

Public Relations: Roles, Entry Requirements and Professionalism

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Abstract: *This paper attempts to describe that there is a chance for non-Public Relations graduates to work as or at the Public Relations industry. Studies have shown that Public Relations practitioners are mostly from generalist background (not Public Relations) and even come into the job by chance. A Public Relations is a very sociable person, possess a mix of functional, managerial and negotiating abilities as well as analytical and well-developed communication and understand people and human psychology. With working roles of Expert Prescriber, Communication Facilitator, Problem Solving Facilitator and Communication Technician, a Public Relations needs to be well prepared by learning foreign language, joining personality improvement course, developing networking and understanding computer and communication technology. Areas of where a Public relations works are in-house (organization/company), consultancy and freelance practitioner having various titles showing their main function in the organization such as public affairs, event manager, community relations manager, marketing communication executive, employee relations manager, corporate communications manager, media coordinator. As there is an increased challenge of Public Relations's professionalism, a true practitioner is best prepared by educational institutions with lecturers having sound education and practice combined with extensive link-and -match research and industrial-practical placement for the graduates.*

Key words: *Public Relations, roles, opportunities, entry requirements and professionalism.*

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Public Relations (PR) is a profession, an academic field of study and an industry. This paper is focused on Public Relations as a profession. It has recently been one of the most popular and developed professions. In the United Kingdom, Public Relations is one of the top three career choices for graduates (the UK Graduate Career Survey, 2003; Pritchard et al, 2006). A Public Relations often appears in mass media or in public to represent his or her organization. A Public Relations usually appears in the mass medias in relation to activities in his/or organization such interesting programs or important events. Moreover, when an organization is under crisis or having problem, it is also the Public Relations who is in duty to speak out about the case. When there is an incident in a hotel; a guest dies, for example, it is the Public Relations who explains the situation to the public. Bali Island also realizes the importance role of Public Relations to re-build its image and reputation as one of the best tourist destinations after being bombarded by seemingly endless crisis such as terrorist bombs, avian flu, unstable politics condition, natural disasters and so forth. Public Relations has been widely applied as an effective communication tool in varied activities such as media campaign, international level events or competitions, foreign journalists site visit and international road shows in order to support the Bali Recovery Program.

Public Relations has been present for over a decade but, the role it plays has been becoming far more important for an organization. This is because organizations' goal is not only a matter of providing goods or services to customers but also establishing good reputation by building and maintaining good relationship. As argued by Harrison (1995: Dolphin, 2002), that "any organization faces a vast number of diversity publics at one time-women, unions, young people, academics, the media, governments, environmentalists, consumer crusaders, minority groups and assorted lobbyists-all those groups of people with which the organization is-or wants to be - in communication". However, organizations recently face a much more complex situation to deal with due to the changes exist

in many parts of business and its related activities. Public relations clearly then experiences more challenges as its role is to develop and maintain relationships between organization and its publics. “Good relationships, in turn, make organizations more effective because they allow organizations more freedom-more autonomy-to achieve their mission than they would with bad relationships” (Grunig et al, 1992:69).

The increased role of Public Relations for all kinds of business has demanded more highly qualified individuals to fulfill the position. It could be seen that nearly all organizations, either for or not-for-profit organizations, nowadays employ Public Relations staff or representatives with various different titles showing their specialization such as Public Relations, Guest Relations Officer, (Integrated) Marketing Communications Executive, Special Event Coordinator, Public Affairs, Community Relations, Government Relations, Investor Relations and others. As Dolphin (2002) explained that many practitioners have looked at the role and have tried to give it a name more appropriate to that which the job entails and to the weight that organizations attach to it.

However, surprisingly, the Public Relations practitioners mostly do not possess any Public Relations-related degree. They even rarely attend any Public Relations-related course. On the other hand, they tend to come from generalist background such as marketing, journalist, psychology, foreign language and many others. A research on the profile of Public Relations officers in big organizations throughout the Great Britain showed that one quarter of the respondents were from generalist background where 35% had a journalist background and 25% had a degree in language. The rest were from various backgrounds such as Pharmacy, Physiology and Chemistry. In fact, no one graduated from a Public relations course. The reason behind this was that the generalists who have subsequently specialized may well have a better grasp of the corporate nature of his/her organization (Winner, 1993 in Dolphin, 2002). A generalist background is believed to bring wide perspective and broad skills into the communication era.

