

# RELATIONS BETWEEN JOURNALISTS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS: COOPERATION, CONFLICT AND NEGOTIATION \*

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The relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners is at once cooperative and fraught with conflict and implies a double negotiation: over the exchange of resources, and over the rules regulating this exchange. This article discusses several hypotheses regarding the tactics and strategies of both actors.

Les relations entre les journalistes et les relationnistes sont à la fois coopératives et conflictuelles et impliquent un double jeu de négociation: il y a marchandage et échange de ressources, et il y a négociation autour des règles qui régissent cet échange. L'article examine quelques hypothèses à propos des tactiques et des stratégies des acteurs.

## Introduction

The relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners has been hotly debated in the field of communication studies<sup>1</sup>. These debates tend to be dominated by normative questions: Is the work of public relations officers legitimate? Does it affect the quality of information? Are journalists starting to become the subservient agents of public relations undertakings?

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While these questions are both valid and desirable, judging the conduct of a particular set of actors by a set of norms or standards does not in itself explain their conduct. The approach developed in this article does not deal with the problem from a normative standpoint. It seeks to shed light on the debate by presenting an analytical framework for understanding the conduct of both public relations officers and journalists.

The relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners is both complex and ambiguous. It is characterized by both cooperation and conflict. The element of cooperation results from the functional nature of the relationship between the two groups. Journalists produce news on world and social events. To do so they need sources of information. The fact that these sources are represented or advised by public relations experts does not basically change the nature of this dependence, although it might change its degree. This dependence is however not one-sided. Those individuals or groups involved in the news scene also depend on journalists to reach their audiences. This dependence is even more crucial for public relations practitioners whose work consists in distributing information about the source they represent in the great game of "news" making. They cannot succeed in their job unless they collaborate with the press. The interdependence of the players is thus based on a mutual interest collaboration<sup>2</sup>.

This dependence of the actors on each other, however, is limited insofar as the control held by one type of actor over what is a vital resource for the other group is only partial. Each actor's dependence on the other varies according to the possible available alternatives. Public relations officers depend less on journalists when they are able to rely on other means of publicity. Likewise, journalists are less dependent on a given source when they are able to obtain the required information elsewhere.

While the two groups' objectives are thus complementary, they are only partially so. Journalists act as intermediaries between various social interests and the general public, but in view of the democratic principles which justify their work in our North American liberal societies, their ties of loyalty and solidarity theoretically lie with the general public. Journalists define their mission as keeping the public informed, which implies an element of control over the production of "news", the agendas for public debates, and the creation of public "reality".

Unfortunately for them, journalists are not the only ones involved in public news production. Protagonists in the contemporary news game also wish to have some control over news production, and their interests are such that they are prepared to invest the necessary resources to achieve their goals. For journalists, public relations officers symbolize the sources' desire to control their work. Journalistic distrust of "interested" sources is thus exacerbated when they come in contact with the PR specialist (Aronoff, 1975; Kopenhaver, Martinson et Ryan, 1984;

Ryan et Martinson, 1988). A more conflictual "political" dimension (struggle for control over news making) is thus added to the "economic" dimension of cooperation (exchange of resources). Journalists and public relations officers find themselves mutually dependent on one another, a situation which demands cooperation, while their divergent control interests cause distrust and opposition.

A conceptual framework to understand the relationship between journalists and public relations officers, must therefore be able to integrate both the dimensions of cooperation and conflict. This article sketches out such a framework, based on meeting in Quebec City and Montreal with three groups of journalists comprising 19 individuals and three public relations groups comprising 20 practitioners. The purpose of these interviews was not to validate specific assumptions, but rather to discover the actors' perception of their relationship. Three topics were covered during these discussions: the development and present status of journalism in Quebec; the evolution of public relations over the past few years and the relationship between journalists and public relations officers.

### Negotiation

The conceptual framework developed in this article conceptualizes the elements of conflict and cooperation in the relationship between journalists and public relations officers as a negotiation between two partners who participate in an exchange for some specifiable benefit in spite of their divergent interests. In the process they engage in two levels of negotiation which correspond to the economic and political dimensions of the relationship. On the first level, negotiations involve the exchange of resources (publicity and information) between journalists and public relations practitioners. On the second level, negotiations involve the distribution of influence which accrues from the rules of the game. In other words, in an exchange between journalists and public relations practitioners, the behavior patterns of first level negotiations are governed by rules which are themselves the product of second level negotiations. The individual settings in which journalists and public relations officers interact give rise to different sets of rules and therefore result in different kinds of games.

