THE NEED FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES IN EUROPE AND ASIA

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ABSTRACT

The use of the term professionalism in public relations (PR) is normally linked to the expression of a need to improve occupational standing (Pieczka, 2000). However, for decades, scholars and practitioners alike have argued about ways to enhance the professionalism and prestige of PR (Sha, 2011b). In general, this paper will discuss the current competencies practised by PR practitioners in some of the countries in Europe and Asia. Based on a literature review, the best competencies will be identified, in order to provide guidelines for a developing professional competencies model that is consistent with the culture and environment of PR practitioners.

Keywords: public relations, professionalism competencies, Europe, Asia

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Research on the profession of public relations (PR) has shown increasing numbers around the world and, in most of the studies, the issue of professionalism is a key area of focus (de Bussy & Wolf, 2009). However, this increasing can be due to the argument expressed by most of the studies which is that PR suffers from low standards of professionalism (Cameron, Sallot, & Weaver-Lariscy, 1996; Van Ruler, 2005; Sallot, Cameron, & Weaver-Lariscy, 1997; Wylie, 1994).

Even, Lorenzo-Molo (2007) found the fact that PR was led by an esteemed professional and supported by well-respected businessmen.
However, most business leaders involved in Abdullah & Threadgold’s (2008) research argued that the talents and competencies of current PR practitioners are still expected to be at a low level. PR is a fast growing and modern management discipline but has not yet become a ‘true’ profession like medicine, law and accountancy (Abdullah & Threadgold, 2008).

According to Piccitotto (2011), an occupation will becomes a profession when members of an occupation group opt to acquire certain traits and respect some behavioural norms, e.g. comply with ethical codes; master a distinct body of knowledge; demonstrate loyalty to colleagues; and achieve agreed quality standards in the conduct of their craft, etc. Unfortunately, the use of the term professionalism in PR is normally linked to the expression of a need to improve its occupational standing (Pieczka, 2000). For decades, scholars and practitioners alike have argued about ways to enhance the professionalism and prestige of PR (Sha, 2011b).

In a study done by Cameron, Sallot and Weaver Lariscy (1996), several dimensions of professionalism in PR have been identified which include skills and activities; salary levels; use of research; the role of PR within the organisation; ethics; racial and gender equity; accreditation and licensing, and, education. Then, in 2009, Broom discovered five indicators of professional status. Broom said, a field of practice could only be considered a “profession” if it had (1) “specialised educational preparation” for entry into the field, (2) “a body of theory-based knowledge,” (3) “codes of ethics and standards of performance,” (4) “autonomy in practice and acceptance of personal responsibility by practitioners,” and (5) community recognition that the field offered “a unique and essential service”.

However, as concluded by Arnold (2002), in a comprehensive review of the professionalism practitioners are still expected to be at a low level. PR is a fast growing and modern literature over the past 30 years, what is now needed most are solid assessment tools of professional behaviour (cited in Lattore & Lumb, 2005). This statement is parallel with Evetts (2011), which also mentioned that the professional values emphasise a shared identity based on competencies which is produced by education, training and apprenticeship socialisation, and sometimes guaranteed by licensing.

**1.1 PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES**

Professional competencies are the qualifications practitioners need to execute those tasks (Sha, 2011a; 2011b). A report of the Commission on PR Education in 1987 has identified the competencies that should be required by all PR majors. The competencies were: 1) Principles, practices, theory, emphasis on ethics; 2) Techniques: Writing, message dissemination, media networks; 3) Research for planning and evaluation; 4) PR strategy and implementation including case studies (Leuven, 1999).

Recently, Broom (2009) stated that PR practitioners need communication skills, knowledge of the media and management, problem-solving abilities, motivation, intellectual curiosity, solid writing skills, an understanding of one’s specific business or industry, ability to relate to people and deal with stress, and knowledge of current events.

For Tanloet and Tuamsuk (2011), in terms of organisational services, the core competency is defined as quality, knowledge, basic ability possessed by every individual in the organisation, and, it can be said to be a common characteristic of the organisational personnel and hence, the
organisational culture. However, with the development of technology and the changes of economic and social status, current PR practitioners need to reconsider the existing competencies, adding more competencies, and think about the other elements that can influence their competencies. Furthermore, attempts to measure and demonstrate professionalism have actually increased the demand for the explicit auditing and accounting of professional competences (Evetts, 2011).

