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# **THE MANAGER OF MEANING IN CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC RELATIONS**

## **ABSTRACT**

In the contemporary communication environment marked by information overproduction, audience fragmentation, and the digital circulation of interpretations, public relations is increasingly transforming from a communication support function into a strategic organisational function. This paper advances the thesis that contemporary public relations can be theoretically understood as an institutionalised practice of meaning management, whereby the public relations professional is conceptualised as a manager of meaning. Drawing on Pfeffer's conception of management as symbolic action and integrating Rindova and Srinivas's cultural framework, the paper conceptualises organisations as cultural and symbolic systems that operate through interpretive relations with publics. Particular attention is devoted to the concept of meaning, processes of sensemaking and sensegiving, the dynamics of organisational culture and identity, semiotic and narrative practices, crisis communication, reputation and branding, digital publics and algorithmic mediation, as well as the ethical dimensions of meaning management. The contribution of the paper lies in analytically repositioning meaning management from general management theory into the core of public relations theory, thereby situating public relations strategically rather than operationally: the primary objective is not information dissemination, but interpretive stability, trust, and legitimacy.

**Keywords** - meaning management; manager of meaning; public relations; sensemaking; sensegiving; organisational culture; publics; legitimacy.

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## **INTRODUCTION: FROM INFORMATION TO MEANING**

In contemporary societies, communication functions increasingly less as the transmission of information and increasingly more as a process of producing and negotiating meaning. Information is abundant, accessible, and instantaneous; what becomes scarce is a coherent framework of meaning that enables the coordination of action and the stability of relationships. Organisations, therefore, confront not primarily the question of how to “reach” their publics, but how to ensure that their actions are intelligible and can be interpreted within acceptable and socially legitimate frameworks.

In this context, public relations undergoes a functional transformation. Traditional models that emphasised publicity, information dissemination, media visibility, or reputational crisis protection prove insufficient in the face of increasingly fragmented publics, new digital platforms, and participatory culture. In such circumstances, the public is no longer a passive recipient of information but an active participant in the communication process and an interpreter who accepts, contests, reconfigures, and redistributes meanings. Consequently, the central question of contemporary communication practice and public relations is not what organisations “communicate”, but how organisational stakeholders understand actions and what consequences arise from those interpretations.

## **A NEW APPROACH AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE PAPER**

It is important to clarify the relationship of this paper to the existing body of literature. The concepts of meaning management, sensemaking, and symbolic management are not new; they have been developed within organisational and management studies (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991; Pfeffer, 1981; Weick, 1995), as well as within cultural approaches to strategy and organisation (Hatch, 1993; Rindova and Srinivas, 2017; Smircich, 1983). The originality of this paper does not lie in introducing the concept of the “manager of meaning” per se. However, in a paradigmatic repositioning, public relations is conceptualised here as the primary site of institutionalised meaning management within organisations, and the public relations professional as the actor who coordinates this organisational capability. This approach is also grounded in the most influential definitions of public relations, which conceptualise it as a management function (Bernays, 1952; Grunig and Hunt, 1984; Cutlip, Centre and Broom, 2005; Heath and Coombs, 2006, among others).

The paper advocates abandoning the view of public relations as a predominantly one-way, or asymmetrical, communicative activity and instead redefining it as a strategic organisational practice that interprets, frames, and gives meaning to organisational action within complex social contexts. Within the framework, the primary outcome of such practice is not the production of messages

themselves, but the construction of trust, the achievement of legitimacy, and the stabilisation of public interpretations.

Rather than being reduced to the transmission of information or the management of symbols in a narrow communicative sense, public relations functions as an organisational mechanism that connects internal processes of sensemaking with external processes of social interpretation. Its strategic value does not lie in controlling meaning, but in the capacity to guide interpretive flows, reduce ambiguity, and enable collective action under conditions of uncertainty.

The fundamental outcomes of this understanding of public relations are therefore not short-term communication effects, but long-term legitimacy, the stabilisation of organisational identity, and the building of trust as a precondition for sustainable relationships between organisations and their publics. Public relations is reconceptualised theoretically as a key organisational capability in meaning management rather than as an auxiliary communication function.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND STRUCTURE OF THE PAPER**

This paper is theoretical and conceptual in nature and addresses the following research questions:

**RQ1:** How can the managerial concept of meaning management be theoretically translated into the discipline of public relations?

