

## **ENTREVISTA AL DR. DEJAN VERČIČ, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia**

Por *Rebeca Illiana Arévalo Martínez*<sup>1</sup>

**Dejan Verčič**, Ph.D., is a Professor and Head of Centre for Marketing and Public Relations at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, visiting lecturer at the University of Lugano, Switzerland, and University of Zagreb, Croatia. In academic year 2013/2014, he is a Fulbright scholar at the San Diego State University, USA. He holds a Ph.D. from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). Dr. Verčič has published 11 books. He has written more than 300 articles, book chapters, monographs, reviews, and conference papers on public relations theory and research. His recent books are *Culture and Public Relations* (2012), *The Global Public Relations Handbook: Theory, Research, and Practice* (2003, 2009), *Public Relations Metrics: Research and Evaluation*. In 2000 and in 2010 he received special awards by the Public Relations Society of Slovenia, and in 2001 he was awarded the Alan Campbell-Johnson Medal for outstanding service to international public relations by the UK Chartered Institute of Public Relations (of which he is a Fellow). Prof. Verčič served, *inter alia*, as the chairman of the Research Committee of the IABC Research Foundation and as the President of the European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EUPRERA). Since 1994, he organizes an annual International Public Relations Research Symposium – BledCom.

### ***Applied Communication Research***

#### **In your perspective, how the Applied Communication Research can be defined?**

Applied communication research is research concerned with communication in real-life settings trying to make a difference: (hopefully) to improve the world using knowledge of social sciences in communication. In a certain way it is a section of social technology, of resources that are at disposal for use.

#### **What are the most important challenges of the Applied Communication Research in Europe and in the rest of the world?**

Applied communication research is still very young (its first journal is in its thirties) and largely underfunded. We miss large empirical projects in particularly in trans- and multi-national setting that could provide foundations for solid conceptualization and theory development. We are still weak in explanation and even weaker in prediction of organizational communication initiatives. Just think about the sums of money the US spends on so called "public diplomacy" - and with what results? The major challenge in Europe is how to think it in communication terms: social sciences are largely defined within a universe of Society largely conceived as a nation-state. Globalization had moved the world on, but our understanding of it is lagging.

**What is the relevance to the society, the culture and/or the organizations to have researchers specialized in Applied Communication?**

I am not aware of any systematic study on the topic, but my anecdotal evidence suggests that the biggest employers of applied communication research are armies (with the US military on the top spot) and multinational enterprises. Already that says something about the value of applied communication research. The global dominance of American English as lingua franca in business and popular culture cannot be understood without the services of applied communication research (just think about its use in media industry; media-buying in advertising is 90% use of applied communication research). What can that tell us? That applied communication research is a valuable resource to exercises of all forms of economic and political power. How much it is also an exercise of social power? Much less than it could and should be.

**Do you have some advices or recommendations to these researchers?**

There seems to be schism between "pure", "academic" and "applied" or "mundane" research, which is a serious problem of social sciences in general. If natural sciences would behave similarly, our world would very much look like it was one hundred years ago. We

need to create a flexible field where the same research teams could move on the while continuum from pure academic to pure mundane applied research. As communication is becoming more problematic and more important in the contemporary world, so is applied communication research.

### *Creating value to organizations by communication*

#### **What is the symbolic capital of the organization and how communication helps in its development?**

Symbolic capital of organizations is recently referred to as reputation (and is also known as reputational capital; but can also be conceptualized as prestige, trust...). Communication is central to its development by nurturing reflexivity which enables its operational isolation and management.

#### **What about the cultural capital and social capital of the organization and the communication role in its development?**

Cultural capital of organizations is in non-tangible assets of organizations that are collected through learning or purchases of know-how, skills, procedures; it can include also organizational culture. Communication is central to its development by nurturing reflexivity which enables its operational isolation and management. Social capital is of organizations exists in valuable relationships they have with other organizations and other social actors in their environments. Communication contributes to its developments as through relationship management approach.

#### **What is the economic capital of the organization and how communication contributes to its development?**

Economic capital is financial value of an organization. Communication enables its accumulation by helping to preserve the license to operate (social legitimacy) and by

developing other forms of capital (symbolic, social and cultural) that are contributing to the development of financial assets.

**In general, what is the perception that the executives of an organization have about the organizational communicator? What characteristics of the organizational communicator do you think are the most valued by them?**

From my study and research I find great differences between regions, countries and sectors in Europe. There seems to be a great appreciation of communicators' work in North-Western Europe, but much lower in South-Eastern Europe. Where organizations demand engaged and intellectual workforce and hospitable social and political environment, they demand sophisticated communication function. This is based on integrity, knowledge of organizations, and strategic thinking. In organizations based on exploitation of natural resources or humans in the periphery, communication is in much lower regard and is perceived primarily as publicity exercise.

**What characteristics do you think are the most valued in organizational communicators since the point of view of the academic (teachers at universities and researchers)?**

My perception is that academics value analytical skills and research competences as the most important when valuing practitioners.

**What is the perception that any person who is not directly related to their professional work?**

That is again dependent on location in geography (North-West of Europe being more and South-East less positive) and social structures. In general, Westerners have some problems with the idea that communication can be managed (as e.g. Impression management or

reputation management), as we are educated (by the generation from 1960s and 1970s?) to value "authenticity".

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