

# Pressconference: Looking for Reliable Decisions

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**Assoc. Prof. Lubomir Stoykov, Ph.D.**

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**Summary:** As a fundamental technology of Public Relations, the pressconference suggests irreplaceable opportunities to the organization to directly and interactively provide information to massmedia. What is the pressconference like? Which are the key steps of management before, during and after the end of the pressconference?

In this article the algorithm of the pressconference is analyzed; the dominant ideas about fragmentary examines the organizational and management steps in the three main stages of the preparation and the implementation of this kind of meeting with media.

The main idea is that pressconference is a special form of public communication whose main goal is to guarantee direct or two-way providing of actual information from the organization (person) to media (journalists). The author offers his own definition about pressconference and four of the most important axioms of its nature and manifestations

**Key words:** Public relations, pressconference, management, organization, media, technology, two-way communication, journalists, PR specialists

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## Introductory notes

The press-conference meets two very important and interrelated needs: on one hand, it provides the opportunity for the organization (state institution, non-governmental organization, trade company, etc.) to meet directly representatives of the mass media and to inform them of its activities and events; and on the other hand, it provides the media themselves with the opportunity (through their representatives) to receive information and on issues, which are of interest to them relating to an event or activity of the respective organization. This type of dialogue is directed towards society as a whole with the mediation of the means of mass communication. The successful course of a press-conference depends on its organization, respectively on the efficiency, if decisions being taken at every phase – preliminary, current, and follow-up. This study aims at analyzing the organization and management of public relations. Its specific subject-matter is the press-conference in the context of its organizational and managerial realization. The purpose is to clarify and enhance the existing notion of this phenomenon, offering a more comprehensive and novel definition of it. The key task is to formulate the pertinent axioms of a press conference, and the main subtasks are related to the consideration of the three phases of the press-conference and determining the main reasons, influencing its differentiation and predetermining its different forms. It is important that the notions of organization and

management are precisely defined, since, the mechanism of a press-conference are essentially organizational and managerial in character.

## 1. The “press-conference” phenomenon

Usually the media policy of PR departments and institutions, and announcing news and current information to newspapers and magazines, television and radio in particular, is implemented via employing a range of technological communication means such as the telephone, fax, electronic mail, video and satellite connections, etc. Being a major form of informing the public, the press-conference presupposes holding a personal meeting to have a dialogue conducted between the organization’s representatives, on the one hand, and the media representatives, on the other. For PR analysts and experts, it is an quite efficient way to achieve some of the core PR goals, such as the timely informing of the public of the organization’s activities, maintaining favorable public relations, the building and development of a positive media image. A press-conference includes key techniques and technology, and tactics for the interrelation within the technology and within the means of mass communication for the development of an adequate media policy. Often the effect of a well-planned, organized and managed press-conference overrides the effect of expensive PR campaigns, special corporate events and image-boosting action.

### 1.1. Essence and definition of a press-conference

But what does a press-conference mean? How does it function at an organizational level? What is its algorithm or system of rules, determining the sequence of operations and procedures to resolve core management tasks, related to the process of providing information to the media? What are

the stages of its preparation and organization? What is the appropriate organizational behavior before, during, and after a press-conference? It is interesting to follow some ideas about the notion of ‘a press-conference’ in foreign and Bulgarian scientific literature not formulated as rigid definitions. According to Marguerite H. Sullivan: “Press conferences bring together members of the media and the public and one or more government officials in a question-and-answer session, usually at a location selected by the government official. Press conferences offer a chance for citizens — through the press — to question government officials and a chance for the government officials to take their message to the people through the media.” [1]. Who will be meeting, where will the contacts take place, and what information do both parties exchange – these are its key aspects and the meaning of a press-conference in terms of its economic nature. Another similar interpretation is offered by Rusi Marinov, who draws a distinction between the news conference (according to him this is the more precise expression) and the meeting held between the spokesman of a given institution, on one hand, and the representatives of the media, on the other. In his opinion journalists’ participation in the discussion (if such discussion is possible at all) along with their respective spokesman is rather limited. Hence, a more precise concept will be the ‘one-layer communication’, where an authorized staff member (this could also be a director of the press-center of the head of the public relations department) transmits his/her message to the reporters and gives them the chance to obtain feedback as well as additional questions and remarks. The news conference, indeed, represents a two-layer communication, where the active participants are both company members and journalists, asking actively and freely the questions of interest to them [2]. Generally speaking, such an explanation of the press-conference is acceptable. And yet one must admit that such a definition it is not

comprehensive enough and is too lapidary, based on the term 'news conference', which has not been really adopted in our country over the last ten years. In the foreign literature, together with the already discussed notions of 'press-conference' and 'news conference', also 'media conference' is being used. As a whole, the media conference provides the opportunity for a wide dissemination of the specific story and event; it offers immediate access for all media to news, allowing journalists to ask their questions directly. [3]. For our purposes, we will use the notion 'a press-conference', which has gained wide popularity. Its content goes far beyond an organization's limited contacts with representatives of print media only. This concept implicitly encompasses the electronic media as well – televisions and radio-stations, online editions, etc.

