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Guest Editor for 2012 Chris Galloway, Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne

I am writing this editorial at the conclusion of the remarkably successful World Public Relations Forum(WPRF) held in Melbourne. Of special note was the Research Colloquium day attended by over 100 academics and practitioners. The Colloquium, a Melbourne initiative, was held as a curtain raiser to the Forum and has been embraced by the next 2014 WPRF organisers in Madrid.

Papers presented to the Colloquium have now been submitted for publication in the APPRJ and Journal of Communication Management for 2013. It is with great pleasure that the APPRJ will be able to publish selected papers that covered a wide breadth of scholarship in most areas of public relations research.

The articles in this final volume for 2012 reflect a variety of practice and academic research. Dr Damian Gleeson's biographical study of Australian public relations pioneer George Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald is hailed in some academic texts as the 'first' PR practitioner in Australia. His sensational means meant that he would certainly leave a lasting impression on public relations. Gleeson remarks that his latter activities involving gambling may have irreparably damaged his career speculation could be given to the harm he may have done to the profession in his own state of New South Wales.

For many of us delivering a 'Western' based curriculum to an international cohort can be challenging. Dr Gregor Half's papers elicit understanding of the challenges in this situation. Brady and Vidyarani, in their paper, focus on an area rarely examined in current public relations literature – diplomacy and in particular use a case study approach to observe how this activity meets concepts of public relations.

The controversial issue of Coal Seam gas is the focus of Jaques and Galloway's paper. A broad overview of activism is included but specifically within this issue the role of the Lock the Gate Alliance is considered and delivers findings that potentially question the traditional methods employed in activism. Practitioner Sasha Grebe's article also adopts a case study approach and examines the Australian Wheat Board's response to the Royal Commission into the UN Oil-for Food programme. Despite the negativity surrounding the Commission outcomes Grebe's perspective also takes into account the contemporaneous restructure of the AWB and the strategy pursued by the organisation.

The work undertaken by the Hunter Institute for Mental Health has led to significant research outcomes and provided public relations teachers with curriculum resources that can be applied across a variety of teaching areas in undergraduate programs. The development of *Mindframe* for public relations has involved PR academics from a variety of institutions over a significant period of time. This paper presents the curriculum activity conclusions and the rationale for those conclusions.

I would like to record my appreciation for the fine work undertaken by my colleague Dr Chris Galloway who in 2013 undertakes an academic role at Massey University. I am certain his scholastic leadership will continue to be recognised and appreciated by public relations academics in the Asia Pacific region.

Mark Sheehan,
Editor, APPRJ,
Deakin University, Australia
December 2012

George William Sydney Fitzpatrick¹ (1884-1948): An Australian Public Relations 'pioneer'

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Abstract

Public relations scholarship has only briefly mentioned George Fitzpatrick, an Australian industry pioneer. This paper – based largely on archival material, contemporary articles, and other published primary sources – seeks to redress this gap in PR historiography. It examines Fitzpatrick's family background, business networks, and diverse career, which included PR and government lobbying activities at a time when publicity practice in Australia was thought to be confined to the film sector. From journalist origins, Fitzpatrick moved into consultancy and pro bono PR work on behalf of governments, business, and charitable organisations. His PR campaigns, grounded in research trips to America and Europe in the 1930s, reflected considerable understanding of the 'science of persuasion' to influence public opinion. Fitzpatrick's strategies included editorial, direct mail, advertising, events, and lobbying. In 1946 Fitzpatrick faced sensational allegations concerning his gambling businesses, from which he does not appear to have recovered. This paper concludes that although Fitzpatrick's reputation was strongly damaged, his earlier charitable and political campaigns encapsulated PR practices well prior to the professional PR era in Australia.

Keywords: Canberra, Gambling, Government, Lobbying, Public Relations, Tasmania

Introduction

In 1948, shortly before the formation of the (Sydney-based) Australian Institute of Public Relations², George Fitzpatrick, credited as Australia's 'first' public relations practitioner, died in Sydney (Potts, 1976; Tymson & Sherman, 2009). According to Australia's first professor of public relations, Fitzpatrick 'did not live to see the PR field he had pioneered progress to accepted respectability and assume professional status' (Potts, 1976, 25). The little coverage about Fitzpatrick notes his registration as a 'practitioner in public persuasion and propaganda' in the 1940s (Tymson & Sherman, 2009, 35). Some Australian PR historical accounts have not included him (Quarles & Rowlings, 1993; Zawawi, 2009); similarly he is absent in critiques of lobbying in Australia (Lloyd, 1991; Sheehan, 2012). It is puzzling that Fitzpatrick, who featured in selective edition of *Who's Who in Australia* (1935-1948), did not earn an entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

Australian PR historiography has traditionally emphasised several watershed events: the arrival of General Douglas MacArthur, accompanied by a large PR team in 1942 (Zawawi, 2009; Turnbull, 2010; Tymson & Sherman, 2009) and the 1949 AIPR formation, 'regarded as the official start of public relations as a profession in Australia' (Tynan, 2011, 141). Mark Sheehan is perhaps the first scholar to have begun the important task of revisiting Australian PR historiography (2007; 2009). His research, which includes uncovering federal government publicity campaigns pre-1950, highlighted 'paucity in recording early public relations efforts' (Sheehan, 2007, 20). Macnamara and Crawford note that there are '... major gaps in understanding of the role and functions of public relations in Australia (2011, 19). Gleeson has begun to revise the early decades of PR tertiary education in Australia (2012a; 2012b). This paper seeks to detail Fitzpatrick's diverse and extensive career, which pre-dates the beginning of the more formalised professional PR era, which began with the AIPR's formation. A range of archival sources and published primary sources form the backdrop of this study.

¹ Various expressed as FitzPatrick. For consistency, Fitzpatrick is adopted in this paper.

² Joined Victoria, South Australia and Queensland chapters to form the federated Public Relations Institute of Australia in 1960.

Family

George William Sydney Fitzpatrick, born in 1884, was the eldest child of Joseph Alexander Fitzpatrick, a 'prominent member of the Loyal Orange Order' (*Sydney Morning Herald* [hereafter *SMH*], 3 August 1932, 15) and Lizzie Jones. The Fitzpatricks, an Anglican family, lived at Westmead, near Parramatta, NSW. In memory of their mother, George and brother, Edwin, paid for one of the bells at St John's Cathedral, Parramatta. Edwin, a qualified pharmacist and physician, worked for quite a few years as a medical missionary in Central Africa (*Mercury*, 1 September 1941, 4). When their father, Joseph, died, his obituary emphasised the family's association with the church and Joseph's strong support of charities, including the Parramatta Mental Hospital (*SMH*, 5 August 1932, 13).

From an early age George Fitzpatrick displayed a flair for business, writing and promotion. As a teenager, he took over editing the parish paper at St John's Cathedral and quickly turned the publication into a profit (*Sun*, 4 July 1943, 'Fact', 4). In 1901, Fitzpatrick began full time work as a telegraph messenger for the Post Master General's Department (*Canberra Times*, 2 August 1948, 2). He then moved into journalism and after completing training as a copy-boy at the *Sunday Times*, Fitzpatrick was appointed the paper's district correspondent for Parramatta. In an early sign of entrepreneurial spirit, he encouraged young boys to report sports results: he paid them 4s, and unsold the information for 5s (*Sun*, 4 July 1943, 'Fact', 4).

Between 1910 and 1914 Fitzpatrick worked at the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Sun* and *Evening News* (*Who's Who in Australia 1935*, 181). He was a member of the Australian Journalists' Association, and became editor and also part-owner of newspapers, including being deputy governor of the *Sunday Times* and director of the *Referee* (*Cairns Post*, 10 September 1929, 4). Fitzpatrick was also involved in Dominion Publishing Agency, the NSW Advertising Men's Institute and the Direct Mail Advertising Association of Australia.

In 1912, George married Gertrude Lowe at Parramatta and they had three children: George Jones, Edwin Albert, and Jean Marguerite. Whilst residing at Parramatta, George was appointed a Justice of the Peace (*The Cumberland Argus & Fruitgrowers Advocate*, 24 October 1914, 4). In the same year he began a role with the NSW Wheat Board.

Patriotic Service

After leaving the public service Fitzpatrick became involved in a myriad of causes and organisations. He was not shy in contacting – and utilising the press – to advance both himself and his clients. From his father, Fitzpatrick inherited strong patriotic sentiment towards the British Empire. In 1918, George became secretary of one such group, the Sydney Millions Club. Established in 1912, the club had a 'belief that accelerated British migration would make Sydney the first Australian city to reach a population of one million' (Spearritt, 1988). Fitzpatrick's role included writing and producing the club's newspaper (*SMH*, 11 March 1920, 5) and supporting returned servicemen, notably ANZACs. (*Nepean Times*, 24 May 1919, 5; *SMH*, 24 May 1919; *SMH*, 31 May 1918). In 1920 Fitzpatrick resigned as secretary, but remained a club member for another two decades. In 1939, after a study trip to the United States, Fitzpatrick gave an address to the Millions Club entitled 'Will America fight?' in relation to World War Two (*SMH*, 28 August 1939, 7). After leaving the club's employ, Fitzpatrick became an associate director of the Tivoli Theatre for a short period.

Another patriotic group that Fitzpatrick joined was the Royal Society of St George. He mixed with influential business members and in December 1921 was elected secretary-manager of this group, whose aims were to ensure strong ties with the British Empire. The Society, through Fitzpatrick, made a public appeal for advice on the 'desirability of having a fixed date to commemorate the death of Jesus Christ...' (*SMH*, 30 December 1921, 9). By the mid 1930s Fitzpatrick would be the organisation's chairman (*SMH*, 15 April 1922, 12; *SMH*, 10 December 1934, 4). Elite political and business leaders, many of whom belonged to Masonic Lodges, attended the Society, providing further networking opportunities for Fitzpatrick. It would not be until the 1940s that George Fitzpatrick declared his Masonic membership (*Who's Who in Australia 1947*).

Fundraising Campaigns

From the 1920s Fitzpatrick became involved in charitable and community services. He undertook fundraising campaigns on behalf of a number of Sydney hospitals. Between 1920 and 1922 he was entrusted to undertake a \$100,000 fundraising campaign for Sydney Hospital. After one appeal he publicly thanked Sydney's business community:

From calculations I have made comparing Sydney on a population basis with other capital cities both in America and England, the figures show that the business men of this State are keenly conscious of their civic responsibilities (Fitzpatrick, 1921).

In 1921 Fitzpatrick joined the St Margaret's Hospital 'men's committee'. Within a short time his powers of persuasion had convinced the Catholic hospital to appoint him as their campaign director, with a weekly salary of £20. Prominent historian, Sister Margaret Press, described Fitzpatrick as 'an energetic man of entrepreneurial experience...' (1994, 33). The St Margaret's post was surprising for several reasons: first, the House Committee at Sydney Hospital had expressed concern at some of Fitzpatrick's methods, which combined with uncertainty about the campaign's viability, led to Fitzpatrick's resignation from Sydney Hospital in March 1922 (*SMH*, 19 August 1922, 7); second, Williams Fitzsimmons, a state Liberal MP, sought to have Fitzpatrick prevented from undertaking further fundraising campaigns (*Mercury*, 25 August 1922, 9); and, third, Fitzpatrick's Masonic affiliation seems at odds with the Catholic philosophy of St Margaret's. Sectarianism was rife in Sydney in the 1920s, exemplified by the nationalist Fuller Government which was 'not just Protestant [but] militantly Protestant and anti-Catholic' (Hogan, 1987, 190).

At St Margaret's, Fitzpatrick changed his title to 'Finance Director' and on several occasions claimed to be either the hospital's Deputy-Chairman or Chairman. Fitzpatrick set up a city office, supported by May Sheehan, the hospital's newly appointed finance secretary (*SMH*, 25 January 1922, 9; *St Margaret's Annual Report, 1922*). Within a couple of years, 'Fitzpatrick had masterminded increasingly productive schemes which raised up to £14,000 a year' (Press, 1994, 37). Yet, on at least one occasion, Sheehan, who would become integral to Fitzpatrick's companies for more than a quarter of a century, had to publicly defend Fitzpatrick's high fundraising costs (Sheehan, 1927).

In 1934, following some articles in *The Bulletin* about Fitzpatrick selling raffle tickets illegally in New Zealand, the NSW government tightened the *Charitable Collections Act*, which restricted St Margaret's fundraising endeavours (Press, 1994, 38). In combination with other financial conflicts with hospital management, Fitzpatrick and Sheehan resigned from St Margaret's. Before doing so they had arranged appointments as superintendent and executive secretary respectively of the 'new' St Margaret's Hospital, which they renamed the New South Wales Community Hospital (now The Langton Centre), and operated independently.

Fitzpatrick also held roles as secretary, president and superintendent of the Food for Babies Fund (FBF). In 1924, FBF became responsible for the operation of Dalwood Home which offered a holiday for underprivileged children while their mothers were in hospital (*History of Dalwood*). In 1928 the facility was renamed Dalwood Health Home (*SMH*, 24 November 1928, 12). However, in 1930 the FBF foundress found it necessary to make the following statement in the fund's Annual Report:

To correct an impression that it is erroneous as it is extensive the Honorary Treasurer [May Sheehan] desires it on record to say that the chairman, Mr George Fitzpatrick is an honorary officer. Mr Fitzpatrick receives no salary, bonus, honorarium or gratuity in any shape or form. Mr and Mrs Fitzpatrick are both generous contributors to the Fund (*Food for Fund Annual Report, 1930*).

Perhaps this statement was necessary because the fund's financial statements that year showed £2058 spent on stationary, stamps, advertising and publicity, a similar amount to the £2097 spent on salaries and wages (*Food for Fund Annual Report, 1930*). In the depths of the 1930s Great Depression, the FBF provided free milk to hundreds of children attending kindergartens in Sydney and inner-city areas (*SMH*, 4 July 1933, 13). Dalwood experienced financial pressures, which led Fitzpatrick to make public appeals for government and private financial support (*SMH*, 28 November 1932; 3; *SMH*, 31 August 1933, 15; *SMH*, 5 October 1937, 7; *SMH*, 5 December 1938, 15; *SMH*, 26 February 1940, 9). Fitzpatrick made headlines when he said that 'there are dogs that receive a

balanced diet superior to that of many children in the community' (*SMH*, 15 September 1937, 10). What Fitzpatrick did not explain is why advertising and publicity soaked up so many funds. In 1935, for example, Dalwood's deficit of nearly £1,600, included some £547 spent on advertising and publicity, the second largest expense item after salaries (*Dalwood Health Home Annual Report, 1935*).

Political Campaigns

Canberra

Fitzpatrick's first significant PR campaign involved supporting the establishment of Canberra as Australia's national capital. In 1908 a decision had been made to create a permanent capital in Canberra, which would require the temporary Parliament to move from Melbourne. In 1919, Fitzpatrick became foundation secretary of a Sydney-based Australian Federal Capital League (AFCL), a lobby group formed to respond to considerable anti-Federal sentiment in Melbourne and less populated Australian states. The AFCL campaign was necessary because '... the press of Victoria were on the whole vigorously virulent. They ridiculed and sneered at the movement inaugurated by the Australian Federal Capital League' (*Federal Capital Pioneer*, 1 February 1925, 2).

Fitzpatrick played a strong advocacy role, combining lobbying and PR abilities, to promote Canberra. 'Persistent propaganda and external vigilance were two of the means adopted for formulating public opinion' (*Federal Capital Pioneer*, 1 February 1925, 2). At one public meeting in Queanbeyan, Fitzpatrick spoke passionately about arresting Melbourne's position and holding politicians to account (*Queanbeyan Age and Queanbeyan Observer*, 5 August 1919, 2). 'Melbourne', he said, 'pretended to ignore the capital movement, and it was this pretence that had called into being the Federal Capital League' (*Queanbeyan Age and Queanbeyan Observer*, 5 August 1919, 2). Fitzpatrick engaged in considerable correspondence with Federal Government representatives, community groups, and also convened or spoke at public meetings in favour of federalism. When a new Federal Minister for Works and Railways was appointed, Fitzpatrick travelled to Melbourne to garnish support. Upon return to Sydney, Fitzpatrick advised the League's executive that: 'although a Victorian' the minister was 'a warm supporter of the Federal capital movement' (*Melbourne Argus*, 13 February 1923, 9).

Ever alert to PR opportunities, Fitzpatrick suggested to the Federal government that events be held to signify milestones, such as the construction of schools or the sale of land (Chapman, 1924; Fitzpatrick, 1923). The AFCL 'is very anxious that the first sale [of land] at Canberra should be a spectacular success', Fitzpatrick (1924) wrote. In 1926, on the eve of re-location, Fitzpatrick made strident representations to government (Fitzpatrick 1926a; 1926b; 1926c). He advised the Minister for Home Affairs and Territories that there is a 'fear here that an attempt will be made by those opposed to the removal to make Canberra merely the nominal and not the actual capital (Fitzpatrick, 1926a).

By the late 1920s Fitzpatrick described himself as a public relations consultant. The first recorded use of the phrase occurred when he visited North Queensland to discuss trade and tariff matters in 1929. Fitzpatrick spoke 'forcefully' in support of the local sugar industry's quest to retain tariffs on imported products (*Cairns Post*, 10 September 1929, 4). In an overview of the development of public opinion campaign and tactics to effect change, Fitzpatrick discussed some overseas precedents:

In America and to a lesser degree in Europe, the creation of public opinion was entrusted to highly-skilled specialists, who never appear in public. The created public opinion by means of the power of the Press, letters, large advertising space, cartoons, letter writing campaigns, lobbying and co-ordinating the support of Chambers of Manufacturers and Chambers of Commerce which secure the desired effect (Fitzpatrick, cited in the *Cairns Post*, 10 September 1929, 4).

'Capitalist Promoters'

In July 1933 Fitzpatrick formalised his PR business by registering his company in NSW (George Fitzpatrick Limited, 1933a). The subscribers (shareholders) also included his wife, Gertrude, brother, Edwin, Janet Nolan, an advertising agent, and his secretary, May Sheehan (George Fitzpatrick Limited, 1933b). The firm's public officer and secretary was his daughter, Jean (Bloomfield). Reflecting Fitzpatrick's broad-based business interests, the firm's objects included 'advising' individuals or companies seeking to extend their business activities, being an 'advertising contractor and agent', and transacting 'business as capitalist promoters and financial and monetary agents both in the state of NSW and elsewhere' (*ibid*).

Two years later, the company amended its Memorandum of Association by inserting the following clause in its Objects:

To carry on business of Public Relations Consultancy, and by propaganda on behalf of approved groups individuals and causes, to mould public opinion (George Fitzpatrick Limited, 1935; Fitzpatrick, Jean, 1936).

