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Expanding the Public Relations Palette: Facilitation as a Means toward CSR Policy Development

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As organizational leadership increasingly appreciates the benefits that accrue from Corporate Social Responsibility, the need arises for a systematic framework for crafting CSR policies. This paper proposes that public relations take the lead in that effort through several deliberate and integrated measures. First, scholars and practitioners should explore the CSR concept thoroughly and analytically, identifying points of tangency between CSR and current public relations practice as well as potential areas of additional compatibility. Second, practitioners should acquire structured facilitation skills to guide panels of organizational managers, employees, and citizens in a purposeful exploration of policy possibilities in regard to CSR. Further, this paper suggests that facilitation skills may offer management-centered applications to public relations practice beyond CSR.

For several decades, the public relations profession has defined itself as comprising a spectrum of skill sets ranging from the technical to the managerial. Technical skills include activities such as planning events and writing, editing, designing and producing public relations products such as news releases, PSAs, brochures, etc., as well as, in more recent years, Web sites and other new media products. Managerial skills have incorporated, in macro context, roles as expert prescriber, communication facilitator and problem-solving facilitator. In these managerial roles, the practitioner exercises authority in addressing communication problems, conducting research, mediating between an organization and its constituencies, and defining and dealing with issues (Broom & Smith, 1979; Broom, 1982). This approach has served the discipline well, elevating public relations from its roots in propaganda and publicity to recognition as a valued component of organizational management, increasingly part of, or at least on the periphery of the "dominant coalition." Moreover, the discipline has made strides in recent years in the area of impact measurement such as reach; opinion, attitude and behavior change; and strength of relationships (see, e.g., Hon, 1998; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Lindenmann, 2006). These advances are mertiworthy, and practitioners who embrace these innovations can be grateful to the scholars and professional leaders who continue to move these components forward. This progress should continue, but this paper argues that these advances offer another opportunity – expanding the public relations practitioner's palette in directions that build upon its management role.

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Specifically, the case is made for a public relations role in major policy development through a purposeful, deliberative and dialogic process initially aimed at identifying and describing policy possibilities in a defined policy area. Bivens (1993), in fact, advocated such a role for public relations more than a decade ago, stating, "In its dual role as mediator and advocate, public relations has the opportunity both to engage in and to encourage public debate" (p.121).

The defined policy area selected as an exemplar to illustrate the efficacy of the policy possibility development process is the rapidly emerging field of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Consequently, the paper begins with a review of CSR: its origins; its definition, its value, its future, and public relations' potential leadership role in its application and administration. Second, the paper outlines a carefully structured, collaborative process designed specifically for the development of policy possibilities across a broad spectrum of macro-level issues. The recommendation is then made and defended to adapt the process to the area of CSR, with public relations leaders initiating and guiding the process. Finally, suggestions are advanced for extending the process to other areas of policy development within the public relations milieu.

Corporate Social Responsibility

Kotler and Lee (2005) examine a number of definitions for CSR including one with references to sustainable economic development, working with employees and their families, and working with communities to improve quality of life. Another definition they cite refers to exceeding ethical and legal standards and public expectations in business operations. They settle, however, on the following definition:

> *Corporate social responsibility is a commitment to improve community well-being through discretionary business practices and contributions of corporate resources* (p.3).

Critical to this definition is the term *discretionary*; CSR policy and activities are neither mandated by regulatory agencies nor are they compelled as part of normal business operations. The authors describe Corporate Social Initiatives as those activities an organization engages in to support social causes and meet obligations (self-imposed) to CSR. If these initiatives and activities are discretionary, what compels organizations to pursue them? Joseph (2001) says the reason often is to "avoid reputation backlashes instigated by active consumers or NGOs" (p.121), though other organizations may be seeking to reach the growing number of consumers and investors making purchasing or investing decisions based on the socially responsible reputation of a company or its products. These are unflattering motivations, and indeed, environmentalists sometimes sniff disparagingly at the concept of CSR, referring to it as "greenwashing," meaning businesses simply apply a patina of environmental responsibility in order to stave off criticism and capitalize on a popular notion (Berkhout, 2005). In fact, in a cynical treatise on the subject, Munshi and Kurian (2005) claim the emerging CSR movement is merely a continuation of a century-old trend of corporations endeavoring to make over their images to satisfy perceived changes in societal sensitivities, an effort they say “rests on a platform of insincerity” (p.514). And the late and highly regarded economist Milton Friedman likely contributed to that impression, stripping the concept of any pretense when he said, “There is one and only one social responsibility of business – to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game” (1962, p.133).