In her interpretation of the press-conference, Ivanka Tsoneva also emphasizes the two-sided nature of the communication and the factor 'speed' and 'promptness' in announcing and distribution of news. She notes: "Press-conferences represent a two-sided communication, effected between the company spokesmen and reporters of printed and electronic media. It means prompt dissemination of information, interpreted from the sponsor's point of view. After the spokesman's introductory words, the company provides answers to journalists' questions, so as to avoid the complex delivery of individual information for all media and actors. Depending on the preliminary organization of a press-conference, it also provides the essential opportunity to the company of exercising control over the information published on the topic." [4]. It once again becomes obvious, that this definition lacks a coherent structure and logical argumentation; it rather gives an explanatory description of its essence and characteristics. The word 'sponsor' is not the appropriate choice of a synonym for 'organization', 'firm' or

a 'topic of a press-conference'. The two-sided communication is undoubtedly a structuring element of this form of public communication. To what an extent the organization can exercise control over the information published on the respective topic remains a controversial issue. One can claim rather that a press-conference minimizes the risks of distorting and deforming the facts and data about a given organization and its activity. Franc Jenkins attributes a somewhat different meaning of the notion of a 'press-conference'. For him, it is more of a means of communicating with the media to provide information, concerning an organization's status and development. The definition is as follows: "Press-conferences are convened when sudden events occur, requiring quick links with the media. This is a form of direct communication, where the spokesman makes a statement in front of the gathered reporters and answers their questions. His statements are circulated as press-information" [5]. This definition is obviously incomplete, although it covers a significant part of the nature and mission of a press-conference. The objections to it are: first, press-conferences are convened not as a result only of the willingness to react promptly; they are, generally speaking, the outcome of the overall effort to conduct a complex, consistent and systematic communication policy. Secondly, statements are not necessarily made by an institutional spokesman only. The former may be delivered by the head of the PR department, the press-center director, the executive director of the company or the top-manager of the organization.

The correct interpretation of the press-conference's nature and functions presupposes regarding it as a basic technology and a mix of public relations communication techniques, where a very stable and reliable contact between the person or corporation, and print and electronic media journalists, takes place. In the process of implementation of a given

PR program, what is essential is the selection of technological models and the application of the varied techniques of implementation of the respective intent in the public space. The latter is related to a whole range of procedures of the selection, gathering and servicing of different communication channels. Why is a press-conference one of the most widely-used techniques in public relations? Is it really a PR technique contributing to the achievement of efficient and two-direction communication with the media and their representatives? Undoubtedly a press-conference offers a unique vehicle, via which journalists become familiar with the organization's stance on certain topics and problems, providing them different records, data and current information on the institution or its projects, which would certainly be of interest to some audiences or society as a whole.

The main advantage of this PR method is the direct interaction between the media and company representatives: it provides a favorable opportunity for acquaintance, contacts and understanding. The press-conference itself gathers both parties – the members of the organization and the journalists – and involves them in a common process, where both are presented in a balanced and equitable manner. Media representatives are even privileged to a great extent as guests and as especially important partners, since they are responsible for the well-intentioned and objective presentation of the information. To hold a successful event, both the hosting party and the print and electronic media representatives attending it are to observe specific rules, ethical norms of mutual respect as well as the fixed schedule of the briefings and the press-conferences. The roles are clear – the journalists come to ask their questions and to satisfy the information interests of the editors, respectively of readers and spectators, and the top management and the company

experts – to satisfy these professional interests and to answer questions, critical remarks and recommendations. The knowledge of these roles means that participants must be prepared in advance – the reporters and journalists to make their research, to work out the respective analyses, to get oriented about public opinion and, as a result, to prepare their questions and remarks; while the managers and authorized persons on the part of the corporation should prepare the specific quantitative information, statistical data and production results in order to be able to adequately present them to the media and their representatives. [6]. Of course, professional practice shows that in most cases the planned schedule of a press-conference is often subject to “ad hoc” changes, and most often the reason for such a change are the attending journalists, who with their questions, publicly expressed opinion and notes can radically change the course of the meeting.

