

3rd sector PR or when Community is our main stakeholder

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Abstract

Purpose of the paper: *The main purpose of this article is to discuss the connection of two disciplines considered as different till now both in their theoretic principles as well as in their practices: Public Relations (PR), or if you prefer Corporate Communications, and Communication in the Public Interest.*

Methodology: *This is essentially a conceptual paper that applies a qualitative approach to the field in consideration. A review of the main literature is presented as well as the considerations gathered from empirical research during the last ten years among Portuguese nonprofit organizations and NGO.*

Findings: *We conclude that Third Sector Public Relations are marked by an ongoing commitment to society and to the community and, therefore, should always incorporate what is usually conceived as Communication in the Public Interest into its core strategy. In the context of Civil Society organizations, Public Relations must be seen as negotiation and commitment*

Research limits: *Its conceptual framework might need to be better developed*

Practical implications: *According to our arguments a redefinition of the scope of both the conceptual and empirical field of Public Relations is needed.*

Originality of the study: *It provides a new theoretical approach to Public Relations.*

Key words: Public Relations; Third Sector; Nonprofit Organizations; Corporate Communications; Communication in the Public Interest; Public Communication Campaigns

1. Introduction

For the past decades we've been discussing Public Relations as if its boundaries both as a profession and as a scientific discipline were well established, which wasn't and still isn't the case. Even if we could defend Public Relations as a complete and integrated discipline with a coherent and autonomous body of knowledge it would still be appropriate to discuss its new developments. When

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speaking about stakeholders we quite often forget those that exist near us but are sometimes only pointed out in quite a silent manner when, for one reason or another, they transform into a pressure group or as envisaged as potential clients. As you might easily understand, we are speaking about communities in their most contextual approaches. For third sector organizations this might be defended as one of the most important and central stakeholders.

Public Relations must be seen as going beyond the classic aspects of their work, that is “(as)... a social practice, helping organizations fit into their social environments, and working on relationships, between groups to help bring about social and economic development and to help in completing social tasks”. (White and Mazur, 1995, p. 266). According to Eiró-Gomes and Lourenço (2009), PR must incorporate aspects that belong to what we usually consider as Communication in the Public Interest, understood as attempts to inform, empower and mobilize individuals and society for changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviors in their body of knowledge (Rice and Atkin, 1989).

Our main hypothesis is precisely that in Third Sector Organizations one of the main aspects of the Public Relations /Corporate Communications Department is to develop Communication campaigns in the Public Interest (in the case under consideration Health Communication) and that these are by principle and in practice central aspects for the maintenance of relationships between organizations and their publics as well as for the enlargement and consolidation of a Corporate positive reputation.

2. Corporate Communications or Public Relations?

The terms Corporate Communications, Public Relations (PR), Institutional Communications and Corporate Communications are different expressions to refer to the same concept¹.

According to Tench and Yeomans (2006), the concept of “Corporate Communications” can be defined as synonymous of the concept of Public Relations. Corporate Communications emerged, according to the authors, as an alternative to the concept of Public Relations, with the strategic objective of “disassociate themselves from the spin doctors”, “propaganda and corporate lying”. We are therefore faced with a view according to which there are no conceptual differences between Public Relations and Corporate Communications. Although there are still several authors who consider that there is no place in the concept of PR for Corporate Communications, we agree with Tench and Yeomans (2006) who

¹ According to Wilcox *et al.*, (2006) there have been definitions of Public Relations that support the definition proposed by the Public Relations Society of America all over the world. Examples of these are the definitions of the *British Institute of Public Opinion*, the Inter-University Forum of Researchers of Public Relaciones in Spain, the *Danish Public Relations Klub*, the *World Assembly of Public Relations* in Mexico City in 1978 and the *Inter-American Federation of Public Relations* in 1963 (Cf: Wilcox *et al.*, 2006).

mention that “there is such a clear correlation between Grunig’s concept of ‘excellent’ Public Relations and the concept of Corporate Communications (Grunig *et al.*, 2002) that the terms could be used interchangeably”. (Tench and Yeomans, 2006, p.540).