On the firm's letterhead, Fitzpatrick detailed his main PR services: 'Public Relations Counselling, Advertising Analysts, Business Builders, and Political Observers and Advocates' (George Fitzpatrick Limited, 1936). PR counselling focused on 'propaganda... to mould public opinion... [along] lines adopted successfully by governments and industries, both in Europe and America' (*ibid*). In terms that might now be recognised as public affairs or lobbying, Fitzpatrick said that his firm could 'supply reports which summarise projected legislation, explaining its bearing on persons affected ... [and] skilled presentation of facts to Parliament...' (*ibid*). Fitzpatrick's letterhead at this time also contained the following quote from American academic, Everitt Dean Martin: 'Public opinion can be manufactured to-date, in exactly the same way as bricks' (*ibid*).

In 1937 the company became Proprietary Limited and by then also had offices in Brisbane, Melbourne, Launceston and Hobart. Recognising the importance of the federal parliament and lobbying, Fitzpatrick had established an office in the Federal (Australian) Capital Territory in 1935 (*Examiner*, 19 September 1935, 6). This was the first PR consultancy in Canberra, and pre-dates the decision by Eric White and Associates (EWA) to establish a Canberra base by several decades (Lloyd, 1991, 11; Sheehan, 2012, 9).

In the early 1940s, Fitzpatrick's firm employed former politicians, such as Labor's Thomas Davies Mutch (NSW Parliament). In 1941, after his brother's death, Fitzpatrick appointed his two sons as directors of the firm. The letterhead proudly proclaimed 'The First Incorporated PUBLIC RELATIONS CONSULTANTS [original text] in the Commonwealth' (George Fitzpatrick Pty Limited, 1943). The letterhead's rear contained in pamphlet style 'The Science of Persuasion' under which fell seven areas of service on offer: PR Consultants, business builders, Propagandists, publicists, Advertising Analysts, Reportable Speeches, and Observes and Advocates (See Plate A).

'Ambassador for Tasmania'

In the early decades of the twentieth century most state governments recognised the need for publicity officers. Publicity officers often worked directly for the premier (or prime minister) of the day. New South Wales had set the precedent with the appointment of Ernest Harpur as publicity officer in its Premier's Department in March 1914 (*NSW Public Service Lists*, 1914). Reflecting his 'professional' categorisation, Harpur's annual starting salary of £600 made him one of the highest paid public servants at the time. A 'small Publicity and Research Branch' was established in 1917. The publicity officer's task included compiling Australian legislation and distributing it widely (*History of the NSW Premier's Department*, n.d. 7) and also seeking to co-ordinate and monitor government expenditure on advertising (Harpur, 1916, 1920a, 1920b).

A publicity office was established in Tasmania in 1935, with H.W. Blackwood fulfilling the roles of 'Publicity Officer, shorthand writer and private secretary to the premier' (*The Examiner*, 17 January 1936, 6). Tasmania's distance from the 'mainland', however, hampered communication, business and trade opportunities. In 1939 the Tasmanian Government made a second appointment when it appointed George Fitzpatrick as its PR consultant in Sydney. The Tasmanian premier said Fitzpatrick was a 'skilled publicity specialist' (*Examiner*, 13

December 1939, 6). An article in the *Burnie Advocate* highlighted Fitzpatrick as the 'founder and managing director of George Fitzpatrick Ltd, the first incorporated public relations consultancy in Australia' (17 November 1939, 6). It also noted that Fitzpatrick had already represented Tasmanian interests in England and other Australian states and was known on the mainland as 'The Ambassador for Tasmania' (*Advocate*, 17 November 1936, 6). Fitzpatrick's appointment was the first in Australia and reflected similar appointments made by the British Government in other countries (*Mercury*, 17 November 1939, 3). Between 1939 and 1946 Fitzpatrick, in an official, though honorary role, had responsibility for 'facilitating and where required carrying out the useful publicity for the state as instructed by the [Tasmanian] government...' (*Examiner*, 13 December 1939, 6).

Public affairs and lobbying became central to Fitzpatrick's early work. He publicised, for example, that Tasmanian premier, Dwyer Gray would step aside to become the state's Governor, as per an earlier agreement with the premier-elect, Robert Cosgrove (*Barrier Miner*, 4 December 1939, 4). Fitzpatrick was the eyes and ears for Tasmanian interests and zealous in advocacy. He organised events and facilitated trade opportunities on behalf of Tasmania. Sydney and Melbourne-based business leaders visited Tasmania, due to his persistence, such as the 1941 visit by M.F. Martin, the managing director of Sulphates Ltd and a representative of the Federal Government's review on deposits of bauxite throughout Australia (*Examiner*, 4 October 1941, 6).

In 1942, Fitzpatrick organised a high level gathering of politicians and dignitaries in Sydney to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the discovery of Tasmania (*Mercury*, 28 November, 1942, 6). In the same year the Tasmanian Labor Government proposed that Fitzpatrick be remunerated for his work and travel. The conservative opposition criticised the need for an interstate PR representative when 'almost every week Ministers visited the Mainland on public business and Tasmanian members of the Federal Cabinet should be able to attend to the work attributed to Mr Fitzpatrick' (*Mercury*, 5 November 1942, 8). The Legislative Council voted against the proposal.

Postal Reforms

From the late 1920s George Fitzpatrick advocated reductions in postal rates both within Australia and mail headed for overseas destinations. He organised activities under the 'Postal Progress Association' (Fitzpatrick, 1928). In the mid 1930s the association was renamed Postal Reduction League. In 1936 Fitzpatrick visited Launceston, seeking support to establish a Tasmanian branch (*Advocate*, 18 November 1936, 5).

World War Two necessitated government taxation, so a patriotic Fitzpatrick shelved the postal reform campaign until after the war. As 'honorary director of Public Relations' and later Chairman of the (re-named) Postal Reform League, he said that 'Taxation will be reduced if sufficient people make known their demands to their parliamentary representative' (Fitzpatrick, 1946a). The League sought to 'abolish the last "temporary" war-time tax of a halfpenny, have all first-class mail within the Commonwealth carried by air without surcharge, reduce telephone rates, either by eliminating the charge for installation or reducing the cost of calls' (*Werribee Shore Banner*, 17 April 1947, 1). Fitzpatrick's message was that it was 'economically immoral for a great social service like the Post Office to be used as a revenue-raising activity... postal profits should be used for postal services only' (Fitzpatrick, 1946b, 2). He also urged people to 'protest by having resolutions carried by the civic authorities ...' (*Morwell Advertiser*, 4 April 1946, 4).

1946 Crisis

Two years before his death, Fitzpatrick experienced a crisis that would severely impact on his reputation (and his PR consultancy). Some concerns about his gambling businesses in Tasmania had been publicly raised as early as 1922 (Sydney), 1935 (Western Australia), and 1942 (Tasmania). *The Mirror* (Perth), for example, urged its readers not to accept any unsolicited tickets from Fitzpatrick-controlled companies: Prudent Investments Pty Ltd of Investment Pty Ltd (28 September 1935, 11). In 1942 the Tasmanian Liberal Opposition directly linked Fitzpatrick to these companies 'selling tickets in sweeps'.

In February 1946 a Tasmanian independent MP tabled a parliamentary motion calling for an inquiry into donations to political parties, and the Liberal Party raised specific concerns about donations by vested business interests, such as Fitzpatrick, to a 'secret fund' kept by the Labor Party leader in Tasmania (*Advocate*, 26 February 1948, 1; *Mercury*, 10 March 1948, 1). Between August and November 1946, Sydney's *Smith's Weekly* (*Smith's*), following a detailed investigation, including company searches in Tasmania, published a series of damning articles about Fitzpatrick and his Tasmanian-based gambling companies, which were predominantly administered from Sydney. *Smith's* initial article, which did not mention Fitzpatrick, criticised the 1935 *Gaming Act* (Tasmania), which allowed private business to sell Tattersall's gambling tickets at a 50 per cent profit on the price set by the Tasmanian Treasury (*SW*, 1946a). *Smith's* conceded that while there was 'nothing illegal', the companies operate under 'ridiculously generous regulation' to maximise their profits (*SW*, 1946a).

Subsequent articles focused heavily on the 'urbane' Fitzpatrick, who lived 'behind a facade of suburban respectability...' (*SW*, 1946i). Dramatic headlines included 'The Vile Trade of George Fitzpatrick: "Smith's" Unmasks this Public Relations Consultant'; 'Despicable Shams of George Fitzpatrick'; 'How George Fitzpatrick gets away with it'; and, 'What becomes of £13,500 Fitzpatrick?' (*SW*, 1946b, 1946f; 1946g; 1946i). *Smith's* accused Fitzpatrick of a 'dual character and personality' (*SW*, 1946h; *SW*, 1946i). It targeted the operations of Prudent Investors and Investments Pty Ltd, which not only ran an 'elaborate gambling racket' through the sale of Tattersall's, but also exploited 'lonely, country people... by methods of astrology, 'lucky' boloney and similar duplicity' (*SW*, 1946b; 1946c, 1946i). The reference to 'lucky' probably referred to "Lucky Fred's", another gambling business that Fitzpatrick's associate May Sheehan had purchased in 1938 (*SW*, 1946b).

Smith's called for the Postmaster General's Department to review its Act so as to bring to an end Fitzpatrick's mail-order gambling business, which operated across Australia from a Sydney GPO box. It also called upon the Postal Reform League, of which Fitzpatrick was a senior member, to 'change its "attack" to prevent George Fitzpatrick's gambling companies from using mails in contravention of the spirit of Section 57 of the Post and Telegraph Act' (*SW*, 1946i). The same GPO box in Sydney, *Smith's* claimed, was the outlet for astrological readings (*SW*, 1946b).

The articles came to the attention of the Tasmanian opposition and media (*Advocate*, 2 October 1946, 2; *Mercury*, 2 October 1946, 6). One opposition member labelled Fitzpatrick a 'human parasite' (*Mercury*, 16 October 1946, 16). Tasmania's Labor premier, (later Sir) Robert Cosgrove, attempted to downplay Fitzpatrick's PR role: 'he offers assistance to the government, mainly by sending us newspaper cuttings of any matter that he thinks might be of interest to Tasmania' (cited in *SW*, 1946b). A motion in the Tasmanian Legislative Council called upon the government to 'sever all relations with George Fitzpatrick, Honorary, Public Relations Officer...' (*Mercury*, 23 October 1946, 22). During this crisis, the highly experienced promoter became publicity-shy. Fitzpatrick did not comment, and it is unknown if *Smith's* asked Fitzpatrick to do so. For the first time in his highly successful PR career, Fitzpatrick faced a significant, and intensely personal, PR crisis. A friend, Labor MP for Bondi (NSW), Abram Landa, repudiated attacks on Fitzpatrick claiming that he '... had given generously to many charities and was too ill to defend himself' (*SMH*, 29 November 1946, 5). With no other public supporters and an ugly parliamentary debate that could impact on the Cosgrove administration, Fitzpatrick resigned from the voluntary post.

The resignation may have saved the Cosgrove government in the short term, as well as Fitzpatrick's gambling interests, but it did not end the matter. In 1948, Cosgrove came under intense pressure. The premier's denial of receiving any money from Fitzpatrick 'since 1938' except for £440, 'paid as a normal contribution to party funds in 1947' did little to enhance Fitzpatrick's damaged reputation (*Examiner*, 10 March 1948, 3). In light of 21st century corporate governance and ethical standards, both Fitzpatrick's donations to Cosgrove and the premier's acceptance of donations, coming *after* the 1946 crisis were serious lapses in judgement by both parties. It created an impression that the donations were payback for Cosgrove maintaining the status quo and not investigating Fitzpatrick's gambling companies.

The situation worsened for the premier, when in late 1947 he was charged with bribery, corruption and conspiracy (Townsend, 1993). While Fitzpatrick was not central to the charges, the Supreme Court Inquiry nevertheless raised Fitzpatrick's donations. Under questioning as to why a 'mainlander' such as Fitzpatrick donated to the Tasmanian premier, Cosgrove replied that 'Mr Fitzpatrick is a supporter of the Labour [sic] Party'

(*Launceston Examiner*, 18 February 1948, 3), though omitted reference to Fitzpatrick's gambling companies. Subsequently, Cosgrove was acquitted on all charges.

A few months later, on 1 August 1948, George Fitzpatrick suffered a fatal heart attack at his Mosman home in Sydney. A small obituary in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (2 August 1948, 4) noted that 'recently he was superintendent of NSW Community Hospital and Chairman of the Dalwood Health Homes'. *The Canberra Times* said Fitzpatrick was 'well known' in 'advertising circles'. Since his retirement [he] had devoted his time to charitable works, and the Dalwood Home for Children' (*Canberra Times*, 2 August 1948, 2). The Tasmanian press published similarly brief articles.

In 1953, Fitzpatrick's daughter advised the NSW Registrar General of Joint Stock Companies that 'the company of George Fitzpatrick is not carrying on any business...and seeks to be dissolved (Bloomfield, 1953a). Clarifying correspondence advised that 'the members have lost all interest in its [public relations] affairs...' (Bloomfield, 1953b). George Fitzpatrick's plea that his father's original company be 'allowed to die' (1954) confirmed the family's decision not to continue Australia's first PR consultancy. In Tasmania, concerns about the corporate structure and excessive profits of Prudent Investors and Investments Pty Ltd continued to attract criticism from the Tasmanian Liberal opposition (*Mercury*, 15 October 1953, 3). The original shareholders, except the deceased Fitzpatrick, remained on the companies's books, and both companies traded until ca 1960.

In death, as in life, Fitzpatrick displayed generosity. Dalwood Health Home received £300. Sheehan, his loyal lieutenant, received the largest non-family benefit of £500, as well as other benefits (Fitzpatrick, 1948). Additionally, Fitzpatrick bequeathed some 10 per cent of his Last Will to non-family members. His Executors were asked to regard staff at Dalwood Home and the NSW Community Hospital as 'his employees', and those who had worked at either institution for more than ten years were eligible for a 'pecuniary legacy' (*ibid*). The amount to these employees totalled £1,300. Fitzpatrick also ensured that his Tasmanian business manager received large share allocations prior to his death (*ibid*).

Conclusion

George Fitzpatrick's career involved multiple businesses including setting up Australia's first PR consultancy. In the 1920s and early 1930s Fitzpatrick made an unprecedented contribution towards the creation of PR practice in Australia. His modus operandi resembled aspects of public information, press agency, lobbying and public affairs. In many respect he was at least a generation ahead of publicists in integrating advertising, publicity, events, direct mail and lobbying, and to this extent he deserves recognition as a pioneer in Australian public relations. To a large extent, also, he was highly successful in the field of persuasion on behalf of his clients.

Fitzpatrick was entrepreneurial, affluent and highly networked. Ironically, as a Mason and 'capitalist promoter', he benefited more from an association with Irish-Australian Catholics, such as May Sheehan, St Margaret's Hospital and Robert Cosgrove's long serving Tasmanian ALP Government, than from establishment peers. Yet, in his non-PR businesses, the master of persuasion appears to have overlooked the importance of professional reputation and personal integrity. From the mid 1930s, Fitzpatrick heavily focused on gambling, which might have been a result of insufficient PR business? Fitzpatrick's (1933, 10) claim: 'Personally I am opposed to gambling...and as far as I remember never had a bet' seems somewhat disingenuous in light of extensive gambling interests set up at about that time. His affiliated gambling businesses suffered from questionable conduct (especially by today's standards) which flowed through to his personal reputation.

He ignored early warning signals about his gambling activities in Sydney (1922), Perth (1933) and Launceston (1942). A high public profile – built on self-promotion – could not be sustained after *Smith's Weekly* uncovered the full extent of his gambling businesses, which, after political attacks, led to his sudden resignation from the Tasmanian government PR role. Fitzpatrick's loyalty to the Cosgrove's Labor government was admirable, though his political donations to the Tasmanian Premier in the wake of his own 1946 crisis reflected further lapses in ethical behaviour.

Nevertheless, throughout his career Fitzpatrick demonstrated commitment to community service. His work at several hospitals and charities was commendable and he seems to have been well motivated in service to children and families of a much lesser station in life. Unsurprisingly, obituaries praised Fitzpatrick as a 'well known philanthropist' (*Canberra Times*, 2 August 1948, 2). Fitzpatrick's death might have robbed the soon to be formed AIPR of someone with significant understanding of 'the science of public persuasion' at a time when PR was largely restricted to publicity roles. A counterfactual question is whether the fledgling AIPR would have welcomed Fitzpatrick, given his somewhat questionable reputation in the late 1940s? (A comparison with pioneers, such as the distinguished Sir Asher Joel, is outside this paper's scope.) Whether or not George Fitzpatrick deserves accolade as Australia's PR 'pioneer', it cannot be overlooked that he was the 'first Australian member of the National Association of Public Relations Counsel Incorporated, America' (*Who's Who in Australia 1947*), a forerunner to the Public Relations Society of America.

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Getting It Right From the Start: How the Initial Crisis Response by Scandalized Organisations is Critical to Repairing Reputational Damage

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper draws on the case study of AWB and the United Nations Oil-For-Food scandal to examine the importance of the initial crisis response strategy for a scandalized organisation in framing the perceptions of stakeholders to the rebuilding of a damaged corporate reputation.

Design/Methodology: The AWB case study is a perfect opportunity to highlight the differences between apologia and apology in post-crisis communication and reputation management.

Findings: In seeking to avoid genuine reform of itself and the regulatory it operated in, AWB caused itself further reputational damage. This demonstrates the importance of getting an apology right from the outset.

Research: The Royal Commission established by the Australian Government examined in great detail the approach taken by AWB to the "Oil-For-Food" "kickback" scandal.

Practical implications: There are numerous studies of corporate scandals and why they occur but the AWB case study provides a unique case study into post-crisis communication and how organisations can respond effectively to corporate scandals.

Original value of the paper: The unique insights gained from the Australian Royal Commission investigations into AWB clearly show that the company initially tried to stonewall or manage through the impacts of the scandal without a genuine contrition and commitment to reform. As the National regulatory Affairs Manager, and Government Relations and Trade Advocacy Manager employed by the new management team, the author was intimately involved.

KEYWORDS: corporate scandal, reputation management, crisis-communication, public apology, post-crisis response, Oil-For-Food scandal, AWB Limited.

Introduction

AWB Limited was the centre of the one the most infamous corporate scandals in Australia and there have only been a handful of companies who have been the subject of Royal Commission. In the case of AWB 'The Inquiry into certain Australian companies in relation to the UN Oil-For-Food Programme' headed up former judge Terrence Cole, found that AWB and AWBI might have breached Australian law in relation to its dealings with Iraq. What made the scandal even more damaging and sensational was the politics, with then Australian Prime Minister called before the Inquiry and a major policy rift occurring within the Coalition Government.