Most of the practitioners also came into the Public Relations by chance (Dolphin, 2002). They are not Public Relations educated and do not intend to be a Public Relations. They are promoted to be a Public Relations because they are considered to have the requirements to so. Apart from the formal Public Relations-related course, this occupation has given a chance for general field of study. This condition also happened in Bali as one of the world's most visited tourist destinations. Dwi Cahaya (2006) who researched Bali-based Public Relations practitioners found that only one has a Public Relations degree. The others are generalists which mostly from Economics and tourism-related field of study such as Food and Beverage, Hotel Management, Business Administration. And one is even from Architecture background. Apart from the formal Public Relations-related course, this occupation has given a wide chance from other general field of study such as Economics, Hotel Management, Marketing, Foreign Language and so forth to work as a Public Relations. So, who wants to be a Public Relations?

This paper then attempts to argue that there is a wide chance for non-Public Relations graduates to be involved in Public Relations industry. Its definition, role(s) and activities in organization, entry requirements and where a Public Relations works are highlighted. In addition, the practitioners' professionalism and its impact on education is also discussed.

PUBLIC RELATIONS: DEFINITION

When I interviewed a number of Public Relations practitioners in Bali-based organization, mostly hotels, they described it words by words and by mentioning the activities of Public Relations as follows: "relations between organization and its publics", "image and reputation building", "spoke-person", "promotion", "media", "meeting people", "party", "telling positive things about an organization", "social activities", "promotion", and "advertising". They are all actually correct because Public Relations involves quite various roles and activities but mostly to maintain the image of the organization

among its public by having a good long term relationships. The simplest definition of Public Relations is that it is “the management of communication between an organisation and its public” (Grunig and Hunt, 1984). While Cutlip *et al.* (2000; p.6) define PR as “the management function that identifies, establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the various publics on whom its success or failure depends”. By “Public Relations” it is meant as communication within the organization or takes place in the organization- in or between departments, in or between subsidiaries, and between the organization and its external public such as local community, customers, government, suppliers, and investors. The communication goes internally and externally. An internal communication goes into various levels of subordinates, as well as with cross relationships that arise when subordinates interact with one another and the external communication deals with a system that includes government regulatory agencies, labor unions, subcontractors, consumer groups, and many other independent-but often related-organizations (Seitel, 2001). He further argued that a public relations practitioner must be able to communicate with a variety of different public with different background, needs, purposes with effective ways and strategies of communication. Public Relations has also been defined by professional organizations. The UK Institute of Public Relations defines it as “deliberate, planned, and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between organization and its publics” (Kitchen, 1997).

It is also a bit confusing that one of Public Relations’ activities is considered as “promotion” or “marketing”. The definition of Public Relations as ‘promotion’ and ‘media’ is because Public Relations function has been used as a support for marketing activity in terms of ‘publicity’ aimed at media coverage to support sales. Public Relations actually plays a very important role in the organizations’ communication programs as supporting marketing of products and services as well as integrating the promotional mix (Kitchen, 1997; Prida, 2007). Besides, Public Relations also refers to the image and

reputation of an organization. This is because brand image playing a very significant role in the success of an organization. Therefore, the Public Relations is mainly aimed at maintaining the image and reputation of their organizations. As defined by CIPR, Public Relations practice is “the discipline concerned with the reputation of organizations (or products, services or individuals) with the aim of earning understanding and support” (Fawkes, 2004). “It’s all about reputation the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you” (ibid.).

PUBLIC RELATIONS: ROLES AND ACTIVITIES

Roles are what we actually have performed daily. A Public Relations’ role can then be defined as the behavior of practitioners or organizations in practicing public relations. As Cutlip et al. (1994) suggest, public relations practitioners ‘adopt roles in organizations by taking on patterns of behaviours to deal with recurring types of situations and to accommodate others’ expectations. The roles of public relations were firstly introduced by Broom and Smith (1979) which Cutlip et al (1994) developed into four major roles such as Expert Prescriber, Communication Facilitator, Problem Solving Facilitator and Communication technician (Pritchard et al, 2006). As an Expert Prescriber, practitioners are regarded as experts on public relations and consequently they are seen as best qualified to handle public relations problems and identify solutions to them. While as Communication facilitator, practitioners are cast as sensitive listeners and information brokers who act in a ‘go between’ role, facilitating communications. A Problem solving facilitator collaborates with other managers to help define and solve organizational communication problems. Communication technician is where practitioners merely provide technical communications services such as writing releases and features for the media, preparing and editing newsletters and handling contacts with the media. All decisions regarding strategy and actions are taken by the dominant management coalition in which practitioners have no role and they are simply given the

task of communicating about the decisions taken by this dominant coalition. The details is shown on the following table.

