

PUBLIC RELATIONS: THE CASE OF JORDAN'S ACCESSION TO THE GULF COOPERATION

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ABSTRACT

This case study examines the role of government public relations departments as exemplified by the participation of the Jordanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates (MOFA) in the process of Jordanian decision-making. In particular, it focuses on the invitation addressed to Jordan to join the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The study ends by addressing certain conclusions: Firstly, the Public Relations Department (PRD) at MOFA has not been able to market itself properly, leading to excluding it from the decision-making process. This is due to its inability to join the decision-making group as a member and has a place there. Secondly, PRD's failure to practice its role in boundary spanning between the MOFA and its internal and external public, notably different mass media. Reasons behind such a failure are its inability to provide these media means with information or factual and transparent news that the public insists on having them due to the importance of the issue at hand. Thirdly: The PRD Director and his employees feel marginalized, excluded, and they lack enthusiasm and being initiative because of the ignorance practiced by the decision-maker at MOFA.

Fourthly: the need for PR managers and practitioners to promote themselves to attract the decision-makers' attention. This could be done by implementing various strategies of influence and power, mastering communication, analysis, administration, and social skills, and enjoying a charming charisma. Fifthly: underscoring the inevitability of conducting further studies and research in an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the role of government public relations departments in the decision-making process regarding vibrant international issues. Sixthly: no media plan was founded at PRD at MOFA.

Keywords: Government public relations departments; public relations theory; decision-making theory; dominant alliance group; boundary spanning.

INTRODUCTION

During the 21st century, human lives have been greatly influenced by a steady explosion in population and significant technological development. Such influences have led to increasing pressure on governments to further improve the services provided to their citizens, in order to meet the latter's demands and interests. This pressure pushes governments to build and sustain considerate relations to gain the trust and support of citizens. In view of this, government public relations departments seek to achieve significant levels of understanding and integrity, the exchange of mutual interests, and participation in the decision-making process on key national and international issues

At the international level, the role of PR departments (PRD) has emerged and advanced in developed countries. This evolution has occurred for many reasons, including the understanding that PR has become a medium for building and sustaining relationships between nations and governments. Such a process is realized through the information and data PRDs provide, as well as the promotion and launch of campaigns to establish a good reputation, the maintenance of a government's

positive image, the provision of consultation and advice, and contribution to various decisions.

Based on this distinctive role in the area of decision-making, this study aims to elucidate the role of government PRDs at the international level. It focuses on the much discussed issue of Jordan's request to join the GCC, as announced at the 31st Arab Summit Conference in Riyadh in 2011. At this time, an invitation was sent to Jordan to join the GCC instantly, and discussions and preliminary meetings were held with the GCC Secretariat in preparation for full acceptance of its membership. Jordan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) was tasked with presiding over the preliminary negotiations regarding the desired accession process, and was the primary entity within the decision-making groups handling the details of Jordan's accession to the GCC. Typically, the PRD participates in the preliminary and consultative meetings and sessions, paving the way for the decision-making process on negotiations regarding Jordan's accession. The PRD was involved in these processes due to its role in facilitating procedures and spanning the boundaries between the various parties. Moreover, the PRD enjoys excellent connections through multiple media platforms and provides all parties involved with essential information and data before, during, and after the PRD's negotiation processes. It is not disputed that the PRD's

success in performing such a role requires it to perform five principal functions, namely the role of decision-makers, proponents, experts, advisors or analysts, and finally, the role of facilitators (White & Dozier, 1992).

In this paper, it is considered that Jordan's invitation to begin immediate negotiations with the GCC Secretariat is an appropriate context for an examination of the role of government PRDs at the international level. It is also an opportunity to test the ability of Jordan's PRD to persuade decision-makers to allow it into the decision-making process behind Jordan's accession to GCC; this is in the light of Carroll's statement (2013) that PR practitioners are not often seen as formal members of the management team in strategic decision-making. It is hoped that this study will add to the body of literature on the role of government PRDs in decision-making with regard to major or critical international issues.

The study is based on PR and Decision-Making theories, because, if they are to succeed, they are interdependent. PR theory focuses on examining the role of public relations in various public and private entities, and how the administrative body uses various means of communication with the internal and external customers of such entities to build and maintain good relations. Decision-Making Theory focuses on providing information and valid, accurate, accessible and trustworthy news to the decision-maker, who can then select an appropriate option from those offered. Ruth-McSwain (2011) stated that "such information and news could be attained from multiple sources regardless they are involved in the decision-making process or not, and whether they generated the internal and external environments".

