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Using Public Relations to Modify Ethics and It`S Legal Framework in an Organization

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ABSTRACT: This study investigated many organisations that have ethics problems even though they have many laws. For example, some managers harass staff because of colour, like threatening a brown employee with a cane or whip and telling a white colleague not to sit with him. Oil companies also have problems like oil spills, corruption and pollution. Public Relations (PR) is supposed to help organisations behave ethically and be the conscience of the organisation, but many companies do not allow PR to do this job. The researcher wanted to know how PR is used to change ethics and legal rules in organisations and compared three types of organisations such as public sector, private sector and oil &gas firms in different countries like USA, UK, Germany, France, Netherlands and Norway. The study employed two different methods. First, 600 people answered a questionnaire, 200 persons from public sector, 200 persons from private sector and 200 respodents from oil and gas companies. Secondly, 45 people were interviewed, 15 from each sector and the study tested 6 ideas. Findings shows PR significantly modifies ethics code, Beta=0. 68, p 0. 001 and legal framework, Beta=0. 62, p 0. 001. The Oil and gas companies exammined shows highest PR influence, mean 4. 05, followed by private sector, 3. 71 and public sector, 3. 52 while F=28. 43, p 0. 001. Hence strong legal frameworks like Equality Act 2010, Title VII, GDPR, FCPA, EITI, CSRD strengthen PR effectiveness, Beta=0. 19. That crisis mediates PR access to dominant coalition, Indirect=0. 21, while low power distance and high individualism culture enable PR ethics role. The study concludede that PR should not just be a communication technician but the ethics counsel and organisational conscience with direct access to the CEO and board. Therefore, should be allowed to change ethics before crisis happens, not after. Law gives liability, but PR gives prevention and that organisations that give PR this role will move from just obeying the law to doing what is right by showing integrity, avoid big fines like $65 billion Deepwater Horizon, and keep trust of employees and communities.

KEYWORDS: Public Relations, Organisational Ethics, Legal Framework, Legal Ethics, Public Sector, Private Sector, Oil Companies, Organisational Conscience, Equality Act 2010, Title VII, Hostile Work Environment, EITI, CSRD, Crisis Management, Dominant Coalition.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Many organizations have ethics codes and legal policies on paper, but unethical behavior persists. The reason is that ethics is often treated as a legal department matter, not a communication and culture matter. Public relations as a management function offers tools to close this gap. PR builds shared meaning, trust and accountability. When used strategically, it can modify how employees understand ethics and how the organization obeys its legal framework. The objective of this study is to explain how public relations can be used to modify ethics and legal compliance in an organization, it´s meaning in the legal framework and corporate ethics international standard as expanded within the international review and perspective.

1.1 Background to the Study

Organisations globally face unprecedented scrutiny over ethics and legal compliance. From Deepwater Horizon oil spill 2010 that cost BP $65 billion, to Volkswagen Dieselgate $30 billion fines, to racial discrimination lawsuits under Title VII and Equality Act 2010, failure to institutionalize ethics has severe financial, legal and reputational consequences. Public Relations has evolved from press agentry to strategic management function. Grunig and Hunt Excellence Theory positions PR as management of communication between organisation and publics, with ethics as core measure of excellent PR. Fitzpatrick and Bowen advanced this to argue PR should be organisational conscience and ethics counsel, not just advocate for management. Yet Bowen's multinational study found pronounced state of neglect while PR practitioners have moral philosophy knowledge but lack access to dominant coalition to advise on ethics. They are often bounded by organisational laws and loyalty to management conflicts with professional code [Bowen, 2008; Idid & Arandas, 2016; Haque & Ahmad, 2017]. Legal framework governing organisations has become multilayered: International conventions [UN Guiding Principles 2011, EITI 2019, OECD Guidelines 2023, Paris Agreement

2015], regional laws [GDPR 2018, CSRD 2022, CSDDD 2024, EU Whistleblower Directive 2019/1937], national statutes [FCPA 1977, SOX 2002, UK Bribery Act 2010, Equality Act 2010, Title VII 1964, Clean Water Act 1972], case law [Meritor 477 U. S. 57, Harris 510 U. S. 17, Kiobel 569 U. S. 108, Bodo Community v Shell 2021] and internal codes. What is legal is not always ethical, and what is ethical is not always legal as argued by [Fitzpatrick & Gauthier, 2001].

1.1.1 In This Study Three Types of Sectors Face were Used to Different Ethical Intensity

Public sector is governed by FOI laws, Nolan Principles, OECD Public Integrity Handbook 2020, with ethical issues of secrecy, political interference and accountability. Liu & Horsley found higher ethical stress in public sector balancing political directives with truthful citizen communication. Private sector is governed by SOX, Companies Act 2006, GDPR, Title VII, Equality Act, AGG, with issues of profit vs integrity, greenwashing and harassment. Coleman & Wilkins found moral reasoning increases with tenure but loyalty to management creates conflict. Oil companies have highest moral intensity [Zyglidopoulos & Fleming, 2008] due to environmental spills, community displacement, corruption under FCPA and UK Bribery Act, safety failures like Piper Alpha 1988 and Deepwater Horizon 2010, governed additionally by EITI, UNGPs, Oil Pollution Act, Offshore Safety Directive. Bowen model shows organisations move from Stage 1 Compliance [obey because must] to Stage 2 Legal Ethics [obey spirit, avoid loopholes] to Stage 3 Integrity [self-regulation beyond law]. PR is catalyst for this movement through stakeholder dialogue [Habermas ideal speech], institutionalization via codes, training, whistleblowing and sustainability reporting. However, most studies are generic and US-focused, few disaggregate public, private and oil internationally, and few test how PR intentionally modifies legal framework across jurisdictions. Hence this study rightly fills the exiting gap.

1.1.2 Legal Ethics

Legal ethics refers to the body of principles, rules and moral obligations that govern the conduct of legal practitioners, organisations and individuals operating within the legal framework. It is the intersection between the law, what is legally permissible and what is morally right. According to American Bar Association legal ethics is seen as the code of conduct governing lawyers and judges, ensuring integrity, competence, and public trust in legal system. In the organisational context, legal ethics extends beyond lawyers to mean ethical compliance with spirit and letter of law by managers as seen public relations practitioners and employees, (ABA Model Rules of Professional Conduct, 2023; Luban, 2020). In public relations literature, legal ethics means, to ensure that organisational communication and actions are legally defensible and justifialbele [Fitzpatrick & Gauthier, 2001]. Fitzpatrick went astep further to argued that what is legal is not always ethical, and what is ethical is not always legal, therefore, public relations as organisational conscience must navigate both. For this study, legal ethics is defined as the system of moral and legal principles that govern organisational conduct to ensure actions are not only compliant with national and international laws [FOIA, SOX, Equality Act 2010, Title VII, FCPA, EITI, GDPR] but also ethically justifiable, fair, transparent and in public interest, as institutionalized and communicated through public relations function acting as organisational conscience.

1.1.3 Legal Ethics in Three Sectors

a. Public Sector Legal Ethics: Governed by Nolan Principles [UK] - selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, leadership. US Office of Government Ethics Standards: public service is public trust. Legal ethics here means PR must not spin or conceal public information protected by FOIA. OECD Public Integrity Handbook says legal ethics in public sector is about "integrity to prevent corruption" [OECD].

b. Private Sector Legal Ethics: Governed by corporate governance codes: Sarbanes-Oxley §406 requires code of ethics for senior officers, UK Corporate Governance Code Principle B. Legal ethics means PR must ensure advertising, labour practices, data processing comply with GDPR Art 5 and Equality Act 2010. Legal ethics failure example: Volkswagen Dieselgate - legal but software manipulation was unethical, PR cover-up made it legal ethics violation resulting in $30bn fines.

c. Oil & Gas Companies Legal Ethics Highest Standard: Governed by FCPA 1977, UK Bribery Act 2010 §7 failure to prevent bribery, OECD Anti-Bribery Convention, EITI Standard 2019, UNGPs. Legal ethics here includes Free Prior Informed Consent [FPIC] of indigenous communities, environmental due diligence, and anti-corruption. Shell v Bodo Community and Kiobel cases show courts now use PR sustainability reports as evidence of legal ethics commitment - if company claims in PR to respect human rights but violates, it breaches legal ethics and creates liability.

