

# GLOBAL CAPABILITY FRAMEWORK

FOR THE PUBLIC RELATIONS AND  
COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT PROFESSION

Indonesian Perspective



# Acknowledgement

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CREATING a global capability framework (GCF) for the public relations and communication management profession is a global project that has been undertaken in several countries. The GCF is the first and foremost Global Alliance<sup>1</sup> project in partnership with the University of Huddersfield, UK, commenced in 2016. To expand the area of study and obtain a diverse range of findings, some similar research is still in progress in several countries. The present study started from May 2019 to October 2020 with the aim to identify and map the core capabilities most needed by Indonesian PR practitioners in carrying out their profession. The study was organized and conducted by researchers from the London School of Public Relations (LSPR) Communication and Business Institute, Jakarta, Indonesia.

At the time of writing, 15 countries from all seven continents have completed their study which listed the most important or the core capabilities of the PR and communication management profession in their respective countries. As with previous studies, some questions were slightly modified to suit the context and character of participants in this country. But in general, the researchers have followed and used a set of research instruments received from the UK, which are also used by other countries to comply with research standards.

In the first stage of data collection, a three-round Delphi method was applied. A total of 20 public relations experts and senior practitioners participated in the first and second round, followed by 18 participants in the third round. In the next stage, an online survey was distributed to public relations experts, practitioners and also was also sent to several PR organizations, but unfortunately, only feedback from 32 respondents was received. The number of survey respondents was certainly insufficient given the large population of PR practitioners in Indonesia. Thus, it was decided to strengthen the data by gathering more insights and perspectives through personal interviews and by increasing the total number of panellists and focus group discussions (FGDs).

In the last stage, seven FGDs were held with 38 participants and three in-depth interviews. All the participants were clustered so that each group consisted of PR practitioners, PR experts, and PR employers, or a combination of professions and educational backgrounds. In each FGD, the PR capabilities that were considered the most

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<sup>1</sup> The Global Alliance is the worldwide confederation of professional associations in public relations and communication management. For more details, see <https://www.globalalliancepr.org>

important generated in the previous stages were discussed. Each participant was asked their views on each PR capability to gain their approval or dissent, or added other capabilities, if any. Finally, a list was formed that reflects the most important PR capabilities from the views of the majority of participants. After recapitulating and analysing the results, the following 10 PR capabilities as the core capabilities of the public relations and communication management profession were obtained.

- Building organizational/personal credibility and trustworthiness
- Managing issues and handling crisis management and communication
- Understanding and ability to work within an ethical framework
- Having a wide knowledge of corporate/organizational culture
- Understanding contemporary public relations
- Identifying, analysing problems to develop strategic solutions
- Having effective interpersonal and public communication skill
- Building, implementing, and managing public relations strategies and plans
- Being an effective advocate for the organization
- Having effective communication by harnessing various media platforms and technology

There are many other capabilities that are different from the above list that emerged from focus discussion groups as additional opinions. Some of them have been integrated into sub-capabilities based on the consideration that the sub-capabilities are part of these capabilities (see, Table 3). Of course, all participants' opinions and their arguments need to be filtered, abilities that are not supported by the majority of participants. Therefore, the above-mentioned top 10 capabilities according to our research findings indicate that these capabilities are considered to be the most important capabilities for the PR and communication management profession from the Indonesian perspective.



# CONTEXT

PUBLIC RELATIONS is often perceived as a product of democracy (e.g., Cutlip, 1994; Moloney, 2004; Verčič, 2004; Xifra, 2011). It is an old and noble profession which can only flourish in a democracy (Verčič, 2004). This argument may be factual since it has occurred in many countries, including in Indonesia's new democracy (Dhani, 2018). In the past two decades, the PR industry in Indonesia grew rapidly shortly after Soeharto and his authoritarian regime fell in 1998 (Dhani, Lee, & Fitch, 2015). Senior PR practitioner, who is also Deputy Chairperson of Perhumas<sup>2</sup>, Heri Rakhmadi emphasized that the rapid development of the PR industry in Indonesia in the era of democratization was also in line with the advancement of new communication and information technology. Consequently, he said, PR practitioners must continue to learn and improve their

capabilities so that they can adapt to the new environments where the news media, journalists, media landscape, bureaucracy, society, are all changing rapidly. "They must understand exactly where their position is. Secondly, they must know the scope of their activities and what they have to do. In short, PR practitioners should be able to map anything within their internal and external environment" (Personal communication with H. Rakhmadi, August 12, 2019).

In the public communication sector, recent developments in the last two decades have shown that government public relations and communication management in Indonesia tends not to be adequately prepared with PR capabilities (e.g. Bayuni, 2020; Sucahyo, 2020). Former Director General of Public Communication and Information of the Ministry of Communication and Informatics, Freddy Tulung, said that during the second term of President Yudhoyono's administration (2009–2014) he had to meet and employ unskilled people in his directorate

<sup>2</sup> Perhumas, the abbreviation of *Perhimpunan Hubungan Masyarakat Indonesia* - Public Relations Association of Indonesia, is a professional organization of Indonesian Public Relations and Communication practitioners which was founded on December 15, 1972. (see, <https://www.perhumas.or.id/sejarah/>).



