asked about their experience/training in different areas, 30 respondents indicated communication, 29 revealed public relations, 23 indicated media relations, 21 revealed crisis communication, 20 indicated public affairs, and 18 of the respondents reported journalism/newswriting.

When asked if they had prior job positions in communication, 22 public administrators indicated they had. Eight of those specified prior positions in only the public sector (government/nonprofit), another eight specified prior positions in communication in only the private sector (corporate), and six public administrators revealed prior positions in communication in both the public and private sectors.

When asked if they had prior job positions in public relations, 21 public administrators indicated they had. Eight of those specified prior positions in only the public sector, seven specified prior positions in public relations only in the private sector, and six public administrators revealed prior positions in public relations in both the
public and private sectors. When asked if they had prior job positions in public affairs, 14 public administrators indicated they had. Twelve of those specified prior positions in only the public sector and two public administrators revealed prior positions in public affairs in both the public and private sectors.

When asked if they had prior job positions in media relations, 14 public administrators indicated they had. Five of those specified prior positions in only the public sector, another five specified prior positions in media relations in only the private sector, and four public administrators revealed prior positions in media relations in both the public and private sectors. When asked if they had prior job positions in marketing/advertising, 16 public administrators indicated they had. Five of those specified prior positions in only the public sector, eight specified prior positions in only the private sector, and three public administrators revealed prior positions in marketing/advertising in both the public and private sectors.

When asked if they had prior job positions in journalism, 11 public administrators indicated they had. Two of those specified prior positions in only the public sector, seven specified prior positions in only the private sector, and two public administrators revealed prior positions in journalism in both the public and private sectors.

Job Titles

The survey revealed seventeen different job titles and four public administrators had two combined job positions in their titles. The most common job title contained the term “community” (nine respondents) and included such positions as community affairs coordinator, community resources coordinator, community events coordinator,
community relations specialist, community and public relations and grant coordinator, community information manager, and community outreach director. The term “communications” was included in job titles for eight respondents, such as communications coordinator, communications manager, director of communications, and communications director. Three respondents identified themselves as the mayor’s assistant, two as an executive administrative assistant and one as an administrative assistant. The job title public information manager or public information officer was used by three administrators. Two public administrators indicated they were the clerk of council. The following job titles were only used once: public relations specialist, training specialist, city administrator, recreation supervisor, assistant director of media relations, city manager, development administrator, director, division manager, and assistant director of law. The different titles support the review of literature that reveals many euphemisms are used by government to conceal and camouflage public relations efforts (McCamy, 1939; Pimlott, 1951; Wilcox & Cameron, 2013; Broom & Sha, 2013).

Analysis of the Interviews

The author conducted 12 face-to-face interviews in mid-December of 2014 with public administrators who perform public communication and public relations duties in both county and city governments in the state of Ohio. Four of the public administrators worked in county government while the other seven worked in city government. Those respondents who were interested in a face-to-face interview but answered the survey near the end of December through the beginning of January of 2015 were offered the
opportunity of a phone interview. One city public administrator chose that method and
the phone interview was conducted the last week of January.

During the first week of January of 2015, the face-to-face interviews were
transcribed from the audio tapes and by the end of the month, the researcher had
compiled a list of 15 categories and themes from the transcribed notes, including the
phone interview that was conducted in late January.

The interviews provided valuable data for the researcher in further developing her
alternative framework of public relations for the public sector. All of the respondents
commented that this study was significant and they were very interested in the results.
The data was rich in descriptive nature and many examples were provided. Indeed, the
information gleaned supported the differences between the public and private sectors that
were found in the Literature Review. Even though public relations is not a term typically
used by government and the job titles collected in the survey reflect that, all 13 public
administrators used the term throughout their interviews.

There are many challenges the public administrators face while performing their
duties in the government sector and all of these will be explored in greater detail
throughout this chapter. Most of these challenges are the result of the differences between
the public and private sectors, such as public interest, transparency, accountability,
political environment, citizen apathy, and lateral working relationships. As the review of
the literature reflected, the advent and rise of social media, including Facebook and
Twitter, has also proven somewhat precarious for public administrators and the interview
findings support this. Also, the changing media landscape has forced many of the public administrators interviewed to rethink their media strategies.

The themes and categories from the interviews that will be presented and discussed in this chapter are: education and experience, professional organization membership, public relations responsibilities, public relations models utilized, evaluation and survey research, internal public relations, traditional media, website, miscellaneous media, social media, social media vehicles, challenges with social and digital media, lateral working relationships, and differences between city and county government. The last theme, challenges with practicing public relations in government, will be presented throughout the different themes and categories.

Education/Experience/Duties

The educational backgrounds of the public administrators were somewhat varied. Three had bachelor degrees in communication, three in political science, two in business, one in English, and another in education. One administrator had obtained her master’s in public administration and two administrators had interned with their cities in college before being offered employment after the internship ended. Experience was varied, as well. Two administrators had successful careers as journalists before entering the public sector. Six others had worked in government before their current positions, and one administrator had worked in the hospitality and tourism industry. Another administrator possessed many years working in military communications with the Federal Government. Although only three administrators had a formal education in the field of communication/public relations, all those interviewed felt comfortable in their
communication/public interest/public relations job functions and all referred to the term “public relations” throughout the entire interviews.

The titles of the public administrators interviewed also varied. Only two titles contained the term public relations: Public Relations Specialist and Community and Public Relations Coordinator. Again, this supports the literature that revealed government typically uses other terms than public relations in job titles (Levy, 1943; Pimlott, 1951; McCamy, 1964). Two titles were Director of Communications, one title was Public Information Manager, and three administrators who worked for their city’s mayor were Press Assistant, Media Relations Director, and Mayor’s Assistant. One public administrator was the Chief Specialist in the area of the division worked in while another was the Recreation Supervisor. Three other public administrators were Community Affairs/Community Relations Directors or Coordinators. It is interesting to note that one respondent had Public Relations in her title but recently petitioned to have it changed to Director of Communications since she revealed that her job has evolved to doing more than just public relations. She shared that it is very unusual to have the term “public relations” in a government title, so she was surprised that the position was originally created with that title. Another administrator admitted that although public relations is in her title, she is more often than not the Public Information Officer. Quite a few administrators mentioned that additional duties are added to their job functions without additional pay and one admitted that her job has the most amount of learning than any of the other jobs in all of the other departments. Still another revealed that a reality of
government is being provided no education or training for your job, forcing you to learn on your own as you go.

Three of the public administrators belong to the professional public relations organization PRSA (Public Relations Society of America) and are working on obtaining their APR (Accreditation in Public Relations). Four administrators belong to 3CMA (City-County Communications and Marketing Association). One administrator did not renew her membership in 3CMA because she feels that those members are doing more public relations, social media, marketing, and event planning. She further commented that since she does more consulting, she has recently joined PRSA, which she feels is a better fit for what she does. She is one of the administrators currently working on her APR. Interestingly, another administrator, whose job title contains the words public relations, did the opposite. She was working on her APR but recently left PRSA because she felt that it did not focus on public relations in the public sector, so she was not getting anything from the meetings. Someone involved in PRSA confided in her that PRSA is not relevant to government since it does not have a product to sell and is more geared toward profit-making organizations.

The supervisor of one of the interviewees belongs to COPIN (Central Ohio Public Information Network) and the interviewee conveyed that soon she will have a membership in the organization as well. She values the sharing of resources and tools in this organization. Another administrator belongs to OPRA (Ohio Parks and Recreation Association) and has her CPRP (Certified Park and Recreation Professional certification).
While one administrator revealed that she is not a member of any “professional communication organizations,” she does belong to a professional secretaries association that provides internal resources for members and benefits the community by spearheading charitable projects. These findings do not support the literature that showed communication practitioners in government trial behind their private sector counterparts in regard to professional development (Lui & Horsley, 2007).

City administrators worked in the offices of both the mayor and city manager. Most of these offices are “one-person” offices and several of the positions had been created within the past 10 years. Several administrators had been part-time for several years and were recently promoted to full-time. Only one administrator interviewed was still employed part-time, but this was more of a personal choice.

One individual, who had a communication background, was working in another department of her city government and had to take a written test when applying for the public relations position. Another had been hired part-time by one department but then absorbed duties of another department and now works full-time but divides her duties in half for each department. This same administrator revealed that before she was hired, the secretary would handle the communication efforts one day and then the next day, the information technology representative would. There was no consistency. Two administrators had successfully covered the local government, which they are now employed in, as journalists. Both of these individuals made the transition to the public sector when the newspaper industry began struggling. One administrator explained that because of her previous government experience in another department, she was prepared
in her new position to know legally what information needed to be disseminated to the public. Another commented that his vast experience in federal government communications has helped him in his current position. The two administrators who came from the journalism field noted that they knew how to write press releases and deal with the media, which helped when they came into their current government positions.

One administrator said that her current position was created solely for her but she had to remain part-time until her city’s finances improved. As such, she had to continually justify her position because residents and government employees questioned why she was hired and not an additional police officer or trash collector. Another administrator divulged that she too has to continually prove the value of communication to her department and others although her efforts are appreciated. When she was first hired, other departments were not pleased as they were against the concept of needing a person like her and her boss really took the heat. When this administrator encountered someone from another department for the first time, he said to her, “So you’re the one that the Commissioners hate.” As a result of this, as well as the fact that her county is very frugal, she has to be “someone that they cannot do without.” This devaluation of communication by management was also supported in the literature as a difference between the private and public sectors (Liu & Horsley, 2007).

More than half of the interviewees feel that their mayor, city council, and/or administration support public relations. One administrator admitted that other departments are relieved that he handles the communication, public relations, and media and now they see the value of his position although he did have to prove himself in the
beginning. Another individual commented that although most of the departments support public relations, she is often times forgotten – “the 11th hour girl” – and finds out about information at the last minute. This theme – learning late about information from other departments – was echoed by many of the public administrators interviewed. Thus, the need for training was emphasized. One administrator remarked that she would like to create a leadership program for communication managers and chiefs of staff in the other departments in which they could learn how to navigate in the government system and how to function at a higher level to be effective. She added that this would be very helpful for people coming into government with no prior government experience or background. Still another administrator shared that she would like to conduct a communication audit of each department and then approach each department head and say, “I think your department should be doing this and that and here’s the person in your department that I think is a good fit to do these things.” She would then train that person although she admitted that only half of the supervisors want her to train other departments. Once the other departments understand the need for public communication and she has taught them how to do it, this public administrator remarked, “This would free me up to do things that provide depth to my position.” She shared that since she does so much “consulting” she asked that her title be changed to encompass this. Another administrator imparted that he coaches department heads and cabinet members about the importance of media and how to deal with the media. One city had an employee stealing gas and when a television investigate reporter came out to cover the story, the administrator admitted that everyone in her department, including herself, did everything
wrong in regards to crisis communication. So she went for training and came back and trained the other departments on how to react to the media in times of controversy.