Philip Lesly also introduces the notion that the two concepts are used as synonyms, but ends by noting that the concept of “Corporate Communications” is very limited, not being seen from a strategic perspective².

We assume, therefore, that the concepts of Corporate Communications and Public Relations are synonyms just because this is the most complete theorization that sees PR as a strategic function and not merely as an operational function. Other definitions of Institutional or Corporate Communications are also valid although too narrow or, conversely, too broad.

We therefore distinguish the concepts of Corporate/Institutional Communications or Public Relations, from what has been defined in literature as Organizational Communication³, largely related to the communication that occurs within an organization. We understand, in a first instance, Public Relations as a discipline that goes far beyond this conceptualization and is assumed as a management function that works to build and manage relationships between the

² “Literature dealing with the subject almost universally uses the term public relations - whether describing the role of consultants in proxy fights, referring to government information efforts, discussing employment opportunities, or other matters. The term *corporate communication* is typically used in corporate-sponsored reports”. (Lesly, 1997, p. 6).

“*Corporate communication* and *corporate relations* are clearly limited to the corporate sphere. These terms are denigrating, because they focus on only limited two-way functions rather than on policy and strategy”. (Lesly, 1997, p. 6).

³ “Organizational communication may be defined as the display and interpretation of messages among communication units that are part of a particular organization. (...) Organizational communication occurs whenever at least one person who occupies a position in an organization interprets some display”. (Pace and Faules, 1993).

“(...) organizational communication is that process wherein mutually interdependent human beings create and exchange messages, and interpret and negotiate meanings, while striving to articulate and realize mutually held visions, purposes, and goals”. (Andrews and Herschel, 1996).

“Three very different ways of conceptualizing “organizational communication” are available. (...) First, the focus could be on the development of organizational communication as a speciality in departments of communication and communication associations. (...) A second approach to conceptualizing organizational communication focuses on communication as a phenomenon that exists in organizations. (...) A third way to approach the issue is to think of communication as a way to describe and explain organizations”. (Jablin and Putnam, 2001).

“The simplest definition of organizational communication is that it is communication that occurs within organizations, but that definition is not very informative. Communication is generally defined as a process through which people, acting together, create, sustain, and manage meanings through the use of verbal and non-verbal signs and symbols within a particular context”. (Conrad and Poole, 2002).

organization and all the stakeholders that are or can be affected by the organization, by dealing with the management of the entire environment and acting proactively to seek solutions and set up different scenarios at the same time.

We cannot conceive, for that reason, PR without a strategic vision, (Cutlip *et al.*, 1999; Steyn and Gustav, 2000; Tench and Yeomans, 2006).

However, we believe it is urgent to build a new reformulation of the concept of Public Relations, that is more suited to the contemporary reality and that responds to the demands of society. Why would we want to continue thinking about PR as fixed in the role that was played a century ago? We will propose here clearly that it is urgent to redefine the concept and follow the evolving needs of organizations.

3. Public Relations' Functions

What are the true functions of Corporate Communications, or, if you prefer, of Public Relations? In "Exploring Public Relations", Tench and Yomans focus on the strategic vision of Corporate Communications, i.e., viewing this as a feature that contributed to the achievement of objectives and fulfilled the mission of the institution⁴.

According to this perspective, in which we believe, one of the key aspects that make Corporate Communications a strategic role is its influence in the decision-making process, more than just contributing to achieving the objectives. This strategic role of communication is thus intrinsically linked to the management of relationships with all the stakeholders and the management of reputation. By being attentive and analyzing the entire environment and all stakeholders, Corporate Communications appears as being able to provide feedback from all stakeholders and to identify trends in society, in the public and media agenda. The role of the PR professional is, as a result, to reduce uncertainty in decision-making processes and to look for decisions that follow a line of symmetry, meeting not only the requirements of the organization, but also the interests of all stakeholders.