Table 1. Roles of PR Practice and their strategic implications

	Role(s)	Implied Strategic Role
Communi- cation Technician	Production of communication material for organization. Dealing with the media.	Nor present when strategists define organizational problems and select solutions. Practitioners produce the communications and implement programmes, sometimes without full knowledge of original motivation or intended results.
Expert Prescriber	Regarded as the authority on PR problems and solutions. Practitioners define PR problems, and develop and implement the programme. Senior management may take a passive role.	PR may become compartmentalized, often apart from the mainstream of the organizations. PR practitioners may only work periodically with senior management
Communi- cation Facilitator	Serve as liaisons, interpreters and mediators between organizations and its publics, maintaining two-way communication and facilitating exchanges	Overall aim is to provide management and stakeholders with the information they need to make decisions of mutual interest. PR practitioners occupy a boundary spanning role, linking the organizations and its publics and thereby improving the quality of decisions by facilitating communication.
Problem- Solving Facilitator	Collaborate with other managers to define and solve organizational problems.	PR practitioners seen as part of the strategic management team, engaged in the formulation of strategies. Incorporates the boundary-spanning role of public relations.

(Moss and Warnaby: 1997:17)

In order to have a more understanding of Public Relations, it is better to have a closer look of a Public Relations' activities. For entry-level, tasks of Public Relations representatives involve things such as answer calls for information from the press and public, work on invitation lists and details for a press conference, escort visitors and clients to events, help with research, write brochures, deliver releases to editorial offices and compile media distribution lists (California Occupational Guide, 2003). In addition, Fawkes (2004) outlined the complete activities of a variety of Public Relations specialization along with the explanation and examples of what to produce accordingly as seen on the following table.

Table 2: Examples of what Public Relations practitioners do

Public Relations Activity	Explanation	Examples
Internal Communication Corporate PR	Communicating with employees Communicating on behalf of whole organization, not good or services.	in-house newsletter, suggestion box Annual reports, conferences, ethical statements, visual identity, images
Media Relations	Communicating with journalists Specialists, editors from local, National and international media	Press releases, photocalls, video news releases, off-the record briefings, press events.
Business to Business	Communicating with other Organizations, e.g. suppliers, Retailers.	Exhibitions, trade events, newsletter
Public Affairs	Communicating with opinion formers, e.g. local/national politicians, Monitoring political environment.	<i>Presentations, briefings, private public speeches.</i>
Community Relations/ Corporate Social Responsibility	Communicating with local community, Elected representatives, head teachers.	Exhibitions, presentations, Letters, meetings, sport activities, And other sponsorships.
Investor Relations	Communicating with financial Organizations/individuals	newsletters, briefings, events
Strategic Communication	Identification&analysis of situation Problem&solutions to further Organizational goals	Researching, planning and executing a campaign to improve ethical reputation of organization.
Issues Management	Monitoring political, social, economic And technological environment	Considering the effect of US economy and presidential campaign Of UK organization.

Crisis Management	Communicating clear messages in In fast changing situation or Emergency.	Dealing with media after major rail crash on behalf of police, Hospital or local authority.
Copywriting	Writing for different audiences to High standard of literacy.	Press releases, newsletters, Annual report.
Publication Management	Overseeing print/media processes, Often using new technology.	leaflets, internal magazines, Websites.
Events Management	Organisation of complex events, Exhibitions.	Annual Conferences, press Launch, trade shows.