Public Relations Duties

Most of the city administrators interviewed reported that they manage not only the public relations for their department, but for the other departments as well. They also coordinate all the public media inquiries, although many of the administrators did not specifically handle public information requests. One administrator observed that the evolution of technology has changed the way she and others in government practice public relations today. Back then, she said, it was all about media relations with only newsletters and public meetings as civic engagement tools. One administrator explained that she spends a lot of her time doing emergency public relations and is in reactionary mode often. As a result, she has “no down time for creative thinking” and she indicated that she almost needs a third-party organization to create exciting public campaigns because she does not have time to do this as she is too busy reacting to all the demands on her time.

Over half of the administrators are involved in event planning, many with not only their own department but with other departments as well. The emphasis on events was apparent in both city and county government and as one administrator revealed, “We try to get out often so people don’t say, ‘you’re only out here during election season.’” One administrator commented that he needs to go out into the community and engage with citizens because most people who come to his building “don’t like us” since citizens typically are experiencing something negative if they are physically on the premises.
Another administrator expressed that maintaining and building relationships over time and increasing networks is important in her job.

Many city governments speak at luncheons with civic and professional organizations and hold annual fairs, community block parties, and/or summer festivals where citizens can meet and talk with government employees. This interaction is important as many of the administrators emphasized relationship building as key in their job functions, which again, is an important aspect of the relational perspective of public relations. One individual imparted that she tells people she is providing them services – customer service – because they (the citizens) are paying her to do that. She revealed, “Customer service is a key point and that is rooted in relationship,” but admitted that you don’t see a lot of that idea from the lower elements in government, like police officers and trash collectors, who have this idea toward citizens that, “Yes, you pay taxes, but not my salary. You don’t pay enough to pay my salary.” She added, “It’s a horrible concept to have and leadership ignores this sometimes. Leadership needs to be engaging the workers with the communities.” This is important as the review of literature revealed that many public employees are in direct and daily contact with citizens, serving as agents of social jurisdiction in which they must consider values that affect individual lives. Even though private employees may be in daily contact with their stakeholders, the interaction mostly involves the product or service rather than policy, governed by legal and procedural factors that affect the everyday lives of residents.

Many of the administrators believe themselves to be the liaison between their department and the public. Several indicated that they are the face of their agency.
One noted, “My job is to get my agency’s story out to the public. Telling the story is important.” Another remarked that telling the agency’s story goes beyond being a public information officer as the person telling the agency story must be someone engaged in the community, engaged with citizens, and someone who can connect with the other departments.

The public administrators interviewed do not spend much time or effort on internal public relations. One administrator said her city has one full staff meeting per month with all employees and she has thought about creating an internal newsletter but has not. Yet another administrator commented that in the future when she is able to train others in the various departments, she will teach them how to do internal public relations. All of the public administrators interviewed spend a large amount of their time practicing communication with their external target publics. This does not support Pandey and Garnett’s (2006) study that found public administrators tend to focus more on internal communications than external communication due to complex and turbulent environments. However, the findings support the survey by Liu et al. (2010) that showed only 5 percent of government organizations prioritize internal communication.

Public Interest

As the review of literature revealed, public interest is another chief difference between the public and private sectors. Government officials must acts as stewards of public interest and consider the public values of society (Dimock, 1937; Appleby, 1945; Rainey et al., 1976; Allison, 1979; Waldo, 1980; Kernaghan & Langford, 1990; Viteritti, 1997; Liu & Horsley, 2007; Cox et al., 2011; Geuras & Garofalo, 2011). All of the public
administrators interviewed took this feature of the public sector to heart. Comments regarding public interest included:

_I ask myself, “What is my responsibility to the (number) citizens of (city)? What do they need to know?”_

My most important job is deciding how to spend the taxpayer’s dollars. I ask myself, “What do I want if I am a resident? What concerns me?”

I am a resident of this city so I think like a resident and not a bureaucrat and that influences my content. Some government employees say, “It’s not my job,” but I say, “What do you mean it’s not my job? You make it your job.”

As identified in the literature review, communications and public relations personnel in the private sector do not have to consider public interest to nearly the extent that government officials do (Appleby, 1945; Viteritti, 1979; Garnett, 1992; Geuras & Garofalo, 2011). This was supported by many of the administrators interviewed.

With public interest comes intense public scrutiny by both media and citizens, which was another noted characteristic in the literature regarding differences between the public and private sectors (Appleby, 1945; Rainey et al., 1976; Viteritti, 1979; Liu & Horsley, 2007; Allison, 2012). A majority of the administrators interviewed shared their concern, as well as frustration at times, with citizens. Municipalities are challenged with doing more for less but citizens do not understand this and one administrator divulged that at times, she wants to tell residents, “Hey, we are doing the best we can dammit!”

Along with information about the public interest element of government communications, the administrators also spoke about the importance of citizens as a target public. Comments included:

*All citizens are stakeholders.*
*Citizens want to be heard.*
*The consumer is the resident and the people who work in the city.*
We are citizens with you and want to be part of the solution, not the problem. Citizens want to be able to ask questions and post opinions. Our audience is public interest at large where we are all things to all people all the time with “no” as an optional answer. I spend a lot of time on research to find out what citizens like and support. You need to share all information with citizens, even negative news. Citizens may not like the information but they need to know and it’s important you get it out first because if you don’t, it may look like you are hiding something. We have all this information but how do we get it out to our residents?

As identified in the literature review, the nature of government’s relationship to citizens is different than a private organization’s relationship to its customers/potential customers because in the public sector, clients may not be constituents and constituents may not be clients and citizens, representing a group without the characteristics of constituents, are a latent force. Government also has conflicting stakeholders. The relationship between citizen and government is an imposed relationship with government influencing more power over an individual’s life than a private organization. An individual has a choice whether to enter into a relationship with a private organization. In government, he or she does not, and as the literature revealed, many citizens distrust government, are not satisfied with its services and performance, and are apathetic in general (Nye, 1997; Mansbridge, 1997; Putnam, 2001; Clawson & Oxley, 2008). This was supported by the interviews. One public administrator relayed that she always reminds her elected officials, “You’re the commissioner for those who voted for you and for those who did not.” She added that the expectations of speaking to the public and the expectations within the counties are very different from the business sector because “if you are an elected official, you have a job to do – provide services to citizens – and you are getting paid by citizen taxes, but citizens may not know the job you’re doing so they
may not know if you’re doing a good job or if you’re even doing your job.” Another administrator admitted that people think her job is glamorous and fun but she wants people to want her job. She said, “It is our charge to make our jobs look attractive.” However, she did note that since her position looks glamorous and fun, people may not know everything that goes into it, so structure is important.

Citizen engagement proves challenging for all the public administrators interviewed and the majority agreed that most citizens are only concerned if an issue affects them personally. One county administrator pulls her communication department counterparts together so they can strive toward a vision of helping that citizen “get that dead skunk off their road.” One of the other county administrators in that interview agreed and added that citizens do not care what your title is – “they just want to know how you are going to get that dead skunk off their road.” She said citizens want to hear this: “… here’s the number you need to call to get that information. If you don’t get the answers, here’s my number and I will help you figure it out.” Another administrator pointed out that the public does not know the difference between an elected politician and a public servant. One administrator admitted that many people in government, up and down the hierarchy, do not understand that their job is to provide services to residents. She stated, “It’s not pervasive that government employees are there to provide customer service.” In her department, though, they are not able to provide legal advice to citizens. They can only talk about processes and procedures and she revealed that many times, citizens get frustrated and want to know why they cannot help them fill out forms, so she
has to educate them that they can only offer resources for processes, procedures, and rules.

Six administrators revealed that there is low attendance at their regular city council meetings and one administrator said he was given the directive to improve attendance because his city sees low attendance as not engaging with citizens. However, he does not see low attendance as that since he promotes the council meetings using both traditional and social media in a fun way that resonates with residents. He also posts a summary of the meetings afterward. Another administrator commented that publicizing meetings is “tricky” but he uses council people and opinion leaders since his community is tight-knit, as well as traditional media, social media, and the mayor’s blog. Several administrators commented that the advent of social media has helped engage citizens and has given them a voice, typically with instant gratification, so now a resident may not need to come in person to a council meeting. The use of social media and its challenges will be discussed later in this chapter.

Another administrator presented her concern that as communication advances, especially with new technologies, disengagement occurs between citizens and those that represent them in government, especially those providing face-to-face services. She commented that if these front line government employees are kind, considerate, and polite, “it speaks volumes about us – they are the face of government and the work they do represents us, so the personal stuff does matter.” And she sees this threatened by new technology.
As found in the literature, public organizations have more constraints on procedures and operations than private sector organizations, and this was supported by one administrator who stated, “Our audience is public interest at large where we are all things to all people all the time with “no” as an optional answer. We want to be everything to all people all the time but sometimes we have to say “no” and you don’t like that it’s the answer but it is an optional answer.” The same administrator added that this does make you defensible and it is frustrating sometimes because you have to prove to that one person who may be asking for something you may not still have (such as an old email). Since they have to make decisions for the public good, one administrator revealed that he has to be very careful because if he says “yes” to one person once, he has to say “yes” to everyone else. Another administrator disclosed, “People don’t come to us unless we have done something wrong.” All of the administrators, however, revealed that they want citizens to share their concerns as this is important for a transparent and open government.