"The rationale for this position is that the Corporate Communications director's knowledge of the organization's environment (trends in public opinion, stakeholder perceptions and expectations, the news agenda and new values, employee views, and so on) enable them to predict stakeholder responses to decisions taken by the dominant coalition. "(Tench and Yeomans, 2006, p. 551)

Globally, Corporate Communications is the area that manages the interests and needs between the various stakeholders and the organization. It is precisely this idea of adjusting the interests and needs of the organization and its publics that Lesly present as the definition of Public Relations. Understanding, as noted above, Public Relations and Corporate Communications as synonyms, we can look also to the definition proposed by the Public Relations Society of America, and shared by

⁴ "One of the key dimensions of corporate communication is understanding its relationship to overall organizational strategy (the cornerstones of which are its mission and goals)". (Tench and Yeomans, 2006, p. 548-549).

Philip Lesly, that PR have the function of “helping an organization and its publics adapt mutually to each other” (Public Relations Society of America, 1982). This idea is also shared by other authors in the field of Public Relations, as is the case of Cutlip *et al.*⁵

However, Public Relations are not limited to knowing the organization's stakeholders, but go further: in fact one of its functions is to create goodwill with all audiences.⁶ In fulfilling these functions, PR will be contributing to the success of the organization as a whole.

“Public Relations properly practiced at the corporate level should be an integral part of the top management team, serving alongside such other staff functions as finance, human resources, legal, and long-range planning, to provide guidance and counsel at the corporations’ basic decision processes. At the same time, it must be geared to provide professional communications planning and service to both the corporation as a whole and the various operating units in a board range of subjects from management communications to financial disclosure to marketing publicity”. (Prout, 1997, p. 687).

Following the same line of thought, Prout (1997) argues that for Public Relations to achieve these objectives and fulfill its strategic role, it must be prepared to work in five major areas: counseling, communication service, research and analysis of public affairs; action programs for public relations, and integration of all communication functions. Prout (1997) also presents a list of the responsibilities of a Public Relations department. The same is done by other authors in the field of Communications. Table 1 presents a summary of what are considered the main functions of Communications.

For the purpose of this paper it is mandatory to make a critique of these proposals, for none of them incorporate Communication in the Public Interest into the functions of Public Relations, except for Wilcox *et al.*, (2006) with the notion of development (desarrollo).

The idea proposed here is that we should not, on one hand, include Corporate Communications in the functions of Public Relations, once we understand these two concepts as synonyms and, on the other hand, that in Third Sector organizations it is especially urgent to look at the social role of PR and include Communication in the Public Interest at the core of the discipline and profession of Public Relations.

⁵ “Public relations is the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the publics on whom its success or failure depends”. (Cutlip *et al.*, 1999, p. 6).

⁶ “Business goodwill today means not only the attitude of the consumer toward the company’s products, but also the attitudes of its employees, the community and government, stockholders, dealers and distributors, suppliers, and others. All must be integrated in understanding and acceptance of the organization and its purposes. Since all of these groups are vital to the success of a company, obtaining the goodwill of every one of them is indispensable. This holds equally true for all other types of organization.” (Lesly, 1997, p. 10).

Table 1: Public Relations Functions

Authors	Public Relations Functions
(White and Mazur, 1995)	Corporate Communications Issues Management Product Publicity Investor Relations Financial Communications Lobbying Public Affairs Media Relations Community Affairs Crisis Management Events Management Sponsorship A range of services which feed into all these
(Prout, 1997)	Public Relations Policy Corporate Statements Corporate Publicity Product Publicity Government Relations Community Relations Inventory Relations Institutional Promotion Corporate Donations Employee Publications Guest Relations Coordinating and Integrating Miscellaneous
(Cutlip <i>et al.</i> , 1999)	Publicity Advertising Press Agency Public Affairs Issues Management Lobbying Investor Relations Development
(Henslowe, 1999)	Images Knowledge and Understanding Interest Acceptance Sympathy
(Wilcox <i>et al.</i> , 2006)	Asesoría Investigación Relaciones con los medios de comunicación Publicity Relaciones con los trabajadores/miembros Relaciones con la comunidad Asuntos públicos Asuntos gubernamentales Gestión de conflictos potenciales (<i>issues management</i>) Relaciones financieras Relaciones sectoriales Desarrollo / Captación de fondos (<i>fund-raising</i>) Relaciones multiculturales / diversidad del lugar de trabajo Acontecimientos especiales Comunicación de marketing
(Argenti, 2007)	Reputation Management Corporate Advertising and Advocacy Media Relations Marketing Communications Internal Communications Investor Relations Corporate Social Responsibility Government Relations Crisis Management

Source: Nunes (2011)

Many are, thus, the functions of PR and, consequently, many are their contributions. It seems pertinent to note that it is imperative to consider a new contribution that we believe is also evident in Public Relations and which is to contribute to the development of society. This is precisely the essential contribution that is missing in the definitions of Public Relations and that we argue must be added.