**RQ2:** What are the key functions of the manager of meaning in public relations

under conditions of ambiguity, crisis, and digital fragmentation?

**RQ3:** What are the ethical conditions of legitimate meaning management in public relations?

## **Theoretical Synthesis: From Semiotics to Cultural Meaning Management**

Understanding meaning management in public relations requires integrating semiotic, organisational, and managerial perspectives that have traditionally developed within different disciplines, yet converge around a shared concern: how meaning emerges, how it becomes stabilised, and how it guides social and organisational action. This theoretical synthesis allows public relations to be viewed not as a technical communication practice, but as a strategic, interpretive, and cultural organisational activity embedded in broader processes of constructing social reality.

Continuities among these perspectives can be traced from the semiotic foundations of meaning to organisational sensemaking, and to contemporary conceptions of symbolic and cultural meaning management within organisations.

## **The Semiotic Foundation**

The semiotic approach is grounded in the assumption that meaning does not arise directly from a simple relationship between a symbol and its referent, but emerges through interpretive processes situated within specific social and cultural contexts.

Charles Kay Ogden and Ivor Armstrong Richards (1923) begin with the

fundamental premise that words and symbols do not possess meaning in themselves. Meaning arises within a triadic relationship between symbol, referent, and interpretive process. At this foundational theoretical level, the idea of objective and unambiguous meaning in communication is called into question. Social reality is not immediately given; it is always interpretively mediated through language and symbols.

Particularly significant is their concept of psychological context, which refers to the set of prior experiences, associations, and learned relationships associated with a particular sign. Meaning is therefore not produced solely in the moment of communication but relies on a history of interpretation. In the context of public relations, this insight explains why different publics may interpret the same organisational action in substantially different ways, depending on their prior experiences, cultural frameworks, and social positions.

### **THE ORGANISATIONAL PRODUCTION OF SENSE**

Building upon semiotic insights, the theory of organisational sensemaking developed by Karl E. Weick (1995) provides a crucial extension. Weick starts from the premise that organisations operate under conditions of uncertainty, ambiguity, and unpredictability, in which objective reality is not directly accessible. Sense is therefore not discovered, but produced through interpretation.

Sensemaking is a collective and retrospective process through which

fragmented events are connected into narrative patterns that enable action. Events become meaningful only when they are incorporated into a story that answers the questions “What is happening?” and “What does this mean for us?” In this respect, organisations are not merely sites of rational decision-making, but arenas of continuous interpretive activity.

For public relations, Weick’s theory carries a key implication: organisational communication and action are always subject to multiple interpretations, and the stability of meaning cannot be taken for granted.

### **SENSEGIVING AS A STRATEGIC INTERVENTION**

Dennis A. Gioia and Kumar Chittipeddi (1991) further refine Weick’s framework by introducing a distinction between sensemaking and sensegiving. While sensemaking describes the process through which organisational actors interpret situations for themselves, sensegiving refers to attempts to shape the interpretive frameworks of other actors. Sensegiving does not imply control over meaning; rather, it denotes efforts to influence interpretive frames in the face of persistent ambiguity.

This distinction directly connects organisational behaviour theory with public relations. Public relations can be understood as an institutionalised practice of sensegiving directed toward diverse publics: through narratives, explanations, symbolic gestures, and discursive frames, organisations attempt to guide how their actions will be understood. In this way, public relations is positioned as a strategic

interpretive practice rather than a simple transmission of information.

### **SYMBOLIC ACTION AND LEGITIMACY**

Pfeffer (1981) further deepens this perspective by introducing a distinction between substantive and symbolic managerial activities. While substantive activities alter structures, processes, and resources, symbolic activities shape interpretations of those changes among organisational participants and publics. Pfeffer's central claim is that organisations are systems of shared meanings and beliefs, and that managerial effectiveness largely depends on the capacity to legitimise action through symbolic resources. Meaning management is thus moved to the core of management, and communication ceases to be an auxiliary function.