Therefore, the purpose of this study will be to find out the professional competencies that need to be practised by PR practitioners in Europe and Asia. However, focus has been given to the countries with a very high human development category in the list of the Human Development Index issued by the United Nations Development Programme in 2011. Unemployment, inequality, and population growth are low in these countries and the citizens enjoy long life expectancy, a high educational level, high health expenditure, as well as high income and a high GDP per capita.

By referring to these current situations and examples, it should be easier for scholars and PR practitioners to identify those appropriate professional competencies. Organisations and employers can use the information regarding the competencies needed in this current study as a guide for them in achieving the organisation’s mission and objectives through their PR practitioners.

1.2 PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES PRACTICE IN EUROPE AND ASIA

To identify the professional competencies to be focused on, this current study used the list developed by the Universal Accreditation Board (UAB). In 2000, after rigorous qualitative and quantitative research, the UAB compiled a list of 10 knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) that comprised those professional competencies deemed most necessary to execute the tasks (Sha, 2011a; 2011b). Based on this list, below is the explanation about the professional competencies and its practice among PR practitioners in Europe and Asia.

1.2.1 Researching, Planning, Implementing & Evaluating Programmes Competency

Researching, planning, implementing and evaluating programmes is the professional competency that includes analytical skills, audience identification and communication, evaluation of programmes, financial management, planning ability, applied research, basic research, stakeholder management, strategic thinking, and methodology.

Although most of the research into PR measurement and evaluation has been done from the perspective of United States (U.S.) practice, there is evidence that the reluctance to employ more sophisticated evaluation techniques is a global phenomenon. In a survey of studies in four countries, including the United Kingdom (UK), the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) found that, although the recognition of the need for better evaluation processes is high, the actual use is relatively low (IPRA, 1994; cited in Baskin, Hahn, Seaman and Reines, 2010).

However, effort still can be seen through the adoption of the Barcelona Declaration of Measurement Principles at the European Measurement Summit in June 2010. This statement of seven principles of measurement of PR activity was a benchmark of basic measurement and evaluation practices and an attempt by the measurement service industry to define the tenets of media analysis before addressing the challenges of both social media...
with its emphasis on ‘conversation.’ The Barcelona Declaration demonstrates that PR measurement and evaluation is big service business and a long way from the local and regional cuttings agencies of 50 to 100 years ago (Watson, 2012).

In Asia, an Israel professional PR firm starts planning an event several months before it occurs, and sometimes even earlier. In order to notify the general public about the event and attract it, the PR practitioner, in combination with regional and cultural reporters, publishes precursory articles and photographs in the newspapers. A seasoned PR firm utilises the benefits of preplanned photographs, which include the ability to organise the site, to coordinate the various participants, and thus save hours of labour for the photographers (Lahav & Avraham, 2008).

Meanwhile, the campaign to promote local Jewish products, Tozeret haAretz, was inspired by needs and ideology where competitions exist between cheap products and a demand for the protection of Jewish products. The Tozeret haAretz campaign used guards, press publicity, and the denunciation of uncooperative consumers by mobilising public opinion against them. Beyond conventional publicity, the campaign also followed earlier Zionist public relations in using the education system to deliver the message (Toledano, 2009).

1.2.2 Ethics and Law

Ethical behaviour, integrity, and knowledge of legal issues are under this competency. Differences can be seen where most of the PR practitioners in European countries have a tendency in applying legal method compare to Asian countries.

For example, The National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia approved the Integrity and Prevention of Corruption Act, which was enacted on 5 June, 2010, where its intention was to “ensure transparency of lobbying so as to support sound lobbying practice and restrict and punish unethical lobbying practice by defining the conditions for lobbying activities in the public sector” (Article 2, Para. 4; cited in Vercic & Vercic, 2012).

