AN INSIDER'S VIEW ON PUBLIC RELATIONS

HOW PR WORKS BUT OFTEN DOESN'T

NOEL TURNBULL

How PR works

…..but often doesn't

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For my parents Alice and Jim

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INTRODUCTION – Stumbling into public relations

Forty years ago I stumbled, in a pub, into public relations. Back then pubs were pubs, journalists were reporters, reporters were more numerous than PR people, and reporters spent more time in pubs than journalists do today.

I was drinking with Lionel Pugh, a reporter on *The Australian* newspaper. Having dropped out of university, where I had spent more time working on *Farrago,* the student newspaper, than studying; lurching from a few personal disasters; and trying to survive on freelance work I desperately needed a job. Lionel said a public relations company, Eric White Associates, was looking for consultants and suggested I contact an acquaintance of his there. With almost no knowledge of public relations, beyond the odd contact with someone trying to a place a story in a paper, I got the job on Lionel's recommendation.

Forty years on public relations is pervasive in society. PR people are more numerous than journalists and work for governments, companies, charities, environmental groups, trade unions and even the media itself. Since that first job my career has encompassed several stints in consultancies; being an ALP Opposition press secretary; working for the Victorian Environment Protection Authority; various returns to journalism; establishing a consultancy; becoming part of a global PR group; and, being involved in PR education I have witnessed at first hand the expansion and development of an industry which is now integral to everything from persuading you to buy a chocolate bar, through investing your money, to influencing how you vote and where you go to school.

This book aims to help people understand how the industry became so pervasive; where the industry came from; how it is structured; who the key players are; and, what PR people actually do in their daily professional lives. It also tries to provide a different perspective from the proliferation of books and articles about the industry. Most of them traditionally fit into one of two categories – apologia or condemnation. The first, written by PR practitioners and academics, are generally descriptive focussing on tactics and campaigns without questioning the legitimacy of the industry and what it does. The second focus on a variety of notorious case studies, question the industry's legitimacy by portraying it solely as a malign instrument of influence and control, but show little understanding of how PR actually works. This book seeks to bridge the two by challenging the myths of the apologists and the critics through a combination of analysis, reflection and memoir. It does not reveal everything about all the projects and campaigns undertaken over those 40 years, as many of them were covered by explicit or implicit confidentiality agreements, but it does try to explain how the PR world works and interacts with the wider world.

There are problems in trying to define PR. The PR industry associations and academics have developed various definitions starting with the broadest concept – that PR is about establishing relationships with publics, that is, using various techniques to reach out to specific target groups or publics. For instance, the Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA), the body which represents a proportion of Australian PR practitioners, defines

PR as “the deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organisation (or individual) and its (or their) publics.” These definitions are less than useful, particularly when there is even little agreement on what to call this pervasive function. In 2003 the Australian Centre for Corporate Public Affairs undertook a survey of the State of Australian Public Affairs. It found that the function was covered by titles such as public relations, external relations, external affairs, corporate relations, communication, corporate communication, public affairs and corporate affairs. When respondents to the survey were asked to list what sort of things they did the list included legal and general counsel, investor relations, consumer affairs, regulatory affairs, environmental affairs, change management, cultural change, intranet management, website management, corporate citizenship, industry association liaison, corporate giving, brand management and brand image, corporate sponsorships, employee communications, stakeholder relations, issues management, crisis management, community relations, government relations, public relations, external communications and media relations.

For the purposes of this book, therefore, public relations is used as convenient and comprehensive shorthand to describe all these various activities while catch-all definitions are avoided as unnecessary, unhelpful and potentially misleading.

“Spin’ is also absent from the list even though physicists say that spin, and statistical theories about spin, are a deep explanation of what keeps the world going and stops it from collapsing. This is not because ‘spin’ is pejorative – after all the term PR has become pretty pejorative itself – but rather because the field is richer and more interesting than either the spinners or the journalists who write about them ever imagine.

The book also tries to come to terms with the central paradoxes of PR practice. Whatever any PR practitioner – whether working for a multinational company or an environmental group - says about ethics, responsibility and the rationale for their actions, the reality is that PR people are paid to change how people think and behave. Given this, it is impossible to avoid the perception that there is an inherent tendency to manipulation. Equally paradoxical is that, while critics focus on multinational consultancies and corporations as users of PR to achieve social control, influence policy and hide unacceptable behaviour, the most successful practitioners of PR techniques are often NGOs and community groups. Finally it may be that PR practice is antithetical to establishing good relations with anyone. All the evidence suggests that enduring relationships – between people, governments and citizens or companies and customers – are rooted in trust built on transparency and authenticity. Grouch Marx once said that all you needed to succeed in life was honesty and sincerity and when you learned to fake those you had it made. To many critics PR is simply trying to commercialise fake authenticity and create an appearance of trust and transparency.

The book doesn’t pretend to resolve such paradoxes but, hopefully, it will help PR practitioners get better at their jobs while simultaneously helping the public to understand what the PR people are up to.

CHAPTER ONE

AN ALTERNATIVE HISTORY OF PR

From Palm Valley to 'negotiation by riot'

Some years ago, travelling from Alice Springs to Palm Valley to see the unique red cabbage palms, I met a French archaeologist who was in Australia attending a conference on cave painting.

We talked about the various theories about why and when humans started to paint caves. Exactly when specific caves were painted can never be known. Why is also impossible to know although theories range across shaman activities, signposts for others about game and hunting, religious ceremonial purposes, creative inspiration or simply leisure activities. The archaeologist suggested that whatever the reason the paintings were an important sign of the birth of a consciousness beyond obsession with survival. If that was the case, I suggested, the first paintings which sought to educate, inform or persuade someone else of something was the first evidence of human public relations activity, making PR the real second oldest profession after hunting and gathering. He laughed politely although his body language made it clear the theory would probably not feature in his next academic paper.

Emmanuel Anati, from the Camunian Centre for Prehistoric Studies in Italy, writing in *ICOM News* (Vol 60 No. 1 2007) estimates that there are around 45 million rock paintings known in 180 countries and at more than 75,000 sites. He says: "the pictures, signs and ideograms reveal ways of thinking, seeing and communicating specific to our origins that have not disappeared." Anati describes the cave paintings as a 'universal language' which "heightens our awareness of the development of the cognitive, imaginative, creative, emotional and requirements of our species." (p 3) It is the next step from our very first form of human communication, gesture, and the principles underlying both cave painting and gesture probably still underpin every form of contemporary communication.

This is not to suggest that PR in Australia started with the Bradshaw figures in The Kimberley, or at Kakadu, but it does suggest that what we think of as public relations techniques are not primarily a 20th century development. So while most who write about PR in Australia date the development of modern public relations from General Douglas MacArthur's arrival in Australia in 1943 with 35 PR employees it is really only the term 'public relations' rather than the activity which is new. Even the term may not be new, however, as there is some evidence of 19th century US usage of the term to cover both philanthropy and press agentry.

Essentially humans have always sought to influence how other humans see things and what meanings people derive from information. The oral story-tellers, from Homer through the Icelandic sagas to the modern political speechwriter, are trying to impose a narrative coherence which engages and persuades. Equally visual images have served the

same purpose. In the late 13th century church, John of Genoa, stressed three purposes for religious images: "First, for the instruction of simple people because they are instructed by them as if by books. Second, so the mystery of (religion) may be more active in our minds through being presented daily to our eyes. Third, to excite feelings of devotion, these being aroused more effectively by things seen than by things heard." The last precept being an exact description of what PR stunts designed to generate TV coverage aims to do.

These attempts to persuade, explain or inform were revolutionised by Gutenberg and the printing press. Elizabeth L. Eisenstein's *The printing press as an agent of change* examines the role of print culture in the movements which created the modern world – the Renaissance, the Reformation and the rise of modern science. Each of them changed our "ways of seeing" as John Berger puts it and each were dependents on conscious attempts to influence people's beliefs and behaviours.

The same revolutions also gave birth to the concept of propaganda – although not in the sense we use the word today. David Welch, Director of the University of Kent Centre for the Study of Propaganda, writing in *History Today* (August 1999), said the word dates back to the Reformation. "The Catholic Church found itself struggling to maintain and extend its hold in non-Catholic countries. A Commission of Cardinals was set up by Pope Gregory XIII charged with spreading Catholicism and regulating ecclesiastical affairs in non-Catholic lands. A generation later, in 1622, Gregory XV made the Commission permanent, as a sacred congregation *de propaganda fide"* (p 24). In other words, as Welch argues, 'propaganda' came to apply to organisations which spread doctrine, the doctrine itself and finally the ways the doctrine was disseminated. A major 1982 report into government communications in Australia by William Butler, John Russell and John Malone (*Report of the Task Force on departmental information)* remarked that from the 17th to the 19th centuries the word had a more neutral connotation as "any association, systematic scheme or concerted movement for the propagation of a particular doctrine or practice". Similarly the word 'progress' once denoted movement with no sense of improvement

Lisa Jardine in *Erasmus, Man of Letters* describes Erasmus' extensive communication networks and how he used them to shape opinion and to shape opinion of himself. Erasmus was a voice for reason and toleration, despite being surrounded by murderous religious maniacs, but was an early and skilful practitioner of the cult of celebrity. Natalie Zemon Davis in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* began the intensive study of ritual in royal courts and examined how this was used to form public opinion. Peter Burke in *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* uses the prism of modern communication activities to understand how Louis' courtiers created the image of the Sun King. The techniques – coins, medallions, operas, architectural decoration statues, masques, paintings – were different from modern communication techniques but they were directed towards the same purposes.

Without detracting in any way from the courage and commitment Archbishop Thomas Cranmer displayed in court, and at the stake on March 21 1556, it is clear that Cranmer

was thinking about how to generate propaganda to benefit the religious reformers. Earlier in court he had retracted his confessions and sought to read a statement, and when at the stake thrust his hand into the fire symbolising the falsity of his submission to Mary's Catholicism. Within a year thousands of books and pamphlets based on his statements in court and at the stake were circulating. Within a few years John Foxe was immortalising Cranmer in his *Martyrs.* On the other side, visiting the Vatican Library and looking at its collection of materials on Queen Christina's reversion to Rome, shows how Rome was using the same techniques to spread a message – pamphlets, books, posters – as were the religious reformers, techniques very similar to those used today to spread a political message or product information.

James Shapiro in *1599 A year in the life of William Shakespeare* claims to see the emergence of a new sense of the word popularity in Shakespeare's *The First Part of Henry Fourth* (1596) and in *Henry the Fifth.* Shapiro says: "In the mid-sixteenth century it (popularity) was used to describe a radical form of democracy that was the opposite of tyranny. Then, in the late 1590's, a new sense of the word emerged, having to do with courting popular favour." (p144) Shapiro makes the observation in the context of Essex's cultivation of popular favour among the people and Essex's fate on the block may be a precursor of some modern popular heroes.

The British Civil War was a battleground of ideas as much as one of troops and weapons. Sects, Royalists and Roundheads used pamphlets, speeches and books to persuade and inform. When Charles II was restored to the throne Tim Harris, in *Restoration,* remarks that Charles needed to both persuade and satisfy local officials and the wider public. Meanwhile his Whig opponents were using recognisable communication and information techniques to oppose Charles and Charles' Tory supporters were seeking to neutralise the Whig efforts among the populace in a form of 17th century issues management.

Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger in the hugely influential *The Invention of Tradition* showed how many so-called traditions in various societies were actually invented, and invented to influence public opinion. In Chapter 10 this book discusses how this same process has been used with the Gallipoli tradition. The public also sought to create traditions and influence opinion as Ian Gilmour points out in *Riots, Risings and Revolutions,* characterising the frequent popular outbursts in 18th Century London as 'negotiation by riot'.

The techniques, from the 13th century church to the British Civil Wars to today, may evolve with technology but the intent has been consistent.

However, it is the late 18th and the 19th century - and in Britain not the United States - when we see the first great PR campaigns – campaigns around slavery, the Belgian Congo atrocities, anti-pollution fights, heritage protection and other mass movements which are instantly recognisable as pioneers of modern public relations activities.

The Evangelicals and the Victorians invent PR

Most discussions of the history of public relations are US-centric and suggest that modern PR stems from 19th Century and early 20th Century US developments. Almost all of them are wrong – mislead by effective public relations and myth-makers starting with the self-styled 'father of PR' Edward Bernays.

As we have seen, recognisable PR techniques were employed by churches, monarchs and religious and political reformers over centuries. Indeed, one of the first great US PR events – the Boston Tea Party – was in this tradition. It was a media and political event in which people dressed up, arranged a symbolic picture opportunity and which generated both media and word-of-mouth publicity. But the real impetus for what we would see as systematic PR campaigning came from the late 18th Century British evangelicals and the 19th century Victorian reformers. Their campaigns were the true precursors of modern political campaigns, benchmarks for modern NGO campaigns and the pioneers of many of the techniques practitioners take for granted today.

Probably the very first of these campaigns was the one to abolish the slave trade. Ironically this campaign itself has become the subject of myth created by reducing complex events to a few sound-bites and a celebrity focus. A typical example of the myth was an article by Michael Shmith in *The Age* (March 26 2007) which talked about the British MP, William Wilberforce, beginning the slavery abolition campaign in 1787. In fact, while Wilberforce was extraordinarily important to the legislative campaign, 1787 was not when he started the campaign, but when he was recruited to it.

One of the best accounts of the campaign, from the perspective of the techniques used to change public opinion and legislation, is by a journalism lecturer at the University of California at Berkely, Adam Hochschild, in his book *Bury the Chains.*

There was probably no single person who began the campaign. Quakers on both sides of the Atlantic fought against slavery from the 1750's at least. Hochschild gives credit to the Quakers; recounts the influence of the eccentric religious pamphleteer, Granville Sharp; and, makes it clear that Africans such as Olaudah Equiano also played a prominent role. But if anyone was the most important initiator and main proponent it was Thomas Clarkson, author of a famous 1786 essay on slavery and one of the 12 people who attended the first meeting of the committee established on May 12 1787 to raise support for abolition. Clarkson recruited Wilberforce, who had previously been mainly concerned about the need for legislation to improve the manners and morals of the working classes, as the legislative spokesman. Wilberforce's subsequent parliamentary activities took place within the context of a systematic, extremely well-organised, widespread community campaign.

The campaign featured media publicity, public speeches, consumer boycotts, submissions to parliamentary inquiries, mass meetings, events, pamphlets and, most importantly, the creation of one vital iconic image. Indeed, when modern PR and advertising people

create an iconic image to act as the centre-point of a campaign they are following in Clarkson's path. In Clarkson's case it was a plate of a full loaded slave ship, the *Brookes,* which was owned by an eponymous Liverpool family and which took slaves from the Gold Coast in Africa to Jamaica. The plate was a diagram, with top, side and end views, of a fully loaded slave ship. Today many people have become inured to the 20th century horrors depicted by photographs, films and other images. But in 1789 the iconic image of the *Brookes* shocked thousands as it was circulated through newspapers, pamphlets, posters, magazines and books.

Nevertheless, while the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 (slavery itself was not abolished in British territories until 1833) was facilitated by a massive public campaign by white British evangelicals, Quakers and others, slave revolts in the West Indies meant that African slaves themselves also played a major role in the campaign's success. That 200 year old reality is always worth remembering when we are told how some brilliant PR campaign has transformed a situation. Changes are usually a product of more than 'spin' and PR.

The anti-slave trade model was adopted in different campaigns in Victorian Britain. Anti-pollution programs such as the Coal Smoke Abatement Society's, started in 1899, used the same mix of facts, images, public campaigns and focus on public opinion to create one of the first environmental campaigns. William Morris, today largely remembered for his role in the arts and crafts movement, spent more time running campaigns about environmental improvement and militant socialism than he did designing carpets and furniture.

Adam Hochschild in an earlier book, *King Leopold's Ghost*, describes how in the late 1890s a young British shipping clerk, Edmund Morel, started the campaign against the brutal slavery and exploitation of the Congo by the Belgian King, Leopold II. The campaign ultimately drew in famous supporters such as Roger Casement, Mark Twain, Booker T. Washington and Anatole France. Roger Casement's hero status ultimately led to the 'dirty tricks' campaign in which the British Government peddled details of Casement's diaries, and their explicit accounts of gay sex, to influential people to head off the protests about his impending execution for treason. In an indication of the twists that come when the focus is on PR and public opinion, Irish patriots, in defence of Casement, always claimed the diaries were forged and it is only today that the diaries are accepted as genuine and Casement's life has been rescued from competing propagandists.

This is not to suggest that such campaigns were absent from US history. While Victorians were pioneering modern campaigns, US reformers, such as the muck-raking writers in the 1890s Gilded Age, were doing many of the same sorts of things as Morel. The US anti-slavery campaign also borrowed tactics from the British. But the more conventional version of PR history is the 19th Century role of press agents such as John M. Burke who worked for William Cody (Buffalo Bill) and the promotions of the showman Barnum.

The history of Australian PR

Most of the references to the history of PR in Australia cover much the same ground. David Potts, *Public Relations Practice in Australia;* Jan Quarles and Bill Rowlings, *Practising Public Relations;* Candy Tymson and Peter Lazar *The new Australian and New Zealand Public Relations Manual;* Clara Zawawi, *Public Relations Theory and Practice,* start the story with a few press agents in the 19th Century and run through to the post-war period with the establishment of a number of major consultancies. There is broad consensus around the basic story but arguably some individual emphases could be skewed.

What is agreed is that the changing nature of the press changed the nature of the sources which provided the content the press used. From their inception newspapers were generally published in a particular interest by people paid to spruik a specific political line. Indeed, many of the great British literary figures of the 17th and 18th Centuries, including Dryden and Swift, were also pens for hire by political parties. Growing public literacy and technological change drove the creation of a new consumer-oriented mass media which relied on circulation and advertising rather than subventions. It was no longer enough to simply buy favourable or unfavourable coverage and instead agents sought to place material in the new media by tailoring their "news" to the needs of the newspapers.

In Australia in the 19th century such press agency services were part of advertising agencies such as Gordon & Gotch in Melbourne and Greville's in Sydney. Henry Mayer, *The Press in Australia,* describes country newspaper editors and owners complaining from the 1880s onwards that city agents exploited them by forcing them to buy paper, ink and news items from agents who often provided advertising supplements or literary copy in place of cash payment.

In the first third of the 20th century PR developed in three strands. First, government PR started to take shape with the appointment of the first government press officer by Australian PM, Billy Hughes, in 1918; and, the development of news management (often mainly censorship) during the First World War. The development of government PR is considered in more detail in Chapter 8. Second, publicity became integral to trade and tourism promotion. In the 1920s the Australian Dried Fruits Board sent Frank McDougall (who had emigrated to Australia to grow fruit on the Murray River and then studied marketing) to London as Australia's representative on the Imperial Economic Committee and the Empire Marketing Board. This Board was set up in 1924 by the UK Baldwin Government with a one million pound budget to persuade UK consumers to buy more Empire foodstuffs. The Board's first PR Head, Gervas Huxley, said in his memoir, *Both Hands,* that "no British Government in peacetime had ever embarked on so large a publicity campaign." The campaign included exhibitions, posters, leaflets from authors such as John Buchan. Jim Davidson and Peter Spearritt, *Holiday Business: Tourism in Australian since 1870,* report that in 1927 T.E.Moorhouse (Development and Migration Commission) and Charles H. Holmes (Chair of the Victorian Railways Betterment and Publicity Board) prepared a confidential report for the federal government on how to

develop a national tourist industry. The proposed strategy included activities similar to those of the Empire Marketing Board. By 1929, as a result, an Australian National Travel Association was employing journalists and poster artists to promote Australia. Third, the emerging film industry became one of the dominants users of publicity, events and stunts to promote films and film celebrities. Most of the Hollywood studios practised vertical integration controlling the whole process from production to distribution and publicity. Australian publicity staff were regularly sent to the US for training and returned to focus on creating publicity for specific films. To promote *Ben Hur,* for instance, a man in Roman toga drove a chariot from Sydney to Melbourne. Clara Zawawi suggests that many in the Australian press disliked film publicists (much as modern media dislike PR people generally) and objected to them simply "regurgitating 'American dope sheets'". Ironically, today film publicists are among the most powerful and successful of PR practitioners forcing the media to queue for, and controlling closely, access to the stars which are used to promote films. If journalists break out of the ritualised coverage of film celebrities which saturate magazines, entertainment programs and the mainstream media and access is quickly denied. Publicists in few other industries have anything remotely like similar power.

Clearly the Australian publicity development does owe something to US industry pioneers such as Edward Bernays and Ivy Lee who worked for clients such as Pennsylvania Railways. But it is also arguable that there was a world-wide trend towards using publicity to achieve various ends. For instance the Japanese painter Foujita, who worked in Paris before the Second World War, returned to Japan to become a propagandist and left Japan again after the War, is quoted by a recent biographer, Phyllis Birnbaum (*Glory in a Line: A life of Foujita, the artist caught between east and west)* as saying in the 1920s that : "Those who think I became famous because of my kappa hairstyle and my earrings should compare me to the automobile company Citroen which spent a fortune to advertise on the Eiffel Tower with the biggest electronic device in the world. Can't you say that my way gives me clever publicity for free?"

David Potts suggests that the first Australian PR practitioner in the modern sense was probably George Fitzpatrick who listed himself in the Sydney telephone directory as a "registered practitioner in Public persuasion, propaganda and publicity." Who he was registered with is unknown, although the debate about registration was to echo throughout the industry for the next 60 years.

Most of the accounts then move to the arrival of General Douglas MacArthur in Brisbane in 1942 with a public relations staff of 35 introducing the term public relations to Australia. But MacArthur was not alone among military leaders in being conscious of PR. Gordon Corrigan, *Blood Sweat and Arrogance: and the myths of Churchill's war,* says that we know all about the British Field Marshall, Lord Montgomery's "abilities and powers of leadership" because "Montgomery has told us so, not only by his masterful grasp of public relations but in one of the most self-serving memoirs ever foisted on the reading public." Once again evidence that Australian PR had British as well as US inspirations. Moreover, if MacArthur introduced the term public relations to Australia it obviously took some time to catch on, because as late as 1957 Henry Mayer says the

Sydney Morning Herald, was still putting the terms in inverted commas when talking about it. Asher Joel (later knighted) became a member of McArthur's staff and is regarded as one of the founders of the Australian consultancy industry. In 1947 the pink pages of the Sydney telephone directory listed two people under the heading Public Relations Counsellors, Joel and George FitzPatrick, although FitzPatrick was still advertising himself as in the business of public persuasion and propaganda.

The conventional narrative then skips to late 1949 when an Australian Institute of Public Relations (AIPR) was founded. Significantly the inaugural meeting was held at the Department of Agriculture office in Sydney, indicating yet again the important role of government in the development of PR in Australia. Founding office holders were Noel Griffiths (Public Relations Officer for the Rural Bank) and Don Barnes, Department of Lands PRO. A PRIA branch was established in Victoria in 1952 and during the 1960s and 70's a new national Public Relations Institute was formed followed by offices in other States. From the 1960s onwards PR education courses started to be established, with the first at Mitchell College (now Charles Sturt University) being set up in 1969, with the result that many PR practitioners began to get formal education in the field rather than solely being drawn from the ranks of journalists.

Three factors and events probably explain how the industry went from this humble beginning to its current pervasive state.

The first was the move from politics to PR consultancy of Eric White. Second was the closure of *The Argus* newspaper which made many journalists start to think of alternative careers in what was seen as a new field; and, third, was the changing social, economic and environmental climate in which business and government operated from the 1970s onwards.

Eric White had been a journalist who worked with the Liberal Party Federal Secretariat from 1943 to 1946. He worked closely with Sir Robert (then R.G. Menzies) and is credited with helping Menzies come back from the political wilderness. Alternatively abrupt and taciturn he set up his business in a Sydney hotel room in 1947. He was probably the first practitioner to recognise that the future of PR was not simply in publicity but more in government relations and in opening up communications between government and private enterprise. There had always been such communication but it tended to be, in a smaller Australian economy, facilitated by personal contacts between business and political leaders in clubs or more informal surroundings. The growth of managerial classes in both government and business meant that specialists were needed to carry on the conversations which could once have been held in the exclusive clubs. White's PR firm grew moderately slowly and, in his first decade, was helped by Eric White's partnership with Don Whitington and Australian Press Services (APS). APS was really the first entrant into the privately-circulated newsletter market in which background information on politics and economics was sent to clients. In 1957 the partners separated although Eric White Associates (EWA) continued to generate fees from providing background information on politics and economics. My first job with EWA was to edit *White's Business Digest*, a collection of snippets of commercial and

political material. Much of the success of EWA's government relations was based on the sheer ignorance of government among many business leaders. Much of the information provided was not secret but simply background which could be obtained by any diligent researcher, much of it from public sources. Today many PR practitioners are still selling clients information which could readily be obtained from online government sources or a few quick phone calls to public servants. EWA clients over the years included TAA, the Department of Trade, James Hardie, RMIT, and the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation.

With the closing of *The Argus* in 1957 two of the newspaper's top journalists, Peter Golding and Laurie Kerr, joined EWA and it began to grow more rapidly. By the time I joined the EWA Melbourne office in 1966 at least a third of the staff were ex-*Argus* staff. I only met Eric White once, in the office of the then Melbourne Manager. He didn't bring himself to speak to the most junior employee in the meeting and I had been advised that it was better to sit quietly and say nothing. He was as taciturn as ever after selling the business to multinational Hill & Knowlton in 1974, retiring to an oyster farm at Shoalhaven in NSW in 1986 and refusing all requests for interviews about the history of the industry. He was succeeded as EWA Chair by Frank Hamilton, a former press secretary to Country Party Leader, John 'Black Jack' McEwen indicating that PR practitioners have been migrating from politics to PR for a long time. Perhaps one of Eric White's lasting contributions to the industry was to ensure that for several decades all PR people wore the same uniform – black shoes, white shirts and dark suits. Brogues, suede shoes, long hair and coloured shirts were all frowned upon and a generation of PR people who started at EWA, or worked for people who had, all adopted the same garb. By the late 60's striped shirts, Paisley ties and raffishly long hair down close to the collar had crept in – but only if Eric was not visiting. At the time it seemed like just another silly sartorial rule among the many in Australia at the time. And yet it reflected something more profound – the need for a new industry to appear respectable by adopting the conservative guise of clients. Sadly the guise also shaped the political and economic thinking of many of the practitioners – then and now.

In 1959 Eric White opened a London office but it was not successful. In the 1960s he started to open offices through Asia in Jakarta, Bangkok, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Hong Kong and then in the Pacific in New Zealand. What only emerged in 1989 was that the offices were subsidised by the Australian Security Intelligence Service. As well as being close to Sir Robert Menzies White was also a friend of Bill Robertson, an ASIS official from its founding in 1952. Robert Haupt in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (July 24 1989) revealed that Australian spies had worked in south-east Asia under cover provided by EWA. Haupt's article, in words presumably drafted by the newspapers lawyers, said: "there is no suggestion that Eric White, his company or the agents acted illegally or engaged in so-called 'dirty tricks', in Asia or elsewhere, or that Mr White or his company derived any profit from the activities. And there were many Eric White employees in Asia who had nothing to do with the activities". Haupt claimed the Bangkok office, opened in 1968, was specifically established as "cover for ASIS intelligence-gathering". A conduit for the meagre information the whole operation apparently uncovered was

allegedly an office employee of *The Age* providing a neat illustration of the often symbiotic relationships between governments, newspapers and PR people.

If EWA created the modern consultancy industry it was further shaped in 1964 when the EWA recruit and Carlton footballer, Laurie Kerr, left EWA to set up IPR. Initially some of the staff left and set up another company called Lincoln PR as Laurie Kerr had a no-compete clause. After a suitable gardening period many EWA staff and many clients went to IPR which grew to become Australia's largest consultancy.

Laurie Kerr died in 2001 and was a legendary behind the scenes political and business figure. When he died the obituaries focussed on his earlier life as a Carlton and Victorian footballer, rather than his PR career, and the *crikey* website (21 January 2002) said: "The man who had manipulated the Australian media so successfully for so long had even managed to do it in dying."

The IPR business was eventually sold to the international group, Shandwick, but huge clients included the Mars group of companies for which he organised an event in which the Carlton Football Club wore light blue jumpers to mark the launch of a new lolly and persuaded a Geelong player, Garry Hocking, to change his name by deed poll to Whiskas, a petfood brand for one match. Part of Laurie Kerr's huge success was the air of mystery and secrecy he built around the company with very little information about clients ever emerging. One former IPR client described to me the Kerr approach as 'the black box' effect. You took a problem to IPR and they fixed it without anyone – client or others – knowing how it was done. The only certainty was that the fees were often huge. With the secrecy and mystery inevitably apocryphal stories multiplied about feats, coups and issues. What is certain is that IPR became so big and successful that it often acted as a facilitator bringing together clients, politicians, organisations for mutual – and IPR benefit. Writing an obituary for Kerr former Melbourne *Herald* editor and long-term IPR director John Fitzgerald, called him 'The man who opened doors'.

Basically everyone who ran a major consultancy in the late 20th century had been an employee of either Eric White or Laurie Kerr and sometimes both. John Cameron set up Rowlands; Peter Lazar set up in PPR (which was in 2007 the largest Australian PR consultancy); Russell Hill was responsible for much of the growth of Holt Public Relations; Mike Jarvis who became head of Ford PR worldwide was ex-IPR. *Crikey* illustrated these connections by citing Greg Ray and ex-IPR employee who set up a successful PR company Timmins Ray, sold part of it to Holt PR which was run by ex-IPR people and the rest of Hill & Knowlton, the successor to EWA.

In 1950 there were three PR agencies in Sydney, by 1957 there were about 30 in Melbourne, in 1976 58 consultancies were listed in the marketing publication *B&T,* in 1984 some 225 consultancies there were listed. Two years later the list had grown to 270 and by 1992 4,000 Victorian students applied for 85 degree places at two Melbourne universities, RMIT and Deakin.

Henry Mayer estimated in 1961 that Australian business spent about 3million pounds annually on PR consultancy and by 1986 the PRIA's annual report estimated that spending on PR services was around $170 million. Today the Federal Government alone probably spends as much on PR.