Though the question of games will be examined later, it is important to note here that the variety of possible games is limited by structural constraints inherent in the news production process itself. These structural constraints establish the general framework for the two types of negotiation (negotiating the exchange of resources, and negotiating the rules governing this exchange). Scholars studying the news production processes have shown that the professional conduct of journalists is very broadly determined by the organizational and institutional settings in which they find themselves (Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978; Epstein, 1973; Fishman, 1980). But it must be considered that these settings also influence the conduct of news sources, in particular public relations officers. The organizational and

institutional settings of news thus impose a "framework" which all actors must respect. It is by conforming to this "framework" that public relations officers gain their influence over news production.

### **The Exchange of Resources between Journalists and Public Relations Officers**

The first level of negotiations between journalists and public relations personnel involve the exchange of resources. In the case of a journalist, the benefit sought is a news item. For the source, it is some type of publicity. Both sides are willing to make certain concessions to obtain what they are looking for. Mostly this negotiation is informal and involves a form of "tacit coordination" (Schelling, 1960) between public relations supplied information and journalistic needs. In this process, public relations officers attempt to "convince" the journalists by adapting their source's message to the journalistic production requirements. This is to ensure that for the journalist the message constitutes a "good story", originating from a credible and newsworthy source. In these negotiations, both sides have resources at their disposal which allow them to influence each other in some way. The actors' main means of influence are related to their interdependence. Control of the access to sources and information, time constraints and an awareness of the needs and preferences of journalists as well as the general characteristics of their "adversary" are some of the kinds of resources which public relations practitioners use in their negotiations with journalists.

The combination of resources and constraints establishes the framework for negotiations and, therefore, the ability of one player to influence the conduct of the other. In effect it is through the relationship between resources and constraints that a given actor is able to influence another. Let us suppose, to simplify this discussion, that it is the public relations officers who wish to influence the journalists, rather than vice versa. The public relations officers will use their resources to act upon the journalists' constraints, causing them to act in ways which are compatible with their own interests. Journalistic constraints thus become resources and opportunities for public relations initiatives. For example, the source could manipulate the time by calling an important press conference close to the journalists' deadline. Under these time constraints journalists cannot prepare themselves, nor can they critically analyse the message, and contact other competing sources. Journalists are consequently more likely to report the sources' views unedited.

Such a tactic, which might be considered coercive, is effective only if the source and/or the message are interesting enough from the journalistic point of view to guarantee the journalists' participation in the exchange. The tactic also involves certain risks insofar as it may provoke a negative reaction by accentuating the journalistic constraints. It is thus effective only on a short-term basis and may jeopardize future relations with the press. The second tactic, no doubt more

effective, is the opposite of the first. Rather than accentuating constraints, sources attempt to alleviate them in order to steer the journalist in the desired direction. The source can for instance use some of their own resources to ease the journalists' work constraints by providing what Gandy (1982) calls "information subsidies". These can take the form of press releases couched in the style of a news article.

Yet another opening for influence by public relations practitioners is offered by the competitive situation between news organizations. This economic constraint leads to a mimicry of news articles across the different media. To the extent that official news is considered important a priori, no medium can afford to miss a news item others have carried. The mimicry of news item becomes a constraint which could eventually turn into an opportunity for action by public relations officers who are able to lend an official flavour to their messages. For a source, the acquisition of official status is thus a sure guarantee of wide publicity<sup>3</sup>.

Other journalistic constraints appear to reduce the opportunities of public relations officers to influence journalists. These may be called "negative" journalistic constraints. In our interviews, public relations practitioners deplored the rigidity of the collective agreements in news organizations, the absence of supervision and intellectual leadership in the news room, the lack of motivation among many journalists, and the appeal of sensational news, etc. All of these factors, according to them, have not only a harmful effect on the quality of information, but also complicate the work of public relations officers. One may conclude from these comments that the relationship between the two groups is more profitable for both "partners" when each side has a fair amount of leeway in the negotiations.