1.1.4 Relationship Between PR and Legal Ethics

The researcher in this study identifies three literature models, namely:

i. Adversarial Model: Lawyers say "say nothing", PR says "say everything" - conflict leads to legal ethics breach either way.

ii. Collaborative Model: Bowen and Fitzpatrick argue PR an legal should collaborate as ethics counsel. PR brings stakeholder ethical expectations, legal brings compliance boundaries, together they modify organisational code to be both legally safe and ethically legitimate as recommended by (Bowen, 2008, and Fitzpatrick, 1996).

iii. PR as Legal Ethics Guardian: *Recent international studies [Bowen et al., 2020] show PR is increasingly responsible for legal ethics institutionalization - drafting ethics codes, whistleblowing systems, ethics training, ESG reporting under CSRD. PR modifies legal framework from reactive compliance to proactive integrity.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite proliferation of laws such as FCPA, UK Bribery Act, GDPR, CSRD, EITI, Equality Act 2010 organisational ethical violations persist globally. Oil spills, corruption, racial harassment like operational manager threatening brown employee with cane/whip based on colour and instructing white colleague not to sit, continue despite formal codes.

Problem 1: PR's role as ethics counsel is theorized but not empirically tested internationally across sectors with different legal intensity.

Problem 2: Organisations have codes but implementation gap - managers violate dignity at work, legal framework fails to prevent hostile work environment under Equality Act s26 and Title VII, employer liability under s109, AGG s12 not enforced.

Problem 3: Legal framework is complex and evolving [CSRD 2022, CSDDD 2024], organisations remain at Stage 1 compliance, not Stage 3 integrity, because PR lacks access to dominant coalition unless crisis occurs. [Bowen]

Problem 4: No comparative study shows whether oil companies allow PR greater influence due to higher risk than private organisations, and whether public sector bureaucratic rigidity constrains PR. Hence the need for international study on using PR to as a tool to modify ethics and its legal framework.

1.3 Aim and Objectives

The aim and objectives of the studay is to examine how public relations is employed as a modification tool to ethics and its legal framework in organisations, within the international frame across organisations such as public sector, private sector, oil and gas sector and etc. Objectives are to,

i. examine role of PR as organisational conscience and ethics counsel internationally.
ii. assess how PR modifies organisational ethics codes in three sectors.
iii. assess how PR modifies legal framework from compliance to integrity.
iv. compare extent of PR influence across public, private and oil sectors.
v. examine moderating role of international legal framework strength [FOIA, SOX, CSRD, FCPA, EITI, GDPR, Equality Act, Title VII]
vi. examine mediating role of crisis experience in enabling PR access to dominant coalition, and,
vii. examine moderating role of national culture.

1.4 Research Questions

Main RQ: To what extent does PR modify ethics and its legal framework internationally, and does this differ across public, private and oil and gas companies?

Specific:

RQ1: What is role of PR as organisational conscience and ethics counsel?
RQ2: How does PR modify ethics codes in three sectors internationally?
RQ3: How does PR modify legal framework from compliance to integrity?
RQ4: Is there significant difference between public, private and oil sectors?
RQ5: How does international legal framework strength moderate PR-ethics relationship?
RQ6: How does crisis experience mediate PR ethics counsel and modification?
RQ7: How does national culture moderate PR effectiveness?

1.5 Research Hypotheses

H1: PR function has significant positive influence on modification of organisational ethics code internationally.
H2: PR function has significant positive influence on modification of legal compliance framework internationally.
H3: Significant difference in extent PR modifies ethics between sectors.
H3a: Oil companies show higher PR influence due to higher environmental and corruption risk. H3b: Public sector shows lower due to bureaucratic rigidity.
H4: International legal framework moderates PR-ethics relationship - stronger framework strengthens PR effectiveness.
H5: Crisis experience mediates relationship between PR role as ethics counsel and modification of ethics codes - organisations with major crisis allow PR greater access to dominant coalition.
H6: National culture [Hofstede individualism vs collectivism] moderates PR effectiveness.

1.6 Significance of the Study Theoretical: Extends Bowen and Fitzpatrick which were US-focused, tests internationally, integrates Systems, Stakeholder, Conscience and Dialogical theories into unified model of PR-led legal ethics modification. First to operationalize modification as Stage 1 → Stage 3.

Practical: Public sectors provides model how GCS UK, US federal agencies, EU DG COMM can use PR to institutionalize OECD Integrity Handbook and Nolan Principles. Private, shows how private organisations can avoid liability under Title VII, Equality Act, AGG, GDPR, SOX via reasonable steps defence through PR training. Oil and gas: Roadmap how Shell, BP, Total Energies,

ExxonMobil, Chevron, Equinor can maintain social licence under EITI, UNGPs, Paris Agreement, preventing Kiobel and Bodo litigation.

Legal/Policy: Shows PR sustainability reports under CSRD are evidence in courts, so must be legally vetted. Supports enforcement of whistleblower laws [EU Directive 2019/1937, US WPA] and transparency laws.

Social: Promotes dignity at work, racial equality, environmental justice, anti-corruption - SDG 16, 10, 13. Reduces ethical distance.

Methodological: First international three-sector comparison, mixed-methods n=600 + 45 interviews, validated scales.

1.7 Population of the Study

The population targets all public relations, communications, CSR, sustainability, ethics & compliance, legal professionals responsible for ethics institutionalization. Total 140, 000 [OECD 2020, PRSA, CIPR, IPIECA] Stratum 1 Public Sector - 45, 000, PR professionals with over three years in government agencies, ministries, EU institutions. Examples: US State Dept, EPA Public Affairs, UK GCS, Local Government Association, EU Commission DG COMM, German Federal Press Office. Governed by FOIA 1966 US, FOIA 2000 UK, EU Transparency Directive 2019/1024, Nolan Principles, OECD Integrity Framework. [Bundespresseamt] Stratum 2 Private Sector - 80, 000, Corporate comms, CSR, ethics managers in Fortune Global 500 non-oil. Examples are Unilever, Patagonia, Starbucks, Microsoft, Siemens, Nestlé. Governed by SOX 2002, UK Companies Act 2006, CSRD 2022, CSDDD 2024, GDPR 2018, CCPA 2020, Title VII 1964, Equality Act 2010, AGG, EU Directive 2000/43, SEC Regulation FD. Stratum 3 Oil Companies, 15, 000 Comms, sustainability, external affairs managers in IOCs like BP and NOCs like Saudi Aramco, Petrobras.

Members of IPIECA, IOGP. governed by all private laws PLUS Petroleum law like US Mineral Leasing Act, UK Petroleum Act 1998, EU Directive 94/22/EC], FCPA 1977, UK Bribery Act 2010, OECD Anti-Bribery, EITI 2019, UNGPs 2011, Environmental like US clean water act 1972, oil pollution act 1990, EU directive 2004/35/EC, offshore s afety directive 2013/30/EU], Paris Agreement 2015. like Shell, TotalEnergies, ExxonMobil, Chevron, Equinor and Eni Frame Sources, OECD Government Communication Network, UK GCS, US Federal Communicators Network, PRSA, CIPR UK, Global Alliance, Page Society, IPIECA directory, IOGP comms committee.

1.7. 1 Sample Size: Krejcie & Morgan for N=140, 000 → min 384. Target 600 [200 per stratum] for comparison and multivariate analysis.

1.7. 2 Sampling: Stratified random by sector, purposive within for 3+ years ethics responsibility. Countries: US, UK, Germany, France, Netherlands, Norway representing common law vs civil law. Exclusion:3 years, interns, agency non-embedded, organisations without formal code.

1.8 Scope of the Study Content Scope: The focuses on PR as organisational conscience, ethics counsel, boundary-spanner, dialogical communicator that intentionally modifies ethics and legal framework from compliance to integrity, the following categories are chosen as the scope of study, such as:

a. Independent: PR roles [access to dominant coalition, ethics counsel, stakeholder engagement, two-way symmetrical, dialogue, drafting code].

b. Dependent: Modification of ethics code and legal framework. Moderators: Sector, legal framework strength, national culture. Mediator: Crisis experience. Not covering marketing, advertising, propaganda.

c. Geographical Scope: International - US, UK, Germany, France, Netherlands, Norway representing Anglo-American and Continental legal traditions, headquarters of major oil majors and standard-setters [OECD, EITI, UNGPs, Paris Agreement]. Generalizable to 57 EITI countries and OECD.

d. Sectoral Scope: Three sectors purposely selected for comparison as above.

e. Temporal Scope: Covers 2020-2026 post major frameworks [Whistleblower Directive 2019, CSRD 2022, CSDDD 2024, EITI 2019]. Crisis cases 2010-2026 [Deepwater Horizon to present]. Primary data Sept-Dec 2026.

f. Theoretical Scope: Anchored on Systems Theory, Stakeholder as argued by (Freeman & Gilbert), Organisational Conscience, Dialogical, Excellence. Not covering other models as argued by (Luhmann, Bowen, Habermas and Grunig).

g. Population Scope: 140, 000 professionals, sample 600 persons or respodents with over three years experence and excludes interns and agency staffs.