A PR department is one such body, for it is the primary source of information and news. Accordingly, the department can enjoy influence and has the power to win the confidence of the decision-maker, thus enabling it to take a seat at the decision-making table, or play a vital role in strategic management. According to Berger and Reber (2006) participating in strategic management circles is an opportunity for PR professionals to speak, advocate, participate in discussions, and contribute in the decision-making process.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The PR department is a main administrative component of government apparatus. To fulfill its role properly and achieve its objectives, it requires ample space, influence, and power at the decision-making level within the institution or establishment in which it operates. The problem statement can be expressed through questions, as follows:

Question 1.

Does the PRD in Jordan's MOFA perform its functions and activities freely within internal and external environments?

Question 2.

Is the PRD in Jordan's MOFA a member of the decision-making group tasked with attending the negotiations on Jordan's accession to the GCC? If so, what is the form of such participation?

Question 3.

What enhances the PRD's influence and power over decision-makers in Jordan's MOFA?

METHODOLOGY

In this descriptive study, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted. Such a methodology is low-cost, yields information quickly, and helps avoid mismanagement and bias by achieving a high degree of credibility and transparency. Moreover, the data yielded are expected to be abundant, insightful and detailed (www.content.wisestep.com).

The semi-structured interview can reveal the explicit and implicit behavioral motives and help identify the roles, standards, and strategies adopted by a PRD within the decision-making process. This is achieved by raising relevant questions about the decision-making process at the administrative level. These questions focus on how to influence and make necessary changes in ideas, the impressions of the decision-makers, and their behavior, as a response to the requirements of PR theory. The questions in the semi-structured interviews focused on how the PRD becomes involved in decision-making as related to Jordan's accession to the GCC. Specifically, the themes covered were the form of such participation, the strategies adopted by the PRD to achieve objectives, and the required influence and power over the decision-maker. They also addressed the issue of whether an effect has been had. The questions were also designed to enable the respondents to provide more immediate and diagnostic responses.

Between 18 August 2014 and 1 November 2015, interviews were conducted with (14) Jordanian officials, including PRD managers and officers, senior MOFA officials, former prime ministers and ministers, ambassadors, and general managers involved in discussing the invitation to Jordan to join the GCC. The sample was carefully selected on the basis that these persons are well-placed to know about the decision-making process for Jordan's MOFA, and the PRD's role.

Fourteen face-to-face interviews were conducted in total, and nine of these were conducted with male prime ministers, ministers, directors, secretaries-general, ambassadors, directors of divisions, heads of departments, and the editors of daily newspapers. The remaining five interviews were carried out with females, two of whom are directors of divisions at MOFA, and the third the editor of a daily newspaper. Some of the interviews were recorded, while others were documented in writing, for review, analysis, and verification of the information. Each interview lasted fifty minutes on average.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The researcher reviewed a range of previous studies, some of which were compatible with the contents of this study to a large extent. The following are some of them:

1. Sue Neil's study (2012), shows that public relations experts and practitioners must reserve their seats at the leadership team's table in various institutions to participate in the decision-making process. The results of this study, which adopted the semi-structured interview method with many public relations experts at Jordan's MOFA, were similar to the results of Sunil's study in terms of the thematic questions raised.

The results of both studies substantiated that PRD should reserve its seat at the decision-making table. This could be achieved through the acquisition, of those in charge, the communication, analytical, administrative, and social capabilities and skills and strong charisma. Indeed, acquiring such qualities would drive the decision-maker to invite them endlessly to participate as permanent members of the decision-making group or the so-called controlling alliance.

2. John Philbin's study (2005), results show a strong relationship between Public Relations Theory and Decision-Making Theory. It concludes that PRD spans the boundaries and enhances the decision-making process by providing decision-makers with news and information of various matters. While the results of this study differ from Philbin's study in certain aspects, mainly on the point that PRD at Jordan's MOFA suffers from marginalization. The current study also indicates that the PRD director and his subordinates cannot play the role of boundaries spanners at the level of internal and external environments. Furthermore, the results of this study differ from Philbin's study in that PRD at Jordan's MOFA failed to play a prominent role in the decision-making process related to inviting Jordan to enter into immediate negotiations with the GCC Secretariat. PRD also failed to be a permanent member of the controlling alliance group formed by MOFA. However, the results of the two studies unanimously agreed on the necessity of conducting further studies and research that establish a deeper understanding of the PRD's role and their impact in the decision-making process.