On the basis of the existing definitions and explanations, and of some of their imperfections and omissions, we will offer the following working definition: *“A press-conference is a basic public relations technology to achieve a direct interactive communication with the mass media, respectively, with their representatives, which results in providing reliable and rapid new information and, thus guaranteeing that, both the interests of the organization and of society are met by achieving consensus and commitment.”* Apart from defining the press-conference as a key communication PR mix and its distinctive features, the above definition contains the statement that its new mission is related to achieving agreement and consensus on the news to be produced, where it is the organization that, at its discretion, will suggest the data and records about itself and its development, and the media are given the opportunity to interpret them respecting rights of freedom of expression, exposure to criticism, generic variety and interpretation of values.

## 1.2. Specific characteristics of the press-conference

The specific characteristics of a press-conference are determined by its specific purposes – the tasks of the organization or the respective PR agency. A main criterion for this differentiation are the ways and means of a successful development of the contacts with the representatives of the media. For the organizers and hosts of a press-conference, it is also very important that at the preparatory stage the preferred forms are chosen – whether they are ‘pure genre’ or a mix, referred to as ‘combined form’ – of influencing the print and electronic media. The available literature offers no clear and orderly classification of possible types and versions of meeting the media. A stronger accent is placed on planning and organizing meetings, preparing and writing press-releases, providing technical support of the place of holding the press-conference, the scenario, etc. One of the few differentiations of the press-conferences suggests two distinct types, the *aggressive* and the *defensive* respectively. According to this view, *the aggressive* type of meeting with the press (regular briefings being included) are positive in their character and their objective is to have news, favourable for the company image, circulated. Press-conferences are classified as *defensive*, if convened at critical and crisis moments, when it is crucial to dissipate doubts raised in the public space about company non-ethical behaviour or of its director, or fight the dark side of their reputation, suspicions about socially unacceptable or directly dangerous actions, etc. [7]. Each attempt to structure and classify an activity is useful, as well as the one mentioned above. However, it does not satisfy several requirements with respect to completeness, exhaustiveness, consistency. It should be taken into account that press-conferences, strictly in line with either polar extreme – aggressive or defensive – are rare. Often in the course of their preparation, tactics

and techniques of communicating with the media representatives have to be changed. Although the meeting might have been planned as a regular exchange of information and current news about the organization, at some moment, as a result of one or a series of critical questions related to certain defects, defensive tactics to look for arguments and present a more persuasive explanation has to be employed. Public relations as part of the communication management count the interactive character of the communication with the media, and such reciprocity enters in a sharp contradiction with the assumption of “aggressiveness” or of “defensiveness” of the press-conference. This is exactly why journalists and reporters have a positive attitude to those top managers, experts or spokesmen who do not stick to the preliminary daily schedule pedantically and mechanically, but are ready to adopt a more flexible approach, ready to improvise showing competence, erudition and level of information in order to facilitate the certified media representatives in the performance of their professional duties.

Press-conferences are usually differentiated as held for different purposes: *internal*, *external* and *mixed*.

*Internal motives* concern the organization’s internal need to share with the general public information related to its success or failures, changes in its organizational hierarchy, diversification or dynamic the processes in the productive or non-productive sphere, at meetings with the media, either planned in advance or accidentally held. In this form, the press-conference is initiated by the organization itself, which is interested to share as quickly as possible its own news.

The *external motives* lead to holding a press-conference as a result of a change in public attitudes and expectations, where public

opinion is polarized or critically focused on the overall activity or a specific segment of an organization's activity. Frequent complaints, criticism, dissatisfaction – on the part of individuals, customers, or partners of the company, also can result in the holding ad hoc meetings with the media to give comments on the disputes and conflicting views. In this case, it is external factors – insistence on the part of media, different public organizations and NGOs, or individuals directly interested key issues of concern – that provoke the press-conference, which is not held upon the organization's initiative.

*Mixed motives* give rise to those types of press-conferences, with the twin objectives both to implement the organization's PR program and respond to the enhanced public expectations and rising demand. The flexible and highly professional PR men and staff at the PR departments usually put effort in combining the motives, underlying a press-conference, where the respective plans and scenarios imply multifunctional intentions. On one hand, they invite journalists and reporters on the occasion of traditional reports and ways of informing the public about the activity of the organization, about new events; on the other hand, they use the meeting to make commentaries and try to clear some doubts, vagueness and criticism on their behalf.

Another differentiation of types of press-conferences and briefings is also possible: *regular and extraordinary*. *Regular press-conferences* are those, planned well in advance, normally as part of the annual, six-month, quarterly, or monthly program of the respective organization. They are synchronized with the purposes and tasks, which are part of the company strategy, in the plans and action programs agreed and approved. Because they are routine, known well in advance and monotonous, journalists often ignore them and consider them a boring

professional duty rather than as an opportunity to collect recent and interesting news, which may attract readership interest.

