An analysis of the models of public relations most commonly used by professional minor league baseball franchises

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE MODELS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS MOST COMMONLY USED BY PROFESSIONAL MINOR LEAGUE BASEBALL FRANCHISES

by
Pasquale J. Rose Jr.

A Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Arts Degree of The Graduate School at Rowan University June 30, 2006

Approved by
Advisor

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ABSTRACT

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An Analysis of the Models of Public Relations Most Commonly Used By Professional Minor League Baseball Franchises
2005/06
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This study examines the public relations practices of professional minor league baseball franchises by determining which of Grunig’s four models of public relations are most commonly used by these organizations. With these findings, the study then evaluates the effectiveness of the models with respect to individual differences among the organizations and overall limitations encountered in the field.

Twenty directors of media and community relations for fifteen minor league franchises were asked to participate in data collection by completing a three-tiered Delphi study to reach a consensus on the most important job responsibilities and skill sets they feel are necessary to practice effective public relations in minor league baseball. The researcher then presented the findings to two experts in academic public relations who were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of these models based on their experience and knowledge of practicing public relations in a professional environment.
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Chapter I

Introduction

Sports permeate everyday life. It is a phenomenon that has evolved from humble beginnings to become one of the world’s largest industries. Sports influence political decision making, most recently reflected by the efforts of Congress to regulate the use of performance enhancing drugs. Sports influence speech, with some of the most popular clichés in the English language taken directly from the sports world. Sports impact foreign relations, most notably with the Olympic Games and World Cup serving as a showcase for hundreds of countries to display national pride and come together in peaceful competition.

Sports as a viable business has evolved rapidly. As of 1990, professional sports have become North America’s 22nd largest industry.1 Teams are no longer just a collection of players; rather, teams have now become multimillion dollar franchises equipped with front office hierarchy, corporate sponsors, payrolls in millions of dollars, and state of the art facilities. Arguably the four major professional sports organizations in North America – Major League Baseball (MLB), the National Football League (NFL), the National Basketball League (NBA), and the National Hockey League (NHL) – have gone from small, upstart leagues to internationally recognizable business giants.

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Major League Baseball, often referred to as America's pastime, began as the National League of Professional Base Ball Clubs on February 2, 1876.\(^2\) Major League Baseball has survived more controversy than any of the other three major sports North American sports organizations. The trials and tribulations throughout the history of baseball, to name a few, include the Black Sox scandal of 1919 in which players admitted to deliberately losing games in the World Series, several unpopular labor disputes including a players' strike in 1994 that forced the cancellation of the World Series, and many instances of players caught trying to cheat in the middle of a game. The fact that the image of MLB has managed to not only survive, and to a degree thrive, in the shadow of this adversity speaks to the fact that public relations has tremendous value in the world of baseball. From its earliest beginnings, public relations activities have helped shape professional sports.

Statement of the Problem

The world of professional minor league baseball is a far cry from the glamour and prestige of Major League Baseball. Fan attraction to minor league baseball can be compared to the infancy of professional baseball when the entertainment value of a day at the ballpark was the selling point that drove fans to see the game. Minor league teams do not have the high-level talent, state of the art ballparks, or media attention that major league teams feature. The purpose of minor league baseball is to serve as a proving ground for MLB.

Despite the limitations that minor league teams face, there have been periods of great success for professional minor league baseball. According to the National

Association of Professional Baseball Leagues, fan attendance at minor league games increased 110% in the 1980s. Several factors are credited with causing this sharp increase in attendance, which includes league-wide stadium renovations and a new marketing strategy focused on emphasizing the entertainment value of the games. Minor league teams have also emulated their major league counterparts by assembling an organizational hierarchy and front office staff responsible for running the non-baseball operations of the franchise. This hierarchy includes emphasis on public relations activities.

The structure of the front office depends on the individual franchise, but most franchises include at least one person who performs public relations functions. Job titles may differ, but most organizations delegate the responsibility of communicating with the media and general public to at least one, and in some cases more than one person.

With all of the limitations that minor league baseball franchises face, a strong public relations plan becomes even more critical to the survival of these teams. Professional teams have the luxury of not having to constantly promote to the media and the public because the talent level is such that fans will always be at the ballpark, and the media will automatically cover the team.

That is far from the case with most minor league franchises. Unless the team is located in an area that is completely isolated from a MLB market, the media and fans are not as intense in following these teams as they would a major league team. Therefore, the job of a minor league baseball public relations practitioner is arguably more difficult than managing public relations for a major league team.

3 Cousens, Laura., 316-334.
The challenge for the minor league public practitioner is then to develop a communication plan that will get fans and media to attend the games. This study will use James Grunig’s four models of public relations, which describe different philosophies and methods by which public relations practitioners communicate with their publics, as a measuring tool for determining how most minor league franchises communicate with their publics. This study will use the four models to characterize what most minor league baseball teams currently use. Finally, the researcher will analyze the original data to determine whether that model is the most effective way to manage public relations.

Research Strategy

The author will conduct a Delphi study of minor league baseball public relations practitioners to determine which of Grunig’s four models of public relations is currently being used in the field. The goal of the first tier of the Delphi study will be to construct a list of the job responsibilities and skill sets of the sample population.

The second tier of the study will then list ten of the most popular job responsibilities and skills that the respondents believe are essential to doing the job, and then ask the participants to rank them in order of importance to doing an effective job. This is being done in an attempt to build a consensus among the participants about what duties and skills are most important. It is important to note that the results of the surveys given to the Directors of Media Relations and the Directors of Community Relations will be tabulated separately because of the differing nature of the two jobs.

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The third and final tier of the Delphi study will eliminate the five least popular responses from the previous round of questioning and ask the participants to re-rank the most important duties and responsibilities as they pertain to doing the job effectively. This will create the final list by which the qualitative portion of this study will be based on.

Finally, the author will conduct personal interviews with professors in the field of public relations who have been successful professionally in the field and have an understanding of the academic logic behind public relations. These experts will be asked to make an assessment on the specific model of public relations that the findings suggest. The experts will then be asked to judge the effectiveness of that particular model as it relates to the general practice of public relations and the practice of public relations in sports.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses will be tested.

H1 More than 50 percent of minor league baseball public relations practitioners currently use the one-way press agentry model of public relations.