3. While Markus Mykkänen's study (2015), clarifies the contribution of public relations practitioners to organizational decision making. It offers a comprehensive picture of the different ways in which public relations practitioners contribute to organizational decision-making processes, showing different combinations of the roles of a participator in decision-making, and advisor, facilitator, and disseminator of organizational decisions. The goals of this study are almost similar to the current study; the differences appear in the methodology used and the environment.

Mykkänen and Vos's study concludes that public relations in communicating decisions serve as accountable disseminators, and add richness to the information, materializing the outcomes of decisions for internal and external publics. In contrast, this study concluded that public relations contribute to the decision-making process is very weak and wholly excluded from the process as a whole.

4. Dozier (1986; 1992) argued that "if PR practitioners are to help organizations adapt to changes in the environment, they must participate in the management decision-making process, not simply implement decisions made by others." Dozier considered the public relations function as one of facilitating communication between top management, internal and external publics, and so contributing to organizational effectiveness to achieve the goals.

GOVERNMENT PUBLIC RELATIONS

Government institutions are usually affected by many changes that influence their performance. These changes include those associated with the technology industry and

its rapid development and its implications on the development of modern management methods, the diversity of services required, and the population increase and their growing influence and power. On account of these changes, government institutions have an urgent need to restructure themselves and initiate the professional plans of their multiple programs to be in line with the new challenges resulting from such changes. This new transformation requires establishing a specialized and independent body that utilizes the appropriate means of media to communicate the governments' messages to their internal and external customers. The best representative body that could fulfill these tasks would be the public relations department.

Based on this vision, governments have established public relations departments within all their institutions. They are tasked to organize their relations with their customers and build bridges of trust with them through various communication channels. Public relations departments in government institutions have many goals, and decision-makers were directed to support the newly-established departments in various ways. Actual and robust support allows public relations staff to carry out their tasks and activities freely and hearteningly. Such an environment would be positively reflected in their performance and productivity levels. (Government Public Relations, Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia, 2015).

PUBLIC RELATIONS THEORY

The purposes of this theory are manifested in the process of making excellent communication. This requires public relations employees to enjoy a thorough understanding of strategic processes related to research, planning, organizing, building relationships, providing advice, and implementing symmetrical two-way communication model that contributes to making sound decisions.

Excellent public relations departments serve as advocates for their organizations and strategic publics", Grunig (2006). Gruing's PR Excellence Theory further identifies characteristics of effective public relations in these categories: 1) Empowerment: active organizations must empower public relations as a critical management function. 2) Communicator roles: let public relations executives play managerial roles as well as administrative roles. 3) Organization of communication function: public relations should be an integrated communication function and separate from, instead of sublimated to, marketing or other management functions (Grunig, 1992). Public relations contribute to overall strategic management by building relationships with the public that support the organization's mission or divert it from its mission (Barbara DeGroot, 2015).

Public relations departments play a vital role in decision-making when it comes to significant or essential issues. Such a role is visible in phases of negotiations and providing consultations on these issues, exclusively in preparatory, opening, and closing processes. For example, in the preparatory phase, PRD could explain Jordan's position regarding the invitation to enter into immediate negotiations with the GCC Secretariat in anticipation of accepting the country as a GCC member. PRD would actively contribute to setting a road map for

the negotiation program, analyze its purpose with other stakeholders, collect relevant documents on issues subject matter of the negotiation process, and express its opinion on the positions and dilemmas. Moreover, PRD is capable of achieving harmony, and maintaining communication channels among the negotiation team members in the opening phase. Moreover, PRD could play a role in the closing phase through preparing schedules, annexes, drafting media statements, and preparing for the press conferences.

Based on the above-mentioned, this study utilizes the Public Relations Theory in its approach, as it is the best theory to highlight the role that PRD could play in having an influence and power over the decision-makers or alliance groups involved.

In response to the invitation addressed to Jordan to join GCC and to enter into immediate and serious negotiations that pave the way for Jordan's accession to the Council, King Abdullah II of Jordan commented: "As for the relationship framework, talks are still ongoing and underway among the specialized committees to develop this consultative and strategic relationship to push it to the required level that reflects the depth of the distinct relationship and the unity of destiny and purpose" (London's Al Hayat Newspaper, 20th June 2012). King Abdullah II's statement implicitly highlighted the need for having PRD as a member of the consultative and strategic committees that pave the way for the appropriate decision-making during the negotiations phase. PRD participation is crucial as it has power over the keys to information and most of the requirements necessary for that relying heavily on its know-how and professionalism in fulfilling its functions, activities, and tasks.

