

EVIDENCE FROM AROUND THE WORLD

- The 53rd Italian gov't since WWII, a rightist coalition, falls to corruption. While Italy's multi-party system & reputation for unethical behavior may not be replicated elsewhere, this is one of the large, successful democratic nations. It has averaged a new gov't every year.
- Eastern Europe, "freed" for democracy from the coils of communism, finds that the accompanying market economy means mafiosi, rampant crime, poverty & joblessness.
- The recent US election cannot be explained rationally.

BOOK CITES SPECIAL INTERESTS UNWILLING TO COMPROMISE

The challenge, says Johnson, is "whether Americans can overcome the narrow competing interests that di-

vide & make them increasingly incapable of resolving problems. Failure will almost surely lead to more fragmentation, to more public frustration & cynicism..."

Thru grassroots interviews, he portrays the "frayed American fabric of the 1990s." Conclusion: "failure to address America's increasing racial & ethnic tensions, economic inequities & the rapidly widening gap between the haves & have-nots will inevitably result in new & greater explosions. The Los Angeles riots of April 1992 were not an aberration."

- "People confuse the lack of consensus with the breakdown of the system," says political scientist Bruce Cain. "They don't understand that the system is designed to operate a certain way when there is disagreement -- namely, that it's designed not to do anything."
- Education about the political system "is out of our hands." Beyond university classes, people "get their understanding of the system from talk radio stations." And they, says Cain, are dominated by the whoever-talks-the-loudest form of political discourse that passes for serious discussion of complicated issues.

JOURNALISTIC SENSE OF HUMOR?

Or so caught up in typical attributive style that irrelevancies pass unnoticed? The awful NYC subway fire of 12/21 had its heroes, one an off-duty transit cop, Denfield Otto, who was on his way to choir practice at the time. News reports noted that "Otto, a baritone, was commended by Mayor Giuliani..."

RE-ENGINEERED ROLE OF COMMUNITY & EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

Cain's concern is where pr comes in. **Teaching civics 101 to communities & employees must become a major organizational thrust -- in its own self-interest.**

Surely this is in the interest of practitioners, for pr thrives only in democracies. But democracies depend on an educated populace. ♦

First-of-the Year Issue

RE-ENGINEERING PR TAKING ON LARGE NEW DIMENSIONS

Whether the goal is to

- 1) build a world class operation,
- 2) survive in a new era of measured accountability, or
- 3) do more with dwindling resources,

elements now at play both within the profession & in society conspire to make a fresh look not only necessary but revolutionary. Call it re-engineering, zero-based strategy or what you will, it is part of every practitioner's fate in '95.

Forces shaping the process are the subject of this issue.

RE-ENGINEERING: DOING DIFFERENT THINGS, NOT JUST BETTER

Changing focus is critical. Is pr proposing activities that support organizational strategy -- or become part of the strategy? Or only communicating about strategy?

- The latter is vital, yes. But pr has always done it, in a support role that can easily be outsourced or given to other dep'ts that lack the depth of understanding about relationships, reputation, perceptions & behavior pr pros have.
- To demonstrate this understanding -- to bring it to bear on effectiveness as a value added by pr -- means that **programmatic ideas embodying it must come from us.**

Example: Customer satisfaction or "delight" is on everyone's goal list. Very few organizations are getting anywhere close. Just communicating the need or browbeating employees with repeated messages accomplishes little.

But 1) customer satisfaction modeling, 2) 2-way interaction projects with the customers we want to delight & 3) self-conducted work group research have proven highly effective to change customer service behaviors.

¶ *Does pr stand around waiting to communicate such activities after someone else suggests them...or do we propose & design such programs and provide communications to support them?*

Re-engineering demands the latter course. And applying it in areas where the organization is currently failing is the opportunity.



DOING THINGS BETTER ALSO IMPORTANT -- BUT CHOOSE WISELY

PROCESS IMPROVEMENT. Chuck Sengstock's Quality journey at Motorola demonstrates how pr process can be improved. It means concentrating on the 3 Quality variables: 1) cycle time reduction, 2) zero defects, 3) customer satisfaction.