Source: Fawkes (2004)

PUBLIC RELATIONS: ENTRY REQUIREMENT

Public Relations industry welcomes highly competent individuals from any academic background who are always willing to learn new things because it requires skill, knowledge and expertise from all disciplines (Dolphin, 2002). There are generally some subjects which boost your career into Public Relations industry such as Public Relations, Journalism, Business Management, Marketing, Psychology, Politic and English (www.prospects.ac.uk). Other Public Relations professionals have joined the occupation by working their way up possibly via the secretarial route or by moving across areas such as journalism or marketing. This condition then raises a question of whether a Public Relations requires any specific personality, skills and knowledge? Or what personalities, skills and knowledge are required to be able to work as a Public Relations? In terms of personality, Weinstein (1990) believed that not all people can work well in Public Relations as a certain type of personality may or may not be suitable with this job (Aprilia et al., 2005) as a Public Relations' success in developing and maintaining relationships with public is greatly influenced by the personality and performance in doing communication-related tasks (Kasali, 1994: Aprilia et al, 2005). In relation to this, White and Mazur (1995) argued that the position requires a mix of functional, managerial, organizational and negotiating abilities. Besides, analytical and well-developed communication skills added to business management

and political/diplomatic skills are all important (Dolphin, 2002). Successful Public Relations have a thorough understanding of people and human psychology (Calmis, 2003; Dolphin, 2002). Fawkes and Tench (2004) found that writing skill and knowledge of the media are what employers want the PR applicant to possess (Tench and Yeomans, 2006). A survey on profile of Public Relations directors in British companies by Dolphin (2002) concluded that a Public Relations practitioner is a very sociable person where among a whole plethora of talents he/she would display, the critical qualities were communication skills, sound judgement and an ability to listen and common sense.

A research conducted on what employers require from the Public Relations graduates or job searchers showed that Literacy is the primary skill required. They also ranked that the second most important skill is teamwork followed by problem solving, analytical thinking, research skills, IT skills and Numeracy. The following is an example of an online vacancy seeking a Public Relations. The advertisement requires the candidate to have/be (www.undp.co.id):

- a. 5 (five) years of professional experience at the national level in public information, communications or related fields of work.
- b. Excellent command of English and Bahasa Indonesia, both spoken and written.
- c. Good experience in the production and development of public information and advocacy materials.
- d. Ability to adapt message to culturally diverse audiences.
- e. A network of contacts and familiarity in working with media at the local, national and international levels.
- f. Excellent interpersonal and communication skills.
- g. Good analytical skills and presentation skills.
- h. Good command of ICT applications.
- i. Knowledge of the organization mandate and its programme of activities.

- j. Ability to work on own initiative as well as a member of a team.
- k. Strong motivation and a team builder.

Furthermore, Public Relations Society of America (PRSA; 1999; www.prsa.org.) and Institute of Public Relations (2003) released a complete list of Port of Entry Recommendations on knowledge and skills for a Public Relations officer as follow:

Table 3. Port of Entry Recommendations on the Knowledge and Skills of Public Relations

Necessary Knowledge Includes	Necessary Skills Include
Communication and PR theories	<i>Research methods and analysis</i>
Societal trends	Management of Information
Public Relations history	Management of communication
Legal requirements and issues	Problem solving and negotiation
Multicultural and global issues	Strategic Planning
Participation in the professional PR community	Issues Management
Working with a current issue	Audience segmentation
Applying cross-cultural and cross-gender	<i>Informative and Persuasive Writing</i>
Communication and persuasion concepts and strategies	Community relations, consumer relations, employee relations and other practice areas
Relationships and relationship building	Technological and visual literacy
Ethical Issues	Managing people, programmes and Resources
Marketing and Finance	Sensitive interpersonal communication
Use of research and forecasting	Fluency in a foreign language
Organisational change and development	Ethical decision making
Message production	
Public Speaking and presentation	Written and verbal communication
Understanding of business	Creativity
Corporate Strategy	Media Relations

Finance and Corporate Governance	Crisis Management
Data Analysis	Issues Management
Audience Research	Interpersonal Skills
Management of resource and people	Credibility and Integrity

Flexibility

(Source: PRSA, 1999; Pritchard, et al, 2006)

PUBLIC RELATIONS: WHERE DO THEY WORK?

It is also important to understand where Public Relations works. Public Relations works in or for Public Relations firms, non-profit organization e.g. Charity, or for-profit organization such as private companies, universities, hospitals, high technology firms and so forth. A different place of work and roles or activities usually refers to different Public Relations titles as it represents their specialization. Public Relations who works for government agencies, for example, are usually called Public Information Officers, Information Officers, Public Affairs Specialists, Press Secretaries or Communication Specialists. A Public Relations who works for an event management company might be called Event Specialists and many others.