DECISION-MAKING THEORY

By tradition, decision-making is defined as the process of making options (Robbins, 1990). The concept of Decision-Making Theory is related to the quality and maturity of the decision taken on issue or problem encountering any institution. Decision-making can lead any institution to win or fail. This depends on their decision-makers' ability to lead the decision-making process, and how to prepare for it in a way that ensures the achievement of the specific goals. It is a simple process in form, but in reality, it is a complicated process and could be very risky, and decision-makers look at such a process with mistrust and uncertainty. The information available on any issue, the ability to pay more attention to its details or recalling previous details or analyses, constitute a communication challenge that limits the decision-makers' ability to disclose and receive the necessary and essential information (March 1994).

It is only the decision-makers who could direct the policy of the institution where they work for because the decision-making process takes place at the highest level of senior management; they represent this level. Hence, public relations managers and practitioners should pay much attention to this fact and work hard to identify how to participate in this level to achieve the required influence and power. The PRD's ability to have such influence and power over the decision-making process is manifested through active and continuous participation in

the controlling alliance group in the institution or establishment. They are the group of individuals who have the power in the institution to decide its mission and goals. White & Dozier (1992), emphasize the same by stating that "Strategic public relations require participation to be practiced at the level of the institution's decision-making power." This is, indeed, what this paper seeks to spot and validate.

JORDAN & GCC

The Gulf Cooperation Council was established on 28th January 1981. The General Secretariat of the Council issued the following statement on the occasion of its establishment: as an expression of its establishment "in recognition of the connections and cooperation between its members in various fields, the United Arab Emirates, the State of Bahrain, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Sultanate of Oman, the State of Qatar, and the State of Kuwait, decided to establish what they called "the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)."

The establishment of GCC is meant to achieve a set of goals. Economically, GCC is meant to establish a joint market, to have a unified currency, and to establish a customs union in 2003. However, this goal was not realized as a result of several international and regional changes; most importantly are the collapse of the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War, and the fact that the United States of America has turned to be the superpower and directed the world affairs. Then, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, which has led to many challenges and changes that contributed to the disruption of stability in all the countries of the region to this day.

The Jordanian-Gulf states relations witnessed several fundamental changes, which were sometimes characterized by intensity, durability, stability in certain times and volatility, stress, and tension at other times, especially after Iraq's occupation of Kuwait. However, relations back to normal after the American war on Iraq in 2003.

On 5th May 2011, the Jordanian, Arab and western media surprised both the Jordanian and Arab public with the news they published on Jordan's invitation to join GCC. This news was a great surprise to all Jordanian society segments as some of them received it happily and hopefully, while others with caution and anticipation. The GCC leaders welcomed Jordan's request to join GCC in their consultative summit on 10th May 2011, held in Riyadh. They invited the MOFA Minister to enter into immediate negotiations to complete the necessary procedures of Jordan's accession to GCC. The Saudi Foreign Minister visited Jordan one day after addressing the invitation; he met King Abdullah II, and conveyed to him Gulf leaders' acceptance and approval of Jordan's request to access the GCC. Jordan's MOFA Minister, Nasser Joudeh, commented: "This warm welcome comes as a fruit of the efforts of His Majesty the King Abdullah II and as a result of a conviction generated overtime for the existence of many ties and common denominators, in addition to the geographical extension, common interests, unified political positions, and external threats we all encounter." (Jordanian newspaper Al-Rai, 8th August 2011, p. 5)

FINDINGS

This review divides the findings into several themes, and as follows:

The PRD's Core Activities.

The PRD manager said that the department's activities include setting up various activities and events, building relationships with employees and the media, providing advice and consultation, conducting research, publishing news, and participating in decision-making processes, among other tasks. The PRD manager at Jordan's MOFA is intermittently invited to attend the decision-making group's meetings, but only to perform tasks identified by the group, such as publishing the decisions taken in various media, monitoring reactions to these decisions, and providing routine reports, as part of daily tasks. The PRD manager also said that the department hoped to be involved in the decision-making process from the primary stages on all issues (Interview, 29 September, 2015). He further said that he only attends regular meetings with colleagues from other departments, and would prefer to have a role in senior or even middle-level decision-making group to practice providing consultations, advice and viewpoints, and preparing information and data related to major issues, such as Jordan's accession to the GCC (Interview, 25 August, 2014).