4. A New Conceptualization for Public Relations

Defining the concept of Public Relations and what this function and discipline comprises is not a pacific or linear issue at all. There are several definitions proposed in the literature and there are several approaches. The definition of White and Mazur (1995) is therefore a mirror of this reality, viewing Public Relations as an umbrella concept, as Lesly (1997) had already done, which covers a variety of areas such as Corporate Communications, management issues, promotion of products and services, investor relations, financial communications, lobbying, public affairs, media advisory, community affairs, crisis management, organization and event management and sponsorship, among others (White and Mazur, 1995).

It is important here, however, to reflect on what the contribution of Public Relations to an organization and to society really is, and more than that, what the future of Public Relations is. According to the possibilities outlined by White and Mazur (1995), we will be facing one of two scenarios:

“In the first scenario, it becomes a largely technical practice, using communications techniques to support marketing activities and is involved in work in product and corporate branding, corporate reputation, market penetration and development”. (White and Mazur, 1995, p. 266).

This is the technical perspective and, above all, a purely operational perspective we believe not to be confined to Public Relations. Facing the PR as a strategic function, we first look at this scenario as a scenario in which the profession is not assumed as such. All the strategic capacity is lost. Note also that in this scenario, the reference to the importance of the publics is not made. We would return to the organization at the center of communication, without a bidirectional and symmetrical focus. It is necessary to leave the technical vision of Public Relations. We have a whole set of activities and contributions that Corporate Communications can bring to any organization.

The second scenario outlined by White and Mazur is, in our opinion, far more ambitious and far more suited to Public Relations from a strategic perspective.

“In the second, Public Relations will increasingly become a social practice, helping organizations fit into their social environments, and working on relationships between groups to help bring about social and economic development, and to help in completing social tasks”. (White and Mazur, 1995, p. 266).

Here we go further, and we can look at PR as a profession with a real contribution, and what seems to us even more relevant, as having a prominent social

role to play in society. If any organization in a given economy and society has a role to play, why must Public Relations be confined to the small world of the organization? This is where we can make a difference, going beyond merely looking at the organization. We talk, for that reason, about looking around and seeing how the organization can contribute to the social and economic development of society and, therefore, how PR can be crucial in this process.

Now, if we understand Public Relations as the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships with all stakeholders, who better than this professional to analyze the environment and understand what the real needs and interests of the publics and society are?

This is precisely the focus that Public Relations should have: the publics. It is increasingly urgent for organizations to obtain the goodwill, confidence and commitment of their audiences. Increasingly it is necessary, above the self-interest of the organization, for there to exist a common interest that will benefit society as a whole. We will be faced here with a new paradigm of Public Relations and with a new definition of this discipline, adapted to the demands of modern and future societies.

Like Eiró-Gomes add, the future of PR may undergo,

“(…) a model closer to an idea that has already been presented by Grunig that the added value of PR has to do with its ability to build community relations, that is, when in addition to the terms of trade, creates relationships that can benefit the publics without necessarily benefitting the organization (a model more focused on commitment.)” (Eiró-Gomes, 2006, p. 13).

But if we look into the reality of the Third Sector, we are led to think that, in fact, this view is no longer a future scenario, but must be the practice of Public Relations within these organizations. More than any other organization, the Third Sector organizations exist to contribute to the good of society and, therefore, the public assumes a superior position. More than existing for its own success, a non-profit organization exists from, for, and within society.

In the organizations of the Civil Society, Public Relations assume a key role: to lay the groundwork for a new era of Corporate Communications in which the focus will be on commitment to and with the publics, with the major goal of having a real contribution to society, rather than to the organization itself, seen as an isolated element.