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and he was convinced that 80 per cent of PR officers were unskilled and unprofessional. "That's why I outsourced some works. I hired about 60 professionals through outsourcing while I was in office" (Personal communication with F. Tulung, January 12, 2016). This phenomenon is arguably related to the authoritarian system which oppressed the news media and freedom of expression during the three decades of Soeharto's rule. It is not surprising that government PR officials (now often called Prana Humas) are not used to dealing with crises and communication problems because they rarely face challenges when it comes to informing government policies. Nevertheless, academics observed this as a global phenomenon that the PR officers' capabilities in government institutions tend to be weak, including in a number of mature democracies, where they remain under pressure to overcome growing dissatisfaction, disengagement, and even distrust among citizens and stakeholders (McNamara, 2018).

On the other hand, PR practitioners in the corporate sector tend to adjust more quickly to the new social and political system that occurs during the transitional



period. The number of PR agencies and PR professionals that have emerged is also in line with their fairly good performance. Former Chairperson of Perhumas, Prita Kemal Gani, who keeps a close watch on the development of public relations in Indonesia, said that over the past decade the capabilities of PR practitioners in Indonesia have improved well and their quality is not inferior to the capabilities of their counterparts globally. She gave a hint that many communication professionals from Indonesia have now become top PR management at both local and multinational PR agencies, as well as in many international companies where the top position was previously held by expatriate practitioners. Besides, many PR agencies in Indonesia also do business with their stakeholders all over the world. This triggers PR practitioners in this country so that they have the capability to create materials and convey messages that can be understood globally. "PR practitioners who work in multinational companies have extraordinary and very complex tasks so they are motivated to always learn and improve their quality and capabilities and

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sometimes they also attend training abroad” (Personal communication with P.K. Gani, October 1, 2020).

However, no research has yet revealed how many practitioners in Indonesia are actively working today in the PR and communications management sector. Prita, who also owns a leading PR/Communication school in Indonesia, said that it is difficult to acquire the exact number of PR workers in Indonesia, but as a rough calculation, it is estimated that there are no less than 35,000 communication professionals who work in the corporate sector today, ranging from junior, middle, to senior PR practitioners. Prita maintains, “This figure does not include practitioners who work in private institutions, NGOs and government agencies at the central and regional levels. Perhaps they don’t work directly as PR officers, but they do public relations work.” The rapid increase in the number of PR practitioners in Indonesia is also supported by a lot of requests from corporations for undergraduate and postgraduate graduates in the field of PR and communication. Currently, Prita explains, “it is estimated that around 700 PR students graduate every year from 210 universities throughout Indonesia that have PR and Communication majors. That means a total of 14,000 undergraduate and postgraduate communication graduates result from tertiary institutions” (Personal communication with P.K. Gani, October 1, 2020).

Meanwhile, in a briefing to the participants of Bako-humas<sup>3</sup>, the government’s Public Relations Coordinating Board on December 14, 2006, Vice President of Republic of Indonesia (2004–2009), Jusuf Kalla, told the audience that the duties and responsibilities of PR officials need to be repositioned and reoriented from being mere mouthpieces of the government and doing other technical aspects to more strategic aspects. Kalla said the government needs to increase the professionalism and credibility of PR practitioners (Kepmennakertrans No. 39, 2008). In 2008, several PR

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<sup>3</sup> Bakohumas, the abbreviation of *Badan Koordinasi Hubungan Masyarakat*- the Public Relations Coordinating Board- is a non-structural institution which is a forum for coordination and cooperation between work units in the field of public relations of government’s institutions, such as ministries, non-ministerial government agencies, provincial and local governments, regencies/municipalities. Bakohumas was established in 1971 based on the Minister of Information Decision Letter No. 31/KEP/MENPEN/1971 (see, [http://www.bpkp.go.id/public/upload/unit/pusat/files/Bakohumas/Sejarah\\_singkat\\_bakohumas.pdf](http://www.bpkp.go.id/public/upload/unit/pusat/files/Bakohumas/Sejarah_singkat_bakohumas.pdf)).



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practitioners from Perhumas and officials in the communication and labour departments followed up on the vice president's statement by mapping and publishing the Indonesian National Work Competency Standards (SKKNI). The 171-page document, which was updated in 2016, is then used by national certification agencies to examine the skills and knowledge of PR practitioners.

Senior PR practitioner and former Chairperson of Perhumas, said that in a broader context, the competence of Indonesian PR practitioners requires immediate improvement to face global competition. Muslim Basya who led a formulation team of said further that they build competency standards because a profession must be measurable. Competency must be clearly measurable and PR practitioners should be honest, for example, government institutions must follow Bakohumas' code of ethics, while corporations need to follow Perhumas' code of ethics, or according to their corporate standard operational procedure. One of the most important things in this competency is that ethical practice must exist at all levels of the competency of the practitioner. Today, ethics is increasingly important because our communication technology is available, but in PR practice you can do everything by influencing public perceptions...they can also create communication techniques that can lead to public opinion" (Personal communication with M. Basya, August 6, 2019).

Within this context and frame, the present study attempts to identify and map the top 10 capabilities most needed by Indonesian PR practitioners in carrying out their profession. Indeed, the most important thing before collecting, identifying and classifying the opinions of PR experts, practitioners and employers is to define the concept of capabilities and competencies within the framework of the PR and communications management profession. Gregory and Fawkes (2019) note that in the summary of management literature there is a lack of clarity and disagreement in terms such as competence, competences, competencies and capability. Capability, she added, often includes the prospect of professionals being prepared to cope with a very different future in which positions are subject to 'disruptive change' and in which it is almost difficult to define what employment would be like when, for example, re-shaped by artificial intelligence. However, the capability treated here refers to a definition stated in the UK research instrument: Capabilities are generic and underlie competencies, where competence describes the skills, knowledge, attributes and/or behaviour of individual practitioners. They are not about duty or function, such as internal communication or media relations, but look for common ground; nor is it related to seniority.