The public relations officers told us they preferred to work with specialized journalists rather than generalists because specialists have greater freedom to negotiate. This freedom consists in flexibility in the choice of subject matter, their available time, knowledge of beats, as well as quality of reporting. Generalists in contrast were viewed as beholden to the assignment editor, pressed for time, lacked depth of knowledge, and were seen as less interested and rigorous in their work. In short, specialists are less restricted than generalists, and have more resources at their disposal and are therefore more able to comprehend the source's point of view. For the public relations officers, critical comments published by a competent specialist are definitely preferable to errors in fact or interpretation due to the incompetence of a generalist. Specialists further more tend to write for the target audiences the public relations officer wishes to reach. Any trend towards expanding journalists' capacity to do their work properly is consequently applauded by the public relations profession. They are also pleased by the improved training and increased numbers of specialized reporters found in contemporary media.

A similar preference for well qualified public relations practitioners who have a lot to offer was noted by the journalists. Interviews elicited that ill-qualified

public relations officers who have little to offer were perceived by the journalists as an obstacle to their work. The higher the organizational position of a public relations officer, the more they have to offer the journalist. Such practitioners are closer to the decision-makers, they have more detailed and complete information, and they have more autonomy. Often they will encourage their directors to be "available" for media comment and to negotiate directly with the media.

The relationship between journalists and public relations officers is facilitated when both have some room to manoeuvre in their respective organizations. This is basic to the concept of negotiation. Why negotiate with someone who has nothing to offer? If one side has insufficient resources to allow the other side to reach some of its objectives, then negotiations will fail.

### The Notion of "Games"

In a given situation, not all negotiating resources and constraints come into play equally. Depending on the context and the circumstances public relations officers can use different resources, focus their action on different journalistic constraints, in short resort to different tactics. Thus what is a resource in one context can become a constraint in another. To introduce the notion of context as a variable in the model, it is useful to consider these different "situations" as so many different "games". The notion of "game" is defined here as a situation in which the journalist and the public relations officers must make decisions which will affect both parties, a situation in which the conduct of the "players" is governed by a set of rules. Everyone knows that in a game there are a set of rules which define the game and from which each player will develop a strategy to win. In our case, these are not necessarily formal rules written down somewhere and recognized by everyone. Rather these rules involve procedures whereby certain things are permitted and others are not. "Game" situations furthermore do not encompass all encounters involving the two groups but only those which are repetitive. In these the relationship between journalists and public relations officers tends to become institutionalized into roles and counter-roles, as well as a set of expectations which both sides recognize and accept. In a recurring situation which tends to become fixed as a game, the resources and constraints of the players will lead to the establishment of more or less defined rules, according to the degree of institutionalization, which then rather rigidly define the conduct of the players.

Unlike parlour games, the rules governing the interactions between public relations officers and journalists are not engraved in stone. Rather they result from the second level negotiations between the two groups in a given context. Both sides seek, while relying on the resources at their disposal, to impose those rules which are in their favour. In other words, the rules govern the game, but at the same time they are the stake of yet another game at a meta-level. An example of such a situation are journalists and public relations practitioners specializing in the same area

of activities who therefore have regular contact. Over time the two groups establish certain rules of conduct for their own "universe" of encounters. In considering these rules, the players will develop strategies and counter-strategies which can be different from one game to the other. We know for example that in the area of sports, journalists and public relations practitioners do not behave in the same way as in the sphere of politics. Each universe is governed by its own rules. Each universe unfolds as if it had its own "culture" governing the interactions between the two groups.

In some cases, for example, certain journalists who are more and less specialists in their area split their time between journalism and public relations contracts. While this practice may be acceptable in one area, it may be questionable in another or totally unthinkable in a third. Thus journalists who become press attachés for a political figure often find it difficult to return to journalism afterwards. In general this is only possible after sufficient time has elapsed. This example demonstrates that public relations officers and journalists follow different rules of conduct depending on their sphere of activity. Viewing their activity as a game makes it possible to take account of these performance differences.

### **Types of Games and Sectors of Coverage**

Our model suggests that there is a link between the nature of the games and different sectors of news coverage. News production is structured in terms of geography (local, regional, national, international), themes (politics, sports, culture, health, consumer affairs, etc.) and institutions (parliament, court, police, etc.). Interviewees drew clear distinctions between these different actors when discussing the relationship between journalists and public relations officers. In the government affairs and public administration sector, journalists assert that it is increasingly difficult for them to escape the actions of public relations officers because of the volume and official nature of information circulating in this milieu.