5. Communication in the Public Interest: Managing Public Communication Campaigns⁷

Public Communication Campaigns⁸ are, as argued earlier, one of the functions of Public Relations (Dozier *et al.*, 2001) and, in general, can be defined as programs

⁷ Here the concept of Public Communication Campaigns is understood as Communication in the Public Interest and not as Communication of Public Entities.

⁸ “Public communication campaigns are media campaigns - with radio or television public-

that aim to bring about changes both in terms of knowledge and beliefs and in behaviors, using such technical information, persuasion and encouragement to change, with a view to the common good (Dozier *et al.*, 2001).

Public Communication Campaigns are thus developed by communication professionals both in non-profit organizations, in which PR professionals look to achieve non-commercial purposes with benefits to society, and in for-profit organizations within the area now understood as corporate social responsibility (Dozier *et al.*, 2001).

There are several stakeholders who engaged in Public Communication Campaigns, each with its specificities. For instance we can think about voluntary associations, media, government agencies, foundations, unions, corporations and industry boards, and even social scientists. One of the key issues that arise when talking about Public Communication Campaigns is precisely the legitimacy that an entity has to defend its right to speak in the “public interest”. According to Paisley, voluntary associations are seen as legitimate by the public to develop campaigns that promote their interests (Paisley, 2001). But before the legitimacy of the promoter of the campaign, its success or failure will depend on another factor: the public agenda. In general, the success of a campaign depends on the perception that the persons have that the subject is really important.

We assume in this paper that it is imperative to consider Communication in the Public Interest as an area of activity of Public Relations. However, it is still necessary to reflect on issues like the general idea associated with Public Relations that exist to manage the interests between the organization and its publics.

In this view the idea that the public is something that belongs to the organization and is “its” public prevails, and thus we are, even recklessly, relegating the “public” to a second place. It is necessary that when we are dealing with campaigns of Communication in the Public Interest, we assume that the publics have their own

service announcements, posters on trash cans or in buses, pamphlets made available by mail. Almost all of these campaigns try to reform the behavior of a target public in some way. Public communication campaigns use marketing strategies similar to those used to publicize products or fund-raising programs. Public communication campaigns also are “social marketing” programs that are used to gain acceptance of a social idea or practice rather than to facilitate a commercial transaction”. (Grunig and Hunt, 1983, p. 364).

“In adapting an earlier definition by Rogers and Storey (1987), Rice and Atkin (1989) defined *public communication campaigns* as Purposive attempts to inform, persuade, or motivate behavior changes in a relatively well-defined and large audience, generally for noncommercial benefits to the individual and/or society, typically within a given period of time, by means of organized communication activities involving mass media and often complemented by interpersonal support. (p. 7)” (Dozier *et al.*, 2001, p. 232).

“Public communication campaigns use the media, messaging, and an organized set of communication activities to generate specific outcomes in a large number of individuals and in a specified period of time. They are an attempt to shape behavior toward desirable social outcomes. To maximize their chances of success, campaigns usually coordinate media efforts with a mix of other interpersonal and community-based communication channels”. (Coffman, 2002, p. 2).

interests regardless of the organization, here the work of PR is to help the publics have the autonomy to achieve their own interests.

Only then can we say that PR are working in the public interest by promoting what Eiró-Gomes (2005) presented as one of the key issues of Public Relations: “to promote human understanding that will only be possible if we really believe that we only communicate if and only if we are able to understand”. (Eiró-Gomes, 2005, p. 145)

It is therefore increasingly important to PR that the focus is really placed on the publics, finding effective ways to give them empowerment and autonomy to be the authors of the desired change. What might now be imperative to Public Relations professionals when working in the public interest is to place the “other” in a central place⁹.

6. Public Relations in Third Sector Organizations, or When community is our main stakeholder

“Practicing Public Relations in a not-for-profit organization closely resembles practicing Public Relations in a profit-making endeavor. In both instances, you want to gain the support of important publics or constituencies for what you do and how you do it. (...) You also use the same basic tools and techniques to deliver your information and messages (...). Then, you manage with the same four-step process in mind: research, plan, communicate, evaluate. You follow a logical pattern to assure the effectiveness of your efforts. There’s nothing particularly special about the practice in the not-for-profit field that is not found in one form or another in corporations and other organizations”. (Bates, 1997, p. 571).