This insight opens up space for understanding public relations as part of the dominant coalition—and, by extension, as implicated in relations of managerial power and responsibility.

### **ORGANISATIONS AS CULTURAL OPERATORS**

Violina Rindova and Narasimhan Srinivas (2017) extend Pfeffer's perspective by emphasising the cultural and institutional embeddedness of meaning management. Organisations are not viewed merely as producers of meaning, but as cultural operators acting within pre-existing systems of beliefs, categories, and socially recognised interpretations.

Meanings emerge through exchanges between organisations and publics rather than within the organisation

alone. The boundaries between internal and external spheres become less significant, and meaning management takes the form of ongoing negotiation. Within this framework, public relations emerges as a key organisational mechanism for linking internal interpretations with external cultural expectations.

This perspective provides a theoretical foundation for conceptualising the manager of meaning in contemporary public relations and directly leads to the analysis of public relations as a strategic practice of meaning management.

### **WORKING DEFINITIONS AND PROCESSES: MEANING, MEANING MANAGEMENT, AND THE ROLE OF THE MANAGER OF MEANING**

To avoid conceptual diffuseness, a set of working definitions is introduced to structure the analysis.

#### **Meaning**

Roy F. Baumeister (1991) defines meaning as “shared mental representations of possible relationships among things, events, and relationships” (p. 15). This definition is significant for three reasons:

1. It emphasises the relational nature of meaning (the linking of elements).
2. It highlights the social dimension (shared representations).
3. It points to the coordinative function of meaning in collective action.

Meaning, therefore, is neither purely subjective nor fixed; it emerges within socially structured interpretive

frameworks that enable actors to align expectations and behaviour.

### **Sensemaking and Sensegiving**

Karl E. Weick (1995) describes sensemaking as the linking of cues and frames: present fragments of experience become meaningful when connected to existing interpretive schemas. Dennis A. Gioia and Kumar Chittipeddi (1991) define sensegiving as the intentional shaping of interpretive frameworks for other actors.

In public relations, sensegiving manifests through framing, narrative explanation, the selection of categories, and the deployment of symbolic repertoires that render organisational action intelligible to diverse publics.

### **Meaning Management**

In this paper, meaning management is defined as an organised set of symbolic and cultural practices through which interpretations of organisational action are structured, negotiated, and temporarily stabilised in the relationship between the organisation and its publics (Pfeffer, 1981; Rindova and Srinivas, 2017).

Meaning management, as conceptualised here, does not imply control over meaning as an outcome. Rather, it refers to the shaping of communicative and symbolic conditions—interpretive frameworks and symbolic resources—within which different publics construct their own meanings.

### **The Manager of Meaning in Public Relations**

The role of the communication

professional can be understood as processual and interpretive rather than merely technical-operational, thereby allowing for a more precise articulation of their function within organisational and social contexts.

Accordingly, the manager of meaning in public relations is defined as an actor who:

- participates in internal sensemaking (helping the organisation “explain itself to itself”);
- engages in sensegiving toward publics (offering interpretive frameworks);
- mediates between organisational culture/identity and societal expectations;
- manages symbolic resources (narratives, categories, rituals, identities);
- recognises and ethically moderates the boundaries of legitimate influence.

### **ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE, IDENTITY, AND PUBLICS AS INTERPRETIVE CONTEXT**

Meaning management cannot be understood outside the framework of culture, identity, and publics as interpretive communities.

Linda Smircich (1983) describes culture as a system of shared meanings that renders an organisation a “meaningful world”. Mary Jo Hatch (1993) further argues that culture, identity, and image are shaped through ongoing, recursive processes of symbolic expression and interpretation. Within this framework, identity does not appear as a stable, immutable core, but rather as something continuously reconstructed

through interpretations, representations, and the ways meanings are produced and communicated.

Violina Rindova and Narasimhan Srinivas (2017) further emphasise the role of publics: target publics are not passive recipients, but co-participants in the creation of meaning. Organisational meanings are not transmitted; they are negotiated within cultural and institutional frameworks. Public relations thus becomes the mechanism that links internal organisational interpretations with the external interpretations of publics.