*Extraordinary press-conferences* are called either in a critical and crisis situation, or where company operations or management behavior has, for a variety of factors (sudden change in the every day rhythm, high and important achievements on both the national and international level, force majeure, related to the current state of the organization in the context of the economy, the culture, or the policy of the respective country or region) become the focus of strong public interest.

To avoid clichés and obsolete forms of meeting the media, many companies and other organizations have increasingly resorted to the use of the so called *press-breakfasts* or *press-lunches*. Unlike the usual press-conferences, in these meetings "on table" the informal approach is sought and a less official style of communication with the journalists is being adopted. How are press-breakfasts or press-lunches usually carried out? What is the usual course of press-breakfasts and press-lunches? First of all, they are the outcome of partnership established between the PR units and the press-departments, on one hand, and catering companies, or hotel and restaurant teams, on the other. The public relations team, respectively, hostesses and assistants welcome, accredit and accommodate the representatives of the media (it is good to determine the places in advance and to place the corresponding labels and inscriptions). The restaurant staff serves the guests in the usual way. In the beginning, the main boss greets all and shortly tells them what the purpose of the meeting is, announcing the main news. While the journalists have breakfast or lunch, they can see the multimedia presentation or a documentary on the event. They also can ask questions or share their comments. In general, this form of

organizing the meeting avoids the use of strict and routine procedures, related to moderating, giving the floor, etc. The idea is to have a closer communication, to create stronger and sustainable links, which, all things considered, is done for the good partner relations between the organization and society with the mediation of the media. There are press-lunch practices, where there are no speeches, no greetings and even no toast. The journalists arrive, have lunch, receive their press-packages and go back to their offices. If they have questions, they call the PR department, negotiate individual meetings to take interviews, to write an article, etc. The popularity of the so called *press-tours* is growing – they rely on the combination of informal factors and the effect of changing the usual environment. The practical value for the representatives of the media is that they have a better opportunity to become familiar with different aspects of company activity in the field and improve their impressions. This form allows closer contacts between the PR men and the journalists – getting to know each other, which will ensure even better results in the *organization – media* interaction in the future.

The *advertisement press-conferences* are a combined form of two types of communication – advertisement and public relations. By their essential characteristics and functions they are also close to *the special event or to the event marketing and event management*. They offer a real communication mix, mainly directed towards the means of mass communication, or their representatives. Unlike the traditional press-conferences, they are oriented not so much towards the facts, but the way of their presentation, the scenario and the place of the event [8]. Multimedia, audio-visual and other high-tech tools guarantee the immense effect of meeting the media. For a better understanding of advertisement press-conferences, it is good to comprehend two especially important tools

for their success: *the advertisement show and the promo-site*.

*The advertisement show* includes a splendid staged show with the participation of famous actors, TV stars and sportsmen and is targeted at displaying data and news about somebody or something in order to make it popular and well-known. The *promo-site* is a tool to upload an image, product or service in the Internet to influence a target audience. It is created during a PR action or campaign and includes all the information related to this action or campaign (timing, place, conditions, online conference, etc.). Agencies have become increasingly specialized in organizing and carrying out advertisement press-conferences, and among the services offered most often are: renting a room and choice of stage, hiring catering services, inviting journalists and sending information to publishers, technical support of the press-conference, including by audio and video recording equipment, welcoming and registration of the journalists, sending electronically a summarized press-message, containing the essentials of an event – and immediately after the end of the meeting with the media. For the media, it becomes increasingly important to prepare the so called video news release (VNR) – a video version of the message to the media. This is prepared by the organization, which has called a press-conference, which undertakes at its expense the preparation and sending the video material to the mass media to be included in their news emissions, for internal use or just for the archive of the publisher.

## 2. The organization technology of a press-conference: from detailization to effective communication

The analysis of the organization of a press-conference entails considering how a given



firm and/or PR agency looks for the adequate approaches ways, means and techniques to achieve its set PR-related goals and tasks. The purposes of this study require that useful insight into the approaches to coordinating the relations among the separate sectors and employees at the different management levels be given. It must be borne in mind that the organization itself is viewed as an aggregate of people, who work together and whose activity and efforts are deliberately coordinated and directed towards the achievement of the outlined goals. Different scholars consider organizations in terms of human strategies (HRM) with common goals or sharing specific systems of correlated human beings, human relations and system approaches [9]. To adequately interpret the algorithm of the classical press-conference, it is useful to consider the organization and management steps at the three main stages of the preparation and implementation of this type of meetings with representatives of the media, respectively, *before, during and after* a press-conference.