1.9 Limitations to the Study

The limitation to the study are as follows:

a. Methodological: Cross-cultural language bias as english is the most used language, second languages are Germans and French, mitigated by pilot, simple language. Self-report social desirability ethics sensitive, oil and gas companies may over state, mitigated by anonymity, GDPR, triangulation with sustainability reports. Sampling bias like IPIECA and PRSA frame over-represents large MNEs, under-represents small organisations, Chinese and Russian NOCs not in EITI mitigated by stratified purposive, which include NOCs where possible. Response rate 15-25% typical international - need contact 3000 for 600 - mitigated by follow-ups, endorsements from Global Alliance, CIPR, PRSA.

b. Theoretical: Bowen US-centric, may not apply in high power distance cultures - mitigated by H6 culture moderator. Legal framework variation - Title VII vs Equality Act vs AGG different thresholds - mitigated by perception scale not objective index, control for country. Cross-sectional cannot prove causality - mitigated by mixed-methods, interviews ask timeline. Geographical: Limited to US/Europe, excludes Asia/Africa/Latin America - acknowledged delimitation. EU law in flux - CSDDD 2024 ongoing, CSRD phased 2024-2028 - measurement may change.

c. Sectoral: Heterogeneity within sectors, public federal vs local, private tech vs manufacturing, IOC vs NOC, the intral variance may exceed inter mitigated by controlling for size and type. Focus on formal framework not informal culture, e. g. , manager threatening an employee with a whip may persist despite ethics code and mitigated by qualitative on implementation gap.

d. Temporal: Recall bias for the last 3 years, mitigated by asking specific examples and documents, while rapid regulatory change AI Act 2024 and ESG litigation may outpace study.

e. Resource: Time/funding for international Zoom interviews - n=45 may reduce if limited. Researcher bias about oil negative ethics - mitigated by reflexivity, supervisor review. Despite all the above mentioned limitations, the study remains one among the first international three-sector comparison using robust mixed-methods.

1.10 Definition of Terms - International

The following terms are defined for the pourpose of this study as follows:

i. Public Relations: Strategic management function managing communication and relationships between organisation and publics to build trust and legitimacy, boundary-spanning with access to dominant coalition [Grunig & Hunt, 1984]. In this study, corporate communication, public affairs, stakeholder engagement and CSR comms are so used for this study.

ii. **Organisational Ethics:** Shared values, principles guiding decisions beyond legal minimum Code of Ethics, Code of Conduct, dignity at work, anti-bribery policy. Measured by Hon & Grunig integrity and Fitzpatrick scale.

iii. Legal Framework: Multilayered system of international conventions [UNGPs 2011, EITI 2019, OECD 2023, Paris 2015], regional [GDPR 2018, CSRD 2022, CSDDD 2024, whistleblower directive 2019/1937, transparency directive 2019/1024], national [FOIA 1966, SOX 2002, FCPA 1977, Title VII 1964, Companies Act 2006, Equality Act 2010, bribery act 2010, AGG, clean water act, oil and gas pollution act 1990, petroleum act 1998, offshore safety directive 2013/30/EU], case law [Meritor, Harris, Kiobel, Bodo v Shell] and internal codes. Focus should be on soft regulations and law as public relations can modify all the regulations and laws.

iv. Legal Ethics: Intersection of law and ethics - ensuring actions legally compliant and ethically justifiable, fair, public interest. Includes confidentiality, competence, conflict avoidance, candour, justice, rule of law [ABA 2023, CCBE, Luban 2020]. Means avoiding legal but unethical.

v. Ethics Modification: Intentional change/update of Code of Ethics, anti-harassment, whistleblowing, dignity at work through PR recommendation, dialogue, training. Example: zero-tolerance for racial harassment with sanctions.

vi. Legal Framework Modification: Intentional change of compliance procedures, adequate procedures under Bribery Act s7, reasonable steps defence under equality act s109 and AGG s12, due diligence under CSDDD, ESG reporting under CSRD, EITI disclosure, moving Stage 1 compliance to stage 2 legal ethics and stage 3 integrity.

vii. Public Sector: State-owned or funded organizations, that is governed by public law, FOI, Nolan Principles, OECD Integrity, Handbook like selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.

viii. Private Sector / Private Organisations: They are profit privately owned, non-oil, governed by corporate, contract, labour, consumer law. Examples Unilever, Patagonia, Microsoft, Siemens. They includes private limited and listed non-oil and gas sector.

ix. Oil & gas Companies: These are firm that are into exploration, production, refining, transportation, marketing of oil/gas. IOCs like BP and NOCs. They are governed by private laws plus petroleum, environmental, anti-corruption, EITI, UNGPs and Paris Agreement. Highest moral intensity like Shell, TotalEnergies, ExxonMobil, Chevron, Equinor, Eni, Aramco and Petrobras.

x. Organisational Conscience: PR as ethical guardian bringing stakeholder values into decisions, challenging unethical decisions, advising top management [Bowen 2008, Neill & Drumwright 2012]. Opposite pathological partisan.

xi. Dominant Coalition: Top management with power to make strategic decisions. PR effectiveness depends on access, crisis increases access [Grunig 1992, Bowen 2009].

xii. Social Licence to Operate: Informal acceptance by host communities/society beyond legal licence, critical for oil, maintained via dialogue.

xiii. Dialogical Communication: Two-way open honest respectful where participants have equal freedom to initiate dialogue and challenge agenda, mutual understanding not persuasion [Habermas 1984, Kent & Taylor 2002].

xiv. Reasonable Steps Defence: Defence under Equality Act s109, AGG s12, Title VII - employer not liable for harassment if proves all reasonable steps to prevent including training, code, disciplinary action. PR institutionalizes.

xv. Whistleblowing: Reporting suspected wrongdoing protected by law [EU Directive 2019/1937, US WPA 1989].

xvi. EITI: Global standard for transparency of oil/gas/mining revenues, 57 countries, disclosure of payments, licences, beneficial ownership.

xvii. UNGPs: UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights 2011 - Protect, Respect, Remedy requiring human rights due diligence, especially oil in indigenous areas.
xviii. CSRD / CSDDD: Sustainability Reporting Directive 2022 requiring 50k EU companies report ESG double materiality; Due Diligence Directive 2024 requiring human rights/environmental due diligence across value chain.
xviiii. FCPA / UK Bribery Act: US FCPA 1977 prohibits bribing foreign officials; UK Bribery Act 2010 s7 failure to prevent bribery unless adequate procedures including PR training. Hostile
xviiiii. Work Environment: Legal term from Meritor and Harris, adopted in Equality Act s26 unwelcome conduct related to protected characteristic violating dignity or creating intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, offensive environment. Example is manager threatening brown skin employee with a whip based on colour and IOCs / NOCs: International Oil Companies / National Oil Companies.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

2. 0 Introduction

This chapter reviews international literature on Using Public Relations to Modify Ethics and its Legal Framework in Organisations, with focus on public sector, private sector / private organisations, and oil companies globally. Public relations is not spin to cover unethical behavior. When used ethically, PR is the tool that makes ethics and legal framework alive. Law compels, but PR persuades and internalizes. Organizations that use PR to modify ethics move from having a code on the shelf to having a culture in the heart. This protects reputation, reduces legal risk and builds stakeholder trust. Hence it said that Legal drafts the code and PR makes people live it. While ethics which has no legal but moral consequences is the standards of right and wrong that guides behavior. In organization it includes integrity, honesty, fairness, respect, accountability and responsibility to stakeholders.

2. 1 Conceptual Review

Public Relations: Grunig and Hunt defined PR as management of communication between organization and publics. Excellence Theory positions ethics as core measure of excellent PR. Organisational Ethics: Velasquez distinguishes normative vs descriptive ethics. Pearson argued PR plays major role in managing moral dimension of corporate conduct. Legal Framework: Statutory laws, case laws and self-regulatory codes bounding PR practice - defamation, privacy, securities disclosure, environmental and anti-bribery laws (Fitzpatrick & Gauthier, 2001).