However, besides law, ethical approach still not being abandoned. One of the European protagonists, Lucien Matrat and the group of academics he led, known as the “European doctrine (or school) of public relations”, who were mainly French, represented a body of knowledge which was characterised by an ethical and anthropological approach to public relations. It is this approach that led to Matrat’s drafting of the Code of Athens and the creation of a theory of public relations based on human beings (Xifra, 2012).

In Asia, an interesting and significant finding in Korea is that practitioners who work in global PR firms have their own unique professionalism which has been formed based on diverse factors affecting their job roles. The researcher identifies their professionalism as “Confucianism-oriented professionalism” based on fidelity, loyalty, and Jeong, a uniquely Korean emotion (Jeong, 2009).

1.2.3 Communication Models and Theories

Communication models and theories competency include the application of communication models and an understanding of the barriers to communication.

Data suggest that PR in Croatia is often practised through personal relationships and rich
communication channels. Moreover, organizations practise a version of Sriramesh’s personal influence model which is based on a cultural variable of power distance. Croatian PR is characterized by a heavy reliance on personal invitations, telephone contacts, and other relational methods for conducting and evaluation PR (Taylor, 2004).

Besides that, in study that uses ‘framing’ concept to analyse the meanings and contexts of media coverage and political PR during the national debate on immigration in Germany, the findings suggest that the political players were effective in placing their preferred frames in the media and, respectively, being related to these frames (Froehlich & Rudiger, 2006).

Meanwhile, evidence showed that, in Japan, the organisation has a participative corporate culture that allows the PR director to work closely with the top management. Kao Corporation’s higher management does not interfere in the development of the message strategy and the PR department has the autonomy to decide the best solution for the communication problem. The idea of collaborative efforts between departments and the practice of being a socially responsible company suggest that Kao’s PR department uses a combination of communication models and Japanese management styles to project a good corporate citizen image (Muk, 2012).

In handling communication barriers, Public and Employee Relations (PER) employees in United Arab Emirates (UAE) noted the function of coordinating with local institutions and suggesting interactive workshops with local people, especially for new employees, who can meet local people, exchange information, and work with new groups. They also stated that foreigners always need special courses, such as ones in learning the Arabic language, local dialects, and local customs. All PER practitioners believe that activities are vital to the organisation (Al-Jenaibi, 2011).

1.2.4 Business Literacy

This professional competency includes business literacy, environmental scanning, industry knowledge, knowledge of current organisational issues, knowledge of business technology and trends, understanding of all levels of management, and usage of an organisation’s resources.

Current results indicate that Spanish PR practitioners consider the economic crisis and Web 2.0 context as a huge opportunity in four ways: (1) because they make organisations aware of the strategic value of PR (and the importance of looking after their online and offline reputation); (2) because advertising budget cuts have been partly allocated PR as better value for money; (3) because PR agencies that offer a crisis communication specialty have seen an increase in demand for their services; and (4) because Web 2.0 is a natural environment for public relations, where new figures such as the community manager simply transfer the management of brand and company reputations to this new digital medium (Estanyol, 2012).

Similarly, in Brunei, the trend in the applications of information technology (IT) continued to grow at a steady rate as technologies become more affordable and easy to use. The accessibility to the Internet and the World Wide Web as enabler to reach out to a wider audience has further encouraged business sectors to continue invest in IT to sustain and enhance their business advantage (Yap, 2002). Moreover, when there is collaboration with other developed countries
such as, Germany, which is willing to cooperate with Ministry of Industry and Primary Resources, Brunei, in renewable energy development (Corporate Communications, IT Centre, 2011).

In Japan, Kao’s PR department uses newsletters on the Intranet, videos, e-mails and face to face meetings to communicate with its 5,000 plus employees in understanding of all levels of management. Kao’s management philosophy also insists that lifetime employment still has its advantage in establishing relationships with its staff during the current economic downturn in Japan. The staff educational programmes help keep employees’ morale up and raise their quality in servicing the customers (Muk, 2012).

1.2.5 Management Skills & Issues

Management skills and issues is the professional competency that include diversity, decision-making abilities, leadership skills, looking beyond prejudices/mind-set, organisational skills, problem-solving skills, sensitivity to cultural concerns, and team building. However, most of the European countries seem like having problem in practising this competency.