In the local governmental sector, on the other hand, journalists feel they have more room to manoeuvre around public relations officers. "Official" information in this sector lacks the journalistic value it has at the provincial or national levels and is therefore not as anxiously sought out<sup>4</sup>. Journalists criticize public relations practitioners in this sector for inundating them with uninteresting information. They feel that public relations practitioners work against their own interests, by desensitizing journalists to their messages over time. The local governmental sector thus constitutes a separate game with different rules from those pertaining in the national news sector.

By linking news sectors with game strategies we are able to resolve some apparent contradictions while avoiding over generalization. Several of the journalists questioned for instance believed that specialization jeopardizes a journalist's

autonomy. They argued that the specialist working in the same sector had a tendency to become less critical through sharing the values prevalent in that sector. We were given the example of financial columnists who became socialized into the business ethic, and ended up uncritically promoting business firms and financial institutions. Even greater critique was voiced about travel reporters who should be paid by the source rather than by the publisher or broadcaster. This loss of autonomy may explain the public relations officers' preference for specialized reporters. Yet how does this explanation jibe with this group's belief that specialized journalists are more critical of their sources than generalists?

This seeming contradiction may be resolved by Tunstall's (1971) finding that the journalists working in different sectors have different objectives. He identified three distinct media objectives: predominantly monetary (enlarging the audience or increasing advertising revenue), non-monetary (influence, the prestige of the publisher or broadcaster), or a blend of the two. According to Tunstall foreign correspondents work in a sector with non-monetary objectives. Parliamentary correspondents cover a sector with predominantly non-monetary mixed objectives. Journalists specializing in education or labour relations work in a sector with predominantly monetary mixed objectives. Fashion reporters cover a sector with primarily monetary objectives. Tunstall discovered that a sector's objectives may affect a journalists' autonomy in relation to the medium, the source and colleagues. Because the sectors' objectives affect the nature and quantity of resources available to the negotiating groups objectives also indirectly condition the prevailing rules of the game. We can therefore postulate that one or more specific types of games will be correlated with the different types of objectives.

Tunstall's findings and our data suggest that a journalist's level of criticism is not as much related to whether he/she is a generalist or not but rather on the sector in which he/she works and on the goals pertaining in that sector. Specialists in "prestige" sectors like foreign correspondents and parliamentary correspondents will be more critical and more autonomous than those reporters who cover sectors whose objective is to increase the audience (sports or legal coverage, for example). The least critical specialists are those working in sectors whose objective is to increase advertising revenue (fashion, automobiles, real estate, etc.). The contradictory reports about different levels of journalistic critique are thus a result of sectorial game rules which respondents failed to distinguish.

### Negotiation Strategies

The choice of strategies depends on the players' objectives, the resources at their disposal and the prevailing rules of the game. That choice also depends on the importance they attach to whether or not their opponents achieve their own objectives.

According to Lewicki and Litterer (1985), partners in a negotiation situation may adopt one of the following five strategies, depending on the degrees of concern have for their own and their opponent's satisfaction:

- (1) Competition, where A tries to convince or force B to adopt a position satisfactory to A.
- (2) Accommodation, where A, either because the stakes of the negotiation are not important to him or because maintaining good relations is more important to him than the result, is mainly concerned with B's satisfaction; A will have a tendency to yield to B what B demands.
- (3) Compromise, where A and B meet halfway so that there is neither winner nor loser, but where neither A nor B is fully satisfied.
- (4) Collaboration, where A and B join forces to seek a solution that is satisfactory to both.
- (5) Avoidance, where A refuses or avoids negotiation because he thinks he has little to gain from negotiating with B.

If public relations and journalistic choices of strategy vary according to the nature of the game and the respective positions of the players at a given time in the "match", several hypotheses about the most likely game plans between the two groups can be advanced. Because public relations officers control access to information their power is the power to reward. They receive the publicity sought to the extent that they can provide a "reward" (information) adapted to the journalists' needs, that is, a reward likely to satisfy the journalists and to guarantee that they will behave the way the public relations practitioner wants them to. The public relations officers must therefore concern themselves with satisfying journalists' needs. The needs and problems affecting journalists in their daily work are the basic data public relations practitioners use in drawing up strategies. To orient the behaviour of the press, the public relations officers must know journalistic working practices, needs, constraints, resources and perceptions in order to anticipate their reactions and behaviour. The effectiveness of public relations strategies will depend on the extent to which this group is able to forecast the behaviour of their "adversaries". They will therefore utilize all means to reduce their uncertainty about journalistic behaviour.