PR had grown into a significant industry by at least the late 1960s. Most of the PR practitioners were concentrated in government departments and agencies and consultancies although there was a growing number employed by business and industry associations.

A transformation occurred in the 1970s – starting with the Whitlam Government from 1972 to 1975. From the 1970s Eric White's prescient focus on government relations had expanded out to incorporate a focus on environmental groups, lobby groups, resident activists and irate consumers as Australia and the world changed. Suddenly Whitlam put sewerage, community development, air pollution, better regulation of industry, environmental issues, native title and social issues on the political agenda.

In the late 1970s and 1980s the world-wide interest in the environment got stronger and a range of people and organisations began to demand that business respond to their demands. Geoff Allen, founder of the Australian Centre for Corporate Public Affairs said in a speech to the Melbourne Business School (July 26 2006) that: "Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* convinced many that the chemical industry was poisoning the earth; iconic US corporations were boycotted for profiting from the Vietnam War. Ralph Nader's attack on the automotive industry, and Galbraith's writing about the military-industrial complex and planned obsolescence were high profile." The concepts of companies operating with community consent and the notion of a licence to operate became common. Edward Freeman pioneered stakeholder theory in his 1984 book *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach* and companies began to realise they must engage with stakeholders with differing political, social and economic agendas. Inevitably this created both new demands on organisations and the need for a new type of PR practitioner working within companies rather than in consultancies. This led to profound changes in the structure of the industry which are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

GOOD HEAVENS – WE'RE NOT IN PR

The structure of the PR industry

The most significant players in the Australian PR industry would be horrified if you called them PR people. The overwhelming majority of them do not work for PR consultancies but for corporations, governments and NGOs. Their titles range across public affairs, corporate affairs and other permutations and, if asked, would be adamant that whatever it is they practise it is certainly not 'just PR'.

To a certain extent they're right – what they do is not the sort of PR which critics who focus on consultancies associate with the industry – and yet they are in the business of persuading, influencing, positioning, shaping opinions and managing relationships with various public and private groups. They are also generally the most highly-paid people in the industry.

The place to find them is at the Australian Centre for Corporate Public Affairs founded by the ex-Business Council of Australia Executive Director, Geoff Allen, in 1990. The Centre, as it is now commonly known, is not an industry or professional association nor is it a commercial operation in the normal sense. Instead it is more a network, centre for training and a centre for information exchange for senior public affairs practitioners.

Its operations and membership have never been secret and Centre Chairman, Geoff Allen, has been prominent as a policy and public affairs consultant, advisor to governments and director in organisations ranging from the Melbourne Business School to the Victorian College of the Arts. Yet it has attracted surprisingly little attention from writers – PR people and industry critics – over the years.

The fullest account of where it came from, and what it does, was an article in the Centre's newsletter, *Corporate Public Affairs* (Volume 15 Number 1 2005), by Geoff Allen marking the first 15 years of the Centre's operations. He recounts how he left the BCA in 1988 to set up Allen Consulting Group and then, later that year, invited a group of senior practitioners to attend the first of a series of conferences, addressed by Australian and overseas speakers, designed to get people thinking about issues which affected organisations and the management approaches needed to respond to them.

Early speakers included former Liberal Cabinet Minister, Ian McPhee, journalist Paul Kelly, corporate regulator Professor Bob Baxt, and social commentators and pollsters such as Hugh Mackay, Rod Cameron and Mark Textor. International guest speakers included Professor Jim Post from Boston University School of Management; risk communication expert, Peter Sandman (the man's whose advice the Australian Wheat

Board paid for but refused to take); Charles Fombrun whose works on reputation management were influential in the 1990s; and high level public affairs managers in corporations such as Shell, Chevron, Weyerhauser, IBM, Dow and ABB.

The first conference was a success and a second was held in 1989. At the second one the participants, said Allen, "conversation turned to issues in the management of the then relatively new and rapidly evolving function of public affairs, to concerns about practitioners explaining their role to line management, and to difficulties in career structures and the professional development of staff." Many also enjoyed and valued the opportunity to come together and talk about issues of common concern. Allen initially suggested that they form a professional association to do this but no-one wanted a formal structure and an organisation managed at arms-length from the Allen Consulting Group was formed.

The Centre was launched in 1990 by Sir Arvi Parbo then Chairman of both BHP and WMC, with the words "We can do our sums, be great at production and marketing, fine tune our cash flows, manage people; we can do all these things well but fail if we haven't managed the social and political issues."

Over the years staff at the Centre have included George Littlewood, ex-CRA and Rio Tinto; Troy Hey, now at Fosters; Gerard Brown, now at ANZ; Dick Conigrave, ex-ICI; and, Dahle Suggett, formerly with Allen Consulting Group and now a Deputy Secretary in the Victorian Education and Training Department.

There are more than 170 members include companies, industry associations, GBEs, universities, lawyers, regulators and others. The membership is a microcosm of the Australian economy. At March 2007 they included Australia Post and the Australian Rugby Union, BHP Billiton and the BCA, the Country Fire Authority and Coles, Dairy Farmers Group and Diageo, Freehills and Fosters, GE and GM, HBF and Hong Kong Bank, James Hardie and JP Morgan, Macquarie Bank and McDonalds, News Limited and Nestle, RACV and Rio Tinto, Santos and Sensis, Telstra and Tourism Tasmania, Unilver and the University of Wollongong, Wesfarmers and Westpac.

In Geoff Allen's speech to the Melbourne Business School (see Chapter 1) in July 2006 he outlined in detail the range of issues which had created this new situation – consumer, community and environmental activism and an end to comfortable relationships between senior political and business leaders. This is not so say that such relationships – particularly under Liberal Governments – are still not comfortable and distressingly so for the rest of the community. But the era in which problems could be fixed over a Scotch in the club was over, the world was now more complex and the media was marginally more aggressive in pursuing governments.

Allen sees the coming together, in the early 1980s, of CEOs from major companies to form the BCA, the creation of "research-based advocacy, and the move to couch business arguments "in the broader public interest" as both a response to this new complexity and the beginning of a new approach to public affairs. Essentially community activism was to

be countered by business activism. From there a number of management streams were refined and further developed. These included issues management, political risk evaluation, stakeholder management, targeted corporate sponsorship and philanthropy. He concluded his speech by referring back to an article he had written in the late 1970s (when he was an advisor to the Federal Treasurer) for the then Mt Eliza Australian Administrative Staff College when he said: "Whether we like it or not, business will not be left on its own to pursue its economic task of producing goods and services with efficiency and minimum cost. Business has been thrust into a major role in the broader social and political drama, and must rapidly improve its performance and skills."

The first Centre newsletter, in 1991, saw the new organisation's objectives as a response to the situation which provided "information exchange and networking; professional training and development for practitioners and line management; research in relevant areas; development of research and advisory services; and, linking the profession in Australia with overseas networks and worldwide state of the art."

Centre activities over the years have included annual conferences, workshops, research projects on community relations and cultural diversity, overseas study tours, regional conferences for Asia-Pacific practitioners, and support for academic research into public affairs. In Canberra each year the Centre organises a Politics and Public Policy Review at which Ministers, Opposition and senior public servants and journalists discuss (under Chatham House rules) issues likely to affect business in the future. The Centre also organises an annual week-long public affairs school in which practitioners and line managers are exposed to intensive training and lectures from Australian and overseas experts. Having spoken at some of the schools it is clear that the participants come from a wide range of background, debate is robust and questioning is unpredictable. There is no one view of issues among the business and government participants and it is difficult to see them agreeing on anything much beyond not being in PR.

But what is perhaps most significant about the Centre is that it has never admitted consultancies to membership.

Government PR

As important as the Centre for Corporate Public Affairs membership to Australian PR is the huge number of PR practitioners within Federal, State and local governments.

No-one knows quite how many there are. In 1975 the Coombes Royal Commission estimated that the Australian Public Service employed more than 800 staff in information sections at a cost of $50 million annually. On top of these numbers are the many media advisers in Ministerial offices. As it is clear that the numbers have almost certainly not reduced, a conservative estimate, based on some experience with staffing levels in PR departments at all levels of government, would be that there are more than 4,000 PR and information practitioners working in government around Australia.

While the practitioners are primarily responsible to their own departments or organisations governments have increasingly tried to centralise control of the function – mainly as part of the ongoing politicisation of the public sector and the relentless emphasis on ensuring that everyone in government is "on message".

The Fraser Government was the first to try to adopt a more systematic and co-ordinated approach to government communication. In July 1980 a Task Force on Department Information produced a report which examined the dissemination of information on government activities; the effectiveness and adequacy of programs; how the activities could best be co-ordinated. The Task Force made a number of recommendations on training, using multimedia (admittedly in this context they meant radio and TV rather than press), using research better and more effective planning.

The Minister assisting the Prime Minister, Michael McKellar, endorsed the report but stressed that departments should be emphasising "letting citizens of this country know their rights and obligations and the use they make of departmental services…(Improved information processes were) not designed to encourage the extravagant use of resources". McKellar also said any programs should be "impartial in their presentation of facts".

The changes following the report, of course, eventually became a platform for steadily more extravagant uses of resources and progressively more blatant use of propaganda. A Melbourne University academic, Sally Young's *Government Communications in Australia* estimates that government advertising and PR now exceed $1 billion. Blatantly political campaigns with limited budgetary scrutiny are now standard practice with the Howard Liberal Government. But at the outset the aim was better co-ordination. In 1982 and Information Co-ordination Branch (ICB) was set up and in May 1984 a Ministerial Committee on Government Information and Advertising was set up to oversee government information activities and check whether they were well-directed and justified. This became the Office of Government Information and Advertising in 1989 and the Government Communications Unit in 1998. The Ministerial Committee – headed by a Minister but controlled during the Howard Governments by political apparatchiks from the Prime Minister's Office – ceased to worry about any justification beyond spending taxpayers money on getting re-elected and directing contracts, where possible, to companies sympathetic to the government.

In Victoria the Bracks Government also sought to centralise PR more effectively and set up a special unit within the Department of Premier and Cabinet (headed by a former colleague of the author, Andrew Hockley) which provides central direction for major campaigns. There are also regular meetings of departmental PR heads to swap information and co-ordinate activities. Most other Australian Governments have adopted similar strategies although there is growing debate, largely fostered by Sally Young, about the legitimacy of much of this spending. As the major beneficiaries of these transfers from taxpayers are organisations such as Fairfax, News Limited, the Packers and other media outlets the outrage is not as great over the practice as that over over-payment of single mothers.

Another important development in government PR has been the creation of the Australia New Zealand School of Government, headed by former ACCC Commissioner, Professor Alan Fels. ANZSOG provides a range of training services, rather like a government MBA course, to State and Federal public servants. Increasingly it is offering seminars, courses and conferences on public affairs and issues management. These courses cover case studies such as the Sydney Water crisis, trends in issues management, trends in the private sector and act as an information exchange for the public servants. As befits an organisation headed by someone who used media brilliantly to further the ACCC's goals there is great emphasis on media activity. ANZSOG has organised one major conference which involved politicians and retired politicians, senior media executives, public servants of departmental head status to discuss mutual interests between media and government on a confidential Chatham House rules basis. At the conference various case studies were given and participants delivered papers used as discussion starters.

Other PRs

Corporations and governments may be the major employees of PR people but just about every charity, union, industry or professional association and many NGOs also employ PR people. When you donate to charity part of your dollar goes to finance the publicity and marketing that encourages you to give. Every time an industry association – from the Insurance Council of Australia to the Business Council of Australia – releases a statement a PR person has played a role. Perhaps the most effective publicity campaign the author has seen was run by a journalist employed by the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union when the Oakdale colliery closed down in NSW and attempted to avoid paying workers their entitlements. I was working on the campaign on a voluntary basis and two colleagues from other consultancies - John Ridley a former Andrew Peacock staffer and Victorian Liberal Party Director; and, Karen Sowada, a former Democrat Senator – were helping. The campaign generated front page news in the Sydney tabloids; recruited Federal Minister, John Fahey; and, managed to persuade Sydney radio identity, Alan Jones to all support the union and the workers. Ultimately, in July 1999, the Federal legislation was changed to try to prevent such cases. While the campaign ended up involving consultants and others the key strategies and implementation activities stemmed from the union and its PR people. PR people get publicity for law and accounting firms. They encourage you to attend agricultural shows. When you read about Australian military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan the journalists have been briefed by military PR people. PR people are ubiquitous.

How many of them are there?

While they are ubiquitous it is difficult to estimate just how many of them there actually are. In 2006 the PRIA, according to its Annual Report, had 2500 members. It is generally accepted that the PRIA has ceased to be representative of the industry as a whole and it is possible that its membership represents anything from one in five to one in 10 of all the practitioners. This suggests there could be more than 10,000 and perhaps more than 25,000 people working in the industry. The PRIA itself works from the Australian Bureau of Statistics survey of Public Relations, Marketing and Advertising employment

group in its annual Labour Force Survey. The November 2005 survey shows that more than 61,000 individuals were employed in the sector. The PRIA estimates that around 15% of this number work (more than 10,000) in PR and that one in four of them are currently members of the PRIA. This is almost certainly an under-estimate because many of the practitioners in the industry are probably listed in other labour force categories.

Another way of approaching the problem is to look at the number of PR people coming out of tertiary institutions. The PRIA accredits 43 courses at 16 universities. There are other universities teaching communications-related courses probably bringing the total of teaching institutions to about 20 and the number of courses to about 50. One of the universities which has been teaching PR for some time, RMIT, in 2007 had 158 students enrolled in undergraduate courses and 60 in post graduate. About 80 graduate each year from the various courses. RMIT has one of the bigger PR courses so other courses may graduate fewer students. But if the average is about 50 graduates a year from 20 universities an additional 1,000 potential PR practitioners a year are coming on to the market. Some of these go off to careers in other areas but, to balance this out, many public affairs professionals come from different backgrounds altogether and may have trained in law, science, accounting or some other discipline.

What is clear, is that not even these numbers are meeting industry demand. In 2006 a PRIA study found that there is a lack of mid-to-senior level staff and that salaries had increased by up to 30% over the previous three years.

What do they do and who are they?

A 1984 PRIA survey found that the major duties of PR practitioners then were promotion and publicity (59%), counselling/consulting (52.1%), management (40%), writer/publications (47.2%), internal communications (30.9%) and government relations (27%). Six years later Tony Stevenson carried out another survey for the PRIA and found that corporate communication, publicity and promotion were heavily used and that PR was integral to management.

In 1997 the PRIA (NSW), in collaboration with Cullen Egan Dell, carried out a survey among PRIA members and managing directors, principals and CEOs of some of the largest consultancies and managers of in-house PR departments in order to draw a picture of the industry. The survey concluded that the majority of practitioners are 25-30 years, and female (however there were more men in the older age categories). The gender balance may shift further because in PR degree courses nationwide 80% of students are female and 20% male. The 1997 report revealed that male practitioners tend to earn more than their female counterparts, a result of the greater number of men in senior positions at that time, although the author's experience is that PR is one of the rare industries in which feminisation has not resulted in employers driving salaries significantly down. A vast majority of the survey participants had completed tertiary education, however only half have a degree in either communication or are qualified through the PRIA's accreditation process. Participant experience ranged from 6-15 years, and 71% were members of PRIA. In regards to specialisation, most practitioners worked in

approximately four different areas of practice, with media relations being by far the most common, followed by internal communication and sponsorship/event management. The highest percentage of participants was employed in the corporate/financial sector and the lowest percentage in the engineering/natural resources sectors. Sixty percent of senior PR staff reported directly to the CEO. The study found that participants saw activities in the future focussing on community awareness and relations, corporate image, globalisation, government relations and lobbying, the Internet and electronic marketing, internal communication, issues management, media relations, and strategic communications planning. Chapter 6 discusses in more detail– and demystifies - what these activities are.

Salary levels in the industry have steadily increased. In 2007 heads of PR in government departments generally earn more than $100,000 a year. Young consultants and practitioners in companies with a few years experience would be earning $60,000 a year. At the top end large listed companies pay considerably more. The Caltex 2006 Annual Report discloses that Richard Beattie, the company's Group Manager Corporate Affairs) had a total package worth $454,780 a year. Matthew Perceval, AMP General Manager Public Affairs had a total remuneration package, according to the AMP 2006 Annual Report, of $1.402 million. Debra Stirling at Rinker had a base salary of some $750,000. The major banks would be paying similar salaries. While this reflects the general growth in management salaries they represent a significant increase in traditional PR and public affairs salaries.

The PRIA – an irrelevancy?

Whenever anything appears in the media criticising the ethics of PR people it always highlights the contrast between the behaviour and the PRIA Code of Ethics. Yet as we have seen the PRIA neither represents a significant proportion of the industry nor does it seem relevant to many practitioners.

The PRIA, of which the author is a member, describes itself as the peak body for public relations and communication professionals in Australia representing some 2,500 individuals and more than 150 consultancies – both very much a minority of the totals in each category.

It offers training and professional development for members; has a consultancy registration scheme; runs conferences, offers annual awards (the Golden Target Awards) for outstanding programs; runs networking opportunities; and, has various affinity groups for members such as a young practitioners' organisation.

It also has links with similar organisations around the world – the Public Relations Society of America (actually the USA) and the Institute of Public Relations in the UK.

The PRIA says its members are "required to meet strict criteria for full professional membership. These include a PRIA accredited tertiary qualification and a minimum of three years fulltime practice, or a minimum of five years full time experience." There is

also a code of ethics for individuals and consultancies (more on this is Chapter 9) and a College of Fellows (of which the author is also a member).

I can't say I haven't enjoyed PRIA membership. The Conferences are good. Over the years speeches at conferences generated significant number of clients for my former firm. Peter Mahon of Royce Communications hosts the Victorian College of Fellows meetings at his Collins Street offices and offers wonderful wine and lunch. We reminisce about the grand old days of PR and we spend an inordinate amount of time talking about the structure of membership and ethics. At a conference in Canberra in the early 1990s I said the PRIA membership structure had more categories – and more rigidity - than medieval guilds.

But the reality is that it has become less and less relevant to the industry – and less representative - and may end up as a quaint anachronism unless something changes dramatically. Reflecting from time to time on why this has happened the explanation probably lies in the early founder obsession with declaring PR a 'profession'. Traditionally professions were the law and medicine although this expanded out to include accountancy, architecture and similar things. Being part of a profession was supposedly a guarantee not so much of what we today know as 'professionalism' but rather a guarantee of certain standards of practice and ethics. Ironically, that modern connotation is the exact opposite of the social distinction between amateur and professional which was so important in Britain in 19th Century sport. From the 19th Century onwards, and particularly in the late 20th Century, more and more people wanted to be part of a profession, thereby conferring respectability on what they did, and who they were, and allowing them to frown on amateurs. Today people have become cynical – often with very good reason – with the traditional professions but the status anxieties continue and many still want their occupation to be a profession.

Fundamentally the PRIA got side-tracked by status anxiety – and the search for respectability. Survey after survey shows PR people are not very well-respected – along with everybody else in politics, media, marketing and advertising – even if they are now very well paid.

The people attracted to the PRIA in the two decades after the World War II were often returned servicemen, and often commissioned officers. They had, perhaps, acquired a taste for deferential treatment. Catapulted into a newish – and not always well-regarded industry – they needed re-assurance and began to think they ought to be regarded as professionals, if not in the same way they regarded the professional at their golf club. The end result was that the newly-formed PRIA became a vehicle for defining its members as being members of a profession. So, while the industry has grown exponentially, its peak body has become less important, mainly because it thinks it is representing a profession rather than an industry.

The consultancies

While critics of the industry focus most of their attention on consultancies – and pharmaceutical companies – they are simply not as important as they once were, being neither the dominant players in the industry nor the leading employers of practitioners.

When Eric White and Laurie Kerr founded their PR companies there were some – but relatively few - internal PR staff in companies. Most consultancy people were ex-journalists and the few internal PR people were likely to have been ex-journalists as well. Qantas, for instance, employed a succession of ex-journalists from the 1960s onwards including people such as Dick Voumard and Dennis Crawford and even ended up with an ex-journalist, Geoff Dixon, as CEO. Many in companies – and PR people – didn't know much about economics or politics. In the 1970s, when I was working for the State Labor Opposition, an International Public Relations Director approached me and asked if we could ask a question of the Leader of the National Party, Peter Ross-Edwards, about some company with which an IPR client was in some sort of battle. I had to patiently explain that the Opposition couldn't ask questions of people on the cross-benches and that my boss, Frank Wilkes, was a close friend of Peter's and wouldn't try to embarrass him anyway. At the time I was surprised by all this but the thought did lodge that there may well be a good living to be made running one's own consultancy if that was the standard from Australia's most successful PR consultancy.

Gradually the make up of consultancies and their staff changed and consultancies grew in importance. Traditionally the industry had been counter-cyclical with the 1961 recession being a time of significant growth. The 1972 Whitlam Government election, and the worldwide stagflation, was another period of growth although this may have been largely due to business' need to respond to increased government activism. By the 1980s there were a number of large, successful national companies as well as a number of multinationals entering the Australian market. Significant players then were IPR, Hill & Knowlton, Rowland Neilsen McCarthy and PPR. Burson Marsteller entered the market and was followed by Edelman. Many of these were major multinationals operating globally although mainly US in origin. At the same time smaller independent firms such as Turnbull Fox Phillips (the author's company), Royce Communications, Michels Warren, Stratcom, and Corporate Communications became important.

The 1987 recession was the first not to result in a counter-cyclical boost and most agencies suffered falls in consulting revenue and cut staff. Turnbull Fox Phillips (TFP) managed to grow by just 1% over the recession period, largely due to big contracts with Telstra and the forest industry, but many others saw revenue losses of more than 30%.

The recession ended and the dotcom boom, allied with dramatic expansion in PR budgets in Federal and State governments, transformed the industry. There were probably four or five companies employing more than 100 people. IPR – taking into account part-timers in its promotion field – probably had more than 300 staff at its peak. TFP, at its peak when it was probably Australia's largest consultancy, employed more than 160 people.

Overseas firms and advertising agencies began to buy PR companies. Hill & Knowlton acquired Corporate Communications. Clemenger BBDO acquired TFP and merged it with Holt Porter Novelli. Fleishman Hillard and Ketchum set up Australian operations. Weber Shandwick acquired IPR. Simultaneously people split off from larger companies to create niche and specialist companies such as John Connelly & Partners (the pre-eminent corporate advisory firm), and rural specialists such as Cox Inall and specialist IT firms were established.

By the end of the century the industry was transformed again – not by recession – but by corporate down-sizing and ruthless cutting of costs. For every claim that business was out-sourcing more there was a reality about PR consultancy budgets being cut. Strangely the actual total number of consultancies probably went up as retrenched staff hung out their shingles as PR advisers, dramatically multiplying the number of sole practitioners. Where companies needed extra staff they turned to personnel firms to provide contractors. Morgan & Banks, which became TMP, and is now Hudson, became, in effect, the biggest PR company in Australia employing hundreds of contractors who are placed on short-term contracts in companies, government and other organisations.

PPR (acquired by George Patterson Bates) and having both Telstra and McDonald's as clients is probably the last old-style major PR company being truly national and employing substantial numbers of people. Instead there is a proliferation of medium size companies and boutique operators. Some of the medium size companies, such as the Ogilvy PR group owned by advertising agency Singletons, group several smaller companies together and seek to cross-sell their services. Many of the medium size businesses such as CPR and Hawker Britton have close ties with one side or other of politics and significant proportions of their work come from government or from lobbying government. Brokers and investment bankers use smaller specialist agencies such as FCR, Cannings, Hintons, Cosway and Gavin Anderson although many of these accounts are transaction-based rather than ongoing. There are also other sorts of specialists such as the multicultural communication company, Cultural Perspectives.Over the past decade former major players such as Hill & Knowlton, Burson Marsteller and Shandwick have closed state offices meaning there are now fewer national firms.

There are probably dozens of medium size companies such as Jackson Wells, Haystac, Quay Connection, Red Agency, The Reputation Group, Clifton Consulting, the Phillips Group, Scaffidi Hugh-Jones operating largely on a State-basis with perhaps an office or affiliate in another State.

An indication of the down-sizing of PR companies is the regular PRIA benchmarking study which looks at the size and operations of PR companies. 49 consultancies participated in the 2003 survey and reported total revenues of $55 million. Firms with turnovers of more than $2 million shrank by 32% while those with revenues of less than $1 million grew by 32%. In the 1990s the bigger companies were posting revenues of $10 million plus and some more than $20 million. The 2006 survey (conducted by W.H.K. Greenwoods for the PRIA Registered Consultancies Group) had 43 responses showing gross revenues of $65 million with about 10% of the sample disclosing billings of more

than $2 million.75% of the consultancies sampled billed between $500,000 and $2 million. Average billable staff levels were nine per firm with the four firms billing more than $2 million a year employing an average of 19 billable staff.

In terms of revenue by industry the 2006 survey showed that 13.26% of revenue came from IT firms with (in order) fast moving consumer goods, health, finance and insurance, the Federal Government, infrastructure and retail coming next. For the bigger consultancies IT, infrastructure and the Federal Government were the three main sources of billings.

Fee levels had also stagnated. Fees over $500 an hour were not uncommon in the 1990s and average fees were all over $150 an hour in big consultancies. Corporate cost cutting forced consultancies to either reduce or freeze fees and in 2006 the highest fees seemed to still be around the $350 to $450 an hour mark suggesting that in a decade there had been virtually no growth at all at that level. The 2006 PRIA Benchmarking Survey showed that principals of the sampled firms were charging an average of $262 and hour. Salary levels in consultancies are normally set on a multiple of charge-out rates. So a top consultant, charging $450 an hour, would normally generate fees of about $650,000 in a year. For anyone puzzling over the arithmetic, this does not imply that the consultant only works 30 hours a week for 48 weeks of the years, but is because it is impossible to make every hour billable. On the standard criteria most consultancies use, this would result in a salary (unless overhead costs are very low or the person is a sole operator) of $190,000 to $250,000. A very good salary, but much less than those being paid by major corporations.

In 2007 there were 908 public relations consultants listed in the Telstra Yellow Pages – 401 in Sydney, 242 in Melbourne, 116 in Brisbane, 68 in Perth, 61 in Adelaide, 14 in Hobart and six in Darwin. This was more than ever in the history of Australian PR – but the nature, role and size of the consultancy industry had changed. For a brief period it was the dominant factor in the PR industry – but not any longer.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PR HOLY GRAIL – FRAMING THE DEBATE

Frames of reference

Throughout Australia – and the world – there are hordes of PR people, think tanks, politicians and others who spend their days and nights thinking about the holy grail of PR: how to frame issues, events, products and ideas in ways which set the agenda for debate.

Framing is PR people's single most important, and most significant, activity. Framing – with phrases, attitudes or ideologies – sets the frame of reference within which the news report events and statements and how people see things.

At its simplest level it can be the use of a phrase such as 'cut and run' as a way of describing the otherwise sensible policy of getting out of Iraq to stop the damage already done, forestall future damage and cut everyone's losses. When Christian fundamentalists stopped referring to their anti-Darwinism as 'Creationism' and started to call it 'intelligent design' they were re-framing their position hoping to change how you thought about it. Creationism has connotations of fundamentalism, raises memories of the ridiculous positions its supporters have taken and is just plain unfashionable. Intelligent design, in contrast, seems to be worth considering because it sounds reasonable, rational, intelligent and good. The fact that it is the same unscientific nonsense dressed up in new rhetoric is obscured. I believe that then Federal Cabinet Minister, Dr Brendan Nelson, trained as a medico and responsible for education and science would not embrace creationism in a bid to win right-wing support. The risks of losing support would be too great and it would almost certainly compromise his principles. But it is interesting that he felt free to say that intelligent design might have some place in schools. Similarly, the attempt by Richard Dawkins' (the scientist and active campaigner for evolution, atheism and reason) opponents to characterise Dawkins, as a 'fundamentalist atheist' is a means of trying to marginalise his views.

Framing is not strictly speaking Orwellian, despite the fact that people who try to frame debates often resort to forms of Newspeak, jargon or euphemism. Rather it is a parallel to the field of Computer Human Interaction (CHI) in which software designers seek to 'control the metaphor' to help users understand how to operate computers and to improve the user interface with computers and other machines. Controlling the metaphor occurs through the abstraction of familiar everyday objects or actions, and applying them to the things on a computer with which the user interfaces. So we get 'metaphors' such as desktops, folders, notebooks, filing cabinets, recycle bins, documents depicted by traditional images of such objects arranged across our computer screens. In controlling the metaphor the computer software designers are simply framing the way you look at, and use, a computer. The PR person who dreams up phrases such as 'cut and run', 'law and order', 'class warfare', 'right to life', 'economic rationalism', 'welfare cheats' and

'gloom and doom' (referring to environmental campaigns) is trying to frame the way we see issues in terms of well-established images and narrative traditions and techniques just as a software designer does with the computer screen. As the list suggests, the technique has been used most effectively by the new right wing radicals who have dominated political and economic debate over the past two decades, forcing social democrats and other progressives to respond, or form policy, within the new frame of reference created. Thus the ruling economic consensus becomes 'economic rationalism', the rational, reasonable policy which frames all alternatives as 'irrational'.

Framing theory

There is now a rich literature on framing and how it works. Robert M. Entman in Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm (*Journal of Communication* 1993, vol 42 (4) 51-58) says framing is about 'selection and salience' and that "to frame is to select some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in the communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described." He says framing is a way to 'define problems', 'diagnose causes', 'make moral judgements' and 'suggest remedies'. Entman's approach is heavily based on framing reflecting perceived reality shaped by cultural values. In practical terms the Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, has spent much of his later career framing issues in terms of cultural values and through phrases which communicate to people with specific sets of cultural values. Indeed, the very word 'values' itself is a form of framing, or code for a set of assumptions about society. Howard, of course, was not original in this. It has become known as 'dog whistle' or 'wedge' politics. Howard, although never saying it publicly, has told political colleagues that he had been impressed by the way Ronald Reagan had created wedges to prise traditional blue collar voters away from the Democrats to the Republicans. On returning to lead the Opposition before the 1996 election he started to consciously develop the technique further within an Australian context. After he had been successfully practising it for some time the media commentators finally noticed something he had been discussing in political circles for some time.

