

Transparency and the Disclosure of Information

Lesson One

1. Overview

This lesson will examine the topic of transparency through two different lenses – disclosure and regulatory obligations. The primary lesson will introduce the topic of transparency going through examples and definitions to better ground student understanding. Next, we will explain disclosure by detailing the differences between full and limited disclosure. The authors suggest using ethical codes, such as the Page Principles, as guides for determining what information to disclose and to whom. The primary lesson will end with a discussion of how two-way communication enhances transparency and best practices for how practitioners can improve transparency in their work.

Also included in this lesson are several activities that can be used to stimulate students' critical thinking and concept application skills. A suggested reading and references list is also included for faculty use. Finally print and video documents are provided for a case study focused on the Flint, Michigan water crisis.

2. Lesson format

a. Purpose

1. To explain transparency as part of the ethical considerations of public relations practice
2. To explain how disclosure and deception relate to transparency within the public relations function
3. To explain how two-way communication enhances transparency
4. To detail guides and best practices, which ensure ethical and transparent communication
5. To use the Flint, Michigan water case to apply the module's learning

b. Materials

1. PowerPoint presentation
2. Flint, Michigan water case summary
3. Link to video news reports about case
<http://www.cnn.com/2016/03/04/us/flint-water-crisis-fast-facts/>
4. Resources for the full or limited disclosure activity
5. Resources and materials for the information activity
6. Suggested reading list

c. Body of Lesson

1. What is transparency
 - a. Accountability
 - b. Types of transparency
 1. Pseudotransparency
 - i. Definition
 - ii. Example
 2. Asynchronous transparency

- i. Definition
 - ii. Examples
 - 1. Brand honesty
 - 2. Customer distress messages
 - 2. What is disclosure
 - a. Types of disclosure
 - 1. Full disclosure
 - i. Definition
 - ii. Examples
 - 1. Making available all legally responsible information
 - 2. Enhancing reasoning ability
 - 3. Making informed decisions
 - 2. Limited disclosure
 - i. Definition
 - ii. Examples
 - 1. Confidential information
 - 2. Private information
 - 3. Proprietary information
 - b. Codes of ethics as guiding principles
 - 1. Deciding what to disclose
 - 2. Deciding to whom to disclose
 - 3. Deciding what information publics need
 - 4. Deciding what is ethical
 - i. Honesty
 - ii. Accuracy
 - iii. Trust
 - 3. Transparency and two-way communication
 - a. What is two-way communication
 - 1. Sender
 - 2. Receiver
 - 3. Feedback
 - b. Benefits of two-way communication
 - 1. Authenticity
 - 2. Free flow of information
 - 3. Consent

3. Learning objectives

- a. After completing the lesson, students will be able to explain the concepts of transparency, disclosure, and deception.
- b. After completing the lesson, students will be able to show the connection between two-way communication and transparency.
- c. After completing the lesson, students will be able to use ethical codes as guides for ethical transparency and disclosure of information.
- d. After completing the lesson, students will be able to detail best practices for ensuring transparent communication in the public relations function.

- e. After completing the lesson, students will be able to apply the concepts of transparency, disclosure, and deception to a case study.
- f. After the completing the lesson, students will be able to differentiate among full disclosure, limited disclosure, and deception within the context of transparency.

4. Key concepts

- a. Transparency
 - 1. Pseudotransparency
 - 2. Asynchronous transparency
- b. Disclosure
 - 1. Full disclosure
 - 2. Limited disclosure
- c. Two-way Communication