According to the public relations officers, press campaigns are now based on a selective approach. Both media and journalists are today chosen with specific objectives in mind. In addition messages are fashioned to fit a particular medium, and to respond to the reporter's task (generalist or specialist) and even, personality. Such a selective approach also permits public relations officers to reduce the production of competing messages which limit the profession's influence. The

selective approach consists of seeing to it that the message is as consonant as possible with what each medium is looking for, or better yet, what each journalist is looking for, thereby increasing the journalistic value of the information he has to offer.

Public relations practitioners acknowledge that journalists have veto power in the game of information exchange because they determine the fate of the message. Public relations practitioners must therefore follow a strategy of seduction and persuasion. They do this by attempting to gain credibility and by posing as journalistic allies. In the negotiating situation this means that public relations personnel will favor Lewicki/Litterer's (1985) strategy of collaboration rather than competition. According to the public relations officers we questioned, the most effective way a practitioner can build up his or her credibility with the press is to play the card of openness and collaboration<sup>5</sup>.

In such a setting furthermore a strategy of accommodation will be more beneficial than avoidance. Accommodation is an investment in maintaining good relations with the journalist; avoidance, on the contrary, would risk jeopardizing that relation. Avoidance is an approach the public relations practitioner may use when alternative means are feasible. Avoidance does, however, give rise to several difficulties. First, other means of communication are generally more costly than media relations. Second, refusal to collaborate with journalists at a given time may heavily damage future relations with the media. Finally, public relations practitioners do not always have a choice. At times of crisis, the media may interpret avoidance as a form of admission and therefore as news.

Collaboration and accommodation, while the best strategies for public relations personnel also entail risk. These include divulging too much information on an issue which might undermine the strength of their case. Furthermore collaboration and accommodation are not always easy to achieve, especially in games where journalists are aggressive or refuse to negotiate. It takes two to collaborate. This is why we can feel that even if the public relations practitioners favour collaboration and accommodation, they should, when faced with journalists' aggressive tactics, respond by seeking compromise, that is, by playing cautiously. Finally, there is a danger that the strategy of collaboration is misunderstood by the journalist as a ruse which is not to be trusted. For such a situation yet another game plan has to be fashioned for enhance credibility of public relations practitioner.

The journalistic players, in contrast follow a very different strategy in negotiations with public relations officers. Some of our respondents rejected collaboration on the ground that it was a sign of weakness. Others believed that relations with public relations practitioners were useful under certain circumstances. Journalists as a whole however did not see any need to follow a strategy of adaptation in their negotiations or to develop an reciprocal knowledge of the work methods,

constraints and specific needs of public relations officers. It seems sufficient to them to believe that public relations officers are constantly seeking publicity and that is reason enough to be on their guard.

The issue of predictability which is crucial to public relations practitioners seems entirely secondary to journalists. The former would like to reduce uncertainty through increased institutionalization of relations, which would enable them to better predict the behaviour of journalists, while the latter see little of interest in further predicting the public relations practitioners' behaviour and do not wish such an institutionalization of relations which, from their point of view, would only increase the threat.

In the light of this evidence it is safe to conclude that journalists will not be inclined to want to satisfy public relations officers' needs, and will adopt a competitive approach. And when their interest is not directly at stake, they will adopt a strategy of avoidance rather than accommodation.

In spite of these contrary needs and negotiating strategies among the two groups there are limits to the opposition journalists can practice towards public relations practitioners. In sectors where the source monopolizes or almost monopolizes information, for example, public relations personnel can punish recalcitrant journalists by refusing them information and disclosing it to others. Furthermore there are cases where journalists need sources for their own verification purposes. In this case the shoe is on the other foot.

Yet, in spite of these cases the widespread attitude of opposition that a large number of journalists adopt toward them frustrates public relations officers. For this reason they would like the rules of the game to be clearer and the roles better defined in order to increase their effectiveness. Public relations personnel would also like to have their legitimacy acknowledged and to induce journalists to change their attitudes toward their profession. They criticize journalists for failing to understand their working constraints. They claim, for example, that journalists do not understand that public relations practitioners do not always have the information requested at hand.

They also criticize the onesidedness of the ranges between the two groups. Adaptation in practices has primarily initiated by public relations officers and not the converse. Over time, public relations officers have sought to redefine their role and to adopt strategies that take into account the prerogatives and professional autonomy of journalists. Public relations practitioners claim that their methods have been refined, are more respectful of the journalistic function and are based on establishing open and cooperative relations. They are disturbed that this adaptation has not been translated into a more open attitude on the part of most journalists.