2. 2 Theoretical Framework

Systems Theory: PR as boundary-spanner bringing external values into organization. (Luhmann)
Stakeholder Theory: Freeman and Gilbert axioms - corporate strategy must reflect stakeholder values and ethical nature of choice. PR is stakeholder manager.
PR as Organisational Conscience Theory, Anchor Theory: Bowen multinational study found pronounced state of neglect but argued proper location of ethical conscience is within PR top echelon. Neill & Drumwright and Baker describe PR as prescribed conscience and responsible advocate. This is the anchor theory.
Dialogical Theory: Habermas ideal speech situation - equal freedom to initiate dialogue and challenge agenda, basis for PR modifying ethics.

2. 3 Ethics and Legal Framework in Public Sector

Legal Framework: US Freedom of Information Act 1966, UK Freedom of Information Act 2000, EU Transparency Directive 2019/1024, US Administrative Procedure Act. OECD Public Integrity Framework 2020 provides global standard. Ethical issues such as political interference, bureaucratic secrecy, lack of accountability, conflict of interest can be avoided through a sensible public realations adhenrence As argued by Liu & Horsley and Lee et al. public sector, PR practitioners face higher ethical stress balancing political directives from dominant coalition with truthful citizen communication. Bowen identified crisis as main route for PR to gain access to dominant coalition. In international public sector, PR modifies ethics by institutionalizing Citizen Charters, whistleblowing protections under EU Whistleblower Directive 2019/1937 and US Whistleblower Protection Act 1989. An example is the US federal agencies and UK Local Government Association using public relations tools to implement Nolan Principles of Public Life such as selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, leadership.

2. 4 Ethics and Legal Framework in Private Sector / Private Organisations Legal Framework: Corporate Governance: Sarbanes-Oxley Act 2002 [US], UK Companies Act 2006, EU Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive [CSRD] 2022. Anti-Discrimination: Title VII Civil Rights Act 1964 [US], Equality Act 2010 [UK], AGG Germany. Data Protection: GDPR 2018 [EU], CCPA 2020 [US]. Securities: SEC Regulation FD - PR responsible for fair disclosure. Ethical Issues: In ethical issues such as profit vs integrity, labour exploitation, greenwashing, workplace harassment. Fitzpatrick argues that PR institutionalizes ethics via codes, training, compliance hotlines.

In the same line, Coleman & Wilkins argues that moral reasoning increases with tenure, while Coombs SCCT shows private firms use PR to reframe ethics after scandal. Hence in private sector, PR can modify internal legal framework quickly via board approval, but faces strict liability under Equality Act §109 and AGG §12 if fails to prevent harassment. International private organisation like Unilever, Patagonia and Brinks Global Services uses PR to modify ethics toward sustainability, e.g., Unilever Sustainable Living Plan was a PR-led ethics modification slogan.

2. 5 Ethics and Legal Framework in Oil Companies – International

Oil and gas companies have highest moral intensity globally [Zyglidopoulos & Fleming, 2008], ethical issues such as: i. Environmental: oil spills, gas flaring, climate change. ii. Community & Human Rights: indigenous rights, resettlement. ii. Corruption: Foreign Corrupt Practices Act 1977 [US], UK Bribery Act 2010, OECD Anti-Bribery Convention, and iv. Safety: Piper Alpha 1988 [UK, 167 deaths], Deepwater Horizon 2010 [US, 11 deaths, largest marine spill].

International Legal Framework: UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights 2011. Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative [EITI] - 57 implementing countries. US Clean Water Act 1972, EU Environmental Liability Directive 2004/35/EC. Paris Agreement 2015 - carbon disclosure pressure on oil PR. Litigation: Kiobel v Royal Dutch Petroleum 569 U. S and 108, Bodo Community v Shell [UK Supreme Court 2021] - PR statements used as evidence. The PR played an important role in modification of international evidences such as Post Deepwater Horizon, BP used PR to institutionalize Safety and Operational Risk function reporting directly to board. This is classic case of PR as ethics counsel gaining dominant coalition access after crisis. [Bowen]. Hence international oil majors such as Shell, BP, Total Energies, ExxonMobil, Chevron, Equinor - now uses public relations as a tool to modify ethical framework through sustainability reporting under GRI and CSRD, stakeholder engagement forums replacing top-down approach, global memorandum of understanding (MOU) with host communities, EITI compliance communication. Zyglidopoulos & Fleming argue that oil companies suffer ethical distance and PR reduces distance via dialogue aligning with Habermas ideal communication. Bowen's work is most tested in oil gas because moral intensity is high and PR must have moral philosophy knowledge to advise against profit-maximizing but environmentally damaging decisions.

2. 6 Comparative Summary

Public Sector: Primary Ethics Driver Primary International Legal Framework How PR Modifies Ethics, public sector, Public interest, accountability FOIA, Nolan Principles, EU Transparency Directive, OECD Integrity PR pushes transparency, citizen charters, whistleblowing culture. Private Sector: Reputation, shareholder value, ESG SOX, Companies Act, GDPR, CSRD, Title VII, Equality Act PR institutionalizes codes, CSR, ethics training, sustainability narrative. The Oil & Gas Companies, environmental & community legitimacy FCPA, UK Bribery Act, Clean Water Act, EITI, UNGPs, Paris Agreement and PR modifies ethics via sustainability reporting, safety reforms, GmoU and human rights due diligence.

2. 7 Empirical Studies

Idid & Arandas in Malaysia/US cross-country study found private practitioners bounded by organisational laws and recommended independent regulatory body beyond PR associations. Haque & Ahmad Malaysia/UK found loyalty to management conflicts with code of ethics especially in oil sector. Bowen et al. meta-analysis confirmed organisations with strong PR ethics counsel had fewer legal violations and higher trust scores measured by Hon & Grunig relationship measures. Institute for Public Relations Global Study: 68% of organisations that used PR-led ethics institutionalization reported reduction in legal violations.

2. 8 Gaps

i. Most studies generic; few disaggregate public, private and oil sectors internationally.

ii. Bowen & Fitzpatrick established PR as ethics counsel but did not test how PR intentionally modifies legal frameworks across jurisdictions.

iii. Few studies compare EU Whistleblower Directive vs US vs OECD frameworks in oil sector, hence this study fills the gaps.

2. 9 Research Hypotheses

H1: Public Relations function has significant positive influence on modification of organisational ethics code internationally.

H2: Public Relations function has significant positive influence on modification of organisational legal compliance framework internationally.

H3: There is significant difference in extent PR modifies ethics between public sector, private sector and oil companies.

H3a: Oil & gas companies show higher PR influence on ethics modification due to higher environmental and corruption risk than private organisations.

H3b: Public sector shows lower PR influence due to bureaucratic rigidity compared to private sector.

H4: International legal framework such as EU Transparency Directive, CSRD, EITI, FCPA moderates relationship between PR and ethics institutionalization and stronger framework strengthens PR effectiveness.

H5: Crisis experience mediates relationship between PR role as ethics counsel and modification of ethics codes, organisations that experienced major crisis such as Deepwater Horizon and public sector scandal allow PR greater access to dominant coalition.

H6: National culture like Hofstede individualism vs collectivism moderates PR effectiveness in modifying ethics collectivist cultures rely more on dialogue approach. Hence literature review shows PR evolved from publicity to conscience role. It`s ability to modify ethics and legal framework depends on sector legal intensity and access to dominant coalition. The international frameworks such as FOI laws for public, SOX/CSRD for private, FCPA & EITI for oil & gas firms shape this.

CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3. 0 Introduction

This chapter presents detailed methodology for international study on Using PR to Modify Ethics and its Legal Framework.

3. 1 Research Philosophy

Pragmatism is adopted because it is appropriate for mixed-methods. Ontology reality of ethics modification is both objective and socially constructed. Epistemology is the knowledge generated through both quantitative measurement and qualitative interpretation. Pragmatism allows testing hypotheses H1-H6 quantitatively and explaining through interviews. laws, codes, culture and dialogue, (Creswell).

3. 2 Research Design by Explanatory Sequential Mixed-Methods

Design: QUAN → qual.

Phase 1: Quantitative survey n=600 across US, UK, Germany, France, Netherlands, Norway, 200 per sector.

Phase 2: Qualitative semi-structured interviews n=45 [15 per sector] purposively selected from survey respondents who reported high PR influence to explain quantitative results, especially crisis mediation.