Public Relations usually works under three categorizations which are In-House, Consultancy and Freelance Practitioners (Pritchard et al, 2006). Working In-House means being employed by an organization, whether a public or private company or a public body, charity or non-governmental organization/NGO). On the other hand, Consultancy is an agency where Public Relations work for one or more different clients for a fee. Lastly, Freelance Practitioners are where an individual works for himself and is employed by in-house departments or consultancies on a short-term contract basis either for a specific project or to fill in during peaks in demand or become staff absence requires additional resource. Although works of Public Relations for the above categories seem the same they actually differ for some extent. In-house is getting to know one organization in depth, work across wide range of Public Relations activities, from writing or editing house journal to arranging visits by or to MPs/

opinion formers, etc. get to know a sector or industry well, e.g. music, motoring. But Consultancy is working across many accounts, variety of clients, changing environment, may work in specialist area such as technology, finance or public affairs.

PUBLIC RELATIONS: ENTRY PREPARATION

“Everybody can be a Public Relations”. This popular saying among practitioners is not meant to underestimate the role of formal education of Public Relations but to boost the motivation of individuals from a variety of field of study to be able to prepare him/herself getting into Public Relations industry. The point is having preparation of the above mentioned activities. The graduates or professionals willing to get into Public Relations industry may also need to prepare themselves such as work experience or volunteering in any events or activities which could boost your experience and self confidence. The following are some tips to prepare if you are interested in working as a Public Relations:

- a. Learn Foreign Languages.** Eventhough English is still the most important and widely spoken language, mastery of other foreign languages is an advantage of working as a Public Relations. This is because the globalization era has resulted in the emergence of amazing countries as ‘new economic players’ such as Japan, China, Germany and Korea. Accordingly, understanding their languages is important in business. In countries with well established international business, Public Relations agencies demand proficiency in at least two foreign languages.
- b. Join Personality Improvement Courses.** As a Public Relations officer mostly deals with people, either face to face or via telephone or internet, good personal and interpersonal skill is strongly required in order to give good impression towards the organization s/he works for. This could be done by joining personality courses such as Etiquette, Public Speaking and Public Manner.

- c. **Join and write for Mass Media (Newspaper, Magazine).** As writing is one of the fundamentals skills a Public Relations practitioner must have, it should be improved by contributing to the mass medias such as newspaper, magazine, bulletin, leaflets, fliers etc. Joining a publication organization is also very useful to learn various parts of media and how it works. Media is the most powerful tool of Public Relations as a medium to gather information and to communicate the organization to the public. Public Relations then is very close with media. Do not forget to keep a record of what you have written or joined!
- d. **Improve General Knowledge or of Related Field of Work.** Public Relations industry requires individuals with mastery of any related information particularly related with the project being conducted. A PR under project of Information technology, for example, should be well informed with IT related information. Therefore, mass media as a source of information is very important to deal with for the graduates looking for jobs in PR.
- e. **Be active in organizations.** It has been proved that those who used to join school or college based organizations are more successful in career than those who did not. School or college based organization are a perfect place for students to learn important skills and knowledge which later support their real jobs activities. As one of Public Relations activities is managing a special event, having experience in organizing is a useful skill to have. Organization is also a perfect place to learn other skills such as team work, event management, leaderships, self confidentiality, time and self management. Remember to keep a record of you have organized.
- f. **Networking; taking part in societies and charity.** Public Relations is relationships; how to build and maintain a mutual relationships with a variety of public. Therefore, a broad networking is highly required through which friends, clients, practitioners gather as a source of information and medium of communication for the purpose of the jobs.