Relationship with the Media

As the literature revealed, another significant difference between the public and private sectors is intense media scrutiny that government experiences (Appleby, 1945; Garnett, 1992; Viteritti, 1997; Liu et al., 2010; Stromback & Kiousis, 2011; Fitch & Holt, 2012; Lee, 2012). Even though more than half of the public administrators interviewed identified their relationships with the media, especially with local outlets, as “good,” many also expressed frustration with the media, including one of the administrators who was a former journalist. The need for the media to ensure government operates in the
public interest makes many of the administrators believe that there is a real burden placed on accountability in the public sector that the private sector does not have to deal with. It was mentioned that the media focuses on waste by government but not waste by the private sector. Not only does this appear counterproductive at times, but it also interferes with administrators trying to get their jobs done. This difference, again noted in the literature review, is something that makes the public administrator’s job more challenging. An example from one county highlights this:

> Out of 300,000 complaints phoned into the 311 phone number, 9,000 were not responded to although a lot of these were duplicates – that’s less than one percent – so even though there was a 99 percent completion rate, we lost our Safety Director over that; in the private sector, a 99 percent completion rate is great, but it is unacceptable in government.

One administrator revealed that all their snow plows have GPS monitors on them so they can monitor operations (“We can tell when the plow went by your street and what it was doing”) because they need to track everything since government has to be held accountable. A government employee was caught stealing gas, so now all government employees need gas cards to purchase gas, divulged one public administrator, who added with frustration, “The private sector does not have to deal with that.”

One administrator confessed that many times when she pitches stories to the media about her department, reporters tell her that the story is not “sexy enough” and does not “bleed.” Reporters tell her it is informative but not interesting. Two other administrators relayed the same with one revealing that reporters are always looking for an edge – some type of controversy. Another said the media is looking for a story angle or drama and they do not find value in the communication she supplies them. She added
that many times, reporters think they have found controversy in something but she has to point out that it is not controversy or drama but rather the policy of how government operates. This supports Sabato’s (1991) findings that identify the news coverage period since 1974 as “junk-yard-dog” journalism in which journalists focus on gossip, rumors, and private lives of officials rather than covering important and substantial issues and mechanisms of government (pp. 25-26).

One administrator said that if the media gets it wrong, he will contact them to correct the story. Several administrators meet with their local media on a regular basis to discuss story ideas and ways to better communicate. Almost all of the public administrators saw media relationships as a very important part of their jobs and one commented that media is a constant in government but not so much in business in the private sector, which is again supported by the literature review. One administrator remarked that keeping up with the media is a job in itself and another admitted that finding the right spokesperson for each department who is an expert but who can speak intelligently to the issue and stick to the message is challenging.

All of the administrators interviewed believe that information is critical in the public sector and the majority of the interviewees cross-promote on all media vehicles, taking an integrated approach to public relations. One remarked that since we are in an era of transparency and civic engagement, the more information put forward by government, the better. Another commented that due to new media vehicles, such as social media, everyone is a messenger. The public relations tools that the public administrators use in their jobs will be discussed later in this chapter.
The changing media landscape and the challenges it presents for city and county government were also revealed in the interviews. With the consolidation of the newspaper industry, the transition from home delivery of news to online and digital, and the reduction of staff reporters, public administrators are rethinking ways to communicate with their residents. One administrator said the biggest challenge is: “We have all this information but how do we get it out to our residents?” His city is part of a larger metro area so the media only comes out for “big stories.” He cannot afford to advertise in the bigger metro market so he has to find tools to promote the city to his residents.

Many administrators expressed concern over the trend toward online and digital news reporting, noting that the goal is not on getting the news right, but getting it out first. This format has changed the philosophy regarding content. One administrator reported that her city’s weekly newspaper, which most of her older citizens obtain their local news from, is “really bad” and focuses more on online and regional news and includes news from other neighboring cities that is not relevant to her residents. Two other administrators noted that this focus on getting the news out first precludes follow-up and repetition, which is important for government news. Thus, many of the administrators interviewed are creating their own virtual newsrooms and social media has helped with these efforts. The ability to get out information to citizens and not have a middleman or gatekeeper decide on the dissemination appeals to the majority of administrators. One revealed, “We want unfiltered messages to go out to our residents so if the media is not receptive to our story, we can still get it out there,” and he pointed toward the mayor’s blog as one such vehicle. He also added, “Breaking through the
barrier of how to get a message you want people to understand through all that noise to where they actually hear it is important.”

Reader comments online regarding news stories is an issue for one administrator. Anonymous readers can post negative comments and try to create controversy and she cannot remove the posts because the site belongs to the news source. She discovered that one person was creating aliases to make it appear as if a group of citizens was disgruntled with the city. The person was striving for strength in numbers and the administrator said that her department has had discussions on how to address this. Someone suggested city employees create aliases and comment positively on the city, but most, including her, felt this was unethical. Some wanted the city to comment positively while others wanted to just ignore the negative comments altogether. The administrator revealed that this is a real dilemma. Her mayor suggests not even reading the comments because he feels those people are the “haters” but she believes if the comments are out there and citizens are reading them, it could create a controversy. For now, their policy is “hands off” the comments.

Public Relations Models

The question regarding what types of public relations models, theories, and frameworks these public administrators utilize in their daily jobs proved very interesting. Several of the public administrators admitted that they do not use any. One individual commented that she uses none because her past experience has taught her how to write news releases and pitch stories to the media. She added that engagement only happens
when residents are affected or when they come to events. Interestingly, these views, according to Grunig and Hunt’s (1984) typology, fit the press agentry/publicity model.

The public information model appears to be the most dominantly employed public relations model by the administrators interviewed, supporting the literature that shows it as the most used model by government and public sector agencies (Turk, 1985; Grunig, 1997; Wetherell, 1989; Wilcox & Cameron, 2012; Broom & Sha, 2013). One administrator remarked that she uses the public information model to get the information out to citizens and then citizens start talking, beginning the dialogue (rather than she starting the dialogue with them). One administrator commented that although he does not use public relations models in a formal way, public information is a huge part, however, he sees it as operating altogether – public information, public relations, and marketing.

Several of the administrators interviewed utilize branding strategies, which was shown in the literature as a popular tool used by government. One administrator commented that branding is important since his job is to sell the city, so he markets his city like a product and includes public services, like safety, fire, police, and good roads. He not only sells the city to residents, but also to businesses, other government agencies, and the media. Recently, his city implemented a branding exercise, rolling out a new logo with the help of a private third-party agency. Two other administrators commented that branding was a model that they too frequently use. More than a few times these administrators mentioned “branding their city” by focusing on these types of questions: Who are we? What messages (and stories) are we trying to get across to citizens? What do I want if I am a resident? What concerns me? The answers influence the content they
create. Another administrator also looks to branding to get her agency’s name out there on a regular basis, such as making sure that everything that goes out of her office now has her agency’s logo on it, which she also helped create.

One administrator utilizes public relations and marketing models for businesses in the private sector by pulling out what she can apply to government and she pointed to storytelling, which she said is a huge element now in marketing and social media, as an example. She does not tell her story on a mass appeal but rather tells it as relevant as she can to the audience that her agency needs to direct their story to. And although the story’s bottom line may have multiple audiences, she is more selective and targeted and tries to find “what’s in it for me” for the citizens in a relevant and caring way to make the connection credible. Shaping messages is important and one interviewee introduced the recent Ebola virus media coverage as an example. The media was focusing on a message of fear regarding the virus in the city and he was able to influence the message and successfully change it to one based on facts. “Inject truth into an issue,” he advocates.

Another public administrator commented that the public relations model she uses depends on the project. She pointed out that state-funded projects require a public involvement process and since the feedback has to be included in the project, a public relations model that requires two-way communication has to be used. Her government had just completed a large state-funded project and she had utilized a private third-party marketing agency to assist with those citizen input efforts. One administrator pointed out that she cannot use public involvement for everything because everyone has an opinion and she would not be able to run government effectively trying to listen to everyone.
Another administrator uses a communication framework that he developed, based on the model the Pentagon utilizes, that employs community engagement. In this framework, media and community are “synonymous” and he observed, “The community doesn’t care what you know, they only want to know that you care and you cannot tell them that – you have to show them that.” He further pointed out that the media is a side note to the communities and community relations is the backbone to effective leadership in government. Another administrator commented that government has to share the same information and communicate it in the same way so it can be trusted in all areas as “transparency and having no secrets is important.” Still another revealed that there has to be trust and reliability on both sides – a two-way street – adding, “Trust and reliability are core to what we do.”

The RACE (Research, Action, Communication, and Evaluation) framework was only mentioned twice. One administrator negatively referred to it as the “1970’s textbook model” and the other referred to a similar counterpart of RACE that was used in his previous government experience and which he still utilizes today known as RPIE (Research, Plan, Implement, and Evaluate).

As these interviews revealed, the use of theory by administrators is not being fully exercised. All the administrators were intrigued by the author’s aim at developing an alternative framework of public relations for government so perhaps the low use of theory can be attributed to the lack of public relations models that take into consideration the nuances of the public sector.
Survey Research/Evaluation/Strategic Plan

Six public administrators shared that they conduct city comprehensive surveys with their citizens and these ranged from every two years to every seven to ten years. The information is not just collected and put away. All of the six examine and utilize the findings in their communication and public relations efforts. One administrator stated that she uses both current and past surveys to gauge public opinion and support of issues and to determine how the climate has changed regarding issues. She pointed out that the issue of storm water in her city is a good example as to how an issue has fluctuated over time. Another revealed that in their citizen surveys, they look at communication and ask residents for feedback and suggestions for improvement. One administrator commented that his council is driving the survey because they want to know what their citizens want and he will be in charge of the next one.

Information gleaned from these citizen surveys is also put to use by these administrators. One said that feedback in the survey about their website showed that it was difficult to navigate as it was listed by department and citizens suggested they organize it by questions residents would have about city services, so he will be revamping the website to make it more user-friendly. Another used evaluation forms at citizen meetings regarding an important issue that they were discussing in the community. The evaluation forms solicited feedback about the actual meetings.

The city of one administrator conducts a free Citizen’s Academy annually in which citizen voluntarily meet twice a month for four months to discuss topics, issues, and government services and departments. The city has been conducted the academies for
five years and the response has been well-received as the 25 available seats get reserved pretty quickly. The administrator revealed that they receive all different types of demographics at the academy so it is a great representative citizen engagement tool. He commented, “We showwarts and all so it’s not propaganda but after, “apostles have been sent out” … when you have better informed residents, you have better government.”

The majority of public administrators interviewed, outside of the comprehensive citizen survey and required feedback for TFL and state-funded grant projects, do not survey their citizens. However, one administrator shared that she creates environments for dialogue for citizen feedback by surveying residents through mail, online, and face-to-face.