Rationale: Bowen and Grunig recommended mixed-methods for PR ethics because ethics institutionalization cannot be captured by numbers alone. International comparison requires both statistical comparison [ANOVA] and cultural explanation [Bowen, 2008, Grunig, 1992].

3. 3 Population, Sample Frame and Sample Size

Population: 140, 000 professionals globally [OECD 2020, PRSA State of Profession 2023, CIPR, IPIECA]. Stratum breakdown: Public sector, 45, 000 [GCS UK 4, 500, US Federal Communicators Network 8, 000, EU institutions 2, 500, others 30, 000], Private sector, 80, 000 [PRSA Corporate 45, 000, CIPR Corporate 15, 000, Page Society 1, 500, others 18, 500] and Oil & Gas, 15, 000 [IPIECA 2, 500 communication professionals, IOGP 1, 000, NOCs 11, 500]

Sample Frame Sources

OECD Government Communication Network database, UK GCS members list, US Federal Communicators Network listserv, PRSA membership directory, CIPR directory, Global Alliance, Arthur W. Page Society, IPIECA members directory, IOGP communication committee, LinkedIn Sales Navigator filtered by title.

Sample Size Determination Using Krejcie and Morgan formula: $n = [X^2NP(1-P)] / [d^2(N-1) + X^2P(1-P)]$ Where X^2=3. 841 for 95%, N=140, 000, P=0. 5, d=0. 05 n = 384 minimum. To allow for multivariate analysis, moderated regression requires 20 cases per variable, 600 respondents needed, non-response [expected 20%], and ANOVA comparison across 3 different sectors, targeted 600 respodents which includes 200 persons from public sector, 200 persons from private sector and 200 persons from oil & gas.

Sampling Technique

Stage 1: Stratified random sampling by sector - equal allocation 200 each despite population disproportionate to ensure comparison power.

Stage 2: Within stratum, simple random sampling from frame using random number generator. Stage 3: Purposive for qualitative, select high scorers on PR influence scale 4. 0 and those who experienced crisis. Inclusion is above 3 years experience, managerial level and organisation has formal ethics code. Exclusion is below 3 years, interns, agency staffs not embedded and no formal ethical code.

3.4 Data Collection Instruments and Procedure

Research Instrument 1

Questionnaire Survey

Structure: 5 sections, 62 items, 5-point Likert 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree. Section A: Demographics 7 items. Section B: PR Role as Organisational Conscience - Independent Variable - 10 items adapted from Bowen Ethics Counsel Scale α=0. 87, Neill & Drumwright Conscience Scale α=0. 85, Grunig Excellence Scale.

Sample items: Our PR has direct access to dominant coalition; PR acts as ethics counsel advising top management on ethical implications; PR has freedom to challenge agenda. [Habermas]

Section C: Modification of Organisational Ethics Code - Dependent 1 - 8 items adapted from Fitzpatrick Institutionalization α=0. 89, OECD Integrity indicators. Example: Code modified due to PR recommendation last 3 years; whistleblowing improved through PR.

Section D: Modification of Legal Framework - Dependent 2 - 8 items adapted from legal compliance scales. Example: PR works with Legal to translate FCPA, Equality Act, GDPR, EITI into internal policies; organisation goes beyond minimum compliance to integrity due to public relations.
Section E: Legal Framework Strength - Moderator - 8 items measuring perceived strength of enforcement. Example: Enforcement of anti-discrimination laws [Title VII, Equality Act, AGG, EU Directive 2000/43] strong in my country; EITI, FCPA enforcement strong in oil.
Section F: Crisis Experience - Mediator - 6 items. Example: Organisation experienced major ethics crisis; after crisis top management allowed PR greater access.
Section G: National Culture - Moderator - 6 items adapted from Hofstede VSM - individualism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance.
Section H: Sector-specific 4 items. Section I: Open-ended 2 items Procedure on Online via Qualtrics with GDPR compliance, hosted on EU server. Distributed Sept-Oct 2026 via email, LinkedIn, professional associations. Two reminders at 2-week intervals. Anonymous, no company name required, informed consent page.

Instrument 2 Semi-structured Interview Guide

45 interviews, 45-60 min via Zoom, recorded with consent, transcribed.
Questions:
1. Describe example where PR modified ethics or legal framework.
2. How did crisis affect PR access?
3. Barriers to PR acting as ethics counsel?
4. How does national law like GDPR, Equality Act, FCPA, EITI] help or hinder PR?
5. Differences between sectors?

3. 5 Validity and Reliability

Validity Content validity: 3 experts - Professor PR Ethics US, Professor International Law UK, Professor Research Methods Germany - reviewed items for relevance, clarity, cultural appropriateness. CVR calculated, items 0. 75 revised.
Construct validity: Pilot n=60 [20 per sector] May 2026. Exploratory Factor Analysis - KMO 0. 7, Bartlett p, 0. 001, factor loadings, 0. 5, AVE, 0. 5. Confirmatory Factor Analysis via AMOS CFI, 0. 90, RMSEA, 0. 08. Criterion validity: Correlation with Hon & Grunig integrity scale expected, 0. 5.
Reliability: Cronbach Alpha pilot results:
i. PR Role B: 0. 89
ii. Ethics Modification C: 0. 91
iii. Legal Framework Modification
D: 0. 88 iv. Legal Framework Strength E: 0. 84 v. Crisis F: 0. 86 vi. Culture G: 0. 78. In all, 0. 70 acceptable. Test-retest: 15 pilot respondents re-surveyed after 2 weeks, r=0. 82.

3. 6 Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative: SPSS 29, AMOS 28, Process Macro v4. 2. Descriptive: frequencies, mean, SD. Inferential: H1-H2: Multiple linear regression: PR role and ethics modification; PR → Legal Framework Modification. Controls: country, organisation size, experience. H3: One-way ANOVA comparing means of C and D across 3 sectors, post-hoc Tukey HSD. H4: Moderated regression Process Model 1: Legal Framework Strength moderates B→C/D. H5: Mediation Process Model 4: Crisis mediates B→C/D. H6: Moderated regression: Culture moderates B→C/D. Assumptions checked is normality via Shapiro-Wilk, multicollinearity VIF 5, homoscedasticity. Qualitative is thematic analysis Braun & Clarke 6 steps using NVivo 14. Coding and open, axial, selective. Themes is access to dominant coalition, crisis as window, legal framework as enabler, culture barrier. Inter-coder reliability $\kappa>0.80$. Integration is joint display table merging QUAN and qual.

3. 7 Ethical Considerations

i. University ethics approval obtained.
ii. GDPR compliance: EU respondents data stored EU server, anonymized, right to withdraw, data retention 5 years then deleted.
iii. US IRB standards: informed consent, voluntary, no coercion.
iv. UK: Data Protection Act 2018.
v. No deception, no harm. vi. Confidentiality: no company names in reporting, aggregate only, oil companies sensitive data protected.
vii. No incentive coercion.
viii. Whistleblower protection: respondents reporting harassment like whip threat protected, no identification.

CHAPTER FOUR
DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION - INTERNATIONAL DATA

4. 0 Introduction

This chapter presents results from 600 survey respondents and 45 interviews.

4. 1 Response Rate

Table 1: Distributed 3, 000 questionnaires. Returned 642. Valid 600 after cleaning. Response rate 21.4% typical for international elite survey.

Sector	Distributed	Returned	Valid	Response Rate
Public	1000	210	200	21.0%
Private	1000	215	200	21.5%
Oil	1000	217	200	21.7%
Total	3000	642	600	21.4%

Source: Field Work 2026

4. 2 Demographic Profile

Table 2: Qualitative of 45 interviews completed [15 per sector].

Variable	Category	Frequency	%
Country	USA	180	30. 0%
	UK	150	25. 0%
	Germany	90	15. 0%
	France	70	11.7%
	Netherlands	60	10. 0%
	Norway	50	8. 3%
Role	PR/Communication Manager	280	46. 7%
	Ethics/Compliance Officer	120	20. 0%
	CSR/Sustainability	100	16. 7%
	Legal	50	8. 3%
	Top Management	50	8. 3%
Experience	3-5 years	140	23. 3%
	6-10 years	260	43. 3%
	10 years	200	33. 3%
Organisation Size	500	90	15. 0%
	500-5000	210	35. 0%
	5000 +	300	50. 0%
Crisis Experience	Yes	342	57. 0%
	No	258	43. 0%

Sources: Field Work 2026

57% experienced major crisis - confirms high relevance.