### Conclusion

Relations between journalists and public relations officers have been described in this article as relations of exchange involving a dimension of conflict and a dimension of cooperation. Incentives to cooperate follow from the interdependence of the two groups, while the dimension of conflict arises from the struggle to control the distribution of the "news" by the two groups of professional "communicators".

The notion of negotiation has been used to synthesize this twofold relation of cooperation and conflict. Negotiation takes place at two levels. At the first, it centres on the exchange of resources. Here the journalist seeks information from the public relations practitioner, while the latter seeks publicity from the journalist. The exchange relationship consists of an adjustment between the public relations practitioner's supply of information and the journalist's demand for information, and, conversely, between the journalist's supply of publicity and the public relations practitioner's demand for it.

At a second or higher level however negotiation focuses on the establishment of rules of the game which will govern the actors' behaviour. The processes of negotiation at this level are more complex, subtle and more difficult to analyze. Our general hypothesis is that rules vary from one milieu to another, from one sector of news coverage to another. This is why we have introduced the game analogy. It clarifies the types of rules emerging out of the repeated encounters between the two professional groups in the different news sectors. It also accounts for the fact that each participating group continually tries to change the rules, to create precedents or to impose new rules for their own benefit. The idea of negotiation involves the idea of exchange achieved through compromise. We therefore cannot pose the question of compromise - and, through it, the key question of influence - in general terms without taking specific situations into account. It will be necessary to analyze concrete situations in order to isolate and compare rules and then to explain the behaviour of the actors in these particular game situation.

It is important to emphasize, however, that, our model help us to understand that influence is not a unidirectional phenomenon by which the public relations practitioner "manipulates" the journalist. It clarifies that in negotiation influence flow in both directions between public relations practitioners and journalists. Such a view does not imply that the game of influence is necessarily balanced. It shows instead that neither partner is completely powerless before the other, that there is not a puppeteer (the public relations practitioner) on one side and a puppet (the journalist) on the other. Public relations officers succeed in exerting influence on journalists only to the extent that they yield, to a point, to the journalists' demands. They in turn, as we have seen, must be open to journalistic influence. By complying with the journalists' working requirements, and by striving to meet their needs,

public relations practitioners make use of journalistic constraints for their own benefit. It is in this sense that there is exchange and compromise in the relationship. The compromise must satisfy both sets of players at least minimally if the relationship is to endure. Relations between public relations practitioners and journalists are maintained and become institutionalized in a game, because both sides want to continue playing.

### NOTES

1. See the debate between journalist Rodolphe Morissette and public relations officer Michel Bissonnette in *Le 30*, vol. 7, no. 10 (Dec, 1983), pp. 14-18, and the report on a conference organized by the Société canadienne des relations publiques, in *Le 30*, vol. 8, no.3 (March 1984), pp. 12-13. Also see the works of journalists Jacques Keable (1985) and Jeff and Marie Blyskal (1985). Finally, the most recent conference of the Fédération professionnelle des journalistes du Québec (FPJQ) held in Quebec City in December 1988, dealt principally with this issue.
2. There are numerous references to the dimensions of exchange and collaboration which characterize the relations between journalists and information sources in the sociological literature on journalism. See, for example: Sigal, 1973; Tunstall, 1970, 1971; Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978; Nimmo, 1964; Gandy, 1982; Grossman and Rourke, 1976.
3. While being official ensures a certain publicity, it at the same time keeps the source from withdrawing from the spotlight even when desired; journalists will always be on the watch. What is a resource in some circumstances can be a constraint in others. Note how a Minister or corporate executive who would prefer to remain silent is bombarded with questions by hordes of journalists at a time of crisis. If he or she says nothing, the journalists will retaliate by letting it be understood publicly that they who are silent have something to hide.
4. The local level, for our subjects, corresponds to Quebec City and Montreal where the interviews were held. It is highly unlikely that journalists working in small cities have much room to manoeuvre in relation to official sources, particularly the municipal council and the mayor's office.
5. Some public relations practitioners go as far as to define themselves to their employers as press attachés to journalists. But others reply: "Don't overdo it. We're in business, the business of selling ideas to the press. We're here to make things easier for journalists, but we're also here to sell a product. It's a battle to see who's going to get coverage. Things are happening all the time, so we have to use means that aren't always kosher to get a page somewhere in the press."

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