CHAPTER 2

APPLYING THEORY TO PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGNS

theory n. **/.** *A statement or set i>f statements designed lit explain a phenomenon. 2. A xet of rules or principles designed for the study or practice of an art or discipline.*

WHAT IS A THEORY?

In the popular situation comedy *Cheers,* bar owner Sam Malone found himself struggling in his attempl lo repair the bar's aging plumbing system.

"Does anyone here know anything about plumbing?" he asked his patrons. Mail carrier Cliff Claven, (he bar's resident know-it-all, was the first to respond.

"The ancient Babylonians built an elaborate system of aqueducts..." he said before Sam interrupted. "No, Cliff, what I need is someone to help FIX the plumbing."

"Sorry, Sammy," Cliff replied. "I'm strictly theory on this one."

Like the characters in *Cheers,* many outside the communications field fail to fully appreciate theoretical concepts. College students typically look at ihe concept of "theory" as a collection of abstract concepts to be memorized for test-iaking purposes, then quickly discarded. Admittedly, much of communications theory is nonsense—but much of it is not. This chapter will deal wilh theory not as a set of abstract concepts, but rather as valuable insights into how members of larget audiences process information and make decisions.

A theory is a set of assumplions used to explain how a process works and to make predictions as to what will result from that process. Theories are not laws or inflexible rules; they are merely guides. One example can be found in Socrates' ideas about inductive and deductive reasoning. If person *X* likes person *Y* and person *Y* likes person 2, it is likely that person *X* will also like person Z But it does not hold (hat if person *X* likes his dog and his dog likes to dig for bones, that person *X* will also like to dig for bones.

Although the (heories that have survived over time have done so because of their applicability, they are most valuable when combined with the practitioner's real-world experience in applying them. The authors of this textbook believe it is more important to concentrate on practical applications of public relations work and give students just enough theory to provide some context. Just as architects must understand physics in order to prevent buildings from falling down, public relations professionals must understand how public opinion and persuasion works in order to be effective in their jobs.

This chapter will therefore deal largely with those theories that have some relevance lo the real-world practice of public iclations. Those theories come not only from the field of mass communications but also from the fields of psychology and education. This listing of theories, however, begins with a widely known set of models for modem public relations practice.

GRUNIG AND HUNT MODELS FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE

In their 1984 book, *Managing Public Relations,* professors James E. Grunig and Todd Hunt describe four theoretical models for public relations practice that have become starting points for examining how the profession works. The four models are press agentry and publicity, public information, two-way asymmetric, and two-way symmetric.

Press Agentry and Publicity

This model is practiced by professionals who use mainly one-way communication to promote products, services and events with little measurement of the results. The press agentry/publicity model is used largely by sports and entertainment publicists, or any person responsible for event promotion. Grunig and Hunt explain that some of the communication resulting from this model includes information that it is "incomplete, distorted, or only partially true." Although that description is somewhat harsh and may not apply as much today as it did decades ago, it is (rue that the professional in this role is primarily concerned with telling the audience about an organization, but is not concerned with measuring the effects of that communication.

Public Information

This model is practiced by professionals who use a combination of one-way and two-way communication to provide information to their audiences. The public information model is used largely by government agencies, law-enforcement agencies, educational institutions, and units of the military. Although research does not play a major role in this model, its practitioners are slightly more likely to gather audience feedback than those in the press agent/publicity model.

Two- Way Asymmetric

This model is practiced by professionals who use two-way communication to persuade audiences to change their points of view in nonconflict situations or conflict situations that are not overly hostile or volatile. The **two-way** asymmetric model is used largely by businesses and nonprofit organizations (or the agencies that represent them) in siluations in which che enlity involved wants lo resolve conflicts without compromise; it prefers opposing forces to change their positions. The organizations practicing this model gather feedback from their audiences, but it is more likely to be used to better understand the behavior of those audiences and design appropriate messages than it is to seek areas of common ground and compromise.

