

# Public Relations Practice and Its Impact on Strategy Effectiveness

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## Abstract

The study conducted through the exploratory research design focused on the perspective that certain factors influence effective public relations practice that result to strategy effectiveness. Public relations practice as a distinctive management function can be expressed in action which is imperative for understanding the philosophy of management and also doing what people like, the way they like it. It obviously integrates participative management, action, and leads to strategy effectiveness. All public relations work is influenced by planning, research, relationship management and communicating with the audience. Traditionally, public relations practice involves communications, often as publicity release for print media that aim at influencing the target audiences. In public relations, the communications function looks at all stakeholders and uses a variety of tools and tactics to enhance cordial relationship to build institutional reputation and acceptability. Reputation management requires credible information which is important in public relations activity well communicated based on knowledge and ensures favourable perception of organizational intentions. 98 respondents participated in the study and the result showed strong positive relationship between public relations practice and strategy effectiveness. Further study in this area could examine the necessity to give top priority to public relations practice by top management so as to enhance strategy effectiveness in human organizations. It was therefore, recommended that adequate planning is required for effective public relations practice in order to achieve the desired result in organizations and governments.

## Keywords

Participative Management, Effective Communication, Systems Theory, Reputation Management, Distinctive Management Function, Publics

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## 1. Introduction

For decades public relations role has developed to achieve objectives in government, business, charitable, traditional, religious, and other organizations. All organizations operate in a unique environment and therefore, thrive on positive public relationships. Even though no single theory can reveal what can be learnt about public relations, it is widely believed that the systems theory is pertinent in the understanding public relations. Lattimore, et al [1] suggest that systems theory looks at organizations as made up of

interrelated parts, adapting and adjusting to changes in the political, economic, legal, social, cultural, and technological environments, in which they operate. They state that the systems perspective emphasizes the interdependence of organizations with their environments, both internal and external to them. They explain also that events like the actions of Martin Luther, and the adventurers seeking Eldorado have all been explained as examples of ancient public relations practice. Also, the creation in the 17<sup>th</sup> century of the congregation for propagating the faith by the Roman Catholic Church is often pointed to as a keystone in the development of public relations. This movement introduced

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the term *propaganda* [2]. In a broad sense, public relations may be defined as a unique management function that uses communication to help in managing relationships with key publics. Public relations practice is a leadership and management function that helps to achieve institutional objectives, defines philosophy, and facilitates positive organizational change. From these definitions, it becomes clear that public relations have influence on strategy and strategy effectiveness. Strategy may be broadly defined as an integrated, coherent pattern of thinking, decision-making; and resources' allocation. Where strategy is properly formulated, implanted, implemented and controlled, it enables an organization to build competitive advantage to achieve sustainable superior performance. Strategy is also defined as the determination of the basic long-term objectives of an enterprise and the adoption of courses of action and the allocation of resources necessary for carrying out these goals. Based on these broad definitions, Hill and Jones [3] suggest that strategy involves rational planning. The planning theme remains an important component of most management definitions of strategy. They insist that strategy is a unified, comprehensive, and integrated plan designed to ensure that the basic objectives of the organization are achieved. On this basis, strategy effectiveness may be operationalized as the degree to which a strategy realizes its goals. A strategy can become effective only when it is properly implemented. Owen [4] asserts that proper strategy implementation requires allocation of clear responsibility and accountability for the successful outcome of the overall institutional strategy. He emphasizes that for the success of the overall strategy someone must have the responsibility to work across boundaries, pull the pieces together and makes sure that things happen to enhance effectiveness, and the reality is that all human organizations strive for effectiveness without which they become less competitive. Among the strategy imperatives that often result to effectiveness as measured by productivity and profitability include close relationship management and understanding the perspectives of major stakeholders and massive investments in cost-efficient measures as well as a process of weeding out the least profitable activities. Onsongo, et al [5] define effectiveness as the accomplishment of recognized objectives of cooperative effort, and also that the degree of accomplishment is the degree of *effectiveness*. They suggest that as a multidimensional affair, whichever way effectiveness is defined or measured, it must take into account the profitability of the organization, the degree to which it satisfies its members and the degree to which it is of value to the larger society. Therefore, it is important to state that the value of public relations practice to management is best measured through quality, cost-effectiveness, profitability, changes in attitudes, behaviours, knowledge or