In Belgium, the persons in charge fulfil the role of manager as well as technician; however, female PR practitioners fulfil more activities that fit into the activity pattern of a communications technician (Van Gorp & Pauwels, 2007). The fact that the female heads of PR in Van Gorp & Pauwels sample are less often members of the executive committee may also be due to the perceived value of communications and PR within the organisation.

Besides this, the strong reactions from the Muslim world towards the controversial cartoon published in 2005 also took the Danish government by surprise. Denmark had traditionally benefited from a long-standing reputation as a tolerant and decent nation, nourished over the years through active United Nations membership as a substantial third world donor, but the cartoon case shows how the Danish government opted for new branding inspired public diplomacy initiatives as a means to enhancing the reputational foundation for the national security in a post 9/11 context (Rasmussen & Merkelsen, 2012).

In discussing about diversity, several interviewees in Bahrain talked positively about their experiences in PR and were confident that there would be equal opportunities for their promotion in the future. They were optimistic because a number of Bahraini public relations women had succeeded in achieving managerial roles in the field (Al-Saqer, 2008).

Meanwhile, in the UAE, all Public and Employee Relations (PER) practitioners agreed that they welcomed new employees from different cultures. In several organisations, mostly those with numerous PER members, they mentioned the existence of official training programmes and workshops for new employees from different cultures. Therefore, PER staff did feel that guiding, advising, and counselling new employees were all part of their specialty. For example, some PER staff felt it was their duty to meet new employees at the airport and offer them good accommodation (Al-Jenaibi, 2011).

Singaporean PR practitioners described examples of the need for intercultural competence in a professional context, but these examples tended to involve work with international campaigns or clients, or in the diverse workplace. A few acknowledged the impact of cultural diversity within Singapore on their professional practice, in terms of campaign development, with two participants describing local campaigns as
“homogenous”. This finding is surprising but could stem from government policies and laws reinforcing the need for social harmony, sensitivity around race, and “mindfulness”, which, in the words of one participant, was “inculcated in Singapore’s youth” (Fitch, 2012).

However, despite Singapore’s organisations recognising the increasing importance of communication with practitioners playing an increasingly more prominent role in recent decades, this study found that the most senior in-house communicators interviewed lack the expertise, and the opportunity when knowledge is present, to play the managerial role. Their work thus lacks the potential to create and add value with desirable outcomes to organisations in the long run (Yeo & Sriramesh, 2009).

1.2.6 Crisis Communication Management

Crisis communication management is the professional competency that includes the understanding of different phases of a crisis and risk management capabilities.

The current findings taken from a random group of Dutch speaking Belgian individuals stress the importance of timing in addition to the content of crisis communication. The difficult choice among several crisis response strategies such as apology, denial, etc. can be avoided by simply selecting the right crisis timing strategy. The managerial implications of these results are that public relations practitioners have several options when confronted with a preventable crisis. They can avoid the difficulty of convincing the management or the legal department to take explicit responsibility for a crisis. If the organisation’s management or its legal department fear that an apology will lead to financial losses, the organisation can simply steal thunder and be the first to give stakeholders the factual information about a crisis, thereby minimising reputational damage (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2012).

In Denmark, the vast majority of organisations have a crisis or contingency plan, and most of these plans contain an internal dimension relating to the management and communication with the internal stakeholders during a crisis. Thus, the study shows a rather professional and formalised behaviour towards crisis management in general, but also when it comes to managing a crisis in relation to the internal organisational stakeholders specifically. In addition, the results clearly indicate a strong relation between organisational size and crisis management; the larger the organisation, the more likely it is to have a crisis plan (Johansen, Aggerholm & Frandsen, 2012).

However, in Belgium, the results show that effective strategies were only used by a few respondents. Denying the rumour by a trusted outside source, for example, was only used by half of the respondents, but they considered it to be more effective than most of the other strategies. “Enhancing formal communication” strategies had been applied by more public sector respondents than the “structuring uncertainty” strategies (Aertsen & Gelders, 2011).