In addition to the Australian Inquiry, there had also been a United Nations Inquiry headed up by Paul Volker that found AWB to be the biggest international culprit in the scandal. The scandal was referred to in Australia as the 'kickback scandal' but even more damaging was the reference to the 'wheat for weapons' scandal, where the company was accused of diverting UN aid money to the regime of Saddam Hussein. In 2007, the then Opposition Trade Minister and future Australian Trade Minister stated in the Parliament that as a result of the actions of AWB "We sent our soldiers to war against an enemy that we partly funded" (Crean, 2007)

The minority partner, the Australian National Party, split from their Coalition partners who voted on legislation to reform the regulatory arrangements for bulk wheat exports with the support of the Opposition in the Australian Parliament. As a result of the scandal, thirteen former executives faced possible criminal charges and

Australia's bulk wheat export marketing arrangements, known as the Single Desk, were legislatively reformed. The new regulatory regime stripped AWB of its former monopoly and an open and competitive market was introduced.

What became apparent during the scandal, was that the company appeared to initially believe that it could weather the storm and fashion a way to maintain the status quo of the marketing arrangements. This was found to patently unlikely, as the initial response by AWB to the scandal was roundly condemned and rejected as the legislative reform process progressed. What made matters worse for the company was the initial attempts to obfuscate and avoid responsibility. This was perhaps best exemplified by the development of a de-merger proposal that was intended to satisfy the demands for precipitous action and to manufacture a legislative response that would maintain the monopoly position of the company under what was known as the 'single desk' marketing arrangements.

It was reported that the Australian Prime Minister had "reacted coolly" (Gluyas, 2006) to the initial de-merger proposal and it was not successful in stemming the demands for AWB to be punished. The company's stakeholders did not accept the initial response of the de-merger proposal as being sufficient for the scale of the transgression. In pursuing this flawed strategy, the company generated further damage to its corporate reputation and lost further credibility from the perspective of the key stakeholders that it needed to assuage if it was to fix its reputation and continue to operate.

The documents provided to the Royal Commission established to investigate the United Nations "Oil-For-Food" scandal, made it clear to many, including the Commissioner that AWB had not acted genuinely during the scandal. This was evidenced by the approach taken by the company to dealing firstly with the Volker inquiry and then the Royal Commission under former judge Terrence Cole. Commissioner Cole stated that;

"AWB's response to this Inquiry was one of non-cooperation, lack of frankness, and resort to litigation to endeavor to keep from disclosure documents and material relevant to this Inquiry. The decision to adopt that approach was made by the Chairman and the Board of AWB. It has caused inestimable reputational harm to AWB" (Cole, 2006)

As a case study of post-crisis communication and effective reputation management following a corporate scandal, AWB failed to grasp the opportunity of the situation. It failed to develop a response that would meet the demands of the community and key stakeholders. I compounded the problem by trying to stonewall and avoid taking responsibility. It was also exposed as being uncooperative and disingenuous in its approach. The so-called apology was insincere and overall it was seen to be trying to defend itself and its position despite the growing demands for action and reform of the company and Australia's wheat marketing arrangements.

Post-Scandal Responses by Damaged Organisations

In examining the processes of repair and re-build from the perspective of the AWB scandal, this paper addresses the gap identified by De Maria (2010, Sims, 2009; Watson, 2007) and others in the field on scandal scholarship about how a damaged organisation can progress out of a scandal. One of the options considered by George and Evuleocha (2003) in their examination of the Enron scandal was image and reputation restoration. The distinction between image and reputation goes to the heart of effective post-scandal responses. Corporate image is defined in corporate branding and marketing literature as what the organisation wants others to think about it, or what it believes they think about it, whereas reputation is what others actually do think about the organisation (Brown et al, 2006, pp102). Thus reputation can be seen as being more aligned with the rebuilding of a fatally compromised reputation from the perspective of those critical to its continued existence and financial performance.

In looking at the unsuccessful attempts by Enron and Arthur Anderson to restore their tarnished reputations George and Evuleocha (2003) use the term triage as an action by companies to seize the initiative in a crisis by unearthing themselves any questionable practices before they are discovered by others. This action suggests that to be effective, organisations which are damaged by an unethical or illegal transgression must dig deeper than a repair of their image. To continue with the medical analogy, to effectively rebuild a damaged reputation, an organisation must treat the causes as well as the symptoms. In the case of AWB, the company was not left with the option of trying to repair its reputation. Instead it how to go about rebuilding 'a' new reputation as the company would never regain its former position but it did recover and it was able to effect a turn-around in its reputation.

While it is noted that the company was eventually accredited under the new bulk wheat export marketing arrangements, it is essentially beyond the scope of this paper to consider the long-term implications for the company based on its response to the scandal. However, it is important to note that the company was eventually reintegrated with key stakeholders, including the regulator and the government and that it was able to continue to operate, albeit in a different structure and operating environment.

According to Sims (2009) how an organisation responds to a scandal will play a large part in determining if they are able to rebuild their reputation. Larkin states that the actions taken by the organisation, especially as they relate to stakeholders, will play a defining role in either exacerbating or reducing the effects of a crisis (2003, pp63). The importance of the post-crisis approach taken by the damaged organisation and the link to genuine cultural and structural reform is highlighted by Fombrun and Van Riel;

“Overtime, some companies recover dissipated value quickly and crisis fizzles. Others experience more extended damage. Research suggests that the enduring difference may well lie in how the crisis is handled and what the reputation of the company was beforehand.” (Fombrun and Van Riel, 2004, pp 34 – 35).

In looking at how organisations respond De Maria (2010) identifies three different types of post-crisis organisation based on the available literature. These being the organisations that respond positively to the trouble they find themselves in, those that accept governance reforms begrudgingly and finally those that miss the opportunities offered by the scandal to reform. De Maria goes on to define these as ‘the redemptive organisation’; the ‘tread water organisation’; and, the ‘rogue organisation’ (2010, pp71 – 72). The focus of this paper is firstly on how AWB begins as a rogue organisation, becomes a tread water organisation through its initial mishandling of the scandal and ultimately it’s move to becoming a redemptive organisation.

This paper is especially concerned with the move by AWB from treading water to a redemptive organisation based on the organisational double-loop reflective learning and then the third-loop regulatory learning processes as a requirement for a genuine commitment to reform that permitted a successful rebuilding of the company’s reputation, especially with key stakeholders.

The Learning Process And Forgiveness

Implicit in much of the work on corporate crisis and even scandals, is that the organisation can ‘manage’ or deal with the incident or issue (Gaines-Ross, 2008; Curtin et al, 2005; Benoit, 1995; Coombs, 2007; Marra, 1998; Seeger, 2010; Hale et al, 2005) as distinct from changing the organisation and addressing the underlying or root causes (Poppo and Schenker, 2010). Rhee and Kim (2010) refer to this as the distinction between superficial and substantive reputation repair and Alsop, (2004) writes of the deep structural basis of a positive reputation. Therefore crisis such as corporate scandals cannot be managed superficially.

According to Pfarrer et al (2008) organisations that work to discover the facts of the transgression, provide an appropriate explanation of their wrongdoing, accept and serve an equitable punishment, and make consistent internal and external rehabilitative changes increase the likelihood of meeting stakeholder demands and, consequently, have a higher probability of successfully achieving reintegration with stakeholders than those that do not. This is the critical difference between single-loop reactive learning and double-loop reflective learning (De Maria, 2010; Sims, 2009; Stead and Smallman, 2002) where re-building requires genuine and meaningful reforms to successfully reintegrate the organisation.

Real success in this process occurs with what Healy and Braithwaite refer to as the third loop, which is when a regulator, which in the case of AWB was Wheat Exports Australia and the Australian Consumer and Competition Commission, incorporate the outcomes of the organisation’s double-loop learning. Once it began to demonstrate genuine contrition and commitment to reform through change, AWB as a disgraced organisation was able to work with the Australian Government on the new wheat marketing arrangements to replace the system that it had effectively dismantled through its own transgression. The successful reforms of the company’s double-loop reflective learning enabled it to then engage with the Commonwealth Departments such as Agriculture and Prime Minister and Cabinet, as well as the regulators on the details of the new arrangements. In 2008 the company was accredited with an export license under arrangements that were strengthened following the Cole Inquiry, which suggests that the revised response strategy was ultimately successful in gaining forgiveness and reintegration.

The deeper learnings of the double-loop reflective learning process can result in more fundamental reforms needed for forgiveness and reintegration. These can complement the potential benefits effective crisis communication. If done successfully, these responses can mitigate the negative impacts of a crisis and sometimes even enhance an already positive reputation (Kauffman, 2005). If however an organisation fails to respond to a crisis in the correct manner, the damage can be greater (Marra, 1998). A perfect example of things getting worse is the adage that the cover up is worse than the crime, which was certainly true of the AWB response exposed during the Cole Inquiry. It is still critical that organisations correctly manage their initial response to a scandal or a crisis, or any communication for that matter. However, while this paper highlights that AWB certainly didn't initially handle itself with contrition or a genuine commitment to reform, the focus here is on the post-crisis response and the program for recovery where the positive outcomes for AWB came from a scrapping of the old ways of doing business that had contributed to the unethical and potentially illegal behavior.

Based on the complex and substantive commitments required to create and build a positive reputation, and what is required to protect and maintain one, Rhee and Kim state that in response to a scandal, organisations should engage in substantive actions to rebuild a reputation which involves changing the organisation's behavior and position to remove the causes of the reputation-damaging event and prevent recurrence of similar events (2010, pp7). Moving beyond the management of the crisis, effective response strategies must address the causes of the transgression. This requires a complete and open assessment of the of the problems underlying the scandal and not just those resulting from the scandal, as well as the root causes and the steps proposed to resolve and treat those causes of the problems (Poppo and Schenker, 2010).

The critical link between crisis management and organisational development has been explored by Lalonde (2007) but most of the situational analysis has been unable to include longitudinal evaluation of the medium to long-term responses by organisations that have resulted in the regaining of credibility and rebuilding of reputation. Taking Lalonde's organisational development approach to effective rebuilding of a corporate reputation, the organisation must go beyond the superficial capability of issues and crisis management, to address the key elements of a company's reputation. These are derived from the fundamentals elements of culture and climate, values and behaviors, policies and procedures. In the AWB example, the company needed to address all of these and its performance in reforming these areas was evaluated by the wheat export regulator as a condition of its license to export.

An important piece of work in the area of restoring positive reputation was the examination by Muzellec and Lambkin (2004) into the tactic of rebranding to cultural change and organisational development and reform. They found that for many organisations, an improvement in the perceptions of the company for a short time did not translate in the long run into a better reputation. This suggests that cosmetic changes in response to a scandal will not address the underlying causes that go to the heart of a genuine rebuilding program from the perspective of stakeholders. This was evidenced by the decision taken by the AWB management was not to 'rebrand' the company, as any new brand would still be damaged by any unresolved legacy issues and only once the company had been reformed could a new brand be considered. The AWB was eventually purchased and the new owner, who saw market value in the brand, it continues to trade with the AWB brand. Suggesting that the company might not have been able to recoup its losses, or recover its lost position or reputation but it was able to continue to operate.

It is for reasons such as those outlined in the above section that Seidman (2004), suggests newly appointed CEOs in a discredited organisation must "take on" the challenge of developing a new reputation based on new culture established through positive values and principles effectively embedded into the organisation and not merely espoused or claimed. This was the case with Gordon Davis at AWB, who in similar manner to the HealthSouth case cited by Sims (2009), changed the culture of the company by riding it of its vestiges of the past, although in the case of AWB this was somewhat assisted by the regulatory changes legislated by the Parliament that removed the company's monopoly entitlements under the 'single desk' wheat marketing arrangements. Ultimately AWB was able to move beyond the scandal and restructure the company through significant constitutional reform such that it was damaged but no longer scandalized through significant community outrage and stakeholder anger.

The Reaction To The Initial AWB Response

In response to the findings of the Royal Commission the company announced in July 2006 (AWBa, 2006) that AWBI the subsidiary of AWB Limited that held the export license would have an independent board and separate governance and committee structures from AWB Limited. The Chairman of AWB International (AWBI),

Mr. Ian Donges, announced in September 2006 (AWBb, 2006), almost on the eve of the findings of the Royal Commission, that key industry good functions and dedicated staff would be transferred to AWBI as part of the improved governance arrangements foreshadowed a few months before.

The Chairman of AWBI announced in September 2006 (AWBb, 2006) that key industry good functions and dedicated staff would be transferred to AWBI as part of the improved governance arrangements foreshadowed in July. In an attempt to bolster the governance arrangements of the single desk, AWBI was also given a separate management team and staff and will serve an industry good function in managing the Single Desk, including controlling the bulk veto and providing input on permit applications to the Wheat Export Authority (“WEA”). Under the model, AWBI would retain its bundled services contract with AWB Limited with the international sales and marketing function, and therefore related staff, to remain within AWB Limited as part of the bundled services contract. However it was acknowledged at the time that the changes were “operational” in nature and didn’t require shareholder approval (AWBb, 2006) so they could not really be considered as genuine and meaningful governance reform.

The reaction to these was muted, skeptical or critical. The PGA at the time labeled the planned reforms as “window dressing and a sham to deflect criticism and curry favor with the Government” (Bettles, 2006). Clearly any response by the company would be influenced by the findings of the Royal Commission and that it would be difficult for the government and other stakeholders to evaluate the suitability of any proposal by AWB. It was also unlikely that the proportionality of the perceived punishment could not be measured until the scale of the transgressions was determined by the Inquiry. It is however instructive that the company would attempt to propose a set of measures before the findings of the Inquiry and then fail to appreciate how this might be negatively received by key stakeholders and the community.

The AWBI proposal by definition didn’t address the systemic issues of unethical and illegal behaviors within AWB Limited. Because the company hadn’t accepted it’s part in the wrongdoing, not only couldn’t it propose or embark on genuine reform, it could appreciate that the AWBI response wouldn’t be accepted by salient stakeholders and that such a proposal might be perceived as further evidence of the inherent organisational failings of the company. At the time it was reported that the Australian Prime Minister had “reacted coolly” to the proposal, a grain grower group referred to it as “smoke and mirrors” “a means to guarantee potential for further deception,” and a market analyst said at the time that “It’s designed to make it look as though they’re doing something without actually doing anything,” (Gluyas, 2006).

After the release of the findings of the Royal Commission in November 2006 the Chairman immediately announced that a new demerger proposal under this proposal the Board of Directors would seek shareholder approval in 2007 to split AWB into two separate companies – a wholly grower-owned Single Desk manager, and a purely commercial agri-business company. These were positioned as reforms that would address the issues raised during the Royal commission. However the AWB de-merger proposal was seen as a “sham” by Professor Kerin (Farley, 2007) from Melbourne University's Business School. He was deeply skeptical of AWB's proposal to demerge, believing it was an exercise in political expediency to buy the company more time with the Federal Government in the wake of the Cole Inquiry.

This was also the overwhelming assessment of government, who felt that these changes were too little too late and did not get to the heart of the fundamental and systemic problems within AWB, which were seen to be intrinsically linked to the monopoly arrangements. With mounting pressure not only the government and competitors but also individual from grain traders to get rid of the single desk the company would need to come up with a more compelling case that it was taking on the challenge to respond to what had been revealed by Volker and what was coming out in the Royal Commission. The government was not going to accept the proposed changes, with the Prime Minister making that clear when he said “It doesn't alter the view I expressed to the joint party room yesterday, and that is that the world cannot remain the same as a result of the Cole inquiry...Plainly the status quo can't remain” (Howard, 2006). In the Parliament, Senator Johnston stated that

“The issue of the demerger we saw last week was not adequately explained, which says to me that this whole thing was simply a charade to try to look good and to be seen to be doing something” (Johnston, 2006).

As noted by one commentator at the time, the underlying flaw of the AWB response and source of much cynicism was that the demerger proposal was predicated on the export monopoly continuing (Hopkins, 2006). AWB was perceived to be trying to preserve the status quo of the monopoly. This was unacceptable to the Prime Minister and other political figures, including the Opposition. This attempt to try and link reforms into the continuation of the arrangements that had contributed to the transgressions behind the scandal was poorly received and if successful would have largely avoided the punishment that was expected from the community and others critical of AWB's behaviour.

The Legislative Response To AWB's Proposals

The prevailing view of the AWB proposals in response to the Oil-For-Food scandal was that company was doing enough and that the status quo could not remain. If the intent of the proposals was to engineer a way for the company to be seen to have been punished without losing its legislative monopoly, then not only was it poorly received it was largely unsuccessful.

In December 2006, the then Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the Hon. Peter McGauran (Productivity Commission, 2011) announced that the bulk veto, which was the key mechanism of the 'single desk' monopoly arrangements, would be transferred temporarily to the Minister. The amendments to the arrangements transferred AWB International's ("AWBI") power to veto bulk wheat exports by non-AWBI exporters to the Minister. AWBI was the wholly owned subsidiary of AWB Limited. These arrangements were only in place until legislation could be passed to enact new regulatory arrangements. At the time the Minister stated that "This is, to a significant degree, a compromise between those who are passionate supporters of a single desk (system) and those who would want instant deregulation" (AAP, 2006).

The passage of the Wheat Marketing Amendment Bill 2006 signified the impending end for the existing wheat marketing arrangements and therefore the futility of the strategy of AWB up until that point. The proposed changes to the arrangements to AWB International and then the de-merger proposal had failed to gain acceptance or prevent reform to the regulatory system. With the system and the company so intrinsically linked, significant reform to one had knock on consequences for the other. AWBN was faced with no option but to adapt and to change to the new wheat marketing arrangements.

Further amendments to the Wheat Marketing Act in 2007 prepared for the complete removal of AWB's involvement in the bulk single desk from 1 March 2008. In this way the Government and the Parliament was signalling the start date for an open and competitive market for bulk wheat exports. This paper doesn't examine in detail what those new arrangement were or what the company needed to do so as to comply but it is important to refer to those developments in reference to the strategy until that point by AWB.

In addition to the Wheat Marketing Amendment Act 2006, the Wheat Marketing Act 2007 and the Wheat Export Marketing Act 2008, there were other pieces of legislation and parliamentary debate relevant to the AWB scandal. One of these was the International Trade Integrity Act 2007, which the then Opposition Trade Minister, Simon Crean told that Parliament would "finally see the government doing something to shut the stable door that was left wide open while AWB officials were shovelling money into Saddam Hussein's coffers. The bill is the government's response to the wheat for weapons scandal—the payments, allowed through the government's negligence, made by the Wheat Board to Saddam Hussein" (Crean, 2007). This link between the Oil-For-Food scandal and undermining the Australian war effort was extremely damaging to the company. It demonstrated the extreme levels of outrage and anger that extended beyond the disappointment of many 'white collar' corporate scandals that related to what were for many in the community abstract transgressions such as accounting procedures.