awareness, as well as the effectiveness of administrative and management processes. For example, management effectiveness means that the organizational strategy, in terms of goals and the needs of the members are simultaneously met. Even though it is the 4<sup>th</sup> key component of the strategic management process, strategy implementation is very critical to strategy effectiveness. Relevant literature on strategic management suggests that a strategy is useless without implementation. It is believed that it is better to have a first-class implementation procedure for a second-class strategy than vice-versa. This is against the background that even the best conceived strategies are of little value if they are not implemented effectively. According to Gomez-Mejia and Balkin [6] in theory, the formulated strategy should guide the implementation; in reality strategy formulation and implementation are two sides of the same coin. This is understandable because strategy may not be effective or may be too risky if the organization does not have the resources or the know-how to implement it [7].

### 1.1. Research Problem

To achieve strategy effectiveness organizations need to realize that public relations as an important leadership and management function must be given priority in top management decision-making process. Unfortunately, the traditional public relations practitioner is often seen as a mere news *reporter* or *communicator* of *second-hand* information. This creates a gap between how the practitioner perceives the information and how such information is implemented, perceived or received by its consumers. Strategy becomes effective only when it is well implemented, communicated and favourably perceived by the publics. The challenge of the leadership in organizations is to quickly appreciate that the attitudes and values of their publics are critical for success. Organizational goals themselves are shaped by factors in the internal and external environments; therefore, leaving public relations in the *cold* is a huge challenge to strategy effectiveness. Public relations practice as a management function serves as counselor to management, mediating, and helping to translate intentions and aims into reality. This also helps businesses, unions, governments, employees, and significant others to achieve their objectives through effective relationship building and management. An original work of this nature is important at this time when business organizations and governments suffer huge damages due to poor public relations practice.

### 1.2. Research Objective

This study was designed to explore the relationship between public relations practice and strategy effectiveness.

### 1.3. Research Significance

The result of this study will help students, researchers, and the general public to gain an understanding of the relevance of public relations practice in strategy effectiveness in organizations, including governments, among others. For example, in the wake of the *FBI wanted list*, The Public Relations Consultants' Association of Nigeria offered to assist the Federal Government of Nigeria in improving the country's *battered image* on the international scene [8].

### 1.4. Research Questions

1. Does planning help in public relations practice?
2. Does research contribute to the value of public relations practice?
3. Can public relations practice enhance strategy effectiveness?
4. Is communication important to public relations practice?
5. Is it true that relationships matter in public relations practice?

### 1.5. Hypothesis

To achieve the objective of the study, this hypothesis was formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Ho: There is no relationship between public relations practice (PRP) and strategy effectiveness (SE)

Hi: There is a relationship between (PRP) and (SE)

### 1.6. Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is the structure of the study and its hypothesized variables in relation to the research problem. It is usually expressed in a schematic model. Models are frequently used in management research to identify, clarify and explain issues that would otherwise be hidden in an excess of words [9]. The major variables of this study are public relations practice on one hand and strategy effectiveness on the other as independent and dependent variables respectively. The assumption is that planning, relationship management, information, research, and communications are PRP elements that influence SE and organizational excellence. Excellence theory explains the value of PRP to an organization and the society in which it operates. Researchers assert that this value is based on the quality of relationships an organization has with its publics, and for PRP to make meaningful impact in an organization, it must be part of the strategic management process. This means that PRP must contribute to immediate and long-term objectives in order to develop a proactive planto promote public understanding of both reactive and proactive strategies and assess them regularly during implementation. The

underlying perspective would then be to solve any problem and satisfy the objectives of both management and significant publics who are connected and affected by decisions made by the organization. Based on the above explanations, the two major variables of this study were expressed as in figure 1, because models show the interaction of two key concepts and help in theory building [10-11].