# METHODOLOGY

THIS RESEARCH project was run from May 2019 and completed in October 2020. It took longer to complete than expected due to several obstacles, including the COVID-19 outbreak which required working from home, and the low response from respondents. The data collection techniques that were planned earlier also experienced a slight modification due to the limited results obtained for one type of method. Although there was a lack of data collection at one stage, the data collection process ended up being completed as expected, and researchers are quite satisfied with the number of panelists obtained and the results are go through significant data collection at another stage.



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As part of a global research project, we did our best to follow the UK's research design and predetermined goals. In the early stage, this exploratory descriptive study was conducted to answer specific questions and use different data collection techniques (see, Fawkes, et al., 2018, p. 3). However, as with the variety of research designs conducted in other countries, only three data collection techniques are reported, i.e. the Delphi method, in-depth interviews, and group discussions.

In the first stage, participant's opinions and insights about PR capabilities from several experts and PR practitioners were gathered through a three-round Delphi method and some interviews. After that, a survey was conducted and ended with other interviews and group discussions. Prior to conducting group discussions, researchers deployed a survey as one of the recommended data collection techniques. Unfortunately, as noted above, we received a very low feedback and a slow response from respondents. Therefore, we decided not to use this survey technique and its data as part of the research design. Instead, seven group discussions were organised with a total of 38 participants. Also information was explored through in-depth

interviews with several informants, including to provide context for this research. Modification of this method had been anticipated and allowed because the characteristics of respondents are different in each country.

Of the seven FGDs, one FGD was conducted face-to-face before the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in Indonesia in early March 2020. After that, the research continued with the other six FGDs by using online conferences via Google meet internet based application from June to August 2020. The benefits of holding this online FGD were that geographic coverage could be expanded and involved several participants from some major cities in Indonesia. To ensure that this study was carried out properly, Professor Anne Gregory from the UK continues to closely monitor the development of this research, including a visit to Jakarta and other countries in the region to provide direction and discussion on the application of research designs that have been and will be done in the field.



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# Delphi Method

After preparing research needs, including making research ethics, the first stage of this research started in June 2019. Initially, researchers identified a number of PR practitioners and experts to obtain their opinions using the Delphi method to obtain opinions on the most important PR capabilities, which we would most like to obtain from academics and practitioners. Potential participants were selected and invited, especially those who have a long teaching experience or are PR practitioners. Apart from utilizing our professional network, the researchers also searched and found colleagues who have joined PR organizations, including in Perhumas, APPRI, and Bakohumas. Table 1 below shows the descriptive characteristics and qualifications of the participants for the three-round Delphi method.

**Table 1:** Characteristics and qualifications of Delphi method participants

Characteristics	Round 1 (n)	Round 2 (n)	Round 3 (n)
Sex			
Male	11	11	11
Female	9	9	7
Age			
25 – 35	3	3	3
36 – 50	11	11	9
> 50	6	6	6
Education			
Bachelor	3	3	3
Masters	12	12	11
Doctoral	5	5	4
Occupation			
Practitioner	7	7	6
Academic	11	11	10
Employer	2	2	2
City			
Jakarta	18	18	16
Denpasar	1	1	1
Yogyakarta	1	1	1



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Initially, each potential participant was explained the aims and objectives of this research project. After that, the participants were asked for their commitment regarding their desire to be involved in the Delphi method for three rounds. Finally, they were asked for their agreement by signing a consent form to participate in this research project on a consistent and voluntary basis. In the first round, participants and their opinions were gathered on two occasions (before and during the COVID-19 outbreak) and then the two results were combined so that the participants reached 20 persons. In the second round, responses were received from the same number of participants, but in the final round, the number of participants decreased to only 18 participants.

## Questionnaire

In the first round of the Delphi method, the participants were asked what they think about PR capabilities and write them into the boxes provided. They then determined the most important capabilities of the public relations profession which are divided into three groups. They are (1) Strategic Communication capabilities; (2) Operational communication capabilities; and (3) Generic professional capabilities. Participants were asked to write or add any comments, suggestions or questions, if any, outside of the three categories above they completed. At the end of this form, some information was asked regarding the characteristics of each participant.

In the first round questionnaire form, it was clearly stated what is meant by capabilities: Capabilities are generic and underpin competences (a competence describes skills, knowledge, attributes and/or behaviours of individual practitioners). Also, the capabilities are not about tasks or functions, such as internal communications or media relations, but look for commonalities. Nor are they related to seniority. On the first occasion of the first round, the form was sent only in English, but due to misunderstandings and unclear statements from participants, all the questionnaires (from round 1 to 3) were translated into Indonesian before being sent back to all participants.

# Findings

## Round 1

In the first round, the participants wrote about a wide variety of capabilities that they considered to be the most important PR capabilities under the Strategic Communication Capabilities, Operational Communication Capabilities, and Generic Professional Capabilities. These various opinions were collated and summarized as follows.