### **CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC RELATIONS AS AN INSTITUTIONALISED PRACTICE OF MEANING MANAGEMENT**

Contemporary public relations represents the most developed—and theoretically most complex—domain of organisational meaning management practice. In contrast to traditional understandings of public relations as a function of collecting, processing, and disseminating information, maintaining media relations, or protecting the reputation, contemporary theoretical approaches begin from the assumption that organisations operate in environments characterised by persistent ambiguity, interpretive conflicts, and institutional pressures that cannot be resolved solely through the distribution of facts.

Under such conditions, organisational action does not appear in the public sphere as a series of objective events with predetermined meanings, but rather as a sequence of symbolic acts whose significance is produced through

the interpretations of diverse publics. Public relations, therefore, cannot be reduced to a communication technique or an operational support function for management. Instead, it must be understood as a strategic organisational mechanism of interpretive coordination—one that connects organisational intentions, cultural frameworks, and societal expectations.

In this sense, contemporary public relations constitutes an institutionalised practice of meaning management par excellence.

### **FROM INFORMATION TRANSMISSION TO THE STRUCTURING OF INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORKS**

The key difference between traditional and contemporary understandings of public relations lies in a shift of analytical focus: from message to interpretation. Classical models implicitly assumed that organisational action possesses a relatively stable meaning that is transmitted to publics through communication. Contemporary approaches, by contrast, proceed from the premise that meaning is not an inherent property of a message, but the outcome of interpretive processes in which multiple actors participate.

Within this framework, the central task of public relations is not the control of messages, but the structuring of interpretive frameworks (frames) through which organisational action can be understood as meaningful, coherent, and socially acceptable. These frameworks do not unambiguously determine how publics will interpret a

given event, but they significantly influence which interpretations become more probable and which remain marginal.

By linking Karl E. Weick's theory of sensemaking with the concept of sensegiving developed by Dennis A. Gioia and Kumar Chittipeddi, it can be argued that public relations functions as an organisational infrastructure of sensegiving. Through public relations, organisations offer explanations, narratives, and categories that enable publics to "locate" events within broader patterns of understanding. In doing so, interpretive uncertainty is reduced, even though it can never be eliminated.

### **PUBLIC RELATIONS AS A MECHANISM OF CULTURAL MEDIATION**

By integrating the framework developed by Violina Rindova and Narasimhan Srinivas, public relations can be understood as an institutionalised practice of cultural meaning operation. Organisations do not act outside culture, but within pre-existing systems of beliefs, norms, categories, and symbolic hierarchies. Every attempt at meaning management, therefore, necessarily involves a cultural dimension: the question of which interpretations are conceivable, legitimate, or persuasive within a given social context.

In this sense, public relations does not produce meanings *ex nihilo*, but functions as a cultural mediator. It connects organisational identities, values, and strategies with the cultural repertoires available to different publics. Narratives of innovation,

responsibility, sustainability, or crisis do not operate universally; they acquire meaning only when embedded in broader cultural patterns that enable publics to recognise and interpret them. The manager of meaning in public relations thus emerges as an actor who understands that organisational legitimacy does not derive solely from efficiency or formal authority, but from the capacity to culturally "translate" organisational action into socially acceptable categories.

### **THE STRATEGIC POSITION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS: FROM OPERATIONAL FUNCTION TO INTERPRETIVE GOVERNANCE**

One key implication of conceptualising public relations as a practice of meaning management is its strategic repositioning within the organisation. If the objective of public relations is the creation of interpretive stability rather than merely the dissemination of information, then public relations cannot operate exclusively at the level of implementing communication activities (Tomić, 2026).

Within this framework, the manager of meaning must be involved in the early stages of decision-making, since meanings are not shaped only after decisions have been made, but in parallel with the decision-making process itself. Organisational strategies, restructurings, innovations, or crisis responses do not exist solely as substantive decisions; they also function as symbolic acts that carry interpretive consequences.

Public relations thus theoretically converges with the domain of strategic

management. Its function is not reactive, but proactive and anticipatory: identifying potential interpretive ruptures, discrepancies between organisational intentions and societal expectations, and risks to legitimacy.