4. 3 Descriptive Statistics

Table 3: Showing 5-point scale, mean 3. 5 high.

Construct	Mean	SD	Interpretation
PR Role as Conscience B	3. 82	0. 71	High
Ethics Modification C	3. 76	0. 68	High
Legal Framework Modification D	3. 68	0. 73	High
Legal Framework Strength E	3. 91	0. 65	High
Crisis Experience F	3. 45	0. 82	Moderate-High

National Culture G	3. 58	0. 69	Moderate-High

Sources: Field Work 2026

All constructs above midpoint, indicating PR has moderate to high influence.

4. 4 Reliability and Validity Results

Table 4: Results of Validity of Main Study

Construct	Cronbach Alpha	KMO	AVE	Decision
PR Role	0. 90	0. 88	0. 61	Excellent
Ethics Modification	0. 92	0. 90	0. 64	Excellent
Legal Framework Modification	0. 89	0. 87	0. 59	Good
Legal Framework Strength	0. 85	0. 83	0. 55	Good
Crisis	0. 87	0. 84	0. 58	Good

Sources: Field Work2026

CFA: CFI=0. 93, RMSEA=0. 06, SRMR=0. 04 - good fit.

4. 5 Hypothesis Testing

H1: PR Role in Ethics Modification Multiple regression: R=0. 71, R^2=0. 50, F=98. 45, p, 0. 001. Predictor Beta t p and PR Role 0. 68 14. 32 0. 001. Beta 0. 68 significant. H1 Supported, PR has significant positive influence on modification of ethics code. 50% variance explained. Interpretation: One-unit increase in PR conscience role leads to 0.68-unit increase in ethics modification. Qualitative support, public sector interview UK. After our equalities scandal where manager threatened staff with cane, PR drafted new dignity at work policy that went beyond Equality Act minimum of zero tolerance and independent investigation.

H2: PR Role in Legal Framework Modification. R=0. 66, R^2=0. 44, F=85. 21, p, 0. 001. Predictor Beta t p. PR Role 0. 62 12. 87, 0. 001. H2 Supported, PR significantly modifies legal framework. Oil interview in Norway recorded that PR sustainability report under CSRD revealed gap in our due diligence. We rewrote adequate procedures under UK Bribery Act s7 to include community consultation, which legal had not required.

H3: Difference Across Sectors and ANOVA Construct. Public sector Mean, Private sector Mean, and Oil & gas Mean, while F, p Post-hoc and ethics modification 3. 52, 3. 71, 4. 05 28. 43, 0. 001 Oil & gas, private sector, public sector, Legal Framework Modification 3. 44 3. 62 3. 98 25. 67, 0. 001 Oil & Gas Private sectors and public sectors.

H3 Supported by significant difference, oil & gas companies shows highest PR influence due to higher environmental, corruption, human rights risk and EITI pressure. Public sector lowest due to bureaucratic rigidity and political interference. ANOVA interpretation aligns with Bowen argument that crisis enables access, while oil & gas has more crises.

H4: Moderating Role of Legal Framework Strength Process Model 1: PR x Legal Framework Strength → Ethics Modification. Effect Beta t p LLCI ULCI. PR Role 0. 45 8. 21 0. 001 0. 34 0. 56 Legal Framework Strength 0. 28 5. 12 0. 001 0. 17 0. 39 Interaction PR x LFS 0. 19 3. 87 0. 001 0. 09 0. 29. Interaction significant p 0. 001. H4 Supported: Stronger legal framework strengthens PR effectiveness. When enforcement of Equality Act, Title VII, FCPA, EITI strong, PR can use law as leverage to modify code. Simple slopes at low legal strength and PR effect Beta, 0. 38 at high legal strength Beta=0. 71.

H5: Mediating Role of Crisis Experience: Process Model 4: PR → Crisis Access → Ethics Modification. Path Beta SE p Boot LLCI Boot ULCI PR → Crisis Access 0. 52 0. 05 0. 001 0. 42 0. 62 Crisis Access → Ethics Modification 0. 41 0. 04 0. 001 0. 33 0. 49 Direct PR → Ethics [c'] 0. 43 0. 05 0. 001 0. 33 0. 53 Indirect PR → Crisis → Ethics 0. 21 0. 03 - 0. 15 0. 28. Indirect effect does not include zero, significant mediation.

H5 Supported: Crisis mediates. PR gains access to dominant coalition after crisis, enabling ethics modification. Supports Bowen crisis as window. Qualitative: BP interview UK recorded that After Deepwater Horizon, safety & operational risk function reporting to board was created, PR led ethics rewrite. Before crisis, legal said say nothing. After, CEO said we must say something. H6: Moderating Role of National Culture: Moderator Interaction Beta p Interpretation Individualism 0. 14 0. 012 high individualism in US and UK and stronger PR effect power distance of about 0. 18 and 0. 003 low power distance with stronger public relations effect, high power distance constrains challenging management and uncertainty avoidance of about 0. 09 0. 089 which is not significant in Netherlands and France.

H6 is partially supported and individualism is a positive moderator, power distance negative moderator. In low power distance cultures like UK, PR freedom to challenge agenda is higher than Norway and Netherlands.

4.6 Qualitative Findings - Thematic Analysis

Theme 1: Access to Dominant Coalition is Key, 80% interviewees said PR effectiveness depends on reporting line. Those reporting to CEO had higher modification scores than reporting to Marketing. Here is a quote from a private sector in Germany, "When PR reports to Legal, we say nothing. When reports to CEO, we institutionalize ethics. "

Theme 2: Legal Framework as Leverage, 75% said strong law helps PR. EU Whistleblower Directive 2019/1937 enabled PR to introduce hotlines despite management resistance. Equality Act s109 reasonable steps defence motivated training. A quote from a public sector in US, "We used Title VII vicarious liability to convince management to act against manager who threatened cane. PR drafted zero-tolerance policy citing Meritor and Harris precedents".

Theme 3: Oil & gas sector specific, EITI and Social Licence, according to Oil &gas interviewees, 90% mentioned EITI, UNGPs, Paris agreement as forcing modification. sustainability reports under CSRD/GRI now legally risky under SEC Rule 10b-5 if greenwashing, so PR must ensure accuracy. A quote from Oil &gas sector in Netherlands, "Our 2023 sustainability report was used by NGOs in court. Now PR and Legal co-draft".

Theme 4: Implementation Gap, 60% said formal code modified but informal behaviour persists. Manager threatening whip may still exist despite code if enforcement weak. PR needs disciplinary power.

4. 7 Summary of Hypotheses

Hypothesis Result Beta/F p

H1 PR → Ethics Modification Supported Beta=0. 68 0. 001

H2 PR → Legal Framework Modification Supported Beta=0. 62 0. 001

H3 Sector Difference Supported, F=28. 43, 0. 001 Oil &gas sector, private sector and public sector.

H4 Legal Framework Strength Moderator Supported Beta=0. 19 0. 001

H5 Crisis Mediator Supported Indirect 0. 21 Significant

H6 National Culture Moderator Partially Supported Power Distance -0. 18 0. 003. All major hypotheses supported, model explains 50% variance in ethics modification, 44% in legal framework modification.

4.8 Integration Joint Displ

Quantitative shows PR influence highest in oil. Qualitative explains: oil has higher crisis frequency, stronger international frameworks like EITI and FCPA, greater social licence pressure like UNGPs and quantitative shows legal framework strengthens public relations practice. Qualitative explains how PR uses law as leverage tools of reasonable steps, defence, adequate procedures, whistleblower protection to convince management.

CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5. 0 Introduction

This chapter discusses findings in relation to research questions, hypotheses, theories and empirical literature from US, UK, EU, oil and gas sector.

5. 1 Discussion of Descriptive Findings

Mean PR Role 3. 82/5 indicates moderate-high PR influence as organisational conscience internationally. This supports Bowen who argued PR should be ethics counsel but found state of neglect in 2008. Our 2026 data shows improvement to 57% experienced crisis which opened access to dominant coalition, confirming Bowen crisis as window. 57% crisis experience high aligns with Institute for PR Global Study 2022 that 68% organisations faced ethics crisis post-COVID and climate litigation surge. Highest mean Legal Framework Strength 3. 91 shows respondents perceive international enforcement as strong, especially GDPR 2018, CSRD 2022, EITI 2019, FCPA. EU respondents rated legal strength higher than US due to Whistleblower Directive 2019/1937 and CSDDD 2024.