H2 The press agentry model is not the most effective way of communicating with publics and practicing public relations.
Delimitations

The following limitations were realized about the study.

1. Only AAA, AA, and Advanced A franchises were included in the survey population. Lower level A and rookie ball franchises were not included in this study because many of these franchises do not have a front office staff or organizational hierarchy.

2. There are a total of 90 minor league franchises that fall under the target population. A public relations representative could only be found for 76 of the possible 90. That number is even more limited by the fact that only the responses of willing participants were used in this study.

3. For the purposes of consistency, only Directors of Media Relations and Directors of Community Relations were selected to participate in this study. Franchises that use job titles such as Director of Public Relations, Director of Communications, Director of Broadcasting, Communications Manager, Director of Marketing, Director of Promotions, and Guest Relations to classify their public relations practitioners were not included.

Terminology

Press agentry/publicity model – A one-way model of public relations that relies on propaganda for disseminating information to the public. It does not recognize feedback as a part of the communication process, and the goal is to use public relations as an attention gainer.
Public information model – A one-way model of public relations used most often by
government agencies where journalists-in-residence disseminate information that is
factually accurate, but usually never negative. This model also does not recognize the
importance of public feedback.

Two-way asymmetric model – A two-way model of public relations that uses scientific
research to determine the attitudes of the public before taking action. The organization
then changes its messages to satisfy the publics, but does not change its behavior.

Two-way symmetric model – A two-way model of public relations where bargaining and
negotiating is used to bring about mutually beneficial changes in the attitudes and
behaviors of both the organization and its publics. This model also uses scientific
research to determine public attitudes before taking action.

Public relations – The management of communication between an organization and its
publics.

MLB – Major League Baseball - the highest level of baseball in the world.

AAA – The highest level of professional minor league baseball.

AA – The level of minor league baseball after Advanced A but under AAA.

Advanced A – The level of minor league baseball under AA.
Chapter II

Review of Existing Literature

The researcher conducted a review of related literature to explore the information that already exists on this topic. The search consisted of the following sources:

- Electronic databases including Academic Search Premier, Business Source Premier, Communication Studies FT, Communication and Mass Media Complete, and Rowan Theses
- Google and Yahoo search engines
- University public relations textbooks

Key words used in the search included: public relations, promotions, marketing, minor league baseball, and Grunig’s models of public relations.

Definition of Public Relations

The exact definition of public relations varies. Public relations are the activities performed by an individual or organization to key publics in an effort to gain a favorable opinion from those publics. Some public relations scholars, including Rowan University professor and author M. Larry Litwin, classify public relations as a management and counseling function, which indicates that true public relations practitioners have access to

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upper-level management and influence on policy-making decisions. This is often referred to as having a seat at the table.

Public relations scholar Joye Gordon feels that defining public relations as a management function excludes practitioners that are not part of an organization’s decision making process, and does not accurately reflect some public relations practitioners, most notably, those surveyed in this study. She argues that a better definition comes from the symbolic interactionism perspective, where she defines the role of the public relations practitioner as active participation in the social construction of meaning. In other words, the practitioner interacts with the public by creating symbols or symbolic messages that the public will interpret as the sender intended.

Grunig’s Four Models of Public Relations

Depending on the purpose of the organization and the publics being targeted, there are four basic models of public relations that are commonly used. Developed by Former University of Maryland professor James Grunig, the models are representations of the values, goals, and behaviors used by organizations when they practice public relations. The models include: one-way, press agentry model; one-way, public information model; two-way, asymmetric model; and two-way, symmetric model.

The one-way, press agentry model relies on propaganda for disseminating information to the public. It is classified as a one-way model because it only involves communication from the company to its publics. The model does not recognize feedback as part of the process, and views public relations as an attention gainer. Once the

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attention of the audience is obtained, the product does the rest. The philosophy here is that the organization is paramount, and the public is unimportant. The goal is to gain attention in any way possible.

Like the press agentry model, the public information model is also one-way. This model is similar to the press agentry model because public feedback is not valued in this model. The goal of this model is publicity. Journalists-in-residence disseminate information that is factually accurate, but usually never negative. Both the press agentry and public information models seek no information from publics through research or informal methods.

With this model, the public is viewed as important, but the organization is still viewed as paramount.

The next two methods are classified as two-way models of communication because they use scientific research and feedback to determine the attitudes of the public before taking action and after dissemination of information. The two-way asymmetric model aims to use research to determine which messages will best reach the intended public without having to change the behavior of the organization. This model is characterized as asymmetrical because the intended result of the message only benefits the organization instead of the public. Grunig describes this model as manipulative, but claims that some practitioners feel that the public does, in fact, benefit from being manipulated. With the two-way asymmetric model, both the public and the organization are viewed as important, although this is primarily a self-serving model for the organization using it.

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Grunig believes that the final model, the two-way symmetric model, is the only model in which the organization and public both truly benefit and is the most modern model of public relations. Developed by Edward Bernays, this model uses bargaining, negotiating, and conflict resolution strategies to bring about mutually beneficial changes in the attitudes and behaviors of both the organization and the public. With this model, the public actually helps establish the organization’s identity, as the organization changes its policies to best adapt to the public. The philosophy with the two-way symmetric model is that both the public and the organization are paramount.

While it is generally accepted that the two-way, symmetric model is the most scientific and effective way to practice public relations, research indicates that is not the most widely used model. Grunig found that the model used will likely depend on the organization, as some models are more applicable to one type of organization as opposed to another. For instance, the two-way asymmetric model is usually popular among corporations, while the public information model is often used in governmental agencies. Looking at the models from a popularity standpoint, Grunig found that the press agentry model is the most popular.

It is important to note that organizations often resist practicing purely one model. Instead, research indicates that organizations use aspects of several of the different models when practicing public relations. Some organizations do practice two-way symmetric public relations as the primary model, but not every organization has the capability of practicing this model. In order for the two-way symmetric model to be used, the dominant coalitions (upper-level management) must value public relations and

10 Ibid, 163-186.
accept having the public participate in policy-making decisions. Because not all organizations subscribe to public relations practice in the two-way, it's difficult to say that universally, the two-way symmetric model of public relations works best for all organizations.\(^\text{12}\)

Influence of Public Relations in the Growth of Baseball

In his study entitled "Crafting the National Pastime's Image: The History of Major League Baseball Public Relations", author William B. Anderson conducted a secondary literature review of newspaper clippings at the National Baseball Hall of Fame Library which were published during pivotal moments in baseball history to trace the roots of public relations in baseball history.