AWB's apologia response clearly failed to address what Dr. Sandman refers to as the outrage of transgression by organisations such as AWB in the Oil-For-Food scandal. References to "the disgraced AWB's single desk policy" (AAP, 2006) highlight the link between AWB and the monopoly arrangements. In speaking support of the 2006 Bill, Senator McGauran (brother of the Minister) made the direct connection between the influence of the monopoly arrangements with the unethical and/or illegal transgressions of the company when he stated "What is being acted out today is a consequence of that culture and that behavior" (AAP, 2006) Another Senator commented on the negative perceptions of AWB's initial response to the Inquiry by stating that "AWB

presented a facade of cooperation with this inquiry but, in truth, it did not cooperate at all. It should be ashamed of itself” (Ferris, 2006).

As a sad indictment on the unsuccessful strategy initially deployed by AWB, one Shadow Minister speaking in support of stripping AWB of its monopoly indicated that the AWB International proposal was too little too late; “A key problem of the services agreement is the fact that its contents have been kept secret from growers and just about everyone else. This secrecy has become a hallmark of the arrogant way in which the AWB has been conducting its business” (Thompson, 2006). A number of Senators (Eggleston, 2006; O’Brien, 2007) complained about the commercial arrangements between AWB Limited and AWB International, which the initial proposals from the company clearly failed to address.

The view of Parliament and that of many stakeholders to the conduct before during and after the scandal was perhaps best summed by Senator Johnston (2006);

“I pause to say that AWB has displayed contemptuous corporate culture with wheat growers, with shareholders—both A and B class—and with the general public. Alarming, the arrogance and contempt continues to this day, notwithstanding the commissioner’s finding. It seems to me that this company, amazingly and incredibly, harbours a victim mentality to its current status.”

Senator Johnston felt that AWB had “not learnt any lessons from the Cole commission” (Johnston, 2006). Perhaps the most telling indictment on the failed initial strategy was that the AWB International restructure arrangements and the demerger proposal barely rated a mention during parliamentary debate. After the negative response by key stakeholders, the damaging evidence of the Inquiry and the release of the final report by the Inquiry, the parliament did not accept the self-reforms put forward by the company and. Instead the government, the parliament and stakeholders pursued radical legislative and regulatory reform that would require a radical rethink by the company about its strategic response to the scandal.

The Findings Of The Royal Commission

If AWBs initial attempts to avoid having to undertake genuine reform through the proposed AWB International package and the de-merger proposal had been poorly received, then company’s stonewalling strategy was completely scuttled by the Royal Commission. The evidence presented to the Inquiry made it clear that the tactics of the company had been to try and manage through the crisis without undertaking genuine reform to address the problems within the company, and the wheat marketing arrangements, that had led to the ethical and/or illegal transgressions by the company.

Much of the critic came from the evidence contained in the documents numbered under Exhibit 1020 relating to Exhibit 665 were otherwise known as “Cole Inquiry – Draft Statement of Contrition”. This was a result firstly of the contents of those documents, the additional insights gained from the cross-examination of witnesses and then the attempts by the company to have the documents suppressed. The latter situation occurred because the documents in question were delivered to the Inquiry by mistake.

On the issue of documents mistakenly tendered to the Inquiry, Justice Young ruled in *AWB Limited v Cole* (No. 1) and (No. 5) (Young, 2006) that the draft statement of contrition did not need to be returned to AWB or removed from the Exhibits list of the Inquiry because it was not protected by a claim for privilege, in part because “The documents were prima facie, brought into existence in furtherance of improper and dishonest purpose” (Young, 2006). So not only did he rule that the documents be made public but he believed that they were further evidence of the transgressions by the company.

Under questioning from the Commissioner and Counsel Assisting the Commission, the former AWB senior in-house counsel acknowledged that AWB had stated in documents associated with those project teams that the company “Can’t cooperate fully – too damaging” and that it would play “hardball” with “limited cooperation” (Cole, 2006, transcript pp7305, AWB.9004.0053). It was little wonder then that Commissioner Cole felt that he had been misled and that the company had not been genuine when it had stated earlier in a public statement that the company would cooperate fully (AWB, 2005).

Commissioner Cole stated that “The question that concerning me is whether in fact the Inquiry is receiving that absolute cooperation” and even directly that “it seems to me we are receiving a façade of cooperation” (Cole, 2006). In addition to the comments about the conduct of the company during the Inquiry, there was mounting evidence about the actions and behaviours of the company that had resulted in the alleged ethical and/or illegal activities. Counsel Assisting the Commission accused one former employee of “dissembling” during his testimony and asked; “Are you making things up as you go along in order to get yourself out of a hole?”; and, “I suggest to you that when you made that statement, and during the course of your evidence yesterday, you were being deliberately obstructive” (Cole, 2006).

What was so damaging about the documents and testimony associated with Exhibit 665, the “Cole Inquiry – Draft Statement of Contrition”, was that it laid bare the careful strategy of confecting a so-called public apology, that was never even finally delivered to the Cole Inquiry by the then CEO or Chairman. According to one Australian newspaper, this batch of material is “essential reading for anyone involved in public life” as it contains a “scalding appraisal of AWB’s efforts to weasel out of acknowledging its ethical failures” (Wood, 2006).

This was hardly the positive environment required by the company to repair its damaged reputation and seek the forgiveness that would allow it to return to business. It was unlikely that with such information becoming known to the community and key stakeholders, that the AWB International package and the de-merger proposal would be positively received and perceived as genuine reforms. Under these circumstances it would be virtually impossible for anyone to disconnect the current public statements of the company from the confidential internal information that was being revealed during the Inquiry.

The Mismanagement Of The Initial AWB Response

According to the established literature (Alsop, 2004; Benoit, 1995; Sims, 2009; van Riel, and Fombrun, 2007; Poppo and Schepker, 2012; Pfarrer, 2008; Ree and Kim, 2010; Ree and Valdez, 2008; Ree and Hadwick, 2011; De Maria, 2010; Seeger, 2003; Mahon, 2002; Dukerich, 2002; Gaines-Ross, 2008; Roux-Dufort, 2000; Coombs, 1999; Coombs, 2007) for a disgraced organisation to successfully rebuild a tarnished reputation, it must first demonstrate a level of contrition sufficient that salient stakeholders and key audiences believe that the organisation has learnt the lessons expected of it and is ready to most into the post-crisis phases of re-establishing the standing of the company so that it can continue to operate commercially. Unfortunately, in most situations, organisations respond to a crisis by taking a defensive stance (Roux-Dufort, 2000) and in this respect AWB was no different to most.

According to Watson, not only did AWB initially attempt to deny any wrongdoing, the Royal Commission discovered a deliberate campaign of deceit to disguise the transgression and attempts to cover it up (Watson, 2007). Based on these findings and other revelations about the original transgression and the subsequent transgressions around the initial response, De Maria’s description of the rogue organisation failing to adequately confront the realities of the scandal it has caused is easily applied to AWB;

“Rogue PSOs [post-scandal organisations] regret their scandals only because they have raised their illegal or immoral profile with the policing and regulatory structures and attracted the unwanted attention of the media. The only likely lesson to emerge from their scandals is how not to get caught next time” (De Maria, 2010, pp72).

This defensive apologia response represents the narrow single-loop redressive actions such as the denials, discrediting and general level of obfuscation displayed by AWB in the initial response to the emerging crisis and eventual breaking of the ‘oil-for-food scandal (Sims, 2009). The shift from AWB to double-loop and the eventual triple-loop learnings of the legislators and regulators led to the eventual rehabilitation of AWB to the extent that it was able to operate successful, albeit with a diminished market share, in an open and competitive but nit fully deregulated wheat export marketing arrangements.

In their work on repairing trust in public organisations, Poppo and Schenker (2010) found that reticence to confront the problem was worse than either apologizing or denying to the extent that doing something was better than doing nothing. AWB was not only scandalized but discredited by a long list of negative perceptions based on it based behaviours and connection to the single desk monopoly. In their work on the repairing of trust in public organisations, Poppo and Schepker (2010) identify the failure to respond appropriately to a scandal can further harm an organisation’s reputation and legitimacy in the marketplace.

There have been a number of frameworks and categorizations for building, maintaining and protecting reputations. For example, Benoit (1995) proposes five strategies for firms or individuals as preventative and restorative approaches. These are denial, evasion of responsibility, reduction of the offensiveness of the act, corrective action, and mortification make up the rhetoric or image repair discourse. Coombs (1999, 2007) develops situational crisis communication theory, creating ten categories of basic organisational crisis communication strategies. Pfarrer et al (2008) identify the four response stages of discovery, explanation, penance, and rehabilitation. These show that organisations that don't own up to their mistakes can't achieve genuine reforms to address the problems and not just the symptoms of the transgression. In contrast those that are genuine about changing their ways embrace double-loop reflective learning and undertake meaningful organisational change.

This paper also draws on the categorization proposed by De Maria of how organisations respond to the crisis of scandal, as this was applied by that author to the initial response by AWB to the 'oil-for-food' scandal, so it aligns with the use of that company as a case study for evaluating how tarnished organisations rebuild their reputations. Whatever the framework or categorization applied to an organisation seeking, if they are not genuine change and reform responses then they will run the risk of being seen as disingenuous, with the perception that "talk is cheap" Bottom et al (2002). This highlights the need for stakeholders to have an ability to accept that the organisation has understood the severity of the situation as much as it is about punishment. The concept of penance entails an acceptance and promise of improvement. Only once stakeholders have this comfort can a damaged organisation hope to achieve the forgiveness required for quelling the outrage and anger of a scandal that then allows the company to regain the lost legitimacy required for reintegration and rehabilitation.

In looking at rehabilitation Pfarrer et al (2008) refer to research from organisational renewal, crisis management, and public relations and the need for alignment between internal and external actions but of critical importance to building, and therefore rebuilding a reputation, is the critical parts played by change management and corporate governance. Effective change management and meaningful reforms in corporate governance ensure that the causes of the scandal are addressed by the organisation and that stakeholders can have assurance that they won't be associated with a repeat or relapse of the unethical or illegal behaviors that led to the transgression that caused the scandal. After a scandal, stakeholders are cautious of claims by damaged organisations that they have rehabilitated themselves, and this can only occur when these changes have been accepted and validated by salient stakeholders.

Watson concludes after looking at a number of case studies that includes AWB that once the exterior wrapping was taken off the companies were seen to have weak ethical performances in their operations and relations with key stakeholders such as governments. Mismanagement of a scandal and disingenuous or ineffective response can compound the problem but the redressive action such as the initial AWBI proposal of AWB can make the breach worse rather than better (Sims, 2009).

Conclusion

AWB faced enormous reputational damage as a result of the Oil-For-Food scandal. The initial investigation by UN investigator Paul Volker, found that the company, was the biggest single source of kickbacks totalling \$220 million. These payments were not paid by the company but were drawn from the UN escrow account. The Australian Government's Royal Commission found that the company had lied about its transgressions and as a result recommended criminal proceedings against a number of former employees and while the criminal charges were dropped by the Australian Federal Police, civil cases were pursued by the Australian Securities and Investment Commission.

Rather than face up to these transgressions and seek to remedy them, AWB tried to deny them and then avoid having to undertake any genuine reforms to either the company or the regulatory arrangements for Australia's bulk what export trade known as the 'single desk'. In doing so, the company was punished further for being seen as having failed to show contrition or genuine effort to change. The extent to which the company had firstly sought to cover-up the transgressions and then avoid the growing demands for action by company, were revealed during the Royal Commission.

AWB was inadvertently caught out when a number of documents were accidentally provided to the Inquiry that highlighted the disingenuous and deceitful manner in which the company was responding. What made matters

worse was that rather than then owning up to the original wrongdoing and the evidence contained in the documents, the company sought to have them suppressed. This strategy was condemned by the judge ruling on the motion and Commissioner Cole. The company was seen to be perpetuating the very culture and behaviors that had caused the problems and that were now seen by key stakeholders, especially the government and the parliament, as unacceptable and unsustainable.

These damaging revelations came to light as the company was being seen to trying and avoid genuine reform through the minimalist proposals associated with a restructure of the wholly owned AWB Limited subsidiary AWB International and then the demerger proposal for AWB Limited and AWB International. Neither of these options was well received, especially against the background of the damaging revelations of the Inquiry and also before the Inquiry had concluded and the findings released and the recommendations actioned. At best this was seen as premature and precipitous but it was far more damaging that they were seen as a deliberate ploy to try and avoid accountability and the need for genuine change. The company was seen to be more interested in maintaining the monopoly under the 'single desk' wheat marketing arrangements.

The parliamentary debates and legislative process make it clear that AWB's initial response was unsuccessful in stemming the tide of criticism and avoiding significant reform of the operating environment. If the initial restructuring proposals were the attempt by the company to self-manage the reform program, then that was largely taken out of the company's hands by the removal of the single desk bulk veto. This then necessitated the internal reforms by putting an end to the previously minimalist approach to change and reform. The public comments and actions of key stakeholders make it clear that these efforts were simply not believed and not accepted as genuine or sufficient.

Ultimately the company went on to put forward genuine constitutional change, once the initial proposals were unsuccessful in mitigating changes to the wheat marketing arrangements. The reforms eventually undertaken by the company resulted in the removal of dual-class share ownership structure, where wheat growers had been entitled to non-tradable 'A class' shares that gave them control of the company board. In contrast to the failure of the initial strategy, as a result of the constitutional changes, the company was accredited by the new wheat exporting regulator established by Australian Government. Following on from these successful changes and reforms, AWB was able to deal with the damage of the scandal and the outrage of the community, including the anger of key stakeholders.

This is not to say that the company could have prevented the loss of the single desk but if it had begun the genuine reform process from the beginning it would have avoided unnecessary additional reputation damage and potentially hastened the recovery and reintegration process. What is unknown at this point is given the circumstances that lead to the scandal, could the company have undertaken the necessary reforms until the initial minimalist approach had run its course. It is not for this paper to address this issue or to try and answer those questions as the purpose of examining the failure of the initial strategy was to demonstrate that it was unsuitable and therefore unsuccessful.

The success of the eventual strategy of the company in not only apologizing but being seen to take appropriate action to change its ways facilitate its reintegration with stakeholders. The company was also believed by key audiences that it was genuine and committed to ensuring that similar transgression would not occur again. This successful strategy is not the focus of this paper, and while it provides opportunity for further research it does provide a useful contrast to the unsuccessful initial post-crisis communication and reputation management strategy of the company.

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Cultural Diplomacy as Public Relations in an Indonesian Consulate in Australia

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Abstract

In this paper we investigate the similarities and possible convergence between public relations and cultural diplomacy in the work of the Indonesian Consulate General in Perth, Western Australia. Using a qualitative research approach, interviews were held with Consulate staff and heads of Indonesian organisations based in Western Australia. The findings show that the Consulate General does perform a public relations role through its culturally based communication practices. Indonesian community organisations liaise with the Consulate General and its publics, and effectively serve as a communication channel to the Indonesian citizens in Perth. Balai Bahasa Indonesia Perth, is an example of an international actor performing cultural diplomacy on behalf of Indonesia. The research concludes that cultural diplomacy is another form of public relations, in which two-way symmetrical communication and mutual understanding are pursued.

Keywords: cultural diplomacy, consular diplomacy, intercultural communication

Introduction

The proximity of Indonesia and Australia, and their history of cooperation and communication, has led to a reciprocal interest between the countries' citizens. This interest spans various fields such as employment, tourism and education. According to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2012), there were more than 15,000 Indonesian students enrolled in Australian institutions in 2012. In addition to these recent migrants are Indonesian citizens who were born, live, and work in Australia, while keeping their Indonesian citizenship.

An embassy is the representative of a government outside the country and has responsibility for the wellbeing of its country's citizens. Toward other countries, an embassy has a role in public relations for its country, in which it seeks to establish and maintain a relationship between its nation and the foreign counterpart. The role of public relations carried out by the embassy can be seen as public diplomacy, where its purpose is to communicate the country's policies and to maintain a positive image of the country in the view of the foreign public.

The Indonesian Embassy in Australia is situated in the national capital, Canberra. However, because Perth is geographically remote from the other states and there are numerous Indonesian citizens living and/or studying in Western Australia, the Indonesian government established a Consulate in Perth in 1993, becoming a Consulate General in 2010. As an organisation, its main purpose is to provide citizen services, including assisting Indonesian citizens with their visa requirements. Indonesian citizens living in Australia have formed a range of student, religious-based and ethnic-based organisations, to accommodate the needs of Indonesians for social and shared experiences. As an alternative conduit for Indonesian citizens, some of these organisations may need to communicate with Indonesian representatives across Australia, depending on the scope of their activities. Likewise, the embassy and consulate could consider these organisations as representatives of residents in Western Australia and channels of communication to their wider public, the Indonesian citizens.

Thus, government representatives overseas carry the task of connecting government (and people) on both sides. The government-to-government relations known as *diplomacy*, has been performed since the ancient era and is now known as *traditional diplomacy* (Signitzer and Coombs, 1992). However, a new era of diplomacy appeared with *public diplomacy*, in which the main agents are not just governments. Public diplomacy takes different forms,

as Cull (2008) proposed in his taxonomy. Differing across countries, one of the key aspects of public diplomacy is cultural diplomacy. This signifies the act of encouraging culture as a way to introduce and promote a nation to a foreign public. Key objectives in conducting cultural diplomacy are to gain the host nation's interest and to enhance the image and reputation of one's country. Public diplomacy has been traditionally studied in the international relations field. Researchers such as Signitzer and Coombs (1992) have attempted to see public diplomacy and public relations within one perspective or to combine both into a new field of study. However, there has been criticism about the effort to unify or to find similarities between these two areas (eg. L'Etang, 2008).

Differences in public relations practice between Asian nations and the USA, and the need to consider the variance in cultural values across cultures as part of a global view of public relations, have been noted (Sriramesh, 2003; 2009). The particular importance of interpersonal relationships in Asian cultural contexts and the use of personal influence models have been addressed in recent research (Devereux and Peirson-Smith, 2009; Kent and Taylor, 2011). Multiculturalism, ethnocentrism and different worldviews may colour the process of building mutual relationships between nations. In exploring this territory we asked two research questions: How does the Indonesian Consulate General in Perth conduct public relations in the form of cultural diplomacy? Can students' and workers' organisations' participate in these processes as third parties?

Methodology

Using a qualitative research methodology situated within an interpretive paradigm, this study aimed "to understand how people in everyday natural settings create meaning and interpret the events of their world" (Wimmer and Dominick, 2006, p. 113). Semi-structured interviews with key staff of the Indonesian Consulate General and members of Indonesian organisations were conducted in Perth in 2011. Information gleaned from interviews was supplemented with documentary research and periods of participant observation by one author (Vidyarani) as an intern at the Consulate and at Balai Bahasa Indonesia Perth, an autonomous Indonesian language and cultural organisation.

Consulate staff interviewed included the Consul General and vice consuls from the Cultural and Information Division, the Consular Division, and the Economic Affairs Division. The head of Balai Bahasa Indonesia Perth (BPIP) was also interviewed.

The heads of three Indonesian organisations were interviewed as part of the research: PPIA WA (*Perhimpunan Pelajar Indonesia di Australia*-Indonesian Students' Association of Western Australia), AIPSSA (Australian Indonesian Postgraduate Students' and Scholars' Association) and KIPAS (*Karyawan Indonesia di Perth Australia*-Indonesian Workers in Perth Australia).