Bates (1997) statement leads us to think that practicing Public Relations in non-profit organizations is exactly the same as practicing Public Relations in for-profit organizations. If this is true to a certain extent, we believe, on the other hand, that non-profit organizations pose a new challenge to the Public Relations professional.

The Public Relations have, in any institution either with or without profit, a vital role to play. If, in many respects, the characteristics of the practice of Public Relations in the Third Sector are the same as the practice in a for-profit organization, such organizations have, on the other hand, certain idiosyncrasies that make them special and that, therefore, require a distinct action.

There are already several authors who have addressed the study of Public Relations in nonprofit organizations. Haywood (1990), Bates (1997), Boyer (1997), Dyer *et al.* (2002) are some of them. However, we believe that this area still needs a

⁹ “My view is that this will only be true if our decisions are taken, not merely from my - my institution, my corporation, government, group, and so on - point of view, my own perspective, but by the demand that my actions conform to universally applicable standards that make them potentially part of an harmonious collective system”. (Eiró-Gomes, 2005, p. 145).

deeper reflection into the essence of these organizations and to see, strategically, on what terms the Public Relations have a major role to play.

To perform the function (at the technical or strategic management level) of Public Relations within a nonprofit organization is, unlike what Bates advocated (1997), distinct from the practice of Public Relations in a profitable organization, or at least in our view, ought to be.

Reflecting on Public Relations in Third Sector organizations leads us to consider what these organizations are, what their needs are and, above all, what their purpose in society is.

Therefore, it is clear that in these organizations Public Relations encounter a peculiar challenge that goes far beyond just reconciling the interests and needs of the organization with those of its stakeholders. For a nonprofit organization, the interests of the publics and well-being come first. More than for its own success, a non-profit organization exists with a role to play in society. Hence the idea that a nonprofit organization has to focus not on itself, but on the interests and needs of target publics, seeing them as independent from the organization and with self-interests and needs.

In this vein, we are faced with the need for a new definition of Public Relations, specifically in the context of the Third Sector, in which the publics are placed above the organization and in which communication takes on a new role, that is to contribute to society. This idea of social PR was previously presented by Mafalda Eiró-Gomes as what must be seen as the future of Public Relations and the subject who will go through

“(…) building community relations, that is, when in addition to the terms of trade, creates relationships that can benefit the public without necessarily benefiting the organization (model more focused on the commitment)”. (Eiró-Gomes, 2006, p. 13).

When we are working as Public Relations professionals in an organization of the Civil Society, this role of PR gains even more importance and we believe it is no longer a vision of the activity in a near future, but already a reality. More than any other organization, Third Sector organizations exist to contribute to the good of society, therefore, the public assumes a greater role. It is precisely this aspect that differentiates the communication that is practiced in a for-profit organization from the one that is practiced in an organization of the Third Sector.

Here, there is no need to adjust the interests of the publics to the organization; the publics are not “something” that belongs to the organization. The protection and furtherance of the interests of the publics are the very purpose of the organization.

PR thus appears with a new function that goes beyond meeting the organization's interests. With the public in the first place, the social role of Public Relations won a prominent position:

“Ask the RP to increasingly become a function of integration and social development, which enables organizations to both develop the level of your self-knowledge and the ability to adapt to the surroundings, promoting and encouraging the negotiation / cooperation between different groups, aiming at the social and

economic development of the community as a whole.” (Eiró-Gomes and Lourenço, 2009, p. 1488).

However, the specificities of Public Relations in the Third Sector do not stop at its focus on publics and society. A nonprofit organization is faced daily with two realities: Corporate Communications and Communication in the Public Interest. On the one hand, Corporate Communications are an inescapable reality, as in any other organization, on the other hand, these organizations have a new challenge: Communication in the Public Interest. It is urgent then to reconcile these two aspects under the scope of the concept of Public Relations, understood in a much broader sense.