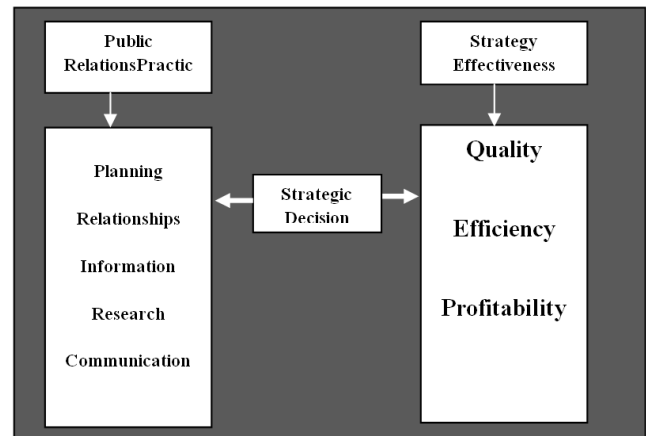


Figure 1. Public Relations Practice And Strategy Effectiveness Model.

Source: Author Designed (2020)

Planning is central to PRP because as a distinctive management function it consists of all forms of forecasts between an organization and its publics. Jefkins [12] explains that effective PRP is imperative for understanding the philosophy of management, the workforce and the target [13-14]. Planning in PRP involves analyzing problems and opportunities, defining goals and the target whose understanding is needed in a unique PR activity. PR plans are both strategic and tactical. For example, decisions concerning the future of an organization should take public relations role into consideration, so as to develop tactical plans to implement and support strategic plans. They also opine that good public relations role begins with good personal relations in an effort to accomplish SE. On the other hand, information is very important for credible PR activity and communications require knowledge and intelligence to ensure understanding and perception to protect the interests of both the organization and its publics. Research is an important PR ingredient to ensure richness and positive perception by relevant publics. In PRP different publications, reports, films, demonstrations, posters, are among the major ways of communicating. But this must be done in such a pattern that pushes towards achieving the strategic decisions and intentions of the organization by taking cognizance of the perspectives of its publics and making sure as far as is possible that *expectations do not move ahead of reality* and Strategic decisions usually drive strategy effectiveness.

## 2. Literature Review

Planning helps in the alignment of all visions, provision of resources, training people as well as the review of operational performance. It is also a strategic approach towards the employment and utilization of available talents. This strategic approach or planning is critical for corporate strategy effectiveness. According to Owolabi and Makinde [15] strategic planning is a forward looking exercise and all managers should be involved in it. They state that when a strategic plan is available and well implemented, an organization will then have little or no challenge in managing external challenges, and that the lack of a strategic plan that covers all aspects of the organization poses a variety of challenges. They also emphasize that strategic planning enhances organizational performance through strategic management [16]. Strategy as a broad-based formula for how business will compete and what policies will be needed to carry out the goals is crucial to focus effort and promote co-ordination of activities to achieve the desired target. Therefore, the process of strategic planning takes into accounts the entire decision-making process and the issues that an organization faces. Accordingly, the strategic planning process is as important as its implementation [17-20]. Planning is the focal factor that drives all PR activities and ensures that the original vision is complied with and then to adjust accordingly to fit emerging events and circumstances. Planning is also necessary to ensure consistency and direction [21]. Critical changes in globalization, technology, and organizational structure lend increasing importance to the management function of PR. It is emphasized that PRP shapes the relationships an organization has with its various publics. Organizations usually have several management functions to help them operate at their maximum capacity in various functional areas like: research and development, finance, legal, human resources, marketing, and operations. According to them, each of these functions is focused on its own contribution to the success of the organization. Then PRP as a unique management function is to help an organization to develop and maintain positive relationships with all key stakeholders by effectively communicating with them. The communication aspect is key in maintaining a satisfactory, long-term trusting relationship with stakeholders. Moreover, PRP provides the greatest value to an organization when used *strategically*. The implication of this is that PRP can have positive correlation with SE in terms of growth, sustainability and profitability.

### 2.1. Conceptual Review

This conceptual review is based on the study argument that certain components of PRP influence SE. For example, good planning is one of the best ways to practice preventive rather