Recorded interviews were transcribed and then analysed using the "constant comparative technique", first articulated by Glasser and Strauss in 1967 (Wimmer and Dominick, 2006, p. 113). The qualitative analysis software NVivo8 was used to facilitate this process. Most of the interviews were conducted in the Indonesian language. Respondents answered in a mixture of Indonesian languages-in which various slang and dialects were used, as well as Javanese and English. The interpretation was done in Indonesian, and then translated to English.

Findings

Culture and Diplomacy

Generally, we found that the understanding of the term *diplomacy* by the Consulate General staff is about understanding the needs of the people whom the diplomats represent and how to provide for those needs. The Consul General himself believed that public diplomacy was a part of diplomacy as a whole and allowed the harnessing of the whole community. One of the goals of the overseas mission is to create a positive image which involves using all assets of the country, in this sense including Indonesian citizens who are living in the area of accreditation. The Consul General stated that: "We have to introduce Indonesia. That is why what I have in mind is how to showcase Indonesia's performances...with a polite and friendly attitude, in terms of fighting for the interest

of Indonesian Republic.” Although Indonesia is relatively close to Australia and the relationship between the two countries has been established over a long period of time, the Consulate General referred to improving the knowledge Australians have of Indonesia and of the need for Indonesia to constantly inform Australia of its true identity and what it has to offer.

The diplomats interviewed during this research are central to the creation of an image. Image is sculpted by various tools, one of which is culture, and it is the concept of *cultural diplomacy* which underlines its the use of culture as a tool or means to promote one’s country. The term culture is often interpreted as something that is related to performing arts, indigenous ornaments and traditional artefacts. In this sense culture is something visible that defines one’s own identity as a member of a large group of people (Samovar, Porter and McDaniel, 2008). This understanding was expressed by multiple Consulate General staff, particularly in relation to the use of cultural performances as a means for conveying a message; that is, the cultural heritage possessed by Indonesia as a nation.

Cultural activities conducted by the Consulate General ranged from independent cultural exhibitions and performances; tourism promotion, such as the Bali promotion road-show; and joint expos with other countries, such as the Perth Holiday and Travel Expo (Cultural and Information Division, 2010). These core events are being held annually. Promotional activities were associated with stage performances, exhibitions and art related events, including dancing and playing traditional musical instruments. They are seen as key promotional means, and important to giving a tangible identity to Indonesian culture.

Building Relationships with Mutual Understanding

One of the main duties of the Consulate General focuses on the relationship and cooperation with the Western Australian government. The purpose of the relationship is related to the protection of Indonesian citizens in WA. The Vice consul of the Consular Division explained that:

With the state government, for example with the premier, it's more of bilateral cooperation between Indonesia and WA. We become the link. For example, the East Java government has a sister city cooperation, we convey (the message) that we have this intention to cooperate. Or when we have a function we also invite the state government. That is more of cooperation...but, if it's the level of Australia (the coordination and leadership) is in Canberra.

The Consulate General acted as a link or channel of intention from provincial governments in Indonesia to WA, whereas the scope of the Indonesian embassy in Canberra covered Australia. The Consulate General cooperates with Western Australian government agencies such as the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. The Economic Affairs Division has a strong relationship with the AIBC (Australia Indonesia Business Council). The Cultural and Information Division handles applications from the Western Australian media who wish to report in Indonesia, which is then sent to Jakarta. On a weekly and monthly basis, the Cultural and Information Division performs media monitoring particularly in the areas of culture and humanities. This media monitoring report, combined with reports by the Consular Division and the Economic Affairs Division, is sent to Jakarta. The Cultural and Information Division in partnership with the Western Australia Department of Education and Training offers the Language Assistant Program to provide teacher assistants for Indonesian Language teachers in WA. It also connects Western Australian schools and universities with researchers, schools and universities in Indonesia.

Other than inter-governmental cooperation, or so-called government to government cooperation, the Consul General also carries out informal liaison with the Western Australia government. This approach is employed as a reinforcement of a previous formal relationship and is carried out by individual contact. The *one on one* approach denotes the significance of knowing the counterpart individually outside the institution to which they belong. In the process of establishing a relationship with the other party, one must have significant knowledge about that other party. This includes knowledge of the culture, the demeanour of the other party, way of life, language, and other cultural aspects.

The Consul General underlined the use of the cultural approach in conducting diplomacy, when he said, “diplomacy is an art, a method. It is the means. It can be cultural, educational, economic.” He further added, “We also need to see the formal rule, but the means is through culture.” Culture is seen as a broad term, more than the iconic and daily life perspectives. By saying that diplomacy is a tool or a means, and by indicating that culture is

used as a tool, diplomacy may be understood as more than just the process of formal negotiation. Diplomacy is an action that involves many aspects, from formal through institutionalised meetings, through to informal via other aspects, such as cultural experiences.

Partnership with Indonesian Organisations

Indonesian organisations were formed to accommodate the needs of Indonesian citizens of various backgrounds, such as students, certain ethnic groups and religious affiliations. The three organisations considered in this research were selected from the many that assist the Consulate General, directly and indirectly through the provision of labour, ideas, independent action and inter-organisational partnerships. Most of these organisations were created without formal recognition from the Consulate General. Membership is voluntary and members often belong to more than one organisation.

AIPSSA has around 300 members, consisting of postgraduate students, scholars and their family members. AIPSSA contributes to the Consulate General activities through their large membership and close connection with academics in educational institutions. PPIA WA is a smaller branch of PPIA based in Canberra and covers Indonesian students from all levels of education, without having an official registration system for membership. However, in order to get all the benefits from the organisations, students are still required to register. Despite its function to accommodate the needs of Indonesian students in Western Australia, PPIA WA also promotes Indonesia through entertainment, social relations and cultural events.

While AIPSSA and PPIA help in promotion in the fields of education and entertainment. KIPAS works closely with Indonesian workers in Western Australia. It supports the Consulate General in the promotional effort by providing labour, ideas, performers, and information about the work situation in Western Australia. For example, a recent Employment Workshop organised by KIPAS gathered ideas that arose from Indonesian workers' real experiences and the results of observation of their everyday encounters with Western Australians. Resulting information on opportunities and competencies required by Western Australian companies was conveyed to the Consulate General.

From their membership databases, these organisations provide information required by the Consulate General to track Indonesian citizens living in Western Australia. Indonesian citizens travelling overseas are advised to inform the government representative in the country of visit about their arrival, by doing a self-report. This action is compulsory according to the Indonesian Law of Population number 23/2006 (The Government of the Republic of Indonesia, 2006) and allows the Embassy, Consulate General or Consulate to identify the citizens and give service and protection in case of need. However, the law has not been properly socialised resulting in many Indonesians overseas being unaware of their obligation and remain unregistered. The gap in information can potentially be filled by the Indonesian organisations. For example, KIPAS assisted the Consulate General during the last Indonesian Presidential election. PPIA WA has a one day a week meeting with students, especially during new students' orientation, where it introduces itself and directs the students toward the Consulate General. This program allows the Consulate General to reach newly arrived students benefitting both the organisations and the Consulate General. The student organisations have an important role as a channel of communication to Indonesian students about laws and regulations.

The Consulate General cooperates with the heads of Indonesian organisations to liaise with Indonesian communities. The contacts are established through the use of new communication technologies such as smart phones utilizing social networking. The head of AIPSSA reported that the Consulate General seldom sent formal letters to the leaders of organisations calling them to meetings, "But all kinds of consulate activities are announced by *gethok tular*." The expression, *gethok tular*, in Javanese can be translated as *mouth to mouth* or *word of mouth*. The use of communication technology such as smart phones or email assumed a close two-way connection between both parties unconstrained by formal bureaucracy.

The partnership between the Consulate General and the organisations runs both ways. The organisations have ideas and plans about events which they convey to the Consulate General. The communication process puts emphasis on the importance of word of mouth and public information mediums, such as posters. The organisations conduct informal communication with their members and the Consulate General provides formal invitations to

some members. Through mutual cooperation, the Consulate General obtains valuable labour and assistance for their events while the organisations accept significant support, other than money, and some status because their activities are noticed by an Indonesian authority.

Balai Bahasa Indonesia Perth (BBIP)

Balai Bahasa Indonesia Perth Inc. (BBIP) was established in 2008 by an Australian language teacher with the support of the Indonesian Consulate in Perth. The initial plan was to create a cultural centre for Indonesians and Australians who were interested in learning about Indonesian culture. The organisation is autonomous and run by a board which includes representatives from the community, the Indonesian Consulate in Perth and the Westralian Indonesian Language Teachers Association (WILTA). Describing itself as “a cultural, non-profit organisation” (Balai Bahasa Indonesia Perth Inc, 2011a), BBIP aims to provide Indonesian language and culture education to assist Australians and Indonesians to interact more effectively. A key role involves providing access to conversational Indonesian language classes at a range of levels for both adults and school children (Balai Bahasa Indonesia Perth Inc, 2011c). The stakeholders for BBIP are a combination of Indonesian and Australian citizens, but particularly Australians who may not have accessed Indonesian language in schools and who can learn more about Indonesia.

BBIP regularly organises events introducing Indonesian culture. Examples include the July 2009 Indonesian Language Expo, 2010 events held to introduce the participants (mostly Australians) to the cooking of Indonesian cuisine and Indonesian Business Insight seminars (Balai Bahasa Indonesia Perth Inc, 2011b). BBIP cooperates with the Australia Indonesia Business Council (AIBC), attending their events to represent the aims of the organisation. Besides organising events for itself, BBIP also supports other cultural activities synchronised with their objective of fostering positive attitudes between both countries.

Although the major means of media communication is through its website, BBIP has a close relationship with the Western Australian Journalists Association (WAJA). A current board member is a freelance journalist for a government agency. In 2010, BBIP developed a media award, to be presented at the WAJA awards, for a journalist who reports positive news about Indonesia and/or the Indonesian-Australian relationship.

BBIP is a non-profit organisation whose main objective is to build relationships between the two countries through education in the language sector and through pursuing a positive attitude among its participants. BBIP therefore has a public relations role. The current chairperson of BBIP stated:

We want to promote the everyday Indonesia. We want to promote contemporary Indonesians and that means, I guess, showing people how Indonesians live their daily lives but integrating the traditional into the modern. So we want people in Australia to know what traditional Indonesia's like but how an Indonesian takes that tradition and uses it day to day....Language is central to what we're doing because, you know, we believe in order to understand that culture you really have to start understanding it through the language.

For BBIP language is being introduced as a separate entity from culture. However, it is essential for someone to learn a language to be really exposed to and understand a culture. It is important to recognize the counterpart's mindset, values, way of life, belief, and try to acknowledge the differences. The process of creating mutual understanding between both parties includes one's knowledge about the other. As the chairperson of BBIP explained:

It's not just about us teaching Australians about Indonesians, but about letting Indonesians know that in Australia, the concept of space is different, or the concept of time or, yeah, modesty - all those sorts of things.

As an organisation run primarily by Australians, BBIP serves the purpose of introducing Indonesian culture and providing a gateway for a closer relationship between both countries. It has the benefit of its Australian members who understand Australian culture. However, the Consulate General also has an interest despite BBIP being an autonomous and non-governmental entity.

Discussion

The Consulate General performs vital tasks in providing citizen services and promoting a positive image of Indonesia. An essential element in the process is communication. The public for the Consulate General are both Indonesians and Western Australians. Both publics are reached with different tools of communication and receive different intended messages. The use of traditional and modern communication technologies implies that the Consulate General enacts the role of *communication technician* (Broom, 2009). The Consulate General plans, creates and produces its packaged message. Two-way communication occurs in relation to Consular matters and immigration rules. Furthermore, this means other public relations models such as public information and two-way asymmetrical communication, or even the combination of the four models are still relevant for the Consulate General (Grunig and Hunt, 1984). The challenge facing the Consulate General in establishing two-way symmetrical communication, that cultivates mutual understanding, may lie in the nature of the Consulate General as a government agency. The autonomy of Balai Bahasa Indonesia Perth (BBIP) as a nongovernmental organisation may preserve the independence of that organisation. Publics will tend to ignore cultural agents that are seen as close partners with a government agency (Gienow-Hecht and Donfried, 2010). Although BBIP has positive intent toward both countries, its independence from tangible government involvement may explain the success of its approach to Western Australians.

To promote Indonesia, the Consulate General uses various formal and informal means. The formal means are consistent with what Signitzer and Coombs (1992) have called traditional diplomacy; government to government. However, the findings show the Consulate General also employed informal strategies, including personal approaches and cultural promotions. The Consul General emphasised an informal *one on one* approach, accessing a larger range of people than only Western Australian government officials. These personal meetings were seen as strengthening the formal approach already conducted with various government agencies by the Consul General and his staff. It can be said that the Indonesian government wants Indonesia to be known as a nation that is polite and friendly; an attitude which becomes a part of the national identity (Samovar, Porter and McDaniel, 2008). The more subtle approaches of the personal and the informal indicate that contemporary public diplomacy is not about propaganda *per se* (Gilboa, 2008). Diplomacy is an intricate process in which an initial interpersonal relationship that accentuates the interest in developing a mutual understanding, is the precursor to a lasting nation to nation relationship.

The image building activities described are consistent with Curtin and Gaither's (2007) view that the main publics targeted for image cultivation are governments (WA government) and other international actors, such as NGOs (non-government organisations). In this case, the Australia Indonesia Business Council (AIBC) and BBIP are the international actors with BBIP fulfilling the cultural diplomatic role of a nongovernmental agency (Wang, 2006). It is interesting that BBIP is a WA based organisation with the majority of committee members being Australian. BBIP is not just Western Australians receiving the outcomes of promotion by the Indonesian government, it actively promotes Indonesian culture.

The Consulate General's activities reflect the dimensions of public diplomacy put forward by Nye (2008) and cover not only daily interaction with the foreign public but also the effort of the agency to build long term relationships. The activities show the soft power of diplomacy through interpersonal relationships, with public relations at the centre. Our findings also show that Western Australians and Indonesians are different types of public. Indonesian citizens could be defined as an active public (Signitzer and Wamser, 2006) who may influence how the Consulate General performs its duties. Western Australians connect with the Consulate General for limited purposes, such as visa requirements, business, or as guests at certain cultural events and may thus be seen as aware publics (Signitzer and Wamser, 2006).

In relation to the Consulate General's cultural programs, structured research into public opinion would be useful to define the Western Australian public it will face. Through research, the Consulate General is *listening* to the public (Cull, 2008). It scans the environment and collects information about their primary public, which is an initial step in public diplomacy (Cull, 2008). Toward the Indonesian government, the Consulate General enacts the role of a *boundary spanner* when it is relaying information about the environment to the organisation in which the process is conducted in a symmetrical fashion (Fawkes, 2007). The media monitoring conducted by the Consulate General could be expanded into deeper research on the nature of Western Australians resulting in more effective cultural communication. With respect to what L'Etang (2008, p. 212) has referred to as "a government-sponsored official notion of national culture", a richer mutual understanding may require more than displays of arts,

performance and delicious cuisine. Still, it is clear that messages about culture, packaged in the form of the arts (dances, music, cuisine, costume etc), do allow Western Australians to identify with the iconic culture of Indonesia. This iconic culture represents the identity of Indonesia as a nation, whose members are Indonesian (Samovar, Porter and McDaniel, 2008). However, to truly understand Indonesia, Western Australians would need to take into account the varied ethnic identities, languages and cultural practices that make up the diverse nation of Indonesia. So while iconic cultural activities are considered to be supportive elements of the formal relationship between both governments, their influence and effectiveness in cultivating deeper mutual understanding, and for promoting a certain image, are perhaps limited but have the potential to be extended.

Ananto (2004, p. 278) has commented on the collective nature of Indonesian culture and the concept of “*gotong royong* (spirit of mutual responsibility for a task where each person belongs to a team)”. In cooperating with the Indonesian organisations to reach Indonesians in Western Australia, the Consulate General displays the nature of a collectivistic society utilising available members (Hofstede, 1984; Kent and Taylor, 2011). In order to reach dispersed communities, other than through community visits, the Consulate General communicates with key persons of Indonesian communities or organisations. The key person or people in the group act as an important gatekeeper and a channel of communication with the Consulate General. With respect to public relations, Indonesian organisations play an important part in the communication process. Indonesian organisations can initiate and accommodate dialogue, and thus become a link in a collective society type of public relations. The Indonesian organisations initiate dialogue through the utilisation of information and communication technologies, such as social networking. The organisations themselves facilitate communication between the Consulate General and Indonesian communities, thus performing a role described as *communication facilitator* (Broom, 2009). The use of communication technologies such as social networking on mobile devices may become the key to enhanced communication and promotion by the Consulate General, and perhaps cultivate real two-way symmetrical communication. This method of communication can also be used with Western Australians, a means that may support the formal promotion efforts from the central government. In this way aware publics can be made into active publics.

Although two-way symmetrical communication is an ideal seldom realised, there are significant elements of cultural exchange occurring in the interactions of the Indonesian Consulate General in Perth. Indonesian community organisations play a key role in assisting the Consulate General to communicate with its publics. Overall, this project has found that cultural diplomacy is a form of public relations, enacted through culturally based promotional activities using a combination of traditional and modern communication practices.

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Coal seam gas in Australia: can activists be effective from the margins?

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Abstract

Activist groups have dual identities: the way they see themselves and the way others see them. Community opposition to coal seam gas and large-scale coal mining in Australia has highlighted this distinction as the radical “Lock the Gate Alliance” and others attempt to hold back the accelerating momentum of coal seam gas exploitation.

This paper backgrounds CSG development in Australia and applies activism, social identity and risk scholarship to examine this alliance of highly motivated opponents in terms of its self-identified roles and responses to industry and governments. It explores implications for organisations confronted by radical activists who pursue a strategy of non-cooperation and questions the effectiveness of such an approach. The paper suggests that non-cooperation may limit activists’ capacity to achieve their objectives.

Key words: activism, coal seam gas, social identity, risk

Introduction

Community social movement or activism has generated a substantial body of research and literature across many different fields of public relations in terms of both promoting and responding to activist causes (Burke, 2005; den Hond & de Bakker, 2007; Hon 2006, Spar & La Mure, 2003). These include corporate communications, political lobbying, stakeholder relations, issue management, framing, community outreach, corporate social responsibility, reputation management, investor communications, and crisis management among others.

However, the many aspects of activism can usefully be brought together in a case study, where focus on a particular activist campaign can effectively illuminate the actions and motivations of parties to an issue and present the strategies used for examination.

Controversy over the extraction of coal seam gas is a classic activist issue, superficially appearing to pit small communities against mining giants. But when this controversy migrated to Australia in the 1990s a more sophisticated scenario emerged involving the contest of national, local, financial, political, environmental and social forces.