In Singapore, of the 21 PR agencies interviewed, 11 embarked on such tie-ups with freelancers or business collaborators as they were of the view that such joint efforts complemented the skills and expertise of their small in-house crisis teams. The other 10 either handled all the crisis work by themselves or for the multinational agencies. In the event that specialised crisis skills were needed, they would fly in their colleagues from
other offices from their international network (Pang & Yeo, 2012).

However, when SARS started to break out in its neighbouring Guangdong province in November 2002, the Hong Kong government announced the establishment of an investigative team. Unfortunately, when being asked when the government could release the investigation results, the Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food of the Hong Kong government, Yeoh Eng-kiong, replied that it might take “a few days at the shortest or years” to come up with the answers. On 5 May, the day after the number of new infected cases had dropped to a one-digit unit, the government announced it was allocating USD64 million to fund related research. However, the measure was seen as vain talk because no concrete actions and timetable were suggested (Lee, 2009).

1.2.7 Media Relations

This professional competency includes media relations, news sensibility, understanding of the media, and understanding of the distribution system.

In Spain, a usual practice in Catalan organisations, as well as sending press releases to the media for their publication, is to invite journalists to press meetings. When journalists were asked whether they considered that they should always attend a press conference or only when they consider that the subsidy to be supplied would be worth it. 60% believed they should go to meetings only when the story was worth it, although we must not underestimate the 35% who believed that they should always go (Xifra, 2009).

However, study by Froehlich & Rudiger (2006) also indicate that journalists tend to use their power to alter PR messages when the communications from political players do not have a distinct focus and/or when the PR focuses were not among the mainstream aspects dominating the general political debate.

A commercial survey in the local media reported senior executives in Singapore to be the most paranoid in the world when it comes to negative publicity of their firms (Luo, 2009; cited in Yeo & Sriramesh, 2009). Being able to call upon practitioners anytime and vice versa is a way of being in control of information released to the public so as to minimise negative publicity. This observation is further supported by the fact that all the practitioners unanimously reported that managing media was one of their most important activities (Yeo & Sriramesh, 2009).

Significantly, media environmental specificity in Korea is one of the strongest contributors to Korean practitioners’ perceptions of their job roles. The Korean media environment reflects a mixed form of the characteristics of Confucianism and Korean media specificity. In Korean society, there are a plethora of media, and the media have tremendous power and influence over the public. Thus Korean public relations practitioners are sensitive to media response and their relationship with the media could be termed submissive. However, once they establish personal relationships with media personnel, based on loyalty and faith, such relationships also affect practitioners’ job roles (Jeong, 2009).

In Israel, PR research has demonstrated that close personal relationships between PR practitioners and journalists help the former to receive better access to the media both at times of crisis and on an everyday basis. This study too
demonstrates that PR practitioners are not assessed only according to their everyday work routines, but also based upon the use of tactics such as forming give-and-take relationships with journalists and understanding how the national media work, enhancing the image of a client by linkage to an event related to another client, constructing the council head as an expert in some field in order to increase positive coverage, and the creative initiation of events and photographs. All of these tactics enable a professional PR practitioner to create and initiate news items promoting positive events and to limit the number of items perceived as negative (Lahav & Avraham, 2008).

1.2.8 Using Information Technology Efficiently

For this professional competency, it includes information management, knowledge of distribution channels, and technological literacy.

Despite the realities of the Digital Divide, Information Communication Technologies (ICT) has created increased opportunities for social interaction among the citizens of the world, predominantly to those who live in urban areas. The level of technology available to PR practitioners and their publics, and the level of technological competence each possesses, directly affects the ability to utilise social media and other forms of virtual communication with stakeholders near and far (Sriramesh & Duhe, 2009).

However, it would be dangerous for communicators to assume that employees share uniform preferences for internal communication media. The findings which have been assembled in the UK support a need to consider employees as a multi-dimensional set of diverse internal stakeholders rather than a single entity. This suggests that the provision of alternative formats is necessary to enable employees to choose the media they find most acceptable, appropriate and usable. This represents a challenge for internal communication practitioners charged with developing strategy and selecting suitable tactics to achieve communication objectives (Welch, 2012).