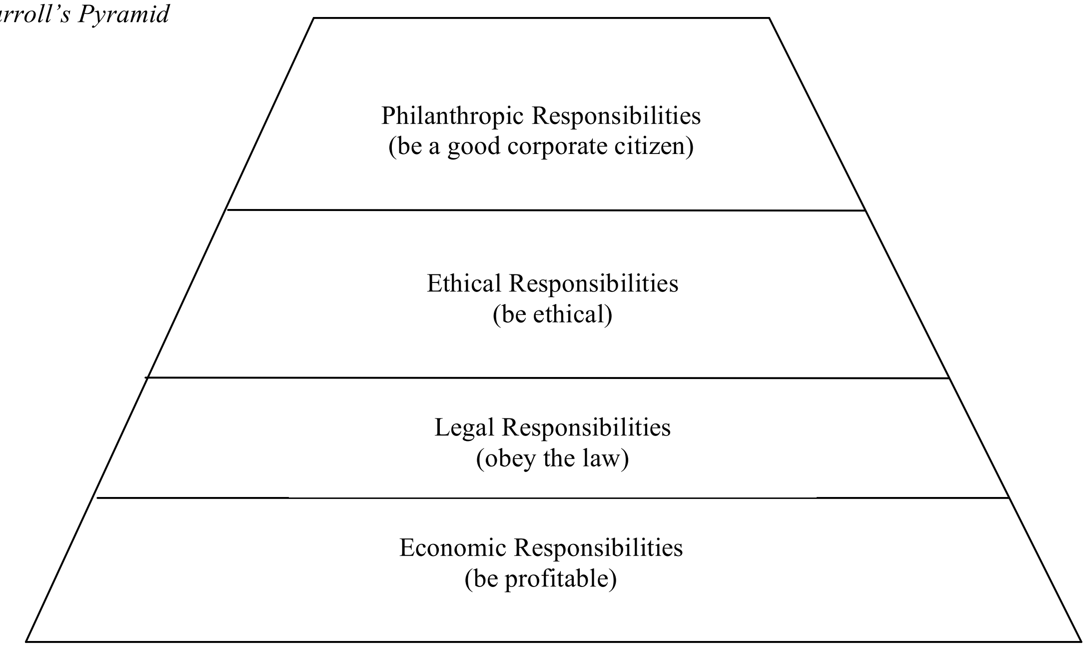
However, sensitivities have changed since Friedman’s dismissive pronouncement, and public relations leaders are ideally poised to seize upon growing recognition of CSR’s potential to create new organizational relationships, strengthen existing ones, improve the western business model, and in so doing, accomplish no less than improving the human condition. Smith (2003) admits that there are certainly profit motivations for engaging actively in CSR-driven activities, and these he calls the “business case,” but he also stresses the growing desire on the part of business leaders to simply do good – what he calls the “normative case” (p.53). Smith acknowledges, therefore, that CSR is likely to result from a mixture of these two motivations, and that the challenge for any organization is to understand and determine the nature and scope of its CSR activities while balancing the business and normative cases. That challenge, as the reader will see, is the motivation for this proposal.

Interestingly, CSR seems to be acquiring adherents outside the United States more rapidly than within the world’s leading economic power. As Smith (2003) notes, The World Economic Forum has made CSR a leading topic at its meetings, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (comprising 120 international companies) reports that CSR is “firmly on the global policy agenda,” and calls for increased attention to CSR have come from organizations including the International Business Leaders Forum, Business for Social Responsibility, and Business in the Community. The United Kingdom has appointed a Minister for CSR. The European Community has adopted a formal strategy for CSR. Nevertheless, the combination of terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, a cascade of corporate scandals in recent years, and the current global economic crisis may be conspiring to compel publics in the United States and elsewhere to expect, even demand greater responsibility from businesses in a democratic society considering that, as Arthur Page said, “All business in a democratic country begins with public permission and exists by public approval” (Griswold, 1967, p.13).