With regard to Corporate Communications, as in any organization, these organizations also have a mission and values to spread, there is an identity that you want to convey to the target audiences and there is a variety of stakeholders with whom it is necessary to establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships.

In turn, with regard to Communication in the Public Interest, it is no longer to spread the mission and objectives of the organization, but to contribute to its fulfillment, namely to contribute to change for a better society and to contribute to managing the publics and having their interests satisfied. In this sense, PR professionals in these organizations have to develop campaigns and work to promote a greater knowledge on the subject in question and meet the needs of the beneficiaries of their efforts. It is thus a performance focused on public interest, as argued earlier.

We are thus faced with two areas of Communication in organizations, on which we focus, that play a prominent role and are necessary to combine. This, then, is the challenge for a Third Sector organization: to set a PR strategy that incorporates Communication in the Public Interest in the strategy of Corporate Communications, which is part of the latter and is therefore inextricably linked.

If communication is working towards achieving the organization's mission, it becomes impossible to separate these two aspects of Public Relations. In seeking to fulfill the mission of the organization, Public Relations will inevitably be pursuing the interests of the public. There is no way to separate the two realities or we would be eliminating the very essence of a nonprofit organization.

Again, we see here a clear social function of PR, which in our view is even more undeniable in an organization of the Third Sector. On the one hand it has the responsibility to manage the organization's reputation, on the other hand, it has a role to play in the process of social change.

“Communication should be the guardian of the organization's values, brand and reputation and should shape the culture and behaviors, as well as have great responsibility to enable (empower) individuals, in order to induce them to act (advocacy) and thus become an active part in decision-making.” (Eiró-Gomes and Lourenço, 2009, p. 1490)

Thus, we see that the importance of Public Relations in a Civil Society organization is undeniable. More than its role of communication management, identity building and organizational reputation, Public Relations have a really active

role in fulfilling the mission of the organization in the Third Sector, to the extent that a deep knowledge of the stakeholders allows the organization to meet their needs and contribute to changes that will improve their life. On the other hand, Public Relations also have to deal with all the work of transmitting information about the cause defended by the organization as well as adapting this information to each public, so that the message is transmitted and understood correctly, boosting their empowerment and, consequently, leading to changes in knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors.

We conclude therefore that in addition to what until now has been considered as belonging to the field of Public Relations (with all its areas of practice), as already mentioned in this paper as Corporate Communications, it is necessary to move on and also consider the new areas which constitute the joint role these organizations play with their publics as living forces from the civil society.

7. Final reflections

The Third Sector has gained extraordinary importance all over the world. Considering this fact, we believe that there is the need for a theoretical reformulation of what has been defined in literature as Public Relations in the Third Sector.

We argue, therefore, that Public Relations in the Third Sector should incorporate Communication in the Public Interest into its core strategy. These are organizations with a role to play in society; their focus is, rather than their own objectives, the interests and needs of their audiences. In this way we will inevitably make the organization fulfill its purpose in society.

The great challenge and demands posed to Public Relations professionals in these organizations is precisely the need to strategically align the objectives of Communication in the Public Interest, with the organization's Corporate Communications, understood in its most classical definition.

Whatever their field of action may be, any nonprofit organization always represents two roles: an institution and a cause of public interest. If Public Relations are working towards fulfilling the mission of the organization it is therefore impossible to separate Communication in the Public Interest and Corporate Communications. More than existing for the management of the organization's reputation, PR in the Third Sector takes on the true role of social public relations. Meeting the needs of target audiences contributes on the one hand, to the development of society and on the other hand, it drives the accomplishment of the mission of the organization. Thus, PR work, not only in order to build and manage relationships with the publics, but also to increase confidence and commitment.

From this perspective, we conceive, PR in the Third Sector as negotiation and commitment. By negotiation we mean the ability to understand mutual needs and desires. When thinking about commitment, we are thinking about the capacity to build community relations in which the interests of the publics are put above organizational interests (if we look at the organization in itself).

PR in the Third Sector, therefore, means much more than managing and reconciling the interests of the organization with its publics. PR in the Third Sector is about to put the “publics” first, understand them as independent of the organization and with self-interests and therefore, work to give them the autonomy and empowerment to achieve their own interests.

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