Two-Way Symmetric

The two-way symmetric model is used mostly by professionals employed by businesses, nonprofit organizations, and special-interest groups that find themselves involved in conflict situations that arc hostile and volatile. The strategy employed in [he model uses two-way communication to achieve mutual understanding and to resolve conflicts through negotiation and compromise. Instead of insisting that all change take place among the audiences, this model suggests that there is room for compromise on the part of both the communicator and the audience. Author Stephen Covey, in his popular book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People,* paraphrased this model by suggesting strategies such as "seeking (he 'win-win' situation" and "seeking first to understand, then to be understood."

Public relations practitioners who find themselves in diagnostic siluations in which they are assigned the task of determining an organization's strengths and weaknesses should first determine if the model practiced by the organization is consistent with its mission and purpose. Public relations consultants often discover that when organizations find themselves operating on Murphy's Law (everything that could possibly go wrong for the organization usually does), the root cause may be an inappropriate model.

Since Grunig and Hunt described these models in their first book, they have tinkered with them and conducted additional research in an attempt to fine-tune (hem. With nearly all the organizations they have studied, the researchers found two recurring phenomena. The first was that nearly every organization they examined could be placed into one of these four categories. The second finding was thai more than half of (he organizations studied were practicing models (hat were not the most effective for their type of organization; they practiced it because of tradition, stubbornness, or resistance to change.

THEORIES FROM MASS COMMUNICATIONS

Because public relations courses are oflen offered through academic departments labeled as "mass communications." they tend to emphasize theories from that discipline. Most of the theories fall into an area known as *media effects,* which is the study of how the journalism and advertising industries influence personal decision making and public policy.

The Magic Bullet Theory

When communications scholars and social scientists first began studying the effects of the mass media in the 1920s, the first major theory they developed was called the magic bullet

theory. It was based on their belief that the media (both news media and entertainment media) were so powerful that they could accomplish almost anything by influencing or manipulating public opinion and social policy. Variations of the theory were also developed, and all were grouped together into a category known as **powerful effects theories.** The concern at the time was that if such theories were true, society would be at the mercy of those persons or companies who controlled the media. Even though the magic bullet theory and most other powerful effects theories have since been discounted, they were credible enough at the time for the federal government to establish rules to limit the size of media conglomerates and encourage competition among the media. Today, communications scholars and legal authorities generally agree that the interests of the people are best served by healthy competition among the media and the "marketplace of ideas" principle.

Cumulative Effects Theory

The **cumulative effects theory** suggests that persuasive campaigns can be most effective when the message comes from a variety of sources and/or is repeated from the same source but over an extended period of time. An example would be a broad-based effort to influence individuals to recycle their newspapers, aluminum cans, and glass and plastic bottles. A man may hear a message about recycling on the car radio while driving to work in the morning, and it may have little or no effect. But if he receives a second recycling message in an employee newsletter at work, a third when his child brings home recycling information from school, and a fourth in the form of a church bulletin the following Sunday, the accumulation of the four messages results in behavior changes.

The theorist most associated with the cumulative effects theory is German social scientist Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann. To some extent, this theory is in opposition to the magic bullet theory. The application of the theory in public relations work means that professional communicators cannot depend on one communication tactic alone to get their message across. Rather, they must use either a combination of multiple tactics carrying the same message, or repeat the same message through one method over an extended period of time.

Two-Step Flow of Communication

In his 1955 book titled *Personal Influence,* researcher Paul Lazarsfeld developed a theoretical model to describe how individuals are influenced to adopt or change their beliefs and behaviors. According to his **two-step flow of communication** model, individuals seldom make decisions based solely on their own beliefs; those decisions are influenced by other persons in their lives, such as friends, parents, work supervisors, educators, church leaders, physicians, public officials, and the media. *Two-step flow* refers to the information passing from the source to the **opinion leaders** and then on to the receivers, whether intended to take that route or not. Opinion leaders can exert their influence by speaking, writing, or modeling behavior that is copied by others. *Formal opinion leaders* are those in positions such as elected public officials or individuals chosen to head unions, special-interest groups, or nonprofit organizations. Journalists often ask them to comment on issues in the news. *Informal opinion leaders* are those people who are not in elected or appointed positions, but are able influence others because of personal characteristics such as charisma or assertiveness.