Perhaps the earliest academic foray into CSR was provided by Bowen (1953) when he asked whether the paths of business interests and society’s interests might ever merge, and Windsor (2001) suggested those paths may occasionally merge, but might equally diverge. Windsor further suggests that CSR may be diminishing in prominence in favor of wealth generation, though he acknowledges that this may be a minority view. This view stems from the assumption that managers may view CSR as reducing maximum wealth, though Windsor agrees that some more altruistic managers may assess CSR activities to be a path to maximum profitability. The question of how those managerial decisions regarding CSR activities are made prompted Carroll (1991) to depict CSR as a pyramidal structure, with the pyramid’s foundational base depicting economic responsibilities, the next layer legal responsibilities, followed by ethical responsibilities, topped at last by philanthropic responsibilities (see Figure 1). Carroll says the four components are in constant dynamic tension, with the greatest tension existing between economic responsibilities and the other three components. Different stakeholders would likely view different components as most important to their own interests. Investors, of course, would be concerned primarily with economic responsibility, while environmentalists or community activists would gauge legal, ethical and/or philanthropic responsibilities as salient. Of course, failure to meet economic responsibilities is foundational because failure in that regard would negate the possibility of any activity in the other sectors. The manager's challenge then becomes determining which stakeholders to accord consideration in any decision-making process.

Figure 1.

Carroll's Pyramid



Kotler and Lee (2005) offer a matrix of six options for CSR activities that fit primarily in the top tier of Carroll's pyramid, but which also extend into ethical and legal sectors, and conceivably underpin profitability in an increasingly sensitive and expectant environment:

1. Cause Promotions – funds or in-kind contributions in support of a social cause managed directly or in partnership by the organization.

2. Cause-related Marketing – Linking a product and committing a percentage of revenue to a social cause.

3. Corporate Social Marketing – Supporting and endorsing a behavior change aimed at improving public health, safety, the environment, etc.

4. Corporate Philanthropy – Direct cash or in-kind contributions to an established charity or cause.

5. Community Volunteering – Encouragement and support for employees and others directly associated with the organization to volunteer for a community charity, effort or cause.

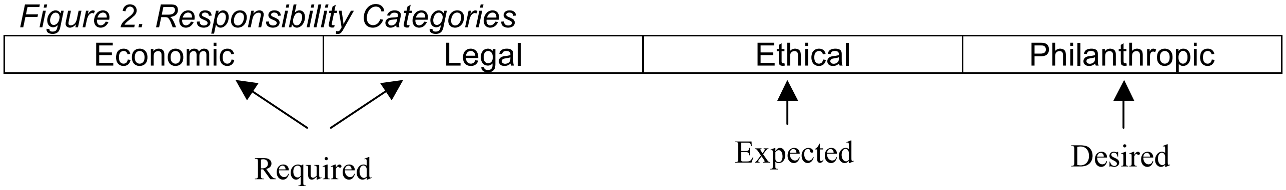
6. Socially Responsible Business Practices – Adopting policies and procedures that reflect social concerns and sensitivities, such as environmentally responsible manufacturing (pp.23-24).

The authors offer principles to aid in identifying appropriate causes and charities to support, such as access to target markets, a link between the cause and the organization, availability of otherwise underutilized organizational assets, and so forth. However, they provide no systematic approach to making those and related determinations. Nevertheless, the list is a useful approach to more clearly identifying the nature of CSR; it also helps make the case for extensive involvement of public relations managers in the deliberative process. Public relations managers, presumably actively engaged in issue monitoring and management, attuned to community sensitivities and concerns, deeply involved in employee communication, and with access to media and interpersonal communication conduits, are ideally positioned to pursue carefully planned approaches to CSR activities in all six categories.

A Public Relations Role

CSR is increasingly correlated with organizational reputation, including at the global level, and reputation is clearly an area under public relations purview. Palacios (2004) notes that companies that have not conducted business responsibly have watched their brands deteriorate and their markets shrink. Public scrutiny of such activities, he says, is increasing. He concludes that CSR needs to exceed merely observing legal and ethical requirements and extend to social accountability with stakeholders including employees, communities and government entities. One might think of socially responsible behavior as describing a continuum from what is required to what is expected to what is desired, as depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Responsibility Categories



Reputation reflects an organization's performance along this entire spectrum, and those activities described as "expected" appear to be expanding beyond the ethical into the philanthropic, a situation that augurs well for increased public relations engagement in organizational policy development. Macleod (2001) calls CSR a "necessary strategy to safeguard corporate reputation" (p.8) and analyzes data from a comprehensive content analysis and series of in-depth interviews in six nations to identify factors impacting reputation. Those factors include, she says, consumerism, environmentalism, anti-capitalism and anti-globalization. She also cites increasingly business-savvy publics, growth of investors, skilled labor shortages (creating recruiting and retention challenges), and spread of media access, especially the Internet. These factors conspire to complicate strategic business planning for organizational leadership, focused as they have been on economic and legal responsibilities because consumers are judging organizations on more than just the quality and value of their products and services.