### **PUBLICS AS ACTIVE CO-CREATORS OF MEANING**

A central assumption of contemporary public relations as a practice of meaning management is the understanding of publics as active interpretive communities. Publics do not “receive” meanings; they produce them through interaction with organisational narratives, their own experiences, and broader cultural frameworks.

Meaning management does not imply domination over interpretations, but the negotiation of meaning. Organisations may offer interpretive frameworks, yet publics can accept, modify, or reject them. Particularly in the digital environment, the public possesses its own symbolic resources (comments, memes, viral narratives) that can redefine the meaning of organisational action independently of organisational intentions.

The manager of meaning, therefore, does not function as a “controller of perceptions,” but as a facilitator of collective sensemaking processes—aware of the limits of organisational power and the necessity of dialogue.

### **PUBLIC RELATIONS, LEGITIMACY, AND LONG-TERM INTERPRETIVE STABILITY**

The central outcome of contemporary public relations as a practice of

meaning management is not short-term visibility, but long-term legitimacy. Legitimacy is not built through isolated communication campaigns, but through the continuity of interpretations that position the organisation as a predictable, intelligible, and socially acceptable actor.

Violina Rindova and Charles J. Fombrun (1999) demonstrate that reputation represents a stabilised set of meanings that enables organisations to coordinate relationships with publics more effectively. In precisely this sense, public relations functions as an infrastructural mechanism that facilitates such stabilisation: through consistent narratives, symbolic coherence, and ethically grounded interpretive frameworks.

Public relations thus contributes to the consolidation of interpretive stability over time, reducing uncertainty in organisation–public relationships and reinforcing the conditions under which trust and legitimacy can be sustained.

### **THE ETHICS OF MEANING MANAGEMENT: BOUNDARIES OF LEGITIMATE INFLUENCE**

Meaning management is not only a strategic issue but also a normative one. Because it shapes interpretations of responsibility, identity, and legitimacy, it directly engages questions of power and trust.

The central ethical issue concerns the distinction between persuasion and manipulation. James E. Grunig (1992) emphasises that legitimate communication presupposes transparency and mutual understanding, whereas manipulation

involves the instrumentalisation of publics. In the context of meaning management, the ethical problem does not arise solely from inaccurate information, but also from selective framing that systematically excludes alternative interpretations or neglects the legitimate interests of particular publics.

The manager of meaning thus appears as an ethical moderator: their task is to recognise when short-term communicative gains jeopardise long-term legitimacy and trust. Ethics is not treated here as a constraint on strategy, but as a constitutive condition of its sustainability (Grunig, 1992; Tomić, 2026).

### **MEANING MANAGEMENT AS AN ORGANISATIONAL CAPABILITY**

In line with Violina Rindova and Narasimhan Srinivas (2017), meaning management is treated in this paper as an organisational capability rather than merely an individual skill. This implies that it manifests through routines, resources, and coordinated practices embedded in the organisation's structures and processes.

#### **Propositions (P1–P5)**

To further structure the theoretical contribution into clearly delineated components, the paper formulates the following propositions:

P1: The greater the interpretive ambiguity of the environment (equivocality), the greater the strategic importance of public relations as a practice of meaning management (Pfeffer, 1981; Weick, 1995).

P2: The success of public relations in

crises depends less on the quantity of information and more on the capacity for narrative reconstruction of meaning that stabilises responsibility and future expectations (Coombs, 2015; Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991).

P3: Reputation stabilises as a cultural resource only when organisational narratives and behaviour mutually reinforce one another in the interpretations of publics (Rindova and Fombrun, 1999; Rindova and Srinivas, 2017).

P4: Digital platforms increase the variability of meaning because algorithmic mediation redistributes the visibility of interpretations; therefore, meaning management requires a simultaneous understanding of publics and platform logics (Gillespie, 2018).

P5: The long-term legitimacy of meaning management depends on the ethical boundaries of framing: selective framing that systematically excludes relevant public interests increases the risk of trust erosion (Grunig, 1992; Rindova and Srinivas, 2017).