than remedial PR, and PR effectiveness depends on good planning. The planning process involves going through elements that provide a structure to the PR campaign. Effective PR campaign also requires the development of a management strategic mindset, behavior and attitude to boost SE. This is important because PR as a top management role makes more positive impact on SE than as a technician role. Organizations are part of a greater environment made up of many systems and therefore, use PRP to bring back information on how productive their relationships are with clients, customers, and other stakeholders. Relationship building is crucial in PRP and SE because an organization enhances its credibility when it demonstrates honest performance, open communications, and consistency between performance and communications, commitment to problem-solving, and establishment of feasible expectations. The relationship factor emphasizes that PRP must become part of the dominant coalition to enhance SE [22]. In some organizations the PR role is performed by the Chief Information Officer (CIO) who is often part of the management decision-making process. The ability to make good decisions often defines strategy effectiveness. To make good decisions, management needs good information. By definition, good information helps to reduce uncertainty in making a decision. It is also stated that rarely is a decision made with utter certainty, but management needs enough information to have confidence that their decisions will result in positive consequences. Such information is provided as data regarding various organizational functions. Also, since PR role is to help the organization to develop and maintain good relationships, it must provide information about how the organization can achieve its objectives. It is recognized that all PR work is underpinned by research. This involves research on issues, organizations, publics, competition, opportunities, threats, among others. PR manager or CIO must spend considerable time incorporating research findings into position statements, public relations plans, communication campaigns, media briefing materials, and other activities. Literature explains that these factors are variously gathered through interviews, review of library materials, data bases, websites, and informal conversations. Research sometimes involves the use of survey techniques. It is generally, believed that good research results influence PR objectives and strategies, which in turn form the basis for evaluating strategic implementation, as well as the ultimate SE [23]. Today, PR roles are required in all modern human organizations to influence SE and organizational effectiveness. PRP uses a variety of communication *channels* to enhance the organization's reputation. This emphasizes that, most importantly, the communications function provides strategic counsel to the organizational leaders to help them in making excellent decisions [24].



## 2.2. Theoretical Review

Any profession exists only by public consent, and PRP provides an overriding social benefit when people have a voice. PR advises the *dominant coalition*, the primary decision makers of the organization, about problems and opportunities in the environment and help these decision-makers to respond to changes effectively. The key is that publics are structural. This means that as the situation, problem, or opportunity changes, the organization must communicate the changes. This makes it imperative for PR to strive on the basis of different theories to promote SE. A theory is a prediction of how events and actions are related. For example, there are basic theories about many actions and events in PRP to influence SE. There is almost a loud agreement in the theoretical literature that good management requires the knowledge of different theoretical models of PR so as to make good decisions. For example, theories of relationships relate to the systems theory that evaluates relationships and structure as they relate to the *whole*. It also relates to the situational theory that maintains the situations and defines relationships as well as the approaches to conflict resolution for mutual gain. The theories of cognition and behavior attempt to ensure that behavior is understood by knowing how people think. The social exchange theory predicts behavior of groups and individuals. Others include the diffusion theory, social learning theory and the theories of mass communication which people read, see, and listen to set the agenda for society's discussion and interaction. However, despite the efficacy of these other theories, the systems theory offers most useful insights to the practice of PR. The systems theory provides a framework through which to view organizations and their relationships with the environment. Therefore, systems theory is importantly used to explain how PR help to understand and manage the relationships an organization has with its publics that make up its environment [25].

## 3. Research Methodology

Research methodology is important because research itself involves the process of arriving at dependable solutions to problems through the planned and systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of data. Research is reserved for activities designed to discover facts and relationships that will make knowledge more effective.

### 3.1. Research Design

A research design is the structure, programme and strategy upon which hypotheses are evaluated [26]. The exploratory research design was used for the study. A combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques can be used in

explanatory research. This method is historical in nature and does not often require a large sample or a structured questionnaire. Abebrese and Smith [27] state that the strength of qualitative research technique is in its capacity to provide insights, rich details and thick descriptions. They emphasize that richness is provided by paying close attention to concept, context and process.

### 3.2. Sources of Data

Data for the study were collected from secondary and primary sources; such as: books, journal articles, annual reports, government reports, newspapers, magazines, personal interviews, observations, surveys, among others. Secondary data are information collected previously for some other purpose other than the research project at hand, whereas primary data are information gathered and assembled specifically for the research objective at hand [28].

### 3.3. Data Collection Method

Each data collection method has advantages and disadvantages. However, among the best approach is using multiple method of collecting data because it offers the researcher a chance to cross check the information obtained through the various methods. Osuala [29] posits that a common technique used to improve the internal validity of data is triangulation. This may be defined as the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspects of human behavior. He explains that in the social sciences, triangular techniques attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the complexity of human behavior by studying it from more than one standpoint and or even using a variety of methods, and even combining qualitative and quantitative methods in some cases.