Although growing interest in CSR would seem to be a positive trend, it presents an ethical dilemma for public relations managers and for the organizations for which they advocate. Fitzpatrick and Gauthier (2001) note that on one hand businesses intuitively benefit by doing good deeds and behaving ethically; therefore, it is permissible for public relations to conduct activities that present and publicize the organization in a positive light based upon its responsible behavior. They say, though, that doing so makes them susceptible to criticism that the responsible behavior is driven by self-serving motives. If driven by altruistic motives, the critics might claim, the organization would engage in such activities quietly. Macleod (2001) echoes that concern. If organizations communicate about their CSR efforts, she says, they could appear boastful. On balance, though, she says her analysis of the research data indicates such communication is received well by most publics provided the public relations effort complies with established best practices. Although this concern revolves around public relations engagement in the CSR process after the fact, astute organizational leaders will recognize the argument it makes for engaging public relations management in the CSR policy development and planning stages; doing so ensures that a balanced strategic communication component is developed alongside CSR activities.

That link between public relations and CSR was explored fully and reported by Clark (2000). She traced the origins of both public relations and CSR, finding considerable parallel between the two, though she lamented the conspicuous absence of references to communication in CSR literature (most CSR literature, it seems, comes from a business paradigm). Clark suggests CSR and public relations began to establish linkages with the Texas Gulf Sulfur case of 1973, and those linkages were reinforced during that decade when public relations leaders such as Harold Burson began to argue that the discipline's role needed to expand its responsibilities into the area of qualitatively analyzing and evaluating social trends, then assisting organizations with developing appropriate responses. To reinforce that contention, Hopkinson (1971) cites national leaders including President John Kennedy's adviser, Ted Sorenson, Chase Manhattan Bank Chairman George Champion, and others as increasingly advocating business's responsibility to address social and economic issues. Clark (2000) then makes a forceful argument that the process for addressing CSR is remarkably parallel to the well-established 4-step public relations process. The message is that the public expects businesses to contribute to social wellbeing and that public relations leaders are uniquely qualified and positioned to guide that effort.

By the 1980s, most but not all public relations professionals were supportive of the CSR concept. Ryan's (1986) survey revealed that roughly three-fourths of responding practitioners by that time believed that pursuing social goals bolstered a corporation's potential for profitability in the long term, and an even larger percentage believed practitioners should play a principal role in identifying and developing social goals. By the late 1980s, Heath and Ryan (1989) observed that CSR was becoming increasingly entrenched in business culture and suggested that organizations had three options in approaching CSR: adopt an appearance of responsible behavior (donate money, encourage employees to participate in community clean-ups, etc.); establish a lofty code of ethics; or establish a culture of monitoring the environment, identifying community interests and needs, and responding ethically and responsibly. Not surprisingly, Heath and Ryan recommend the third option and argue that public relations practitioners are uniquely qualified to administer such a process, given practitioners' skill sets in environmental scanning, relationship maintenance and ethics monitoring.

Utting (2005) agrees that during the last 20 years, CSR has continued to become increasingly embedded in corporate culture, driven by expansion of NGOs, unethical practices of some transnational corporations (TNCs), perceptions of inequitable financial flow patterns that favored TNCs at the expense of labor and environmental conditions, and a series of disasters and perceived social injustices such as Bhopal, India; Exxon Valdez; Shell's Nigerian activities; and Nike's sweatshop issues. Utting argues that CSR can now address many of these manifestations of lapses in corporate social conscience (real or perceived), but CSR has not matured adequately to address underlying political and economic, systemic issues that lead to those manifestations. Utting suggests, though, that the way to achieving that next level of CSR is to develop concrete measures of accountability applied universally. Other research and thought concerning CSR suggests that public relations leaders ought to be at the vanguard of elevating CSR to an even higher plane than it now occupies.

Seeking a Structure for CSR Policy

That CSR is increasingly accepted as an important component of business practice is evident, but what is not evident is how that should look in practice or how approaches to CSR should be developed. Eclectic approaches by a variety of companies and industries reflect the various interests of the business sectors, the communities and publics they serve, and the contemporary environments in which each operates. For example, Weldon (2003) describes the CSR efforts of British public transport company Go-Ahead. Those activities began with environment-related efforts involving reducing damaging emissions from its fleet of buses, but it extended to in-kind contributions related to public transport and even to employee training programs. Still, the author lamented the lack of guiding policies or strategies. Eventually, Go-Ahead addressed that deficiency by establishing a "Stakeholder Board" that met quarterly and included structured CSR performance reporting in its meeting agendas. And British American Tobacco (Beadle & Ridderbeekx, 2001), acknowledging that its products carry with them a degree of risk, focuses on public health and safety issues in its CSR programs. Nevertheless, despite some organizations such as these evolving what appear to be coherent and purposeful approaches to CSR, it's also possible that CSR-generated activities reflect nothing more than the personal interests of a CEO. Often, CSR activities make intuitive sense on the surface, but in most cases it would be difficult to identify connective tissue between and among an organization's activities and to assemble a comprehensive organizing rubric that explains how each activity reinforces and extends the others in a unifying, purposeful way.