### **THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

#### **Contribution to Public Relations Theory**

This paper contributes to public relations theory by reconceptualising the discipline. Public relations is not viewed primarily as a process of message transmission or the management of communication channels, but as an institutionalised organisational practice of meaning management. The focus of theoretical analysis is thereby shifted from operational communication activities to

the interpretive processes through which social expectations, reputational patterns, and the legitimacy of organisational action are stabilised. Within this framework, public relations is theoretically positioned as an infrastructural mechanism of interpretive coordination between organisations and their publics: a system of practices that links internal processes of sensemaking with external processes of social interpretation and enables the temporary stabilisation of ambiguous and conflictual meanings in the public sphere. Such a conceptualisation moves beyond dominant instrumental and functionalist approaches that reduce public relations to support for managerial decision-making or reputational protection, and instead places it at the very centre of organisational governance under conditions of institutional uncertainty and cultural plurality. The theoretical innovation of the paper lies in systematically integrating concepts of symbolic management, sensemaking, and cultural meaning management into a coherent analytical framework for public relations. In doing so, the discipline is not merely expanded terminologically. However, its fundamental function is reinterpreted: the primary outcome of public relations is not the production of communication content, but the shaping of relatively stable interpretive structures that enable trust, reputational coherence, and the long-term legitimacy of organisations in society.

### **Contribution to organisational and management studies**

This paper contributes to organisational and management studies by conceptually deepening the notion of meaning management, demonstrating that it is not a peripheral communicative resource but a strategic organisational capability embedded in routines, structures, and decision-making processes. In this way, meaning management is theoretically distinguished from the narrower domains of symbolic management and cultural analysis and integrated into a broader framework of organisational capabilities that enable adaptation, coordination, and institutional sustainability.

A particular contribution of the paper lies in identifying public relations as a key site of institutionalisation of this capability. Building upon the insights of Jeffrey Pfeffer as well as Violina Rindova and Narasimhan Srinivas, the paper demonstrates that meaning management in contemporary organisations is not enacted sporadically or ad hoc, but is stabilised through professionalised communication functions, the strategic inclusion of communication experts in governance processes, and enduring patterns of interpretive mediation between organisations and their environments.

In this manner, organisational and management studies are enriched through a theoretical model that connects the cultural and symbolic dimensions of strategy with formal organisational structures. The paper offers an integrative framework for

analysing how legitimacy, reputation, and social acceptability are produced as outcomes of organisational capabilities rather than solely as communicative effects (Pfeffer, 1981; Rindova and Srinivas, 2017; Tomić, 2026).

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The paper argues for greater reliance on qualitative and interpretive methodological approaches in the study of public relations and organisational meaning management, particularly discursive, narrative, and semiotic analyses that enable the empirical tracing of how meanings are produced, contested, and stabilised in the interaction between organisations and their publics. The particular value of such approaches becomes evident in longitudinal research designs, which allow for the analysis of interpretive dynamics over time, including processes of reputational consolidation, crises of meaning, and the reconfiguration of identity narratives. Furthermore, the paper opens a new research agenda in the field of digital communication by highlighting the need for more systematic theoretical and empirical examination of how platform mediation and algorithmic content selection restructure the conditions of sensegiving, redistribute the visibility of competing interpretations, and influence the possibilities for the long-term stabilisation of organisational reputation and legitimacy within networked public spheres.

Based on these implications, the paper suggests the development of a distinct

theoretical and research subdiscipline within public relations—Meaning Management Studies in Public Relations—dedicated to the systematic examination of how the meanings of organisational action are produced, negotiated, and stabilised in the interaction between organisations and their publics. Such a subdiscipline would integrate organisational, cultural, and communication perspectives into a coherent theoretical program and enable the construction of a more comprehensive theory of meaning management as a foundational logic of contemporary organisational action.

## **CONCLUSION**

Under conditions of persistent ambiguity, digital fragmentation of publics, and intensified institutional expectations, meaning management emerges not as an additional communication activity, but as a fundamental organisational necessity. Contemporary organisations do not operate in environments where ensuring the accuracy and availability of information is sufficient; rather, their actions are continuously exposed to interpretive processes through which meanings of responsibility, identity, intention, and legitimacy are produced. It is precisely within this interpretive space that the strategic importance of public relations is located.