In the Strategic Communication Capabilities category, the most relevant and common responses in this area that emerged most frequently and are similar to one another include the capability to:

- solve problems and handle crisis communication
- prepare and implement a strategic plan
- conduct social and stakeholder mapping
- creative thinking
- adaptability
- research and evaluate
- analytical and strategic thinking
- build a good reputation

Some panellists stated that a PR practitioner needs to have sufficient insight and ability to read national and international socio-political situations, read and scan environmental changes, and alike, as the main basis for planning various strategic communication plans. Also, there is an opinion that PR professional should be able to review the general situation and conditions relating to the organisation and the public/stakeholders. These comments were put into one capability that already exists on the list above: conduct social and stakeholder mapping.



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Other panellists commented that public relations professionals should ideally have strategic positions and think strategically. They should be in strategic management positions and must have the capability to solve communication problems. In short, PR officers must have an adaptive nature, creative thinking, and be able to become a think tank or change roles as an important actor in an organization. Comments like this were separated into two main capabilities that are not yet in this category: adaptability (to a new environment); and creative thinking.

In the Operational Communication Capabilities category, the most relevant and common responses in this area that emerged most frequently and are similar to one another include the ability to:

- lead the work team
- good interpersonal communication
- persuasive communication
- public communication (good communication with the public)
- have knowledge of PR
- negotiate and persuade
- budget management
- digital savvy



There are many other comments from the panellists that could be included in this category, such as the ability to recognize changes/public shifts that are important to the company/organization. These opinions have been included in Strategic Communication Capabilities. However, there is also opinion related to the new environment that was kept in this category (operational communication capabilities), such as changes in the role of the media due to changes in information and communication technology. Another participant briefly said that PR professionals should be digital savvy and familiar with social media.

Meanwhile, there were many other opinions regarding communication skills in several contexts conveyed by panellists in this category, including interpersonal communication and public communication. Others say that public relations professionals must possess effective persuasive

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communication skills through communication across cultures and countries. Of course, not all types of communication skills performed in different contexts can be combined into one type of capability.

Persuasive communication was also included at the operational level, among others because it was proposed by several panellists and one of them argued that the capability of PR practitioners in making plans is prominent because no matter how good the planned strategy is, it often fails at the level of persuasive communication, especially with the public that has more dominant power, for example in the corporates, NGOs and executive/legislative institutions

In the Generic Professional Capabilities category, the most relevant and common responses in this area that emerged most frequently and are similar to one another include the capability to:

- understand how to work ethically
- visionary thinking
- honest and credible
- good writing skills
- discipline and trustworthy
- develop leadership
- knowledge of the PR industry
- expand and maintain networking

In this category, the researchers have received less participant opinion compared to the previous two categories. Some opinions from panellists in this category, including extensive knowledge of the industry in which he works, emotionally intelligent, storytelling, perseverance, and alike.

## Round 2

After collecting all the answers and grouping them into several capabilities in the first round, a list was then made which contains all of the 24 capabilities selected from the first round. Some of the capabilities were modified and combined from two or three elements to become one capability. The task of the panellists is to assess the 24 capabilities so that the 18 capabilities can be determined using a scale of 1 to 7, which indicates that 1 is not at all-important to 7 which indicates extremely important.

Finding in round 2 of Delphi method are as follows.

1. Have a broad understanding of the company and industry
2. Identify and analyse problems properly (strong analytical skill)
3. Able to adapt and be able to read situations (adaptable)
4. Creative thinking
5. Able to set the organization's objectives, vision, and mission (visionary thinking)
6. Strategic thinking
7. Able to solve problems
8. Have effective public communication skills
9. Mastering communication technology
10. Good writing skills
11. Have effective interpersonal communication skills
12. Have the ability to lead a group of people or an organization (have leadership skills)
13. Able to create and implement PR strategies
14. Able to manage and overcome crisis communication
15. Have a good understanding of PR knowledge
16. Honest, credible, disciplined, and trustworthy
17. Able to negotiate and lobby (persuasive communication)
18. Understand and be able to work within an ethical framework

There was only one question that was distributed back to the same panellists which asked participants to rate and consider how important each capability presented in the list was. However, an empty box was also provided for participants to fill in their opinions and comments just in case some panellists felt other capabilities had not been included in the list and were considered as important, or even more important than several capabilities that have been mentioned in the list above.

## Round 3

In the third and final round, a list of 18 capabilities that was found in the second round was modified and proposed. All the participants were asked to select 10 of the 18 listed capabilities and also rank them according to 7 levels of each on a scale from 1 (not at all important) to 7 (very important). 20 participants were distributed with the final questionnaire, but only 18 of them gave responses. The results of the third round can be seen in the list of 10 core PR abilities that have been compiled starting from the highest scores as follows.

1. To build organizational credibility, honesty, and trustworthiness
2. To manage and overcome crisis communication
3. To understand and be able to work within an ethical framework
4. To have a wide knowledge of the corporate/organizational culture
5. To have a good understanding of public relations
6. To identify and analyse problems properly
7. To solve organizational communication problems
8. To have effective interpersonal communication skill
9. To build and implement public relations strategies
10. To have an effective public communication skill

In addition to the 10 core abilities that were obtained in the third and final rounds of the Delphi technique mentioned above, also eight other capabilities (that have the lower score) were kept which will be presented again to the FGD participants as choices. The aim is to examine and verify these capabilities so that it can be confirmed whether the participants (with a wider number, background and distribution of locations) have mostly expressed their consent and can consider these to be the core skills of PR professionals. Moreover, the results of the capability ranking that were obtained in the last round were quite surprising because several essential capabilities, such as digital savvy and research capability, were not the panellists' main choices or the top 10 capabilities. While the capabilities to build the organizational credibility, honesty, and trustworthiness received the highest score and are ranked first of the 10 core PR capabilities.