An outspoken opponent of coal seam gas exploration and development in Australia is the Lock the Gate Alliance. In this paper, case analysis is used to explore how this radical activist alliance positioned itself within a tangle of competing agendas. We suggest that the group has found itself on the margins of policy development because it is isolated by idealism and a strategy of non-cooperation,

Background

Australia’s wealth has long relied on mineral exploitation, going back to the gold rushes of the 1850s and 1860s, although minerals have overtaken agricultural products as the country’s most valuable exports. Furthermore, energy resources play a dominant role, with coal being Australia’s second largest export earner (second only to iron ore) closely followed by gas, petroleum products and uranium.

While these energy resources came from offshore gas fields or remote mine sites, Australia's largely urban population paid only limited attention. But that began to change in the 1990s with the emerging exploitation of coal seam gas (CSG). It is over 95% methane and is extracted from relatively shallow coal deposits, typically at between 300 and 1,000 metres. CSG is used for industrial and domestic purposes, as well as in gas turbines to generate electricity (CSIRO, 2012)

Most importantly, substantial areas of CSG reserves largely coincide with high-value agricultural land, with some areas also lying above Australia's important underground water resources, particularly in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia.

With CSG development perceived to be threatening farm land and water resources, and moving closer to larger urban areas, the industry has become a lightning rod for public concern about "uncontrolled development", with opposition further fuelled by the claimed environmental risks of hydraulic fracturing (fracking) of coal seams to release the gas.

The three populous "eastern states" are where much of the commercial CSG has been identified and where it is believed many of the political, social and environmental issues will be played out. Adding complexity to the issue is that while the Commonwealth has some regulatory authority over underground aquifers, state governments control mining licences and land use planning.

Queensland has by far the greatest CSG development, with 90% of the state's gas coming from CSG and massive current investment in huge plants to convert CSG to LNG for export. New South Wales also has large CSG reserves, though only very limited current production, but is moving to extend exploration and development after the withdrawal of a temporary moratorium. Victoria also has substantial CSG reserves but no active development. At the time of writing the state has a moratorium on exploration and development pending establishment of national guidelines being developed jointly by the Commonwealth and State governments, based on the work of a Federal Independent Expert Scientific Committee established in 2011.³

Broadly, however, the Commonwealth and state governments all support appropriate development of CSG in the national and local interest, provided adequate safeguards are in place. This is the environment in which the Lock the Gate Alliance finds itself attempting to hold back development.

Theoretical framework

The issue of coal seam gas development in Australia, and how it is managed in terms of the communication and policy strategies of key stakeholders, can be seen in the context of three broad areas of scholarship – activism, social identity and risk.

Activism

Larissa Grunig was an early researcher in the field of activism whose definition of an activist group has stood the test of time:

".. a group of two or more individuals who organise to influence another public or publics through action that may include education, compromise, persuasion,, pressure tactics or force (Grunig, L. 1992)

Although her definition was satisfyingly broad, much of the subsequent scholarship has focused on what has been called an "organisational-centric" approach to understanding activism, which builds on a characterization of bilateral relationships between organisations – primarily big business or big government – and activist groups.

This "corporate vs activist" approach has produced a substantial literature exploring the development of organisational "response" to what is presented as an activist "problem". This in turn, saw the emergence of a major

³ www.environment.gov.au/coal-seam-gas-mining/index.html

sub-section of the literature which aligns activism with anti-corporatism. Some of this more confrontational literature – from the activist and the corporate viewpoint – specifically addresses both the morality and value of co-operation and warns of the perceived dangers of such co-operation (Beder, 2006; Nicols, 2001).

At the same time two other important areas developed – firstly, attempting to understand and characterise the nature and motivation of activists (Fassin, 2009; Henderson, 2005; Jaques, 2006) and secondly, attempting to define a *modus vivendi* between activists and their targets (Burke, 2005; Galloway, 2005; Taylor, Vasquez & Doorley, 2003)

Updating the original Grunig definition, den Hond and de Bakker (2007) wrote:

Activist groups emerge out of the need for organisation and co-ordination. They are *activist* in transforming shared ideals, concerns and grievances into organized contention, and they are a *group* in the sense that a collective identify enables them to overcome the problem of collective action (p. 903)

When characterising such groups it is a common practice to place them along a spectrum – from those which are willing to co-operate with corporates and authorities, to radical groups which reject any co-operation with the establishment

In the context of corporate social change, reformative groups can be defined as those which believe that although companies are part of the problem they can also be part of the solution. By contrast, radical groups do not believe that companies can part of the solution (den Hond and de Bakker, 2007).

This distinction has led to a great deal of theorizing on how both corporates and activists should develop mutual relationships (Cooper, 2009; Hon, 2006; Susskind & Field, 1996). A very influential early conception was “two-way symmetrical communication” which was developed as an ideal model (Grunig, J, 1992; Grunig, Grunig and Dozier, 2002) However, this approach has many critics, who argue that two-way communication is essential, but that symmetry may be illusory (Derville, 2005; Stokes & Rubin, 2010)

In fact, some activist groups at the radical end of the spectrum reject the win-win philosophy and regard co-operation as a sell-out. As one activist manual proposes:

Be a responsible extremist. Responsible extremism sets the agenda. To move the media, you must communicate as responsible extremists, not as reasonable moderates (Gunther, 1985, para.8).

It is this contest between corporates and confrontation which is explored in the case study here which involves the Lock the Gate Alliance.

Social identity and the social construction of risk

What is it that unites the disparate membership of organisations such as the Lock the Gate Alliance (LTGA) and their individual adherents other than a desire to preserve and protect things they value? Stallings argued that “risk and safety are not objective conditions ‘out there’ simply waiting to be perceived by citizens or calculated by professional risk analysts”; rather, he contended, they are embedded in social structure (1990,p. 80). Risk, then, is socially constructed, not just scientifically assessed. While LTGA is focused on perceived risks associated with coal and coal seam gas extraction, the scope of its attention and activity is wider than hazards alone, so risk theories are not in themselves sufficient to explain the movement’s motivation and growth. Theories of identity provide one way of considering how such organisations are able to link such a diversity of groups.

The theories suggest that social movement organisations are sustained by people who find in them a *raison d’etre* related not only to the organisation’s identity but also to their own. Further, social identity theory advances the notion that while people identify with their own group, they accentuate differences with those who do not belong. For example, LTGA’s activism appears to be founded in a preservationist identity, with its protest tactics expressing an ethos based on protecting what the group prizes against the perceived depredations of outsiders. In the same way, the outsiders, whether governments or mining companies, are positioned as possessing identities which at best are conservationist (where that term is understood to mean the wise use of the world’s resources to

benefit people) and at worst, predatory, profit-driven and indifferent to communities' concerns, setting up a "we care, they don't" dichotomy.

Identity is one of the main factors influencing sustained participation in social movements (Klandermans, 2002 and Whittier, 1995, in Hardnack, 2011, p.65). However, social movement scholars' studies have extended beyond individual identities to encompassing "the broader collective identities of social movements and social movement organisations (Hardnack, 2011, p. 64). Hardnack notes that "new social movement theory suggests collective identities define personal and social identities" (p.65). Collective identity has been linked to social movement participation and activity (Hardnack, 2011, p.66); Melucci (1989) says it is the way a group collectively defines itself, taking into account "members' common interests, experiences, and solidarity" (cited in Hardnack, 2011, p.67).

Henderson studied the role of identity and power in issues management campaigns, illustrating "how issues management strategies involving the management of multiple identities can motivate significant public activism" (2005, p.117). She cites Heath, who suggested that identity – creating a persona characteristic of the organisation – was one of the key elements of any issue management campaign and commented that people are often simply asked to trust the symbolic identity of an organisation (1997,p. 124, in Henderson, 2005, p.124). Drawing on Cheney & Christensen's view that organisations "must attempt to manage both identifiable issues and their own identities", Henderson comments that, "an interest group resisting the normalised discourse needs, therefore, to articulate a particular identity to facilitate legitimation of this counter-discourse and to gain support" (Cheney & Christensen, 2001, p. 233, in Henderson, 2005,p. 124).

Henderson uses three ideas in discussing identity, suggesting that it may be viewed as "belonging"; "representation" and "a way of organising". She describes the latter concept as "how individuals create structures that build an identity as an organisation or interest group" (Cheney & Christensen, 2001; R.Scott, Corman, & Cheney, 1998, in Henderson, 2005, p. 125). In this sense, says Henderson, identity management is an important strategy in issues management.

Fielding et al argue that "Whether community members engage in environmental activism is ...likely to be determined by whether they are aligned with a group that encourages and supports this type of behaviour" (2005, p.6). They note that:

According to social identity theory, an individual's self-concept comprises both personal and social identities (Abrams 1999; Tajfel 1981; Turner et al., 1994). Personal identities involve unique self-descriptions, whereas a social identity is the part of an individual's self-concept that stems from membership of a social group (or groups) and comprises knowledge of that membership, as well as the value and emotional significance that the membership entails (Tajfel 1981). Identification and categorisation of the self in terms of a particular social group or category highlights the similarities shared with members of that same group and the differences between the in-group and other out-groups (Turner et al, 1994)

On this basis, we argue that LTGA resists normalised discourse needs, as described by Henderson, and that in line with her analysis, LTGA's articulation and reinforcement of its identity may be seen not only as reactive, a response to CSG developments, but also as strategic and forward-looking.

The Lock the Gate Alliance

According to its website (<https://lockthegate.org.au>, accessed 26 October, 2012)

Lock the Gate Alliance is a national grassroots organisation made up of thousands of individuals and over 160 local groups who are concerned about inappropriate mining. The mission of the Lock the Gate Alliance is to protect Australia's natural, environmental, cultural and agricultural resources from inappropriate mining and to educate and empower all Australians to demand sustainable solutions to food and energy production (*About Lock the Gate*, paras 1 & 2).

The Alliance says it has five central aims: to protect Australia's water systems; agricultural land for food and fibre production; bushlands, wetlands and wildlife; the health of all Australians and Australia's Aboriginal and cultural heritage (LTGA website, *About Lock the Gate*, para.4, accessed 26 October, 2012).

The Lock the Gate Alliance was formed in 2010 following meetings in New South Wales and Queensland of landholders and others concerned about the rapid expansion of coal and coal seam gas development. LTGA president Mr Drew Hutton credits private showings of the controversial 2010 documentary *Gasland*⁴ with sparking the initial interest. The film deals with communities affected by natural gas drilling in the United States, and for many Australians was certainly their first exposure to the issue.

Mr Hutton, an environmental advocate and former Green Party candidate (Macfie, 2012), spent time in regional and rural areas canvassing the issues with farmers. He told New Zealand journalist Rebecca Macfie that during that period, he learned of mounting tensions between landowners and the companies drilling for gas on and around their properties. "[Farmers] were feeling disempowered ... They had no way of organising, or any real strategy to deal with what they were facing. I said to farmers, 'You might not like me [as a prominent environmentalist]', and farmers haven't tended to like environmentalists. But I said to them that they were not going to win this west of the Great Dividing Range⁵ as a farmers' issue, and I didn't think it could be won as a green issue, either. They needed to be brought together." (Macfie, 2012, para. 2). Mr Hutton called a meeting and "suggested either [we] roll over or take [things] to a new level". In an interview with one of the authors he identified a town/country aspect: "Farmers saw the advantage of a strategic alliance – [taking] the fight to the city" (pers comm, 27 June, 2012).

Formation

In late 2010 a forum representing over 40 community, professional and environmental groups from across Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia found that communities across Australia faced common issues wherever coal mining and coal seam gas was being expanded. The forum "considered the role of government in the expansion of the coal and coal seam gas industries and the lack of consideration for the will of local residents and communities in the approval of these coal and gas projects." (LTGA website, *History*, para.2, accessed 26 October, 2012).

Meanwhile in south-east Queensland, local landholders, farmers and environmentalists gathered to consider a response to the state government's approval of a number of major coal seam gas developments. At this meeting "the 'Lock the Gate' name was decided, and so began the campaign calling on all landholders to refuse to negotiate access to coal seam gas companies and refuse to negotiate sale of their properties to coal companies" (LTGA website, *History*, para.3., accessed 26 October, 2012).

The Lock the Gate campaign was launched in November 2010, while The Lock the Gate Alliance (LTGA) was incorporated in NSW in December 2010 and became a registered company in March 2012. Member groups (167 at time of writing) range from animal advocates (Australians for Animals NSW) to chambers of commerce (Bulahdelah Chamber of Commerce) to churches (Community Church of St Mark, Clifton Hill, Victoria) to environmental issues advocates (Friends of the Earth) to water users (NSW Artesian BoreWater Users Association) to indigenous groups (the Plains Clan of the Wonnarua People).

Principles

⁴ www.gaslandthemovie.com

⁵ The Great Dividing Range separates the east coast of Australia from the inland (<http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/austn-rocks-and-mountains>)

The Alliance says it is committed to three core principles:

1. That robust scientific assessment, the precautionary principle, and the principle of intergenerational equity should guide decision-making.
2. That communities should have the ultimate say, within the context of principle 1.
3. That it will support all and any communities who support the objectives of the Alliance (LTGA website, *About Lock the Gate*, para.3, accessed 26 October, 2012).

[The precautionary principle “asserts, essentially, that ‘when there is scientific uncertainty as to the nature of [the] damage or the likelihood of the risk’ posed by some activity...’then decisions should be made so as to prevent such activity...unless and until scientific evidence shows that the damage will not occur” (Sunstein, 2005, in Slovic, 2010, p. 190)].

In an interview with one of the authors, Mr Hutton outlined other Alliance values:

- Autonomy and “self-activity”. “A blockade [of a farming property to prevent drilling] is always run by the local group. There is never any hint of the central organisation taking over. There is an ethic of we’re here to help, not take over.”
- Guarding the land: “It’s almost nationalistic – about protecting [our] country”
- Community cohesiveness on the CSG issue (and also on coal mining issues – the Alliance is against both). This means looking to what the Alliance sees as the community interest rather than individuals’ interests: “We are not just leaving it to the landowner as, if one lets them [the coal seam gas miners] on [to their land], it divides the community.”
- “Respect for rural people – farmers” (pers comm 27 June, 2012).

An earlier version of the LTGA website, accessed on 22 June, 2012, included material on the Alliance’s views about governments’ role, stating that the grouping was concerned about

the devastating impact that certain inadequately addressed and inadequately-regulated fossil fuel extraction industries are having on our short and long term physical, social, environmental and economic wellbeing.

Under the heading of *What does LOCK THE GATE want?* The Alliance was unequivocal about its view on governments’ role:

neither we, nor our governments (at all levels) are sufficiently well informed about these industries, about their true role in our economy and their impact on our health and welfare as a nation...We are concerned that the short-term greed associated with these industries (including that of governments through royalties and other returns) is compromising the welfare of future generations of Australians and our future ability to thrive in a new world driven by renewable energy sources. We believe that the interaction of these industries with our governments and the extreme imbalance between the way their rights are measured against the rights of others in the community is indicative of a system that is no longer working for all Australians and that has lost a moral and ethical compass.

The Alliance added that its mission was “to hold our governments to account for past decisions regarding the operation of destructive fossil fuel industries and ensure that future decisions incorporate the rights of current and future generations of Australians to sustain their communities...” (LTGA website, accessed 22 June, 2012).

In this context, LTGA’s diverse membership and sweeping aims need more than an anti coal-seam gas agenda to unite them. As previously outlined, social identity theory is one way of explaining what that “glue” might be: a shared identity based on a perception that the alliance’s persona is that of a guardian preserving the environment, farmland and rural ways of life for the future. The more this preservationist manifesto is articulated by, and within, the alliance, the more differences between alliance members and mining companies and others are underscored. The mining companies are not only conceptually on the outer; they are to be physically placed outside locked gates and denied access to landholders’ property. They are positioned as predators, particularly urban predators, whose depredations may be irreversible and are therefore to be resisted.

Activities

In addition to its website, LTGA operates a Facebook page and Twitter feeds. An indication of the spread of its activities is available on its website under the heading, *Latest news* (accessed 26 October, 2012). The news section describes how a

week of action saw thousands of Australians take part in local events to protest the rapidly expanding unsustainable coal seam gas and coal mining industries that are threatening to do irreversible damage to our land, water and the health of our communities.

The events included towns declaring, or moving towards declaring themselves CSG-free (Nattai, in the Sydney basin, and Poowong, in Victoria, respectively); thousands of people turning out to form two massive human signs spelling out “Stop CSG!” and “Protect H2O, Stop CSG!”; a big “Rock the Gate” concert and a group called “The Knitting Nannas” hosted tours of “Gasino” (the town of Casino, home to coal seam gas mining company Metgasco). In addition, abseilers from six regions in Queensland dropped banners from a cliff at Kangaroo Point, Brisbane, protesting coal and coal seam gas encroachment.

Day-to-day promotional and advocacy activities are indicated by the range of resources available on the LTGA website, such as a model advertisement for a rally in various centres; sample letters such as a generic letter to a Minister and a template letter of objection to coal seam gas exploration/production; copies of flyers in printer-ready format; petitions, lists of chemicals used in hydraulic fracturing (“fracking”) to release coal seam gas; presentations; posters; white papers and even a state election “scorecard” to rate candidates by their position on LTGA issues. There are also sample parliamentary submissions, contact lists, and documents and links for registered LTGA members.

Non-cooperation

The Alliance’s platform does not promote negotiation as a desired outcome of its activities. According to Mr Hutton, “The core of the LTGA campaign is a non-cooperation campaign”; a “Ghandian style campaign” (pers comm 27 June, 2012).

Mr Hutton reportedly told Rebecca Macfie that, “We’ve had farmers who have never broken the law in their lives, and who are some of the most conservative people in the country, stand on blockades and even get arrested ... Our strategy is basically to harass [the gas companies], slow them down, make their lives as miserable as we possibly can, so that governments are forced to say there is a moratorium on until we are absolutely sure what the impacts are. And we’re going to narrow their [commercial] margins along the way (Macfie, 2012, para.5.)”

In Mr Hutton’s view, the broader environmental movement has allowed its strength to be sapped through compromise: “[It] has been weakened almost to the point of not being able to campaign. You don’t negotiate with the Government – that’s the last thing you’d do” (pers comm 27 June, 2012). He is sceptical about industry and government assurances that environmental regulation and monitoring of the industry is robust, alleging that both the sector and the Government have a “suck it and see” approach that “throws the precautionary principle out the window ... They simply don’t know what the impacts are going to be on people’s health or the water or land” (Macfie, 2012, para.6). His advice to people in New Zealand, where the Government aims to accelerate the development of oil and gas industries, was to “call on the Government to introduce a moratorium until all the research is done on the impacts” (Macfie, 2012, para. 7).