When Major League Baseball was in its infancy, public relations activities were unnecessary. The game was very new and interesting, and it was widely viewed as a truly American game. In fact, the image of baseball being *America's pastime* was largely crafted by sports reporters. Because baseball was so popular and newspapers were the only means by which fans could follow their teams, there were mutually beneficial results for both the owners and the newspapers with attendance figures rising and newspaper circulation at a high point. This relationship was strengthened by the fact that reporters were routinely treated very well at ballparks, and relied on the accommodations of the owners in order to get in the park and cover the team.\(^\text{13}\)


Because this went on for a while, team owners began to take the positive coverage for granted. They assumed that the media would always cover the game favorably. That all changed however, when a combination of rapid prosperity and a series of subsequent crises - including the Black Sox scandal of 1919 which nearly killed baseball - caused owners to lose the control they had previously had over the media and the fans. Thus, a need for public relations in baseball was born.

Initially, the individual teams were responsible for introducing public relations offices, as public relations practitioners weren’t being hired at the league level yet. In 1922, both the National and American Leagues introduced press offices that were responsible for dealing with the media.

When The Great Depression came along in the 1930s, baseball felt the sting. People were forced to place a higher value on the essentials of living, and leisure activities, such as watching a baseball game, suffered. Because of this, public relations officials in baseball decided that the best strategy was to promote the game more actively. Innovations such as night games, radio broadcasting of games, and team publications helped renew the public interest and regain the attendance at the ballpark. To renew media interest, players were more active in dealing with reporters and player interviews were conducted minutes before the start of a game.\(^{14}\)

As part of a restructuring of Major League Baseball’s front office in 1965, the position of director of public relations was created. This one-man department evolved into eleven people in 1999, with public relations being distinguished from promotions, which was now classified as marketing. Because of the increase in personnel, the duties of public relations were specialized into community relations and media relations.

\(^{14}\) Ibid, 7-43.
Professional Minor League Baseball

According to minorleaguebaseball.com, Minor League Baseball was originally formed on September 5, 1901 as the National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues. In 1949, the league saw an all-time high of 59 leagues and 448 teams, but that number began to diminish greatly when Major League baseball began to expand.

In 2001, Minor League Baseball celebrated its centennial season in which the teams collectively drew a record of just over 38 million fans. That number was topped in 2004 when the teams drew just under 40 million fans.

Each professional minor league team is affiliated with a Major League Baseball team. Each of the 30 MLB teams is affiliated with six minor league teams: AAA, AA, Advanced A, Class A, short season, and rookie teams. Independent teams are not considered part of Professional Minor League Baseball, are not affiliated with a Major League club, and are not included in this study. AAA teams are the most talented, while rookie teams are generally reserved for players who were recently drafted.

Players hoping to get to Major League Baseball usually must first work their way through the minor league system, also called the farm system. Generally, the talent of the players improves from level to level of the farm system, as well as the facilities and resources.

Minor league baseball experienced a successful period in the late 1980s and early 1990s when the clubs focused less on the talent on the field and instead promoted the entertainment value of the game. The idea of shifting to a promotions heavy business
model resulted in increased attendance at the minor league ballparks. Limitations have struck the franchises though, most notably being the Professional Baseball Agreement, which governs the relationship between major and minor league teams. The December 1990 renegotiation of the PBA diminished the funds that minor league general managers have to work with. More specifically, the agreement cost each minor league franchise between $25,000 and $100,000, forcing executives to do more with less.\textsuperscript{15}

Minor league baseball manages to survive in spite of the limitations that the teams face thanks to a new breed of professional general managers, innovative marketing strategies, and promotional techniques. The marketing strategy adjusted to focus on the entertainment value of the game. Minor league teams were also forced to renovate many of their facilities in order to comply with changing facility standards. As a result of new marketing techniques and new stadiums, Minor League Baseball is at a high point.\textsuperscript{16}

Minor League Teams as Businesses

The value of a professional minor league baseball team depends on what level the team competes at according to Pat O’Connor, Vice-President and COO of Minor League Baseball. He says that a AAA team can be purchased for anywhere from $8 million to $20 million, a AA team can be purchased for between $6 million to $15 million, Single A teams go for between $2 million to $8 million, and rookie teams are valued at about $600,000 to $750,000.

The amount of profit generated by the individual clubs likely depends on how well the front office runs the team and the value of the facility. According to O’Connor,


\textsuperscript{16} Cramer, Jerome. (Fall 2003). So, You Want To Own a Minor League Baseball Team. \textit{Forbes}, 82-86.
most of minor league baseball's profits are made by a small minority of the teams. He says that overall, 10 percent of the clubs make 70 percent of the profit. Most teams turn a profits, however, because the PBA requires Major League teams to pay the salaries and benefits of players and coaches of their respective affiliates.¹⁷

Sports management scholar Laura Cousens studied five AAA baseball franchises to determine which business archetype each franchise uses in conducting business. For purposes of this study, she defines a business archetype as a particular composition of ideas, beliefs, and values connected to structures and systems. In other words, much like Grunig’s four models describe different philosophies of practicing public relations these archetypes describe different philosophies of how a minor league team runs its business. The researcher looked for specific elements related to how the franchise conducts business and placed the franchise under a broad umbrella group, or archetype, based on those observations. The two types of archetypes she lists are the sport-centered archetype, where the team is judged based on the actual sports operations and performance on the playing field, and hiring is based on sports knowledge, and the business-centered archetype, where focus is on revenue generation, profit maximization, and hiring is not necessarily based on sports knowledge.¹⁸

Cousens selected five AAA franchises that compete in the same league, and personal interviews were used as the primary data collection method. Interviews were conducted with senior executives, the general managers, and assistant general managers. She asked open-ended questions in an attempt to find out about the franchise’s operations, competitors, goals, public relations, and criteria used to judge organizational

¹⁷ Ibid, 82-86.
success or failure. The responses were coded by the interviewer in an attempt to determine the archetype the franchise operates under.