PUBLIC RELATIONS' PROFESSIONALISM AND EDUCATION: LESSON LEARNED

Apart from the fact the considerable number of Public Relations are from generalist background, there has recently been a constant debate of the extent to which the practitioners are able to work professionally and how education plays its role to prepare the graduates. The various academic and professional background has resulted in the fact that the practitioners have not played their roles satisfactorily and are limited to a certain tasks and roles only (Cornelissen, 2004; Grunig and Hunt, 1984; Theaker, 2001). Their activities are limited to only doing technical things where according to a survey, the majority of the respondent were happiest performing the 'down and dirty' tasks such as writing, editing and production of news releases only (McGoon, 1993; Cornelisse, 2004). This is not surprising as why most practitioners come into the profession by largely perform technician roles (Cornelissen, 2004), as Grunig and Hunt (1984:4) believed that:

The profession has its roots in press agency and propaganda, activities that society generally holds in low esteem. Most of its practitioners have little training in the social sciences. Few have been trained in Public Relations..... We must admit that many people today who call Public Relations practitioners still do not measure up to professional standards.

However, as the business situation has recently been much more challenging due to the increased demands of the related stakeholders, the roles of Public Relations for a business has also been far more crucial. The growth of social responsibility in business has led to a feeling among practitioners that they should be recognized as professionals, despite the origins of the industry in press agency (Theaker, 2004). As a consequence, there has been a shift of demand of a Public Relations' roles from technicians to managers where unfortunately, the practitioners have been not ready yet. Practitioners have little aspiration to enact the manager

roles as they have built their careers around technical specializations and skills and exhibit high levels of job satisfactions in the stability of technician role enactment over time (Cornelissen, 2004).

Eventhough Public Relations as a profession is relatively young and evolving (Bernays, 1952 in Hogg and Dolan, 1999; Grunig and Hunt, 1984) and also its education (Tench and Fawkes, 2005), the significantly increased requirement for a professional Public Relations practitioner has made the route to this job is becoming much more difficult (Theaker, 2004). In other words, industry has demanded increased professionalism of the Public Relations practitioners. This has challenged both the academicians and professionals of how to prepare the best Public Relations practitioners. Scholars recommend that a true professional practitioner is best prepared by having a combination of good education and satisfactory professional training (Theaker, 2004). In terms of education aspect, Public Relations related-courses should be taught by individuals with a sound experience and understanding of both the academic and professional aspects of the field as well as continuously develop the professional experience while holding teaching appointments (IPRA, 1990; Theaker, 2004). This recommendation has challenged Public Relations institutions worldwide to improve their lecturers' professional qualification including in Indonesia which has limited number of lecturers having practical experience (Jamilah and Ngurah Putra, 2008). Besides, professional training of Public Relations is also highly required as an attempt to improve the practitioners' practical professionalism. A report by the Institute of Public Relations suggested to provide work placement on all its managed and approved Public Relations courses where the work placement charter should be developed setting out the requirements and expectations on both sides for all organizations offering such placement (IPR, 2003; Theaker, 2004).

In addition, research on Public Relations both of academic and professional aspects should also be improved. Lecturers are not only to teach and industry practitioners are not also to be busily doing their professional roles. They have to link the education and practice

leading to a true professionalism by extensive research. Raupp and Ruler (2006) believed that communication management is more and more seen as an occupation on strategic, managerial level and that is developing towards the status of a true profession. A profession in academic terms is often characterized by the use of research-based knowledge (Abbott, 1988; Pieczka and L'Etang, 2001; Raupp and Ruler, 2006). The US Commission on Public Relations Education reported that: Most Public Relations educators – not having attained Ph.D. level – have not been

“required to do research ... most are teaching skills courses that have little relationship to basic research. Public relations practitioners .. have generally been too busy at their jobs to engage in basic research, not connected with specific Public Relations tasks (IPRA 1990: 21; Theaker, 2004).

CONCLUSION

Public Relations practitioners are mostly from generalist background and come into the job by chance. A Public Relations is a very sociable person, possess a mix of functional, managerial and negotiating abilities as well as analytical and well-developed communication and understand people and human psychology. With working roles of Expert Prescriber, Communication Facilitator, Problem Solving Facilitator and Communication Technician, a Public Relations needs to be well prepared by learning foreign language, joining personality improvement course, developing networking and understanding computer and communication technology. Areas of where a Public relations works are in-house (organization/company), consultancy and freelance practitioner having various titles showing their main function in the organization such as public affairs, event manager, community relations manager, marketing communication executive, employee relations manager, corporate communications manager, media coordinator. As there is recently an increased challenge of Public Relations's professionalism, a true practitioner is best prepared by educational institutions with lecturers having

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