Gathering input from various internal and external constituencies might seem an appropriate approach. Thompson and Driver (2005), however, caution against simply assembling traditional stakeholder groups if that process is merely "cosmetic." Often such exchanges are reduced to parochialism. To achieve a high level of purpose and effectiveness would require a procedural protocol to guide those exchanges and ensure that each CSR activity met a set of meaningful and logical standards. Those policies would necessarily be linked to the organization but would transcend reactive, disconnected activities, well-intentioned as they might be. Achieving policies sufficiently flexible to accommodate evolving operating environments and emerging stakeholder groups would require a deliberative process that thoroughly examines a range of possibilities, and that process would need to be conducted by a group that is both manageable and inclusive of potentially underrepresented voices. Leading such a process would require a peculiar set of skills as well as an understanding of the purpose of the exercise. The remainder of this paper outlines just such a deliberative process and advocates that skill in guiding the process be acquired by public relations leaders.

The Role of Facilitation

Researchers have addressed a public relations role in employing structured dialogue with relevant constituencies (Woodward, 2000), and in managing issue dynamics (Hallahan, 2001; Vasquez, 1996). McComas (2003) examined the value of public meetings as a public relations tactic, and a number of researchers have examined a public relations role in conflict resolution (Huang, 2001; Plowman, 1998). Importantly, Plowman (1998) makes the case that acquiring skills in conflict resolution can empower public relations managers and reinforce their right to participate in the dominant coalition's decision-making processes. Nevertheless, what is advocated here is different from issues management, conflict resolution, and ongoing dialogic efforts with stakeholders. Rather, the proposal here is that public relations managers would benefit from the ability to guide small groups through a structured process leading to collaborative development of policy possibilities. For illustration, CSR is the demonstration platform, selected because it represents an emerging area of potential leadership responsibility for public relations practice.

A possible model of considerable promise comes from the Interactivity Foundation, a nonprofit organization whose mission is "to stimulate and enhance democratic discussion or deliberation" (Gunderson, 2005, p.3).[1] Selected members of the Foundation are titled "Fellows," and they have designed, after several years' work, a

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[1] This and other Interactivity Foundation documents are available through the Foundation's Web site, www.interactivityfoundation.org.

structured but flexible deliberative model designed to facilitate purposeful discussion by small groups. Gunderson says the purpose of the deliberative process is to pursue clearly delineated projects, detailing a number of policy possibilities for addressing the project issue and enumerating the potential consequences of each policy possibility. This is accomplished, under Interactivity Foundation guidelines, by two separate small groups – one comprising issue experts and the other “ordinary” citizens. Initially, the groups work separately, but over time are brought together to “fuse” their respective work. Ideally, individual groups initially meet monthly for 18 months, then jointly for 4-6 months; the total deliberative process, therefore, takes two years. The resulting “Staff Work Report” contains crisply articulated, contrasting policy possibilities that have been thoroughly scrutinized and that represent the groups’ collective wisdom. The Foundation is quick to point out, though, that the Staff Work Reports reflect neither “group think” nor consensus; any member of the group who presents a logical, compelling case for a policy possibility may have that possibility included in the report. To date, Foundation Fellows have conducted deliberative processes on several broad social issues: human genetic technology; depression as a health policy issue; rewarding work; science; and privacy rights. Underway are projects addressing public discourse and property. Certainly, public relations application of the IF process would be more tightly focused, which would have several implications. First, the deliberative process in a public relations context is unlikely to take two years. Second, the employment of two separate groups may not be necessary in most cases. Third, the impact of results would extend potentially to more narrowly defined publics. On the other hand, if the IF deliberative process were to be employed as a qualitative research method to explore broader public relations issues, application of the full model would be appropriate.

The Facilitation Model

Before describing in some detail the IF deliberative model, it’s important to present key assumptions that underlie the process.