Many of the administrators admitted that they do not perform much evaluation on their communication and public relations efforts. The one exception appears to be the measuring of website usage and social media performance, the latter achieved by using the analytic evaluation tools provided by the social media platforms. Perhaps this is because the programs are part of the platforms, thus making it fairly easy to collect and present the data. One administrator commented that his evaluation attempts are not formal and he believes he needs to do a better job at it. However, he does prepare annual reports regarding how quickly he responds to media requests, the amount of time he spends on media tasks, the city’s website usage, and social media evaluation. He shared that in 2014, he attended to 200 media requests with 89 percent of those addressed within 24 hours or less. Another administrator said that in 2009, her boss developed a community relations program and brought her on board to develop the program and now,
five years later, she is the director of community relations. The challenge though, she admitted, lies with determining the new department’s value so she developed metrics to measure the success of events and programs within five years. Another administrator commented that if a lot of people show up at her events, she deems them successful. One admitted that she is still trying to develop a culture where everyone approves and fully accepts her role and functions before she can start to evaluate.

As was found in the literature, due to less market exposure, the public sector results in less incentive cost reduction, operating efficiency, effective performance, and allocational efficiency (Rainey et al., 1976). The data from the interviews supports this as most of the administrators do not have the time or resources available to properly evaluate their communication and public relations efforts. Furthermore, since government operates with no clear bottom line, evaluation appears to be less critical than in the private sector where organizations must be conscious of it for profit and survival. In addition, there were few administrators who had strategic plans in place. One administrator admitted that not only does she not have a strategic plan, but she does not have strategic communication goals either. However, several administrators attempt strategic plans. One said every year she lays out her plans by asking herself, “What are the three big things I want to do this year?” She also revealed that she sees her office as a “glorified manufacturing entity – they do the work and I see my role as more creative at the executive level and more planful.” To increase Facebook likes and website hits was another administrator’s strategic plan. One administrator revealed that his strategic plan includes council retreats and a city retreat to set vision and goals. One city was operating
under an old strategic plan that needs to be updated but the administrator noted that her boss provides her with project updates, containing action plans for recurring events.

Public Relations Tools: Traditional Media

All of the public administrators interviewed rely very heavily on traditional media to communicate with their citizens and the media. The most used tools in this category were news releases and newsletters. One administrator puts out 60 news releases per year and this includes information from other departments. Most interviewees had good working relationships with their local media and a few revealed that the newspapers pretty much print their releases word-for-word. Most of the administrators write all of the content for the newsletters, which are still mailed to residents. One administrator revealed that her quarterly newsletter is the primary source of information for her 20,000 residents. Most of the newsletters were generated quarterly and placed on the government website as well. Fliers and brochures were other traditional tools that close to half of the administrators develop and distribute. One administrator writes and designs 80 percent of her city’s brochures and another helps design the brochures, close to 100, and revises them every two years. Two administrators use utility bills to get messages out about their city. Only three administrators utilize radio and one said that his local radio station airs a Friday morning public affairs program which is well-received in the community. Another administrator uses local television but many others did not have a metro television station in their markets. One administrator uses cable television and three take advantage of their public access government station by providing event slides. One administrator supplies
other content for his government channel, such as recorded messages from the mayor’s office.

Website

All of the public administrators interviewed utilize their county or city government websites. The majority of websites were originally designed by the government’s IT department or by private third-party agencies. The duties varied with some administrators being responsible for most of the content posted while others were responsible for their department’s content only. Four administrators redesigned their websites, making them more open and easier to navigate, with the help of third-party agencies, while two revealed that they would like to redesign their websites next year.

The majority of the public administrators are not responsible for the technical or programming aspects of the website as most of those functions are contracted out to a private third-party agency or handled internally by the IT department. One administrator commented that there are close to 400 pdf files on their current website and she would like to reduce that to between 50 and 100. Another administrator reported that she is responsible for training other departments on how to use the website.

Although the website is an important tool for all of the administrators, it appears that it is utilized mostly for public information dissemination rather than starting dialogue with citizens. Emails are the most typical communication and are answered by the administrators or forwarded to the correct department. One administrator admitted that when he receives emails in the evening from citizens, he feels compelled to answer them from home.
Public Relations Tools: Social Media

As the literature revealed, social media is a powerful tool and can be used by public administrators to help connect theories of administration and governance (Mergel & Greeves, 2013). Social media is an important tool for the public administrators interviewed but there are several different views regarding the use of social media in government communication and public relations. All of the city public administrators utilize social media and the top two platforms were Facebook and Twitter. Instagram is also used by three administrators and YouTube by two administrators. Other platforms mentioned, but used by only one administrator respectively, were Pinterest, Craig’s List, and LinkedIn.

Interestingly, the county administrators lagged behind on using social media. One county administrator uses Facebook but added that social media is a low priority in her county. Another admitted that her decision not to use social media was based on the fact that she was, at that time, a one-person office with many duties so she had to ask herself, “Do I want to manage three other platforms 24/7 in addition to everything else I do?” She does help write content for her politically appointed supervisor but since the supervisor uses her own individual Facebook account, they do not have to be concerned with public retention laws. As the literature revealed, social media and public retention laws are an area of concern for those in government practicing public communication and public relations (Deamer, 2011; Lidsky, 2011; Schultz, 2013; Salkin & Tappendorf, 2013). Another county administrator mentioned that his department does not want to dive into social media because of the public retention laws and the inability to remove
inflammatory comments, which he noted that businesses in the private sector can delete if they wish. He does see his department using social media in the future but the big issue for him is “when do negative comments posted cross the line?”

The concern and handling of negative postings was a theme amongst the city administrators utilizing social media platforms. Most had social media policies in place and two administrators were updating their policies. One interviewee based her city’s social media policy on that of the U.S. Army’s, which she felt was the best government policy when she was researching social media policies. All of the cities’ social media policies address the posting of negative and derogatory comments, but there were several different views expressed by the administrators regarding how they handle negative posts. One administrator revealed that in the first year of using Facebook, a small group of citizens complained that she was taking away their first amendment rights by removing posts; however, she told them that she does not own Facebook so she was not taking away their right. She also has a disclaimer on the city’s Facebook page and continues to remove negative posts. Another administrator also removes derogatory or racist comments on the city’s Facebook page. One administrator makes a copy of the negative post first for record retention due to the Sunshine Laws and then removes the post. Another administrator does not remove negative posts but forwards them to the appropriate department; however, she does block vulgar or obscene messages. She also responds to all posts including the negative ones and will let the individuals who posted the negative comments know that she is going to private message them. Another administrator does not remove negative posts but she will “hide” posts that have nothing
to do with the conversation or are irrelevant. She has deleted only two posts for profanity and both times, she informed the individuals she was deleting them. To help control for profanity, several administrators subscribe to a filter that blocks profanity on social media platforms.

As the literature revealed, social media is an opportunity to encourage dialogue and engagement with citizens, but most of the administrators utilize social media to get public information out and only three felt that they were moving towards more of a dialogue with citizens. One administrator commented that he answers all questions and complaints on social media and would like to create dialogue about bigger issues, but currently, a big portion of his time is spent on “managing expectations.” Another revealed that they had been using social media for five years mostly for one-way communication but now, in her sixth year of its use, there is more feedback from citizens. One administrator reminds his city manager, “Facebook is not a bulletin board where you post stuff and walk away.” He stresses that Facebook is conversation, and he provides the information to start the dialogue that he has with his residents.

One administrator revealed that the challenge with social media is that “for everything you say, there is a message and if you are just putting out raw information, you are missing out on the opportunity to relay your message. Ninety-nine percent of the time the audience won’t be able to pick up on the message so you have to provide it to them.”

Most of the supervisors of the public administrators interviewed support social media although many were cautious at first. One administrator shared that when she
started to use social media, many departments thought she should only post about public meetings because they were scared of the new vehicle. She persisted and now, the other departments understand the importance of social media. Another admitted that the city solicitor was against its use but she did it anyway and now, five years later, “he would still like to yank it.” One noted that some employees want to get rid of their city’s Facebook account.

Five administrators handle the social media activities for their entire city although in many cases, other city employees can also post. Several administrators mentioned that they wished other department heads would also use social media but many of them have refused, leaving the administrator solely responsible for their city’s social media activity. Only one of the city administrators does not handle the social media efforts for her city. Younger people in the office oversee the Facebook account because she does not understand it and although she has attended many workshops promoting social media’s importance, currently she does not know its value. Another administrator confessed that last year, he did not understand social media or “get it” but now he sees the value in it. In addition to the city’s own Facebook and Twitter accounts, some of the other departments in some of the cities also have their own social media accounts. The Police Department, Public Works/Services Department, and Parks and Recreation were the most common departments cited that maintain their own social media efforts, separate from the city’s accounts. One administrator did point out that the biggest consequence of maintaining various city accounts is that it dilutes the audience.
Several of the interviewees mentioned that due to the changing environment of news coverage, social media has helped them to create their own newsroom so they can reach their citizens without relying solely on local media. One administrator remarked that reporters are now using social media to generate news so that is a big reason why she utilizes it as well. She wants reporters to come to her for stories instead of the other way around. Another administrator, though, specifies to the media that social media is not a platform for public records requests or official statements. He strongly encourages the media to contact the office and obtain a statement; however, he admits that the media doesn’t see it that way many times, so it becomes a battle between the media and the public information personnel. Another administrator lets citizens know that she is not going to use social media to work out their problems with the city. She tells them to call, email, write, or stop in, and commented in the interview, “now that’s public record.”

Most of the public administrators, however, find it difficult to put a value on their social media efforts. Although most utilize the analytics that the social media platforms provide, one administrator commented, “In social media, what is a “good” number for evaluation?” Another has found that since the city started to use social media, the number of phone inquiries has declined.

As presented earlier, the advent and use of social media by the cities has not increased attendance at city council meetings although all the administrators using social media promote the meetings on these platforms. As one administrator noted, “It’s not all about “showing up” to be engaged,” and he pointed to the younger generation who are not only using social media to engage, but who also expect immediate gratification from
their engagement. Another administrator noted that people now expect immediate feedback from their communication and they “get pissed” if you don’t immediately answer their posting, email, or call.