Opinion leaders can be male or female and are found in every racial, ethnic, social, and political group. Lazarsfeld estimated that one in every five persons is an opinion leader in some respect. During one of Lazarsfeld's studies, he asked people who their opinion leaders were and why they listened to them. One waitress in a coffee shop described to Lazarsfeld her opinion leader as "a customer who sounded like he knew what he was talking about."

Lazarsfeld first applied this model to how voters made decisions about candidates and issues in the 1940s, and public relations professionals soon began applying it to fields other than politics. One of those practitioners was Edward Bcrnays, who wrote in a 1932 article that many opinion leaders arc not even aware of their role and amount of the power that they have. Today, public relations professionals use this model in other types of campaigns by first identifying target audiences for their messages and then determining who those groups consider their opinion leaders.

The expansion of lechnology over the last century has changed the nature of opinion leaders. In the early 1900s, for example, opinion leaders were most likely the town bankers, retailers, clergy, union stewards, and schoolteachers. Some of those may still play that role loday, but for some groups, their opinion leaders are more remote—such as television personalities, popular authors, newspaper columnists, national political leaders, and those expressing their opinions 10 large audiences via the Internet.

Opinion leaders in today's society typically share five characteristics. The first is that they tend to possess a higher degree of education than people around them. The majority have attended college, and many have gone on to graduate school. The second characteristic is thai ihey consume more media than other individuals and are usually more informed about current events and social trends. They tend to rely on daily newspapers more than on television for news, anil when they watch television, they do so for the purposes of information rather than entertainment.

The next characteristic is that opinion leaders tend to be active in politics and community affairs. The majority attend public meetings, write letters to newspaper editors and elected public officials, work for special-interest groups, and serve on the boards of community associations and nonprofit organizations. The fourth characteristic is that they are early adopters of new ideas. Within a list of friends, coworkers, or other persons considered to be members of a peer group, the first individual on that list lo use electronic mail, own a cellular telephone, or design his or her own website is also likely to be the group's opinion leader.

The fifth and perhaps most important characteristic is that opinion leaders have the ability to influence people around them, either because of posiiion {such as in the case of parents, employment supervisors, or union stewards) or personal qualities such as charisma or assertivcness,

A variation of the two-step model is the N-slep theory, which states that individuals seldom receive information from only one opinion leader. Instead, they are likely to turn to different opinion leaders for each issue on which they form an opinion. Health care marketers know, for example, that elderly patients treat their doctors and pharmacists as opinion leaders on medical issues, and they direct their marketing efforts accordingly. But those same eldcily patients are likely to select a trusted public official for information on political issues, and an educated son or daughter for information on social issues.

Agenda **Setting**

First described in a 1973 study by University of North Carolina professors Max McCombs and Donald Shaw, the agenda-setting theory suggests that the media—cither purposely or noi—set the agenda for public debate and discussion. If applied to public relations practice, the theory would place more emphasis on the media as opinion leaders and active participants in the persuasion process. This is especially true of the newspaper editorial page— perhaps the most important part of the newspaper in terms of influencing public opinion and public policy.

The agenda-setting theory can take two forms. The *passive* agenda-setting theory states that influence is unintentional: The media do not tell audiences *what* to think but *wliai to think about.* Most newspaper publishers are proud of the fact that they are agenda .setters. One publisher describes his newspaper's role as an agenda setter as "keeping the community in conversation with itself."