### 3.4. Population, Sample and Size

The population comprised of all the public companies listed on the floor of the Nigerian Stock Exchange (NSE). The sample was selected through the judgmental technique, while the size was determined by the sample ratio concept [30].

### 3.5. Area of Study

The study was conducted in Southeast Nigeria comprised of five states out of the thirty six states in Nigeria. It is believed that the opinion of the people in this area is representative of the opinion of the people in Nigeria, based on the 1/10<sup>th</sup> principle [31].

### 3.6. Decision Rule

The decision rule for the mean cut-off point for the analysis of responses to the research questions was at 3 points. According to Nwankwo [32] this method is appropriate to

answer research questions.

### 3.7. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed through descriptive and regression statistical methods. The Ordinary Least Square (OLS) technique was used for the regression analysis. OLS technique is a method used to estimate the unknown parameter in a linear regression model with the goal of minimizing the differences between observed variances in a dataset. The method was not chosen because of its simplicity but also due to its unique properties of linearity, efficiency, sufficiency, least variances, unbiasedness, and least mean errors. The F-test and t-test were used to determine the overall adequacy of the regression line using the E-View Statistical Package.

### 3.8. Model Specification

Model specification is the expression of a relationship into precise mathematical form. According to Koutsoyiannis [33] economic theory does not indicate the functional form of any

relationship. This means that economic theory does not state whether a relationship will be expressed in linear form, quadratic form or in a cubic form. On the strength of this, it was decided to specify the relationship between SE and PRP as

$$SE = b_0 + b_1 \text{ PLG}_t + b_2 \text{ REL}_t + b_3 \text{ INF}_t + b_4 \text{ COM}_t + u$$

Where:

SE - Strategy Effectiveness

PLG - Planning

REL - Relationships

INF - Information

COM - Communications

$b_0$  - Constant term

$b_1, b_2, b_3, b_4$  - Coefficient attached to explanatory variable.

$t$  - Time period

$u$  - Stochastic error term.

## 4. Presentation of Result

**Table 1.** Profile of Respondents (n=98).

S/N	Description	Category	Total	Percentage
1	Sex	a) Female	58	59.18
		b) Male	40	40.82
2	Education	a) Diplomas	20	20.41
		b) Degrees	65	66.32
		c) Others	13	13.27
3	Age	a) 18 – 30 years	35	35.71
		b) 31 – 65 years	40	40.82
		c) 66 - 70 years	23	23.47
4	Experience	a) Below 10 years	30	30.61
		b) 11 – 30 years	48	48.98
		c) Above 31 years	20	20.41
5	Status	a) Low	25	25.51
		b) Middle	42	42.86
		c) High	31	31.63

Source: Fieldwork (2020)

Table 1 demonstrated the characteristics of the respondents, who provided useful information to enhance the academic potency of this study.

**Table 2.** Frequency and Mean for Response to Research Questions.

S/N	Restatement of Research Questions	Scores					x	$\bar{n}$	$\bar{x}$	Decision rule @ 3 points
		SA	A	N	D	SD				
		5	4	3	2	1				
1	Planning does not help in effective PRP	10	3	1	14	70	163	98	1.66	Rejected
2	Research contributes to effective PRP	50	20	2	6	20	368	98	3.76	Accepted
3	PR enhances SE	55	18	1	5	19	379	98	3.87	Accepted
4	Communication function is not important in PRP and SE	15	2	2	10	69	178	98	1.82	Rejected
5	Relationships form the basis of sound PRP	60	10	3	2	23	376	98	3.84	Accepted

Source: Fieldwork (2020)

Table 2 was used to analyze the responses to the research questions.

**Table 3.** Regression Analysis.

Variables	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
PRP	3.232600	1.240286	2.657766	0.0231
C	3.549931	0.269590	13.16791	0.0000
R-squared	0.802072	Mean dependent var		0.024801
Adj. R-squared	0.649820	S.D. dependent var		0.031579
S.E. of regression	0.018687	Akaike info criterion		4.763781
Sun squared resid	0.004540	Schwarz criterion		4.223839
Log likelihood	68.16537	Han-Quinn criterion		4.620534
F-Statistic	5.268059	Durbin-Watson Stat		1.783499
Prob (F-statistic)	0.003355			

Source: E-View Statistical Package

Table 3 was used to statistically establish the relationship between PRP and SE.