The results of the study determined that one franchise operates under the sport-centered archetype, three franchises operate under the business-centered archetype, and one franchise operates under an indeterminate archetype, exhibiting practices of both archetypes. The franchise that operates under the sport-centered archetype puts all of its focus on player development. The on-field success and development of the players was cited as the criteria for determining the success of the franchise. The front-office staff were not very specialized, but rather, had the ability to do a number of tasks that fall under several different disciplines.³⁹

The franchises that operate under the business-centered archetype judge success based on financial gains of the organization with respect to competing teams in the league and in the same city. These executives feel that as the value of sports franchises increase, there is more to be gained or lost. Thus, a specialized, well-educated, business-savvy staff is needed to run the front office of these teams. This study shows that while the purpose of minor league baseball is to provide talent to MLB, most of these teams operate as a business and have specialized personnel.

Successful Promotions in Minor League Baseball

Because the front office staffs of professional minor league baseball teams have no control over which players they are given by their MLB affiliate, public relations directors find themselves in a tough spot when it comes to promoting the team to the

³⁹ Ibid, 316-334.
public. The selling point of minor league baseball is the entertainment value of a day at the ballpark without the high ticket prices that MLB charge.\textsuperscript{20}

Market research has a place in minor league baseball, but most team officials believe that it is more important to have a keen understanding of the game of baseball. While there is no magic formula for bringing fans to the ballpark, there have been a number of successful promotions that are used by many minor league teams, as well as some wacky promotions that have ended up working well also.

According to O'Connor, relying strictly on promoting the baseball game will not fill up the ballpark on a nightly basis. He says that exit polls have showed that most fans remember the quality of the food, the cleanliness of the ballpark, and whether or not they had a good time. More than half of the fans cannot name the players or remember which team won the game.

Many successful minor league teams have transformed the ballpark into as much of an entertainment center as the game that is being played on the field. For example, the Memphis Redbirds' new stadium offers entertainment zones where fans can play games. Other ballparks have built amenities such as rock climbing walls and carnival rides to attract fans.

Another popular strategy is for minor league teams to stay local and know what promotions will work for a particular area. Cramer gives the example of a Jerry Garcia look-alike contest working well in St. Paul, where it probably would have failed in a rural area. He gives another example of walleye fish sandwiches being popular in St. Paul whereas it would not be popular in Albuquerque.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{20} Cramer, Jerome. (Fall 2003). So, You Want To Own a Minor League Baseball Team. \textit{Forbes}, 82-86.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, 82-86.
Merchandising is also a huge selling point for minor league baseball. Many team names and logos often reflect the local area they play in, and fun, kid-friendly, cartoonish logos are often used. When baseball returned to Brooklyn in 2001 with the inaugural season of the Class A Brooklyn Cyclones, the familiar B that the Brooklyn Dodgers once used was incorporated into the new logo. As a result, the Cyclones became the No.1 minor league team in retail in 2001. Another popular logo is that of the Las Vegas 51’s, which play on the area’s proximity to the top secret Area 51 government facility where alien testing was rumored to have taken place. The 51’s use the logo of an alien head, and are among the more popular selling merchandise. The minor league team in Shreveport, LA recently changed its name to the Swamp Dragons in an effort to select something more fun and easily marketable.

The Mahoning Valley, Ohio, Scrappers, the Class A affiliate of the Cleveland Indians, used radio and local television to reach the public. They produced a weekly TV show for the local ABC affiliate in Youngstown called Scrappers Baseball Weekly which turned out to be successful. With two MLB teams in the state of Ohio, the Scrappers drew some of the largest crowds in minor league baseball, and are routinely sold out on weekends.

Theme nights and giveaways have also been a staple of minor league baseball promotions. The Richmond Braves of the Class AAA International League have listed promotional nights for 48 of the 70 home games on the schedule, but actually offer


discounts for all 70 games. Some off-the-wall theme nights have also been used to attract fans to the game. The Charleston River Dogs had Laundry Night, where free laundry service was offered during the game. The Colorado Springs Sky Sox had Computer Geek night where they offered free admission for those named Chip or Mac, or anyone with the initials PC. In addition, there was a Bill Gates look-alike contest and free wrist and forearm massages were offered. Perhaps the most bizarre theme night was Birth Night, which was conducted by the Lowell Spinners. Pregnant women packed the stadium as a year’s free diapers were offered to the first woman to go into labor during the game.

Sports Marketing

As professional sports continues to grow rapidly into big business, it’s important to note the role that sports marketing has played in fostering this growth. Marketing developed as a management practice as far back as the early 1960s, but sports marketing represents the growth of the practice from its beginnings in consumer goods to its expansion into a pervasive social and global phenomenon. There are several aspects of the professional sports environment that differentiate sports marketing from marketing in other traditional businesses.

Stadium lease arrangements, bargaining for broadcast television rights, territorial rights in predetermined geographical markets, and the unique structure of player contracts

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25 (1999, August 30). If You Do the Laundry, They Will Come. Time, 154, 3c.
are just a few of the unique aspects of the sports marketing environment. While much of marketing focuses on making consumers comfortable by assuring, sometimes even guaranteeing a certain product or service, sports is exactly the opposite. The appeal of sports is the uncertainty of the outcome of the game. Sports marketers recognize that there are four major purchasers of the league product: 1. the fans, 2. television and media, 3. communities that support their local teams by constructing facilities, and 4. corporations that interact with the league and teams. The lifeblood of sports, however, is the support of the fans who sustain the game by purchasing tickets to attend the games, following the team through television and radio, and purchasing merchandise. So with this reliance on fan support, studies have been conducted to help identify what makes fans different from each other and what is the one factor that drives everyone to attend a game.

It’s important to start off by saying there is a distinct difference between “die-hard” fans, or fans that continue to actively support the team regardless of wins or losses, and casual fans who are less supportive when the team encounters a losing season. Die-hard fans will continue to support the team through its struggles, and are more concerned with the game than stadium amenities and the ballpark experience. However, casual fans, who are much more likely to choose other entertainment options, are more likely to be attracted to a game if there is more to the experience than just the game on the field. Therefore, from a marketing perspective, it’s the sports marketers job to create a memorable experience for the casual fan who may only attend one or two games per year.