- ✓ The process is characterized as an unhurried, wide-ranging, conceptual approach to a policy issue.
- ✓ It transcends any single viewpoint or discipline purview and considers ethical, social and cultural dimensions of the issue.
- ✓ Typically, 6-8 panelists participate in each of two separate groups: one a panel of subject matter experts, the other a panel of lay citizens. All are selected for their willingness to engage actively within IF process guidelines.
- ✓ Panels are guided by a non-participating facilitator.
- ✓ Panel discussions are conducted under condition of what the Foundation calls “sanctuary,” meaning there is no attribution, and deliberations are not to be discussed with those not on the panel.

✓ The focus is not on fixing problems but on crafting possible approaches along with potential consequences of each approach.

Figure 3 is a graphic illustration of the IF process designed to guide panels through a 2-year discussion process culminating in a Staff Work Report.

Figure 3. The Facilitation Process

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Stage 1 – Preparing for Sanctuary Discussions
Planning and Assembling a Project</td></tr>
<tr><td>1</td><td>Identify an area of concern that appears appropriate for the IF Discussion Process</td></tr>
<tr><td>2</td><td>Select panels likely to be effective in the collegial and conceptual discussions of the policy area.</td></tr>
<tr><td>3</td><td>Develop a starting point to foster unfettered conceptual discussions as free as possible from bias.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Stage 2 – Exploring and Developing the Area of Concern
Generating the broad conceptual questions to which policy possibilities might respond</td></tr>
<tr><td>4</td><td>Describe (without defining) the various aspects of the area of concern from multiple perspectives</td></tr>
<tr><td>5</td><td>Develop initial general question to which public policy possibilities might respond</td></tr>
<tr><td>6</td><td>Expand the description of the area of concern by continued development of possible questions</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Stage 3 – Exploring and Developing contrasting Governance Possibilities
Generating contrasting conceptual policy possibilities to address the above questions</td></tr>
<tr><td>7</td><td>Brainstorm conceptual policy possibilities for addressing the area of concern</td></tr>
<tr><td>8</td><td>Continue development of contrasting conceptual policy possibilities that represent distinct responses to the area of concern, with the goal of producing at least four</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Stage 4 – Exploring Potential Consequences, Review and Revision
Imagining the practical implications of policy possibilities and making revisions</td></tr>
<tr><td>9</td><td>Explore the potential consequences and real-world implications of the policy possibilities from a variety of perspectives in a democratic society with a mixed market economy</td></tr>
<tr><td>10</td><td>Exclude or change policy possibilities that the panel finds deficient (e.g. conceptually incoherent, falling short of its own goals), while aiming at producing contrasting conceptual possibilities regardless of feasibility or personal preferences</td></tr>
<tr><td>11</td><td>Select policy possibilities that the panel would like to take forward into joint panel discussions and eventual public discussion; perhaps revising, consolidating, or generating new possibilities</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Stage 5 – Clarifying Policy Possibilities and Renewed Exploration of Consequences
Capturing the gist of each policy possibility and illustrative consequences</td></tr>
<tr><td>12</td><td>Develop concise descriptions of at least four conceptual policy possibilities based on the above review activities, including the general exploration of consequences, and the goal of focusing attention on the basic ideas of each possibility</td></tr>
<tr><td>13</td><td>Renew exploration of potential consequences for the conceptually clarified policy possibilities</td></tr>
</table>

Stage 6 – Joint Panel Discussions	
14	Prepare and conduct several joint panel sessions for interactive development of at least four policy possibilities and their possible consequences for eventual public discussion
15	Develop the Staff Work Report that represents the thinking of the joint panel (both the citizen-generalist and expert-specialist panels) to stimulate further public discussion
16	Prepare recommendations, including panelists', for public discussions of the Staff Work Report
Stage 7 – Moving from Sanctuary into Public Discussions	
	No predetermined activities, on-going development

Obviously, the process is elaborate and somewhat complex and should not be employed by facilitators untrained in it. To this end, the Interactivity Foundation initiated in summer 2006 its first workshop aimed at equipping a small group of university instructors with the capability not only to design and facilitate IF panels, but also to train others in the process.[2] With additional workshops, and with those trained instructors teaching, in turn, others to apply the process, a body of facilitators will develop. Among those should be instructors in public relations, a discipline that will benefit from the introduction of this new and very practical tool. To illustrate its efficacy, let us examine its potential application to the challenge of developing possible approaches to an organization's social responsibility policies.