The *active* agenda-setting theory states that the media do in fact tell audiences what to think. The besl example of that is the newspaper editorial page, which informs readers "this is what the management of this newspaper thinks" and implies lhat readers should agree and act accordingly. One recent book based on the active agenda-setting theory is titled *Mediaspeak: How Television Makes Up Your Mind.* In the introduction to the book, the author writes. "We do nol see the world as it is. We see it as television presents it to us,"

Social Learning Theory

Sociologist Albert Bandura developed the social learning theory, which suggests that people adopt not only their opinions from modeling others but also their behaviors— especially those behaviors they see modeled for them in the media. In researching media habits of children, Bandura demonstrated that children will imitate the violent acts they see on television when they see no punishment associated with such behavior. Government officials recognized the validity of Bandura's work when they claimed that a relationship exists between television violence and antisocial behavior in youth.

On the adult level, when individuals observe others being rewarded for exhibiting certain behaviors, they attempt the same behaviors and expect the same rewards. Rewards can be external, such as recognition and praise, or internal, such as a feeling of self-worth or increased prestige.

Public relations professionals working in the area of employee relations have noticed that even negative behaviors will be repeated by others if they see those behaviors being rewarded. For example, if complaining about large workloads results in an individual's workloads being reduced, that behavior is likely to be exhibited by others. If employees are allowed to violate safety rules without being corrected or reprimanded, other employees are unlikely to take those rules seriously. Whether the rewards are intentional or unintentional, employers will get the behaviors they reward.

There is also a strong link between consumer behavior presented in entertainment programming and consumer spending by real persons. In a 1998 study, for example. Harvard economist Juliet Schor found that for each hour per week spent watching television, a household spent an additional $208 per year. Schor attributed the increase to the depiction of glamorous lifestyles on television and the audience's belief thai the clothing, automobiles, and entertainment choices shown on television represented the typical American family, and because of that belief audiences increased their spending in order to "keep up."

Episodic Framing

Episodic framing theory, also known as the *issue-attention cycle,* states that the media set the agenda for societal debate, bu(that the agenda is always changing. In short, it says that the media select a topic, pay some attention to it, and then the public follows. But after a while, the public loses interest, and the media move onto other issues. The cycle then starts over again with a different topic. The public's attention span dictates how long the media will pay attention to something; the media will keep something on their agenda as long as people keep reading the newspaper stories and watching the television stories.

One example of the issue-attention cycle was media coverage of famine and starvation in Ethiopia. In October 1987. American newspapers and television networks produced a series of stories about starvation in the African country and treated the topic as if it were a new one. Both the newspaper and television stories overlooked the fact that the conditions had existed for more than a decade. Later, the media lost interest in the issue and began to produce fewer and fewer stories about it until the coverage disappeared altogether. More than a decade later, famine and starvation arc still widespread in Ethiopia, but few Americans are aware of it because of the lack of media coverage.

A variation of episodic framing is *thematic framing,* which is different only because it features a "triggering event." An example of thematic framing theory is found in the media coverage of the murders of Nicolc Brown Simpson and Ron Goldman in 1994, a crime for which O. J. Simpson was the chief suspect. As part of their coverage of the crime, both print and electronic media produced a number of "sidebars" about domestic violence. Social workers specializing in domestic violence work appreciated the attention the issue received, but questioned why ii took a highly publicized murder case to call attention to the issue. They also worried that after media interest in the murder case subsided, their coverage of the domestic violence issue would decline as well, which it did. Other examples include the increase in attention paid to environmental causes following the 1989 oil spill in Alaska, increased attention paid to "hate groups" and domestic terrorism following the 1995 bombing of a federal building in Oklahoma City, and increased attention paid to international terrorism following the September 11,2001, terrorist attacks on New York City and the Pentagon.

Gatekeeping

The gatekeeping model is used to describe the editorial process by which potential news stories are evaluated and yes/no decisions are made as to whether those stories are published or broadcast. The theory was first explained by Kurt Lewin in the 1940s and was refined by David Manning White in the 1960s and 1970s. Gatekeeping is often confused with "censorship," but there is a significant difference. *Censorship* refers to action taken by a governmental official or other outside authority, whereas *gutekeeping* refers to a voluntary process of self-editing.