Many of the administrators believe that they can be more creative with social media, especially since it incorporates pictures and videos, helping to make information more interesting. The majority cross-promote and use links and one administrator admitted that she will place information on social media if she does not have time to issue a press release. All agreed that they have to combine the use of social media with traditional media. One administrator revealed that in 2013, he spent 15 percent of his time working on social media and estimates that in 2015, he will spend 30 percent of his time working on it. Another disclosed that she cannot “estimate” the time she spends on social media efforts because she is always on social media throughout the day so she doesn’t actually schedule time to do it since she is doing it throughout the day. She admitted that it can only be time-consuming when she is awaiting information from other departments.

Although it appears that social media has benefited administrators tasked with public communication and public relations duties, there are also challenges it presents besides the public records retention laws previously discussed. Most of the administrators interviewed admitted that they have to be conscious of what they are placing on social media. And one administrator said that she has to be very careful with her own personal social media accounts because she represents the city. She makes sure that what she posts, including photographs, does not portray her unprofessionally.
Social media has also placed more public scrutiny on government and government workers and one administrator believes that this is a turn-off for the younger generation in regard to running for public office. This younger generation sees all the negative information that is on social media about both the professional and personal lives of politicians and government workers and thus, may be less inclined to want to become a public servant. Another administrator stated that people are subjective and in favor of everything they do, so “it’s invalid reasoning to think you are going to use your own social media sites to promote yourself and look for customer feedback.” One administrator mentioned that although you can do so much today with social media and smart phones regarding government services, she sees it as disengagement with the residents from their government.

The review of the literature showed that the advent of social media promises new opportunities for increasing civic engagement, participation, and dialogue but also presents threats. Overall, the interview findings revealed that those public administrators utilizing social media, however, are not realizing its potential to create two-way conversations with government that foster dialogue, collaboration, and negotiation. The findings did show that social media has its challenges and that there is no widely accepted social media policy that addresses the unique concerns government faces. Thus those organizations in the private sector that are utilizing social media for their public relations functions do not have those types of constraints that government does when using these social networking platforms.
Public Relations Tools: Miscellaneous

Several of the city administrators also utilize miscellaneous media to communicate with their citizens. One city has a mobile app that residents can download on their smart phones and mobile devices that allow them look up information, as well as the ability to forward problems, issues, and or concerns. The city administrator commented that the app has been in existence for four years and there has been about 600 downloads. Two cities have a one-call phone system that notifies citizens of emergencies and public service announcements. Another city has an alert system, operated by a third-party provider, that allows citizens to sign up for different information alerts, such as events and trash pick-ups, via texting, email, or telephone call. Another city has a free voluntary call system for their senior residents that automatically dials their phone number on a specified day and time to make sure they are alright. If the resident doesn’t answer a second time, his/her emergency contact person is called and a police cruiser may be dispatched to go to the home. Residents can also call the city to check on their neighbors if they suspect they are not alright. The administrator commented that this program distinguishes the city as a “front porch” community. The same administrator also uses her local school system’s closed circuit television to air public service announcements since she has no local or cable government access television in her market. She is also collaborating with the school’s communication director on a social media feed so the city’s social media efforts will be fed into the school system’s social media, allowing greater reach.
One city uses an Internet-based program that records public meetings and places them online for citizens. The program also has links for legislation and the city purchased the program because according to the administrator, “the price was good.” She is also investigating an online interactive citizen dialogue program for government called mysidewalk.com that some larger cities are using. The cost of these types of programs is based on a city’s population, so she has to research it carefully.

Internal Lateral Relationships

One of the differences between the public and private sectors that was found in the literature is the complex internal structures and processes that characterize public organizations. This includes a greater multiplicity and diversity of objectives, greater vagueness and intangibility of objectives, greater tendency of conflicting goals, and less decision-making autonomy (Dunlop, 1979; Rainey et al., 1976; Viteritti, 1997; Allison, 2012). Many of the public administrators interviewed confirmed these findings and only two described their relationships with other departments as “good.” One administrator admitted that there is a constant fight in her city over who is to handle communication with many departments wanting to handle their own. However, she believes “you need one voice” to build the city’s brand and this becomes a problem if you have departments wanting to do their own communication because it can result in isolated silos. She added that it is tougher to convince her internal audiences of the value of communication than it is the external audiences. Another administrator mentioned that other agencies can be territorial but he needs to work together with the other departments to be effective. He believes that the 911 national tragedy exposed departments working in their own silos
and it helped “wake us up” in regards to creating working relationships with other agencies. One administrator commented that his city’s departments worked in silos until they were organized under one umbrella – Public Services – and this consolidation has contributed to more communication and collaboration since all departments are now “on the same page.”

As mentioned previously, several administrators admitted that they find out about information and events from other departments at the last minute, making it difficult to publicize and promote them effectively. One administrator said she had less than a week to organize a ribbon-cutting ceremony for a new public building that was opening in her county.

Sometimes collaboration can be viewed as imposition by another department. One administrator revealed that her department helped publicize a public meeting that one agency was holding and the agency got very upset. The administrator believes that the agency did not desire the meeting to be well attended because it wanted to implement its own agenda and not muddy it up with citizen input.

One administrator commented that the political dimension can be challenging and noted that his city manager insulates himself from the elected official he has to work with. Another administrator shared that her supervisor had been with the former mayor for close to 20 years, but two years ago, a new mayor was voted in and the transition has been rough for this supervisor.

The complexity of lateral working relationships was noted most by the county public administrators with one administrator comparing working with other government
departments in her county as organizing a race with six different sponsors, all who want to participate in the race but have different goals and agendas, resulting in very little collaboration.

Differences between City and County Government

These interviews revealed some stark differences between municipal and county government with many of these challenges resulting from working with the other county departments. One administrator, who has worked in both city and county government, revealed that Republicans and Democrats in municipal government work together and that there is a synergy between them as they want to provide citizens with the best services. However, she pointed out that this is not the case with county government where there are silos and traditional hierarchies that should be working “nice-nice” but may not. She divulged that there is more political friction between departments in the same political party in the county and referred to county government as having “small “p” and big “p” politics.” Small “p” politics refers to personal agendas and egos in which people define themselves by their role and won’t sway on issues. Regarding “big “p” politics,” she used her own county as an example: They have three commissioners who oversee, direct, and manage the financial activities of all the county offices. Fourteen departments report to the commissioner in which alliance is to the commissioner because the positions are appointed. The county also has its elected officials, which are their own entities, but they are dependent upon the commissioner for funding as well. “We can do what the heck we want to do but if the board of commissioners doesn’t like it, we are shit out of finances – follow the money,” she commented. However, she and another
administrator pointed out, the vying for budget dollars does not set a competitive playing field for the agencies but rather it makes departments defensible regarding how and why they spend so they can justify the need for funding. The other administrator revealed that each department is driven by purpose and often times, this is detrimental to the overall community. Both city and county government may be working on something similar, but they get so focused (“with blinders on”) that they do not stop to think they could be collaborating. He pointed out that sometimes being too focused on efficiency in one’s job can prevent seeing “other things” such as a trash collector not seeing street lights out because he is so focused on picking up the trash quickly since his job demands efficiency. Thus, collaboration tends to be difficult.

Another administrator revealed that internal communication is so different in county government because if the commissioner does not approve something, the judges can make a legal mandate to enforce behavior and then there is no communication and she has to make it “happy” regardless if her department did not make the decision. She disclosed that expectations are different for each department and she may think a project in one of the departments is not important but someone in that department may think it is very important so she has to make sure that she addresses the needs of each department. The county website was an example that she presented. If other departments don’t like the website, she pointed out, they can make their own and there is nothing she can do about it. She noted that this would not happen in the private sector as “you can fire the person not agreeing with you. In government, you cannot.”
One administrator commented that many of the other offices cannot think creatively nor think beyond their core target market. She acknowledges that there are different segments in county government but all segments need to work together as a unit so they can answer the question, “How best can I get the message out?” She was to present a paper at a national conference about another department that she was cross-promoting to show collaboration in county government but the other department was not pleased that she was going to the conference and not someone from their department. At the conference, another county employee approached the administrator to let her know that after listening to her presentation, she felt very proud to be a part of the county. The interviewee said, “I now have a “sneezer” in another department supporting collaboration.”

Another county administrator admitted that it is very difficult to organize the efforts of other departments so she is starting to get to know the other people in the offices so she can find a “sponge” to help her with her efforts and thus be able to focus more on being a consultant. Having a support person in another department is important for county administrators. To help achieve this, one administrator started gathering communication heads in other departments to meet at least monthly to discuss collaboration, and she is now working with about six individuals from other departments and has been for several years. Having a collaborator in another department also helps break down barriers. She commented that when you reach out to someone in a different department to take care of something for a citizen, you have a relationship with that person and that person understands that you are asking him/her and not “Jane Smith” so
that person feels more accountable. Another administrator agreed and revealed that this has broken down many barriers between the county and the community as it creates a synergy between community relations and communications collaboration. She added that it helps them create talking points as a group so when they go out in the community, the message is unified even if the offices are not.

Practicing community relations was stressed by these county administrators as well. Three revealed that they work really hard and go out into the community on Saturdays for events because their job is to be in the community. One of the administrators admitted, “The mindset in county government is that this job is an 8 to 5 job,” and she sees this mindset with some of her superiors. Another administrator believes that government agencies need both a community relations director and a communications director because there are so many barriers between government and outside the walls of government. Since community relations is new in her office, she relayed that she needs to create a structured department so it can be a mainstay and part of the fabric of the office.

Another administrator that works for the court system has his own unique challenges since the courts, although funded 98 percent by the city, have county-wide jurisdiction. This unusual arrangement causes confusion even internally with the county department telling him he is with the city and the city telling him he is with the county. He admitted that city governments are sometimes after the county’s citizens to the disadvantage of the overall county. In addition, he represents a collection of judges so although he is employed as only one judge’s communication executive, a majority vote is
needed for all projects. He disclosed that the judges are sometimes resistance to partnership although they all have the same goal in mind. This can sometimes be frustrating but he tries to represent them all as a collaborator promoter.

Several county administrators admitted that they will do things first and then ask for forgiveness later because sometimes it is easier than asking for permission and not receiving it. One revealed that she does projects before the county asks her because typically they want projects done yesterday so she has “to stay 20 steps ahead of them.” She added that since her county is so frugal, she also has to be a person that they cannot do without.