In Stage 1, the facilitator first crafts what Byrd calls a "charter statement" (2005), "a document that describes what the participants are being asked to accomplish" (p.26). Provided to panel members at the first meeting, the document provides basic background of the issue, a description of the deliverable – the Staff Work Report, an introductory set of questions to guide initial discussion, a broad description of the project's scope, and a projected timetable. In the CSR scenario, the charter statement might summarize the CSR concept, broadly outline the organization's past and current approaches to CSR, and suggest relevant constituencies that affect and are affected by organizational CSR activities. Also in the first stage, the facilitator (the public relations manager, trained in the IF process, in this CSR demonstration scenario) identifies and recruits members of the panel. For this CSR scenario, a single panel rather than two panels is appropriate. The panel can be considered a hybrid of the advisory panel concept, a public relations strategy recommended by many public relations scholars and practitioners (see, e.g., Austin & Pinkleton, 2001, pp.94-95; Wilcox, Cameron, Ault & Agee, 2003, pp. 205-206). Often, public relations managers are puzzled as to how best to employ an advisory board; recruiting a board willing to engage in the deliberative process of policy exploration using the IF structure would assign purpose to the board at the same time the board's activities would benefit the organization by helping to develop beneficial policies (governing CSR, for example). Selecting board members from employees, volunteers, community leaders, media and other constituencies would have

[2] The author of this paper was privileged to have participated in this workshop. Subsequently, he taught a spring 2007 graduate course called "Facilitating Corporate Social Responsibility" in which the precepts of this paper were applied.

the added benefit of building productive relationships and tangibly conveying the organization's value of two-way communication.

Stage 2 sees the initial panel sessions during which the facilitator helps panelists explore in an unfettered manner the open-ended questions posed in the charter statement. Through this stage, panelists expand on initial discussions by identifying potential perspectives from which to view the issue. In all panel sessions, the facilitator's initial role is to summarize previous discussion and to help panelists discern any emerging patterns that might eventually help form the basis of the Staff Work Report, though this aspect must not be hurried. The IF process calls for a designated note taker for each session, and the facilitator uses these notes along with his or her own to prepare succinct bulleted and narrative session summaries; these summaries are distributed to panelists in advance of subsequent meetings. Perspectives in a discussion concerning CSR policies might identify as potential perspectives those of shareholders, management, rank-and-file employees, community leaders, nonprofit organizations (related to health, the arts, education, the environment, etc.), government agencies, and so forth. It becomes increasingly evident in this stage – as discussion sessions progress -- that facilitators must be trained in the delicate art of encouraging participation while preventing individual dominance or advocacy. The IF process stresses the importance of panel members moving beyond simply representing their individual points of view, a quality of the process wholly compatible with the public relations discipline. The IF process also stresses that thoughts and ideas are developed without rivalry or dispute; in fact, a technique IF Fellows recommend is to have panel members restate other members' ideas. The process also calls for ideas to unfold in a self-directed, non-linear manner, with anecdotal instances gradually giving way to general themes and concepts. Also during this stage, panelists seek (under facilitator guidance) to develop broad questions to which eventual policy possibilities might respond.

By stage three, the facilitator should begin helping panelists sketch embryonic policy possibilities and explore those possibilities in terms of their (the policies) core values and goals as well as the roles potentially played by various actors involved in each possible approach. This stage marks a transition from broad exploration of the issue to emerging alternative approaches to the issue. For CSR, panelists might, for example, consider one possible approach that maximizes shareholder return, another that responds to perceived community needs, a third that addresses employee pride and morale, a fourth that builds organizational reputation, and a fifth that focuses only on community needs in the area of public education. Important to note, though, is that this stage's early sessions do not involve critical evaluation of each possibility, nor should the panel eliminate or even consolidate ideas. However, panelists may, during later sessions of this stage, begin to note potential connections and hybrid combinations among approaches. With facilitator guidance, the aim is to generate at least four, but probably not more than eight or nine distinct policy possibilities with the understanding that further revision is possible, even likely, in subsequent stages.

Stage four is marked by recursive review of the policy possibilities along with the exploration of potential consequences (positive and negative) for each. Panelists seek here to envision how each possibility would change the environment if implemented, but discussion purposefully avoids addressing how each would be implemented. The aim is for panelists to jointly clarify and expand group understanding for each policy possibility. Consequences could include social, economic and cultural areas and would consider which groups are benefited or harmed by the policies. There is a risk, of course, for panelists to see only positive consequences of policies they support and negative consequences of those they oppose; the facilitator must skillfully prevent that from occurring. Stage four concludes with the panel eliminating policy approaches that fail, upon thorough examination, to meet criteria set in earlier stages, consolidating policy approaches where appropriate, and identifying the fundamental policy approaches the panel agrees should be moved forward to the final single-panel stage. The IF process includes a "negative veto" policy here – one panelist's vote is sufficient to retain a policy possibility to the next stage. For CSR, panelists might, by way of illustration, determine that a policy aimed solely at benefiting public education is not feasible and incorporate some elements of that policy into another policy that more broadly addresses community needs.