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# INTERVIEWS & FGDs

Interviews and FGDs are the next important step of collecting data in this research project. In-depth interviews were conducted in some occasions with three prominent informants who have central roles, not only have long experience as PR practitioners and academics, but also have significant roles in advancing public relations in Indonesia. From these three key informants, we extracted various information related to the context and history of the development of public relations in Indonesia, both in the public and corporate sectors. Apart from that, we also wanted to obtain data on PR workers and communication management professionals as well as the progress of PR education in Indonesia.

## Interviews

As mentioned earlier, two interviews were conducted with two key informants at the start of this project. The first interview was conducted on 6 August 2019 with Muslim Basya, a senior practitioner, academic and also the person who led a project team that writes the Indonesian National Work Competency Standards (SKKNI). SKKNI project was initiated and directed by the Ministry of Manpower to establish competency standards and capabilities for the public relations field in Indonesia. In the interview, Basya among other things said that in general, they (the SKKNI committee) divide PR competences at the highest managerial and strategic levels, and the main thing is how these communication professionals understand PR knowledge in a broad sense. At that level, the expected capability is that they can communicate widely or with various parties, including being able to communicate in a social-cultural context at the international level. He noted that the practitioners' PR knowledge must be broad and strategic because if compared to operational ones, it is more about how they can



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apply the knowledge they have to various fields. Knowledge here, he said, is not only PR knowledge but also information technology connectivity and knowledge that facilitates digital communication and all forms of internet-based platforms. We want to see the role of PR here as a wide variety, not a conventional one.

On August 12, 2019, the second interview was conducted with Heri Rakhmadi, another senior practitioner and academic who also owned a PR agency and often provides PR training in several government institutions. In addition to providing a context for the development of PR in Indonesia, Rakhmadi also provides insight into PR and communication management capabilities. He noted that as PR practitioners, whatever functions the PR practitioners will carry out, they must understand PR knowledge and have a very good understanding about the business, what kind of business and organization, then what and how to carry out their job desk, so that they can really understand where their position is, not to pass through the corridor. In addition, PR practitioners must know the mapping of what is in their internal and external environment. In both corporate and government organizations, for example, they have to know what are the negative issues, analyse the negative issues and then create a positive issue, only these two, unless they are given another task, to reposition the image that has been formed, even though their company is quite good but they may need to reposition again and maintain their reputation.

On October 1, 2020, the last interview was conducted with Prita Kemal Gani, a senior public relations practitioner who is also the former Chairperson of Perhumas and this was carried out shortly before this project was completed. In the interview, Prita highlighted the rapid progress of the PR industry in Indonesia in the last two decades, not only in the corporate sector but also in the public sector. This is also supported by the increasing number of tertiary educations in this country which have opened departments of public relations and produce hundreds of PR graduates every year both at the undergraduate and master level.

Regarding the curriculum taught in universities and colleges in Indonesia, Prita noted that it has undergone many changes today because



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it needs to adapt to the development of digital communication and information technology. She appreciates the efforts to identify PR capabilities that can be applied globally. Prita supports this research project because she is aware of the importance of innovative studies like this that can be used to standardize PR skills and education. Therefore, all related parties can take advantage of the results of this research by knowing what academics have or have not taught their students at their respective educational institutions so that later they will comply with national and international standards. Moreover, it is also fruitful for employers to know what capabilities their PR practitioners should have and need to improve, whether they work in government organizations or companies.

Apart from the above three informants, we also tried to contact several other key persons, including the chairman of PR organizations and a high-ranking officer from the Ministry of Communication and Informatics to obtain new information and update regarding the data already collected. Some of them did not respond to our request until the research project deadline. For this reason, we have tried to enrich the information from other sources as well as using interview data that was done several years before but is still relevant to current conditions, particularly as background information.

## **Focus Group Discussions**

Seven FGDs have been conducted in this project involving 38 panellists from three different groups: practitioners, academics, and employers, some of which are senior practitioners and prominent academics. This is to ensure we are testing elite and expert views through the Delphi technique with more people who may have slightly different opinions and who can moderate those views. With a slight difference from the original plan, eventually a discussion group was organised which consisted of four groups of practitioners, two groups of academics, and one group of employers. Minor changes in group composition have also occurred due to the complexity of the situation and it was difficult for all participants in a particular group to be grouped as scheduled. Apart from this issue, some participants had dual status (i.e., practitioner–employer, practitioner–academic, or academic–employer) because some of the practitioners and academics also owned PR agencies and they were included in practitioner or academic discussion groups.

Moreover, there was the opportunity to hold a face-to-face discussion group by gathering seven participants before the outbreak of Covid-19 in Jakarta. However, after the coronavirus pandemic began to spread in the capital city in March 2020, this research project was postponed for several months while preparing and re-inviting many participants to be involved in this discussion group through the Google-meet, an inter-

net-based meeting group application. Although FGDs are rarely done online, it turned out that the discussions were able to be organised and all the discussions ran smoothly and remarkably. Even though there were differences of opinion that were sometimes expressed by the participants, all the panellists are satisfied that they contributed their insights.