At first, gutekeeping was treated as though it was a finite event that occurred only one time. Researchers now think of galekeeping as a process rather than an event. Public relations professionals know that is especially true in the case of news releases, which must pass through a series of "gates," including reporters who receive them, editors who approve the reporters' pursuit of those stories, and other editors who make the final decisions concerning when and how those stories will be published.

Interaction Theory

Interaction theory suggests that the influence a medium has over its audience is proportional to the amount of effort involved in consuming it. The theory was first suggested by education researcher Jean Piaget, but is paraphrased in the Native American proverb that says, "Tell me and I will forget. Show me and I will remember. Involve me and I will understand." According to educational researcher Ken Spencer, humans remember only 10 percent of what they read, 20 percent of what they hear, and 30 percent of what they see. However, memory improves to 50 percent for those who see and hear something, and 90 percent if the person is actively involved in the process or event instead of merely observing it.

One example of a medium requiring a high level of effort to consume is the newspaper; it takes some degree of intellectual involvement to read a newspaper to get any benefit from the experience. That is in contrast to more passive forms of media consumption, such as watching television and listening to the radio. This contrast is part of the reason why retention studies consistently show that newspaper readers remember more of the content of stories they read (and are more likely to take action as a result) than television viewers or radio listeners remember from their experience.

An example of the interaction theory being applied in the real world occurred during the investigation into the 1999 murder-suicides committed by two teenagers at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. Investigations into the background of the perpetrators determined that their chief form of entertainment was violent video games, and psychologists claimed those games being interactive in nature contributed to their violent behavior.

In public relations work, the theory can be illustrated by considering the results of staged events involving audience participation. One example is "Take Our Daughters to Work Day," an annual event organized by the Ms. Foundation for Women in order to expose young girls to career choices.

Klapper's Reinforcement Theory

In response to the "powerful effects" family of theories, skeptical researchers developed a number of theories known as **minimal effects theories.** These theories acknowledged the power of the mass media, but insisted that the media were not as powerful or influential as once thought. One theory that came out of this group is **Klapper's reinforcement theory** developed by Joseph Klapper. It maintains that the media cannot create opinions from scratch, but can be effective in reinforcing existing beliefs and attitudes (or bringing latent beliefs and attitudes to the surface) and encouraging individuals to act on them. German philosopher Immanuel Kant also had a reinforcement theory, but instead of dealing with the influence of the media, it dealt with the influence of other individuals on the persons in question.

THEORIES FROM PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATION

Field Theory

In the early 1950s, sociologist Kurt Lewin developed the field theory to explain the processes of decision making and change in both individuals and organizations. According to Lewin, no decision making or change takes place in a vacuum; it is always influenced hy a variety of factors in the environment. Joe Thomas, a professor of management at Middle Tennessee State University, expanded field theory to further study the change process in companies and nonprofit organizations. Thomas categorized factors in the environment as either *driving forces* or *restraining forces,* and developed mathematical formulas to help organizations better deal with change.

In public relations setiings. driving forces could include factors such as leadership ability, financial resources, name recognition, and the worthiness or popularity of the organization's cause or mission. Conversely, restraining (or limiting) sources could include staff limitations, lack of financial resources, lack of name recognition, or lack of a popular or glamorous cause,

Cognitive Dissonance

Cognitive dissonance theory, first explained by Leon Festinger in the 195()s, suggests that media cannot be all powerful as once thought (in the case of the "magic bullet theory") because audience members lend to ignore or "explain away" messages that are inconsistent with previously held beliefs. Newspaper research studies, for example, indicate that readers tend to predict the content of a story based on its headline, and then read those with • which they expect to agree and ignore those with which they expect to disagree. Public relations representatives working on campaigns that require influencing public opinion on controversial and emotional issues will often find cognitive dissonance a serious barrier to overcome. One of the strongest characteristic of human behavior is resistance to change.