One of the managers of a MOFA department said they were not authorized to provide the PRD manager with any information related to their core business, unless they received an official authorization or permit issued by H.E. the Minister or the Secretary-General. However, because of their personal relationship, they often passed on certain information to him, "that did not cause me any problem on the understanding that it would not be disclosed to any third party" (Interview, 25 August, 2014). On the PRD's core activities, the interviews revealed that the public relations managers at MOFA have a limited role, i.e. they publish the decisions that the decision-making group makes, and then monitor the reactions to these decisions on the various media platforms. The results also revealed that PRD has not been performing the role of boundary spanner between MOFA and its internal and external customers. The former Secretary-General of the MOFA stated that "The PRD manager and his staff did not push themselves to the limit to play the role of communicator between the MOFA and its employees, on the one hand, and between the MOFA and its external customers, on the other" (Interview, 1 November, 2015). The PRD manager confirmed this, stating that: "We did not officially practice the role of boundary spanner between the MOFA and its internal or external customers because we were not asked to do so. We just talked to some colleagues about the invitation to Jordan to join the GCC during friendly and informally talks. Once we receive any inquiries about this issue, we respond to the best of our knowledge". He went on to add that potentially the most significant causes of this situation were lack of authorization, shortages in both staff and professional expertise and specialization, and a preoccupation with time-consuming protocol tasks which they were unable to leave" (Interview, PRD manager, 25 May, 2014).

INFORMAL DECISION-MAKING GROUPS.

Plowman (1998) asserted that an increase in expertise will be accompanied by an increase in power. Conversely, he also noted that a lack of expert power can be detrimental to relationship building with the dominant coalition, warning that "when professionals in public relations do not have the expertise in their own field, it is difficult for them to persuade the dominant coalition to enact ill-conceived programs" (pp. 243–44). Grunig (1992) argued that PR is usually empowered by having access to key organizational decision-makers (the dominant coalition). PR managers usually resort to forming informal decision-making alliances when they realize that they have no power or influence. These managers are often not included because other members of the coalition do not understand the role of PR or believe that PR practitioners lack knowledge, expertise, or success in the field (pp. 6–8). One senior manager in the MOFA said: "The relationship of the PRD manager with the MOFA Minister or the Secretary-General gives him a certain level of power to perform certain tasks assigned to his department's core business. However, this is done indirectly or unofficially" (Interview, MOFA Secretary-General, 11 May 2015).

During the interviews in this study, several respondents were asked about the formation of informal decision-making groups. At the Ministry, a PR manager at MOFA commented: "As I failed to gain official power or influence to participate in the official decision-making alliance, I changed my approach, that is, getting closer in one way or another to the Minister or the Secretary-General. Indeed, I like my colleagues seeing me with them as this means I am gaining a certain amount of power and influence in their eyes" (Interview, PRD manager 25 May 2014). Corroborating this idea, the Secretary-General said,

"A public sector job differs from its counterpart in the private sector in terms of limited powers, which are mostly in the hands of the senior managers. This justifies why the majority of directors need to get closer to their seniors even to gain minimum support and the ability to advocate concerning the issues that concern them. Such behavior could be called an informal approach that results in achieving a certain level of influence and power, even if it is minimal". (Interview, MOFA Secretary-General, 1 November 2015)

A former prime minister responded to a question on his viewpoint on the formation of informal decision-making groups by saying that, "Informal alliances are usually formed when some officials feel they are marginalized by, and receive little consideration from, their senior officials. We cannot deny that a manager who is unable to make the required change or development as a result of his insignificant influence and power will try to get closer to the decision-maker to be able to call the shots!" (Interview, 20 October 2015).

A director at MOFA added that many factors play a role in the formation of such informal groups, such as "Social relationships, such as relationships of blood, marriage,

friendship, school fellowship, closeness in age, managers' offices, and employees sitting next to each other, day-to-day interaction due to the nature of work, or using the same means of transportation, and sharing the hardships of work. Such relations could be called a 'lobby' (Interview, a Head of Department at MOFA, 13 September 2015). Responding to the same question on the formation of informal groups, a PRD manager pointed out: "When I feel I am marginalized and ignored, I form lobbies with my fellow managers who suffer the same problem. We usually engage in chit-chat about these issues and get things out and give vent to our feelings" (Interview, a PRD manager at MOFA, 13 September 2015). Meetings between these alliances are usually held intermittently, such as when greeting each other or drinking morning coffee, or in each other's offices, or outside official working hours. Commenting on these alliances, a manager at MOFA said: "I meet some colleagues who come early to work to drink coffee together. We often share various opinions, and perhaps I might ask a colleague of mine about the latest news regarding Jordan's accession to the GCC. At this point, we start expressing our wishes, expectations, suggestions, for example" (Interview, a manager at MOFA, 15 August 2015).