By holding online discussions, it also allowed organization of group discussions that can reach a wider distribution of participants. Thus, the focus was not only on practitioners, academics, and entrepreneurs from Jakarta alone but also in eight cities, seven provinces and they represented panellists from four islands in Indonesia (Sumatra, Jawa, Bali and Kalimantan). As the centre of government and business, as well as a barometer in Indonesia, it is normal that to choose participants from Jakarta to be the dominant panellists involved in the discussion groups. In contrast to the Delphi method participants, the prospective panellists invited to discuss the capabilities of PR were relatively easy to be persuaded to be willing participants in this project. In Table 2 below detailed characteristics and qualifications of FGD participants are described.

**Table 2:** Characteristics and qualifications of FGD participants

Characteristics	n
Sex	
Male	17
Female	21
Age	
25 – 35	5
36 – 50	24
> 50	9
Education	
Bachelor	7
Masters	24
Doctoral	7
Occupation	
Practitioner	19
Academic	12
Employer	7
City–Province	
Jakarta – Capital Special Region	29
Denpasar – Bali	1
Yogyakarta – Special Region	1
Tangerang – West Jawa	2
Palembang – South Sumatra	1
Bandung – West Jawa	2
Surakarta – Central Jawa	1
Kutai Timur – East Kalimantan	1



Eko Herwanto

## FGD Procedure

The FGD process started with the sending out of a list of questions to each participant who had expressed an interest in participating in the group discussion. The form contains five questions that were deliberately sent beforehand so that the participants could read and send some of their answers before the discussion began. A list of the top 10 PR capabilities was sent which was generated from the Delphi method to all participants in each group, and from the top 10 capabilities, the panellists were asked to select seven capabilities that were considered the most important capabilities.

Besides, we also listed eight other capabilities that were intended as alternative options for panellists to determine the other top three, or add other capabilities if they think there are more important capabilities to be placed as sub-capabilities. Participants were required to provide answers to the first two questions to be discussed later in the discussion, while the rest can be answered in group discussions. As such, the time scheduled for discussion was maximized to around 90 minutes per group discussion.

## Questionnaire

The following is a list of questions for all discussion group participants who all had the same questions, except for question number 2 which was adjusted. Question 2a was addressed to practitioners, question 2b to academics, and question 2c to entrepreneurs. Before sending questions to participants, they were first translated into Indonesian. This was done because several participants misunderstood the questionnaires.

1. When thinking about the future of public relations and communication management as a profession, which capabilities do you think are most



important? Please rank the following capabilities from 1- 7 where 1 is Extremely Important and 7 is Not at all important. (10 capabilities were listed under the question)

2. a. Question for practitioner: When thinking about your own future as a practitioner which capabilities are most important to you? Please rank the following capabilities from 1- 7 where 1 is Extremely Important and 7 is Not at all important (8 capabilities were listed under the question)
- b. Question for academic: As an educator, which of these capabilities seems most important for educating future practitioners?
- c. As an employer, which of the following capabilities are most important when hiring public relations and communication staff (all levels)?
3. Please identify anything which might prevent you from realizing these capabilities. This might be an external issue, such as resources, or an internal issue, like unfamiliarity. (List of capabilities with two columns Internal and External)
4. Please identify any internal or external opportunities or support you are aware of which would help you achieve progress in these capabilities?
5. Finally, have we missed a key capability? Do you want to say something about your own situation? We welcome suggestions and comments.

## Findings and analysis

After receiving the participants' answers, particularly for questions 1 and 2, it was found that the top 10 PR capabilities that were deliberately arranged randomly (not based on the most important ranking) that were asked to be selected as top-seven, did not produce the same order with the original one, although it was close to the order obtained via the Delhi method. In other words, the perspectives of each FGD participant turned out to be different with the order of the most important to the least important levels according to the results of the third round of the Delphi method. However, the majority of participants from the seven group discussions agreed on the top 10 capabilities resulting from the Delphi method, even though some participants wanted to add a few more capabilities to the list of top 10 capabilities. These additional capabilities were recapitulated to be associated as sub-capabilities on the relevant capabilities. Also, some important comments from the panellists were summarised and their justifications as follows.

## General Comments

Many comments were received regarding the order of the core PR capabilities from the Delphi method, both those who support it or those who do not agree with the ranking or level of these capabilities. Here are some selected comments from participants, as follows.

- Participants considered that effective public communication must be the most important capability for future PR practitioners and public officials. This is based on the observations of several panellists that public relations practitioners, ministers, and other high-rank officials tend to be weak in their public communication.
  - o A panellist said: “The way officials communicate with the public at official events with the public, politicians and community leaders appear weak in their public communication. So, this is what I think is needed in the future, especially for Indonesia: it is necessary to have effective public communication skills” (PR practitioner, male, 45).
  - o Likewise, one participant who worked in a government institution, said that they have a lot to do with the public and within institutions, they also have a lot to do with the bureaucratic system. “The capability of a PR practitioner must be able to be a mouthpiece, for example upward and downward, and to the external public. This capability is so-called public communication, and they must be able to convey messages and explain the government policies as well” (PR practitioner, female, 32).