Robert .L. Heath in *The Wrangle in the Marketplace: a Rhetorical Perspective of Public Relations* reminds us that framing is an outgrowth of rhetorical techniques which date back to Aristotle. Heath describes rhetoric as a form of effective communication which meets Aristotle's definition of 'the ability to observe in any given case the available means of persuasion – what needs to be said and how it should be said to achieve the desired outcome.' He actually defines PR in terms of framing by seeing PR as a 'corporate discourse' guided by 'the art of adjusting organisations to environments …strategically negotiated rhetorically, through words, interests, opinions and actions.' This is a profoundly post-modern view of PR in which perception shapes reality. (see chapter 6 for further discussion of this concept)

Kirk Hallahan in the Seven Models of Framing: Implications for Public Relations (*Journal of Public Relations Research* 1999 vol 11 (3) 205-242) puts framing within a

cognitive saying it is related to 'underlying psychological processes people use to examine information, to make judgments, and to draw inferences about the world around them.' Hallahan sees PR framing as entailing defining reality for organisations and their publics by shaping their respective views of the world as it relates to the other. George Lakoff in the most entertaining book written about framing, *Don't Think of the Elephant* says "Frames are mental structures that shape the way we see the world. As a result they shape the goals we seek, the plans we make, the way we act, and what counts as a good or bad outcome of our action." (p xv)

How does it work?

Across the generations

Lakoff gives the best short summary of how it works: "Once your frame is accepted into the discourse, everything you say is taken for granted." (p115)

Within this context framing works at generational, strategic and tactical levels. The generational level is exemplified by the way in which societies accept a common frame of reference for quite long periods. The Dreyfus Affair in France shaped a dominant view of French discourse around clericalism and anti-clericalism which still persists today in arguments about what religious symbols students can wear to school. Remembered disillusion after the First World War shaped a determination to avoid the same errors after the Second World War. The Great Depression was an event which framed views of economic debate for decades. During the Depression if you had said you believed in Keynesian economics you would have been regarded as insane and dangerous. After the Second World War if you didn't you were regarded as odd. By the 1970s and stagflation a new consensus around neo liberal economics was forming. What is significant about this process is that major events can shape the ideas which form the conventional wisdom and which then act as a frame of reference for all public debate for quite long periods. There are, however, always revisionists beavering away to overturn the conventional wisdom – just as Hayek and others beavered away to over-turn the Keynesian consensus. For the last couple of decades this new conventional wisdom has driven politics and markets and generally, as Friedrich Engels predicted, reduced most things to the status of a cash commodity. This process works at the individual level because psychologically we resist, or ignore, information which does not fit well with our belief systems and community attitudes. We have all experienced the effects of cognitive dissonance when we read something and think we have read something quite different because we have filtered it through our cognitive belief systems. In essence this generational level framing is empirical evidence that the Jesuits were right about how giving them the boy will allow them to shape the man.

Framing at a strategic level

At a strategic level framing works by some standard techniques. Hallahan describes seven framing models:

- Framing of situations is a model in which communications are anchored in particular aspects of everyday life and experiences. This form of framing dictates the way we try to organise organisational behaviour towards those inside and outside the organisation so that relationships are always consistent with communications and experiences. Marketers see this as fulfilling the 'brand promise' that is ensuring that each and every time you use a product or service you get the benefits and feelings you associate with the 'brand'.
- Framing of attributes is a way of characterising objects, events and people. The attacks on so-called 'welfare cheats' and single mothers are a form of typecasting or framing of discussion about people. Essentially the same thing can be done with events or objects by associating them with positive or derogatory attributes. Gallipoli (see Chapter 10) is framed as a unique moment in Australian history which defines our national identity even though it could, probably more validly, be framed as an invasion which was a military disaster in which a few Australians suffered rather less than Turks, British, French, Indians or New Zealanders.
- Framing of risky choices exploits people's innate risk aversion to shape decisions. Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, the behavioural economists, and others have shown how much human decision-making is not according to some ideal Adam Smith invisible hand but is, instead, largely non-rational. Thus people regularly take risks to minimise losses but avoid risks which might maximise gains. Conservative politicians down the age have consistently used this reality to frighten people against progressive change. Equally environmentalists use the same technique to frighten people about development.
- Framing of actions aims to get people to choose one action option largely by reducing the perception of the number of options available. Thus for much of the 21st century so far Liberal and National parties have tried to frame the choice of voting actions between their continued allegedly sound economic management and the risk of economic disaster and high interest rates under Labor Governments. Much social marketing also works by framing actions in terms of choices – most graphically in situations such as quitting smoking or drink driving or dying.
- Framing of issues is about getting issues on the public or policy agenda. This process is inevitably the same: pose a problem, propose a solution and then motivate people to take action on the solution. Activist groups often play into the hands of their opponents by skipping the second phase or coming up with an implausible solution. Former BHP Chairman, Sir Arvi Parbo, speaking at a Leadership Victoria Leadership Week Forum (June 19 2002) said that to achieve change it was not enough to know what you were against but rather to know what you were for. Every day of the week lobbyists and companies approach governments seeking what are, at base, favours if inevitably dressed up as sound

policy. The key to this lobbying is to identify a problem (under-investment in an industry for example because of government regulations); identify a solution (changing the laws or giving incentives); and then motivating action by promising investment, jobs and flow on social and economic effects. This varies from government to government. In Queensland under Jo Bjelke-Petersen the only relevant question was who would benefit and how that would help keep the government in power. Under the Hawke-Keating Governments it was always advisable to frame the issue in terms of an economic model and case. Under the Howard Governments it was always advisable to bring along consumer research illustrating how the change would impact on the government's re-election prospects.

- Framing of responsibility works at generational, strategic and tactical levels. The US, for instance, despite being rich and powerful overall has had responsibility for problems framed in terms of fear and the alleged actions or threats of others. Since World War I alone. foreigners, communists, the Japanese, Muslim extremists, the Chinese, welfare mothers and assorted other groups have been put in the frame as responsible for various ills. The gun lobby has framed responsibility in this way extremely effectively so that after one of the regular US school, shopping centre or other massacres it is now common for people to argue that if those massacred had had guns the tragedy would never have occurred. This is an example of re-framing the debate away from the problems of gun ownership and the people who use them, to the responsibility of those who try to infringe gun ownership rights. Framing of responsibility is also important in crisis management where people want to know what happened, who was responsible and what is being done about it. Companies who fail to admit responsibility, show contrition or fail to have a clear solution tend to suffer longer from crises than those who do the reverse.
- Framing of news both exploits journalists tendency to report within their frame of reference and the nature of the medium which relies on pre-packaged short-hand to characterise events, actions and policies. In politics one of the commonest ways to frame news is by using framing devices as titles for legislation or policies. The Hawke-Keating Governments released policies under headings such as Creative Nation or Working Nation. The US Government introduces legislation with catchy titles – the Patriot Act to restrict civil liberties; the Clean Skies policy which loosens restrictions on pollutants; the Healthy Forests initiative designed to fell more trees. The Howard Government introduced WorkChoices, legislation designed to reduce workers choices. Tax cuts, especially for the affluent, are characterised as tax relief as if taxes were a burden from which we should be released rather than the price for living in society. In this area framing verges on the Orwellian and uses similar techniques to those employed by Joseph Goebbels where language is used to convey the opposite of reality.

Perhaps the most common form of strategic framing is the use of dualism – polarising choices between two contrasting concepts. Good and evil is the classic form of dualism, with us being good and them being evil. Politics in India is still blighted by seeing political disputes through the frame of Hindus versus Muslim dualism. But dualism is

also at the heart of advertising, which asks people to choose washing powder on the basis of being clean or not clean enough. Dualism works because it appeals to value-based frames about what is right or wrong supported by references to holy texts, the common good or some aspiration.

We should not imagine that facts are not important in framing. Facts and objective reality still provide the ultimate scientific framework for considering any question. The problem is that PR people can employ facts to create an aura of objectivity by presenting facts without context.

Framing works because it taps into people's desires and aspirations, their values and beliefs, their interests and education, their geographic location and their community networks. The PR person setting out to frame things successfully can't rely on just a resonant phrase, instead it is a matter of devising language and actions which appeal to deeper psychological and historic factors. It is ultimately a narrative technique which draws on legends, myths and traditional memories formed by social memory, collective memory, legitimate memory – and sadly – a bit of structural amnesia.

How technology has made it easier

What has made this all easier in the 20th and 21st centuries is technological change and the expansion of TV and visual electronic media. Jeffrey Scheuer in *The Soundbite Society* argues that two factors are important in recent US politics. First the emergence of TV 'not just as an important element in the political process, but as its very framework'(p 1) ; and, second the collapse of US liberalism and the emergence of the new Right. He describes a "soundbite society (as) one that is flooded with images and slogans, bits of information and abbreviated or symbolic messages – a culture of instant but shallow communication" (p 8). He sees TV as a 'simplifying lens' which filters out the complex in favour of 'blunt emotional messages'. Of course television technology, if not the owners of TV stations, is a neutral factor. However, the technology has become, through commercialisation, greed and a desire for instant thoughtless gratification what it is.What is clear is that, in the past two decades the Right has been better at framing messages which suit the medium – partly because liberal and progressive options tend to be more intellectually complex and nuanced than racism, fear of foreigners and terrorism and appeals to tax relief, crack downs on welfare cheats and so on. However, many activists have been equally successful in using the medium, soundbites and made for TV events to get their causes across as well. Others could do the same. A few years ago The Fabian Society approached me for some advice about raising their profile and increasing their influence. As well as a range of activities such as research, conferences and policy documents – the mainstay of Fabian activity since the Society's formation – it was clear that its image needed to be modernised and a rationale for listening to it provided. Working on the basis that much of what they did was intellectually complex but robust, and often nuanced as life and reality is, I suggested a new slogan: 'the antidote to soundbites.' I did confess that the idea stemmed from having read Scheuer's book, but it struck me as a good way of re-positioning a valuable organisation which had been out-gunned by the myriad of well-financed right wing think tanks who had successfully

framed the agenda around the contradictory streams of neo-liberal economics and conservative values expressed through carefully crafted soundbites. Unfortunately they didn't adopt the slogan but the imperative remains – finding antidotes to the soundbites which frame what we think.

Tactical framing

Framing works at a tactical level largely through language and phrases which resonate. There are many examples. The Victorian Department of Sustainability and the Environment decided to drain an artificial lake called Lake Mokoan in northern Victoria. The decision was going to affect tourists, some farmers and had the potential to be a wider issue around the State. In the early discussions of the policy the people involved described the process as 'de-commissioning Lake Mokoan', a legitimate if bureaucratic form of words. After further discussion it was agreed that what the DSE was actually doing was restoring the area to its natural state. The difference between the two frames of reference is not only obvious but also huge in terms of minimising controversy. The tactic doesn't always work, however. Shortly after the same Department decided to return Honeysuckle Creek, which runs through the Strathbogie Ranges in an area nearby to Lake Mokoan, to its natural state, pulling down the old dam which had blocked the river, and also freeing up water flow for the Snowy River. This time the return to natural state *was* met by controversy because the locals saw the old dam as an emergency water storage and a source of water for fire-fighting. The Department had not framed the Honeysuckle Creek case in exactly the same way as they had Lake Mokoan, but if they had it wouldn't have worked because those they were trying to influence already had a frame of reference resistant to the natural state position.

During the attempt by the Australian Cricketers Association to negotiate massive salary increases for Test players, and changes to the management of the game, I was working with Cricket Australia. The players were being advised by a successful financier who was hoping for a large proportion of the money which would flow from the changed distributions of media revenues the new deal would produce. Now cricket has been a mini case study in the Marxist theory of development. It started as a sport run by the participants in a form of primitive communism; it evolved into a feudal system in which the 'natural leaders of society' told players what to do and controlled the game; and then it evolved further into a form of global capitalism. The Australian game was part of the global capitalist sporting system but it was still run by people actively involved in the game who had come up, democratically, through the system. While many imagine the game is now run solely in the interests of the media, its traditions and structure have kept a robust, democratic element in its operations. Initially the dispute featured many aspects from salaries for elite players through to more assistance for State cricketers. There was no one frame within which the issue was viewed other than a bit of journalistic sympathy for players versus bureaucrats. What changed the debate, as well as an ill-timed threat by players to strike during a Test Match, was to re-frame the debate to one about who would control the game – the existing democratic structure, or the players and their financial backer. A compromise was reached but the initial sympathy for the players was dissipated because the issue was re-framed.

For many years the bottle manufacturers and the brewers and soft-drink manufacturers had fought against Container Deposit Legislation (CDL) a system used in South Australia, Canada and some other places to encourage people to return containers for recycling. The argument had been going on for years with those in favour of CDL accusing industry of environmental vandalism and arguing that deposits would get rid of waste and litter. The industry traditionally responded with economic arguments. It also created an industry association, the Litter Research and Recycling Association of Victoria, which began to support recycling efforts, in particular the newish kerbside recycling system in the State. In effect the pro- and anti-CDL lobbies had created an industry which supported jobs, positions, researchers, lobbyists and others. At one dinner a visiting US expert talked with the industry about the fight in the US and then noted – 'but is has paid a lot of college fees'. The big change for industry came when it re-framed the debate by pointing out that taking the higher-value recyclables, such as bottles and cans, out the kerbside recycling system would undermine both the economic viability of the kerbside system, and the positive effect the system was having in encouraging people to be more environmentally responsible. CDL was then framed as potentially damaging to the environment rather than beneficial, as it proponents claimed.

In the early 1990s the Keating Government decided to introduce a system of Divisions of General Practice. Traditionally GPs tended to operate in a surgery on their own or with another doctor and a receptionist/nurse. Research showed they had a target income. Their public statements showed they believed any reforms to the system were a stalking horse for socialised medicine – despite the fact that the bulk of their target income already comes from taxpayers. The Health Minister, Brian Howe, was aware that the traditional way of providing GP services was no longer efficient or effective. It was important, to keep people out of hospital and to put greater emphasis on preventive medicine; and, that a stronger and more diverse primary health care system was developed in which GPs worked with physiotherapists, psychologists, and other primary health care providers in one convenient location. Initially it seemed that the GPs and the Australian Medical Association would be hostile to the move. Research showed that they were suspicious and felt that any change proposed by a Labor Government was not in their interests. Yet the research also showed a more powerful emotional factor. GPs believed their position in the medical system was being eroded and that others – specialists and hospitals - were becoming more important. It was decided on the basis of the research that the Divisions of General Practice reforms needed to be re-framed as a reform which would put GPs back into the centre of the health care system as co-ordinators of the primary health care system and the gatekeepers for the rest of the system. The Australian College of General Practitioners supported the policy, partly because it also involved more training for doctors, and other medical groups became supportive. The issue was no longer a socialist threat but one which went to the core of GPs' values and self-esteem. More than a decade later it has also turned out to be a financial bonanza, as some doctors have sold these new, bigger practices, to large health care companies.

When the Howard Government introduced various private health insurance (PHI) incentives in the form of rebates, and some changes which made it less attractive to delay taking out private health insurance until you were older and more likely to need it, the issue seemed to be that it was privatisation by stealth designed to undermine Medicare – perhaps the most popular institution in Australia. While working on the Divisions of General Practice campaign I had also worked on a concurrent program to promote awareness of people's rights and entitlements under Medicare. The campaign was enormously successful and research indicated that in the 1993 'true believers' election Medicare was the second biggest issue after John Hewson's Fightback Plan and the GST. It had another effect, the incoming Howard Government, whatever the desires of the Prime Minister and some medical groups, couldn't privatise or get rid of Medicare. It had become politically impossible. So the framing of the PHI changes had to be approached carefully. In the end the frame of reference chosen was to emphasise that PHI was a way of protecting Medicare by reducing the pressure on the public system. At the time I had my doubts as to whether it was the right way to go but all those involved in the campaign in the Department of Health, and our consultancy, felt it was actually another way to cement Medicare in the life of Australia and make it even harder to dismantle.

But framing is not only about narrowing down options and refining messages so that they resonate. It can also involve broadening the debate. For years the food industry has been afflicted by claims that this or that foodstuff causes cancer or some other disease. The fact is that during the 20th Century consumption of processed food, as well as 'unhealthy' products such as butter, milk, chocolate, ice cream and meat has rocketed. At the same time people are living longer suggesting that the modern food industry is not the greatest threat around to human existence. The problem for the food industry was that their opponents always seized on one example and the industry fought back on that one example. The debate didn't begin to shift until the industry stopped fighting fires and exploded the debate by encouraging lots of opinions and then adopting the position – scientifically sound at that – that the best course with food was moderation. While the re-framed debate has not helped with the ongoing arguments about obesity it is an alternative to a sterile fight about tiny amounts of some ingredient in individual foodstuffs.

NGOs and activists are also good at framing debates. In Australia, public attitudes to two major issues – the fate of David Hicks and refugees – started to shift when the debate was re-framed. In the case of David Hicks it ceased to be about whether he was a terrorist or not, but what his basic legal rights were, and whether the Government was denying them in complicity with its close friends in the White House. Many people had supported Hicks' return to Australia on these grounds from the beginning - and the campaign was long, sustained, moral and systematic - but as more and more people raised questions about what protection an Australian passport gave you, the terrorism framing adopted by the Government became less and less effective. Similarly – again not merely as a result of re-framing – attitudes to the refugees changed when the Government was no longer able to frame the issue as 'queue jumping' by anonymous individuals who threw babies overboard and had to confront people with direct experience of refugees in their

community. The issue became – should anyone be treated like that and the framing by type-casting was no longer effective.

Obviously much of this tactical framing is about language. There are people trying to do it on every issue every day. In the *Australian Financial Review* (March 5 2007) a US water expert, John Reutten, said that people would never come to terms with drinking recycled waste-water while it was called that, or its technical name 'indirect potable re-use.' Instead, he urged, it should be called 'water supply replenishment'. It seems better than toxic sludge is good for you but perhaps the theoretical underpinnings need to be explored more thoroughly. Lakoff recounts how in the US the political commentator and analyst, Frank Luntz, regularly circulates language guideline books for conservatives. They are a how-to-manual to generate frames of reference and soundbites. Steven Poole in *Unspeak* tries to update Orwell and looks at how language can incorporate unspoken assumptions. He, like Lakoff, discusses terms such as 'tax relief' but also analyses the incorporated assumptions about terms such as 'surgical strike', 'community' and 'reform' and how all of them relate back to positive collective and individual memories. PR people, if they are going to be effective, need to use the techniques of framing and persuasion. But other people need to protect themselves by not only understanding them but also be being able to deconstruct, understand and clarify language.

Bringing it all together

The biggest, most sustained (and among the most effective) framing campaigns in recent history has operated at generational, strategic and tactical level. It is that pursued by the Israeli Government and its supporters around the world. Any deconstruction of the campaign – and systematic campaign it is – uncovers examples of just about every framing theory, strategy and technique there is. Some would argue that the campaign for neo-liberal economics and the Washington consensus has been bigger, but that campaign has been more successful in the Anglo-Saxon part of the western world. In the entire the western world it is impossible to write anything critical of Israel without finding yourself exposed to a massive campaign. In Australia and the US, in particular, writing something about the Occupied Territories, or killing civilians, which would be regarded as commonplace in Israel is likely to result in being besieged by letters, emails and criticism. The Israeli Government and lobby groups around the world send out briefing notes, talking points, suggestions on how to frame issues, advice on tactics and what language (such as the Occupied Territories) to avoid.

Initially the campaigns were crude, accusing anyone criticising Israel of being anti-Semitic. If the critic was Jewish then they were accused of being a 'self-hating Jew'. The response was partly legitimate – many critics of Israel are anti-Semitic, some of them are Holocaust-deniers and many of them do want to destroy Israel. But what was a legitimate response to criticism has become a catch-all means of generational framing. Thus to criticise Israel is to somehow discount the horror and significance of the Holocaust and to side with the anti-Semites down the ages.

At a strategic level the US Jewish community started to emphasise the centrality of the Holocaust in their public lobbying in the late 1960's. As Norman Finklestein, *The Holocaust Industry,* and Peter Novick, *The Holocaust and Collective Memory,* make clear, the leaders of US Jewish organisations were, until 1967, in favour of playing down the Holocaust in the interests of the US anti-communism crusade. It is more than possible that many people wanted to simply forget the horror, although the number of survivors in the US or children of victims, is relatively lower than in other Western countries. But since 1967, when the threat to Israel became extremely great, remembering has sometimes walked hand in hand with political use.

At the tactical level the response to Jimmy Carter's book *Palestine: Peace not Apartheid* is an example of how a variety of strategies – framing the book as supporting terrorism, characterising his views as 'strident and uncompromising', 'malicious advocacy', 'condoning terror as a means of obtaining the objective of a Palestinian state." In Australia, Anthony Lowenstein's book, *My Israel Question,* was subjected to similar vilification.

Why choose the Israeli example? Because, if we can see how framing can be used through language, events, behaviours, positioning on an issue of fundamental importance to human rights, political debate, peace in the Middle East, and the survival of Israel we can begin to see that framing is not simply something done by PR people wanting you to buy more chocolate bars, politicians wanting you to vote for them, but something fundamental to discourse around the world.

A positive view of framing

Ironically the best guide to how framing could be a positive concept with desirable social benefits is contained in Habermas' *Communicative Action Theory.* Traditional PR falls into Habermas' category of strategic action which has the purpose of influence and control rather than understanding. But Habermas' communicative action theory centres around dialogue as the pre-requisite for rational consensus building. This emphasises understanding, openness, factual evidence, moral norms and reasons, and consistency and honesty. As we have seen framing theory contains elements of all of these concepts.

It can therefore be regarded as a touchstone as to whether a PR activity is simply about influence, control and manipulation or about achieving understanding between the senders and receivers of messages. In Chapter 9 we discuss some of the ethical questions this raises.

CHAPTER FOUR

ISSUES MANAGEMENT - KEEPING THE ELEPHANTS AWAY

What is issues management?

In 2000 David Goodwin, then General Manager Government Relations BHP wrote an article for the Centre for Corporate Public Affairs (*Corporate Public Affairs,* Vol 10, No 1, 2000) on a Public Affairs Best Practice Tour to the USA the year before.

He recounted an anecdote common in the field about an External Affairs Manager who, under pressure to describe her role, says "I keep the elephants away." "But there are no elephants" replies a sceptical CEO. To which she responds "See what a great job I'm doing."

"Effective issues management is like that – inconspicuous when it is successful, and valued most highly in its absence" Goodwin said.

There is now a significant literature on issues management and an increasing number of PR practitioners who describe themselves as in the issues management business. Many briefs for government work are about managing issues. Some governments have tried to define it and many PR industry critics regard it as a euphemistic term designed to hide the more nefarious things PR people do.

But essentially it is all about "keeping the elephants away" - by identifying issues which might impact on an organisation and then developing strategies to manage them and prevent them damaging the organisation.

In his PhD research, one of Australia's leading issues management experts, Tony Jaques says that issues management developed in the mid 1970s as a business discipline which helped companies to "participate in, and not simply respond to, public policy issues which had the potential to impact the organisation."

He says: "issue management is unusual among management processes in that the moment of it's formal birth is definitive and the record of its infant development is remarkably well documented…..the date was 15 April 1976 which marked the publication of issue 1 of *Corporate Public Affairs and their management (CPI)* in which editor and founder Howard Chase coined the expression 'issue management'."

To a certain extent this development went hand in hand with the development of the broader corporate public affairs role which covered corporate relations, government relations, economics, public policy, community relations and the whole gamut of activities which relate to organisation's relationships with stakeholders (see Chapter 6).

Geoff Allen , of the Australian Centre for Corporate Public Affairs, dates the major development of these corporate public affairs concepts to the 1970s and 1980s and cites important work by "Robert Ackerman and Raymond Bauer, Igor Ansoff, David Baron, Roger Bucholtz, Archie Carroll, Howard Chase, Edwin Epstein, Edward Freeman, Robert Heath, Neil Jacoby, John Mahon, Joseph Nagelschmidt, James Post, Lee Preston, Peter Sandman, S. Prakash Sethi, George Steiner and David Vogel"

Two of these were immensely influential in the development of Australia theory and practice: Professor Peter Sandman, the risk communication guru; and, Professor James Post of the Boston University Research Group. Post's team undertook wide-ranging research into the way firms managed issues. Sandman developed a series of unique methods for handling community outrage about risks – from avian flu to the siting of petro-chemical works.

With issues management Jaques (*Journal of Business Strategy* Vol 28 No 6 2007 25-28) takes issue with the terminology and argues that the term "issues management" as been plagued by the "careless use of the word "issue" " in which just about every business problem is characterised as issues management. He suggests that issue management should be restricted to use within a formal "issue management" process where the issue involves "external parties; where there is no black and white answer; that may involved public policy or regulation; where emotions rather than data often prevail; that happen in public or in the news media; and where the risks of failure are greatest, and if left unmanaged have the potential to become crises and threaten the entire organisation."

While Jaques is right about the nomenclature and the precise definition we will, for this book at least, continue to use the more common, if less accurate term, issues management.

What is an issue?

Professor John Mahon, University of Maine, writing in the ACCPA Newsletter (Vol 15: No. 2, 2005), says an issue is: "a disagreement over facts, values or policies; a disagreement over procedural or substantive matters related to how resources or positions are distributed; a controversial inconsistency based on one or more gaps in expectations involving management perceptions about changing cost/benefit positions and different views about what is, and/or, what ought to be organisational performance; and, the issue is also what you want the issue to be."

A disagreement over facts, values and policies is illustrated by the ongoing debate about funding for government and independent schools. How much do the Federal and State Governments spend on each sector; is it equitable to provide government grants to already-rich private schools; should we be financing religious schools which teach fundamentalism; do taxpayers have a right to a choice about how their children are educated; are parents entitled to some financial contribution to support their choice in return for the taxes they have paid; what are the social implications of private versus public education? The list of questions is endless and campaigns are run by the Australian

Education Union and the Australian Independent Schools Association contesting every one of them with facts and differing ideological positions. To give one example of such campaigns, in the 2004 election campaign Opposition Leader, Mark Latham, announced a policy to end the then government's system of financial support for private schools by reducing the money being paid to elite schools. The Association of Independent Schools Victoria's CEO, Michelle Green, characterised the policy as Mark Latham's 'schools hit list' and 'class warfare.' Her comments achieved front page *Herald Sun* coverage.

Disagreements over procedural or substantive matters are the stuff of every major political, environmental and public policy campaign. The Howard Government's rural and community aid programs were political pork barrelling rorted to an extent that grants were provided even before the applications were made. The ongoing fight over the Victorian Government plan to dredge Port Phillip Bay to provide access to bigger ships has ostensibly been about the economy and the environment, but much of the PR positioning has been about the technicalities of environmental effects statements and processes.

Gaps in expectations are found in government and private sector organisations. In government an example is with aged care provision and the fate of an aged persons' home. Under an early Howard Government initiative Cabinet discussed a policy change which would require people to fund more of the cost of their own aged care through the sale of their home. Normally when such controversial changes are put to Cabinet there is an attachment outlining what the communication and issues management ramifications might be. In this case the Cabinet didn't consider a communication campaign was warranted because the policy was economically rational and sensible and didn't need explaining. In fact the policy triggered deep emotional responses. On the one hand the aged were unhappy about losing their homes at a time when their lives were being disrupted by something very few people want to happen – going into a nursing home. On the other hand an even deeper emotional factor – greed – was at work. Many in the generation of baby boomers had been sweating on one day inheriting their parents' home at a time when a real estate boom had made many once ordinary homes into very valuable assets. The greedy baby boomers were able to cloak their concern in an expectation about performance – ongoing care of ageing parents at a difficult time in their life – instead of the reality of their greed.

Age care performance was also the source of an issue with regulation. The same government introduced a system of semi self-regulation for nursing homes through a series of surveys and reporting. The number of inspections was cut back. The problem was that some nursing home proprietors were unscrupulous and exploited the patients – just as some greedy baby boomers exploited and neglected their parents to maximise the amount they inherited.

At the time I was working with the Federal Department of Health and Aged Care and the Minister responsible was Senator Bronwyn Bishop. The issue was generating national media coverage, Parliamentary questions and motions, anguished parents, neglected old people and blame-shifting between States and the Federal Government. When one

proprietor was found to be asking staff to bathe patients in kerosene the Minister Bishop's future – even with the easy-going attitude of the Howard Government to Ministerial responsibility – was under threat. The easy answer was to just close down the rogue operators but the reality was that doing so meant that the patients had to be housed somewhere when hospitals were over-crowded and few other nursing home beds were available.

A number of issues management strategies were pursued. The Department of Health Public Affairs staff led by Virginia Dove undertook a sustained media management campaign while department and State Government staff tried to house residents and fix problems. The other traditional tactic of seeking a scapegoat was emerging as an option for some. But, as with all such issues management situations, there was a shortage of information. As a consultant to the Department I had to gather information, assess the risks and make some recommendations on how the issue was to be managed. My first visit was to the regulatory agency based in Parramatta in NSW. In a discussion with the CEO it became clear that while there were unscrupulous operators there was also a fundamental problem with the policy. The public had an expectation of government performance - that nursing homes would be regulated, inspected, and monitored. Some in the public also had a sub-conscious expectation of another sort of performance – that the whole nursing home experience be out of mind and out of sight. The government policy was based on a strict cost/benefit analysis of expected performance – with the costs to government being reduced and the benefits to residents and patients being enhanced by a streamlined regulation system. The policy wasn't really delivering on any of these expectations.