LTGA is an alliance of groups with a broad sweep of concerns, identifying themselves with oppositional, activist positions on issues that go well beyond the immediate questions around coal resource development and coal seam gas mining. For example, an earlier version of their website (accessed 22 June, 2012) referred to the

possibility of falling property values and potential road damage and traffic hazards from the transport of heavy machinery. “Thousands of hectares of remnant vegetation will be destroyed...Losses will include endangered communities and the habitat of threatened species,” the website said. LTGA, therefore, is much more than a grassroots movement centred on a perceived need to mitigate a hazard-related risk or set of risks.

Although the Alliance has asserted it is not against mining as such, it argues for application of the precautionary principle to prevent mining activities until they can be proven safe. As long as the relevant science on subjects such as fracking remains disputable, such a point may never be reached. Its own statements, whether via the website or its leader, characterise LTGA as a largely preservationist movement seeking its risk mitigation objectives in the context of a wider agenda to guard everything from prime agricultural land to wildlife and ways of life, such as those of farmers.

The alliance’s approach is reminiscent of the preservation movement in the US, which emphasises protecting the environment for its own sake, rather than that of scientific conservationists, who were interested in saving the environment for human purposes (see http://library.thinkquest.org/26026/History/preservationists_versus_conser.html.) It is logical, therefore, for a preservationist movement to reject any responses to its activities that do not amount to a continuation of the *status quo*, as compromise would inevitably entail an agreed loss of some at least of what the is determined to keep safe.

Discussion

As previously described, reformative activist groups believe they can work with target organisations to achieve positive outcomes, while radical activists regard co-operation as a sell-out. While labels can be superficial and pejorative, it is useful to consider LTGA within that context. Derville (2005) says radical activist organisations manage their communications in ways that significantly differ from other organisations, and she offers this definition:

A radical activist organisation is a group of two or more people who come together in opposition to something in their environment, including threats to the status quo: they work outside of the system to express their objections; influence social goals, or both, through means such as agitative communication with key organisations that contribute to the phenomenon they oppose (p. 528)

On this basis we suggest LTGA would be classified as radical. The organisation is generally neither militant nor extremist, yet their policy of non-cooperation and no compromise is unambiguous. A Derville concludes, radical activists “view moderate approaches as ineffective compared with hard-line positions, and demand more ground than their targets are willing to give” (2005, p. 529).

The issue under discussion here is not the merits or morality of this approach, but whether it is effective. By setting itself aside from establishment groups and moderate/reformative activists, LTGA has positioned itself outside the ambit of policy decision-making and influence.

Its inclusive involvement of a wide variety of social, cultural, heritage and moral factors has widened its constituency but weakened its focus. Accordingly, effort and expectation is committed to areas which are not on the immediate agenda of the principal actors in the issue.

Moreover, LTGA’s strategy has little alignment or correspondence with the key proponents, regulators or moderate opponents.

For instance, while LTGA purports to represent rural interests, the leading farmer associations have clearly stated that they do not oppose appropriate CSG development in principal and do not support a general farmer veto. Similarly, key local government organisations, which stand to benefit from rural jobs and regional investment, also support appropriate development, as do Federal and State governments and both main political parties.

We do not suggest that the social, cultural, heritage and moral factors embraced by the alliance are unimportant or insignificant. But we do believe the result has been that LTGA has effectively dealt itself out of mainstream contention.

Implications for PR practice

From an activist viewpoint the LTGA example can be seen in two different ways – in terms of participation and identity, and in terms of policy effectiveness. There is no doubt that LTGA has raised and mobilised a range of legitimate concerns and provides a focus for that nexus of issues. Furthermore, by acting out against the enemy, activist organisations “declare themselves winners even when no social territory is gained because of member fulfilment” (Derville, 2005, p 530)

However, in terms of effectiveness, the policy of non-cooperation appears to be a flawed approach. The Gandhian principle of non-cooperation - which LTGA evokes – was a non-violent mass movement to end British rule in India (Bakshi, 1983). It aimed to bring Government to a standstill by withdrawing support for government institutions and a boycott of British goods. Its strength was a united mass population used in a “decidedly nationalistic context” (Ramanathan, 2006, p.235) against unfair and unjust government, which is hardly an appropriate comparison to the LTGA and its cause. For a genuine grass-roots movement to be effective it needs to be relevant and connected, and focused on specific and readily expressed objectives. Politics is often described as the art of compromise, and the CSG issue is fundamentally a political issue.

From a corporate/government perspective the CSG debate in Australia is largely a process of “finding a way to make it work.” There are many genuine, practical concerns, but the end-point is to develop the industry in what is seen as the national interest. Major concerns raised by government and industry groups and reformative activists include encroachment on prime farm land; threats to surface and underground water; land access; sustainable food production; environmental emissions; compensation for land-holders; equitable sharing of royalties; and adverse impact on small communities.

But all of these are presented as operational details which can be negotiated by using a mutual gains approach (Susskind & Field, 1996) as opposed to the ethical and moral issues predicated by the alliance. Meantime, apart from the state of Victoria where a moratorium remains in place, CSG exploration and development is proceeding, albeit cautiously. By marginalizing itself, LTGA has become effectively isolated from any meaningful part of that negotiation, and this very important social and economic development seems likely to proceed without their participation.

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Teaching Public Relations to Students with a Confucian Cultural Background

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Abstract

This paper explores how the Confucian cultural background of students influences their perceptions of and reaction to the dominant public relations curriculum from the 'West'. Using focus groups of Asian students, three heuristics that affect the students' affinity to learn public relations are identified. Instructors working with students from a Confucian cultural background are advised to incorporate these heuristics when planning their curriculum.

Keywords: Teaching, Public Relations, Intercultural Relations

Teaching Public Relations to Students with a Confucian Cultural Background.

Globalization has led to the emergence of the Asian economies. Over the last 4 decades, they have increased their output tremendously while the scope of their business operations has expanded and now includes the management of multiple external relations. Today, large Asian businesses operate on the principles that: a) they need to compete for the attention of customers, b) they are accountable for the quality of their products and, c) the public extends this accountability to all aspects of their business, including workplace conditions and service quality. These principles have also gained traction because of the simultaneous rise in the average level of education in Asian societies, and the increased access to information both from a technological and a cognitive standpoint.

Not surprisingly, these operating principles have led to public relations becoming an increasingly important business function in the Asian 'tiger economies', one that is attracting more managerial resources, attention and workforce entrants each year. Tertiary institutions in many 'Asian tiger' countries have begun to incorporate public relations into their undergraduate social science and/or business curricula. While there are very few graduate programmes in corporate communication in Asian Universities, most programmes in mass communication or business administration include at least one course on public relations or public affairs. Additionally, courses in public opinion or persuasive communication are sometimes seen to provide public relations knowledge.

Given the comparative recency of public relations as a business function in Asian economies, and the paradigmatic dominance of 'Western' concepts in academia, these courses, while taught in Asian Universities to an Asian student population, are often based on Western curriculum design standards (e.g. Commission on Public Relations Education, 2006, 2012), teaching materials and textbooks. Much has been written about the effects of cultural backgrounds on business interactions (Hofstede, 2005; Hall, 1976; House *et al.*, 2004), on public relations (Gupta & Bartlett, 2007) as well as on education as a systemic purpose and a personal experience (De Bary, 1984, 2007). No data yet exists though, about how a learner's cultural background (whether it is an overt meta-model or merely a loose set of worldviews) frames and the affects teaching of public relations and its hitherto mostly Western pedagogical origins. The primary goal of this study is therefore to explore how Asian students' cultural identity affects their affinity to learn public relations. It also aims to show how affinity (or the lack of it) can be integrated into the planning of a PR curriculum.

Methodology

The study faced a methodological challenge brought about by the fact that most Asian students are unlikely to point out any cultural distance between themselves and the course content, especially if doing so would give the impression that they were distancing themselves from - or even criticizing - their course instructors. Thus, we asked the students to reflect upon the differences between themselves and their fellow 'Western' students in the public relations course. The research question of this paper was:

How do Asian students demarcate their cultural identity from 'the West' when learning public relations?

Focus group interviews were conducted with undergraduate Asian students after they had completed an introductory or advanced public relations course with students from Europe, the Americas, Australia or New Zealand. Each course employed a case-based, participant-centred pedagogy, where students interacted very regularly with each other in project groups as well as in plenary sessions. The courses and focus groups took place in tertiary institutions where participants were either exchange students (alongside 'Western' full-time students) or were enrolled full-time (alongside 'Western' exchange students). English was the language of instruction in all courses.

The participants were between 21 and 27 years of age and came from China, Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea. The focus groups were conducted twice annually between 2005 and 2011, and once again in 2012. They took place in Germany (International School of Management), New Zealand (Unitec), Singapore (Singapore Management University) and Taiwan (National Taiwan University of Science and Technology). Importantly, the participants in the focus group were – with the exception of Asian students at Unitec- at least as proficient in English as their 'Western' counterparts (at ISM, Germany and NTUST, Taiwan) or spoke English as a native language (at SMU, Singapore).

Six to nine Asian students were recruited for each focus group for what was termed 'informal course feedback' after the final course grades had been released to the students. Participants' recruitment was a self-selection process, but focus groups reflected a range of performance scores, as well as both genders. After providing general course feedback, the students were asked to comment on the following question: "How did you experience the collaboration with the exchange students from [country names] in this course?" (if the focus group participants were in their home University), or "How did you experience the collaboration with the students of [University name] in this course?" (if the focus group participants were exchange students). Participants were encouraged to give examples, elaborate on their observations, and – particularly when they observed differences – suggest underlying causes. Minutes of the each focus group were taken by the course's teaching assistant for later evaluation.

Results

Three themes were surfaced from the comments of the focus group participants on their interactions with 'Western' students and their view of the underlying causes of these perceived differences. These themes emerged unprompted in almost all the focus groups, and were quickly agreed upon whenever they were raised by a participant. They appeared to serve as quick, easily understood demarcations of the participants' cultural identities and demonstrated how they stood apart from the 'West' with regard to learning public relations. We consequently proposed to label them 'demarcation heuristics'.

1. "PR is less important to us than to Western students". Public relations as a profession is often held in low esteem by Asian students. Unlike 'Western' students, the focus group participants drew a sharp line between corporate behaviour and communication, or between action and words, with the latter being less important to them than the former. The paradigm of a public relation curriculum – that all messages are part of the symbolic inter-action of organisations (Zorn, 2002) – seemed inherently 'Western' to them. Instead, the focus group participants agreed that "actions speak louder than words" and "the packaging isn't as important as the content" to them as to the 'Western' students.
2. "We're not as good at communicating as Western students". The Asian students seemed to display a different awareness of their skills (Holmes, 2004). Unlike 'Western' students, who rarely doubt their technical communication skills, the focus group participants often expressed relative ineptitude at crafting messages for the general public, and even more so at verbally conveying messages in public, in spite of their comparable English proficiency. The Asian students expressed that their 'Western' peers were naturally better equipped at talking, but some also derided them as "NATO – no action talk only". They also pointed out that the industry's most vocal practitioners and the most media savvy CEOs all seemed to have a 'Western' cultural background that was often far removed from their own.

3. “The Western case-studies are simplistic”. Although American and European case studies dominate tertiary teaching, the focus group participants did not criticise this regional bias. Instead, they questioned the cause-and-effect style of narrative that is frequently adopted. Most case-studies revolve around key personae and their efforts to overcome strategic and operational obstacles. Asian students frequently remarked that companies are rarely “one-man-shows” (“It’s not like in Hollywood”).

Analysis

All focus group participants were socio-culturally from what the GLOBE study (House *et al.*, 2004) calls ‘Confucian societies’. They were highly self-aware of their Confucian upbringing, frequently referring to it in their attempts to meta-analyse the focus group’s conversations and two of their three demarcation heuristics. We hence employ the Confucian cultural background as an analytical framework.

Confucianism is a normative model of society based on the understanding that each individual’s behaviour is expected to contribute ultimately to the establishment of an ideal society. Although Confucianism has been changed by millennia of human experience in increasingly complex societies, each with their own collective identities, it has maintained its core belief in the importance of establishing harmonious order. This order is metaphysical, but actualized and sustained by the efforts of humans. Individuals are thus expected to engage in a constant effort to cultivate themselves and improve their many relationships, thereby improving the harmonious balance in society.

While relations are maintained by all parties under the Confucian framework, the superior is the entity that guarantees order and trust. Superiors do not have a metaphysical claim to their role, but their actions and decisions are meant to bring about the best outcome for as many subordinates as possible. In pursuing this goal, they are assumed to be pursuing the betterment of society as a whole.

Scholars and sages such as Zhu Xi in the 12th century and Wang Yangming in the 16th century redefined and re-applied the key Confucian principles for their time. By today’s standards, these scholars were ‘opinion leaders’ for the collective identities of their societies. Although not primarily a scholar, Yu Dan comes closest to being the current opinion leader for Confucianism. She is a household name in Chinese communities and is the face and author of TV-series and bestselling books on the ‘Analects’ of Confucius (Dan, 2006, 2010).

Not surprisingly, given the nature of TV and international bestsellers, this popular version of Confucianism makes few references to metaphysics, focusing instead on self-improvement. It calls for every person to be at least the best version of herself and ideally a *junzi* (literally ‘lord’s son’, or gentleman). A *junzi* has a profound personality and remains wary of pettiness and parochialism. A person of deeds, rather than of words, he is ‘halting in speech, but quick in action’ (Analects IV) and knows when it is better to remain respectfully silent in a relationship. Moderation is his general approach to life, and is particularly important when he is pursuing an advantage or portraying himself to others. He will not meddle in matters of the state, public issues or anything for which he does not have immediate responsibility or authority.

This quotidian form of Confucianism can explain at least two of the three demarcation heuristics used by Chinese, South-Korean, Taiwanese and Singaporean students enrolled in PR courses. That they purport to attach less value to communication and more to action than their ‘Western’ peers is in accordance with the normative distinction that Confucianism draws between speaking and doing. This is particularly true for public relations with its inherently persuasive nature and its benefits to the organisation rather than to society. Likewise, the focus group participants’ self-perceived lack of communication aptitude reflects the low priority that Confucianism accords it. When queried, all participants blamed their ‘Confucian education’ for their allegedly underdeveloped communication talent.

Students did not ascribe their difficulty in relating to ‘Western’ case studies to their Confucian socialization. Nevertheless, the relational thinking they found missing is indeed prevalent in Confucian cultures, where harmony means establishing and balancing relationships in all directions, and all the time. Accordingly, Y.K Chung, one of the founders of the public relations profession in Taiwan, defines public relations as “cultivating understanding and harmony to achieve prosperity” (Freitag & Quesinberry Stokes, 2009, p. 157).

Implications for PR education

This study retains a caveat, in that it assessed neither the intensity, nor the centrality of Confucian values for each participating student individually. We instead assumed that cultural origin was an antecedent variable for all students when learning public relations. Similarly, we could not discern if there was an impact in the reverse direction: the interaction with 'Western' students over 'Western' concepts could have affected students' Confucian self-identity or their propensity to reflect upon it. Hence, future research will need to embed the focus group methodology in pre- and post-tests to possibly validate the demarcation heuristics observed here.

At least two of the three demarcation heuristics will likely impact the efficacy with which public relations is taught to students with a Confucian cultural background. It does not necessarily make it more difficult, but the heuristics indicate that instructors may need to take an approach that is somewhat different from what most textbooks purport. Calls to make education and thought leadership in public relations more diverse are not new, but mostly have a macroscopic perspective. Hence, even though increasing cultural diversity has long been a feature of public relations research (e.g. Sriramesh & Vercic, 2009), increasing cultural diversity in public relations classrooms can only be a first and general principle (Creedon & Al-Khaja, 2005) as the demarcation heuristics have a more immediate relation to curriculum design.

Firstly - and very early in a public relations course - a holistic understanding of PR should be established that prevents the discipline from being misperceived as 'just communication'. Educators should instead familiarize Confucian learners with the concept of reputation as the result of an organisation's actions as well as its messages. Secondly, technical exercises in messaging and speaking (up) are best conducted continuously throughout course, not so much to improve students' personal communication skills, but rather their self-confidence.

More generally - and not ascribed to their cultural background by the participants of this study - the concept of multiple stakeholder relations might well be inherently plausible to learners with a Confucian cultural background. Hence, PR and other business processes are likely to be understood by Confucian learners as resulting from multiple relationships, rather than from an individual's or organisation's actions, as is often the case in 'Western' teaching materials (Gupta & Bartlett, 2007). This means that a course can be based on the paradigm of stakeholder management, with case studies (or other teaching materials) illustrating multi-polarity and networked management rather than the actions of individual business personae and their effects.

Lastly, PR- educators need to allow for meta-communication to take place in the classroom and for students to discuss on an ad hoc basis how their affinity to public relations is affected by their cultural background. When this is allowed to become the subject of reflective classroom discourse, future practitioners will be better able to function with the cultural 'other' (George, 2003). Such encounters which will only increase with the further growth of Asian economies.

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Empowering Future Practitioners: A Curriculum Approach to Enhance 'Response Able' Communication about Mental Health Issues.

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Abstract

The power of public relations to shape community attitudes is well documented but with it comes professional responsibility. Mental illness and suicide are two key social issues requiring the profession of public relations to consider its role. This paper reports on the development process and pilot evaluation of a federally funded educational initiative designed to empower public relations undergraduates to consider the impact of communication on public understandings of, and responses to specific social and health issues. While the curriculum materials focus on mental illness and suicide, the process has application to other areas of social responsibility. The curriculum resources reflect the model of empowerment and capacity building, avoiding proscription or censorship but offering emerging practitioners tools and knowledge to make their own informed decisions about the way in which they can responsibly communicate in practice.

Keywords: Public Relations, Community Attitudes, Professional Responsibility, Social Issues, Mental Illness.

Public Relations and Social Impact: The Challenge for Responsible Practice

There is on-going international interest in the impact of certain forms of communication about suicide and mental illness; however Australia is the first country to integrate a program dedicated to public relations practice into its mental health or suicide prevention strategy (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011). While many countries internationally have developed media guidelines that promote responsible reporting of suicide and in some cases mental illness (for example, the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and Hong Kong), a more comprehensive approach has been taken in Australia by working with a range of other sectors (such as the mental health sector, police and courts) and by including this material in the undergraduate training of journalism students (Pirkis, Blood, Beautrais, Burgess, & Skehan, 2006; Skehan et al., 2009). Addressing the role of public relations professionals, through undergraduate training is internationally innovative and so evaluation of its effectiveness is significant.

Research shows that certain representations of suicide may increase the risk of copycat behaviour among vulnerable people (Pirkis & Blood, 2010). There is also concern that people living with a mental illness are predominantly portrayed in a negative and stereotypical way, which may increase stigma and discrimination (Francis et al., 2001). The Australian Government's response to this evidence was the establishment of the *Mindframe* National Media Initiative, funded under the National Suicide Prevention Strategy to encourage responsible, accurate and sensitive media representation of mental illness and suicide (Skehan, Sheridan-Burns, & Hazell, 2009).