Timur Kozmenko

- From several FGDs, participants stated that knowledge about public relations is the most important thing or the core capability that all public relations practitioners need to have because it's the big picture and what must become the first thing from public relations then mastering other capabilities. They must know PR knowledge in detail before going any further, and they must understand the essence of PR first.
- Meanwhile, some participants considered that the ethical aspects in some conditions and some types of companies were not capabilities that were ranked among the highest.
  - o A participant who worked in a mining company, for example, argued that understanding and being able to work within an ethical

- framework is not very important for the company that she works for every day. She said mining companies prioritize identifying and analysing problems first, and then what kind of technique of speaking to the local community. “We, as PR officers, are often accompanied by the military when we have to speak to local people because what we are dealing with is not someone who can be spoken to in polite language or who can be invited to understand communication. It doesn’t work, because they come with machetes or spears” (PR practitioner, female, 51). She maintains that mining companies are an industry that is very vulnerable to death and there are often problems in it. In such conditions, communicating with public ethically is not a priority.
- o Similarly, another participant said that working within an ethical framework can sometimes be problematic, especially in the hospital where she works every day. For hospitals, particularly in the region, the priority here is the healthcare business, and especially services that promote lifesaving. So, safety first. After that, they must convey the form of solutions or ways to solve a problem related to ethical aspects and it will only be done ethically after they know the patient is safe.
  - On the other hand, some participants said that PR activities are closely related to ethical issues, especially in efforts to build a good image and reputation. This ethical issue is of concern to them and therefore they would like to underline the lack of attitude and empathy of many practitioners, especially for new PR practitioners.
  - Some participants agreed with strategic thinking as the core of PR capability as they think that the ability to think strategically is needed by PR people. “That is the main thing, so PR is not only doing things within standard operating procedures, but it is more of creativity and also more strategic as well” (PR practitioner, male, 43).
  - Another participant argued that an important thing that must be conveyed from lecturers to students is related to how we build social responsibility and accountability. “Usually such issues should be included in character building. It has just been adopted by educational institutions because character building is usually part of a school but never part of the curriculum” (PR academic, male, 37).
  - Some participants also discussed and wanted to add digital-savvy as a PR capability that should be included in the top 10 or core capabilities. Some reasons, among others, is because currently communication is entering the era of social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and various other media and a PR person must be able to understand the strategy of

using social media. Another participant said: in my opinion, the most important capability is adaptive skills, because things change rapidly, we need to have the skill to adapt and adopt new things. New skills, new tools, new environment and especially, the knowledge of using the information and technology.

- On the other hand, some other participants considered that digital-savvy was not a very important capability for a PR practitioner because they were also able to use social media in their daily communication. Apart from that, they can also ask other workers to do such tasks with much more sophisticated results, or with a large number of strategists in digital communication, a company can just look for freelancers such as outsourcing workers.

### **Obstacles to developing capabilities**

- Many participants considered that financial and budget issues were the main obstacles in developing capabilities. Some of them argue as follows.
  - What hinders the development of these capabilities is how we as practitioners must carry out the interests required to benefit or the interests of the company. In a sense, this is a financial value. So sometimes we can't prioritize ethics and good work because there is always a consideration of financial benefits.
  - In addition to having the capability of making PR strategies and programs, another important capability is persuasion skills, especially to convince management that the program will have a lot of positive impacts or can support the company's profits and business. This is because sometimes the management must understand and have to be convinced of what we are proposing. After all, it is related to the budget.
  - What has been the obstacle so far is related to the implementation we are dealing with the first state budget, what may be the obstacle is related to the budget, because the budget is rigid. Working day-to-day in public relations, we need equipment and other materials such as support or infrastructure for the program.
- Another problem raised in some group discussions was the lack of understanding of public relations, including from the managers and CEOs in an organization. Some of the participant's comments that emerged in the discussion were as follows.
  - "There are generations who may already understand the importance of PR, but others may not. That is still a problem because not every one knows the importance of public relations and the importance of reputation for the organization's survival" (PR academic, male, 58).

- o “In our place the main obstacle is management which does not see PR as important because the mindset of the management is of different backgrounds and they do not come from the fields of communication and social sciences” (PR academic, female, 38).
- o “For management, the most important thing is that their mindset is production because it is considered to have a direct impact on profits. On the other hand, there is an idea that the field of public relations may be considered less important and not profitable” (PR practitioner, male, 41).
- Participants also discussed how to increase the standard of public relations education in higher education. One of them is regarding raising an understanding of ethics because we cannot control the students one by one because their souls are still in an unstable state or are still looking for an identity. “If we ignore this, that will create a hindrance for the public relations practitioner, because usually his ethics and behaviour are more or less out of control so they can affect his reputation in the future” (PR academic, female, 43). For example, in terms of content on social media, universities need to have regulations that apply and must be implemented for all students. Sometimes they post something bad on social media and that affects the reputation and branding of our institution. This can be a serious problem as we cannot monitor all the time and we cannot limit their freedom of expression too much.

### **Opportunities for developing capabilities**

Apart from expressing many comments regarding the obstacles in developing public relations capability, the participants also gave their opinions regarding the opportunities as follows.

- From the perspective of higher education graduates in Indonesia, the real opportunity for public relations practitioners here is to be able to create a system in strategic policies, how to convey government programs to related parties and so on. For example, in the past, PR only supported certain programs so with this opportunity the public relations have their responsibilities and they can enter into the strategic plan for the next four years.
- With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, this could be a revolution in the world including the field of PR, because with this practice, previously written concepts, including how to handle media, how to handle social media have changed so much. That is an understanding of additional policies may be needed, for example, with an understanding of stakeholder mapping. “It is necessary to explore which one is more contemporary, including earlier if for example with the media, the pros

and cons, and later I am sure there is no need for face-to-face communication anymore” (PR practitioner, male 50).