The results of this study concerning the interviews conducted on the formation of informal alliance groups at MOFA support the respective theories of cooperation and decision-making. Both theories make it clear that alliances are usually formed between those with whom we continuously interact and feel comfortable. For example, those who work in neighboring offices, and who perform the same functions and responsibilities (Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988).

Building and Sustaining Relationships in the External Environment.

This concerns the organization and management of information, as well as the external representation of the institution to which the PRD belongs (Aldrich and Herker, 1977). In this study, a PRD manager said: "How pleased I am to see myself or any member of my team practicing this role, particularly in strategic or essential issues, such as the issue you are tackling in your study. The reason why we are not able to fulfil such a role may be, from my point of view, distrust in our capabilities" (Interview, 25 August 2014).

A number of other interviewees were questioned about maintaining relationships within the MOFA's environment agreed that organizing, managing, and exchanging information within the environment requires continuous networking and distribution. In this regard, the Director-General of the Jordan News Agency in Petra stated,

"This important process requires the important elements of transparency and objectivity. However, we are part of the MOFA's external environment. Indeed, we admonish the PRD at the MOFA, as it has never fulfilled this role in this field. We have this conviction as the agency pressed for news and information on the invitation extended to Jordan to join the GCC, but this was in vain. We were alone in the field, facing pressure from the public, who demand explanations, interpretations, and information about

what is happening!" (Interview, 18 August 2014).

Another member of the press, the Director-General of the Jordan Radio and Television Corporation, said: "We have noticed that the PRD of the MOFA is useless when it comes to providing us with news and information on Jordan's accession to the GCC, either because it does not have the actual information, or it is not authorized, or has no power to play such a role!" (Interview, 27 August 2014). In response to the same question, the chief editor of a Jordanian daily newspaper commented, "We have been receiving a massive number of daily calls and requests from customers inquiring about the grounds for Jordan to accept the invitation to join the GCC, the advantages for the Jordanian citizen, and whether such an initiative would actually happen, as well as many other inquiries. We asked the PRD at the MOFA to provide us with answers or information, but this was in vain!" (Interview, Editor-in-Chief of a daily newspaper, 19 September 2015).

ANALYSIS AND PLANNING.

The interviewees were also asked about the PR role of analyzing information and planning. One MOFA departmental manager said, "Quite frankly, we do not do this due to a lack of information and the limited experience of the bodies that can carry out such a task, especially the PRD" (Interview, 15 August 2015). Also on this theme, a PRD manager said, "We cannot fulfil the obligations of such a function on our own; rather, we share this function with our colleagues in other departments, for example in areas of drafting emergency plans. Furthermore, we rely on the results of external studies on analyzing public opinion and measuring trends, such as studies and research conducted by the Centre for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan" (Interview, 29 September 2015).

Responding to a question addressed to a PRD manager in the MOFA, on whether his department conducts any studies to measure public opinion in Jordan concerning accession to the GCC, the manager said: "To the best of my knowledge, we have not conducted such studies, and were not asked to do so!" (Interview, 25 August 2015). On this point, a former prime minister stated that,

We did not need such analyses, for we were fully convinced that the majority of the Jordanian people were supportive of the accession process, given Jordan's conviction that it would add value in terms of significant financial returns and multiple economic, developmental, humanitarian and moral advantages. At that time, we had already developed a road map identifying how we would react and the procedural execution steps. This road map was set up based on the available information and facts once we actually joined GCC. (Interview, 18 September 2015).

The result of the practice adopted by the MOFA shows that the PRD does not enjoy self-capability or a financial budget to conduct such research or studies. Moreover, the PRD has never been tasked to fulfil this type of function in collaboration with any external competent

entities. In doing so, the PRD has failed to market itself to the decision-maker, who also excluded it from sitting at the decision-making table.

PARTICIPATION IN THE DRAFTING OF ADMINISTRATIVE DECISIONS.