### 2.1. Preliminary organization – management steps

Everything related to the organization and management of public relations in the eve of the meeting with the media is a question of concept, a clear strategy and reliable methodology and technology for the achievement of the planned goals. The start of the planning of the forthcoming PR event undoubtedly is the concrete occasion or the topic, to which the organizers the organizers and hosts intend to attract the attention of journalists. The topic, undoubtedly, must be a “hot” one, real and rich in content. If there is nothing new to announce to the newspapers, the magazines, the radio and TV stations, it is better not to undertake anything. In this respect, searching for something that is astonishing, extraordinary and unknown is especially important. The

key word is ‘for the first time’, as what has happened for the first time, what has no precedent and is not known by the wide public, is of course a magnet to the media and will be surely circulated, published and broadcasted.

Let us follow the stages and procedures, which the American writer Margaret H. Sullivan offers for this first phase. She herself has a long-standing journalistic and public communication experience. Before taking the position of PR director of the US National humanitarian foundation, she was a reporter and editor of “Koply news”, and later worked in the magazine “Washington woman”. In 1991, she became personal assistant to the American vice-president Dan Quayle and a press-secretary of his wife – Marilyn Quayle, during president George Bush’s term of office from 1989 to 1993. She has also been president of the headquarters of Lyn Chaney, wife of the vice-president Richard Chaney during the presidential election campaign (2000). Recently Marguerite H. Sullivan has been working for a high-profile NGO, dealing with problems of democracy – and further, as a public relations deputy director of the US International Republican Institute. Reminding us, that the preparation of a press-conference must start with the piece of news to be announced, Sullivan considers the following key steps in organizing a press-conference:

- Determining the topic and the news that will be offered to the media;
- Making a decision on the necessity of carrying out a press-conference, and the possibility to inform the media in another way;
- Outlining the main points that the manager of the organization could say in its initial address to the accredited journalists;
- Consideration of the questions officials can possibly raise;



- Making a rehearsal and playing a conditional press-conference, where the role of the journalists is performed by the press-service staff, who ask probable questions to their boss;
- Planning the proper timing, i.e. the specific day of the week, hour, and place to call the press-conference (it is considered in more detail in the paragraph on the temporal and space aspects);
- Making a decision on the visual tools: on one hand, whether to use such tools, and on the other hand – in case visual aid is used, to plan their positioning close to the moderator or the main person. Other sources emphasize the necessity at this stage to check and test the equipment, as well as to provide tables, schemes, maps, photos, especially prepared for the journalists [10];
- Making a decision on who will open and close the press-conference, as well as who and in what way will present the manager (s);
- The announcement must be made to the journalists well in advance by phone calls, by fax, or electronic mail. It is advisable one or two days before the event to make reminder phone calls;
- Parallel with notifying and inviting the media, information about the press-conference together with details related to date, place, topic, etc., must be placed on the company web site
- Other, not less important details: to decide in advance, if only the invited journalists will be accredited, or other people will also be admitted; to check the technical operation of the equipment, of sound, lighting, multimedia, etc; to appoint a technical officer, a room supervisor, and a logistics responsible, etc. [11].

Other organizational steps can be added to this list of the key essential ones. In this respect,

the following should be taken into account:

- Preparation of *media kits* or *media packages*, containing the most essential things, intended to facilitate the work of the journalists. The leading role among them pertains to the so-called press message (also known as press-file, message to the press and press-release). In elaborating the press message, the high criteria of the standard algorithm of this activity must be followed: the layout, the paper type, the headline, the date, the structure, and the ending. The text must absolutely be of a news type outlining the announcement, what is new and unknown in it. One should never forget that the press-message is the principal official source of information for journalists and, therefore, it must be 100% reliable, trustworthy and agreed upon by management, as well as carefully elaborated in terms of its graphic design and style. At the same time, it must be clear, concise and understandable. [12]. In addition to the press-message, media kits contain several other company-related documents, such as fact sheets, a profile of the organization, a profile (biographical note or CV) of its head, CDs or DVDs, containing main and additional text, video and audio information and presentation (for example, a Power Point Presentation), guides, statistical references, annual reports, plans, posters, publications in the press, containing key commentaries about the organization (key newspaper clippings), passes and vouchers for the journalists, complements and gifts like T-shirts, key holders, mugs, caps, bags, pockets calculators, etc. [13]
- In drafting the lists of journalists, editors, reporters, and in some cases – the chief editors, producers, and even the media bosses, it is important to have an approach that is *functional* and *flexible* at the same time. *Functional* means to take into account the so called “topical” journalists or, in other words, those, who follow closely the activity of the organization and are

most competent about its activity, dynamics, and problems. And *flexible* means the topic of the press-conference may be of interest also to other colleagues in the media, who – even though they do not work so frequently and closely with these topics and problems, still can be useful in strategic sense for the purposes of public relations and well-intentioned informing of public opinion. As practice shows wherever there are representatives of the economic and cultural elite, then not only the business journalists, but also art journalists and reporters must be invited. Such multiplication of the communication effect would be certainly beneficial for PR-related management goals;

➤ The media have to be invited on time; they have to be clearly informed of the topic and the content of the upcoming press-meeting. Informing of a meeting at short notice (the day before or even the same day) is an indicator of weakness and lack of organizational experience. There are exceptions in case of force majeure events – disasters, catastrophes, grave accidents, different events of public interest, where there are breaking news received in the last moment. Moreover, the electronic media and the TV teams in particular, should be informed in at least a week's notice, as in the structure and organization of the TV process, the planning of filming equipment, mobile TV stations, timer-circuit or satellite broadcast is relatively slower workload.