Needless to say there were many meetings, conferences and brainstorming sessions about what to do. The most important was in a Parliament House conference room with the Minister, Bronwyn Bishop, the Department Head, staff from the Minister for Health's and the Minister for Ageing's offices, myself and department staff. The discussion ranged over operational matters, what the Minister should wear on TV, and who might be responsible. Ken Smith, Michael Wooldridge's Chief of Staff, while not pretending that this was the sole answer was forthright about the need for the Minister to change her hairstyle, wear more casual clothes and to start looking and talking like someone who related to ordinary Australians. The meeting froze and the Minister looked about to erupt. I leapt in with some euphemistic words about how we understood the Minister dressed like an elegant middle-class woman but that it wasn't always appropriate in all circumstances. It was clear that the Minister didn't want to hear most of our advice and some of the people in the meeting were already thinking that a scapegoat might be the best strategy with the CEO of the agency being the person who could be held responsible. Having spent some time with the CEO I was able to mention, almost casually, that he had been very helpful and that he had very extensive files on how they were implementing the government policy and what reports they had been providing. This was no electrifying moment – unlike Ken's earlier comments. Indeed, the comment passed with just a few seconds of silence before the two senior Department officials, Andrew Podger and Mary Murnane, smoothly stepped in to take the discussion back to operational

matters and detailed recommendations on how to fix the problem and how to communicate that it was being fixed.
Professor Mahon's definition about expectations of performance is thus, not just about perceptions, blame and responsibility, but also about reality.

His last definition – that an issue is what you want it to be – is an illustration of the importance of the framing strategies discussed in Chapter Three. To a large extent the people or groups who have most influence on how an issue is debated and resolved are the ones who are most successful in framing it in their terms. The Howard Government's Work Choices are an example. The Government sought to frame the legislation as an economic reform which provided flexibility and jobs. The ACTU sought to frame the issue as being about unfairness and insecurity. The Labor Opposition extended the ACTU position by seeking to frame the issue as a government which had 'gone too far' and had become hubristic.

Issues in the private and public sectors

The problem for government is that while issues management has become a mainstream public affairs function – and a means of political survival – the fabric of issues management strategies raise questions about how legitimate the practice is for government. Certainly governments need to research issues, monitor questions, communicate what they are doing and why and resolving issues which arise. But the problem is the line between communicating information and managing (by neutering) what is simply an expression of democratic disagreement.

The examples given to illustrate Mahon's definitions of what is an issue are largely public sector ones. But there are significant differences between how issues management is seen in business and government. In general, best practice issues management in the private sector focuses on anticipating issues, scenario planning, reputation maintenance and avoidance of crises. In government, issues management is much more media driven and the focus is on putting out fires, managing the crisis of the day and dealing with the needs of Ministers and their media staff. While the distinctions are admittedly a bit of an over-simplification they represent different time horizons, different contexts and different personnel between the two sectors.

The 24 hour a day, seven day a week, news cycle and the advent of permanent campaigning mean that the media is a much more important element in government thinking. While departments and officials try to practice long term planning the Minister's media staff (normally ex-journalists) are constantly driven by what's in the press or what the shock jocks are saying on radio. For corporate public affairs staff (normally not ex-journalists) the intrusion of the media is generally unwelcome. They spend much of their time trying to stay out of the media, while the Ministerial minders spend most of their time trying to get their Ministers into the media. Business leaders tend to be media averse. They are moderately happy with dealing with the finance media but find dealings with other journalists perplexing. However, at times they also react like Ministers to media coverage. For instance, when BHP was dealing with the issues which

arose around its OK Tedi mine in Papua New Guinea, much of the response was driven by unfavourable media coverage, in particular what were perceived to be unflattering photographs and adverse coverage of the then CEO, John Prescott. The problems with the mine included disputes with the local community, pollution problems, construction problems – a mess which was seized upon by NGOs in Australia. BHP was managing the business issues well and recognised the actions required (it ultimately closed the mine down and undertook extensive remedial work) but was concerned to manage the adverse media coverage of the CEO because it believed it was impacting on its reputation. Extensive research was conducted which showed that a small minority of Australians were aware of the problem and the majority of those aware felt unfavourably about the issue. The strategic options were to: try to change the attitudes of the minority, try to confine the knowledge and concern to the minority and prevent it escalating to the wider community, or generate wider community support. The third option was adopted and the company undertook an extensive, print dense and print based advertising campaign. The result – the proportion of Australians who were aware of the issue shot up but the proportion of those concerned stayed the same. In other words making more people aware had made more people concerned. Just continuing to quietly work through the business issues and focussing on telling people what was actually planned, completed and achieved would have been a more successful strategy.

But, despite the differences both public and private sector issues management, specialists all practice some form of the issue management model outlined by Howard W. Chase and Barry L. Jones in 1977. That involves: issue identification; issue analysis; issue change strategy options; issue action program; and accomplishment of issues action program goal and evaluation of results. Like most PR planning models it represents a loop which should encourage continuous learning and improvement. The Issues Management Council (www.issuemanagement.org) has details of this model and publications exploring issues management techniques.

Identifying issues

Identifying and anticipating issues is partly a product of conventional planning tools such as scenario planning, SWOT analysis, environmental scanning, stakeholder analysis, corporate planning methodologies. Equally it is important to monitor and understand the global context and trends. This involves knowing about demography, economics, sociology, social change and all the various things which shape our world.

There are short cuts for this. Californian social trends are a key lead indicator for global social changes. They get diffused through the entertainment industry and shape what people sing, wear, eat, think and say. The ubiquitous ‘like’, used as a comma, emerged from California. Australia and the Scandinavian countries are key lead indicators on issues such as alcohol and health. Both have well-organised anti-alcohol lobbies which have traditionally espoused a control theory of alcohol harm reduction which suggests that reducing total alcohol consumption will reduce harm. The argument is now shifting, mainly because it is very difficult to persuade the public that the control theory is a good idea, towards attacking patterns of drinking which cause drunkenness and harm and we

are seeing a new emphasis on 'binge drinking'. Until the defeat of the Howard Government, watching the US Republicans' policy priorities and campaign techniques were a good guide to what John Howard would do. Some people use media content and trend analysis although generally, media coverage is not a way of identifying a potential issue but rather a way of recognising that it has become a real, actual problem. Others swear by Internet monitoring although even the CIA has trouble monitoring and digesting all the information there is on the web.

For most organisations the most effective issues identification technique is simply practising reality therapy. In a 40 year career one of the most striking discoveries is the extent to which very smart, intelligent people at the head of organisations miss the obvious things which are sweeping society. Most senior business people now lead unusual lives. They are paid huge amounts – whether they succeed or fail; they get chauffer-driven; always travel at the front of the plane; and generally mix with people who think like they do. One of my favourite pieces of advice to senior managers was to try to ring their own company – not saying who they were – and negotiate the various telephonic options and then make a re-assessment of how customer focussed the company actually was. The reality was that they never experienced this because their PA dealt with the trivial things which are the substance of the everyday lives of most Australians.

The best PR practitioners need to avoid this group think and challenge the conventional wisdom. They need to sit on trams, trains and buses and listen to what people talk about, and they need to study the demographic trends and youth culture to see what's actually happening in the world and avoid the ambushes which seem to surprise business leaders when they venture out of the Chairman's Lounge.

The issues lifecyle

If they do study these trends they get a new perspective on how issues originate and develop. They don't actually spring from nowhere – in fact most follow a similar lifecycle.

Normally they start with a few people concerned about an issue. It might be a resident action group concerned about high density development or a freeway. It might be a think tank, like the Climate Institute or the Institute of Public Affairs, trying to change public policy. It could be a business group such as the Business Council of Australia wanting to change taxation and infrastructure policy. Equally it could be a few friends and neighbours concerned about an issue – whether it is their local school or the odour from a nearby factory.

The small group starts to talk with other people to recruit supporters and get other people involved. They might write a letter to the local Council, prepare a position paper or research report or hold a meeting. At some point in the cycle someone in the group will go to the media – perhaps a local newspaper or possibly a mainstream metropolitan media outlet. Frequently the media approach is associated with a stunt – a demonstration

or a protest. When the Port Melbourne, Victoria, residents were organising to prevent a Surfers Paradise type development in their Melbourne bayside suburb they chose a visit to the area by Prince Charles and the then premier, John Cain. The media entourage following the Royal visit couldn't help but miss the placard-holding mothers with children in prams pointing out their opposition to the development. It is at that point that an issue starts to become a major issue or not. The interplay between media and action becomes more frequent. The stunts become more creative. When Camberwell Victoria, a solid middle class suburb, residents organised against the Victorian Government's 2030 Planning Scheme actors Geoffrey Rush and Barry Humphries participated in protests outside Camberwell railway station attracting widespread media coverage. 2030 was a planning scheme designed to reduce urban sprawl, encourage urban consolidation and reduce pressure on water, transport and other infrastructure. It was a sensible and carefully considered plan, but the merits of the case were rarely debated because the high profile media events caught the attention.

It is at this stage of the lifecycle that the framing of the debate and the issue becomes all important. For opponents of whatever constitutes the issue there are claims that it will cause cancer, add to global warming, destroy jobs, ruin property values, lead to all sorts of unanticipated consequences. For proponents the claims are inevitably that jobs will be created, you can't fight progress, world hunger will be cured and the opponents are selfish and short-sighted. This formulaic development is partly driven by the need to create media coverage and most of the media is unlikely (see Chapter 5) to analyse the issues in any detail. They want action, conflict and concepts which can readily be fitted into a few seconds on TV or radio.

The media didn't have some magical magisterial Fourth Estate past which it has lost and replaced with this new formulaic coverage. Most mainstream media was always populist and partisan but the pace of the cycle and the crucial significance of the need for pictures and action – or optics as the media managers see it - was different. For me the most dramatic realisation of this came when I was working as a press secretary to the then Victorian Labor Opposition Leader, Frank Wilkes, in the 1970s. There had been a scandal about the South Australian Police Special Branch, the files it kept on ordinary people whose only crime was to dissent and the methods by which it spied on people. The Victorian Labor Party decided to make an issue of the matter – this was in the era when Labor Opposition's still opposed the extension of police powers and infringements on civil liberties – and prepared a very detailed report on the Victorian Special Branch. Frank Wilkes offered to provide the report to the then Premier, Dick Hamer. Hamer agreed to meet him – this was in the era when Liberals listened to Oppositions and practised some civility in inter-party relations – to discuss the report.

The Premier's office was at 1 Treasury Place at the top end of Collins Street in Melbourne. The Opposition Leader's office was in Parliament House a short distance away. Frank, with the Shadow Minister and some staff, decided simply for reasons of convenience that he'd visit the Premier on foot. The media were keen to discover when the meeting was and what would take place. We told them Frank was going to see Dick and when. We mentioned that Frank would probably walk across and anyone who wanted

to could catch up with him on the way over or the on the way back. He strolled out of the back door of Parliament House and off to the Premier's office. Every TV channel and every radio station had a crew there. None of them reported much detail about the Opposition report but every channel carried footage of the short walk. Today there is nothing remarkable about media minders thinking about how to package an issue for TV but then it was still an emerging art. Naively we were shocked by the reaction but quickly realised that we had seen the future.

By the time an issue is achieving major media coverage a new stage sets in. There are questions in Parliament; other groups join the debate piggy-backing their concern; legislation or regulation is proposed; and, then the project or issue is dropped or modified.

Looked out as a graph the typical issues cycle starts with low intensity and then rapidly escalates only to tail off a bit at the end. Most issues never entirely disappear (witness the nuclear power discussion in Chapter 10 and many reach a plateau from which new issues develop. The growth of the environmental movement in the 1970s exemplifies this trend. By the 1980s environmental awareness had reached a new plateau and it was impossible to return to a relatively uncontrolled situation with industrial pollutants.

The problem for PR people and organisations is that the resource allocation – time, people, money – is greatest when the curve peaks. Traditionally the resource allocation is lowest when the intensity curve is lowest. This may be because the issue is not recognised as important, or it may be because no-one is responsible for tracking and monitoring the host of issues which confront organisations. The art of issues management is to develop the anticipation methods which allow you to address issues early in their lifecycles. Generally you will not anticipate them on the basis of data gathered over lunch in a club or in the Qantas Chairman's lounge. It is more likely to come from your children (if you have them) around the dinner table; from a paragraph in a local newspaper; from a conversation outside the school when parents pick up their children; from the activities of an environmental or pressure group that your CEO thinks is mad, bad and dangerous; or, from conversations in public transport.

Managing the issues

Managing the issues when they arise fundamentally requires rigorous analysis of some basic strategic questions. The most important illustrates the importance of framing because who is framing the issue determines much of the course of the future contest about it. If you are a food manufacturer (despite the fact that food quality and safety is infinitely better than it was decades ago) it is very difficult to overcome an issue about food safety framed by an NGO group – GMOs being an example. Australia currently pays out billions of dollars in subsidies to farmers in drought relief because the issue is framed in terms of farmers as a unique part of our heritage who should be protected at all costs. If the issue was framed in terms of reality – that droughts are not exactly unusual in Australia and that any prudent farmer should prepare for them – you then ask why should the most inefficient (those who are not prudent) be subsidised by the rest of us. Worse,

when dry conditions are probably due to climate change why should we be risking further environmental damage by farming areas (with subsidies) which might be better returned to nature? If we look at agricultural subsidies from European perspectives the issue again looks different. In international trade negotiations Australia always claims that its agriculture is super efficient and doesn't require subsidies. Europeans look at Australian agriculture and say it is subsidised because it doesn't meet the full environmental costs of its operation. The issue is fundamentally the same but the starting point in managing it radically different.

Framing is also a matter of apportioning blame. If we take the examples of obesity and smoking, when the issues first developed, manufacturers were focussed on framing the issue in terms of individuals exercising free choice. In the next phase there are grudging admissions that individuals were exercising their free choice badly. In these phases individual causes are biological or behavioural such as over-eating or lack of exercise. As the issue developed further , opponents managed to re-frame it around the concept that the individuals were actually innocent victims of corporate misdeeds which the corporations ought to be accountable for. The last phase is about fixing blame and retribution through legal, regulatory or financial means. In these phases environmental causes are systematic factors such as corporate marketing or lack of government guidelines on healthy eating.

The next strategic step is to ask what is the real core of the issue and, the corollary of this, why is it an issue? In Victoria in 2007 there was a long-running controversy over the brakes on the trains supplied by Siemens to the privatised rail network. Exhaustive testing couldn't identify the precise problem although there was a suspicion that it was a combination of failing track infrastructure and some driver error. However, the real issue was the ongoing opposition of unions, the public and public transport pressure groups to the privatisation of the system. The brake issue became a symbol of everything that Victorians disliked about the privatised system. Siemens as a supplier to a contractor to the privatised system could never manage the issue in an active way because it could not damage supplier relationships. Similarly, the contractor, Connex, couldn't actively manage the issue by talking about the pressure increased patronage had placed on the system or by talking about ageing infrastructure. With the first approach the public simply ignores the problem. As with health care more is never enough. With the second it would have meant attacking the ultimate system paymaster – the Victorian Government – which was responsible for the infrastructure.

A third strategic step is to be aware of where an issue will be fought out and by whom? Will it be in the media, between government departments, between companies or between residents and a developer? Will it be one of the Prime Minister's friends, as it was when Geoffrey Cousins campaigned in the 2007 Federal Election about the proposed Tasmanian pulp mill? In terms of families and kitchen tables one of the reasons the Fraser Government banned whaling was because Malcolm Fraser's children raised the subject with him.

And the last strategic question is how the issue or problem can be fixed. In the 1970s when a factory was accused of emitting air pollution the PR people moved in a made a video or produced a colour brochure with all traces of pollution removed and lots of shots of green grass, smiling children and happy workers. By the 1980s the only way to fix the problem was to fix the problem. Obviously some issues can never be resolved – for ideological, financial or personal reasons. The disputes about forestry are an example of this, as opponents won't be satisfied until all logging of native forests stops. On the other hand a major development might be modified to satisfy opponents. What PR people need to realise, however, is that most issues cannot be resolved by changing perceptions but instead need a change in reality.

The role of stakeholders

All issues management relies on identification and classification of stakeholders. The problem for many companies was that they were lead down a dead end on the question of stakeholders by the views of economist, Milton Friedman. Friedman argued that a company had to focus only on shareholders as they were the only stakeholders who mattered. The business of business is making a profit and building shareholder value is the prime purpose. This suited the neo-liberal and de-regulation theorists of the 1980s and suited the businesspeople who were easily convinced that it was a natural law that the society was better off if they were as free as possible to make as much money as possible.

The problem with this theory is that the quickest way to destroy shareholder value is to ignore stakeholders. Ultimately corporations and organisations operate with the consent of the community. Communities comprise groups of stakeholders and winning the consent of these stakeholders provides a licence to operate. There is also a moral or philosophical argument for focussing on stakeholders – the need for companies to be socially and environmentally responsible. In 1984 R.Edward Freeman (*Strategic Management: A stakeholder approach)* developed a view that stakeholder theory is about identifying the groups who are stakeholders in a corporation and who need to be managed to ensure the licence to operate is constantly renewed.

Stakeholder theory is thus the cornerstone of all public affairs or PR management. But it also plays an important role in issues management.

Since Freeman, PR people have longer and longer lists of stakeholders, and potential stakeholders, have been developed. The lists usually includes those who are directly involved such as investors, employees, suppliers and customers. Other, more indirect stakeholders, are governments, trade unions, community groups, NGOs, neighbours to company operations, communities in which companies operate. Some of those directly involved are often ambivalent about how strong their relationship with the company is while some of these less directly involved, for example NGOs, are passionate about their interest in the company. The media is sometimes seen as a stakeholder by some PR people and the media itself is quick to see a role for itself. At best some in the media see themselves as an independent and objective arbiter although the reality is probably that they are a significant player in issues management without having much of a stake in the

outcomes beyond the aspirations of individual journalists and the economic interests of media companies.

How companies deal with these stakeholders is sometimes determined for them. What a company says to investors is largely determined by ASIC and the ASX although this doesn't stop PR people fudging the issue in dealing with the media. For instance, in nearly every dotcom boom IPO some PR person whispered to some financial media gossip column that the Packers, or some other rich investor, were buying into the company's shares. In some cases it was even true, but the objective was to generate interest in the shares, not to keep the market informed.

Successful companies communicate with their employees as much as possible on a face-to-face basis despite the advents of email, company blogs and other internal communication techniques. Much lobbying of governments is mainly a matter of building up contacts and goodwill for the future. Smart companies operate on the basis of trying to pick the political and official stars of the future as the US State Department does by inviting rising young politicians and public officials for US study tours. They also maintain ongoing relationships irrespective of passing circumstances. Former Federal Health Minister, Dr Michael Wooldridge recounts the time when he was elected Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party. He received hundreds of telephone calls and letters. When he subsequently lost the position he received a handful of calls and letters. He asks: "Guess whose calls I'm most likely to return first?" John Howard, when in opposition had a small kitchen cabinet of supporters who met regularly with him and provided him with assistance. Obviously the group had better access when Howard returned to Government. There are other views of stakeholder relations with governments, for example, one Australian company, Brambles, for many years had a policy of only dealing with governments and had no contact at all with opposition parties or politicians.

In PR management overall, nearly all stakeholders need attention. But in day to day issues management, the art is more to focus on segmenting stakeholders and work out precisely what the relationship between the stakeholder and the organisation are and how that will shape their attitudes to the company.

John Claringbould, once Australian legal counsel to the Mars group of companies and later the group's global counsel, analysed the various work undertaken on stakeholder management and summarised the major approaches into a matrix which could be used for all issues management. In a personal communication with the author he said the weight of the theory and practice suggested that you could segment stakeholders according to whether they had a direct interest in your business (employees for instance); whether they were potential allies (the trade and business associations to which you belonged, local Members of Parliament, trade unions, local councils and so on); whether they were hard core opponents (Greenpeace is inevitably a hard-core opponent and anti-GM campaigners are going to be had-core opponents of anyone wanting to produce GM food); whether they are independent monitors (Human Rights Watch wants to monitor companies and not get involved directly with them); or whether they are uninvolved (this is normally the general public).

Once you categorise stakeholders in this way you can determine the appropriate strategy. If they are directly involved with you they can be recruited as advocates. Amcor was extraordinarily effective in this with their staff at Maryvale Mill in Victoria. Amcor took over APPM in Tasmania (a company with an industrial relations record such that a Liberal Premier supported the unions and workers when the company locked them out) and wanted to re-assure the new staff about Amcor's industrial relations policies. They could have told them about the policies, issued newsletters or used any of the many traditional methods companies use. Instead, they flew all the APPM staff – from managers to shopfloor staff – to the Maryvale Mill and let them talk directly to their Mill employees. In doing so they recruited their directly involved Maryvale stakeholders as advocates for their industrial relations performance.

Searching for potential allies among stakeholders, forestry and pulp and paper companies in the long-running battle over native forest logging effectively formed alliances with unions to fight for continued logging. Almost the entire carbon-based industry in Australia recruited a very willing stakeholder and ally, the Howard Government, to fight against restrictions on emissions which caused climate change.

With dedicated opponents the only strategy is to seek to neutralise them. I have often thought that that these groups, such as Greenpeace, might have their own agendas and take action not only to achieve environmental goals but to also sustain donations and their global brand. At times it appears that they have little interest in dialogue and could sometimes be characterised as people who won't take yes for an answer. In the 1980s Greenpeace conducted one of its raids on a western suburban plant owned by Nufarm, an agricultural chemical manufacturer. They accused the plant of being a source of toxic threats to the water supply. In this case Melbourne Water, the local water utility, demolished Greenpeace's arguments with an aggressive campaign based on scientific evidence obtained from their own records and from independent experts. Admittedly it was one of the few examples where scientific evidence triumphed over pressure group activism, but it was also an example of how determined opponents can be neutralised. With independents the strategy is to conduct a dialogue which provides the hard data on which the monitors of behaviour can judge for themselves. Chocolate manufacturers adopted this strategy to combat criticism of their dealings with chocolate producers in developing countries. First, the companies agreed on a set of policies and actions to ensure good labour conditions and adequate prices; and, then they focussed on providing the data on which critics could make judgements. With this strategy, however, it is also necessary to think about how to make the information transparently available to as many people as possible. A company in Australia, which I was asked to advise, was concerned that the independent monitors were not ranking their social and environmental performance as highly as that of some of its competitors. The company argued that objectively their performance seemed to be as good if not better. My view was that many of these international benchmarks for performance are often met more by managing the umpires than by raw data. How you present the data and how it is adapted to the benchmark framework of the monitor can become all important. My recommendation was to provide all the raw data online and let the public judge the performance

themselves. In essence this involves eliminating the filter and keeping the independent as honest and transparent as they expected others to be.

Finally, with the uninvolved it is simply a matter of monitoring their attitudes and anticipating what might happen if they get involved. In the BHP Ok Tedi case they got the uninvolved involved but with unanticipated consequences. Research, particularly qualitative research, is the best way of making sure that you don't get caught in the same way.

The future

Issues management is becoming more and more important to companies, the public sector and other organisations. It is often the area in which ethical dilemmas arise. It is even more often the centrepoint for fundamental disagreements about ideologies, values and what facts mean.

It is also one of the areas which highlight the limitations of paid PR. It is too easy to assume that rich and powerful interests can always shape opinions, regulations and legislation as they want. And while there is abundant evidence that they do – the policies of the Bush and Howard Goverments towards climate change are a prime example – there is also abundant evidence that NGOs and ordinary people can stop and deflect corporate and governments' plans. The Port Melbourne residents were effective with their demonstration at the visit of Prince Charles and Premier Cain. But the decisive moment in the battle was at an environmental effects hearing when Terry Chumley, a former worker at one of the factories on the site to be re-developed and a leader of the local campaign, told the inquiry that the site was probably contaminated, detailed the activities which would have caused the contamination and suggested someone check. They did. He was right and the development was de-railed.

The developers' PR people had run a textbook issues management campaign for the time. They reached out to the community and sponsored the popular local football team. They employed the Mayor's wife as a community information officer. They had the Minister for Planning, Evan Walker, as an advocate. But they didn't get around to talking to Terry Chumley because they obviously characterised him as a radical activist who could be ignored or marginalised.

CHAPTER FIVE

PR AND THE MEDIA - THE SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP

An uneasy relationship

Richard Farmer - some time journalist, vintner, lobbyist and political operator – was a guest speaker at a PRIA conference in Brisbane in the 1980s. He spent much of his speech berating the PR industry for its awful behaviour and announced that he made it a practice never to speak to PR people. The late Russell Hill, then CEO of Holt Public Relations, got up in question time after Farmer's speech and said: "Well I never speak to journalists."

While it is true that only very few PR people ***never*** talk to the media, publicity-seeking is a declining part of overall PR practice and ex-journalists a declining proportion of the PR industry. While early in my career in the 1960s I talked regularly to journalists, particularly finance journalists, by the 1980s and 1990s I talked to journalists very rarely.

Today media relations are most important for political PR staff (see Chapter Eight) and PR people dealing with the lifestyle media. Many senior PR people only talk to journalists when something has gone wrong. Conversely journalists frequently call PR people for information, stories and follow ups to material provided to them.

Yet despite this, tension between journalists and PR people and the impact of PR people on the media are probably the subjects, other than ethics, which critics of PR focus on most.

The problem for journalists is that many of them retain a traditional Fourth Estate view of the mainstream media – independent, objective, a key part of the democratic process and a guarantee of liberty. The term Fourth Estate stems from the traditional French notion of their being three estates in the nation – journalism termed itself the fourth estate, the extra one which watched and reported on the other three. The media was probably never like that. Newspapers in Britain in the 18th century were normally just scandal sheets controlled by one or other political faction or the government itself. Editors were subsidised and bribed and were not above accepting money for either including or excluding items which were called "puffs". There was a strong satirical press but Vic Gatrell (*City of Laughter Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London)* points out that this suddenly disappeared in the 1820s. The disappearance was not due to any repressive legislation but simply a result of the Liverpool Government's decision to eradicate savage satire by bribing the satirists to keep quiet.

Today the media don't take bribes – although some journalists do trade favours for information and media proprietors receive massive subsidies from government in the form of government advertising – but they are just as commercial in their outlook as their pioneering predecessors. In fact the media is a gigantic industry in itself, a player in the

political game, and producers of products carefully geared to the needs, interests and lifestyles of specific demographic segments. The US sociologist, Thorstein Veblen, summed it up in *The Theory of Business Enterprise*: "The successful magazine writers are those who follow the taste of the class to whom they speak, in any aberration (fad, mannerism, or misapprehension) and in any shortcoming or insight or force which may beset that class."

Indeed, successful publicity today is more likely to be based on tailoring news to the lifestyle segment (readers, viewers, listeners or bloggers) a media outlet targets to win advertising.

The problem for many journalists is that their worldview – the Fourth Estate view is in stark contrast to this reality. Hence, their false consciousness about who they are, what they do and why; and, a need to find scapegoats to blame for the obvious disparity between their worldview and the actual performance of media outlets. I have often said that the relationship between journalists and PR people is akin to that between white sharecroppers and African Americans in the Deep South before the civil rights movement. The white sharecroppers, instead of focussing on the class basis of their situation, displaced their anger and violence on to the African Americans who were even poorer and worse off than them. While no-one is suggesting PR people are poor, under-privileged, exploited or likely to be lynched: they fulfil the same emotional displacement role for journalists. They are simply easier to blame than media proprietors and commercial reality for the state of the media.

Some journalists exist in an uneasy relationship with PR people but others can be angry and aggressive. A food producing client of mine was being hounded by an *Age* journalist about an individual who did contract work for the food producer and was also a media commentator. The relationship was never secret but the journalist kept writing stories about it. We had largely decided to ignore it in the belief that, like all such stories, they would eventually pass and be forgotten. Unfortunately the individual was becoming stressed and unwell as a result of the media stories and I had to ring *The Age* so as to be seen to be trying to set the record straight. When the journalist finally returned the call (I had to get a senior *Age* staff member to persuade her to do so) she yelled down the phone at me: "I didn't call you. I'll call you only if I need to speak to you." Never being of the school that constantly seeks to placate the media, I replied that if she took the attitude that the only knowledge worth acquiring came from who she decided to ring, she was going to go through life being pretty ill-informed. This probably did my client no good at all, but gave me some satisfaction, although that was partly cancelled out by the journalist beating me to the phone hang-up. Needless to say it didn't stop the stories, but a few days later they stopped anyway. Not because of my intervention, but because something else came up and the story had run its natural course.

The strangest response to the PR-media relationship is the view, by some journalists, that PR people manipulate the media. The PR manipulation view was being espoused some years ago by Wendy Bacon when we were both being interviewed on an ABC program about some alleged PR manipulation. I argued in response that for Bacon to be right it

implied that journalists were either stupid or lazy – stupid and capable of being manipulated, or too lazy or distracted to spend the time digging out the truth. Many PR people claim to be successful at manipulating the media, many wish they could and a few probably do on a minor scale – but generally the relationship is actually different.

Indeed, the majority of journalists have simply adapted to a world in which there are more PR people than media workers and that the PR people are the most likely source of information, quotes, data and background. The relationship is thus not actually adversarial but rather symbiotic – both sides need each other and work out pragmatic arrangements to achieve their mutual goals.

PR influence on media content

This symbiotic relationship leads to an outcome which troubles some journalists and PR critics, and encourages some PR people to boast. Indeed, a variety of studies of the media seem to demonstrate that the majority of stories in the media are placed there by PR people.

In *Fame Games,* Graeme Turner and his co-authors report that1993 the Queensland Electoral and Administrative Review Commission examined government media and found that the State's newspapers, radio and TV journalists reproduce news releases almost unchanged. Of 279 media releases from Queensland Government Ministers some 200 of them were taken up by newspapers; 140 of them were reproduced practically word for word; and, 60% of the releases were not verified in any way.(p 42)

Clara Zawawi, in Sources of news – who feeds the watchdogs? (A*ustralian Journalism Review January-June 1994 67-7)* says that in 1980 then-PRIA President, Bill Sherman, estimated PR activity accounted for 30 per cent of material published in the daily press. Other estimates in the 1990s suggested PR activity accounted for some 60 to 90 per cent of media coverage. Zawawi studied the phenomenon in more detail trying to work out how much did come from PR; whether it was more pronounced in the business than the general news pages; and, whether you could actually pick the PR activity through the text of the stories. In June 1993 she looked at *The Australian, Sydney Morning Herald* and *Gold Coast Bulletin* on a day when news hadn't been skewed by a big event. She found that on that day 64% of the news in *The Australian*, 53% in the *Gold Coast Bulletin* and 65% in *The Sydney Morning Herald* came from PR sources. "This pilot study suggests that perhaps researchers should adopt a model that removes the journalist from the centre of the news process in the print media and gives more emphasis to the role of the PR practitioner," she concluded.