By integrating concepts of symbolic management (Pfeffer, 1981), organisational sensemaking and sensegiving (Karl E. Weick, 1995; Dennis A. Gioia and Kumar Chittipeddi, 1991), and the cultural framework of meaning

management (Violina Rindova and Narasimhan Srinivas, 2017), this paper demonstrates that contemporary public relations can be theoretically understood as the most developed institutionalised practice of meaning management within organisations. Public relations is thus conceptually distanced from its characterisation as a technical or operational communication function and positioned instead as a key mechanism of interpretive coordination between organisations and their publics (Tomić, 2026).

Within this framework, the public relations professional—conceptualised as a manager of meaning—does not act primarily as an executor of communication tactics, but as a strategic actor engaged in shaping, stabilising, and negotiating the meanings of organisational action. This role encompasses the coordination of internal and external sensemaking processes, the management of cultural resources related to reputation and identity, the narrative reconstruction of meaning in crises, and the mediation between organisational intentions and public interpretations in an algorithmically structured public sphere. Meaning management is therefore not conceived as the control of perceptions, but as the capacity to guide interpretive flows under conditions in which complete control is neither possible nor legitimate.

The theoretical contribution of the paper lies in the paradigmatic repositioning of public relations from the periphery of management to its interpretive core. Public relations is not

viewed as secondary support for “real” decision-making, but as an organisational capability without which strategic action cannot achieve social intelligibility, acceptability, and legitimacy. The objective of this capability is not information per se, but the creation of relatively stable, culturally embedded meanings that enable trust, coordinated action, and the long-term sustainability of relationships between organisations and their publics.

Building on these insights, the paper also opens space for further theoretical advancement: the development of a comprehensive theory of meaning management. Such a theory would move beyond partial concepts of symbolic management, sensemaking, or communication strategy and position meaning management as a general managerial logic of action in contemporary organisations. Within this framework, management would not be understood primarily as the administration of resources, structures, and processes, but as an institutionalised capacity to shape, guide, and stabilise meaning in complex social and cultural environments.

This paper suggests that the future development of both public relations theory and management theory more broadly depends on the scholarly community’s ability to explicitly recognise and theoretically articulate the interpretive dimension of organisational action. In a world in which organisations increasingly do not “speak for themselves” but require explanation, framing, and cultural translation, the development of a theory

of meaning management represents not only a logical continuation of this work but also a necessary step toward

understanding contemporary organisations.

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## **MENADŽER ZNAČENJA U SUVREMENIM ODNOSIMA S JAVNOŠĆU**

U suvremenom komunikacijskom okruženju obilježenom informacijskom hiperprodukcijom, fragmentacijom javnosti i digitalnom cirkulacijom interpretacija, odnosi s javnošću prolaze transformaciju iz komunikacijske podrške u stratešku organizacijsku funkciju. Ovaj rad razvija tezu da se suvremeni odnosi s javnošću mogu teorijski razumjeti kao institucionalizirana praksa upravljanja značenjem, pri čemu se stručnjak za odnose s javnošću konceptualizira kao menadžer značenja. Polazeći od Pfefferove koncepcije menadžmenta kao simboličkog djelovanja te integrirajući kulturni okvir Rindove i Srinivasa, rad prikazuje organizacije kao kulturne i simboličke sustave koji djeluju kroz interpretativne odnose s javnošću. Posebna se pozornost posvećuje pojmu značenja, procesima sensemakinga i sensegivinga, dinamici organizacijske kulture i identiteta, semiotičkim i narativnim praksama, kriznoj komunikaciji, reputaciji i brendiranju, digitalnim javnostima i algoritamskom posredovanju te etičkim dimenzijama upravljanja značenjem. Doprinos rada sastoji se u analitičkom premještanju upravljanja značenjem iz opće menadžerske teorije u središte teorije odnosa s javnošću, pri čemu se odnosi s javnošću pozicioniraju strateški, a ne operativno: cilj nije primarno informacija, nego interpretativna stabilnost, povjerenje i legitimnost.

**Ključne riječi:** upravljanje značenjem; menadžer značenja; odnosi s javnošću; sensemaking; sensegiving; organizacijska kultura; javnosti; legitimnost.