5. 2 Discussion by Hypothesis

International Comparison,

H1: PR in Ethics Modification, Beta=0. 68 p, 0. 001 Supported Finding confirms Fitzpatrick institutionalization theory - PR plays major role managing moral dimension. When PR drafts code, conducts training, establishes hotline, ethics modification increases 0. 68 units. International comparison shows effect is stronger in US and UK than Germany and France. As regards to Hofstede individualism moderates, US individualistic culture allows challenging management. While in Germany, co-determination model works council also influences ethics, reducing PR exclusive influence.

An example of validated, in Germany, an international public sector case where an operational manager threatened a brown skin employee with cane or whip based on colour constitutes harassment under equality Act 2010 s26 hostile environment, s27 victimization, s109 employer liability, title vii hostile work environment under Meritor 477 U. S. 57 and Harris 510 U. S. 17, AGG s12, EU directive 2000/43. PR intervention led to modification from generic equality statement to zero-tolerance policy with

independent investigation, disciplinary sanctions, reasonable steps defence training. This is Stage 1 to Stage 3 movement and supports Pearson who argued PR manages moral dimension.

H2: PR → Legal Framework Modification Beta=0. 62 Supported, confirms Bowen model that PR moves organisation from compliance to integrity. PR does not change statute but modifies internal adequate procedures, reasonable steps as reported by ESG. International evidence includes US PR translates SOX s406 code of ethics requirement, SEC Regulation FD fair disclosure, Title VII prevention into internal policies and UK PR translates Equality Act s109, Bribery Act s7 failure to prevent bribery requiring adequate procedures including training and communication. While EU PR translates GDPR Art 88 employment data, CSRD double materiality, CSDDD due diligence, whistleblower directive protection. Oil and gas sector strongest show is that of shell sustainability report 2023 and BP sustainability report were co-drafted by PR and Legal because misleading ESG claims now while securities fraud under SEC rule 10b-5 and litigation like Bodo community v Shell 2021 used sustainability claims as evidence. PR ensures legal vetting, modifying legal framework from marketing to legally binding disclosure. This supports OECD Public Integrity Handbook 2020 which lists communication as pillar of integrity system.

H3: Sector Difference F=28. 43 p, 0. 001 Supported Oil & gas, private sector and public sector This is novel contribution to the gap because no record prior to this study that compared three different sectors internationally.

5. 2. 1 Why Oil and Gas is highest with 4. 05

i. Highest moral intensity [Zyglidopoulos & Fleming 2008] - oil spills, corruption, human rights.

ii. Triple regulation is corporate + sectoral + international such as EITI, UNGPs, Paris Agreement, FCPA, Oil Pollution Act, Offshore Safety Directive.

iii. Social licence to operate more important than legal licence - community can stop operation even if legally permitted. PR maintains licence via dialogue, GMoU, stakeholder forums.

iv. Crisis frequency higher, Deepwater Horizon and Piper Alpha which increases PR access to dominant coalition (Bowen 2009).

Why private sector is in the middle 3. 71, CSRD, SOX, GDPR create strong pressure but profit motive limits integrity beyond compliance unless reputation threat like Starbucks 2018 racial bias incident which led to PR-led store closure training.

Why public sector is at lowest 3. 52, bureaucratic rigidity, political interference and PR officers reports to political appointee not CEO, FOI laws make PR risk-averse. Liu & Horsley found higher ethical stress balancing political directives with truthful communication. However, the public sector has highest public interest obligation under Nolan Principles.

H4: Legal Framework Strength as Moderator Beta, 0. 19 p, 0. 001 Supported. Strong legal framework strengthens PR effectiveness. This is institutional theory where law provides legitimacy for PR ethics counsel. When enforcement of anti-discrimination is strong, equality act, title vii, AGG, EU directive 2000/43 and PR can say we must take all reasonable steps or be liable under s109, vicarious liability. When FCPA and UK bribery act enforcement is strong, PR officer can demand adequate procedures. When EITI requires revenue disclosure in 57 countries, PR officer can push for transparency. Low legal strength countries, while PR lacks leverage and management always says why go beyond law. EU respondents rated whistleblower directive 2019/1937 as a game-changer, it enabled PR officers to introduce speak-up hotlines despite management fearing retaliation claims. US respondents rated SOX 2002 s806 whistleblower protection similarly. This supports Idid & Arandas who recommended independent regulatory body to strengthen PR ethics role.

H5: Crisis as Mediator Indirect 0. 21 significant supported most important theoretical contribution confirming Bowen`s argument. The process, if PR has ethics counsel competence but lacks access to crisis threatens reputation while top management allows PR into dominant coalition, PR rewrites code and ethics modified. Data shows PR crisis access beta=0. 52, crisis access, while ethics modification beta=0. 41, indirect 0. 21. Qualitative, 80% interviewees said access is key. Those reporting to CEO had mean ethics modification 4. 12 vs reporting to Marketing 3. 41. Oil and Gas example: In this sector, BP after Deepwater Horizon 2010 created safety & operational risk function reporting directly to the board which independent from the operations as recommendated by PR, and this is stage 3 of integrity. Before crisis, legal advised say nothing to avoid liability (Bowen lawyer-PR clash 2008). After crisis, CEO said we must say something to maintain trust. A public sector example is in UK where an MP expenses scandal 2009, government communication service rewrote propriety guidance and allowed PR to challenge political spin. This explains why oil and gas is at highest and more crises is equal to more access.

H6: National culture moderator partially supported individualism positive 0. 14 p, 0. 012 US and UK high individualism value, individual rights, freedom to challenge, so PR can act as responsible advocate as argued by (Baker 2008). Power Distance negative is 0. 18 p=0. 003, which high power distance as can be seen in France and Germany to lesser extent which constrains challenging management. While low power distance like in UK allows ideal speech situation where PR can initiate dialogue and challenge agenda, (Habermas 1984 and Hofstede), eg. Netherlands and Norway. Uncertainty avoidance not significant and suggests that strict rules do not affect PR ethics role. The implication is multinationals must adapt PR ethics strategy to culture in high power distance, need anonymous channels and in low, open dialogue.

5. 3 Integration with Theories

The intergrated theories in the study are as follows:

a. **Systems Theory:** Findings shows support for PR as boundary-spanner which mean stakeholder engagement is 3. 82, PR brings external values such as EITI, UNGPs, Paris agreement, black lives matter and climate activism into internal code. Open systems with strong legal framework allow better boundary-spanning, as argued by (Luhmann).

b. Stakeholder Theory: Supports Freeman & Gilbert axioms as corporate strategy reflects stakeholder values, while Oil and gas companies modify legal framework due to community, NGO, investor stakeholders demanding EITI and CSRD compliance. In all, PR manages these relationships.

c. PR as Organisational Conscience: Main anchor fully supported. Beta 0. 68 is strongest evidence internationally that PR ethics counsel leads to ethics modification. Extends Bowen 2008 which was US-focused and qualitative. Provides quantitative international validation with 600 sample.

d. Dialogical Theory: Supports Kent & Taylor - two-way symmetrical and freedom to challenge agenda correlates with ethics modification. Power distance moderator shows where dialogue constrained, modification lower. Habermas ideal speech requires low power distance.

e. Excellence Theory: Supports Grunig - ethical PR is excellent PR, managing relationships not just publicity leads to higher trust and fewer legal violations.

5.4 Comparison with Empirical Studies

i. Idid & Arandas 2016 found practitioners bounded by organisational laws, recommended independent body - our H4 shows when laws strong, PR less bounded, more enabled. So solution is strengthen law, not just professional body.

ii. Haque & Ahmad 2017 Malaysia/UK found loyalty to management conflicts with code especially oil - our data shows crisis reduces loyalty conflict because management needs PR to restore legitimacy.

iii. Bowen et al. 2020 meta-analysis found organisations with strong PR ethics counsel had fewer violations and higher trust - our R^2=0. 50 explains 50% variance, consistent. Institute for PR 2022 global study 68% with PR-led institutionalization reported reduction in violations, our means 3. 76 high modification aligns.

5. 5 Unexpected Findings

i. GDPR perceived as both enabler and barrier - enables data protection ethics but constrains internal investigations into harassment because Art 88 employment data restricts monitoring.

ii. Oil companies rated CSRD and CSDDD more positively than private - because already used to EITI and UNGPs due diligence, so CSRD is extension, not new burden.

iii. Public sector respondents reported using OECD public integrity handbook as PR tool to convince politicians and unexpected use of soft law as leverage.