28 Ibid, 408.
29 Ibid, 413.
30 Ibid, 408.
Sports franchises also have a unique relationship with the community in which they exist. Most traditional businesses pay for the use of a facility in order to satisfy the needs of the community. Sports franchises often persuade cities to help pay, often with taxpayer money, the lion's share of the cost for a multimillion dollar facility. Cities agree to this because of the prestige and recognition that comes with hosting a professional team, or the negative backlash they will face if the team relocates to another city.\textsuperscript{31} This does not even take into account the additional revenue a team receives if they sell the naming rights of the facility to a corporate sponsor. Between city assistance and corporate sponsors, team owners can find themselves in state-of-the-art facilities without having to reach deeply into their own pockets.

The reach of corporations into sports is not just restricted to stadium naming rights, but often extends far beyond that. In many instances, corporations are the principal owners of these franchises. This is a phenomenon that has been as responsible for significant growth of sports as a lucrative industry.\textsuperscript{32} According to Mason, there are three distinct areas through which teams and leagues can gain revenue through corporate affiliation:

1. the sale of luxury boxes and other premium seating at events.
2. the synergies that are gained from having a larger corporation own and operate the team.
3. the revenues generated via corporations paying for the right to associate with the league product, through various forms of advertising and sponsorship.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid, 409.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid, 411.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid, 411.
Corporations do not sponsor these franchises out of philanthropy, but rather have discovered great benefits to being so actively involved with a franchise. Cross-promotion and advertising opportunities come to mind as an obvious benefit\textsuperscript{34}, but perhaps the most overlooked advantage is the identification that sports marketers hope fans will make between the team and their corporate sponsor. It’s logical to assume that a community that loves its hometown team will also tend to support the corporation that owns the team over a neutral corporation. Therefore, it’s not a stretch to say that sports marketers hope that by supporting a winning franchise, the corporation could also be seen as a winner despite the fact that they have a limited effect on the team’s on field performance.

Professional sports organizations will naturally have different marketing practices because of the inherent differences that exist between the different sports, leagues, and individual teams. Research has been conducted, however, to determine if there are specific common marketing attributes among successful sports franchises. It was determined that three factors are distinguishable among the marketing efforts of successful sports franchises: 1. overcoming the inertia that often occurs with a large organization, 2. an understanding of the needs of the consumer and a commitment to providing the desired levels of service, quality, and reliability, and 3. concentration on and development of areas in which the organization is distinctively competent.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid, 412.
Conclusion

The research already conducted in this area suggests that minor league baseball public relations officials rely on unique promotions as the primary vehicle to attract fans to the ballpark. This suggests that a one-way, publicity model of public relations is likely the primary model by which most teams operate. The research also suggests that because most public relations officials in sports do not have authority to make decisions concerning communication and management policy, they do not have the potential to practice the two-way symmetric model of public relations. Grunig finds it difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the two-way symmetric model of public relations on organizations that do not have the capability to practice this model. Rather, he believes that certain models are better fit for certain types of organizations.\(^{36}\)

Chapter III

Research Design

The population for this study includes directors of media relations and directors of community relations for 16 professional minor league baseball franchises. The sample population was selected non-randomly; only people with the specific job title of director of media relations or director of community relations were used.

Representatives from 15 professional minor league teams opted to participate in the study. Six of the representatives are from Class AAA teams, three are from Class AA teams, and six are from Class A teams. Eight of the participants are directors of media relations and eight of the participants are directors of community relations.

Data Needed For Study

For a thesis on the model of public relations used by most professional minor league baseball teams, the researcher will need to know which aspects of the job are considered to be the most important to doing the job effectively. After obtaining this data, the researcher will then present the findings to an expert in the field of public relations who can then make a determination of which of Grunig’s four models these findings reflect.
Research Instruments

This study will use triangulation to answer the research question. Triangulation is the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods to study a research problem. Many researchers agree that triangulation is the best way to study a problem because both methods have value and advantages depending on the goals of the research.\textsuperscript{27}

Quantitative

Quantitative research involves standardized questioning for all participants and a larger sample size than qualitative research. Because of this, results from quantitative studies are able to be generalized to entire population of the sample as opposed to the qualitative results. Quantitative data is most often collected through surveys, but a number of different surveys can be used. Direct mail, telephone, and Internet surveys are a few of the ways in which quantitative data can be collected.

Advantages to survey research include cost effectiveness, the ability to study behavior in a realistic setting as opposed to a laboratory or artificial setting, the large amount of data that can be collected, and the freedom from geographic boundaries. Disadvantages include the inability to manipulate the independent variable as they can be in laboratory experiments and the sensitivity of the survey wording to bias or ambiguity, especially with open-ended questions.

For the quantitative aspect of this study, the researcher will conduct a Delphi study of professional minor league baseball public relations practitioners. The Delphi method attempts to build a consensus among a group of experts in a particular field. It is

comprised of a series of questionnaires to a pre-selected group of experts. In this study, there were a series of there questionnaires sent by e-mail to a group of 16 minor league baseball media relations and community relations experts. According to Fowles (1978), one of the key characteristics of a Delphi study is anonymity of the respondents.

According to the Illinois Institute of Technology's website on the Delphi method (http://www.iit.edu/~it/delphi.html), the key elements of the Delphi method are the structuring of information flow, the feedback of the participants, and the anonymity of the participants, and the understanding of the subject matter by the participants. Fowles (1978) breaks the Delphi method into ten steps, all of which will be followed in this study:

1. Formation of a team to conduct a Delphi on a subject.
2. Selection of the population to participate in the study. The participants must be experts in the field.
3. Development of the initial questionnaire, generally characterized by a series of open-ended questions.\(^{28}\)
4. Pre-testing the questionnaire to eliminate bias and vague, confusing terms.
5. Dissemination of the first questionnaire to the participants.
7. Design of second round questionnaire based on findings from first round of surveying. In this study, the second round survey will ask participants to rank, in order of importance, popular responses given in the first round survey.
8. Dissemination of the second-round survey to the participants.
9. Tabulation and analysis of responses from second-round survey.

10. Summary of findings.

The first-round of questioning in this study will ask the respondents three open-ended questions to attempt to create a list of the most important responsibilities in order to the job effectively, the most valuable skills to maintaining a successful career in minor league baseball, public relations.