In Spain, as a mass phenomenon, Barcelona Football Club’s (BFC’s) activity has become a sumum of events given full coverage in the press, making Barca the main news player in Catalonia, more so than its regional government. Therefore, BFC’s public relations function can be split into two main groups, which are the press and international tours managed by the Press Department, and visits and non-sports event and using the club’s facilities managed by the PR Department. Interestingly, apart from its source-media relationships, the club has three of its own news media which are the Revista Barca newsletter, Diari del Partit (Newspaper of The Match), and the satellite television channel Barca TV which has over 50,000 subscribers. The newsletter Revista Barca has a circulation of 130,000 copies and therefore has the largest circulation of all press written in Catalan, surpassing all the Catalan daily papers (Xifra, 2008).

However, in Poland, an unsatisfactory range and quality of investor information is also reflected in company websites. The research supports the hypothesis that most companies fail to adequately use the Internet to engage the investment community. In 2006 only 30% of companies’ websites included basic information such as prior year annual and quarterly reports, market announcements, and contact information for the person responsible for dealing with investors (Niedziolka, 2007).
The good news about online public relations in the UAE is that PR managers and practitioners think they should construct and upgrade the organisation’s website. The majority of them think also that providing press releases, and a press releases archive, posting the companies’ publications and displaying the latest news and events and future activities of the organisation are all indispensable and essential elements of good media relations online. All the respondents think that the Internet has helped their organisation tremendously in promoting online relations with the news media (Kirat, 2007).

In Japan, PR practitioners focus on cementing good relationships with journalists who are members of the press club system (Cooper-Chen & Tanaka, 2008; Watson & Sallot, 2001; cited in Muk, 2012). The press club system is a networking channel for journalists to gain access to the business elites and governmental agencies. Each governmental agency has its own press club and only members are allowed to access its official information and resources (Cooper-Chen & Tanaka, 2008; cited in Muk, 2012). Major media, including newspapers, broadcasting companies and magazine publishers, are the press club system members (Muk, 2012).

1.2.9 History of and Current Issues in PR

This is the professional competency that includes knowledge of the field of PR.

Today PR, according to Sriramesh and Duhe (2009) is more effective, especially when working on a global scale, for clients, stakeholders, and the society at large, when practitioners take into account not only the economic, but also the social and political factors that influence relationship building with publics.

Furthermore, concerns have risen about the need for an increase in business, economics, and financial knowledge among practitioners, accompanied by the need to recognise the economic context in PR education. In this context, Lawniczak (2009) states that the only two PR departments which are attached to faculties of economics and distinct from business or management are at the University of Pretoria in South Africa, and at Poznan University of Economics in Poland.

In the UK, practitioners may need to take account of employees’ views on resources and cost effectiveness in the selection of the decision making process. Practitioners need to be aware of formats deemed acceptable and appropriate by employees in their organisations in order to inform their strategies, and also need to be aware of the media attributes valued by their organisations’ employees, including usability and employee-controllability (Welch, 2012).

Lately, online PR has become a major medium that PR practitioners should use efficiently and rationally for effective PR. PR professionals should adopt and master the new technology because of the various services it provides for a transparent, democratic and effective communication to promote and develop strong relationships between the organisation and its publics (Kirat, 2007). However, the range and quality of disclosure of information by most of the companies in Poland is unsatisfactory. Companies often content themselves with disclosing only the information required by law and regulations. Companies invoke trade secrets to avoid full disclosure (Niedziolka, 2007). Similarly, in over two thirds of the companies in the UAE, the PR department does not design or maintain the company’s website. This is a negative trend in online PR (Kirat, 2007).
Besides that, lack of knowledge has meant that the Hong Kong government’s crisis management during an outbreak of SARS was considered the worst among its other counterparts such as the Canadian, Macau and Singapore governments (Cheng, 2004; cited in Lee, 2009). For example, the director of the Government Information Service (GIS), who was supposedly the Chief Executive’s public relations advisor and representative, remained absent from the scene throughout the SARS crisis. With over 400 staff in the GIS office, there was not one single designated media spokesperson from the unit. The office had been doing little besides updating the daily figures of contracted medical staff every day through press releases (Lee, 2009).

