Title: Social Calibration and Public Relations…A Critical Approach

Problem: At the core of public relations is a desire to establish relationships, both inside and outside of an organization. Yet, the assumption is that public relations practitioners actually know how to build these relationships, not just maintain them. All too often the focus of the field has centered on writing press releases, organizing campaigns, and speaking at press conferences.

Significance of Problem: A PR person's job should not start and end with a well-planned and rehearsed speech, but rather, it should be a way of life. A public relations professional should fundamentally be able to approach anyone, regardless of their level of power, prestige, or status and establish a relationship with him or her in a very short period of time. The difficulty with this is that there is often a level of approach anxiety that is hard to combat, and some people may simply not know how to initialize a conversation well enough to push forward to comfort-building activities.

Value: Relationship-building is primarily a component of dialogue, self-disclosure, and uncertainty reduction theories. These concepts also rely on a combination of principles from psychology, dialogic communication, rhetoric, trust formation, credibility, and congruency. Social dynamics and rapport building in interpersonal relationships is very much akin and analogous to that of an organization and its stakeholders. The purpose is to ingrain public relations professionals with the interpersonal mindset necessary to effectively communicate their message, build rapport, establish trust, and encourage long-term relationships to actually flourish.

Methodology: The purpose of this study is to review the historical analysis of basic interpersonal relations, and to establish guidelines for a new paradigm that better accounts for mental barriers to relationship formation. The traditional conception of relationship building is based too heavy on formal situations and verbal exchanges, focusing more on maintenance activities rather than true skill development. A more internal approach to public relations role development and personal competency has to be undertaken in order for strategies and tactics to be congruent with messages. The goal is to extrapolate upon existing theories of relationship building and develop a new understanding and practical guide for relationship development. Ultimately, this will contribute to a new interpersonal paradigm for public relations practitioners.