- In terms of improving PR curriculum, one participant argues that as PR practitioners, our performance would probably be more optimal if we did not just understand communication science, but we also understood other sciences such as mass psychology and sociology. “Therefore, this can be an opportunity to improve PR capabilities by adding more subjects like these, so that when they want to communicate with a community they could understand more comprehensively who they were and what their characters were. So that we will be able to have the right understanding to solve the existing problems” (PR academic, female, 45).
- Another participant from academics stated that leadership is undoubtedly a strategy that must have a vision and mission, the rest is technical skills. He hopes that students can become leaders in public relations and one of the strengths of leaders is through mastery of communication. “This country lacks leaders who can communicate well because of the lack of leadership skills they must have in communication” (PR academic, male, 58).



Kaboompics

# SUMMARY: Country-Specific Observations

A series of data collection has been conducted through several stages from many participants to identify several PR capabilities. This is based on the perspectives of PR practitioners, academics, and employers who work in Indonesia. In this research project, we offer our findings through three rounds of the FGDs and interviews and are presented here as core capabilities or the top 10 professions of public relations and communications management in Indonesia.

Apart from the rapid growth of the PR industry in the country in the last two decades, several panellists in this study highlighted several capabilities that need to be improved, including PR knowledge, the scope of PR activities and industry, as well as tasks related to the PR field. Many academics and PR practitioners, both in the regions and in the capital city, have made comments like this. A senior PR practitioner who took part in a group discussion said that all PR students as future public relations practitioners should have a good understanding of PR. They must really know what the concept of public relations is, what the constraints of public relations work are, and where the position of public relations is in marketing and other types and contexts of communication as a basis for enhancing other public relations capabilities.

Another important finding in this study is that there are various opinions from the participants regarding the importance of each public relations capability as measured through the stages of the Delphi method and group discussions. A capability that received the highest score in the top three in the Delphi method was only in the fifth or even the lowest order when assessed by some FGD participants. These capabilities are 1) Building the organizational credibility, honesty, and trustworthiness; 2) Managing and overcoming crisis communication; and 3) Understanding and able to work within an ethical framework.

According to the participants' justification, this is related to the type of company, the kind of business the company was running, and several issues they face. We analysed this phenomenon as something that is closely related to cultural values, education level, and socio-economy, which are very diverse in Indonesian society. So, the high capabilities and competencies possessed by PR practitioners in several corporations in Jakarta and several other big cities will certainly not be the same as that of some PR practitioners even in the same big cities, especially practitioners in the regions.

Finally, we identified problems that are often faced by practitioners related to the ability to communicate interpersonally, including persuasive communication in the

convincing of top management of a PR program. Participants stated that this obstacle was due to the lack of understanding by company leaders regarding the importance and long-term benefits of creating and carrying out PR programs.

Based on the analysis and observation of the panellists' views in the study conducted above, in Table 3 below we present the core of PR capabilities and sub-capabilities according to the perceptions of the participants and also based on the environment and cultural diversity, education level, as well as the socio-economic level of the Indonesian people.



Vlada Karpovich



**Table 3:** PR capabilities and sub-capabilities in Indonesia

Capability	Sub-Capability
Building organizational/personal credibility and trustworthiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To develop and maintain trust among stakeholders</li> <li>• To develop and maintain organizational/personal good reputation</li> <li>• To listen and respond to stakeholder needs</li> </ul>
Managing issues and handling crisis management and communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To have critical and analytical thinking</li> <li>• To develop, maintain and rehearse crisis communication plans</li> <li>• To build effective teams to handle crises</li> </ul>
Understanding and ability to work within an ethical framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To engage with and demonstrate empathy to stakeholders</li> <li>• To speak honestly and in a timely manner with stakeholders</li> <li>• To maintain ethical behaviour and apply ethical principles in the workplace and in daily PR activities</li> </ul>
Having a wide knowledge of corporate/organizational culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To be adaptable to changes, both internally and externally to the organization</li> <li>• To have a broad knowledge of business and able to influence organizational culture</li> <li>• To understand business strategy, processes and decision-making</li> </ul>
Understanding contemporary public relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To improve PR skills and knowledge through independent learning or guided training</li> <li>• To update the development of new PR practices, techniques and strategies</li> <li>• To develop the team</li> </ul>
Identifying, analyzing problems to develop strategic solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To assess and identify problems</li> <li>• To do research and evaluation</li> <li>• To create and implement a suitable strategy for the problem at hand</li> </ul>
Having effective interpersonal and public communication skill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To be able to influence organizational decision making</li> <li>• To have good persuasive communication skills with stakeholders</li> <li>• To be able to communicate effectively across the range of communication channels</li> </ul>
Building, implementing, and managing public relations strategies and plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To create and implement the right PR strategies and plans</li> <li>• To manage timeliness and budgets efficiently</li> <li>• To monitor, control and adjust programs and projects</li> </ul>
Being an effective advocate for the organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To provide and recommend specific strategies to top management to achieve organizational goals</li> <li>• To convince the CEO for the importance of program and project management for the organization</li> </ul>
Having effective communication by harnessing various media platforms and technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To understand and utilize the latest communication technologies</li> <li>• To fully exploit the benefits of all available platforms and technologies</li> </ul>

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