➤ Preparing lists of journalists willing to take a personal interview with the main person at the press-conference is also an important and delicate moment of the preliminary work. Why is this necessary? There are cases, where the key official is a very famous person or a celebrity, enjoying the strong interest of both media and the public. Then, reporters prefer to ask their questions in private, so that representatives of other media will not be able to use them as well. There are, generally, two options for

providing this opportunity: the first, to have the interview before the press-conference, and the second, the interview can be taken after its end. In such situations, it is advisable that the exact location where the pre- or post-pressconference interview will take place: an appropriate room, well equipped, including conditions of TV recording, a radio or a virtual interview and the respective internet connection. It would be good to send an advance to the journalists, who will sign up for meetings outside the time of the press-conference, press-information, text and pictures, so that they would be able to prepare better and to be competent and precise in asking their questions. As to the interview itself and the behavior of the interviewed, it would be useful for him/her to think about the fourteen things, which should be never said to a reporter, accurately described by Sally Stuart in her book «A Guide to Meeting the Press». Here are some randomly selected recommendations from this Bible for PR specialists. *First*, avoid throwing to journalists talks like: «I will tell you something, which is not to be published!», as it is the best way to make somebody publish it in a newspaper or broadcast it. *Second*, there is a regular and banal question, which always annoys reporters: «May I see the article or the interview before they are published?». Such a voiced requirement may insult and repel the journalists, which may result in closed doors to his/her media for the next interview. It is recommended that facts are checked together the reporter, only upon his consent, so as to avoid inaccuracies. [14].

➤ When the topic is discussed, as well as the stage order and generally the future course of a press-conference, it is recommendable that the public communication archives and documentation related to previous press-conferences are also to be reviewed to see whether certain problems had not been voiced, or specific questions have not been answered (or answered incompletely and superficially). Once

the «anamnesis» is clarified, it is advisable that a strategy for the consideration of unresolved problems and unanswered questions be drafted. In some cases, it is even preferable that, at the beginning of a press-conference, the officials point out these problems and clarify what has happened with them during the time between the previous and the current press-conference. But even if this is not brought up, it is a good idea to take these problems into consideration, to probe into the history of the topic and the problem;

➤ During the preparation of the moderator or the chief manager, who will focus the attention of all and will answer questions coming from the media, it is necessary to conduct short training in his/her communication skills, adequate behaviour in both verbal and non-verbal communication. This means discussing carefully and acting out the different possible speech and behavior techniques of persuasive communication, including inspiring confidence, creating an impression of reliability, enjoying positive attitudes [15]. Those PR men, who during the preparation specify details personally with their boss and even spend time video recording and training the 'behavior before a camera' and 'speaking in public' make a good choice. He/she or the spokesman have to think about a closer communication with the accredited and generally with the attending journalists. There is nothing more efficient than to know their names, the media they represent, to ensure a trusted and partly familiar type of communication;

➤ Once more, everybody, involved in the preparation measures on the organization and management of a press-conference, must outline the main methods of provoking the interest of the media, of using the up-dated expression and image technologies and visual aids to create communication comfort for the journalists and to arouse their curiosity – to

offer them a solid database, new fresh facts and first hand news.

The organizing actions during the time before the press-conference takes place are subject to its preparation and its content and in formal-technical sense. Playing the possible situations and especially of possible direction of criticism as a possible course of the press-conference is of great importance for the final success of the PR meeting. Although it is impossible to plan everything in the preparatory stage, to direct and predict everything in advance, a serious and responsible approach will reduce to a minimum the negative outcome and embarrassment during the actual event.