Lynne M. Sallot and Elizabeth A. Johnson in Investigating relationships between journalist and public relations people: working together to set, frame and build the public agenda 1991-2004 (*Public Relations Review 32 (2006) 151-159)* looked at relationships between journalists and PR practitioners in the US. They found that, on average, journalists in their survey estimated that 44% of the content of news media in the US is influenced by practitioners. A lot of them valued their relationships with PR people,

many had a love-hate relationship and – significantly – the longer someone had been in journalism the better the relationship with the PRs. Journalists who had worked in the media for 18 to 45 years reported improving relationships more often than those with fewer than eight years experience.

A charitable explanation of the last finding is that older journalists shed the veil of false consciousness. A less charitable one is that they become more cynical and more accepting of the realities of the symbiotic relations. A charitable explanation of the finding about younger journalists is that they are still afire with idealism. A less charitable one, from my own experience at least, is that they are just more arrogant. Every PR person – and not a few politicians, businesspeople and others – have all had experience of some 20 plus young journalist being hostile, patronising and arrogant about subjects on which they have virtually no knowledge. For many years I was involved in extensive media training for people likely to be interviewed by journalists. Over the years we used a lot of practising journalists to question the trainees. One of the best of these was Pru Goward, now a NSW MP. In particular, we used her extensively with a very large private company which was reluctant to talk to the media about anything much but needed to, from time to time, to promote its brands and deal with issues. Almost by accident we discovered something interesting about journalistic techniques. As part of the training the company staff were subjected to a wide variety of interview types for different media – radio, TV and print – and with differing degrees of hostility. It may have been a function of Pru's technique, but we found a fascinating pattern. The more hostile the interview, the less information was forthcoming. On reflection it was natural – in a hostile environment the normal reaction is to close up, be more defensive and much more careful. In a more relaxed conversational mode the interviewees were more likely to provide more information – often stuff which company policy precluded them discussing. Unfortunately the combative interview – particularly of politicians – appears to make better value, if only for its gladiatorial elements. Yet conversation not only discloses more information, but is more likely to disclose information people don't want exposed.

The paradox is partly explained by the tendency for news today to be about what people say rather than what they do. Thus a journalist covering a story rounds up a few quotes and that becomes the news. The Library of Congress' Daniel Boorstin, in his book *The Image,* explained it by contrasting Benjamin Franklin's newspapers which regularly reported that there "was no news today" because the packet had not arrive on the boat from London. In other words the paper felt free to say that there was nothing out of the ordinary going on. Boorstin recognised that if nothing out of the ordinary was going on in the modern world, then the news media had to make the ordinary extra-ordinary, or create news by getting someone to say something newsworthy. In Chapter 8 we discuss how this concept influences much of what political PR people do day in and day out – focussing on subtle shifts in words as opposed to focussing on actions. But it is not only in politics that the concept of 'no news today' has disappeared. As Ryzard Kapuscinski, the Polish foreign correspondent was reported as saying (*The Monthly* April 2007) "contemporary media sometimes reminds one of a narcotic addict. Just as he, to continue his being, must secure narcotic, so the media, to maintain their market share, must inject into their veins ever more shocks, jolts and horrors."

What is interesting about the Zawawi research (which confirmed some earlier research by Rod Tiffen) was that the PR influence was most pronounced in the business pages. In this case the source is often not a PR person but a player – a CEO, a stockbroker or a merchant banker. In most of the privatisations in Australia the PR person acted as an official spokesperson when a routine announcement needed to be made. Most of the heavy briefing was done by the financial people involved. Many of them were addicted to the publicity involved. Our company was involved in the preparatory stages of a privatisation and it at one stage there was a stream of journalist briefings critical of the company which could have been coming from the finance team. Most of the briefings seemed to suggest that the financial whizkids were very competent but the company management was hopeless. At one meeting I decided to say that there seemed to be a lot of publicity about the company. I tactfully suggested that some people – clearly wrong but we had to deal with the perception of the problem – thought that the privatisation team were responsible for the adverse publicity and that this was anomalous given that we were supposed to be maximising the value of the asset rather than talking it down. One thing years in PR does, is to create an infinite capacity to spew out unpalatable news in tactful, euphemistic language. Everyone tut, tutted about how terrible it was that people could be so foolish as to imagine that any of the bad publicity stemmed from the privatisation team; the senior public servant made the obligatory statement about how everyone had to be very careful about how we briefed people; and, we never got to work with the team again.

In most major financial transactions and activities similar background briefings – generally designed to promote the company although sometimes to denigrate a competitor – are carried out by senior business and financial people. In the 1980s a newly-appointed CEO asked me for advice on how to deal with the media. Within a week or so of being appointed he kept getting calls from senior finance journalists who obviously had his direct line. He quickly realised that his predecessor had spent an inordinate amount of time talking to the journalists on a background basis – a practice he wanted to discontinue.

So, when you read a carefully reasoned article by a finance journalist, and are impressed by its level of financial literacy and detailed technical analysis ask yourself who was the most likely beneficiary of the story and that will allow you to identify the most likely source.

Cui bono?

Unfortunately the beneficiary is not always immediately apparent – particularly when differing people claim the credit for it.

In 1999 a Melbourne *Age* journalist, Sushi Das, broke a series of stories about problems at a call centre, Data Connection, which was the sub contractor servicing Melbourne's Transurban City Link project. She received a bundle of papers which suggested that Data Connection was losing account details, overcharging customers and making a major mess

in the lead up to the opening of the toll road and its electronic tolling technology. It seemed to me that Das' original source could have been a former Data Connection employee, a visiting backpacker who had recently been sacked for taking drugs while on the job. The story was also fundamentally correct – the call centre data was a mess. But the reason for the mess was not really an incompetent call centre but apparently rather the lack of a computer system in which to record the information. All the data from impending customers was being manually handled with a view to inputting it to the computer system when it finally became available. Data Connection management was in a difficult position – as a sub-contractor with various legal obligations they couldn't come out and say the problems were a result of there not being a proper computer system. The contractor for the computer system was the same company involved in the long-running Collins Class submarine software debacle.

Das was not writing about the computer problems, and seems not to have known about them, instead focussing exclusively on the manual inputting problems. The computer story was actually broken by *The Herald-Sun.* I wondered at the time whether Das was being fed material by the sacked drug-taker for some reason other than an interest in fixing the problem? Was she being provided information by Transurban or their PR people Buchan Communications? Transurban denied that Buchan were involved in the media liaison at all and also said that Das never printed anything that wasn't true. Why did the big story – the computer system at the heart of the tolling technology and its link with the Collins Class submarines – take so long to emerge? Why did it emerge in another paper – not the one following the Data Connection story most closely?

Some lessons

There are two lessons from the situation. First, when journalists get on to a good story which can run for days they get protective about it. Psychologically it's a form of cognitive dissonance in which each day something new - which fleshes out the story, wins another by-line and provokes more reactions - is pursued within a framework which tends to exclude dissonant information. Companies which are subject to the scrutiny find it almost impossible to escape the pressure. All new information is considered through the prism of the unfolding story and denials are regarded as self-serving.

In the 1990s, while working with APM Maryvale's Mill, I was forced to try to rectify a front page story in the *Latrobe Valley Express* falsely asserting in massive headlines that APM was polluting the Latrobe River with heavy metals, particularly mercury. There had been a long-running story about the plant's waste disposal options and the company had, admitted and sought to address, an odour problem. Its discharges to the Latrobe River, from where it got the water in the first place, were of higher quality after being treated in the mill than it was when drawn from the river. But *The Latrobe Valley Express* had read the plant's new EPA discharge licence. The licences require companies to disclose all discharges – however minute. In this case the company disclosed mercury discharges in concentrations about the same as those contained in a can of beer. The quantity was irrelevant and the story made the front page – simply because it was seen through the prism of all discharge stories and the Mill and its long-term waste disposal problems. We

never got a retraction but we did ask the EPA to try to educate journalists about licences and how they worked. A similar education campaign was undertaken about the industrial relations practice of ambit claims. Under the then-IR system unions had to make an ambit claim which provided room for manoeuvre in future negotiations over subsequent years. To make sure there was flexibility there were provisions for very low numbers of hours worked in a week and potentially high salaries. For years journalists coming across such claims wrote shock horror stories about greedy unionists making irresponsible and ridiculous claims. They never wrote, as with EPA licences, that the system made it legally necessary. Fortunately the Industrial Commission and unions combined to educate journalists about the system and the stories ceased.

Both the ambit claim stories, and the alleged mercury pollution story, are also products of ignorance on the part of journalists – a frequent situation when complex legal or scientific questions are at stake or when the scientific facts go against the journalist's frame of reference. These can be quite simple scientific facts. A crusading TV consumer program rang one of our clients, a petfood manufacturer, saying they wanted to interview someone about a terrible scandal – the fact that much of the bulk of a can of petfood is actually fluid and not meat. In fact the amount of water in a can of petfood is less by volume than the amount of water in a slice of prime steak, a lettuce leaf or the human body. Simple – scientific fact – water and fluids make up much of what we think are solid. The journalist simply could not be convinced, and although the manufacturer's technical staff did a good job in the interview, the story was the story within the frame of reference. The former ABC program *The Investigators* decided to do an expose on our client, the egg industry, and the virtues of free range eggs rather than battery hen eggs. There are many arguments about the subject – probably the major one being the treatment of battery hens. But strangely at the time there was little focus on the nutritional arguments. The consumer magazine, *Choice,* had looked at the issue a number of times, and found that battery eggs were less likely to contain chemicals and other residues than free range eggs. Since then stricter regulation about how hens are kept, restrictions on the use of antibiotics and other measures have changed much in the industry. We used the *Choice* material hoping it would be a trump card with a consumer program but the evidence was less important than the frame of reference. The TV show host's final comments were that consumers could tell which were free range eggs and which were battery because the mark of the cages was on the eggs. The comment was neither true nor relevant and, like the Data Connection story, missing what perhaps was a much bigger story.

Needless to say PR people are hardly innocents in all of this, and regularly use 'scientific facts' and data to support their pitches to journalists. While today there is nothing quite as disgraceful as the 1950s tobacco industry use of medicos in cigarette promotions, there are a steady flow of reports, surveys, evidence and testimonials vouching for the safety of developments in sensitive environments, the benefits of GMOs and the efficacy of pharmaceuticals. Equally there are journalists such as Tim Colebatch and Ross Gittins who practise the sort of journalism promoted by the late legendary US journalist, I. F. Stone, in which what people say is less important than detailed and intelligent analysis of data, official government publications and academic research. They may talk to PR people but you know they are not going to be manipulated.

The second lesson is that journalists have a wider frame of reference shaped by the commercial direction of the outlet for which they work and the ruling culture of the society in which they operate. Particular stories get pursued because they fit within the formula outlined by Thorstein Veblen – following the tastes of the class of readers they serve. Thus PR people are more likely to get some lifestyle stories in *The Age* than the *Herald Sun* or a teen magazine as opposed to a woman's magazine. A former colleague, Robin MacDonald, who ran a PR company in the Northern Territory for many years says that planning any PR campaign in the Territory just had to take into account that the *Northern Territory News* and its sister publication, *The Sunday Territorian* (colloquially known as the Terra) " have an almost fixated fetish for anything crocodilian. It doesn't even have to be a Territory crocodile, any crocodile will do. Indeed it would be fair to say that if there were scientists working in the Limpopo River who were able to bottle the gas that a crocodile farted then the NT News and the Terra would run it as a front page story – even if the PM had just been assassinated." So, for instance, to launch a new bakery he got the Chief Minister, Shane Stone, and a crocodile shaped loaf of soy and linseed bread. Launching National Dental Week the ploy was to get the president of the NT Dental Health Association in close proximity to a baby crocodile with very sharp teeth. The result in both cases – blanket media exposure. It is easy to imagine that this is simply a Northern Territory phenomenon but in reality all media outlets have their own fixations or fetishes. The only difference is that some of them are more upmarket. Launching a National Book Council prize we included in the media material a copy of what might have been the last thing the historian Manning Clark wrote, a testimonial letter about the prizes. We were as confident that it would be on the front page of *The Age* as Robin MacDonald was about the fate of his crocodile stories. All media share some common frames of reference which change as society changes. In Australia many economic stories in the past decade – especially the former Howard Government's economic management – were seen through the prism of the impact of the mining boom and sales of minerals to India and China. The economist, Phil Ruthven, writing in the Australian Institute of Company Directors magazine, Price Increases causing Mining Bonanzas *The Company Director,* in December 2006 (p43-44) pointed out that the mining bonanza was more a case of "serendipity than it is of traditional hard work and productivity". He suggested that increasing returns were not a result of increasing volumes or productivity increases but more of boom prices which were so good that they masked the fact that mining industry productivity had fallen when compared with other sectors of the economy. In such a situation any Government, unless they were totally incompetent, would look good. The Government had in fact won the lottery; convinced themselves it was a product of their intelligence and good management; and, then went out and squandered rather than investing it. Yet not until the very end of its 11 years in office did this reality start to intrude on the media conventional wisdom of good economic management. In this case the frame of reference was created by co-ordinated activity by government and business PR people in conjunction with the media itself.

The societal frame of reference stems from the ruling frame of references discussed in Chapter Three. This involves forgetting some things and constantly referring to others. The 1918 Spanish flu epidemic has, until the possible avian flu epidemic, been forgotten

but World War One is ever-present. With World War II we hear constantly about the Battle of Britain and D Day but very little about how the war was actually won and lost in Russia. We hear about welfare fraud all the time but the US savings and loan collapse, the biggest corporate welfare handout in history, has disappeared from public debate. When in late 2007 the sub-prime crisis emerged we heard more about the problems of bank CEOs than we did about home owners. The fact that the US and Israel shot down civilian planes is forgotten in the West, while acts of terrorism by Muslim extremist are always in the news. A culture of forgetting, and a culture in which alternative agendas are set, are some of the major products of a society in which PR is omnipresent.

Deconstructing the media and PR

Within these contexts there are an awful lot of PR people trying very hard to keep the percentage of PR influenced material in the news media high. While there are still thousands of media releases produced which are emailed, delivered and variously sent off to media outlets throughout Australia every day, 'the blanket all outlets' media release is becoming a less important form of communication between PR people and journalists.

The Press Gallery in Parliaments around Australia still see huge numbers of releases stuffed into media outlet boxes each day. People still dream up stunts. Over the years I have seen someone send a brick to news rooms to promote a building appeal; a leather briefcase filled with reference books to promote a corporate fitness program; red frilly knickers to promote the film *The Woman in Red*; and, a pair of odd socks to promote a new sock range. For Holeproof our firm issued a media release focussing on that great mystery – where do socks you put in the washing machine disappear to and how do you end up with so many odd socks? It received massive national radio and TV coverage.

But amidst all this the PR practitioner is just as likely to make a telephone call to a selected journalist to offer them an exclusive story or an exclusive angle on an existing story. That's how the CityLink computer story worked with the *Herald-Sun.* Another organisation will place all its media material on its website and encourage media outlets to come it rather than pushing stories out. Someone else will prepare a short one page backgrounder on a subject – a company, event, book, visiting personality – which will go to a talk radio show producer to ensure an interview covers the ground the PR person wants to emphasise. If a new plant is being opened there will be fact sheets full of details about steel, cement, construction details and the equivalent in Melbourne Cricket Ground's the site covers. No fact sheet on water or liquids can be issued without an obligatory reference to how it compares to the size of Sydney Harbour or Port Phillip Bay. If a potentially embarrassing story could be about to appear the PR person will be on the phone – usually totally unsuccessfully – trying to convince some journalistic contact that it's not really a story.

Other PR people will be trying to persuade their employer or their client to just say nothing and practise masterly inaction. The BHP Ok Tedi example cited earlier is an example where masterly inaction is sometimes preferable to action. Since I retired I often speak to groups about aspects of PR – many of them from the public sector. Public sector

PR practitioners find their jobs made more difficult by the fact that few among their political masters, and the ex-journalists who staff Ministerial media units, feel comfortable with not responding to the media. I often try to set the issue in context by asking the audience to nominate the lead item on the previous nights Channel 9 news or the page three news lead in the daily newspaper in their capital city. Despite being PR practitioners regularly monitoring the media few can ever get the right answer. This is partly because many people don't read or see the media, partly because TV news is on before many people get home; and, partly because there is just too much media to absorb it all. Yet journalists in Ministers offices are often convinced of the absolute need to tell the media whatever they can whenever they can. An acquaintance and former journalist went to work for a State Treasurer in the 1980s. Chatting to them after they had left the job they said they had agonising moments when journalists, often former colleagues, asked them for comments on things which were confidential – like Budget details – which they couldn't disclose. Obviously in a classic view of journalism the best sort of news is something someone wants to keep secret. But there are good reasons for keeping some things confidential, or ensuring that the information is released accessibly to everyone at the same time rather than selectively to a few journalists. The problem is that the journalists are convinced that they have a right to know. My advice to the public sector audiences is that the media is just another section of the lifestyle industry and has no more right to know than any other commercial organisation. The people with the right to know are the public and there are many ways in which they can be informed without using the media as a conduit. Every day of the week listed public companies do exactly that by simultaneously making statements to the Australian Stock Exchange, shareholders and the media and making the information available on their website.

Whatever media management techniques are adopted they are in an evolving context where the emphasis in PR is less on media releases and more on matching outlets which reach specific audiences with specific information. Indeed, the key to the best modern PR is successfully targeting messages to specific audiences and, in the case of the media, it is its role as a conduit to those targets rather than as an audience in its own right which is important. Of course, some PR campaigns target journalists as a specific audience in the hope that convincing them of a viewpoint will assist with agenda setting. Almost every major industry association campaign targets feature writers, or journalists who report on their area, to try to get them to understand a policy position. In this case the PR is designed to recruit the commentators and feature writers as a source of independent third party endorsement no different, in a way, than recruiting a celebrity as a third party endorser for a product or a cause.

The media is also targeted because, while in most cases it re-inforces attitudes, it can be powerful. New products featured in the media are more likely to take off. A favourable review of an opera production from a little known company can result in all the tickets being sold. Adverse restaurant reviews can kill a restaurant commercially. A paragraph in a what's on column can mean success for a local festival. On the other hand film reviews are far less effective than word of mouth in building cinema audiences and book sales also tend to be driven more by word of mouth than reviews. The Oprah Winfrey program's book club is a notable exception to this rule, even though the Oprah show may

be more entertainment media than news media. But the lines between the two are increasingly blurred as media outlets become obsessed with celebrities and British and Australian tabloids report soap opera plots and reality TV developments as if they are real, newsworthy events.

For the PR practitioner there are standard ways to achieve media coverage. For the print or online reader, listener, or viewer the presence of these standard ways is a surefire way of identifying when PR has been involved in what she see or hear.

A colleague, Lelde McCoy, once systematised the standard techniques into an A to Z of media relations and management which could be used for teaching students and clients about media liaison. The list is instructive and a useful way to deconstruct media coverage. Whenever you see anything on the list in a media story you can normally assume PR has been involved.

Awards are a way to recognise accomplishments or contributions. Some of them – like the Nobel Prize – are obviously important but there are many more which are created partly to generate media coverage. Book prizes are recognitions of authors but more importantly they generate publicity and sales although sometimes the judges' decisions infuriate publishers and booksellers by having limited or not impact on sales. Perhaps the worst forms of awards are those that reward journalists for writing about particular subjects. Pharmaceutical companies sponsor health writing awards. Food companies sponsor awards about reporting on nutrition.

When you pick up a booklet in a government information office or a retail outlet you might think it has been created as an information source – and that is partly the case. But an information booklet is just as likely to have been produced as a means of attracting publicity through a media launch and follow up publicity in media outlets. Most of the drug information booklets produced by Government health organisations are less likely to be used by drug users than they are to be promoted to make it appear that the Government is doing something about the problem. Perhaps the most useless example of this was the parent's guide to drugs produced by the former Howard Government. Posted out to every household the entire booklet was predicated on a vision of a father figure sitting down at a table with a traditional nuclear family discussing the issue of drugs and why they are bad for you. As traditional nuclear families are a minority form of household formation, and few families ever sit together in the one room, the booklet was never going to achieve its ostensible goals.

Competitions on radio, TV or in print are a common form of media promotion. The company – a cinema chain, an airline – offers the prize and the media outlet provides the publicity.

I've always thought that whenever a new committee appears – the Australian version of the neocon movement specialise in them covering everything from industrial relations (the H.R.Nicholls Society) to global warming (the Lavoisier Society) – it may be that one aim is to generate publicity. Given that the people associated with these committees are

staunchly anti-communist, it is ironic that the tactic could be said to be similar to the tactics adopted by the Communist Party, throughout the 1930s, 40s and 60s, set up front groups for various campaigns.

A demonstration is probably made up of people with a genuine commitment to a cause but the primary function is to create an event which will attract the media.

It is not only metropolitan media which can targetted. Something as simple as an exhibit in a shopping centre, linked with a visit to the exhibit by a personality, local MP or local official can result in a photo in a local newspaper. In the months before the 1993 Federal election we organised a series of exhibits about healthcare in major shopping centres. The decision was made because women with young children are the primary gatekeepers on health matters. Women who go out to paid work (and work at home as well), and those who do unpaid work at home are difficult to reach. However, the modern shopping complex is the 21st century version of a medieval cathedral square where multiple generations gather to sit, talk and entertain themselves. Research following the election showed that the Medicare campaign was second only to the GST campaign in bringing about the unexpected Keating victory. Indeed, its success was so great that it made it virtually impossible for the Liberal Government elected in 1996 to dismantle the system as they may have hoped to do. That situation was obviously mainly due to Medicare's position in Australian society but it was a PR campaign, run through shopping centres, which helped entrench it among Australians as something they saw as a fundamental right. And obviously offering stories as exclusives needs to fit into this part of the A to Z compendium as well.

Friends groups and fan clubs can create word of mouth publicity as well as achieving media coverage. The Friends of the ABC is perhaps the most high profile such organisation but the anti-smoking campaign, Quit, ran a friends organisation which reached out to local media and employed word of mouth tactics during the 1070s and 1980s.

Gimmicks are the most obvious source of publicity – the brick, the briefcase, the frilly knickers and so on are everyday events for PR people and the bane of gossip columnists lives.

Hotlines are normally created less to provide information and more to get publicity at a launch with a Minister, a personality or a business leader answering the first calls. Turnbull Fox Phillips used one in a National Be Wise with Medicines Month where thousands of people rang pharmacists about sensible use of pharmaceuticals and disposing of old drugs. In a campaign for the Real Estate Institute of New South Wales on re-introducing negative gearing, a hotline was used to provide information about how negative gearing worked and why it was supposed to benefit the housing sector. Today similar programs tend to be run on websites, but the telephone and the human voice still make for a better picture of the Minister or the local MP.

Interviews, junkets, visiting VIPs and experts, product placements in movies and TVs, getting public health issues talked about in soaps, predictions, reports, seminars, talks, tie ins with major events or news, creation of weeks or months are all time honoured techniques for PR practitioners.

Research studies are a never fail way of getting a journalist to file a story or a talk radio program to hold a discussion. Sometimes all it takes is a small investment in a question on one of the omnibus studies undertaken by the major opinion research companies which produces a media statement about "92% of Australians drink this, feel this, think this, aren't aware that, are deeply concerned about". Whenever this formulation appears in the media one should automatically assume that some PR person has commissioned the research simply to get coverage of their product, service or organisation.

While it is easy to be cynical about the techniques they are sometimes characterised by considerable creativity. Most of the major public health awareness campaigns - from anti-smoking to anti-obesity campaigns – in recent decades have used some or all of these elements.

The Internet

This picture of the media, how PR interacts with and influences it and where people get their information from is often said to be made redundant by the new media, the Internet, social networking and other online developments.

There is no doubt that online media has transformed communications in terms of speed and reach. At the same time mainstream daily newspapers are in decline; free to air TV is losing market share; audiences are fragmenting; and, new media forms are taking market share.

It is easy, however, to over-estimate the impacts of these technological changes. Humans have not suddenly developed the capacity to absorb and react to thousands of different sources of data and images. There are almost certainly evolutionary and neurological constraints on social networking. Small world theory may indicate that everyone is connected to everyone else but most people's world of immediate friends and contacts is still small. The basic source of information on everything from politics to films to books to financial advice tends to be family and friends before media outlets and companies.

What is interesting though, is that when people do go online they frequently turn to the online services of established media outlets for their information. In Australia it is estimated that some 25% to 35% of people go online for their news and the Melbourne *Age,* with almost 2 million visitors a month viewing close to 48 million pages (2006 figures) was the most popular news site in Victoria.

Moreover, the media may be changing dramatically but the strategies to achieve media coverage, and the reasons for them, are not changing quite so dramatically. At the same time the commercial imperatives facing media companies mean that their agendas are

mostly about generating audience figures which drive advertising revenue. In doing so the real problem, to quote Ryzard Kapunscinski again, becomes: “Modern people, living in a world conjured up by the media, of illusions and appearances, simulacra and fables, instinctively feel they are being fed untruth and hypocrisy. And so they seek something that has the power of a document, truth and reality, things authentic.” (*The Monthly April 2007).*

From this perspective one can argue that PR people are not solely responsible for the state of the media as a result of some systematic manipulation of media coverage. Rather PR people, together with the media, have created the illusions and the appearances as a result of the symbiotic relationship the two groups have formed.

CHAPTER SIX

WHAT PR PEOPLE DO -THE UBIQUITY OF PR

In Papua New Guinea the local branch of Transparency International (TI), the world's most authoritative anti-corruption body, organises theatre presentations in small PNG villages about voting and corruption.

The actors play out the common PNG scene of someone visiting the village; offering pigs and money for votes; and insisting that in return for the pigs and money other political candidates be excluded from the village. Then they play out another series of scenes in which people refuse the bribes and ask questions about what the prospective MPs will do about the specific problems facing the village.

TI doesn't see its activities as PR but that's exactly what they are – events, activities, stunts, promotions, community education, dramatised community information programs – which are fundamentally similar to things done by PR people around the world every day. It is these sorts of activities – rather than the media relations which get most public and critical attention – which represent the bulk of PR work and the primary explanation for its ubiquity in societies around the world.

The use of stunts or promotions is as old as PR itself. Often they are created just to generate media publicity but increasingly they reflect the need to find alternative channels to reach audiences as communication channels fragment and proliferate and traditional mass media becomes less relevant.

Inventions, stunts and promotions

Hobsbawm and Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition* describes a variety of developments which we would see today as PR-driven. Perhaps the most amusing is that, what we know today as Scottish tartans, are really a 19th century English invention quite different from the historic clan tartans. The supposedly ancient Royal investiture traditions, and the alleged British brilliance in organising ceremonial occasions, are often quite recent – as recent as the early 20th century. Before then many coronations were chaotic, and in recent years the demands of television have been as important as tradition.

Everyone's history of PR includes the infamous Edward Bernays' 1929 stunt when he got a number of women to smoke cigarettes while walking down Fifth Avenue. It was billed as the Torches of Freedom march and positioned as a protest to advance the feminist cause. In fact Bernays was working for American Tobacco. Among others Malcolm Gladwell, in a July 6 1998 *New Yorker* article (The Spin Myth: Are our spin meisters just spinning each other?), has punctured the Bernays myth and questioned the extent to which spinners are spinning themselves. Unfortunately the journalist's words in *The Man who Shot Liberty Valance,* "when the legend becomes fact, print the legend", seem to best describe the continued focus on Edward Bernays.

There were many people before Bernays who used similar tactics but either didn't live as long, or deliberately tried to hide their role in myth, stunt and legendary creations. Ivar Kreuger, a Swedish businessman, was probably the world's greatest swindler and built a massive match monopoly. J.K.Galbraith once described him as 'the Leonardo' of the conman's craft. Amongst his other talents was a talent for promotion about the virtues of the humble match. In the totality of human history the match – instant, reliable, compact, portable fire – was remarkable. But Kreuger knew that even the miraculous needed some help and invented the superstition that it was bad luck to light more than two cigarettes from the one match. Over the years people dated the superstition back to World War I and the dangers of being seen and shot by a sniper if the light was visible for too long. Instead, it was a marketing ploy by Kreuger made more successful because people retrospectively 'remembered' its World War I origin.

Thomas Edison is remembered today as a brilliant inventor. He was also a brilliant inventor of stunts. Edison's name is remembered by huge numbers of people, partly because his name lived on in a brand, and partly because of his PR ability. An equally prolific Edison contemporary was Nikolas Tesla. Edison's electrical invention was DC and Tesla's was AC – the latter becoming the dominant technology.

Edison used legal tactics, lobbying and PR stunts to limit the spread of AC electrical technology. Robert Pool, in *Beyond Engineering,* says that Edison had a former assistant, Harold Brown, carry out 'experiments' on cats and dogs to prove the effectiveness of high voltage alternating current as an "instantaneous, painless and humane" form of execution. "He then launched a campaign to convince the state of New York to replace hanging with an 'electric chair' for capital crimes," Pool says. Pool suggests that someone – possibly Edison himself – tried to get the process called "to be Westinghoused" after the company which by then owned Tesla's process. The name didn't catch on, but many people were persuaded that AC was risky.

Australia had had it share of traditions invented by PR people and supported by events and stunts. The historian, John Hirst, writing in *The Age,* on January 26 2008, said: "Australia Day has to have a council to promote it. That makes it unusual among national holidays". He describes all the celebration as having a 'contrived' air. Indeed, Australia Day was never seen as particularly significant until the 1880s when the Australian Natives Association promoted January 26 as a national holiday. It had been celebrated under other names in NSW but didn't become a national holiday until 1935. In recent years its significance has been relentlessly promoted by Australia Day Councils in each State and Territory. Lunches, first day cover releases by Australia Post of stamps featuring Australian 'legends', Australian of the Year announcements, honours lists, pageants and entertainment have all created a 'tradition' of celebration.