**Budgets**

Not only was working within tight budgets a recurring theme with the county administrators, it was also echoed by the majority of city public administrators interviewed. They revealed that their budgets are small or nonexistent so there is very little funding for their public communication and public relations efforts. The findings from the interviews support the research that found government communicators are not satisfied with the availability of resources, including funding (Liu & Levenshus, 2008; Liu, Horsley & Levenshus, 2010).

One administrator shared that since her city has experienced two failed levies, she needs to focus on core services. Another administrator admitted the biggest challenge for him in a fiscally constrained environment is working within budget limits. “We can’t expand beyond the budget – what we have is what we have.” He pointed out that since his limitations are the number of people he has and the amount of time they all have, he
has to prioritize and do the important things really well. He added, “The rest is chaff and if you focus on that, you lose sight of the important things.” Another administrator confessed that her budget is very small and most of it goes to public works because the mayor has made public safety the number one priority for the city. Because her city already has a very high percent income tax, they cannot ask residents for more, so the budget has become a priority for her. A county administrator compared the aggravation he had to go through with his administration to purchase 2,500 inexpensive sales promotions items with the administration’s decision to spend a considerable amount of money on installing equipment on the government vehicles to deter inefficiency with idling. As he relayed, “I got so much flak and had to go through a lot of rigmarole to justify buying the pens for $700, but no one bats an eye to pay $700 to equip each county vehicle with an idle meter on a fleet of 5,000 county vehicles!” As one administrator pointed out humorously, “Government doesn’t make money – it spends it.”

Another county administrator revealed that she has to walk a fine line because if she does “too flashy of a job” people will start thinking that she’s getting a big budget and other government departments may be thinking the same thing. Then the commissioner’s office will want to see what she is doing and they will start asking for details regarding budgeting.

One administrator acknowledges that her city does not have a marketing budget; however, she has a $3,000 printing budget that must go toward the printing of all brochures, fliers, and newsletters that she designs and prints. She prides herself on being
able to do a lot with very little and utilizes cross-promotion with other departments, such as including the newsletter in the utility bills for residents.

One administrator revealed that since municipalities are challenged with doing more for less, merging and consolidating departments seems to be a trend. His own city had consolidated departments and he noted that currently, the new consolidation was working well. Another administrator shared her concern for the push toward regionalization. The city she represents is getting pressure from neighboring cities for regionalization and although the cities currently share some services, such as dispatching, she and others in her city government do not want that for their residents. Interestingly, two county administrators mentioned that city budgets for public relations are bigger than county budgets and two city administrators commented that county budgets are bigger.

Summary

The information from the survey and face-to-face interviews employed in this study helped answer R1: How is public relations practiced by public administrators in the public sector? The activities of the public administrators interviewed did indeed reflect those of the Liu et al. (2010) survey that found government communicators develop and edit content for their websites, respond to media inquiries, write news releases, and network. However, the interviews revealed that the majority of public administrators spend a great deal of time disseminating information about their agencies utilizing traditional and social media as well as interacting with citizens in their communities. Representation of public interest and values, transparency, accountability, and citizen
engagement are important goals of communication with citizens. Currently, these administrators are using few public relations models to accomplish these objectives.

The information from the survey and face-to-face interviews employed in this study also helped answer R2: Do the differences between the public and private sectors affect the way public relations is practiced by public administrators? While realizing the above listed goals, the public administrators are also presented with many challenges in their daily jobs. These administrators must work effectively with and educate other departments and agencies, balance demands and manage both department and citizen expectations, prove the value of communication, stay abreast of current technology, navigate the nuances of new technology in regards to public information, engage citizens, adapt to the changing media landscape, deal with intense public scrutiny internally and externally, and practice transparency and accountability.

The majority of these challenges are the result of the differences between the public and private sectors which are supported in the review of literature, including inadequate budgets, influence of politics, frequency of communication with primary target publics, public pressure for information, interaction with outside organizations, frequency of media coverage, negative evaluation of media coverage, and impact of legal frameworks. As one administrator revealed to the author, “There’s always that comparison between government and the private sector and it’s ridiculous because there are so many nuances.”

The data also supports the creation of a public relations framework for government. The interview findings revealed that few public administrators have
progressed to a dialogue stage with citizens. Most are utilizing the public information model, disseminating information to their citizens unless circumstances dictate involvement. Thus, a new framework of public relations that goes beyond the dominant business history paradigm to recognize the realities of the public sector is needed and the next chapter explores an emergent alternative public relations framework for government communicators.
CHAPTER V
EMERGENT ALTERNATIVE PUBLIC RELATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR THE PUBLIC SECTOR: THE GOVERNMENT-CITIZEN RELATIONSHIP FRAMEWORK

As the review of literature found and the interviews of this study reflected, there are significant differences between the public and private sectors. Government faces a heterogeneous, unpredictable, diffused, and often volatile environment, characterized by public interest, public values, political/legal constraints, and complex organizational structures. Thus, public administrators practicing public communication and public relations in this environment face unique challenges that corporations and organizations in the private sector may not. In addition, the interview findings reveal that few public administrators have progressed to a dialogue stage with citizens. Most are utilizing the public information model, disseminating information to their citizens.

Government is many things to many people, thus citizens have to deal with government in their everyday lives. The relationship between government and citizens is also established by legal parameters, which encourage a democratic society based on public values and public interest. Since public relations is practiced with the intent to establish and maintain these relationships, an alternative model for government must
address these values in relationship dimensions. This chapter proposes an alternative framework that elaborates on the relational theory of public relations and the concept of public participation decision making in administration that can help administrators form relationships with their citizens.

Since it emphasizes relationship building and also helps build community, the author chose to use the relational dimensions from the relational theory of public relations, which is based on the relationship management perspective. The relationship dimensions of trust, openness, involvement, investment, and commitment in the government-citizen relationship are utilized in the model.

The alternative framework also uses Thomas’ public participation decision making approaches. Since public relations is a function of management that encompasses building and maintaining relationships with target publics/stakeholders, Thomas’ (1995) Effective Decision Model of Public Involvement can be used in conjunction with public relations efforts. For example, Thomas’ five decision-making approaches can easily be reflected in the four models of public relations:

1). _Autonomous managerial decision_. Press Agentry/Publicity Model and Public Information Model
2). _Modified autonomous managerial decision_. Two-Way Asymmetrical Model.
3). _Segmented public consultation_. Two-Way Asymmetrical Model.
5). _Public decision_. Two-Way Symmetrical Model.

In addition, several indices of Grunig and Hunt’s (1984) public relations models can be applied to further demonstrate the relationship between the models and the decision-making approaches (see Appendix B).
Based on the review of the literature, the survey findings, and information gleaned from the interviews, the author proposes an alternative framework of public relations for city and county public administrators based on the endogenic tradition. In this approach, public relations practitioners use intervention through social interaction to encourage dialogue, mutual understanding, and collaboration with their target publics to find knowledge (Gordan & Pellegrin, 2008). Hence, both the relational theory of public relations and the public participation process support an endogenic and ethical approach.

The alternative framework takes into account public interest, public values, and accountability by utilizing the concepts of trust, openness, involvement, investment, and commitment in the relational theory of public relations. The integrated alternative model meets relational communication goals and goes one step further by allowing praxis so city and county public administrators can easily incorporate the framework in their daily public relations activities. Figure 5.1 shows the alternative model, entitled the Government-Citizen Relationship Framework of Public Relations.

### The Government-Citizen Relationship Framework

**Step 1:** Determine the main relationship management goal of the public relations effort: investment, commitment, trust, openness, or involvement.

**Step 2:** Follow the process for the relationship management goal below.

**INVESTMENT:**

- **Focus:** public awareness
- **Action:** publicity and public information
- **Public Participation:** Autonomous Managerial Decision
- **Key Channels:** news media, organizational media
Key Channels:

New Media: print news releases; video & audio news releases; public service announcements; fact sheets; feature stories; news conferences; media kits; media tours

Social Media: apps for digital and mobile devices, any social media platforms, including digital apps, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, Craig’s List, etc.

Organizational Media: newsletters; letters; brochures; fliers; posters; websites; e-mail; photos; annual reports

Face-to-Face Communication: speaking engagements; meetings; exhibits; demonstrations; exhibits; special events

Figure 5.1 The government-citizen relationship framework of public relations.
COMMITMENT:
• Focus: public awareness and affiliation
• Action: public information and dialogue
• Public Participation: Modified Autonomous Managerial Decision
• Key Channels: news media, organizational media

TRUST:
• Focus: credibility
• Action: dialogue and feedback
• Public Participation: Segmented Public Consultation
• Key Channels: news media, organizational media, face-to-face communication

OPENNESS:
• Focus: transparency and accountability
• Action: dialogue and feedback
• Public Participation: Unitary Public Consultation
• Key Channels: face-to-face communication, news media, organizational media, social media

INVolVEMENT:
• Focus: citizen participation
• Action: dialogue and feedback
• Public Participation: Public Decision
• Key Channels: face-to-face communication, news media, organizational media, social media

Key Channels:
News Media: print news releases; video & audio news releases; public service announcements; fact sheets; feature stories; news conferences; media kits; media tours

Social Media: apps for digital and mobile devices, any social media platforms, including digital apps, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, Craig’s List, etc.

Organizational Media: newsletters; letters; brochures; fliers; posters; websites; e-mail; photos; videos; annual reports

Face-to-Face Communication: speaking engagements; meetings; exhibits; demonstrations; exhibits; special events
Discussion of the New Framework

The Government-Citizen Relationship Framework begins with the public administrator determining the overall public relations goal he/she is trying to achieve and then following the process for that goal. For example, the main goal of public relations for a city event showcasing a government service or project (such as a ribbon-cutting ceremony for a new building or a concert in the park) might be investment (government showing its investment in the community). The public administrator would want to focus on creating awareness, so his/her actions would center on publicizing the event by disseminating information to the citizens. Since public awareness is the focus, there is little public participation required, so the autonomous managerial decision option can be used, which has the public administrator making the decision alone without public involvement. He/she would utilize the following key communication channels to achieve that option: news media and organizational media. The public administrator can publicize the event on additional media, such as social media platforms (if employing that media) or face-to-face communication once the key communication channels have been utilized.