Quarterly reports to shareholders as recently as '91 took 10 days to produce. In '93 that cycle time fell to less than 2 days. That's re-engineering the process, for sure.

As he points out, wringing out costs in this way is how practitioners can cope with downsizing & other do-more-with-less initiatives. See t&t 4/2/90. (For copy of new article about Sengstock's work, call pr.)

AVOIDING THE ROMANCE OF HI-TECH. Using computers speeds up communication, right? Wrong. Voice mail is quicker than e-mail -- you don't have to type it, merely talk. And recipients get the added, personalizing touch of a human voice.

Faxes are also quicker than e-mail -- and recipients don't even have to log in to receive them.

E-mail has the advantage when a) it's a document you want the recipient to edit, or b) the recipient may want to circulate it to a network of people, whether or not he or she edits it first.

¶ *The reality of electronic networks/the information highway is dawning. Just because it's some new glitzy feature doesn't mean it's better. In most cases, hi-tech is depersonalizing & destroys face-to-face relationship opportunities.*

Re-engineering means pr must stand up to the MIS nerds & techno-whizzes. ◆

PR's EMERGENCE IN FEDERAL GOV'T: TITLES TELL ALL

They form an instructive sequence describing the re-engineering & maturing of the profession from propaganda to co-authorship:

- Originally, we were **press secretaries**.
- Then we became **public information officers**.
- In 1980, after the military had pioneered the term, we became **public affairs operatives**.
- A few years later, our focus shifted to **public participation**.
- Now, the trend is to **stakeholder involvement**.

The supposed "federal order" that prohibits use of **public relations** -- issued, some sources say, in 1913! -- is de facto the rule, since no one ever proposes calling these positions by this generally accepted title. ◆

RE-ENGINEER STRATEGIES TO FOCUS WHERE ORGANIZATION IS FAILING

Re-engineering pr focus begins by asking, "What *isn't* working?" Areas often fitting that category are customer service (see p.1), employee relations & "empowerment," getting supervisors to practice the new management paradigm including face-to-face communication with their work teams, decentralization that is not held accountable, etc.

- In the latest of its Excellence studies, IABC Research Foundation finds a "new generation of CEOs" that **expect practitioners to "help develop strategies** that more effectively communicate the changes that come from quality improvement, re-engineering & organization development programs." (Phase II Qualitative Study, \$29.95 + \$5 shipping from 1-800-776-4222)
- As organizations re-engineer, "**CEOs get more comfortable with hearing new, radical ideas**," points out Jean Farinelli, head of Creamer Dickson Basford. "This may be your golden opportunity to show your CEO the full potential of what public relations could achieve" for the organization.

She cites the example of ensuring that employees stay tuned in to corporate vision & values in the midst of major change. "Decentralized organizations still need a common set of values, a global state of mind. Especially in the kind of horizontal organizations we have today, a company is only as strong as its weakest link -- the person who has the least information."

"Ask yourself why the CFO & general counsel have more access to the CEO. Part of the reason is that accountants & lawyers are more inclined to think of themselves as problem-solvers & policy-shapers. Does a general counsel talk to the CEO about depositions & briefs? Does a CFO talk about debits & credits? We, on the other hand, talk about press releases." -- Jean Farinelli ◆

RE-ENGINEER COMMUNITY RELATIONS TO DEAL WITH THE ULTIMATE

Political analyst Haynes Johnson posits in his book, *Divided We Fall*, the possible demise of democracy. Or at least of many democracies, including the US. This potential disaster is visible all around us -- and would be disastrous for organizations, and particularly for pr. The symptoms are:

1. **An angry populace that lashes out** at anything & sometimes everything, but has no insight beyond simplistic non-solutions -- like "throw out the incumbents" or "build more prisons."
2. **An elected "leadership" that panders to the mob** & offers no real leadership; that asks the electorate "what do you want?" instead of proposing honest solutions from their position of superior access to information.
3. **An economic/political system increasingly serving the top 1-5%** & diminishing the position & future hopes of the great majority.