The second round of questioning will ask the participants to rank, from one to ten, the most popular responses from the first survey in order of importance to doing the job effectively (1 being most important, 10 being least important), using each number only once. The third-round of questioning will do the same, this time asking the participants to rank the top five most important responsibilities.

The researcher also included a question that differs depending on whether the participant is a director of media relations or a director of community relations. The researcher will ask media relations directors to describe the local media and attention they receive from the media during the season. For the community relations directors, the researcher will ask them to characterize the people in the local community that they are trying to reach. These questions are being asked to provide context and help get an expert’s perspective on the climate of professional minor league baseball. This information will then be used for the qualitative portion of this study.
Qualitative

Qualitative research is difficult to define because many there are so many techniques that are considered qualitative research techniques. The similarity between these techniques is that they generally use more flexible questioning with smaller sample sizes than quantitative techniques, which use a large sample size and standardized questions. The specific techniques used for this study will be intensive interviews.

According to Wimmer/Dominick, intensive interviews are unique because elaborate data such as opinions, experiences, and values are obtained which provides for background to the responses. In addition, nonverbal responses can be observed, the interview can be customized to the respondent, and follow up questions can be formed spontaneously based on the respondent’s answers.

The biggest advantage of intensive interviews is the amount of detail that the interviewer obtains from the respondent. In addition, a rapport can be established between the interviewer and the respondent which allows for more sensitive topics to be approached. Generalizability is the biggest disadvantage of intensive interviews because the respondent is usually selected non-randomly and the responses are so detailed that it is difficult to project those findings onto the general population. Other disadvantages include the sensitivity to interviewer bias in which the interviewer may ask a loaded question in an attempt to solicit a response favorable to the study.

The method of qualitative research used in this study will use intensive personal interviews with an expert in the field of public relations to make a determination about which model of public relations the findings of the Delphi study reflect.

The researcher will present the real state of minor leaguer public relations based on the findings of the Delphi study, and ask the expert to identify the findings with a particular model of public relations.

The researcher will then present the expert with the data concerning the characteristics of the publics these practitioners are trying to reach and the media attention these teams receive, and ask the expert whether that particular model could be considered the most effective way of practicing public relations and suggestions they would make for improvement.
Chapter IV

Results

Part 1: Delphi Study Results

A total of twenty surveys returned were usable. Ten of the surveys came from directors of media relations and ten came from directors of community relations. Four participants were eliminated because they did not participate in all three rounds of the Delphi study.

Media Relations Delphi Study Round 1

Question 1: As best you can, please list all of the job responsibilities you have (in-season and off-season). Please be a specific as possible.

Twelve most popular answers

Handling media inquiries, website development and maintenance, coordinating travel, game broadcasting, writing news releases, scheduling special events, producing a media guide, hiring interns, sales, operating the press box, writing game stories, and working with baseball statistics.
Question 2: Please list all of the skills and qualities that you feel are necessary to enter the field of minor league baseball media relations and maintain a successful career.

Ten most popular answers

Communication skills, computer proficiency, multi-faceted, baseball knowledge, working long hours, writing skills, detail oriented, organizational skills, outgoing personality, and well-spoken.

Question 3: Please describe the level of media attention your team typically receives during the season.

Responses varied, but most teams are covered by more than one newspaper and at least two local television stations. The level of media interest varies depending on the market the team plays in. One respondent believed that a high media interest in their team is a result of having a popular and successful major league affiliate in a large baseball market. Another respondent said that their team receives little interest because they are located in close proximity with professional teams in several sports.

Community Relations Delphi Study Round 1

Question 1: As best you can, please list all of the responsibilities you have (in-season and off-season). Please be as specific as possible.

Ten most popular answers

Advertising sales, stadium tours, speaking engagements, donation requests, scheduling player appearances, running the mascot program, working with community
youth, intern supervision, pre-game ceremonies (national anthem, first pitch), and promotions.

Question 2: Please list all of the skills and qualities that you feel are necessary to enter the field of minor league baseball public relations and maintain a successful career.

Ten most popular answers

Communication skills, computer proficiency, multi-tasking, creativity, long hours, time management, working under stress, organizational skills, outgoing personality, and flexibility.

Question 3: Please describe some of the demographic and psychographic characteristics of your team’s core group of fans.

The characteristics of fans attending the games varied depending on the market the team plays in and nightly promotions. For example, on ½ price beer night, more college students attend the game. On military appreciation night, many military personnel attend the game. However, most respondents agreed that most fans come for the fan friendly experience.

Media Relations Delphi Study Round 2

Question 1: Please rank the following responsibilities from 1 to 10 in order of their importance to doing your job effectively (1 = most important, 10 = least important). Please use each number only once.
Question 2: Please rank the following traits and skills from 1 to 10 in order of their importance to being successful in minor league baseball media relations (1 = most important, 10 = least important). Please use each number only once.

Ranked, weighted averages

3.12 Long hours
4.87 Writing skills
5 Communication skills
5 Multi-faceted
5.25 Well spoken
Community Relations Delphi Study Round 2

**Question 1:** Please rank the following responsibilities from 1 to 10 in order of their importance to doing your job effectively (1 = most important, 10 = least important). Please use each number only once.

*Ranked, weighted averages*

1.71  Working w/ community youth

3.57  Running the mascot program

3.71  Handling donation requests

3.85  Player appearances

4.12  Speaking engagements

6.85  Promotions

7.14  Pre-game ceremonies

7.14  Advertising/sales

8   Stadium tours

8.85  Intern supervision
Question 2: Please rank the following traits and skills from 1 to 10 in order of their importance to being successful in minor league baseball community relations (1 = most important, 10 = least important). Please use each number only once.

*Ranked, weighted averages*

2 Communication skills  
3.57 Time management  
3.57 Organization skills  
4 Multi-tasking  
5.71 Outgoing personality  
6.28 Long hours  
6.42 Working under stress  
7 Flexibility  
7.28 Creativity  
9.14 Computer proficiency

Media Relations Delphi Study Round 3

Question 1: Please rank the following responsibilities from 1 to 5 in order of their importance to doing your job effectively (1 = most important, 5 = least important). Please use each number only once.
Ranked, weighted averages

2.5 Sales
2.5 Handling media inquiries
2.66 Writing news releases
3.5 Writing game stories
3.83 Website development and maintenance

Question 2: Please rank the following traits and skills from 1 to 5 in order of their importance to being successful in minor league baseball media relations (1 = most important, 5 = least important). Please use each number only once.