CHAPTER SIX
SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, CONTRIBUTIONS

6. 1 Summary of Study

This study examined using PR to modify ethics and its legal framework in organisations internationally across public sectors, private sectors and oil &gas sectors. With the aim of examining PR role as the conscience and ethics counsel and its influence on modification of ethics codes and legal frameworks, moderated by legal strength and culture, mediated by crisis, using the method of pragmatism, explanatory sequential mixed-methods, population of 140, 000, sample size of 600 persons with 200 respodents per sector across US, UK, Germany, France, Netherlands, Norway, plus 45 interviews. Validated scales Bowen, Fitzpatrick, Hon & Grunig, OECD, Hofstede. SPSS, AMOS, Process Macro, NVivo. The researcher was able to established that all hypotheses were supported. PR significantly modifies ethics [Beta=0. 68] and legal framework [Beta=0. 62]. While Oil and gas sectors, private sectors and public sectors, where F=28. 43. However, the legal framework strength moderates positively, Beta=0. 19. Crisis mediates, indirect is 0. 21. Individualism positive moderator and power distance shows negative.

6.2 Conclusion

The researcher concluded as follows:

i. PR is not just communication technician but strategic ethics counsel - when given access to dominant coalition, PR moves organisation from compliance to integrity, modifying both formal code and internal legal adequate procedures.

ii. Legal framework alone insufficient without PR institutionalization - laws like Equality Act s109, AGG s12, FCPA, UK Bribery Act s7 require reasonable steps and adequate procedures which are PR-led training, hotlines, culture campaigns. Example of manager threatening cane/whip based on colour violates s26, s27, Title VII, AGG - law provides liability but PR provides prevention through zero-tolerance policy, training, disciplinary communication.

iii. Sector matters: Oil companies allow PR greater influence due to higher moral intensity, triple regulation, social licence pressure and crisis frequency. Public sector constrains PR due to bureaucracy and politics despite higher public interest obligation. Private sector middle.

iv. International legal framework is enabler not constraint - strong enforcement of GDPR, CSRD, EITI, FCPA, equality act, title vii, whistleblower directive strengthens PR leverage to convince management.
v. Crisis is catalyst - organisations learn ethics through failure. PR gains access after reputation threat. Proactive organisations should give PR access before crisis, not after.
vi. Culture matters - low power distance and high individualism cultures enable PR to challenge management, high power distance constrains. Multinationals must adapt.

6. 3 Contributions to Knowledge

There are many contributions to knowledge from this study, such as:

a. Theoretical Contribution

i. First international quantitative validation of Bowen Organisational Conscience theory with 600 sample across 6 countries, extending beyond US.
ii. Extends Fitzpatrick institutionalization theory by adding legal framework modification construct - movement Stage 1 to 3.
iii. Integrates 4 theories into unified model: Systems + Stakeholder + Conscience + Dialogical with moderators and mediator tested via Process Macro. iv. Introduces two new moderators - legal framework strength and national culture - and mediator crisis access - into PR ethics model.

b. Methodological Contribution

i. First three-sector international comparative design, public sector vs private sector vs oil and gas sector.
ii. Mixed-methods explanatory sequential with joint display integration and robust validity such as KMO, 0. 8, AVE, 0. 5, CFI=0. 93.
iii. Validated international scales for PR-led legal framework modification applicable for CSRD, CSDDD and EITI context.

c. Practical Contribution

i. Provides model for organisations on how to use PR tools to avoid liability, reasonable steps defence under equality act s109 and AGG, adequate procedures under bribery act s7, due diligence under CSDDD and ESG reporting under CSRD.
ii. Provides evidence for policy makers that strengthening whistleblower protection and transparency laws through empowering public realtions and ethics role in an organisation.

6. 4 Recommendations

This study recommends as follows:

a. For Public Sector

i. Government Communication Service UK, US Federal Communicators Network, EU DG COMM should adopt OECD Public Integrity Handbook 2020 recommendation, head of PR department should report to Head of Organisation not political appointee, have statutory ethics counsel role.
ii. Institutionalize Nolan Principles through a public relations led training, citizen charters, whistleblowing hotlines protected under EU Directive 2019/1937 and US WPA 1989. iii. Give PR freedom to challenge political spin adopt, Habermas ideal speech and equal freedom to initiate dialogue.

b. For Private Sector

i. The board should mandate PR officers to be part of ethics counsel with direct access to dominant coalition reporting to chief executive officer (CEO) or board of ethics committee and not head of marketing department and as include public relations department in the drafting of code under the SOX s406.
ii. Implement reasonable steps defence - PR-led dignity at work training, zero-tolerance for harassment including racial threats like cane/whip, independent investigation, disciplinary sanctions communicated transparently.
iii. Co-draft sustainability reports under CSRD/GRI by PR and Legal to avoid securities fraud under SEC Rule 10b-5 and greenwashing litigation.

c. For Oil and Gas Companies

i. Maintain IPIECA, EITI, UNGPs, Paris Agreement compliance through PR stakeholder forums, GMoU with host communities, Human Rights Impact Assessment beyond mandatory EIA.
ii. Institutionalize Safety & Operational Risk function reporting to board as BP did after Deepwater Horizon, with PR leading safety culture campaign.
iii. Adopt parent company liability prevention - parent should ensure subsidiary compliance with Offshore Safety Directive 2013/30/EU, Oil Pollution Act, to avoid Bodo v Shell liability. PR communicates parent standards.

d. For All Sectors at International Best Practice

i. Implement four pillar ethics modification model by code drafting PR and legal frame work training that is public relations led, Hotline that is protected under whistleblower directive and reporting CSRD and GRI.
ii. Before crisis, grant PR access to dominant coalition - proactive integrity cheaper than reactive crisis management costing billions.
iii. Adapt to culture in high power distance countries, use anonymous hotlines; in low like in UK and US, using open dialogue.

iv. Link PR performance metrics to ethics modification that includes integrity KPIs in PR appraisal like in France, Germany, Netherlands and Norway.

e. For Policymakers

i. Strengthen enforcement of anti-discrimination such as title vii, equality act, AGG, EU directive 2000/43, anti-corruption such as FCPA, UK bribery act, environmental clean water act, EU directives, transparency such as EITI, CSRD and CSDDD.

ii. Enact mandatory PR ethics counsel role in large organisations, 500 employees similar to mandatory compliance officer under SOX.

iii. Protect whistleblowers robustly under EU directive 2019/1937 implementation.

6. 5 Managerial Implications

CEO: Giving PR access to dominant coalition reduces legal violations by 50% variance cost-benefit positive vs $65bn Deepwater Horizon. Chief Legal Officer. Collaborate not clash with PR lawyer says no to saying nothing as PR says always say something. The solution legally vetted transparency candour with care. The PR Manager acquire ethics and law competence, understand equality act s109, bribery act s7, GDPR Art 88, CSRD, EITI, FCPA to act as ethics counsel and not just communicator.

6. 6 Limitations Revisited

As established in Chapter 3, cross-cultural language bias, self-report social desirability, sampling bias toward large MNEs, cross-sectional causality, heterogeneity within sector, EU law flux.

6. 7 Suggestions for Future Research

The researcher surggested the followings:

i. Longitudinal study tracking PR ethics modification before and after CSDDD 2024 implementation 2026-2030.

ii. Include Global South - Nigeria, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, China NOCs - where EITI implementing and corruption dynamics different.

iii. Experimental design testing PR intervention, e.g., randomized control trial of PR-led dignity at work training on harassment reduction.

iv. Study informal ethics culture beyond formal code - ethnography of how manager threatening whip persists despite code.

v. AI and PR ethics, how AI Act 2024 and generative AI affect public relations modification of legal framework.

6. 8 Final Conclusion

This study proves internationally that public relations, when empowered as organisational conscience with access to dominant coalition, significantly modifies organisational ethics and its legal framework from compliance to integrity, especially in oil companies facing high moral intensity, when supported by strong international legal framework and triggered by crisis, moderated by national culture.

The key message for international organisations, do not wait for crisis to give PR ethics counsel role. Institutionalize PR-led ethics modification now, draft zero-tolerance policies for racial harassment including cane or whip threats, implement adequate procedures under Bribery Act, reasonable steps under Equality Act, due diligence under CSDDD, transparent ESG reporting under CSRD and EITI, and dialogical stakeholder engagement. The researcher ended and concluded this study with the slogan that laws provides liability, while public relations provides prevention.

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