## 2.2. Current organization – management steps

What is the course of an usual press-conference? At the scheduled hour (a little earlier, or – which also happens often – a little later) the journalists of the different media. Part of the team of the public relations unit starts welcoming them, it performs their accreditation, i.e. – writes down their names – often asks them for a signature – and gives them special media files containing press-releases, discs with textual and visual information, catalogues, documents, gifts, etc. After this, the reporters are showed their places, offered tea or coffee, mineral water or some other non-alcohol drinks. Press-breakfasts, press-lunches and press-dinners and cocktails for the media are a separate topic – they have somewhat different purpose than the usual press-conference. We will talk about them at a later stage. The formal opening is typically done by the organization's spokesman or the PR manager. He greets the journalists and formally presents the official(s). There is an official address to the representatives of the media – this is most often a statement on the news, the purpose, and the main items from the point of view of the content. Next, questions are posed, and the press etiquette

requires that the journalist introduces himself/herself by name, surname, media, and possibly, position in the media. A normal practice is for the questions to be directed to a specific representative at the table of the official guests. The labels with names of the organizers and the hosts of the event, contribute to orienting media representatives as to 'who is who'. When questions are over, the main person can make a short summary and repeat the principal points of what has been said up to that moment. It has been generally acknowledged that the person, who has opened the press-conference is supposed to announce its end. If, however, there are still questions, and the time is almost over, there two possible ways to proceed. One is to continue the dialogue only with those willing to stay and to ask their questions at the same place, or in the CEO's office; the other is to offer to the journalists to send the questions in writing and to answer them shortly also in written form – by fax or e-mail.

There are some more measures and steps, which should be undertaken during a press-conference:

- Preparing a list of attendants is helpful for the orientation with respect to media representativeness, and the follow-up (the so called monitoring) of publications and editions on the respective topic;
- It is important that journalists are aware in advance of the length (available time) as well as the availability of the main actor;
- Never forget that the press conference moderator may interrupt journalists, who ask several questions for many reasons, relating to the time limits, too many willing to ask a question, or evading the topic and embarking upon other domains considered inadmissible in terms of ethical standards (questions related to personal life, privacy, dignity of a person, etc);

- It is recommendable to reduce to a minimum (even, if needed, abbreviating the text) of the statement of the main person. The time for official statements must be much shorter than the time for questions, respectively, for answering them;
- All the press-conferences must be recorded using audio and video equipment, which allows careful further analysis of questions and replies, and provides an opportunity for general deciphering and public release in a company bulletin or internet page;
- The PR department is directly responsible if some of the reporters, who have asked questions, are not given answers, to provide such an answer later, but within the time of preparation of the publication, respectively, to send this answer ASAP [16].

A wrong idea is that gathering journalists from the part of the organization is a way to use them egoistically for the goals of this organization, telling them only what is advantageous for the company and to conceal facts, which would place it at a disadvantageous position and discredit it in the eyes of the public. It is most important to understand that the press-conference is a very special form of public communication, whose main purpose is directly and bilaterally to suggest current information, analysis and comments to the media. In other words – it is the environment and the technology for most reliable servicing of the journalists so that they are able to do high quality work. In this sense, it is quite logical, when a press-conference is taking place on the eve of an important cultural event, for example, a theater première, an art exhibition, a symphony or chamber concerto, a tour of a pop-group or other performers, so the journalists are presented with the opportunity to preliminary interviews, the photo-reporters and TV operators – with the chance to shoot in advance part of the show or some small demonstration or performance.

### 2.3. Follow-up organization and management steps

It is an illusion to think that after a press-conference is over, the work of the public relations department or agency will come to an end. On the contrary, it is at this stage that all mistakes, gaps, achievements and findings are most easily noticeable. This is due to the fact that this phase means analysing what has been done, studying media reactions, summarizing results and drawing conclusions and generalizations. This phase is replete with organizational and expert activity, multi-directional communication and especially feedback control and verification – accounting for the effect carrying out the meeting with mass media representatives.

Organization and management steps in the third, last phase of a press-conference boil down to several key actions such as:

- Publishing the overall information – text, photos, and videos in the page of the organization in the world wide web;
- Sending by courier or e-mail the press-materials that have already been given to the journalists, to those media whose representatives have, for any reason, failed to attend;
- Observing the time limit, in compliance with editorial schedules, responsibilities assumed, following from the discussion of the questions, which did not receive concrete answers, as well as expressing readiness to provide extra up-dated information;
- Performing monitoring of publications and comments on the press-conference after its end;
- Performing the so called clipping, or processing, including cutting out and placing in a special book (catalogue) of printed publications

with the respective data about the media – its rating, circulation, and other parameters as degree of confidence, etc.;

- Analysis of all comments and calls – positive, neutral and critical, and drafting proposals to management, related to improvement of the quality of working with the media. A comparative analysis of the results of previous press-conferences will be useful. Crucial is not just the number of journalists, who have been present, but also the character and direction of their publications and editions; the peculiarities and the specific characteristics of their critical comments, recommendations, remarks, etc. [17]

The activity of the press-center staff or the PR section after the end of the press-conference is not at all limited to phone calls and sending press-materials to those publishers, who failed to send their representative. The PR men must be especially responsive and helpful to journalists, who, impressed by the received news and the announced results, decide to publish lengthier materials about the organization, its management, activities, products or services. In this case, the PR should do their best to provide complete extra information such as new video materials, slides, texts, including data from studies or statistics about the industry on the world scale, etc.