Links to history and anniversaries are always reliable ways to promote things. Working with Kraft on a promotion for Vegemite we were bereft of ideas until one of the staff suggested a birthday celebration. Most anniversary celebrations are organised around numbers with 0 or 5 at the end. Unfortunately it was the 58th (or some similar date) when we had the idea but that didn't stop us – merely re-positioning the promotion as a

birthday rather than an anniversary and getting together a range of Australian sports legends at the MCG for the party.

I suspect that if forced to choose between Federation and Vegemite for their personal significance to me I would probably choose Vegemite. But on the other hand I had always been fascinated by the Tom Roberts painting in *Opening of the First Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia by HRH the Duke of Cornwall and York, May 9 1901.* The painting is a monumental example of the history painting genre and accurately depicts everyone who was present on the day. A guide is available which identifies each individual. Over the years whenever I passed it in Parliament House I always took a brief look and marvelled at its scope and how surprisingly multicultural Australia was even back then.

In May 1997 the Federal Education Minister, David Kemp, announced a national program of civics and citizen education activities, called *Discovering Democracy,* was to be developed. Our company was approached later in the year by the Curriculum Corporation – an agency jointly owned by the Commonwealth, States and Territory Governments – to launch a major element of the program: the *Discovering Democracy School Materials Project.* In March 1998 every school in Australia was to be sent information about the project including a resource booklet and a CD-Rom on the history of Federation.

We had to promote the materials to teachers, school students, parents, education departments, and state and Federal MPs. Any campaign also had to reach the wider community to demonstrate the Government's commitment to helping people understand their national history, reflect on their roles and rights as citizens, and contribute to the build up to the 2001 Centenary of Federation. At this stage of the new Howard Government the program was approached with a degree of bipartisanship. Later any such program would have been considered in the context of the conservative commentariat's culture wars, although there were already intimations of this as the CD-Rom was called *One Destiny* and the Minister's staff carefully re-wrote every bit of the promotional material already checked by the Curriculum Corporation and the Department.

In the office trying to think of a peg on which to hang the whole launch I remembered the Roberts painting and suggested that we recreate the painting at Melbourne's Royal Exhibition Building using more than 250 year 7 students, representative of the Australian demography in 1998, and wearing modern dress to reflect a modern day version of the painting. The Exhibition Building still looked as it did in 1901 and the tableau was impressive.

We had very little money in the budget and had to scrounge around for sponsorships from catering companies and equipment hire companies. The Exhibition Building Trustees were committed to the user pays principle, which allegedly makes public institutions more efficient and responsive, so a major part of the budget was hiring the building in the first place – despite the historic significance and promotional benefit the Building would obtain from the event. Then Victorian Premier, Jeff Kennett, made his contribution with

education funding cutbacks which provoked Victorian teachers to go out on strike at the time of launch.

But on the day four students read passages from the original opening ceremony, the historian John Hirst and the Minister spoke, and some 550 people attended. There was national prime time TV coverage as well as print and radio media. Much of the publicity focussed on the children who were asked questions about what they would do if they were running Australia and what the Centenary of Federation meant to them.

All in all an event which was, in many respects, just as much a piece of theatre as the Transparency International playlets in PNG villages.

Fads and fashions

While it may appear from this that not much changes in how PR tactics are used they are often re-packaged in ways that make them appear to be some form of unique intellectual property or as some new fad or fashion which sweeps the industry for a while.

Consultancies in particular love neat packaging of their products and services. Some years ago one of the world's largest consultancies Burson Mastellar announced that they were no longer in the communications business but were now in the business of 'perception management'. One had to admire their chutzpah in adopting such a postmodern approach to the game. Years before I had written a spoof article which got published in a number of industry journals under the title: *Is PR the first postmodern profession?* It was heavily influenced by Umberto Eco's hyperreality – the notion that the artificial is more real to people than the real – and argued that the history of the world was the history of various people trying to shape people's views of reality. It was around the time of the Alan Sokal hoax and included the obligatory references to quantum mechanics and the fact that physics 'proved' that where you stood was vital in what you perceived. At a PRIA Congress in Adelaide the then BM Australian CEO, Chris Savage, gave a talk on how 'perception management' was the way of the future. At the end of the session I got up and asked him if they were paying licence fees or royalties to Umberto Eco but apparently they had developed the insight on their own. The new business model seemed to go by the wayside after a while although most companies have used similar constructions to differentiate their offerings. Porter Novelli International started off with the three I's – insight, imagination and something else – which transmogrified into five I's which then got downsized into something else again.

While on the Porter Novelli International Board I was involved in many of the discussions about the positioning and how to describe what we did. At one stage someone did a major research project going through all the major consultancies' websites comparing vision, values and positioning. They found a blancmange of words which all actually sounded the same.

Consultancies are the worst offenders when it comes to inventing and promoting fads and fashions. At their best some consultancies do develop some distinctive intellectual

property or some expertise not shared by competitors. But normally when you read a statement by someone from a consultancy saying the next big trend is x, y, or z you can normally assume that the nominated trend is what the consultancy is good at.

In the financial markets there was once a belief (ascribed to the Kennedy family patriarch, Joseph Kennedy), that you should start selling shares when the shoe shine boys and the lift drivers start giving you stock market tips. Lift drivers have largely disappeared, and shoe shine boys put in a brief re-appearance during the early 21st century stock market boom, but there are too few of them to be a robust sample. Instead, if you wanted to update the saying it might be that you should start selling your shares when PR people start talking about the growth potential of investor relations or some other area. At a PNI Board meeting in Buenos Aires just before the end of the dotcom boom one of the US directors was arguing most strongly that the firm's positioning ought to be as the 'PR company for the new economy'. Some of us argued equally strongly that the dotcom boom was just another bubble and it was hard to see how a technology which led to disintermediation, dramatic reductions in transaction costs and universal almost free access could automatically lead to a profit boom. We were told, as all the doubters were at the time, 'you just don't get it'. Fortunately the crash overtook the discussions and we retreated to the safety of solid revenues from our 'old' economy clients.

A more enduring fad was that of reputation management which engulfed companies around the world, generated many reputation management indices and sold various management textbooks.

In essence the theory was that the key role of public affairs, or PR, was to manage the reputation of organisations because reputation may have been an intangible but one which had real economic value. The better your reputation the better able you were to recover from a crisis; the more people wanted to work with you; the stronger your share price was; and, the more successful you were.

One very influential book on the subject was published in 1996 by an NYU academic, Charles Fombrun, *Reputation: Realising Value from the Corporate Image.* From there a veritable industry was formed with a Reputation Management Institute, a series of national and international conferences, more text books and a proliferation of ways of measuring reputation.

There had always been ways of measuring what people thought about companies. *Fortune* ranked companies for years but the rankings were based on the perceptions of finance professionals and were generally driven by how well the share price was performing. One notable company to head the *Fortune* list of most admired companies was Enron.

The reputation management industry aimed to take the measurement beyond narrow economic ones and encompass all the other things which shape a company's reputation – industrial relations, corporate social responsibility and so on.

Geoff Allen of the Centre for Corporate Public Affairs developed, in 2002, a list of ranking systems around the world on reputation and related concepts. The list was not exhaustive but there were lots of them, including ratings by magazines, accounting firms, stock markets and others. Charles Fombrun also had one – the Reputation Quotient which was based on the opinions among various stakeholders of companies' performance. At a Reputation Institute conference in Boston in 2002 a researcher who was doing preliminary attitudinal research on reputation in Italy, prior to setting up a Reputation Quotient there, reported that a large number of their sample reported that one of Italy's most secretive private companies was the best at providing information to the public, suggesting that perception and reality are but only loosely linked.

In Australia for a brief time we had our own survey – the Good Reputation Index (GRI) – which survived into 2007 as a survey by the Fairfax media group. A colleague, Lelde McCoy, and I undertook a research project on reputation indices and the GRI. An extensive literature review suggested that rankings of reputation were more popularity contests than meaningful assessments of quality. There was the perennial problem of putting a numerical score – a value – on what was a complex and subjective set of opinions. We asked questions about whether the surveys were simply a business version of our celebrity culture with celebrity CEOs taking the place of Paris Hilton; the confusing array of methodologies; whether there was any real statistical significance between ranked positions; and the tendency for ratings to become self-fulfilling through a halo effect. Companies get a good reputation and are more likely to be nominated in surveys as having a good reputation whether or not the respondent has any knowledge of the company at all.

With GRI the organisers used 18 interest groups ranging from the Australian Council of Trade Unions to Greenpeace, from Amnesty International to the Institute of Chartered Accountants and from the Australian Shareholders Association to the PRIA. The results were controversial when they were published in the Fairfax media. We surveyed companies about the results and found that only one of the respondents had no reservations about the GRI and most complained about the methodology and the ideological positions of those doing the rankings. Most importantly none of them considered reputation indices as important to their reputation management activity. A large scale survey by Echo, the UK based communication research group, found that the vast majority of CEOs in a sample drawn from Europe, South Africa and the US were concerned about their rating results but none of them considered them important to their corporate communications or reputation management activities.

There were other reputation indices which were more robust than the GRI but the inherent flaws – how did you put a numerical value on a non-numerical concept; the fact that it was sometimes difficult to work out what was the difference between brand and reputation; and, the confusing methodologies made the whole area of limited usefulness.

This, of course, didn't stop people talking endlessly about reputation management. I was facilitating a planning workshop for the Victoria Police communication staff and one of the members, in a discussion about what their core priority ought to be, kept insisting that

it was the management of the reputation of the Victorian Police. However much I tried to suggest that reputation was determined by what the police did, and their relationships with the community, the individual kept repeating rote-like the reputation mantra.

Ironically what was new here was also based on an old age concept. Talking about reputation to a colleague at RMIT, Professor Peter Horsfield, he mentioned that in the plot of an Ellis Peters' detective novel one of the (medieval) characters gives his word that he will not try to escape. He didn't try to escape because his reputation was, in chivalric terms, based on his word. As we now know much that we think of as a typical of the age of chivalry were post-facto inventions by later monarchs or 19th century enthusiasts and romantics. But the notion of an individual's reputation – whether of a businessperson or your next door neighbour's child – is a significant factor in determining what you think of that person.

So, a useful concept with some validity and some historical credibility became a concept packaged in business books. Then it spawned an industry, conferences, reputation indices, consultancies who would work with you to improve your ranking….and a host of PR people moving as quickly as possible to get on board the new fad.

The fad has passed but the good things about reputation still have some relevance – the importance of intangibles, the need to think as a whole about what a company does, the role of stakeholders – and the need to measure performance. However, the measurement of reputation has tended to be superseded by a new range of indices and codes related to corporate social and environmental responsibility which are discussed later. Where reputation measurement remains relevant has tended to be in terms of how the quality of the company's relationships with stakeholders shape what those stakeholders think about that company. Much of the opposition to the GRI was driven by think tanks such as the Institute of Public Affairs who took the Friedmanite position that the only duty for a company was to make a profit and to deliver shareholder value. Unfortunately for them, as mentioned in Chapter Four, the quickest way to destroy shareholder value is to ignore stakeholders.

To most of us our perceptions probably are the reality in which we live. Fads are important in politics, fashion, food and life. Many of those perceptions and fads have been created, or shaped, by PR practitioners. It could be that, as a result, they could be said to be in the perception management business. But they might be able to avoid ethical and conceptual problems if they don't get too carried away with it and remember the Boswell anecdote about Dr Johnson, who set out to refute Bishop Berkeley's 18th century version of perception shaping reality by kicking a stone and saying: "I refute it thus."

Networks and interpersonal communication

The most influential communication form – word-of-mouth and networking – is also the least understood.

PR practitioners have for decades wanted to tap into those powerful networks of family, friends and colleagues which disseminate information, inform choices and shape opinions. Recently some of them have assumed that they have through the medium of Web 2.0 and the range of social networking tools such as FaceBook which have been developed. But experience, and some science, suggests that we are not quite there yet. Indeed we should think about technology in terms of how the wired or wireless world impacts on whispers rather than the other way around.

PR people and marketers have always known about the impact of word-of-mouth publicity. In 1998 Porter Novelli International undertook research which asked people about their main source of information about products and brands, In Australia the results showed that 45% of the sample nominated TV as their main source of information, 12% magazines, 17% newspapers, 16% friends and family, four percent radio and five per cent direct mail. At that stage the survey didn't track online sources. The survey also sampled people in the USA, Brazil, France and Japan. In the USA the family and friends figure was 18% although it was under eight per cent for the other countries.

In my book, *The Millennium Edge,* I discussed word of mouth publicity and suggested that it was effective because it came from trusted sources at a time when trust in institutions and community leaders was in decline.

Michael Kiely, then editor of Australia's *Marketing Magazine* , told me that he was aware of a US computer services company 1997 survey of 100 new customers which showed that only five per cent mentioned advertising as a reason for becoming a customer whereas 20% mentioned a sales presentation and 56% came as a referral by a colleague. In the same year Mintel, a research company, surveyed 7000 people in Europe to find out what made them try new products and 60% said it was recommendations from family and friends. The liqueur, Bailey's Irish Cream, is tried for the first time by about five per cent of people responding to ads promoting it but 64% try it at the urging of their friends.

These sorts of responses are not only found for brands and products but also for how people learn about company actions and positions and whether they believe the source or not. A 1997 US study by Siegal & Gale/Roper Starch Worldwide found that 44% of people felt that what customers of a company say is not only the best source of information about the company, but also the most accurate and believable. Respondents could nominate multiple sources and 40% nominated what people you know tell you about the company although only 33% thought this was the most accurate and believable source. Media releases rated as the best source by 11% although only 6% saw them as the most accurate and believable. Top management did even worse with 10% finding them the best source and only seven per cent finding them the most accurate and believable.

There is also anecdotal evidence to support the findings about the power of word-of-mouth. In Australia the top selling beer had always been Fosters Lager. When the then Fosters head, John Elliott, began talking about 'Fosterising' the world by making it a

major international brand he made it clear that he saw the Fosters brand as his and the company's. The customers had always believed it was their beer. Gradually people stopped drinking Fosters as much as they had and turned to another product Victoria Bitter. Despite any change in marketing support the brand became the biggest selling beer in Australia with the change being a result of community networking and word-of-mouth publicity. By the 2000 Sydney Olympics the company, which was a major Games' sponsor, was worried. Fosters had become a major international brand and was, in some beer drinking markets synonymous with Australia and drinking. Visitors to Australia would arrive and discover that Australians actually drank another beer altogether. In fact the number of visitors, relative to the global markets, was probably either sufficiently small (or not in the beer segment market) not to be influential although Fosters undertook major advertising, point of sale and promotion to minimise the risk.

There is also a story, possibly apocryphal, that former Australian Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser, ended whaling in Australia and supported the international treaty for abolition because of a trusted source – a discussion with his then teenage children around the dinner table.

Urban legends – the Porsche which was cheap because it had had a dead body in it for a year and the 1960s tale of a woman getting pregnant because her daughter had taken her contraceptive pills and substituted others – are spread by word-of-mouth. Jokes spread by word-of-mouth. Email didn't change the transmission pattern but merely speeded it up.

Word-of-mouth is astonishingly important in financial markets where confidence is all-important. The 2007 run on the Northern Rock bank in the UK was accelerated by images of people queuing to get their money back but it was neighbours and friends talking which prompted the first rush. All the assurances and guarantees of the British Government were less important than the word passed from person to person.

In some societies it is not word-of-mouth but silent language which can be important. In 1997 during the Asian financial crisis the then IMF head, Michael Camdessus, caused a scandal in Indonesia by standing with his arms folded behind the then Indonesian President while he signed the IMF agreement. In Indonesia this action symbolises disrespect and communicated a powerful message about how the IMF was imposing the Washington consensus on the nation.

In 19th century England a raised eyebrow – repeated from individual to individual – could destroy a person's reputation more quickly and effectively than words of newspaper articles. Edith Wharton and Henry James novels convey as much by the descriptions of silent language as they would if the characters were given dialogue.

But while the awareness of the importance of networking and word-of-mouth was general there was little understanding of how it worked and why? Evolutionary psychologists could plausibly argue that word-of-mouth was our earliest form of communication with our fellow cave–dwellers and our small band of nomads. The information we got from them was trusted as opposed to information from outsiders who might be violent or

untrustworthy. Many internal communications programs probably fail for this reason – why trust the messenger who says it's all okay and there is not a great, angry hairy mammoth outside the cave – when you can rely on the words of the people closest to you in the cave or on your own office floor.

The most important insight came with the psychologist Stanley Milgram. He carried out an experiment which involved sending one letter to each of 100 random people with the aim of eventually reaching a specific target person. The letters had to be passed on to someone known on a given name basis. He found that it took an average of six steps to reach the target – hence its description as six degrees of separation. Milgram published the results in The small-world problem (*Psychology Today* 1967 1 60-67). The work created interest among social scientists and other interested in social networks and was part of what was called the 'small world' phenomenon. Milgram was also slightly infamous for his psychological experiments about obedience which shed light on how humans can so readily torture others. In the 1990s he was probably more famous for the small world work- particularly after the 1990 play *Six Degrees of Separation* by John Guare was staged and then, three years later, filmed. Since rendition, Iraq and Abu Ghabi he is known for both sets of work. A recent Milgram biographer, Thomas Blass (*The Man who Shocked the World),* says that: "In 1998, two researchers in applied mathematics at Cornell, Steven Strogatz and Duncan Watts……broke new ground with their startling discovery that Milgram may have identified and underlying principle that is pervasive in our world, and not limited to social contacts" (p 285)

Their work is very technical and scientific but, in lay terms, they have tried to come up with a new model for looking at social structures. All people belong to different groups and the more of these groups people share the more likely they are to be friends. If you are a rugby union supporter who belongs to the Victorian Writers Centre and regularly visits Australian Chamber Orchestra concerts the more likely you are to be a friend of someone who is in the same groups. By defining the groups and the people associated with the groups the distance – degrees of separation – between people will be defined. This is the theory of random affiliation networks and how they produce small world networks.

Small world theory has been much more systematically studied since then although Duncan Watts *Six Degrees: The Science of a Connected Age* is the best introduction even if it is mathematically difficult at times. We understand more about the Northern Rock bank run because we understand more about social graphs and networks; information cascades and collective behaviour; the impact of hierarchy on communications; early adopters; and how epidemiology can provide corollaries for communication activity.

In studying Toyota's just-in-time manufacturing system Watts demonstrated that at times of crisis or ambiguity, communication at lower levels of production can produce better decisions and problem-solving them traditional top-down communication. The finding, following a fire in a factory crucial to the integrated manufacturing process, questions most of the PR conventional wisdom on internal communications which focus on clear, unambiguous messages from the top. The problem is that ambiguity is introduced by

middle layers of managers thereby causing confusion. We tested the theory ourselves in a staff communication program in the Victorian Department of Human Services where we deliberately took semi-random short cuts in communication channels to bypass layers of management. The message seemed to get through more effectively and more quickly.

The epidemiological line of inquiry led to a best-selling book by Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point,* in which he suggested that pivotal influential individuals determine which trends, products and services take off by 'tipping' into a mass movement, and which don't. Related marketing theory has also tried to identify those individuals we all know – colleagues, family or friends – who happen to be absolute experts on everything we need to know about cars, stereos, investment products and who are catalysts for purchasing decisions. The parallel is a disease which infects a few people and then spreads: first to the few who are very susceptible; then to others; and then to a tipping point at which there is explosive growth followed by a falling-off as there are fewer and fewer people to infect.

Watts says Gladwell has taken the wrong lessons from both 'influentials' and epidemics and claims the individuals are too small a group to make a major difference. Rather he says we should focus on the most easily influenced – like the most susceptible to infection – and how they make up their mind. In this model mass media is still very important where mass market products are involved. There is also support for this in evolutionary psychology (granted that evolutionary psychology can explain so much that it may explain nothing) in which humans have spent thousands of generations convincing themselves that gods, evil people, or someone else has caused the events which shape their lives. Another explanation of the role of the 'influentials' may be that people just make up their own mind but find it psychologically convenient to claim they were influenced by someone else.

Whatever the case there is no doubt that small world theory, and the mathematics associated with it, has huge potential to suggest new forms of communication and more effective pathways for PR people. Whether we want them to live in the sort of society in which they discover them is another question.

In the meantime PR people will continue to try to tap into word-of-mouth publicity and social networks. Marketers call it 'buzz' – creating a buzz about a product or service. Sometimes it can be by means as simple as sending people out intro streets and bars to talk about products. Sampling programs – traditional as they are – are a form of creating buzz. A food industry client of ours was planning to introduce ready to cook food to the Asian market. The obvious barrier was that traditionally Asian households shop daily and prefer home prepared meals. They sought to create a buzz by having older ladies out on the street offering samples of the prepared food. The sampling gave an opportunity for people to try the food in a traditional way – as in a street market – while the silent message from the age of the women was that even the traditional older generations thought the new way of preparing food was legitimate.

The Economist reported (April 7 2007) that Nintendo had promoted its new video-game console, the Wii, in the US by recruiting a handful of carefully chosen suburban mothers hoping that they would spread the word that this was a gaming console the whole family could enjoy. "Nintendo thus became the latest company to use 'word-of-mouth' marketing: Nestle, Sony and Philips have all launched similar campaigns in recent months to promote everything from bottled water to electric toothbrushes," *The Economist* said. Amway and Tupperware are two brands which have focussed almost all their marketing through social networks.

When our company's Sydney office was asked to launch a new bottled water product they decided to launch it at all night gay dance parties. There was no advertising support, simply sponsorships and sampling in an environment in which trend-setters were gathered. The launch was successful and cost effective because early adopters legitimised the product.

Diana Dundon, a successful PR person; Margaret Heffernan, an academic and cancer sufferer, Professor Michael Quinn, an oncologist; Dulcie Boling, legendary magazine editor and later company director; and myself conducted a campaign to raise funds to re-build the Royal Women's Hospital gynaecological cancer unit which was old, run-down and sub-standard. We had been talking for some time about how we could tap into the important women's networks which linked women through Victoria. Diana came up with the call to action – Lend a Name Lend a Hand. We began – in small world theory – a directed search by contacting other people and asking them to lend a hand to the campaign or lend a name of someone else who might help. The networks reached into the Victorian Lady Bowlers Association who made a massive donation gathered from the thousands of women who play lawn bowls. Other individuals reached out to the partners of CEOs (still predominantly male) to get sponsorship. The network reached the then Premier's wife, Felicity Kennnett, who spoke to her husband Jeff about the campaign. Eventually the Government matched the funds raised on a dollar for dollar basis. Interestingly, unlike most fund-raising appeals we had virtually no publicity. Our efforts were directed towards the social networks in which women operated.

Buzz and word-of-mouth campaigns can backfire of course.Microsoft sent laptops, containing its new Windows Vista software, to influential bloggers. The aim was to get them to publicise the new software but the promotion back-fired. Instead of writing about the software they started a worldwide blogging and email campaign about the ethics of the move. This is a reminder that word-of-mouth can also work in reverse for companies, whether they plan to use it or not, because negative news can spread (probably faster) by word-of-mouth just as positive can.

Showing not telling

If inter-personal communications are one of the most important forms of communication, perhaps the second most is actually showing people things, rather than telling people about them.

People react more strongly to the tangible than the intangible. If they can see and touch something it is more likely (that is, according to Johnson rather than Eco) that they believe it.

The first person to bring this lesson home to me was Fred Chaney, former Cabinet Minister and a Reconciliation Australia Director. Fred, speaking at a PRIA Conference, said that he had been representing as a barrister the WA mining magnate, Lang Hancock. He had been briefed and said he was comfortable with the facts and situation and moved to end the meeting. Hancock immediately asked if Fred was going to look at the site involved in the legal dispute. When Fred said he wasn't, Hancock said he didn't want anyone representing him unless they actually saw what was involved. The moral – showing is better than telling.

A few years later, working for Telstra, we were confronted by the problem that research showed that the public didn't really understand Telstra network technology and wasn't convinced that it was modern and efficient. In a meeting with two Telstra managers, Brian Donovan and Gerry Tidd, we tossed around the problem for a while and considered a number of options. Most of them involved telling people about the network in different ways. Gerry suggested we hold some open days to let people come and see for themselves. Over the next few years we organised open days at local Telstra exchanges throughout Australia. Telstra staff hosted the open days and family, friends and the local community were invited along. There were sausage sizzles and giveaways and people could wonder through local buildings that had never before been open to the public.

The research showed an astonishing turn-around in attitudes. Obviously not all Australians visited the centre – although many thousands did – but the ones who did then talked about it to others. Telstra ratings on the quality and extent of its network went up sharply. We had shown them the reality rather than trying to tell them about it.

A myriad of specialisations

As PR has pervaded all sections of society and the economy, so a series of specialisations have emerged in which specific tactics and techniques are targeted to specific areas or groups. In most cases these specialisations are sub-sets of the general PR undertaken by practitioners but there are more and more PR people working solely in one discrete area. It is impossible to segment the industry into all the specialisations but the next section of this chapter tries to give an overview of the major ones.

Corporate communications

Many of the specialisations can be grouped under the broad heading corporate communications. While the term applies specifically to companies the reality is that most

of the activities (except investor relations) apply equally to government agencies and not-for-profit organisations.

Public affairs

Both the PR head of a government department and a major corporate are likely to be called a public affairs person.

Geoff Allen of the ACCPA has kindly provided me with details of two of the annual Centre for Corporate Public Affairs orations by corporate leaders to illustrate the scope of the role. In introducing the very first of the orations in 1994, Mark Rayner, then a top mining executive and later the chair of three listed companies said:

In my experience Public Affairs means many different things to different Australian managers, whether it is performed in companies or in industry associations. Perhaps influenced by the team in my own company, with which I have worked very closely, I have come to accept the view of public affairs that seems to be the model adopted by the Centre. This view stresses that the function should:

- *contribute significantly to the way business relates to its internal and external stakeholders;*
- *interpret the current and future social and political environment for strategic commercial planning; and,*
- *encourage the integration of responsibility for dealing with social and political matters with other aspects of direct line management.*

More and more the role of Public Affairs executives ought to be about driving and managing that integration.

The next year then CEO of BHP (now BHP Billiton), John Prescott, gave the oration and said:

I spoke of the community's licence to business, and the notion of legitimacy so essential to survival. To maintain this legitimacy, and to ensure a positive environment in which to operate requires skills and approaches which are as important as the financial, technical and marketing capabilities which we have traditionally valued.

Public affairs people play a vital role in the process, which is reflected in BHP's support for the Centre, and for a more sophisticated development of public affairs specialists. They have the communication skills, the community contacts and the understanding of different audiences – internal and external – which are important to the firm's future.

In essence, they are the acknowledged authority on the social and political environments and their effect on our business. As such, they are playing an increasingly strategic role in planning, issues management and the creative use of public policy to further company goals.

The public affairs role is also evolving in other ways. It's my belief that forging closer partnerships with our communities involves changing the thinking of our managers.

Of course the speeches would have been written by someone in the public affairs department, although the CEOs had to give them, and by uttering the words made them theirs.

But what do the words mean in practice? For a start they mean senior public affairs staff are deeply involved in the strategic planning of business and other organisations. Their role is to bring the external view about politics, society, social trends into the organisation. As the US management thinker, Peter Drucker, once said - the role of PR is to bring the outside inside an organisation. It can also involve contributing expertise in the vital framing and issues management areas discussed in chapters three and four. They are almost certainly also responsible for internal communications, less likely investor relations, and certainly for advice on government relations, crisis management, risk communications, corporate social responsibility and the various communication tools – from newsletters to corporate blogs which disseminate the company's views.

A major study (The competencies of senior practitioners in the UK in *Public Relations Review Vol 34 No 3 ppp 215*-223) by a British academic, Professor Ann Gregory, suggests much of this contribution develops from building social, political and community networks. In a way the small world phenomenon applies very much to corporate public affairs and a public affairs person might spend time shifting backwards and forwards between the private and public sectors, industry associations and think tanks. They will have contacts at Federal and State Government levels (both political and bureaucratic); know senior finance journalists and public policy commentators; will regularly meet economists in consulting firms; meet regularly with their counterparts in other companies to swap notes; visit each other's company corporate boxes at sporting venues; attend the same seminars. Their backgrounds will be as diverse as law degrees to economics and public affairs.

The mechanics of what they do and produce can be mundane. But the best of them, in a world in which corporations and CEOs are extremely powerful, are those who speak truth to power. Indeed, in my time in the industry I think the most important advice I ever provided was always the advice that no-one wanted to hear. Early in my consulting career I was asked by a client to look at a marketing communication problem they had which was causing serious problems for their relations with customers. After asking a few questions and talking to a few people it became obvious what the problem was and, equally obvious, that the company could fix it itself. The company had two silos, one comprising the manufacturing side of the business and the other the marketing side. They effectively only talked at the top of the silos and needed a major re-organisation to remedy it. Now while management consultants are constantly telling companies they need to re-organise, often to re-organise the structure they had previously recommended, communication people tend not to get into that area except when it comes to communication departments. The client calmly accepted the advice and proceeded to

spend years recommending me to other clients on the basis that he had found a consultant who had told him not to spend money to fix a problem.

In Australia in the 1970s when there were still people warning about the Yellow Peril and the domino effect, Ken Gott made a remarkable contribution to CRA (now Rio Tinto) from his public affairs role. Ken had been a former student leader, left wing apparatchik, bon vivant and journalist. Ken convinced the CEO that the company needed to start taking seriously opportunities in the China market. He admitted his advice was possibly a bit premature but predicted the changes which are now sweeping China and the opportunities which would be created. At the time Mao was still alive and the Cultural Revolution had swept the country taking, apparently from the evidence of his early work, into its warm embrace current Australian conservatives such as Keith Windschuttle. It took time, but in 2008 a Chinese company, seeking to protect its raw material sources, is a major shareholder in Rio Tinto.

In the 1990s I had a client which faced a major trade practices problem. I was called in to advise on the communications aspects of the case – how the company would position itself with stakeholders, the public, and the media. My first action was to go around and talk to all the people involved. The second was to sit down, with their public affairs person, and read all the witness statements the regulator had gathered. It didn't take very long to realise that the problem was more than a communications one, although if the statements had been publicised reputations – corporate and individual – would have been ruined. The upshot was that we had no alternative but to go to the Chairman and suggest that they totally re-think their strategy. Why did the communications people need to do it? Why wasn't it the lawyers or some of the corporate staff? The problem was that the company couldn't believe that they were wrong and were in denial. They had gone into an industry where trade practices problems were endemic and found themselves embroiled. While their automatic response was to defend themselves, and their strong culture, there was a need for someone external to the place to bell the cat.