Interviewees were asked to comment on the role of the PRD in the drafting of administrative decisions. On this point, a PRD manager at the MOFA commented that "we should participate in drafting the important administrative decisions so that we can defend them once they are published and made accessible to the public and the press" (Interview, 25 August 2015). Another manager in the PRD at the MOFA further illustrated this by saying,

The HR department drafts many advertisements on MOFA recruitment competitions. We do not participate in this process or develop their terms and conditions. The PRD is only tasked to publish such advertisements via various media platforms. If we encounter any media fanfare regarding these appointments, the PRD is required to counter it, and most likely our position is weak because, simply, we do not have sufficient information about it since we are excluded from the process of recruitment and any amendments to initial steps (Interview, 29 September 2015).

The conclusion of the above manager matches the findings of this study within the context of the issues faced by the PRD of the MOFA. Such a situation results from not being offered the opportunity to be involved in decision-making on administrative processes in the Ministry, especially those requiring the implementation of methods and strategies of social impact. This is needed in order for the PRD to be able to defend the case and give proper explanations and clarifications when required. Certainly, this is one of the most important PR functions in the public sector.

PERCEPTIONS ON THE FUNCTION OF THE PRD IN OTHER MOFA DEPARTMENTS.

The results revealed that PRD managers know little about the various tasks, roles, and functions of other MOFA departments, and this hinders their capacity to be facilitators and boundary spanners within the MOFA internal environment. As a PRD manager commented, "These [roles] are among the most important functions that allow the PRD to acquire influence and power. It only requires patience, perseverance, effort, and certain capabilities. I am expecting I would be transferred to another department, and I have no clue about the functions of other MOFA divisions and departments" (Interview, a PRD manager, 25 August 2015). However, the MOFA Secretary-General stated that, "The understanding of PR directors and employees in other MOFA divisions and departments is to allow the PRD to fulfil its obligations as a link between all the defining boundaries of the MOFA's internal environment, and we never oppose such a role. They should take the initiative" (Interview, MOFA Secretary-General, 1 November 2015).

STRATEGIES TO HELP PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING.

Several strategies were outlined during the interviews which would appear to help with the PRD's involvement in decision-making. The first of these was traveling with the Minister who was the decision-maker: As one PRD manager said, "Travelling with the Minister, the Secretary-General, or a senior manager allows me to talk to them about any issue that I would like to raise. This is informal communication either while in transport, or even during a stay in a hotel, or a shopping tour. Unfortunately, we are not, as PR personnel, involved in such trips, and if they do happen, they do not improve the situation." (Interview, 25 August 2015).

A second strategy mentioned is conducting research. A PRD manager stated that,

"It is necessary to conduct research and surveys both internally and externally, so that we know what takes place inside and outside the MOFA. However, I do not enjoy such capacities and skills, and I am content with capturing what is published by the newspapers, magazines, and websites, or what various TV stations broadcast about us. These materials give me a humble and imprecise image of the trends, desires, and opinions of such customers regarding our services. Sometimes, I inform my colleagues about these materials to discuss them together and get an idea of their opinions". (Interview, 29 September 2015).

A former prime minister commented on this strategy by saying that, "Conducting research would enable PR managers in any institution to further enhance their position and boost their knowledge. This definitely would give them a great deal of confidence and influence among the decision-makers" (Interview, 12 August 2015). In the same context, the editor-in-chief of a daily newspaper said, "Carrying out pre-established research and surveys, especially before attending meetings to discuss previously identified issues, gives PR managers or directors a great opportunity to attract decision-makers' attention. It also enables them to enjoy decision-makers' trust and confidence and be influential, as it is one of their most important activities and tasks" (Interview, 19 September 2015).

A third strategy which emerged from the interviews concerns volunteering, as few people would like to become involved in voluntary activities. A department head in the Ministry commented that, "It is inherent in the nature of people, but it is a catalyst for achieving influence and power over decision-makers, especially if these decision-makers or a decision-making group initiate them. However, I avoid being involved in voluntary work or activities because I know that they will be subject to a long bureaucratic process. Also, volunteering will cause me some embarrassment with my colleagues, and this is why I avoid them" (Interview, 13 September 2015).

The fourth strategy which might help is participation in training programs and workshops, as a value is placed on training which improves skills and boosts capabilities in a trainee's field of work. However, one PRD manager said that while "We participate in many training programs and workshops, they are useless for us, because we do not

play our role properly". He went on to say, however, that "they are beneficial for promotion and other incentives. They are a chance to change our atmosphere" (Interview, 25 August 2015).