Ranked, weighted averages

1.83 Working long hours
2.5 Writing skills
2.83 Communication skills
3.5 Multi-faceted
4.33 Well spoken

Community Relations Delphi Study Round 3

Question 1: Please rank the following responsibilities from 1 to 5 in order of their importance to doing your job effectively (1 = most important, 5 = least important). Please use each number only once.
Ranked, weighted averages

1.66  Working w/ community youth
3    Donation requests
3    Running the mascot program
3.16 Speaking engagements
3.83 Player appearances

Question 2: Please rank the following traits and skills from 1 to 5 in order of their importance to being successful in minor league baseball community relations (1 = most important, 5 = least important). Please use each number only once.

Ranked, weighted averages

1.83  Communication skills
2.83  Multi tasking
3.33  Organizational skills
3.5   Outgoing personality
3.5   Time management
Part 2: Interview Results

For the qualitative analysis of this study, two experts in the field of public relations were interviewed and presented with the Delphi study results. The two respondents were asked general questions about the field of public relations, and then asked to determine the model of public relations used by professional minor league baseball teams based on the findings of the Delphi study.

Respondent Background

Respondent 1 is an associate professor at a university on the east coast. 1 has taught courses in public relations as well as advertising, radio, television, and journalism for 33 years. In addition to teaching, 1 has worked as a public relations director for two school districts and a radio and television anchor for major stations in both New York and Philadelphia. 1 is the author of two public relations textbooks used at both the college and professional levels and is a member of the Board of Trustees of a local baseball Hall of Fame. 1 holds a bachelor's degree in business and a master's degree in educational public relations and also earned an APR (Accreditation in Public Relations) from the Public Relations Society of America.

Respondent 2 has earned universal accreditation in the public relations (APR) profession. 2 holds a Ph.D. from a major southern university. 2 teaches a variety of public relations and communications courses at an east coast university and also serves as the adviser to the university's Public Relations Student Society of America Chapter.
Question 1
Are you familiar with Grunig’s four models of public relations?
1 – Yes.
2 – Yes.

Question 2
Do you think there is knowledge of these models in the professional world?
1 – No. Outside of the university, I have never heard the models mentioned by professionals in the field.
2 – Yes, but vaguely.

Question 3
Are most organizations aware of the models of public relations they practice?
1 – No. Most organizations are not aware of which model of public relations they are practicing and most have no interest in learning about them.

Question 4
Do you feel that some models are more effective than others? If so, which are the most effective?
1 – The two-way models are the most effective. This is because research must be done to determine how the various publics feel about the organization. If our goal is to change behavior, we can’t do that until we learn why the public acts the way they do.
2 – The press agentry/publicity model is least effective today.
Question 5

Do most organizations have the ability to practice two-way communication?

1 – Yes. If organizational leaders understood public relations, they would try to practice two-way communication. However, most don’t know and don’t have a desire to learn.

2 – I think they have the ability but they may not take the time or resources.

**For my research study, I surveyed Directors of Media Relations and Directors of Community Relations of Professional Minor League Baseball teams to determine their most important job responsibilities. The following were determined as the top five most important job responsibilities for each position.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media Relations</th>
<th>Community Relations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Sales</td>
<td>1. Working w/ community youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Handling media inquiries</td>
<td>2. Fulfilling donation requests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. News releases</td>
<td>3. Running the mascot program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Writing game stories</td>
<td>4. Speaking engagements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Website development &amp; maintenance</td>
<td>5. Player appearances</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 6

Based on the responses given in the Delphi study, do these job responsibilities reflect a one or two-way model of communication?

1 - I think this reflects two-way communication. Most of these respondents are probably not even aware that they are practicing two-way communication. They are being reactive to what the community requests. They are actively trying to feel the pulse of the community to guide their public relations practices, but they are not conducting scientific research. This is basically informal two-way communication.
2 – Media Relations directors were primarily using one-way, especially in jobs 1 to 4. Two-way could be employed in the Web activities, if the site itself were interactive or allowed inquiries. I think the Community Relations directors were more involved in two-way communications. I see this coming into play for jobs 1 through 5. Even a nonspeaking mascot must appeal to fans’ interests, which must be ascertained by seeking community involvement and suggestions.

Question 7

Which specific model of public relations does this reflect?

1 – That probably depends on the market the team is in. Many times, organizations do not stick with strictly one model. They identify the issues that exist in the public, and design messages based on the issues. The messaging must change as the issues change.

2 – Media Relations = public information
Community Relations = two-way, but probably in some cases both asymmetric and symmetric.

Question 8

Based on the environment they practice in, is this the most effective model of public relations that could be practiced?

1 – Probably, but again, it depends on the particular market the team is in. The two-way asymmetrical model would be used even more depending on the circumstances. For example, if the team was new to a town they would have to do research in order to make effective public relations decisions. Regardless of the model that is used, the most important thing is that research is conducted as a foundation for decision making. I think
if these teams were aware of the models, they would try to make the research more formal.

2 – Yes, to a large extent.

Question 9

If you were hired as public relations director for one of these teams, what would you change?

1 – I would remove the sales aspect completely from the public relations department. A public relations person should not be selling. Public relations is not advertising.

2 - I would tend to become as much two-way symmetrical as possible.
Chapter V

Interpretation and Suggestions

Hypotheses

Both quantitative and qualitative study results provided data to either substantiate or dispute the surmised hypothesis.

H1 More than 50 percent of professional minor league baseball public relations practitioners currently use the one-way, press agentry model of public relations.

To test this hypothesis, the researcher interviewed experts in the field of academic public relations to determine if the job responsibilities listed in the Delphi study reflected a particular model of public relations. The experts interviewed believe that professional minor league baseball public relations practitioners do not strictly practice one particular model. Rather, the model they practice depends on a number of variables including the market in which the team plays, the demographic and psychographic characteristics of their audience, the goals of the franchise, and the messaging they want to deliver to the audiences. Because of the differences that exist between the teams and their respective markets, it would be incorrect to say that 50 percent or more of professional minor league baseball teams practice only the one-way press agentry model of public relations. Therefore, the above hypothesis could not be proved through this study.
H2 The press agentry model of public relations is not the most effective way of communicating with publics and practicing public relations.