5. Activities

- a. Full or limited disclosure
 - 1. Students in pairs will receive a list of scenarios and decide if full or limited disclosure is needed. Students will learn there are some things you cannot say to anyone and some things you cannot tell every public. In situations such as these, we must allow ethics to guide us. Examples could include the secret formula for a product, the illegal behavior of a CEO, and the personnel records of an employee.
 - 2. Resources for finding cases and case ideas
 - a. <http://www.ibe.org.uk/scenarios/98/52>
 - b. http://www.differencemakers.com/swapshop/pdf/dilemma_examples.pdf
 - c. <http://lessonplans.btskinner.com/ethics1.html>
 - d. <http://ethicsunwrapped.utexas.edu/>
 - e. <http://dornsife.usc.edu/levan-institute/dilemmas-and-case-studies/>
- b. What information would you release? Why? To whom?
 - 1. In this activity, students will be given a hypothetical situation, a list of facts, and a list of stakeholders. The students will decide when and to whom the facts should be released. Students could also role play the message delivery and decide the setting, format, and messaging of the facts.
 - 2. Zombie Attack Activity
- c. The Flint, Michigan water case
 - 1. Students will examine a news account of the case by both print and video media outlets.
 - 2. Students will discuss the ethical obligations of the case.
 - 3. Students will examine the information to determine the type(s) of disclosure necessary. The case will be examined for the types of disclosure.
 - 4. Students will take the role of the communication practitioner and offer analysis and recommendations.

6. Suggested readings

a. Transparency

1. <http://www.instituteforpr.org/research-for-public-relations-is-transparency-good-for-business/>
2. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/theyec/2013/06/20/the-3-ts-of-a-great-pr-experience-truth-trust-and-transparency/#66b879b62fde>
3. <http://mediashift.org/2009/01/transparency-as-a-pr-principle-not-a-tactic007/>
4. http://www.online-pr.com/Holding/Lying_and_transparency_.pdf
5. <http://www.nevillehobson.com/2006/03/10/disclosure-and-transparency-its-pr-101/>

b. Disclosure

1. https://ssir.org/articles/entry/ethics_and_nonprofits
2. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0363811105000809>
3. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Richard_Waters/publication/222649552_Engaging_Stakeholders_through_Social_Networking_How_Nonprofit_Organizations_Are_Using_Facebook/links/00b7d52dec7a5283e7000000.pdf
4. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/davidkroll/2015/09/10/what-the-new-york-times-missed-on-kevin-folta-and-monsantos-cultivation-of-academic-scientists/#4ff31ba72a09>
5. <http://prsala.org/what-would-you-do-an-ethics-dilemma-disclosure-of-information/>
6. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0363811113000398>

c. Zombie Activity

1. <https://www.cdc.gov/phpr/learn.htm>
2. <http://cssc.uscannenberg.org/cases/v2/v2art3/>
3. <http://webershandwickseattle.com/2012/07/zombie-apocalypse-modern-pr/>
4. <http://www.axiapr.com/blog/zombie-apocalypse-what-youll-need-to-survive>
5. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/00909882.2015.1019544?nedAccess=true>

7. References

- a. Balkin, Jack M., "How Mass Media Simulate Political Transparency" (1999). Faculty Scholarship Series. Paper 259. Retrieved from: http://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/fss_papers/259
- b. Ethicsinpr (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://ethicsinpr.wikispaces.com/Transparency>
- c. Kruckeberg, D. (2014, August). Transparency and its vulnerabilities: trust must be the public relations goal of governments, civil society organizations and corporations. Retrieved from <https://www.ipra.org/news/itle/transparency-and-its-vulnerabilities-trust-must-be-the-public-relations-goal-of-governments-civil->

[society-organizations-and-corporations/](#)

- d. Lukaszewski, J. (2014, Sept. 24). Disclosure and candor: The two most powerful ingredients of trust. *PRSA Y*. Retrieved from <http://prsay.prsa.org/2014/09/24/disclosure-candor-the-two-most-powerful-ingredients-of-trust/>
- e. Rawlins, B. (2008). Measuring the relationship between organizational transparency and employee trust. *Public Relations Journal*, 2, 1-21. Retrieved from <http://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1884&context=facpub>
- f. Zuk, R. (2011, September 14). The new network: Authenticity, anonymity and the digital divide. Retrieved from http://www.prsa.org/intelligence/tactics/articles/view/9393/1035/the_new_network_authenticity_anonymity_and_the_dig#.WFAb26KCP4k