For those public relations goals of commitment, the focus is on creating awareness and affiliation. The public administrator’s action would center on disseminating information to the citizens and since affiliation may be part of the focus, some participation would be required, so the modified autonomous managerial decision option can be used. In this option, the public administrator seeks information from segments of the public but decides alone in a manner that may or may not reflect the group influence. Thus, the public administrator would utilize the following key communication channels
to achieve that option: news media and organizational media. The public administrator can publicize the event on additional media, such as social media platforms (if employing that media) or face-to-face communication once the key communication channels have been utilized.

If **trust** is determined to be the main goal of the public relations effort, the focus will be on establishing and building credibility so the public administrator’s actions would center on dialogue and feedback. Public participation would be required, so the segmented public consultation option can be used. In this option, the public administrator shares the problem/issue/opportunity separately with segments of the public, getting ideas and suggestions, then makes a decision that reflects group influence. He/she would utilize the following key communication channels to achieve that option: news media, organizational media, and face-to-face communication. Again, the public administrator can publicize the event on additional media, such as social media platforms (if employing that media) once the key communication channels have been utilized.

For those public relations goals of **openness**, the focus will be on creating transparency and accountability. The public administrator’s action would center on dialogue and feedback, so public participation would be required. The public administrator would use the unitary public consultation option in which he/she shares the problem/issue/opportunity as a single assembled group, obtaining ideas and suggestions and making a decision that reflects the group influence. The following key communication channels would be utilized to achieve that option: news media,
organizational media, face-to-face communication, and social media (if employing that media).

If involvement is determined to be the main goal of the public relations effort, such as discussing how to spend federal grant money to improve roads and transportation, the focus will be on generating citizen participation and engagement. The public administrator’s actions would center on citizen collaboration, so public participation is essential, necessitating the public decision option in which he/she shares the problem/issue/opportunity with the assembled public, and together, they reach agreement on the solution/plan. The public administrator would utilize the following key communication channels to achieve this option: news media, organizational media, face-to-face communication, and social media (if employing that media).

This alternative framework contributes to praxis because it helps public administrators practice public relations based on a relationship-centric approach. And since it is based on contingencies, it can be applied easily to all public relations efforts, including crisis public relations.

Government officials have to be cognizant of the principles of democracy – accountability, transparency, citizen participation, and the media as a public watchdog. The Government-Citizen Relationship Framework affords government administrators a structure that recognizes these principles and assists them in their communication efforts with citizens in an environment characterized by legal, ethical, and political constraints, and poor public perception. Furthermore, the framework can be applied to new models of governance and administration, such as Public Value and New Public Service, which
emphasize communication with constituents to increase public value, civic participation, engagement, and dialogue. This model is a start in building theory for government public relations.

Summary

This study supports the development of an alternative public relations framework for government. The relational perspective of public relations, which has shown the most promise for building public relations theory, along with decision making in public participation, were used to establish a new model. The author created the Government-Citizen Relationship Framework that recognizes the unique differences between the public and private sectors by allowing city and county public administrators to evaluate their public relations efforts through relational dimensions, thus ensuring public interest, public values, transparency, and accountability. It can also be used in crisis communication. The framework, which offers a connection between theory and research, serves both pragmatic and democratic public relations.

Bruning, Langenhop, and Green (2004) write “… practitioners must design relationship-building programs that (a) engage public members and the organization in a highly interactive process, (b) fulfill the needs and expectation of both the public and organization, and (c) provide benefit to both the public and organization” (p. 341). The Government-Citizen Relationship Framework was designed to accomplish these goals.
CHAPTER VI
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The intent of this study was to examine the differences between the public and private sectors, discover how public administrators practice public relations, and determine if the differences between the two sectors affect the way public relations is practiced by the administrators. If the differences did indeed affect the practice of public relations by those in government, the other objective of the study was to create an alternative framework of public relations that recognizes the nuances of the public sector and assists public administrators with communicating and establishing relationships with their citizens. This chapter will summarize the project and findings, review the central themes, present the limitations of the study, suggest future research, and conclude the project.

Summary and Review of Central Themes

The first chapter of this study introduced the subject and presented its significance as communication is a critical component of government. Developing effective communication programs for both internal and external audiences to establish relationships is considered the practice of public relations. Public relations was an important component of the public administration discipline in the early to mid-twentieth
century, but disappeared from training and research until the 1990s with emergence of new models of administration and governance. The new models stress public participation, citizen engagement, and public value so the practice of public relations can help public administrators achieve these purposes. This chapter also explored the idea that although the public and private sectors share similarities, it is the differences that have a bearing on the practice of public relations by government. Theoretical frameworks of public relations were presented, as well as the following two research questions:

R₁: How is public relations practiced by public administrators in the public sector?

R₂: Do the differences between the public and private sectors affect the way public relations is practiced by public administrators?

The second chapter of this study reviewed the literature pertaining to the following: the history of public relations, the definition of public relations, the role of public relations in government, and the differences between the public and private sectors. The history of public relations is important because it affects the way public relations is practiced today. Although government has been utilizing public relations techniques since its colonial founding, it was not until the turn of the twentieth century that public relations began to transform into an established practice. The early practice was greatly influenced by corporations in the private sector so the majority of current public relations frameworks and theories are viewed through a corporate lens, which is problematic for the public sector.
The definition of public relations was also explored in the second chapter, revealing that the term has no universal agreed-upon definition. Furthermore, due to Congress’ distrust of the term public relations, resulting in the 1913 Gillet Amendment and Section 305 of the 1973 Public Law 93-50, public relations activities in government may go by different names, such as public information and public affairs.

The second chapter also looked at the role of public relations in government, starting with its early use as propaganda and publicity. Although there were several prominent public administrator scholars that supported the practice of public relations from the 1930s through the 1960s, Congress’ distrust of its use and earlier legislation made most public administrators cautious of its use in everyday practice. It was not until the 1990s with the emergence of new models of administration and governance, such as Reinventing Government, New Public Management, Public Value Theory, and New Public Service, that books and research began to focus on the use of public relations by the public sector. However, the majority of strategies and practices supported in the current literature are still rooted in traditional public relations practices created in the corporate context. Also, few studies have been undertaken that have examined current public relations practices of public officials who are not elected.

The differences between the public and private sectors were also expounded in the second chapter, and the review of the literature found that there are many significant differences between the two sectors. Public administrators operate in an environment that is characterized by political, legal, social, and ethical constraints, as well as constant public scrutiny, specifically from the media. In addition, public administrators must be
cognizant at all times of value-laden democratic principles, such as transparency, accountability, and separation of powers. This operating environment is very unique from the environment of the private business sector. As Allison (1979) wrote, “I conclude that public and private management are at least as different as they are similar and that the differences are more important than the similarities” (p. 408).

The literature review also uncovered few studies that have proposed new models of public communication and public relations for the public sector that are not based in the corporate business context. Liu and Horsley (2007) did propose a government communication model that instructs administrators on what types of communication to utilize in the different types of microenvironments government operates in; however, the model does not provide direction beyond communication selection and it does not differentiate between elected officials and non-elected officials.

The third chapter of this study addressed the research design that was used to answer the first research question posed in this study: R1: How is public relations practiced by public administrators in the public sector? The author proposed a qualitative research design in the interpretative paradigm to survey and interview public officials in Ohio who are responsible for the public relations function and justified the use of this inquiry for this study. Qualitative research is best used when the subject matter needs to be clearly defined, when depth and dimension are needed to understand the phenomena being studied, and when the aim of the research is to answer “how” questions based on meanings, concepts, characteristics, and symbols. To answer the first research question, this study needed to examine how public administrators practice public relations in a
government context so an interpretative paradigm with a qualitative research plan was the best methodology fit. Also revealed was the study’s use of grounded theory to analyze the data and help generate an alternative framework of public relations for the public sector.

The research design chapter also set forth the three-step design of the study, with the first step being a purposeful sampling of city and county public administrators in the state of Ohio who handle the public communication and public relations functions, based on population of constituents. Once the sample was determined, the author administered an online survey to locate public administrators interested in being interviewed about their public relations job duties. There were ten questions that the survey explored, including area of government employed in (city or county), department, job title, experience/training, prior positions (public sector, private sector, or both), education, gender, and age.

Permission for the survey was granted from the University of Akron Institutional Research Department and the survey was created by the author utilizing the survey program, Qualtrics, which is owned by the University. The surveys were emailed to 110 Ohio public administrators, discovered in the purposeful sampling stage, and 34 were completed. Twelve public administrators from those respondents who had completed the survey by the first week of December indicated that they would like to meet with the author for a face-to-face interview.

The second step of the research design involved conducting semi-structured face-to-face interviews with the 12 administrators at or near their offices. The interview guide
consisted of the following topics: educational background, prior job experience, current position, the use of public relations, public relations models and theories, public relations tools, working with other governmental departments (internal lateral relationships), internal public relations, survey and evaluation, and other challenges or obstacles in practicing public relations in government. All audio tapes were transcribed by the author within two weeks of the initial interviews. A phone interview was also conducted after the initial in-person interviews were completed.

The fourth chapter of this study contained the results of the online survey and analysis of the face-to-face and phone interviews and provided answers to the first research question (R1: How is public relations practiced by public administrators in the public sector?) and second research question (R2: Do the differences between the public and private sectors affect the way public relations is practiced by public administrators?). All of the public administrators spend a great deal of time disseminating information about their agencies utilizing traditional media (and for most, social media as well) and interacting with citizens in their communities. Typical activities include developing and editing content for websites and newsletters, writing and disseminating news releases, working with the media, networking, and event planning.

Representation of public interest and values, transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement are important goals of communicating with citizens, however, it was discovered that currently, these administrators are using few public relations models to accomplish these objectives.
While realizing these above goals, the public administrators are also presented with many challenges in their daily jobs. These administrators must work effectively with and educate other departments and agencies, balance demands and manage both department and citizen expectations, prove the value of communication, stay abreast of current technology, navigate the nuances of new technology in regards to public information, engage citizens, adapt to the changing media landscape, deal with intense public scrutiny internally and externally, and practice transparency and accountability. The majority of these challenges are the result of the differences between the public and private sectors which were supported in the review of literature. Thus, the data justified the creation of a public relations framework for government that goes beyond the dominant business history paradigm to recognize the realities of the public sector.