In the 1980s our consultancy grew quickly mainly because of the environmental tidal wave which started to engulf companies. In the 1960s I had worked with a consultancy which had a cement company as a client. The company had a plant which was once in the country but suburban development had gradually encroached on it leading to concern from residents about dust and other emissions. There was no Environment Protection Agency then although there was a Clean Air Act and a number of air pollution monitoring stations around the State. One of them was close to the plant and the readings were a constant source of negative media coverage and resident anger. We kept stressing jobs and investment, as you did then, but the brightest suggestion came from a consultant who said we should just get the monitor moved. We didn't, but it seemed like a good idea for a while.

By the 1980s, after my time in politics and environmental and resident action groups, it became clear that environmental awareness was not just a fad but a major social movement which would not recede but rather plateau from time to time and then move upwards again. Starting off in my own consultancy I suddenly attracted a large number of

clients with environmental problems. A good friend, David Thomson, who had worked in CRA Public Affairs said it was a case of poacher turned gamekpeeper. In the past PR people had fixed the problems by air-brushing out the smoke from the stacks (this was pre-digital days) but by then the only solution was to open up dialogues with communities, agree improvements in performance and then report on progress towards them. In my own suburb I didn't want to deal with pollution, development threats, new freeways and similar problems. I fought tooth and nail against them. So I could empathise with my clients' opponents.

Every day good PR practitioners have to tell someone something they don't want to hear. The product is not going to be publicised on the front page of the newspaper. The customer service complaint is justified. The government doesn't accept that everything the CEO is convinced is good for the nation is actually sensible or implementable. The Chairman should stop patronising dissident shareholders. Equally the good PR practitioner has to recognise that they themselves might well be out of touch. They, like CEOs, often fly at the front end of the plane. They mix with senior politicians, public servants and media people. They earn big salaries. Many years ago Bruce Petty drew a cartoon depicting a group of large US businessmen (back then they would have been all men and Edwardian girths were still acceptable) in their wood-pannelled club talking about NASA and the Moon program. One of them says to the others: "How can we waste billions of dollars sending a man to the Moon when the whole world is crying out for company tax relief?" Every day there is some PR practitioner who thinks in a similar way. As a young PR person in the 1960s I constantly heard senior practitioners say that PR had to get into the boardroom to provide advice. Today they are there. What they probably need to do more is to get out of the boardroom and on to public transport to see, and listen to, the views of those who don't see company tax relief as the most important national priority.

Of course, this sounds remarkably high minded and likely to cause significant pain and anguish in many corporate environments. Most importantly it doesn't necessarily follow that the PR person, however sensitive they are to the environment in which the organisation is operating and however well they listen to the community, is right or going to win the argument.

Internal communications

Internal communications have been profoundly affected by technology – for good and bad.

On the one hand it has made it easier to reach everyone in an organisation with messages – either from the CEO or from someone on the shopfloor – but equally it has made it easier to swamp people with so much information that they are overwhelmed and simply ignore it.

Internal communications (often called staff communications) has really evolved as the nature of companies and the markets in which they operate have evolved. Henry Ford

gave his customers one choice in car colour – black – and gave his employees one choice, do what the company told you to or be sacked. By the 1950s companies and organisations were more characterised by layers of professional managers, salaried rather than owners, and communications tended to mirror the structured and bureaucratic nature of the organisation. It is probably only in the past few decades that staff communications has become important.

The first reason is perhaps a sociological one – the displacement of the 1960s and 70s language of empowerment and change into commercial settings. Back then, in a cloud of pot and a chorus of folk, a section of the baby boom generation was determined to change the world – peace, love, and an end to greed and all its evil consequences. As part of the generation I was as much affected as anyone else, despite always preferring alcohol and tobacco, as the preferred substance abuse choice. To a certain extent the generation did have significant influence. For a start they provoked a long backlash manifested in the culture war politics of George W. Bush and John Howard. They also encouraged the spread of environmental awareness and a general loosening up of society around issues of sex, race, gender preference and social freedoms. But, despite the fears of the culture warriors, they didn't actually carry out a social and economic revolution. People still get married and have families, capitalism is still operating and more people than ever own shares either directly, or indirectly, through superannuation.

The late Peter Kerr, who worked as an adviser to Victorian Premier, Jeff Kennett, and subsequently became the Institute of Public Affairs Director, argued that their most significant impact was on the language by which organisations – private and public sector – communicated. The language of empowerment, ending alienation, rights and so on became commonplace in organisational discourse. In the 1990s attending meetings at the department store chain, Myer, was like attending a late 1960s or early 1970s sit in – without the undercurrent of sexism and the expectation that men were leading the revolution and the women were operating the roneo machines and providing sex. Everyone spoke with astonishing politeness and inclusive language was always used. Everyone, whatever their position, was regarded as having equal right to speak and equal right to be listened to and respected. It was the perfect fulfilment of 1960s radicalism in operation within a capitalist context. Unfortunately it didn't work that well because some decisions took a long time to make and consensus is not always possible. However, while it was an extreme version of a new model, the essential characteristics were carried over into staff communications throughout organisations.

The second reason, related to this first one, was the growth of the knowledge economy and the importance of knowledge workers. In the 1890s and early 20th century if workers were upset they were driven out of factories (in the US with the help of troops, police, Pinkerton or all three together) and replaced by another lot of migrants off the boat. While many low wage jobs are still staffed on a similar basis most organisations depend on more skilled and better trained staff. The myriad of lawyers, accountants, technicians, engineers, PR people and semi-professionals are better educated than in the past and less likely to accept someone else's version of what should or not should happen. They are also in scarce supply as Kathy Sampson, the MD of Australia's leading legal recruiting

and search firm, Mahlab, said to me at function in early 2008: "The market has moved from finding vacancies for people to finding people to fill vacancies." Factory workers are now more highly skilled and tradespeople have become more independent as they have turned to contracting as an alternative to working for an employer.

One of my clients, the manager of a manufacturing plant in a regional centre, provided an example of these new levels of awareness and competence. He was giving the plant workers a pep talk on how the plant was going and did the normal thing of telling everyone how they had to work harder and keep meeting challenges because of how tough things were. He then asked for questions. Immediately one of the staff said: "You've just told us how tough things are but *The Australian Financial Review* had a story this morning saying that we are likely to have a record profit because of the exchange rate." The assumption that the boss has one level of knowledge and the workers some other is no longer sustainable.

The third reason was the growth of change management. Change management is a sort of truism – organisations need to adapt to survive. Organisms and humans have tended to do it slowly through evolution. Most successful organisations, unless there are sudden changes in external circumstances, prosper best if they evolve in the same way. However, from the late 1970s there were a series of external shocks: stagflation, oil crises, new competitors, consumerism, new technologies and social, economic and regulatory changes which transformed the environment in which organisations operated. In the public sector reforming governments, under the guise of making the public sector more responsive, introduced changes which were often more about managerialism than management.

This change management focus led to a huge investment in communication designed to inform people of the need for change and the benefits of change. Organisations were turned upside down, re-structured, abolished and re-created, layers of management were stripped out, staff were sacked. The organisational pendulum swung backwards and forwards between centralisation and decentralisation. At every stage and twist of the process there was a PR person, or a management consultant, advising on communications.

Despite the talk of empowerment this period demonstrated to staff that, whatever the program was called, they were not actually stakeholders and of great value, but rather just another cost or a pawn to be re-structured. Many of them became cynical about change and staff communication; some who kept their jobs suffered from survivor mentality; and many of them were distrustful of management. There was a chasm between the views of senior management and the staff about the need, role and execution of the change programs.

Reflecting on it in the 1990s I tried to distil, in ironic form what change management actually amounted to and wrote a brief article which I then emailed anonymously around to a number of people as part of an experiment to see how widely it would be disseminated. Anonymity was chosen to remove any possible skews in perception of the

piece or the author. It was based on my own observations and those of my wife who had worked for not-for-profit organisation which had gone through a merger exemplifying the change process. Originally I had intended to write a paper tracking where it had gone, and how quickly, but its popularity, and the difficulty of tracking its dissemination, persuaded me to drop the paper and just acknowledge it. The article said:

"Over the past two decades a generation of change managers has set out to transform organisations – from universities and companies to charities and government departments. While there has been much scholarly study of these transformations (vide Dilbert *et al*) there has been no simple guide to what change managers do.

This guide has been prepared to remedy that lack. Change managers:

1. Announce soon after arrival, and before any analysis which might cloud judgments, that the organisation must face up to the new competitive environment and must change to survive.
2. Sack significant numbers of incumbent managers and replace them with friends and colleagues from previous jobs.
3. Increase the number of both middle managers and management levels giving new managers titles such as Organisational Capability Development Manager.
4. Ensure none of the new managers have definable line management accountabilities or job descriptions written in English.
5. Objectify the people the organisation is set up to serve. Eg citizens become customers of government departments while students and courses at universities become clients and services.
6. Announce a major re-organisation to affect change and confront the challenges of the competitive environment.
7. Identify another agency or group with which to merge, form strategic alliances or generally hold meetings with.
8. Retrench as many operational staff as possible, singling out in particular anyone with detailed knowledge of how systems actually work.
9. Introduce a culture based on continuous meetings and managerial Newspeak while insulating all managers from any operational realities.
10. Identify any centres of excellence or international best practice in the organisation, close them down and outsource the function to someone more expensive and less effective.
11. Promulgate changes to any systems which effectively meet client/customer needs.
12. Introduce a completely untried IT system designed to integrate all existing systems and produce massive productivity savings.
13. Sack any operational staff who had not previously taken redundancy packages for the failures in these changes to systems and the IT implementation.
14. Announce another major re-organisation to enhance effectiveness and focus more effectively on change.
15. Move on to next job, before the organisation goes into critical state and after including in CV details of change management expertise, to start the process all over again."

Within a few weeks of distributing it the article started to come back to me from people who had seen it circulated in their organisations including one from the daughter of a friend who worked at the BBC and thought it summed up the reign of the notoriously jargon-obsessed BBC Director-General, John Birt, rather well.

Having emptied out my bile it seemed a bit hypocritical to keep earning huge fees from the process of change management. It also prompted a think about how staff communications in changing environments could be done better.

We had a good opportunity with the Victorian Department of Human Services, the biggest public sector employer in the state. They had gone through a major re-structure as a result of the introduction of a new policy framework – the purchaser-provider split. Just as companies were challenging models of vertical integration so governments were questioning whether the organisations that regulated and funded services were necessarily the best to provide them. The upshot was a belief that managers who were good at managing the funding ought to focus on that and contract with specialists who provided the funded services. This opened up opportunities for private sector and not-for-profit providers of health and welfare services.

A previous re-organisation had been marked by a communication disaster. A consultancy persuaded some managers to print a series of four colour brochures showing the new organisational layout and including photographs of the senior managers. These were then distributed en masse to staff throughout the State. When we came in to look at staff communications we were quickly shown undistributed piles of posters and told of staff cynicism about 'communication'. The new communications manager and the department head wanted a new approach.

After looking at the problem for a while two solutions suggested themselves. The first, the random short cut cascading of information discussed earlier in the section on small world theory. This was used to provide basic information and seemed, from staff surveys, to be working well in that the process had some credibility. The second was based on the premise that if the Department was going to have a new way of doing business and a new model, then the logical thing to do was to undertake training programs to help people do their new jobs. Staff communication about why and how the changes were occurring were subsumed into training modules about what people now needed to do. In other words we focussed not on communicating change but instead on equipping people to do their job. The idea was not new – in a way it was reminiscent of the Marxist concept of *praxis* – but it was immensely effective and cost effective. No glossy brochures, no video presentations, no exhortations but rather communicating the reasons for change (the theoretical basis) through practical learning about how to do the new job.

Other projects which focussed on the doing, rather than the communications, were for Telstra during the many regulatory changes it was going through. Telstra had been the monopoly carrier and gradually competition was being introduced. The first major change was to end Telstra's monopoly on providing the first phone – the connection and

handset - for the home landline. Telstra not only had to retain its customers but it also had the responsibility, watched by government and regulators, to inform the customers about the changes. Telstra put together a team of an advertising agency, research company and PR company. Our company was not directly involved in the implementation but I had been asked to project manage the team for Telstra.

The research showed that people were actually quite happy with Telstra although they wanted to have the right to choose. We devised a campaign which did two things. First, we re-packaged what had always existed – Telstra's commitment to servicing your phone line – into the Telstra Guarantee. The guarantee was the 100% guarantee that if anything went wrong with your phone, Telstra would come and fix it. The implicit contrast was between Telstra and new and unknown competitors with no track record. Second, we were very upfront about telling people they had a choice as the research indicated that frustration levels with Telstra fell dramatically when customers knew they could go somewhere else. They were less dissatisfied with Telstra service than with the lack of another option.

To deliver the campaign the team developed a Telstra Family – teams of Telstra staff who reflected national demographics. The 'family' went on radio, did shopping centre displays, and went to various community groups. The execution involved staff; it showed how the company reflected Australian life; and, it positioned Telstra as helpful and informative with ordinary Australians telling (not selling) other Australians about the changes.

A similar program was used for the identity change from Telecom Australia to Telstra. Telecom had been merged with OTC and was expanding overseas. The generic brand, Telecom, would be hard to protect in new markets so a new identity was required. The Telstra team, working with a design company, developed the new name, new colours and a new brand architecture.

Unfortunately Telstra was in an issue rich environment. A former Telecom Corporate Affairs Manager, Peter Thomas, had said: "We might be high-tech but more importantly we are high touch – we have an impact on almost every Australian." Whatever Telstra did it would provoke media comment, questions in Parliament, and letters and phone calls. All Australians owned it (this was before privatisation) and all of them had an opinion on how it should perform. In this context a multi-million dollar identity change could have been a disaster. There would have been complaints about the expense; arguments about whether it was necessary; interminable outrage by talk radio shock jocks; and questions in Parliament about every last detail of the change and its cost.

In particular the Telstra team wanted to avoid the massive task of a rapid corporate ID changeover when the company had sites all over Australia including buildings, exchanges and telephone booths. It was even doubtful if a rapid physical changeover was physically possible. Instead a soft launch was planned. Telecom changed it colour scheme and typography and OTC changed its name to Telstra with a view to making the overall move gradually further down the track. The new ID was launched at staff

functions to which staff could invite their families. There were major launches in theatres and stadiums with entertainment and visuals of the changes. Staff were encouraged to go out and talk about the new ID and, largely, they did so positively and enthusiastically. It was another example of how staff, empowered and involved, could be advocates for an organisation.

The opportunity arose to extend the concept later. A senior marketing manager in the consumer division, Tim Ungar, approached us about a particular regulatory change, pre-selection. Pre-selection was not about political preference and selection but about choosing which carrier consumers wanted to use. The regulatory restrictions were even tighter and detailed instructions had been given about what Telstra could say to customers about the change and what staff could say. There were to be sanctions for breaching the guidelines for marketing.

Tim Ungar wanted to involve the staff (and staff wanted to be involved) but he wanted to involve them in a structured way consistent with the restrictions placed on Telstra marketing. Two of our staff – Lelde McCoy and Rupert Hugh-Jones – were involved in the project. Lelde came up with the concept of Telstra Friends, a sort of staff club or association in which staff received rewards for undertaking specific marketing activities outside their work. The three of them developed the concept more fully and pulled in a range of other people to help with implementing it.

It became one of the most successful staff empowerment and involvement programs run in Australia. Eventually it survived the pre-selection project and extended to a range of other activities across the company. Perhaps its success was testified to most by the number of people – at least a dozen or so within Telstra alone – who told me how they dreamt up the idea.

In staff communications, however, probably the most significant development has been technological with the creation of intranets. Intranets facilitate communication; provide data; let people share experiences and intellectual property; and, become a sort of custodian of corporate culture. They are predominantly functional and are relatively free of the disadvantages of other forms of internal communication and such things as corporate blogs (see next section). Cisco Systems was the pioneer in this area – as hopefully to be expected of a technology company the success of which is dependent on the web – and stripped out the nonsense from internal communications and replaced it with practical, functional information about entitlements, training, policies, procedures and just about every thing any employee really needs to know to do their job.

Ultimately, of course, the problem with staff communications is that the interests of staff and managers are not necessarily aligned. Managers often want staff to do things they don't want to do and no amount of communication is going to persuade them to do it willingly. Management is more likely to sacrifice jobs to satisfy the market than to demonstrate a commitment to staff and let profits and share prices fall below expectations. Employees understand this reality.

Where alignment occurs most effectively is where a strong culture is created. Where this happens peer pressure and/or a sense of teamwork do more than communication from management to instil values and influence behaviours.

Staff communications' tone, techniques and tactics may change, but the major constraint on them is still probably the evolutionary one. As discussed earlier we have always trusted the people we were safe with, and closest to. Venturing outside the cave was full of risk. Today we still listen to those close to us first, those united in adversity, and listen least to those from outside who bring messages of change.

Perhaps in this situation the best thing any PR person can do is to understand the limitations of staff communications and to avoid being carried away with enthusiasm for the transformational capacity of words from senior managers.

Corporate blogging

Theorists, some politicians, lots of PR people and some companies have argued that corporate blogging will transform not only staff communications but also relationships with stakeholders. The idea is that blogs provide an interactive medium – an opportunity for stakeholders to have conversations with companies and organisations. Similar opportunities can be created by websites which offer email, chatrooms, games, links, and search engines. Catherine Wahl, who helped with the research on this book, says in her MA thesis: "The profitable promise of interactive consumer communication is the main motivation for implementing weblogs as a strategy for building and maintaining strong relationships with customers." But she concludes "parallel to the potentials of weblogs as a strategic public relations tool, it must be recognised that the concept of corporate blogging per se is inherently problematic as it involves employing an originally collaborative, transparent and egalitarian medium for commercial, or strategic purposes."

So far corporate blogs in Australia are limited in number and scope – particularly when compared with the US and UK. In the US, CEOs and employees blog on behalf of their organisations, with Microsoft being among the leaders in the field. A US website www.businessblogconsulting.com provides a good summary of the range of thinking; details on the sorts of corporate blogs that exist; and, links to a variety of other useful sites.

In Australia, in contrast, an article in *The Age* (13 February 2007) by Graeme Phillipson on blogs was entitled "Bosses let sleeping blogs lie". The best known Australian, and oldest, corporate blog was Telstra's www.nowwearetalking.com.au run by Rob Bruem, although now discontinued. The blog has been widely reported on in the Australian media and Bruem has been widely interviewed. Corporate gadfly and *Crikey* founder, Stephen Mayne, tested the Telstra willingness to control the blog by posting a number of comments about the company which were all published. The postings actually generated favourable publicity.

Bruem has also been interviewed by Australia's most prominent PR blogger, Trevor Cook, formerly of the Sydney firm, Jackson Wells Morris, who now blogs at www.abc.net.au. The Financial Planning Association www.fpa.asn.au ; Dymocks in South Australia www.dymade.blogspot.com ;and, the University of Sydney http://blogs.usyd.edu.au.sydneylife/ are all examples of Australian corporate and organisational blogs which include material from students and staff. Two Australians - Frank Arrigo, blogs.msdn.com/frankarr/, and Matt Moore http://engineerswithoutfears.blogspot.com/ - are Microsoft and IBM bloggers respectively.

But the conflict between control and conversation will always inhibit corporate blogs. They are an interesting technological development which seek to give companies a personal voice, encourage loyalty and become a source of competitive differentiation. Yet weblogs, to be effective, as Wahl says: need "to be characterised by interactivity, transparency, participation, opinion, personality, immediacy, commentary, informality, sociability, and conversationality. Conversely organisational communication is traditionally top-down, factual and highly, controlled."

Some of the results of this conflict were reported by *The Australian Financial Review* (April 14-15 2007) in a reprint of a *BusinessWeek* article by Michelle Conlin. The article recounted an unsuccessful attempt by Martin Sorrell (CEO of communications group WPP) to sue two blogging ex-colleagues for what he claimed was a web hate campaign against him and a former lover. The US company, Home Depot, had 14,000 angry customers storm on to an MSN comment room. Most significantly it reported on a range of services such as BuzzLogic and ReputationDefender.com which trawl the web for adverse comment or try to promote information companies want promoted.

Once again a new transformational technology has seemed to fit quite quickly back into more traditional PR models.

Investor relations

Investor relations are, theoretically, the easiest form of PR because the restrictions on it are so closely defined through securities and ASX regulation. With investor communications you can only say what you can say when you can say it, and you have to say it to everyone at once. Learn the rules and it should be easy from then – much easier for instance than trying to persuade a talk radio host to feature a segment about socks or underwear or some other marketing communications task.

Of course it isn't easy at all, mainly because investor relations are not only about investment communication but often intersect with issues management problems. It's also not easy if you are a consultancy because you are in effect working both in competition with, and along side your own client and the client's advisors. It's not easy because, despite the assumption that investment is based on rational calculation, markets are driven by emotion, sentiment and what Keynes described as 'animal spirits'. And it's not easy because large companies nowadays have investor relations specialists reporting

direct to Chief Financial Officers (sometimes but not that often to CEOs) rather than it being part of the PR function.

The ACCPA's Geoff Allen, says that Centre surveys in the mid to late 1990s showed that about 30% of publicly listed companies had the investor relations function in the public affairs area and about 70% had it elsewhere. In another survey in 2003 the Centre found a decline in the number of investor relations people being part of public affairs "a fact attributable to the function's increased complexity, regulatory intervention, and corporate significance," Allen says. He also quotes an unnamed investor relations executive as saying: "It is hard to envisage anyone doing our job without a finance background, or being part of the finance team".

The 2003 survey showed that the major role for public affairs/PR in investor relations were preparing the annual report; co-ordinating and support for the AGM; and assistance with roadshows. Maintaining shareholder data, preparing quarterly reports, investor and analysts surveys, analyst briefings and liaison are rarely PR function. Where PR people do have a role in these areas they may well have had a background in finance journalism.

There are specialist consultancies such as FCR and Third Person which provide a range of investor relations services to companies ranging from smaller listed companies to some quite large ones. Where governments have sought to privatise government entities PR consultancies have been employed to help with media liaison, positioning and marketing.

When I started in PR in the 1960s it was during the Poseidon mining stock market boom – a time when regulation was light and almost anything went. Companies were being listed with smaller nickel concentrations in their leases than most people have in their backyard gardens. Stocks soared on rumours passed on to journalists by PR people, brokers and companies themselves. In a few cases journalists traded in shares they were writing about without having, as they do today, to disclose their shareholdings. There was only ever one accusation – and that directed to a very junior journalist – that they had sought to profit from such trading, but the transparency demanded today did not exist then.

The mining boom milieu was typified in the late 1960s and early 1970s by a visit almost any night to the Duke of Wellington in Melbourne where you would see PR people, journalists from *The Sun* and brokers enjoying a drink together and gossiping. Legendary figures such as The *Sun* Finance Editor, Des Keegan, held court. His deputy, Trevor Sykes, and a cadet to become famous later on, Terry McCrann, were also regulars listening to stories they still draw on today to warn about the dangers of speculation and corporate cowboys. There was even a noble PR person, Lord Jimmy Zouche, who had headed off to Australia and settled into a good life promoting companies among other things. In other hotels around Australia there would be other PR people and other journalists. Sports and other journalists were more likely to drink at Lou Richard's Phoenix Hotel although I can remember being in the MCG press box when everybody

was less interested in the Sheffield Shield Match being played than they were in the paper fortune an *Adelaide Advertiser* cricket writer had made investing in Poseidon shares.

Mining companies were created through backdoor listings of former manufacturing or service companies. Some of them even survived to transmogrify into dot com companies in the dot com boom.

Of course what can't go on doesn't go on, and the mining boom ended about the time investment clubs were being set up to pool their funds to buy a few Poseidon shares. My own attitude to investor relations was shaped by the experience; the thought that it was better left to investor relations specialists; and, some doubts about whether I had the stuff to work through more booms. Before the 1987 crash I was working with McCaughan Dyson, a broking firm, and they had organised a lunch to brief a visiting banker from Baring Bros, then still in existence and considered very blue-blooded and reliable. The briefings were informal and more a conversation about politics, the Australian economy and the market. One of the younger McCaughan Dyson staff was talking about the market when one or two of us started to smile at the same time. His discourse on the market was essentially predicated on the fact that the market would just keep going up. I looked around at our guest and some of the older broking firm staff there and said: "He's never seen the market go down". We all laughed, but time after time PR people are prominent in promoting the latest version of the 'it's different this time' mantra to justify a bubble. Those who haven't experienced the volatility, or erase it from their memory, simply can't comprehend what might happen.

At another point I was asked to a briefing by a gold mining company about to list and wanting PR assistance. The prospectus indicated that the company would operate by using new technology to work through the tailings of old Tasmanian gold mines to generate ore. It could well have been successful but we talked about it and passed mainly because we couldn't work up the enthusiasm to promote something about which we had doubts ourselves.

Not that the consultancies I worked with did no investor relations. I can claim that I have worked on the two most unsuccessful takeover bids of Australian history: the bid by Australian Portland Cement for Adelaide Brighton in South Australia; and, the bid for Coca Cola Bottlers South Australia. In both cases – some 30 years apart – we managed to get fewer than five per cent of the shares. Adelaide Brighton is still independent and still resisting sale. The head of the consultancy which involved us in the Coca Cola Bottlers project later went to gaol after being convicted of insider trading. I was also involved in one of the most successful takeovers, the Amcor takeover of APPM, but most IR people can point to a success and very few can, or even would, point to such spectacular failures.

Where we did get involved in investor relations was where there was an issues management element of the project. During the long-running Yannon affair at Coles Myer the company had employed a number of PR consultancies but, on the recommendation of a director, Nick Greiner (former NSW Premier), we were asked to help out. A marathon AGM, claim and counter-claim, non-stop media coverage, TV

stakeouts of the protagonists homes were more like one would expect in a political or a celebrity issues than a corporate one. Much of our work was helping craft messages and helping with media liaison. But the bulk of the strategy and tactical decisions were driven by the Chair, Nobby Clark, and corporate counsel, Tim Hammon. By the end of the process I was in awe (as many others have been) of Nobby Clark. He was intelligent, unassuming, modest and extraordinarily wise. Chairing the AGM in Sydney in which Solomon Lew's forces were organising votes against other directors and some institutions were organising votes against Solomon Lew, Nobby was on stage for hours at a time before marathon AGMs became common. Michael Danby, not yet an MP, was in the audience with a host of other people, some of them apparently organised by the Lew forces, to ask questions and promote the Lew cause. The usual cast of shareholder activists and bores interjected and spoke for too long. When it was finally over Nobby came off the stage and was mobbed by advisers wanting to congratulate him and ask how he felt. He just grinned, waved away the compliments and concerns, and said: "Well that was a long meeting. I think I need a pee."

Later, after he had retired from most things, he intervened in a NAB AGM , held after the NAB foreign exchange and Boardroom controversies pointing out that the new Chief Operating Officer, Ahmed Fahour, was paid more in 28 days than Nobby had earned in 45 years at NAB. Honest, straightforward and smart. After the experience of working with him it was sometimes difficult to find enthusiasm for other some projects where CEOs and Chairs had higher, if less justified, opinions of themselves.

Ironically, around the same time as we worked on the Yannon issue we were also helping Country Road, the fashion and retail company, which had gone through difficult times and was changing. Working with the CEO, Mike Howell, was a similar experience as working with Nobby Clark, even though it got us involved in another controversy with Solomon Lew, this time when he tried to take over Country Road. Our opposition PR was not a conventional consultancy but merchant banker, Michael Kroger, who issued a stream of statements around the time of profit and other announcements. He was more than matched, however, by the Country Road advisor, Mike Tilley, who was a brilliant briefer of finance journalists. Long after I had retired, Country Road had been majority acquired by a South African firm and new management was in place, Kroger was still issuing statements to coincide with results announcements and Lew still had about 10% of the shares. The same tactics were applied to Coles Myer, although with somewhat more success in that they coincided with more widespread market disillusionment with the company.

For some reason or other we also got involved in a spate of resignations by CEOs. The process would normally start with a call from the company Chairman asking for a meeting – sometimes at your office. The brief was the always the same: draft up two media releases, one announcing the CEO's retirement with suitable glowing comments from the Chair and some words from the outgoing CEO; and one with a few spare comments from the Chair about the change and the process to find a replacement. The negotiations over the media releases were always complex, perhaps more complex than the severance package negotiations and these were normally settled by more money or

within conditions in the CEO's contract. In the space of about six months I think I had three such projects and was always astonished by the amount of money involved and the concern over the power of words and the impressions they create among peers and in the market.

During the dotcom boom we also got involved in floats – some of them still in business and trading successfully and some of dubious value. For all the changes in regulation some of the tactics of the 1960s and 1970s were revived. The major one was the spreading of rumours about which famous people – most frequently the Packers – were going to get involved in some IPO and how you couldn't afford to miss out. Many famous people did take shares but qualitatively the atmosphere didn't seem much different to that at the Duke of Wellington – without the fun and the good company.

The PR lessons I learnt from it all were: that solid, low-key fact based approaches are the only effective long-term ways to promote companies; the most credible spinners are the merchant bankers; fads, fashions and crazes are just as common in finance as they are in games and clothes – except in finance they are retrospectively called bubbles; and, that when lots of money is washing around no regulatory system is going to stop some greedy people doing irregular things. The challenge for PR people is to ask themselves whether they use the first approach, or are contributors to the bubbles and the irregularities.

Corporate social responsibility

The biggest change in corporate communications in the past decade has been in the area of corporate social responsibility. In 1997 our company had undertaken a benchmarking study (Old wine in new bottles: Benchmarking for best practice with public relations *Journal of Communication Management* vol 1 No 3 262-271) for BHP as it then was. At the time BHP was considering publishing its first environmental report. We tried to explore best practice in environmental reporting to provide a basis for what the report might contain but we also broadened the study to look at international reporting guidelines, shareholder communications and ethical codes.