While many may argue that the potential for public relations practitioners to influence media content is limited, studies on the effect of public relations on the media have found that almost half of the articles published in major metropolitan media are the result of public relations activity with some media content as high as 70 per cent (Macnamara, 1993; Zawawi, 1994, 2001). Australian studies also show that while the reporting of both suicide and

mental illness is improving in quality in Australia, the number of reports have more than doubled, indicating increased media attention (Pirkis, Blood, Dare, & Holland, 2008). Increased media attention is likely to lead to increased public relations practice, both in a reactive manner and proactively through development of health communication campaigns to influence community attitudes and behaviour. It could be argued that mental health issues are more likely to be a focus of activity for practitioners in the future; necessitating further attention to this area in pre-service education and professional development.

This paper presents a rationale for including public relations in any national strategy to address media reporting and portrayal of suicide and mental illness. It also outlines the developmental process for a curriculum approach and reports on evaluation data from seven institutions that completed a pilot of the program.

Why consider the role of public relations?

Public relations practice has an impact on health and social issues, just as important social issues inevitably have an impact, either directly or indirectly, on public relations practice. Public relations is potentially powerful in shaping public opinion, and can have a significant impact on community attitudes and behaviour (Bowen, 2005). This impact may be even greater for complex social issues such as mental illness and suicide where evidence suggests that, despite improvements, community understanding is generally poor. This lack of understanding leads to confusion, fear, misconceptions, stereotyping and discrimination of those living with a mental illness (Barney, Griffiths, Christensen, & Jorm, 2009; Hocking, 2003; Jorm, Korten, Jacomb, Christensen, & Henderson, 1999; Wahl, 1999).

The power to influence, points to the need for public relations practitioners to have a broader view of ethical standards and practice that include the welfare of specific publics and “to act...in a socially responsible way” (Starck & Kruckeberg, 2003, p. 37; Fitzpatrick & Gauthier, 2001). As Fitch (2012) and others argue, the social impact of public relations practice should be measured beyond business practice and corporate ethics alone, to consider community and society more broadly. Communication can at times “require some limits and careful consideration of... how to influence target audiences” considering both harms and benefits of that communication (Fitzpatrick & Gauthier, 2001, p. 206).

There is possibly no better illustration of these ethical considerations than with the issues of mental illness and suicide. Mental illness and suicide are complex and emotional issues that affect many stakeholders. Mental illnesses and mental health problems are common in the Australian community. Research suggests that one in five people will be directly affected by mental illness in any 12-month period with many more indirectly affected as a family member, friends or colleague (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007). Official data also suggest that just over 2,000 people die by suicide each year in Australia, with many more attempting to take their own lives. This has devastating effects on family, friends, colleagues and potentially the whole community. The way both suicide and mental illness are discussed is important, especially where that discussion occurs through the mass media or other public means (Pirkis & Blood, 2010; Francis, Pirkis, Dunt, & Blood, 2001).

Without appropriate consideration of responsible practice, public relations practice could reinforce the discriminatory attitude of a largely uninformed general public/society, generating further alienation of those most vulnerable. Alternatively, public relations practice that considers the potential impact of these issues on communities and stakeholders. PR could empower publics and assist in breaking down stigma associated with mental illness and in reducing potential harm to those who are vulnerable to suicide or impacted by suicide.

Public relations practitioners need to be conscious of the powerful messages that certain images, symbols, pictures and words are conveying to publics about mental health issues. It is often too easy to use emotive words or images or to escalate an issue through the use of certain statistics to gain interest in an issue or promote a particular client. The practitioner, however, needs to be aware that images and words can perpetuate negative and inaccurate stereotypes about mental illness or place people who are vulnerable to suicide at increased risk by providing specific details about suicide, such as the method or location of a death or deaths (Francis et al., 2001; Pirkis & Blood, 2010). Public relations practitioners need to make choices about the ethical use of language and understand its potential impact on those who may be vulnerable. Is there a case example where this was illustrated?

Public relations practitioners are also uniquely placed to advance the needs of certain publics when armed with appropriate knowledge and skills to navigate the interface between vulnerability, communication, risk and advocacy. To achieve this level of skill, public relations practitioners require relevant education and training to enact their communication roles within a socially responsible framework. The Public Relations Institute of Australia outlines the importance of such a framework in mandating the consideration of social and ethical implications of public relations practice within tertiary education as a prerequisite for accreditation (Public Relations Institute of Australia, 2012).

A Curriculum Approach: Engaging with Educators to Build Relevant Resources

As the largest focus for tertiary study in public relations, the undergraduate degree provides an ideal opportunity to expose future practitioners to social issues and dilemmas and provide them with guided opportunities to understand and navigate complex ethical challenges. Public relations educators, however, need to find practical and relevant ways to introduce these concepts as part of their teaching program.

Response Ability for Public Relations (rebranded as *Mindframe* for public relations in December 2012) was developed in partnership with public relations educators and professionals. It includes a set of flexible multi-media curriculum resources that were based on a successful curriculum program used in the undergraduate training of journalism students (Skehan et al., 2009). While the resources use mental illness and suicide as the topics to be explored, the resources have been developed in a way as to expose students to authentic learning tasks in public relations, such as engaging with real-world case-studies and discussing critical social issues that build the students' understanding and skills for future practice.

Given that these curriculum resources were internationally innovative, public relations educators from around Australia were consulted before the development of the materials to ensure that the resources would be relevant and useful. The project team at the Hunter Institute of Mental Health conducted semi-structured telephone interviews with 23 public relations educators to determine: (a) whether mental illness, suicide or related topics were currently covered in the public relations curriculum; (b) the type of information educators would find useful, and (c) the potential barriers to future uptake. The interviews were conducted with universities (60%), TAFE campuses (22%), private colleges (9%) and the Public Relations Institute of Australia (9%).

The consultation revealed that public relations programs varied, but programs were all structured around core public relations skills and generally did not offer any topic-based subjects. Despite this, some educators indicated that mental health could be included as a campaign example or a student assignment: "They [mental health topics] are covered as case studies where the lecturer thinks they are relevant and appropriate... It's really a matter of incorporating whatever issues are current or the lecturer feels will get the interest of students." In addition, several educators noted students' interest in the topics of mental health and mental illness. When students were offered the opportunity to choose their own topic, many reflected that mental health issues were a very popular choice: "I know when students get to choose their own subjects, a number of them choose mental health...so there is interest out there, but I don't think it should be a subject in itself."

The consultations revealed a strong preference for curriculum resources that were specifically tailored for public relations practice, rather than for redeveloping the current *Mindframe* or *Response Ability* resources. However, similar to Australian journalism educators, there was a strong preference for problem-based learning approaches with topical and relevant case-studies that could enhance student learning of public relations practice while also exposing students to an area that involved management of a sensitive social issue (Skehan et al., 2009). Respondents noted that supporting materials and background documents would also be required to ensure that educators could teach, not only practical skills and tactics, but be in an informed position to address the social responsibility, ethical dilemmas and practical challenges that communication about suicide and mental illness involves.

Educators noted that barriers to uptake would include space within the curriculum to address the issues, a perception that mental illness and suicide may not be the core business of public relations as well as staff discomfort at raising sensitive issues in a classroom setting. Given the prevalence of mental illness and suicide, and the reported misinformation that exists in the community, educators believed they would require additional support to cover the topics well. Educators did, however, believe that these barriers could be managed as long as the

resources were of high quality, easy to use, relevant and provided enough guidance to educators in handling the content areas.

It was clear from consultations with public relations educators that a curriculum approach for public relations programs would need to be flexible and developed in a way that they could be used at various points in the curriculum and in a range of subject areas such as ethics, crisis communication, issues management, media relations and campaign development, to name a few. The resources would also need to be based on core public relations skills, rather than on trying to teach students about mental illness or suicide specifically.

The model of curriculum development already trialed under the *Mindframe* National Media Initiative was translated for use in public relations education; maintaining the inherent problem-based learning design (Skehan et al., 2007, 2009; Greenhalgh & Hazell, 2005; Sheridan-Burns & Hazell, 1998). Problem-based learning models have been used elsewhere for the study of ethics and related subjects within tertiary public relations courses (Slattery, 2002; Erzikova, 2010). In this way, a problem is posed and serves as the context for new learning. To be successful however, it needs to be grounded in real world or authentic contexts (Slattery, 2002).

The resources were developed as an online package and include a core document for students, lecture slides and notes, and six case-studies including video and other multi-media materials. The case-studies are the practical components of the resources and include group work, activities and written exercises that promote what Hutchison described as “active learning”; laying strong foundations for skills proficiency (2002, p. 302). The public relations curriculum resources were developed in partnership with an expert working group of public relations educators and industry representatives who assisted the project team to ensure all exercises and activities were based on ‘real-world’ scenarios. One case study, for example, involves crisis communication about the suicide death of a young person with implications for a number of organisations involved. Other case studies involved the development of a mental health campaign to promote help-seeking behaviour and planning an event to raise awareness of mental illness and engage publics. The case-study and lecture materials are supported by information to assist educators in using the materials and discussing sensitive issues with students, as well as a range of fact sheets that provide background context, facts and statistics, and summaries of research evidence. Refer to www.mindframe-media.info for access to the curriculum resources.

The curriculum resources reflect the model of empowerment and capacity building suggested by Baker and Martinson (2002), avoiding proscription or censorship but offering emerging practitioners tools and knowledge to make their own informed decisions about the way in which they can responsibly communicate about mental illness and suicide in practice.

Usefulness and Relevance of the Curriculum Approach: Pilot Study

A pilot study was run to determine the acceptability and usefulness of the resources to both educators and students. The study also sought to assess the impact of resource-use on students’ knowledge and attitudes to communication about suicide and mental illness. The results of the pilot study were used to identify areas of resource improvement and ways that the resources might best articulate into a public relations course before full dissemination to all relevant Australian tertiary institutions.

Seven universities and technical colleges responded to an invitation to pilot the *Response Ability* for Public Relations resources. Members of the pilot group were sent the *Response Ability* for Public Relations resources, which included a DVD containing the video clips for case studies and copies of other supporting case study materials. For the remainder of the resources—having been designed as online materials—the pilot group was directed to the home website. The website contains a ‘User’s Guide’ for instruction on using the resources.

The seven Australian tertiary institutions that participated in the pilot study were based in New South Wales (3), Queensland, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia and included five universities and two TAFE Campuses. Each tertiary institution used the *Response Ability* materials with students and completed evaluation components. Students ($n = 198$) from across first, second and third year subjects received the materials. Measures for the pilot study included semi-structured telephone interviews with educators who piloted the resources as well

as pre (Time One) and post (Time Two) student surveys measures to assess change in knowledge and attitudes, and to gauge views and opinions about the materials and the topic.

Resource Usage

Educators reported using the materials across all years of study, although most used the materials in a second or third year course. Educators indicated that the resources were used in “Ethics”, “Public Relations and the Media” and “Campaign” related subjects. The materials were used predominantly in tutorials or as an individual assessment for students.

While all six case studies were used at least once in the pilot, the most popular case-studies were: (a) *Case Study 1* (50%) dealing with a suicide incident that could be used for crisis management, media relations and related topics; and (b) *Case Study 3* (50%) which was based on a mental health campaign. Most respondents (75%) indicated that they had used the core background document for students, *Issues and Impact* and the planning document for educators, *Discussing Sensitive Issues*.

Relevance, Usefulness, Quality and Ease of Use

Educators were asked to separately rate the relevance, usefulness, ease of use and quality of the resources in their teaching. Educators generally rated each of the resource components as “very relevant” or “relevant” with only one educator rating the fact sheets as only “somewhat relevant”. All educators gave a rating of “very useful” or “useful” and all educators rated the resources as “very easy” to use. A majority of the educators (75%) also rated the quality of both the content and the presentation of the resources as “excellent”.

Educators commented that the resources were of high quality, useful and easy for them to use and thought that students also found them useful and easy to use. Positive comments were generally related to the limited preparation required, the applicability of the material to the subjects, and the quality of the materials. For instance, one educator commented: “The quality of the [information] and the way it is presented is very good... puts it in a format which makes it easy to transfer into a course and then be able to teach” and another: “Most of our students are distance educations and the fact I didn’t get one question about the assignment... indicates there were no issues and I didn’t really have to provide a lot of guidance.”

Flexible Enough for my Students to Use in a Way That Was Meaningful to Them

A majority of students (84%) “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the information presented in the lecture or tutorial on ‘appropriate communication about mental illness and suicide’ was relevant to their public relations study. A majority of students (86%) also “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the information presented in the lecture and/or tutorial was interesting.

Survey measures pre- and post-exposure to the resources, indicated that students generally agreed that public relations practice can impact on health and social issues, including mental illness and suicide. Additionally, students generally agreed that public relations practitioners needed to have some level of responsibility for the impact of their campaign or communication.

Knowledge and Confidence

Educators were asked to self-rate their knowledge of the issues related to appropriate communication about mental illness and suicide, both pre- and post-exposure to the *Response Ability* resources. Ratings ranged from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent) across both knowledge and confidence ratings.

All educators (100%) gave a “neutral” rating of knowledge before exposure to the resources ($M = 3.00$), with improvements to self-reported knowledge following exposure to the resources ($M = 4.25$). Educators also rated their confidence in teaching about these issues as “neutral” ($M = 3.00$) before exposure but showed an increase in self-reported confidence following exposure to the resources ($M = 4.00$).

All participants (100%) indicated they felt they were provided with enough support to implement the pilot and all participants indicated that they planned to use the resources again in the future and would recommend the resources to other educators: “We will use the resources over a number of subjects...and adapt them to the course.

The resources were more helpful than I thought they would be.” Despite the generally positive feedback from educators, they did highlight issues of concern relating to crowded curriculum and the currency of the resources over time as issues change: “The barrier is not the materials, the barrier is organising your semester or course to accommodate it and working out how much you can fit in. Issues become more complex. In three or four years you will need to see what the current issues are.”

Students were asked to rate from 0 (strongly agree) to 3 (strongly disagree) their confidence in their ability to communicate about mental illness and suicide following the lecture or tutorial. The majority of students (79%) indicated that they either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that their confidence had increased, while a minority indicated that they (19%) “disagreed” or (2%) “strongly disagreed”.

Students were asked to rate their agreement from 0 (strongly disagree) to 3 (strongly agree), with the statement: “I feel I have had enough knowledge regarding appropriate communication about suicide to avoid my practice causing any harm to vulnerable members of the community.” Prior to being exposed to the resource over half of all participants indicated they “disagree” or “strongly disagree” with the above statement, whereas only 31% of participants assigned a rating of “disagree” or “strongly disagree” after exposure. A paired *t*-test showed that student’s level of agreement prior exposure to the resource ($M = 1.41$) was significantly different to their level of agreement after exposure ($M = 1.74, p < .05$).

Students were asked to rate their agreement from 0 (strongly disagree) to 3 (strongly agree), with the statement: “I feel I have had enough knowledge regarding appropriate communication about mental illness to avoid my practice causing any harm to vulnerable members of the community.” Prior to being exposed to the resource over half of all participants indicated they “disagree” or “strongly disagree” with the above statement, whereas only 30% of participants assigned a rating of “disagree” or “strongly disagree” after exposure. A paired *t*-test showed that student’s level of agreement prior exposure to the resource ($M = 1.44$) was significantly different to their level of agreement after exposure ($M = 1.74, p < .05$).

Additional questions to assess student knowledge in the pilot study were flawed, with students misinterpreting some questions and answering them in relation to “personal communication” to people they thought may be at risk rather than “professional communication”. Assessment of changes in student knowledge is needed in future research.

Conclusions and Ways Forward

The power and influence, and indeed the reputation, of the public relations profession require an ethical standard of practice that is responsible, accurate and considered. This is true of many issues and areas that will be encountered by practitioners in the professional realm. If practice is considered, it can have positive impacts in terms of increasing engagement with and awareness of important social issues such as suicide and mental illness. Done without care and consideration, the impacts for publics directly affected, such as those living with a mental illness or vulnerable to suicide, can be harmful and at worst, life threatening.

For public relations education to maintain relevance and usefulness in relation to the demands of practice, both the philosophical principles of ethical conduct, as well as providing opportunity for practical skills-development and experience must be introduced. For educators and institutions seeking to produce these capabilities in graduates, resources should respond to the sector’s needs in their design, relevance and currency. The *Response Ability [Mindframe]* for Public Relations learning suite has been developed with the needs of educators, students as well as those of sector professionals and marginalised publics in mind.

Evaluation conducted in the university context has indicated that there is a place for the material within public relations education. Despite some limitations in measuring the impact of the resources on student knowledge to date, educators and students have recognised the resources as being useful and relevant and have self-reported that the resources have impacted on improved confidence and knowledge. In endeavouring to empower students with

the skills and knowledge to communicate responsibly about mental illness and suicide, the logical next step for this project is to conduct more comprehensive evaluation of the impact of the materials on student knowledge and skill. Beyond this, there would be value in estimating the potential impact of the curriculum resources on future professional practice of those that were exposed to the materials in their undergraduate training.

Fitch (2012) conducted a further evaluation of the *Response Ability [Mindframe]* materials and ethical practice with a cohort of students at one university. The author made a number of recommendations about both the place of these issues in public relations curricula, but also in regards to the nature of their inclusion. In particular, Fitch argues that there is a need to scaffold materials into the assessment schedule to best contextualise learning and provide real-time client experiences that ensure students can apply the principles taught in the materials. The materials will also need to respond to the cultural diversity of many university programs and ensure the materials integrate the opportunities and challenges that the new media environment may present for public relations practice (Fitch, 2012; Makau & Arnett, 1997). Of particular interest to communication studies, it has been argued that globalisation and new media have contributed to an ever-increasing need for a diverse, flexible and effective ethical education (Austin & Toth, 2011; Starck & Kruckeberg 2003; Makau & Arnett, 1997). The *Response Ability [Mindframe]* for Public Relations project has maintained currency and responded to emerging issues through the development of new case study material that incorporates dilemmas facing practitioners in managing media technologies and environments. The relative benefit and risks associated with communicating about mental illness and suicide using new technologies is under-researched posing challenges for both the public relations and health sectors and requiring further examination (Pirkis & Blood, 2010). This is an area for future investigation under the *Mindframe* National media initiative.

As the speed of communication changes, so too must the provisions of both educational and professional support, in order to maintain an empowered profession that leads by example and advocates on behalf of marginalised publics and their safety. While the *Mindframe* program has collaborated with the peak industry body, the Public Relations Institute of Australia, further work is needed to link the curriculum approach to industry skills and standards. An approach that integrates both undergraduate and professional support across all related sectors – health, public relations and media – will have more power to positively influence publics and contribute to the promotion of mental health and wellbeing and to the prevention of suicide.

Note: Since this pilot study was completed, the curriculum resources for public relations will be rebranded as *Mindframe for Public Relations Education* and all resources will be located on the *Mindframe* website at www.mindframe-media.info

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