Science communication, public relations, journalism -
Exploring blurry boundaries

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Science PR: the missing link

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'Many science communicators may not [...] recognise their role in public relations. However, they are in the business of building relationships through communication and they are the guardians and promoters of their organisations’ reputations. That, in my opinion, all makes them far more complete public relations practitioners than some who use the title but who only carry out basic publicity functions’

Sue Wolstenholme, CIPR President, 2014
Pressure to create impact
CCO Perspective

"communication is the key process for the emergence, perpetuation, and transformation of organizations"

Schoenenborn and Vasques, 2017
Organisational actorhood

“an integrated, goal-oriented entity that is deliberately choosing its own actions and that can thus be held responsible for what it does”

Krücken and Meier, 2006
Organisational drivers

Institutionalisation of science communication

• Press releases highly valued by journalists (State of the Media, 2018)
• Fake news may be increasing reliance on quality PR sources
• Scientists routinely work with press officers (e.g. Wilkinson & Weitkamp, 2013)
Engagement or relations?

**Public relations**

‘Establish and **protect the reputation** of a company or brand, to create **mutual understanding** between the organisation and the segments of the public with whom it needs to communicate.’

Cornelissen, 2017

**Public Engagement**

"Public engagement describes the myriad of ways in which the **activity and benefits** of higher education and research can be shared with the public. Engagement is by definition a **two-way process**, involving interaction and listening, with the goal of **generating mutual benefit**."

UK NCCPE, nd
‘. PR sceptics seem to imply that public relations is something that research organisations could (and should) choose to avoid. This is something of a paradox, since scientific organisations and science as such, have no choice other than to relate and build relationships through communication.’

Autzen & Weitkamp, forthcoming
Levels in public relations

“Managing the trust portfolio” Borchelt and Nielsen, 2014
Conclusions

Science PR has been present as long as the academy has told science stories in public and we might dare ask whether we should turn the picture upside down and begin to perceive science communication as public relations...

Autzen and Weitkamp, forthcoming
Future directions

• Understand organisational actorhood in science communication

• Consider new spaces where organisations can contribute to meaningful and socially valuable science communication

• Points to the need to understand the roles and practices of PIOs

• Raises questions about what constitutes ethical science communication
Thank you!

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