Stage five moves the process to the serious document drafting level, with primary writing responsibilities falling on the facilitator with active panel involvement. Here is where policy approaches are expressed in concise but conceptual terms. The document begins to clarify goals and purposes, underlying assumptions, responsible agents, specific actions and activities. For the CSR illustration, the panel, led by the public relations manager, would draft a document describing in some detail the policy possibilities the organization might adopt, the measures needed to implement each, responsibilities of each person or agency involved, benefits and costs for each participant, and other likely consequences. The writing process, though executed primarily by the facilitator, is a recursive exercise with the same rules of engagement that apply to discussions: sanctuary conditions; negative veto regarding inclusion of policy possibilities; deliberate and unhurried; avoiding consensus or compromise. It's important to emphasize that the ultimate product, the Staff Work Report, is, as Gunderson (2006) describes, "conceptual rather than technical or quantitative" (p.21). Therefore, the iterative drafting process that begins in Stage 5 requires that policy possibilities be described in general with details sufficient to convey a distinct vision of each. During this stage, too, each possibility is retested against conceptual questions established in the earliest stages of the discussion process. Participants seek to imagine and describe what the world would look like if each policy possibility were implemented.

Stage six calls for joint sessions combining the lay citizen and expert panels, though in a public relations setting, where advisory panels are charged with developing organizational policies related to communication issues, a single panel approach is appropriate and this stage is not envisioned. However, in some applications of the IF deliberative process the two-panel structure may be employed. In the joint panel version, panelists would explore elements of divergence and convergence between the two panels' findings. That exercise may lead to fresh ideas as well as to merging of possibilities.

With the single-panel approach appropriate for most public relations issues, or with the two-panel approach, the process now moves to completing the final Staff Work Report. The panel now serves to guide the facilitator in this task, helping to ensure that the document is a straightforward summary of participants' collective efforts, with no recommendations or arguments for or against any of the possibilities. The Staff Work Report, representing the culmination of the discussion process, also represents the beginning of more public discussion of the issue, with the ultimate aim of establishing policy that has been logically developed, thoroughly examined, and carefully considered. Continuing the CSR example, the Staff Work Report might contain organizational policy possibilities from perspectives such as a pure business case, a pure normative case, a mixed motive case, a responsive case, a pre-game case, a corporate citizen case, a global case, etc. Policy makers would then be able to conduct a deliberative process based upon the exhaustive work of the panel.

Summary

Public relations managers can continue to establish themselves as essential components of the dominant coalition by consistently demonstrating the important skills they bring to the decision-making process. Practitioners continue to apply increasingly well-developed skill in critical thinking, situation analysis, and creative problem solving. By acquiring the skills associated with facilitation, practitioners can expand their value into the area of policy development, and because those skills applied to the IF process do not require extensive knowledge of the policy area, the public relations manager so qualified could exercise those skills in areas beyond public relations and organizational communication policies. The public relations manager thus becomes indispensable in an organization's policy development activities. Even within the public relations arena, a skilled facilitator could direct the process of crafting policies in the area of employee communication, community relations and other areas important to organizational vitality and reputation. An ongoing facilitation process, such as might be incorporated into advisory group activities, could serve as a valuable research tool in aiding public relations managers as they engage in the important process of issue analysis and management.

Another aim of this paper has been to argue that public relations managers ought to claim the arena of corporate social responsibility. Researchers from other disciplines such as political science, business management, sociology and economics lament the lack of a structured approach or definitive framework for developing organizational policies addressing CSR (Smith, 2003). The IF deliberative process offers an important component of that framework, and public relations managers acting as skilled facilitators can guide it purposefully and productively. CSR has ebbed and flowed for more than a century as management struggled to balance responsibilities to shareholders with nobler, if normative, aims, but intensified scrutiny enabled by advances in communication and transportation make finding that balance increasingly imperative.

Doing so will require informed and unemotional examination of carefully developed policy possibilities, followed by high-order public discourse. Public relations managers are uniquely positioned, experienced and qualified to guide that effort.

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