The fifth chapter of the study introduced an emergent alternative public relations framework for government communicators, the Government-Citizen Relationship Framework. The author, using the relational theory of public relations that focuses on the organization-public relationship and a public participation model from the public administration discipline created the integrated contingency framework for city and county public administrators. She also utilized the findings from the online survey and face-to-face interviews with the public administrators in this study to develop this new framework. The goal of the new framework is to help public administrators practice public relations in the government/public sector.

The relational theory was chosen as it stresses practitioners go beyond using public relations as propaganda and persuasion to creating and maintaining relationships
that benefit both the organization and the stakeholder. The literature also shows that it is the best approach to build public relations theory. It also helps build community. Using the relationship dimensions of investment, commitment, trust, openness, and involvement and the public participation decision making options established by Thomas (1995), the city or county public administrator is to able practice public relations that recognizes the differences between the public and private sectors while ensuring public interest, public values, transparency, and accountability.

Limitations and Implications for Future Studies

Although recent research presents the types of relationship dimensions and scales to measure them, there is no research that demonstrates how to achieve them. The Government-Citizen Relationship Framework developed in this study attempts to provide public administrators with a process that can help them achieve the relationship dimensions in government-citizen relationships. However, this study has several limitations. Though randomness and probability are not significant concerns in qualitative research since the data is not being used to quantify information, the data collected from this study in the face-to-face interviews and phone interview cannot be generalized to a larger population since it was a purposeful sample. Although the return response rate of the online survey was sufficient (31 percent), the original Ohio sample of 110 was rather limiting. Also, the interviewing represented a small sample and those public administrators that desired having the author come to their office to discuss the topic in greater detail may have been predisposed to public relations.
The sample was very limited as it only comprised public administrators from the state of Ohio. Future research needs to address public administrators in other states to determine if public relations is indeed being practiced in the same fashion as it is in Ohio. Secondly, the study focused on county and city government, excluding state and federal governments. The alternative framework of public relations proposed by the author is more directed to city and county administrators rather than those at the state and federal levels. Since this study showed some slight differences between county and city government regarding how public relations is practiced, future studies need to examine similarities and differences between the practice of public relations on the city, county, state, and federal levels. Thus, further research needs to include public administrators from a variety of government offices and from a range of states. It would also be interesting to see if government administrators in countries other than the United States are practicing public relations in the same way as their counterparts in the states and determine what challenges and obstacles these officials face in their quest to practice public relations.

The Government-Citizen Relationship Framework also forces administrators to choose only one main relationship dimension for their public relations effort. All the relationship dimensions are important in a government-citizen relationship so a new model, that recognizes more than one main relationship dimension, would be advantageous.

The alternative framework of public relations proposed by the author needs to be tested empirically in the field by government public administrators to ensure its
effectiveness. Hypotheses need to be generated for the framework and tested empirically to see if indeed the framework is contributing positively to the government-citizen relationship. Bruning and Ledingham’s 16-item relationship scale that measures stakeholder’s personal, professional, and community relationship attitudes could be used to determine this. Only by testing and application can theory grow and evolve.

Though the relational theory of public relations was utilized in this study since it shows the most promise for developing two-way symmetrical relationships, other theoretical lenses of public relations in the endogenic tradition need to be investigated for developing alternative frameworks for practicing public relations in the public sector. The author employed the public participation discussion model from the public administration research for an integrated approach so further research regarding public relations in government also needs to be examined in conjunction with theories and concepts from the public administration discipline.

Conclusions

The majority of theories and models used by public relations practitioners to communicate internally and externally with stakeholders are based on contemporary public relations with roots in the organizational theory of communication. However, the private sector and public sector represent two different kinds of contexts as discovered in this study. Much of the organizational theory literature has focused on the private sector and adapting it to the public sector may be inadequate (Viteritti, 1997). Attempts to develop a specific public relations model for the public sector have also been rare.
Yet, public relations is a critical function of a democracy as government must create policies and programs, generate awareness, inform, encourage input and engagement, solicit support, and measure results. Furthermore, government has a public responsibility to protect and promote public interest. In addition, new models of governance and administration are emphasizing citizen participation and engagement. Thus, public administrators must practice public relations, and Lee (2009) proposes both pragmatic public relations, which is concerned with communicating the public agency’s purpose, and democratic public relations, which uses communication as an outreach to promote the principles of democracy.

With so much riding on the effective employment of public relations by government officials, we must provide public administrators with models and theories that take into account the unique context of the public sector. This study has attempted to do just that by developing an alternative contingency framework based on the relational perspective of public relations and public participation decision making. This study equips public administrators with a new model of public relations, the Government-Citizen Relationship Framework, that recognizes the nuances of government, utilizes an interdisciplinary approach, and embraces the endogenic tradition that seeks dialogue with citizens for collaboration and mutual understanding. Furthermore, this study is important because it offers praxis and contributes to theory building in both the communication and public administration disciplines.
Appleby (1949) writes that a government should grow out “of the life of its people rather than one that is imposed upon them” (p. 124). Public relations is essential for ensuring this.
REFERENCES


1). *Autonomous managerial decision.* Press Agentry/Publicity Model and Public Information Model:
   - This organization perceives the public relations department to be an advocate for the organization rather than advocate for publics or a mediator between the organization and its public
   - Most public relations programs in this organization involve one-way communication from the organization to publics (Press Agentry/Publicity Model and Public Information Model)
   - The organization believes the public relations department should be more of a disseminator of information than an advocate for the organization or a mediator between management and publics (Public Information Model)

2). *Modified autonomous managerial decision.* Two-Way Asymmetrical Model:
   - In a broad sense, I would say a primary goal of our public relations programs is to get publics to behave in the way the organization wants them to behave
   - Most public relations programs in this organization involve two-way communication between the organization and publics
   - The purpose of public relations in this organization is to persuade the public to agree with the organization’s point of view
   - Before starting a public relations program, we usually look at attitude surveys to make sure we describe the organization and its policies in ways the public is most likely to accept

3). *Segmented public consultation.* Two-Way Asymmetrical Model:
   - See above: *Modified autonomous managerial decision.* Two-Way Asymmetrical Model

4). *Unitary public consultation.* Two-Way Symmetrical Model:
   - We evaluate our public relations programs by doing surveys or informal research of how many people have been exposed to our programs and how much they have learned about the organization – not by surveys to find out if we have changed their attitudes
• The purpose of public relations in this organization is to develop mutual understanding between the management of the organization and the publics the organization affects.
• In this organization, public relations tries to change the attitudes and behavior of management as often as it tries to change the attitudes and behavior of publics.
• Most public relations programs in this organization involve two-way communication between the organization and publics.
• This organization believes the public relations department should provide mediation for the organization to help management and publics negotiate conflict.

5). Public decision. Two-Way Symmetrical Model:
• See above: Unitary public consultation. Two-Way Symmetrical Model.
APPENDIX B

HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL FROM THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD,
OFFICE OF RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION, THE UNIVERSITY OF AKRON
NOTICE OF APPROVAL

August 11, 2014

Andrea M. Ferra
School of Communication
The University of Akron
Akron, Ohio 44325-3003

From: Steven McWhorter, IRB Administrator


Thank you for submitting your IRB Application for Review of Research Involving Human Subjects for the referenced project. Your application was approved on August 11, 2014. Your protocol represents minimal risk to subjects and matches the following federal category for exemption:

☐ Exemption 1 - Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices.

☒ Exemption 2 - Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior.

☐ Exemption 3 - Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior not exempt under category 2, but subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office.

☐ Exemption 4 - Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens.

☐ Exemption 5 - Research and demonstration projects conducted by or subject to the approval of department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine public programs or benefits.

☐ Exemption 6 - Tests and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies.

Annual continuation applications are not required for exempt projects. If you make changes to the study’s design or procedures that increase the risk to subjects or involve activities that do not fall within the approved exemption category, please contact me to discuss whether or not a new application must be submitted. Any such changes or modifications must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

Please retain this letter for your files. This office will hold your exemption application for a period of three years from the approval date. If you wish to continue this protocol beyond this period, you will need to submit another Exemption Request. If the research is being conducted for a master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation, the student must file a copy of this letter with the thesis or dissertation.

Cc: R. Cervell - Advisor
Cc: Valerie Gallivan - IRB Chair

☒ Approved consent form/s enclosed
Please Note: This is a copy of the letter that will be emailed to the public officials practicing public relations in city, county, and state government in Ohio.

Dear Public Administrator:

I have sent you this email because I believe you are responsible for public communication with the different target publics/audiences in your constituency. As I am conducting research regarding how public administrators create and maintain relationships with their different audiences through public communication, I would be interested in learning more about the job functions that you perform in this regard. This area has not been fully explored, so your feedback is very important as it will help in the development of a framework to assist public administrators with their public communication efforts. This research is part of my dissertation for my Ph.D. in Public Affairs and Urban Studies at the University of Akron (Akron, Ohio).

There are 25 questions (all yes or no answers) on this short web-based questionnaire that examines job functions and activities related to public communication and building and maintaining relationships with your audiences. If you are agreeable to a face-to-face interview for further exploration of the topic after the survey results have been analyzed, please indicate that at the end of the survey. My Intent is to interview 6 to 12 public administrators by random sample who are responsible for public communication and relationship building. If you are chosen, I will travel to your office to conduct the interview on a date and at a time convenient for you (I anticipate the duration to be no more than one hour).

Your participation in the questionnaire is completely voluntary, as well as in the face-to-face interview, and we can assure you that all the information you provide us will be handled confidentially. In this questionnaire, there is no right or wrong answer and you can refuse to answer any of the questions if you wish. You may also choose to withdraw from this study at any time before completing the questionnaire. The University of Akron's Institutional Review Board has reviewed and approved this study. To access the web-based questionnaire, please click on the following link: http://survey13.uakron.edu/public_communication

Once again, thank you for your participation. We are very excited about this research and look forward to your contribution. If you would like further information about this research project or have any questions, please contact me.

Cordially,

Andrea M. Ferraro
Doctoral Candidate, Public Affairs and Urban Studies
Visiting Lecturer & Internship Coordinator
The University of Akron
School of Communication
Kolbe Hall, Office 105D
Akron, OH 44325-1003
Office Phone: 330.972-6780
amf35@uakron.edu

APPROVED

IRB

Date, 

The University of Akron