1.2.10 Advanced Communication Skills

Consensus-building, consulting skills and negotiating skills are including in this professional competency.

In an exploratory study of 24 Norwegian companies, Haug and Koppang (1997) found that lobbying is conducted by CEOs, managed by PR departments and is composed of a number of staff from other departments. They also noted that “in a relatively small country like Norway, CEOs often know personally the people they wish to influence. They have often moved in the same circles for years and sometimes even have the same political affiliations” (cited in Vercic & Vercic, 2012).

However, an international internal communication study by Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2012) in Finland found that the employees in the globally operating NGO were not happy with the strategy of multiple corporate languages, which is English, French, Spanish and Portuguese – in spite of the fact that at the outset the decision seemed to nurture equality and fairness. The lack of clear and explicit guidelines as to when, how, and why each of the four languages should be used was perceived as problematic.

Findings showed that agencies in Singapore hired PR consultants based on skills such as writing, speaking and ability to manage the media. For some, lack of direct experience was compensated for by in-house training. International agencies appeared to have an advantage over the local agencies by virtue of their access to expertise and knowledge from their international network (Pang & Yeo, 2012).

In Israel, communication campaigns contributed to major controversies over the economic development of the Jewish state, its different sectors, and its economic relations with the rest of the world. The Zionist leadership designed messages and campaigns to mobilise the Jewish people and the new settlers in Israel to build a nation. They had campaigns designed to prefer Jewish workers and Jewish products over Arab employees and imported products, and to connect the Jewish people to the land by promoting agriculture and settlement (Toledano, 2009).

In Brunei, lack of communication between parties involved has become one of the main factors for the delay in the execution of construction projects. There is no communication team overseeing all project team members throughout the life cycle of the project. The roles and responsibilities were not clearly identified and project teams were represented by different authorities or departments. There are no appropriate overall organisational structures and communication systems linking all project teams throughout the life of the project (Salleh, 2009).
1.3 DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Competency is demonstrated in the ability to effectively manage the varying perceptions and expectations of others (Chong, 2011). Sha (2011b) found that the top professional competencies mastered by PR practitioners in the U.S. were the use of information technology and new media channels; management skills and issues; media relations; research, planning, implementation and evaluation of PR programmes; use of advanced communication skills, and incorporation of business literacy into PR duties.

However, the literature review showed that most of the PR practitioners in Europe and Asia have weaknesses in mastering the professional competencies which PR practitioners in U.S considered as important and needed in current situations, such as decision making and technology literacy.

There might be many reasons to explain these situations. Abdullah (2009) argued that western models are still inadequate and may not be directly applied to a country where multicultural facets should be taken into account.

However, as mentioned by Yaxley (2011), the rewards of pursuing a career in PR seem to have fallen primarily to those who founded and built up public relations agencies, gaining high profiles and securing corporate clients. The experiences and career paths of most juniors employed in support functions have also largely gone documented.

A few practitioners did progress from a technician role to a managerial role, but promotion within organisations into management functions is lacking in the PR literature. Indeed, although senior positions were available heading up publicity functions within a range of organisations; these were not presented as appropriate for those moving from support roles.

Based on these situations, it is obvious that PR will always be dominated by North American scholars and practitioners. The U.S had more than 3,000 universities teaching PR, more than the rest of the world put together. The two U.S. based practitioner organisations, which are the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), and the International Public Relations Association (IABC), each have more members than the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) (Vercic, van Ruler, Butschi & Flodin, 2001).

Therefore, this current study stresses the need to overcome the poor professional competencies among PR practitioners in both Europe and Asia. In order to improve the quality of PR professional competencies, two things are important in our opinion: In the first place, a stronger cooperation between academicians and practitioners is needed in building the relevant PR professional competencies model based on European and Asian culture and environment. The detail information can be found in industrial training or internship, but surely these efforts should be increased. Secondly, PR practitioners should be more included in research activities. The willingness to cooperate in research projects can help the researcher to understand more about the current problem statement, research questions and also by providing sources for knowledge production.

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