#### 4.1. Discussion

The study made use of competent respondents so as to provide valid information for the study. About 60 percent or 58 of the total respondents were male while the rest were female. They were in the age range between 18 years, and 70 years, with different academic qualifications, and falling within the income range from low to high; as shown in table 1. As in table 2, the respondents, among others, agreed that planning is crucial in effective PRP and SE. This supports the earlier view of Jefkins [12] that PR helps an organization in achieving specific objectives, and mutual understanding. For example at 1.82 points in table 2 column 4, the respondents rejected the research statement that communications function is not important in PRP and SE, to agree with the Saylor Academy [34] that an important component in PRP is a *communication strategy*. Communication is also key in maintaining a satisfactory, long-term, trusting relationship with publics and stakeholders. The Saylor Academy posits that “*balancing the needs of publics is just one facet of the impact PR can have on achieving organizational goals*”. The Academy emphasizes that successful communications build brand recognition, encourage investor interest in a publicly traded company and increase the effectiveness of traditional advertising and marketing efforts. Through effective PRP publics can appreciate the impact of an organization and its strategy in its area of operation. It is recognized that the impact of well-conceived strategic communications can build upon the strengths of an organization. PRP is linked to SE because, an effective PRP can be expressed in action; and philosophy of doing what people like, the way they like [35]. As in table 3, in regression analysis, there is an important measure  $R^2$ , which measures the goodness-of-fit of the regression model. By this, it calculates the percentage of variation in the dependent variable accounted for by the independent variable(s). The possible values of  $R^2$  range from 0 to 1.00. The closer  $R^2$  is to 1.00 the greater the percentage of the explained variation. A high value of  $R^2$ , of

about .80 or more would indicate that the independent variable is a good predictor of values of the dependent variable of interest. A low value of about .25 or less would indicate a poor predictor, and a value between .25 and .80 would suggest a moderate predictor [36]. In this study, the  $R^2$  value of 0.80 suggests that there is a strong positive relationship between the variables of interest. This means that the independent variables explain about 80 percent of the variation in the dependent variable. The goodness-of-fit test of the model is very good with the adjusted  $R^2$  value of 0.65. The value of Durbin-Watson Statistics is 1.78 that is within the range between 1.5 and 2.5. On this account, it is safe to state that there is no autocorrelation among the independent variables of the study. The F-test and t-test are significant at 0.05 level. Therefore,  $H_0$ : was rejected and  $H_1$ : accepted to confirm that PRP explains SE. This is the objective of the study.

#### 4.2. Recommendations

- Adequate planning is essential for effective PRP so that organizations can fully implement important strategies without being misunderstood.
- Relationship management is imperative in organizational excellence and can be helpful in SE.
- Successful organizations in the present century and beyond will be those that give priority to PRP and SE, and this must form part of top management action.
- PRP must be guided by business ethical standards, so as to gain acceptability by individuals, organizations and society at large.
- PRP is critical to reputation management and should be deployed by organizations for SE and overall goal achievement.

#### 4.3. Scope for Further Study

Most publicly traded companies do not give PR executives a seat in their boards; therefore, further study could examine the need for the reversal of such shortfall and its relationship with performance.

## 5. Conclusion

The study was designed to investigate the relationship between PRP and SE through the exploratory research design. Conceptual and theoretical literature emphasizes that PRP is a distinctive management function and critical to SE and organizational effectiveness. 98 respondents participated in the study and data were collected through primary and secondary sources. Data were organized, triangulated and coded before they were analyzed using descriptive and regression statistical techniques. The result of this original study showed a strong positive relationship between PRP and SE. This is the objective of the investigation.

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## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

This author declares no potential conflicts of interest to this research, authorship, and/or publication of this paper.

## Contribution/Originality

This paper is one of the few studies to find strong positive relationship between public relations practice and strategy effectiveness. It emphasizes that organizations strive for effectiveness without which they will cease to exist. The paper posits that effectiveness as a multidimensional phenomenon is best achieved when strategy is implemented.

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