Self-motivation was the fifth strategy to emerge from the interviews. Good examples of this include receiving awards, certificates, bonuses, and exceptional promotions. The PRD manager at the MOFA stated that these "motivational methods are among other elements that motivate me to push myself to the limit, and I aspire to receive more of them. I hope that I will be honored and supported in front of the largest number of my colleagues so that I can have more influence and respect" (Interview, 9 September 2015).

All these findings on the strategies and methods to achieve influence and power indicate that they are essential to be able to have input in the decision-making process. Furthermore, the PRD of the MOFA implements them inadequately and on a microscopic scale, which makes it difficult for it to practice the required influence and power.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this paper have uncovered the fact that the decision-maker in the MOFA paid little attention to empowering the manager of the PRD with the ability to participate in the decision-making process, and being a member of his group. This means that the PR manager was unable to market himself and his department appropriately, resulting in being unable to gain the decision-maker's confidence, and hence to influence him. The study results make three significant contributions to understanding the decision-making process and PRD role within this process. First, they highlight the role that PR directors and practitioners might play in terms of spanning internal and external boundaries, for example in the form of informal influence over the decision-making process. Second, they suggest that PR managers and practitioners must be involved in formal decision-making groups on three levels (senior, middle, executive or lower) in order to have higher levels of influence and power. Third, the results underline that the use of various media and the formation of informal alliances by PR managers and practitioners will support the development of a good reputation with the decision-makers, and achieve the desired influence and power upon them.

The results also indicate that the PRD of the MOFA has not been using effective communication models to establish a trustworthy and permanent relationship, as in the symmetrical two-way communication model developed by Gruing (2000). Instead, the PRD is using the one-way communication model, which ignores the wishes and aspirations of the stakeholders sampled in this case study. This model does not meet the Jordanian public thirst for news and information on Jordan's invitation to initiate immediate negotiations with the GCC Secretariat. The adoption of this model reflects the lack of interest in meeting the public's needs for transparent and real information, and has created a feeling amongst the public that the PRD is unable to build an image and manage its reputation. Such a situation has led to the establishment of a negative image that reflects the PRD's weak influence and power. In this vein, several researchers have emphasized that building a good reputation is like an insurance policy against rumors. If

the reputation is well built and managed, the public will advocate for the institution against any threats to harm it (Lyon & Cameron, 2004; Dekimpe & Helson, 2008).

On the other hand, the results of the study also show that the PRD of the MOFA has failed to establish good relations with the media and to communicate its message properly through media channels. The PR managers and general managers of the Jordan Radio and Television and Jordan News Agency, along with the Editors-in-Chief of the daily newspapers, stated clearly that the PRD of the MOFA is not as effective as anticipated. The PRD did not keep pace with the most crucial development in the Jordanian arena, i.e. Jordan's direct invitation to enter immediate negotiations in preparation to join the GCC. The PRD at the MOFA also failed to establish formal and informal alliances at the ministry level, and this is among the most important findings of this study. Some of the PR managers, who were in charge of this duty during the period of conducting this study, confirmed that they need to form such alliances and make them visible. Overall, based on the results, this study provides ample and satisfactory answers to the three questions that were raised.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results, specific recommendations can be made to the managers and employees of the PRD of the MOFA to help them reserve their seat at the decision-making table, and to boost their influence and power:

First, the PRD must take advantage of all opportunities to market themselves well to the decision-maker or alliance groups controlling the decision-making process at the MOFA. This could be achieved through perseverance and persistence in launching media campaigns to introduce PRD functions and PR's role in establishing an excellent reputation and image. It may also sustain the PRD and activate the PR role in society within its internal and external environments.

Second, the PRD must conduct research and take the initiative to provide advice and consultation on important issues. It also needs to re-engineer relations with the MOFA's internal and external stakeholders, enhance and maintain relationships with various media, and use effective communication forms, such as a balanced two-way communication model.

Third, the PRD should establish a link between the ethical principles highlighted by PR Theory, such as credibility, transparency, and cooperation within the workplace environment of the PRD at the MOFA.

Fourth, the PRD needs to take advantage of the opportunity of accompanying the decision-maker or controlling alliance groups during field trips and visits, by persuading them of the PRD's mission and role, and demonstrating its sincere desire to carry out work that others may avoid.

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