What are some of the most frequent mistakes and flaws made by PR specialists during the last phase of the organization of a press-conference – the period after its end?

- Delaying or skipping the final summary report (account, reportage or article) about the way, in which the press-conference has developed together with the respective accents on the most important news, publicly shared by the management of the respective organization. In the era of the global net, the new interactive and multimedia information, uploaded on the

company's web page is really transmitted at the speed of light and can have an extremely strong effect. Provided that, of course, it is really published in time in the virtual space;

- Irresponsible attitude to hot news. The amount of energy and effort needed to prepare and organize a press-meeting with the journalists is well-known. After it is over, everybody is tired, quite often overwhelmed by the illusion that the main result has been achieved. However, this is not quite so, because the old rule in journalism and public communication is that news cannot wait: "A piece of news is important only for the day it has occurred. All inquiries to the press and especially demands for radio and television news and programs of current events require immediate replies, usually within one or two hours. The press-center staff members should not be asked for information about dubious upcoming events, mentions Jack Guee, a communication deputy-director in the Ministry of Environment, United Kingdom [18].
- A serious mistake, committed most often by 'newcomers in the industry' – young and inexperienced PR specialists is impatiently calling the media after the end of a press-conference to ask how, when and where the event will be covered. This is one of the most unpleasant things for any – to report to the PR on his/her work or on the intention to do the work in a specific way. The reporter, who has attended a press-conference has the full right to cover it either positively or negatively, or in a neutral way, or not to publish a line in the newspaper at all. The possible question about the meaning of his/her presence on the press-conference would be a stupid one, simply because he/she is a journalist and is supposed to learn all that is new in his/her field, irrespective of whether they would write immediately or later about it, react by a new publication, or would preserve the

information for a later article, commentary, or survey. The lack of immediate follow-up information in his/her media can be explained by several reasons. Firstly, it is possible that a recent publication on the topic has already appeared. Secondly, the follow-up information may be delayed, if the journalist wants to write a more comprehensive and in-depth article. Thirdly, the possibility should not be excluded that the attending reporter had not discovered a news for him/her and his media, etc. All this can be found out by a highly professional PR specialist, if he has a more delicate approach – for example, if he calls the respective publisher to ask if the journalist has received the information he needed, if he would appreciate additional help, photos, and data. If during the conversation the journalist decides to let him know how he will act – it would be good; if this does not happen, it is not necessary to show pushy impatience and careless insistence, because, in principle, the media and journalism are two 'separate domains', they represent a fourth and independent power (branch of government) with its own rules and regulations.

It is possible to trace many more PR mistakes and gaps at the stage after the end of the press-conference of a management, organizational, and technical nature; however it is essential that the final activities are performed, the opinions are analyzed ASAP and high quality and conclusions are drawn, recommendations and proposals are drafted with a view to improving the future press-initiatives.

## Conclusion

Theoretical and practical analysis of the organization of a press-conference in the process of searching for the most reliable solutions provides a basis to draw the following more important conclusions:

- The press-conference is a basic technology and a mix of communication techniques of public relations, where a direct contact between the organization and journalists from the printed and electronic media is made. The main advantage of this method of public relations is the direct interactive communication between the media and the organization, providing an extremely favorable opportunity of getting to know each other, of contacts and mutual understanding.

- The motive to have a press-conference organized can be external, internal, and reasons of mixed character. Depending on the specific occasion – planned or not, meetings with the media are regular or special. One of marked trends in this type of public relations is the increasing diversity of its forms, which in combination with advertisement, marketing, and presentation functions manifest some proximity with the event management and the show business.

The three main types of organizational steps are important in a press-conferences: preliminary, current and follow-up. Their precise observance ensures the full effect of a press-conference, as a main form of public communication, having as a purpose the direct offering of actual information, analysis and commentaries to the media.

- The key aspects of the press-conference can be summarized as follows:

1. It is a direct interactive form of communication between the organization and the media with a strong feedback and immediate effect, expressed in the opportunity for attending journalists to satisfy their concrete interests (personal, editorial, and recipients ).

2. It is a source of news provided by the organization to be disseminated by the media to the benefit of the general public.

3. A modern means of achieving integrity and consensus between the specific organization (institution, company, firm) and society in general, in both favorable and adverse moments.

4. It is dependent on the publicity and transparency of the information, provided by an open source willing to have a dialogue with the public in the name of public well-being.

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