Kant's Reinforcement Theory

German philosopher Immanuel Kant developed **Kant's** reinforcement theory in the 1800s to describe how individuals were influenced to change their behaviors. According to Kant, when a desired behavior is rewarded or reinforced positively, that behavior is likely to be repeated. But Kant found that the converse is not true: When undesirable behavior is punished, ihe behavior does not stop. Instead, the individual will continue the undesirable behavior (often due to rewards coming from other sources) but will try harder to avoid the punishment.

The ongoing battle against youth smoking provides a good example of reinforcement theory. Research has indicated that teenagers seldom respond to "scare tactics," such as warnings about the long-term health problems caused by smoking, because those dangers seem loo remote to affect them. In some studies, however, teens were influenced to stop smoking (or to not stan) by appealing to their vanity. At a time when many teens were beginning to date, thoughts of yellow teeth and bad breath were enough to discourage smoking, while the more serious health problems of the distant future did not matter.

Diffusion Theory

This theory explains the five steps that individuals go through in adopting new ideas or products: awareness, interest, trial, evaluation, and adoption. Diffusion theory was first suggested in the 1980s by psychologist Everett Rogers, who claimed that although the mass media are often responsible for individuals moving through the first two steps, the personal influence exerted by friends and family members is more likely to move the person through the third and fourth steps. Only a person's satisfaction wilh the product or idea can ensure that he or she will reach the fifth step.

Activation **Theory**

Activation theory, sometimes called the *clean state theory,* suggests that persuasion is most effective when it does not have to compete with strong, previously held attitudes. Psychologist Carl Hovland theorized that individuals are more likely to change their perceptions if the information provided (by the mass media or other sources) is not contradictory to previous experiences and beliefs.

Unstructured Attitude Theory

Unstructured attitude theory, sometimes called the *conversion theory,* asserts that in for-or-against issues, especially those to be determined by a public vote, persuasive efforts can be effective with audiences that are slightly in opposition to the idea, but not strongly in opposition.

If a large general audience is segmented into five groups, using a continuum of (1) strongly for. (2) somewhat for, (3) no opinion, (4) somewhat against, and (5) strongly against, an individual or group advocating the "for" side of the issue would find their time best spent attempting to influence groups 2, 3, and 4. Time spent communicating to groups 1 and 5 may be wasted, as members of group 1 are already committed to the idea, and members of group 5 will never be, regardless of the strength of the persuasive effort. Even though members of group 2 are leaning in favor of the idea, communicating to them is necessary to prevent individuals in that group from defecting to the other side. Communicating to group 4 can be time and effort well spent, as those individuals arc leaning against the issue, but are still within reach. Even though members of group 3 (the undecided) would appear to be the most likely targets for a persuasive campaign, some political analysts are skeptical aboul their importance in election issues because they are often the least likely individuals to vote.

Source Credibility **Theory**

Another theory developed by Carl Hovland suggesting that the major factor in whether or not a message is believed is the credibility of its source, whether a person or an organiza-

tion. The most important factors in **source credibility theory** are trustworthiness and expertise. Credibility is increased by establishing a common ground with the audience.

The advertising industry has applied this theory for decades, basing many campaigns on the endorsement of products by professional athletes, well-known entertainers, and other celebrities. The restriction of this theory, however, is that it has a limited life span. Research studies consistently show that credibility exerts a decreasing amount of influence over time.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Psychologist Abraham Maslow developed this model in the 1940s to explain how individuals perceive their level of comfort with their surroundings. **Maslow's hierarchy of needs** is studied in psychology classes and is often used as the basis for studying any subject involving human behavior.

Maslow's hierarchy lists human needs in ascending order: basic (food, water, shelter, and transportation), security (physical and financial), social (acceptance, friendship, love, romance, and sex), ego (status, recognition, accomplishment, and fame), and self-actualization (education, travel, recreation, and development of artistic or creative talent).