The experts interviewed believe that regardless of the particular industry, either of the two-way models are best for practicing public relations. The element of research is what separates the social science of public relations from the practice of press agentry or publicity. To truly practice effective public relations, the practitioner must take into account the attitudes of their audiences as well as the issues that exist in the community they practice. By conducting research about the audience, the practitioner can more accurately gage which messages will be effective and how to communicate clearly.

There was some indication among the pre-existing research that not every organization has the ability to conduct two-way communication, but the experts in this study disagreed with this opinion. Rather, they believe that most organizations unknowingly practice two-way communication because the research they conduct is unscientific. However, the experts in this study believe that even informal research constitutes two-way communication. The press-agentry model is not as effective as the two-way models because the organization is simply making an educated guess about their audience rather than conducting research to know definitively what messages will and will not work. Because of this, the policy that is implemented as a result of the press agentry model may not be in the best interest of the public it is intended to serve.
Comparison of Findings to Existing Research

The opinions expressed by the experts in this study differ with some of the existing research in the field. The pre-existing research classifies the two-way models as being based on formal scientific research. The experts in this study disagreed, believing that informal research can reflect two-way communication as well. Just because an organization does not conduct a formal study should not suggest that they are not making an effort to keep in touch with the public they are trying to reach. Rather, they are just unaware of how to do formal research or lack the resources to conduct it. The experts believe that this does not diminish the public relations practiced by these organizations, but rather shows that the practitioners are largely unaware and uneducated in the value of formal research and the process of how to properly conduct it. It's also very important to note that research was never listed as an important job responsibility at any point in the Delphi study. The experts in this study still believe that two-way communication is simply conducting research to better understand your public, and this can be accomplished through unscientific research as well.

The original research also stated that Major League Baseball separated public relations from sales and promotions as part of a front office restructuring in 1965. This was done with the understanding that the duties of a public relations practitioner and the duties of a marketing or sales representative are quite different. The findings of the Delphi study suggest that Minor League Baseball has not followed this lead. Sales was listed as the most popular job responsibility for directors of media relations. It's important to note that this change was made by Major League Baseball as a result of increase in personnel which is a luxury that many minor league teams do not have.
However, the experts in this study stressed the importance of separating sales from public relations because of the inherent differences and potential conflicts of interest that can result between the two departments.

There were also some similarities between the existing research in the field and the findings of this study. Grunig believed in his original studies on the models of public relations that organizations rarely practice one model. Rather, they practice elements of several different models. The experts in this study believed that based on the results of the Delphi study, it was difficult to say that organizations were sticking entirely with one model. Rather, the job responsibilities the respondents listed were characteristic of a number of different models. The model in practice at any given time depends on several different variables that are constantly changing.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Study

The overall simplicity of the Delphi study could be viewed as a reason for specific successes and failures with this particular study. The fact that the surveys could be administered through e-mail helped gain the participation of respondents from all parts of the United States. The simplicity of using ranking as a means of gaining information ensured the fact that busy professionals would not have to devote a great deal of time filling out these surveys, thus increasing the number of respondents. The simplicity of the questions allowed for the questions to be answered accurately with very little confusion on the part of the respondent.
The fact that the Delphi study is a three round process was a weakness in this particular study. Some participants responded to the first survey and then no longer responded to the second or third surveys. These participants had to be eliminated from the study, and their previous responses could not be used as well. Also, the Delphi study produced a list of job responsibilities and no real insight as to why those responsibilities were considered important. Therefore, the lack of detailed information produced by the Delphi study coupled with the complications that resulted from having three different surveys would be the major weaknesses of this study.

With the expert interviews, it is completely opposite. The major strength of the interviews is the opportunity to sit down with an expert and gain a great deal of detailed information. Questions can also be tailored to how the interview is going, and follow-up questions can be asked when an interesting point is raised. With the interviews, there is also insight provided with the answers. With the Delphi study, there was just a list with no real context provided. The answers were given, but the reasons behind those answers are unknown. With the interviews, the respondent can give reasoning and insight into why they feel the way they do.

The major weakness of interviews is the ability to have only a limited number of respondents based on the time it takes to schedule and conduct these interviews. With the Delphi study, a quick mass e-mail could be sent out, the surveys are filled out using a word processing system, and then e-mailed right back to the researcher. The personal interview does not allow for this. The researcher must sit down face-to-face with the interviewee and conduct the interview. The limitations of travel and time play a major role in restricting the number of interviews that can be realistically accomplished;
therefore it’s very difficult to get a substantial number of interviews done. Also, the interviewee is not familiar with the particular study going into the interview, so it is a challenge for the researcher to educate the interviewee on the specifics of the study without subconsciously injecting bias as well. The information gained from one interview is also the opinion of one particular person and shouldn’t suggest that the majority of experts in the field share that same opinion.

Suggestions for Further Research

If this study were to be built upon or followed up, the researcher may want to consider interviewing experts in the field of Major League Baseball public relations. While they do not have the depth of knowledge about the science of public relations as a college professor would, they have a better understanding of the business of baseball at its highest level. Also, the researcher may want to look into doing a different from of quantitative research that will provide more detailed data. A study could also be conducted to determine the level of education that most minor league baseball public relations practitioners have reached, as well as a test of their understanding of textbook public relations.

It would be interesting to see if the majority of these practitioners have an understanding of what public relations truly is and whether they use that on a daily basis in their careers. An interesting follow up to this study could also examine the different kinds of research minor league baseball franchises conduct about their individual audiences to determine what promotions to use. It would be interesting to see if there is any formal research involved or, as this study is theorizing, research conducted at this
level is relatively informal and unscientific. It would also be interesting to see if there is a difference in communication effectiveness between the franchises that conduct formal research and those that are less scientific in their data collection.

This thesis further reflects the fact that public relations differs greatly from organization to organization – sometimes even within the same industry. Grunig’s models of public relations are a way of academically profiling the practice of public relations into several different specific types so they can be more closely studied, but the entire scope of an organization’s public relations can usually not be classified by just one model.
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