Applying this theory, public relations professionals know that it is difficult to persuade an audience to pursue one need when needs on a lower level have not yet been achieved. For example, an individual unable to afford adequate housing or transportation is at the bottom level of the hierarchy and would not pay attention to commercial messages attempting to appeal to his or her desire for ego or self-actualization. Conversely, it would be difficult to communicate to audiences at an upper level of the hierarchy about ideas and issues related to a lower level. For example, basic needs such as food and housing are unlikely to cross the mind of an individual with stable employment or being supported by family members.

But Maslow's hierarchy is not as simple as it appears. All five of the categories of needs are present in the individual's mind at all times; they vary only in relative strength. And individuals do not necessarily move from one level to another in a logical fashion. The sudden decline in a person's health or the health of the family's breadwinner may cause an individual to drop to a lower level almost instantly. Corporate downsizing and uncertainty about an employer's future may cause employees to worry about a lower level as well—a factor that should be taken into consideration in employee communications at a time of uncertainty.

GENERALIZATIONS ABOUT PERSUASION AND OPINION CHANGE

In their 1953 book, *Communication and Persuasion*, psychologists Carl Hovland, Irving Janis, and Harold Kelley explained a number of generalizations about persuasion and opinion change that are just as valid today as they were a half century ago. Among them were:

1. An individual's opinions are more likely to change in the desired direction if conclusions are exnlicitlv stated than if those individuals are left to draw their own conclusions.

Some people believe that if all the facts are laid before audience members, they will make the right decisions. The weakness of that theory is that even highly intelligent audiences frequently fail to see the implications of the facts unless those implications are laid out.

2. Effects of persuasive messages tend to wear off over time. Even when persuasion is effective, the results are seldom permanent. Repetition is often necessary to drive home certain points.

3. Audience members most in need of hearing a message are least likely to hear it. Parents who show up at PTA meetings are mostly those whose children are having the least difficulty in school. Persons who could benefit from social services are the least likely ones to show up at public meetings at which those services are discussed. Promoters must therefore use a variety of communication tactics rather than just a limited number.

4. Audience members are more likely to make the desired choice if both sides of an argument are presented instead of only one side. Audiences tend to be skeptical of an individual or an organization that tells them only one side of the story and expects them to accept it without questions. A more effective strategy is to explain both sides of an issue, but then explain why one side should be preferred over the other.

DECISION-MAKING MODELS

In a 1983 study, James O. Prochaska and Carlo C. DiClemente identified four stages of human decision making. Although their study dealt mainly with tobacco usage, the same model could be used to study other personal behaviors, such as those related to alcohol consumption, drug use, and sexual conduct. Advertising, marketing, and public relations researchers can apply these stages to purchasing decisions and other consumer behaviors.

The four stages of the Prochaska and DiClemente models are precontemplation, contemplation, action, and maintenance. In some cases, a fifth stage of relapse occurs if the maintenance effort is not successful.

In the *precontemplation* stage, communicators must overcome one or both of the following problems: (1) receivers of the message do not see the proposed behavior as relative to their needs and (2) receivers of the message believe it is not appropriate or necessary for someone like them. Examples include a television viewer who sees a commercial for computers, cellular telephones, or other technology products and comments, "I can't imagine any circumstances under which I would ever use one."

At the *contemplation* stage, members of the audience weigh the advantages and disadvantages (or benefits and risks) of the product, service, or behavior being suggested. In order to get audience members to move from the contemplation stage to the *action* stage, communicators musi emphasize the benefits and minimize any perception of drawbacks.

The *maintenance* stage is where many communication campaigns fall apart. Audience members may purchase a product, subscribe to a service, or adopt a new behavior. However, unless such decisions are reinforced, the natural tendency is to discontinue the use of a product or service and relapse into old choices or behaviors if the rewards of doing so outweigh the rewards associated with the new behavior are not sufficient.