The very first question we researched was whether the company should publish an environmental report at all, followed by questions about what might be in it and what standards it might meet. Back then there were a variety of standards, including the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and the coalition for environmentally responsible economies (CERES), and others. There was no internationally agreed standard and only a few companies had launched into the field. Most of the reporting was narrow and focussed on waste and recycling although even in 1997 attention was being paid to tonnes of carbon dioxide emitted as a result of energy use.

The ethical field was more complex as guidelines existed but Australia had no legislation such as the US Foreign Corrupt Practices Act 1977 where companies could be prosecuted for paying bribes and engaging in corrupt practices in other countries. There was no legal risk unless it involved an offence in Australia under Australian law. Many companies combined ethical codes with an awareness of what were termed 'cross-cultural

differences in applying ethical codes' and a refusal to pay bribes but a willingness to pay 'facilitation fees' to third parties.

At this stage corporate environmental reporting across Australia probably was 'just PR' as the critics said, although once BHP became serious about it and, began undertaking extensive environmental audits, other companies started to follow. Indeed, BHP was not the first to publish an environmental report as a bit of race, which BHP consciously decided not to join, developed as to who would be first among the resource companies to do so.

Within 10 years the tentative steps towards corporate environmental reporting had become a major international effort re-titled corporate social responsibility (CSR). The function is still generally within public affairs but is staffed by specialists. There is now effectively one global standard, The Global Reporting Initiative G3, and independent quality assurance programs to check any company's claims. In Australia there are also reporting standards which require information on environmental and other matters. There are also a number of indices such as the Dow Jones Sustainability Index which ranks companies on their performance against various criteria.

Arguably the indices contain some of the problems inherent in reputation indices. It is possible to become expert in managing the data and the data provision process to get a good outcome. Reporting on the other hand provides raw data on which stakeholders can make their own judgements. ANZ, which in 2007, displaced Westpac at the top of the Dow Jones Index simultaneously released as much data as possible on its website in the interests of greater transparency.

The latest developments in this field are back in the environmental area: how do companies account for their carbon footprint and what are realistic and credible claims on carbon offsetting. This is creating new problems in terms of reporting and new claims, from critics, about 'greenwashing'.

The entire area, however, is still plagued by ideological conflict. There are some in business (as discussed in the chapter on stakeholder theory) who will resist too much emphasis on CSR; and, there are anti-business groups who believe CSR is a con trick.

The Economist (19 January 2008) described CSR as 'enlightened self interest' and pointed out that there are high profile leaders in the field; followers who simply produce reports; and, laggards who are still hoping nobody will notice. *The Economist* has always been sceptical about CSR and has often criticised it as distracting attention from the true purpose of companies, making a profit. Yet in the 2008 article it took a new line: "one way of looking at CSR is that it is part of what businesses need to do to keep up with (or, if possibly, stay slightly ahead of) society's fast-changing expectations. It is an aspect of taking care of a company's reputation, managing its risks and gaining a competitive edge." It saw the long-term future of CSR as combining "a company's principles and its commercial competence" or "nothing more than good business practice".

The reality is that any move to transparency is worthwhile. The more information companies provide about what they do, the better able stakeholders, and the wider community, are to judge the company. The very fact of reporting, even if coloured by optimism and some degree of promotion, encourages responsible behaviour. This will embed corporate social responsibility in the culture and make it less a specialisation and more about core business focus. In the meantime, one thing is certain, the growth potential for communicators in the CSR field is likely to be more sustained than it is for investor relations.

Crisis communications

Every year some journalist rings me to get a comment on crisis management and what PR people do to help companies and organisations facing crises. Sometimes it is about a specific crisis. Generally where it is a specific crisis I don't comment at all. It is impossible to say from outside whether the company is doing the most effective job possible or not. Indeed, as a general rule any PR practitioner who races into the media with comments on the crisis of the day is demonstrating their lack of competence in, and understanding of, the field.

In the most recent calls it has become apparent that there is a divergence between media views of crisis management and the view of practitioners. For the media the crisis is the all-consuming major event with front page stories and wall-to-wall electronic coverage. For the practitioner it is no longer the glamorous area once imagined but, rather a commoditised service in which well-rehearsed responses are used. A crisis is still a crisis, and it can be all-consuming, but generally people are able to roll out a carefully considered plan to deal with the immediate effects and the aftermath.

Every major company has a developed disaster plan which covers off just about every possible eventuality. In fact the most fun about preparing for crises is brain-storming vulnerabilities and scenarios. It serves as an antidote to corporate complacency; an opportunity for people to speak out on things they have been concerned about but reluctant to voice; and, an opportunity for iconoclasts to speculate on worst case scenarios. For a chemical plant it could be an explosion or an intrusion by activists. For a food company it could be a product recall due to poisoning. For a financial institution it might be a fraud. In each and every case someone has thought through what might happen and documented, minutely, the appropriate response about who to call and what to say. Consultancies such as Regester Larkin operate worldwide in helping companies prepare these responses. One of the principals, Michael Regester, has written the standard text on the subject*, Crisis Management,* as well as editing a number of case studies. In Australia the major consultancies offer services although the major player in the field is probably Ross Campbell & Associates. Most companies – particularly in the oil and chemicals fields – have in house specialists working on it. Governments at local, State and Federal level work closely with companies to develop responses to scenarios from oil spills to extortion. Some of the most experienced crisis managers are in police forces, fire and emergency services and government departments. A bushfire, for instance, mobilises not only fire fighters but government and political PR people.

The greatest misconception about crises is that they are random, unanticipated events which happen to the company in the form, or as the insurance companies used to call them, of an Act of God. Normally crises are caused by mistakes made by people because of incompetence, inattention or sheer idiocy. Technology is actually reducing risks and industrial accidents and operational crises are declining in importance. The public is more forgiving with accidents (unless they are due to negligence) because people know accidents happen whereas frauds are perpetrated.

Crises, in general, are more likely to arise from smouldering causes, issues which have been neglected through denial, complacency, greed or executive egos not admitting management error. They can be categorised as crises arising from products and processes such as health, safety and the environment; crises arising from corporate issues such as lawsuits, boycotts and takeovers; crises arising from people including sabotage, industrial action and embezzlement.

The key characteristics of a crisis are surprise; insufficient information at the outset; an escalating flow of events; loss of control; intense external scrutiny; a tendency to a siege mentality; panic; and a short-term focus. The key characteristics of successful crisis management are being prepared and a culture pre-disposed to transparency.

Some of the international companies which have become famous for how crises have been handled (some well and some badly) include Exxon and the Valdez oil spill; BP and oil spills, plant accidents and senior management relationships with former male prostitutes; Intel for a chip which did not perform to specifications; McDonalds for their reaction to the film *Supersize Me* and their ham-fisted attempt to sue two animal liberation activists in the UK; Johnson & Johnson for the Tylenol tampering; and Perrier for radioactive water. In Australia the Sydney Water crisis when *Giardia* was found in the water supply reduced people in hotels to drinking water from a bottle as if they were in a developing country; the Victorian Esso gas explosion; and the Arnott's and Kraft peanut butter cases.

Working for a number of food industry clients a group of us tried to analyse the differences in approach between the Arnott's and Kraft (owned by Phillip Morris) cases to see what lessons could be learnt. In Kraft's case there was product contamination in the production process of a peanut butter product widely eaten by young people. Arnott's was the victim of an extortion bid. While the causes were different both affected public health; both companies were custodians of the crisis; and, both had major impacts on public image, brand loyalty and profitability. While the causes were different the reactions were different as well. Initially Kraft said the problem was caused by a supplier and removed only a selection of brands from sale. Arnott's immediately withdrew all products from the shelves in the affected areas (NSW and Queensland) and took responsibility for the situation. Kraft put up as a media spokesperson a corporate lawyer and called the first media conference late on a Sunday evening. In fact journalists already had most of the information through the police and health authorities and were waiting to ambush Kraft. Arnott's put up their Managing Director, Chris Roberts. Kraft

progressively withdrew more and brands over the coming day while maintaining that the cause was only one batch of peanuts from one supplier. Arnott's extended its recall beyond the danger zone just to be safe. On a day-to-day basis Kraft was seen as difficult by the media while Roberts was always accessible. One seemed concerned to restrict the problem and seemed to overlook longer-term brand considerations. Arnott's publicly demonstrated its concern for public safety. Research after showed that consumers rewarded Arnott's, and that sales of their products boomed after they returned to shelves.

What makes crises, and issues for that matter, most difficult is the advent of the Internet. Images, responses, criticisms and complaints can be spread around the world instantly. Today there are still websites devoted to attacking McDonalds and cyber crises, that is, crises that unfold in cyberspace have joined the other sources of crisis situations. The Intel Pentium chip crisis is an example of this.

Seminars will continue to be held on crisis management; lessons will be learnt; new crises will arise; adrenalin will pump in managers and media people; but the reality is that it is happening within a context in which people are better prepared than ever before.

Risk communications

Risk communications are a major part of companies', and organisations', attempts to refine their communication with customers and the public. The problem is that people are not very good at estimating what risk involves. Today most people in the western world are safer, healthier, live longer and face fewer risks than at any time in human history. They are terrified of terrorist attacks or plane crashes but calmly get into cars where the risk of death or injury is much higher. Trains feel safer than planes even though planes, measured by deaths by kilometres travelled, are actually safer. In the six months after the September 11 attacks fewer people in the US flew and more drover. The resultant increase in the road toll was greater than the death toll in 9/11. Media food scares, developments, new plants, new technologies all create fears independent of the actual risk. These fears are exploited by activists and opponents of developments. Whether it be GMOs, nanotechnology or something else the world is going to be ruined and we should not take the risk. Sometimes, as with climate change and AIDs, the fears are justified but there have been so many scares for so long that it is often difficult to get people to engage in new ones, however important.

The worldwide expert in risk communication is Professor Peter Sandman who has identified the problem as being less about risk and more about outrage. He has developed a formula – Risk= Hazard + Outrage – to encapsulate the problem. He recommends, among many rich insights, three broad approaches. First, what he calls precautionary advocacy for people who are not aware that they face a serious hazard. He colloquialises it as: 'watch out'. Second, outrage management where people are excessively upset about small hazards where the need is to send a message to 'calm down'. Third, crisis communications, where people are rightly upset about a serious hazard. Here the message is: 'We'll get through this together'. Professor Sandman's website www.psandman.com provides details of his writings, research and methods.

Sandman was called in to advise the Australian Wheat Board in the Iraqi bribes situation. He advocated confessing and apologising. The AWB rejected the advice although by the time a judicial inquiry into the events was held all his advice was tabled for all to read. He also wrote an analysis (on the website) of a speech given by then Health Minister, Tony Abbott, on avian flu which is a brilliant explanation of how risks ought to be communicated. The speech is a model of the best practice
'watch out' genre.

In communicating about risk and problems the spokesperson can be a crucially important factor. Generally women are more credible spokespeople. Scientists are not always credible. Middle aged men in suits are least credible. Politicians are not trusted at all but officials can be in certain circumstances. What the spokesperson says is equally important. Some years ago we were working with the Plastics Industry Association then headed by a former Labor Cabinet Minister, Susan Ryan. The industry was being attacked over the production of disposable plastic nappies. Susan gave a media conference with words scripted by herself. She made two points: first, that the nappies could be disposed of safely and in an environmentally responsible way: second, that they were convenient and their opponents were trying to take women back to the days of washing cloth nappies in the local stream. The controversy stopped immediately but she was a credible spokesperson who re-assured her fellow women and put it into a context for hard-worked and stressed mothers.

Litigation PR

In the United States a slightly bizarre PR specialisation is litigation PR – providing PR support for people, companies and organisations involved in legal actions. Without the same concern about contempt of court US lawyers make statements to the media; PR practitioners brief journalists; and talk shows debate guilt or otherwise.

Litigation PR exists in Australia but not so openly and not all its practitioners are PR people. The most high-profile practitioner is Mike Smith, former *Age* editor, IPR Shandwick CEO, and now running his own PR company. Smith has represented a fugitive Mexican banker, Carlos Cabal; Coles Myer head, Brian Quinn, and media personality Steve Vizard through their court cases. While obviously very careful about contempt of court, Smith arranges positive publicity to put his clients in the best possible light. The aim is not to influence the legal proceedings but more to position the litigant against any possible reputational damage.

But as with merchant bankers, barristers and solicitors are at least as good at PR as most practitioners. In major court cases it is common for the legal counsel to brief the media, not so much to influence the court outcome, but to make sure the points made for their client are understood and reported on.

My view is that the risks tend to outweigh the benefits in litigation PR. The fact that a PR person is being employed becomes the story rather than having the focus on the facts. Out of court legal nods and winks seem a much safer alternative.

Community consultation

Most people have been involved in a community consultation project at some time or other. Ostensibly the process is designed to involve people in decision-making about planning, developments, policies and projects. If a desalination plant or other major project is announced governments and developers inevitably say they will consult with the community to get their views. But the process is generally one of co-option rather than consultation and many consultative processes start out with a pre-conceived outcome in mind.

Community consultation was really born as a major communications strategy in the 1970s and 1980s. Much of it coincided with the gentrification of inner suburbs in Australia's capital cities. The new residents, professional and middle class, wanted to prevent development which had the potential to ruin the charming suburbs they had discovered even though the suburbs had always been industrial and there had been mixed land uses operating for as long as the suburbs had existed.

The gentrification also coincided with the election of the Whitlam Labor Government which was committed to a range of urban renewal and development projects from providing sewerage to better public transport. It is a reflection on the state of Australian suburbs in the post-war period that the Whitlam urban agenda was very similar to the agenda of British municipal reformers in London and the great industrial cities in the late 19th century. An important part of the policy was community involvement with advisory committees and formal consultation processes.

So in both the inner suburbs and the outer suburbs there were powerful social, economic and political forces producing new forms and new levels of community involvement in planning and development. There were two responses to this. At first proponents of developments or changes tended to organise public meetings to tell people about what they were doing. Consultation was really about allowing questions from the floor. But public meetings are easy for activists to hijack. The proponents of a development are up on the stage showing their architect drawings and outlining their environmental reports. The activists on the floor can grab the microphones, boo, hiss, ask aggressive questions and propose motions contrary to the interests of the proponents. Having done a fair bit of this myself I always advised proponents that they should avoid large public meetings as much as possible. The second response was a more considered one from academics such as Professor John Power and sociologists such as Lois Bryson and Faith Thompson. They developed consultation processes which tried to create more structured opportunities for people to have a dialogue about a development rather than being told about it. Local governments, which used the techniques extensively, discovered this new approach could also be hijacked (although more subtly) by just extending and extending the discussions to delay decisions. One local government client said to me that at the height of such

consultation people often ended up forgetting what the consultation was originally about and moved on to other subjects altogether.

Thus, in the pre-1970s period the approach was really decide, announce and implement. With the upsurge in resident action it became a case of decide, announce, defend and then finally abandon or implement through some compromise. Then it became decide, consult defend and finally: consult, consult, consult.

By the 1990s a new consultative model, conducted by people skilled in community consultation, but really driven by PR people evolved. This was a much more directed model which aimed to go out beyond activists to involve more of the community. In effect it was a form of proactive research. Turnbull Fox Phillips was one of the pioneers in the field, largely as a result of a conversation with a US practitioner at a conference. He worked for a chemical company which had had a spill at a plant. They needed to gauge community reaction and manage in the crisis in the most emotional climate possible with people fearful of health and other consequences from the spill. They could have just knocked on the door of every affected resident and asked what they thought but there was a strong possibility that this would uncover anger more than enlightenment. Finding the anger is an important finding in itself but to fix the problem it is necessary to go further. What he did was to employ researchers, who disclosed who they were working for, to go and gauge feelings through a more independent, neutral and objective approach. This defused the anger, avoided hijacks and provided useful information. The approach saw research as an active tool which communicates information.

The unethical version of this approach is push-polling where you ask brief controversial questions which denigrate your political opponent or ascribe extreme views to them. The Bush campaign used this very effectively against John McCain in the 2000 South Carolina primary campaign. The result was a whispering campaign that McCain had fathered an illegitimate African-American child – a potent lie in a Bible belt area inhabited by racists who still call the US Civil War the War of Northern Aggression.

But it can be legitimate and useful to communicate information through research if you want an informed choice. Today deliberative consultations on subjects from stem cells to constitutional change are a logical extension of this concept.

We had been looking for an opportunity to employ the technique when we were approached in 1990 by the Geelong and District Water Board to run a campaign to help them introduce a user pays system for water rates. It is difficult to imagine after the impacts of climate change, and a drought worse than at any time since European settlement, the way Australians priced their scarcest commodity – water – just two decades ago. Water rates had been based on local government rates and the value of the property. How much water used was less important. Geelong was the very first Australian water authority to start to move to a new system – now universal across Australia – which changed the way people paid for water and encouraged conservation.

There were going to be winners and losers in the change and complex information had to be provided and attitudes understood. We organised a series of focus groups in which Board staff made a standard presentation explaining how the current rating system worked, suggested its shortcomings and canvassed options for change with a stress on the need for any changes to be both equitable and environmentally sustainable. The focus groups discussed the issues but also, at the end, filled in a questionnaire. We also distributed questionnaires to the wider community; produced the standard brochures; and had Board staff go out and speak to community groups.

The astonishing thing was that more than 90% of those who attended the focus groups supported change to a user pays system and support for a basic water entitlement for everyone. The voluntary questionnaire was returned by about five per cent of the population and showed roughly comparable results demonstrating that we had not push polled the focus groups.

Once the community opted for a preferred rating structure, detailed financial models showing the precise impacts of the change on specific groups of ratepayers were prepared and a second round of research was undertaken to see whether people still wanted the option they had preferred in the first stage. They did, and we then rolled out a more traditional campaign with brochures, ads, information with rate notices to inform people about when and how the changes would be implemented.

Looking back on it now it is gratifying to have been involved in the very beginnings of a move which had profound effect on a major environmental issue. On the other hand the technique got simplified, and more directed, so that much modern PR-driven community consultation is really about convincing people that the proponent's (often government) preferred option is the best one. Dialogue in this model is illusionary as the proponent has already decided what to do and just inserts a bit of consultation into the process before they move on to implement. This has forced activists to go back to more traditional opposition tactics – demonstrations, political action and stunts bringing us full circle back to where we started in the 1970s.

Sport

Sport operates at many levels, from children playing in the park or the street, to mega-businesses such as international football (soccer still in some Australia minds), The Olympics, international cricket, and clubs like Manchester United which have created major global brands.

But at whatever level it is played there are PR people promoting it and the businesses that supply sports and sportspeople. You don't jog, play golf, go cycling or even go for a walk without some PR person having thought about how you can be persuaded to buy a particular brand of sports gear. Even governments are involved in encouraging people to exercise as a public health measure.

In Australia both Nike and Cathy Freeman were represented by a PR company, Royce Communications. At the Munich Olympics crisis management specialists were called in to assist with communications. The IOC called on issues management specialists to deal with allegations of corruption and sleaze as did FIFA, the world football body. The Australian Football League and individual clubs employed PR staff and consultants to promote mergers, ground moves and handle player scandals.

My own involvement in this intersection between sport, big business and PR came from working with Cricket Australia and the International Cricket Council over the players' dispute in Australia and then later allegations of corruption and bribes associated with betting on international matches.

My involvement in the 1997 players' dispute was always invisible but in 2007 the official Cricket Australia history disclosed the involvement, so it seems legitimate to talk about it now. It was not invisible for any nefarious reason but simply that as an adviser I gave advice. Cricket CEO, Malcolm Speed, and Cricket Australia Board made the decisions. I had always thought that good PR people were like football referees and cricket umpires – if they aren't noticed they have done a good job – and this was just another example of that approach.

Test cricket had become a huge business and the Test team players had become celebrities. Test cricketers had always had fame, but within the new celebrity culture, that fame was about more than just sporting prowess. But while Test cricket generated large sums the profits went to subsidise grass roots cricket played in parks, clubs, emerging nations and between Australian States.

The players' association, The Australian Cricketers' Association, could see the huge sums involved in sponsorship, TV rights and endorsements and wanted to get a bigger share. The ACA was run by a former player, Tim May, but an entrepreneur, James Erskine, got involved in advising the ACA and stood to gain from the financial gains to be made.

Disputes between players and cricket officialdom were not new – as far back as 1912 six leading players declined an invitation to got to England for a triangular Test series unless they could choose the team manager and unless they got a bigger share of the revenue from the tour. In the 1970s Packer World Series Cricket was made possible because players wanted more for their role in the game.

Throughout the history of the game in Australia it would be fair to say that the public normally sided with anyone other than the cricket administrators, and the players probably thought that the same would apply again. At first Cricket Australia responded by providing details of what top players earned. There was dispute in the media about this, but if senior executives of companies had to disclose their earnings in company annual reports, senior sportspeople earning as much or more probably couldn't complain too much. The players sensibly responded by focussing on pay levels for State players which were much lower. There were two turning points, however, in the dispute. The

detailed claims from the players also included a series of provisions which would have given them significant control over most aspects of cricket – from scheduling to TV and advertising revenues. A group of us were reading through the document and swapping notes. Thinking aloud I said: "This is not a wage claim, it's a takeover bid." It became one of the key messages for the rest of the dispute. The second turning point was when the players indicated that they would consider strike action during, or before, the next Test match. They had not publicly announced the threat but, after discussion, we all thought the public was entitled to know what was at stake so we informed the media. It was, of course, front page news and the Prime Minister, Opposition Leader, State Premiers and editorial writers fell over themselves condemning the players. The original disclosure of salary levels suddenly became relevant in the media coverage.

Inevitably, the matter was settled as Board Chairman, Denis Rogers, and another director, Bob Merriman, who was an Industrial Relations Commissioner always knew would happen. For the first time in cricket history, though, the public sentiment was with the administrators. They had clearly spelt out that cricket was more than Tests and that their primary obligation was to the entire game and that couldn't be jeopardised; they successfully positioned the dispute as one about the control of the game by an outside entrepreneur; and, the players made a mistake in threatening to go on strike. The players got more and the Test went on.

In 1999 South Africa's cricket captain, Hansie Cronje, admitted taking money for information about matches. Australian players, Mark Waugh and Shane Warne, were also alleged to have talked to bookmakers about matches but had not provided any information beyond that publicly available. The story escalated with claims and counter-claims and there was huge international media coverage.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) established an Anti-Corruption Unit (ACU) to investigate the claims. It was headed by Sir Paul Condon, a former London Metropolitan Police Commissioner, who also had a personal security unit attached to him.

We were given a brief to help the ICC through the issue. Clearly PR couldn't help unless the problem was fixed and seen to be fixed but we could try to position the ICC as acting responsibly and effectively. The opportunity was provided by the ACU visit to Australia to interview various players and the presentation of ACU progress reports to the annual ICC Board meeting in Melbourne in 2001.

The scale of interest in the subject was shown by the fact that 380 journalists needed to be informed about the meeting and its findings.

The first thing we did was to ensure that there was a steady stream of positive stories about what the ICC was doing generally with cricket including the release of a 10 year test program, the creation of a Test Championship and the establishment of a professional umpiring system. We organised a media opportunity for all the Test playing country captains. Originally it was to be filming the captains only but the Australian captain,

Steve Waugh, agreed to speak on behalf of all the captains. He was succinct, calm and collected and effective. It was probably one of the best media performances I'd seen over the years, significantly better than most pressured political interviews. We also arranged for each of the other Test captains to record interviews around agreed messages and the footage was distributed internationally, particular to media in their own countries. We had Channel 9 take film inside the ICC board meeting and share the footage with other stations.

Mark Waugh was to be interviewed by the ACU while the meeting was being held. It had been planned to hold the interview in a secret location but someone leaked the location and there was a media stakeout at the hotel. An on the spot decision was made, after discussions with Mark and his agent, for Waugh to hold a media conference immediately and dismiss the rumours and inaccuracies which had been published. We actually held it outside a lift in a lift foyer away from the main floor and the floor on which Mark was staying. Theoretically his agent should have supervised the interview as we were working for the ICC and with the ACU and couldn't be seen representing Mark Waugh as well. The Cricket Australia Corporate Affairs Manager, Brendan McClements, was in the same boat. But it seemed to us both that the agent may not have had a lot of experience with media scrums. He was also about half the size of McClements, who was a more formidable presence between Waugh and the massed media. Meanwhile I was loitering in the lift with alarm signals going off because I was holding the open button down. After a few questions and answers Waugh simply had to take two steps backwards while Brendan stood in the doorway and the interview was over and the media scrum left in the lift foyer.

Later in the day we had Sir Paul give a media conference and the following day ICC Chairman, Malcolm Gray, and the CEO, Malcolm Speed, gave one on one interviews. Later, in May, before the final ACU report we arranged an exclusive feature on BBC Panorama, which featured interviews with ICC officials, on the ICC's role in curbing corruption. We also arranged a limited number of interviews by phone with media around for the world for Malcolm Gray. This was all preliminary positioning as a lead-up to the release of the ACU report in the same month. For the release we simply uploaded the report; media statements and a broadcast quality video news release featuring Malcolm; and other information to ICC website. Then it was just a matter of advising the media it was there without having to worry about time zone differences and media conferences. The worldwide web may not change fundamental PR strategies as much as one would imagine – but it certainly makes communication more convenient.

At the time we were delighted with the strategy and it did meet its objectives. In hindsight we realised that we had a hidden factor working for us. Sports writers do spend a portion of their time covering things which occur outside the playing field. Players' behaviours, national disputes, strike threats, player disputes, corruption claims are all massively newsworthy. The British tabloids, in particular, are probably more interested in sex tricks than hat tricks. But most sports writers are fundamentally passionate about the game they cover. Most of them are close to the teams and the players. They are more interested in the sport than the issues. They had to cover it all but I suspect that deep

down they all got bored with it after a while and really wanted to get back to just reporting the cricket. I know I wanted to get back to watching cricket not managing issues about it. Cricket Australian Chairman, Denis Rogers, made an observation about it which I found interesting because I had not been aware of it myself. He pointed out that I had been useful to Cricket Australia for, among other things of course, being passionate about cricket but dispassionate about the players off the field. He referred contemptuously to those advisers who lost their objectivity and became obsessed with the players' celebrity as "jockstrap sniffers". I preferred to watch Steve and Mark Waugh on the field than stand by them during a media conference, or provide an escape route through an open lift door, or be alongside them in the dressing room. There was no celebrity-spotting thrill just another talking person to be passed before the cameras and microphones before they moved on to someone else.

The great BBC cricket commentator and cricket writer, John Arlott, always insisted cricket was just a game. I couldn't entirely believe it because my other favourite cricket writer was the West Indian Trotskyite, C.L.R. James, whose writings made fans face the race and class issues involved in the game. But I found I could draw a distinction in my mind between the game I played (not very well) and the business for which I provided issues management services. I suspect that most PR people who are successful in sports PR have to do exactly that every day of their working lives.

Entertainment

If PR has become important to sport it was always important to the entertainment business. Much of PR's reputation probably stems from the days of Barnum and Bailey and the roll up, roll up days when the outlandish was used to promote circuses and theatrical performances.

The advent of the movies created a whole new group of PR people who, as well as promotions, were skilled in covering up inconvenient facts such as homosexuality, drunkenness, drug taking and violence that might detract from a romantic matinee idol's image. Classical musicians, rock bands, symphony orchestras, theatre companies, comedians and actors all also employ PR people.

The basic strategies are the same for most of them. Organise announcements about events, get reviews, arrange interviews with performers, set up photo opportunities at rehearsals. In some cases the aim is to generate media coverage in others to generate media coverage which creates word of mouth publicity. Films and the performing arts are often successful largely because friends tell friends and other people about how much they enjoyed them.

Many of these people are not very well paid – arts companies don't have the budgets – and it is a difficult life dealing with the sometimes fragile and sometimes overweening egos of performers.

They are the true heirs of the barnstorming, creative press-agentry days of PR. My only direct contact with show business clients was our client, Blockbuster Video, where the marketing manager, Ben Amarfio, was a former colleague of mine. I went along to a meeting with our account executive, Alisa Bowen, and during the meeting there was an excited discussion about Blockbuster's plan to bring out a celebrity to promote some video. Not knowing who they were talking about I kept my head low and let Alisa do the talking while I tried to smile and nod at what I hoped were the right moments. After we left the meeting and got in the car to go back to the office I said to Alisa: "Who the fuck is Claudia Schiffer?"

My next involvement with entertainment and cultural PR was with the Melbourne International Arts Festival (MIAF) where I was on the board. I was more likely to recognise the names of artists but still didn't know much about how the PR was done. It struck me that PR people in the area seemed to work exceptionally long hours – out late at performances and up early in the morning to meet early media deadlines – for very little money. It obviously also takes a special kind of creativity to come up with ideas to generate the publicity. One of the best of these PR people I ever saw was Ally Catterick who was a publicist for MIAF. When she took on the job she set herself a number of objectives – one of them being to get the Festival on the cover of the *Age* EG, the Friday entertainment lift-out, as often as possible. Ally was aware that journalists are used to getting odd things from people generally, let alone publicists. Most journalists recognise the signs of the unbalanced very quickly: minute writing in green or purple ink which covers every part of the paper; clumsily cut out words and images to make news pages; obsessive secrecy; and, a distinctly conspiratorial air. Counter-intuitively she actually decided to use one of these hallmark tactics as a way of getting the EG editor, Gary Munro, to agree to publicise what she wanted, in this case, an 85 year old actor in a Festival performance Young@Heart. She started with a cut-out EG masthead on a blank page. Then with Derwents and Textas, photocopies, overhead transparency sheets she created alternative EG covers which she then sent in. Instead of saying "please publicise my event" she was assuming that he would and giving him a range of choices, admittedly in a format normally favoured by nutters. Over the years she had a remarkable run getting cover after cover. Today she says: "If I was honest with myself I might conclude that I was successful in getting so many EG covers over the years out of pity – or at very least because I amused him".

The basic difference between other forms of PR and entertainment PR is that some of what mainstream PR puts out gets covered as a matter of course – company results, major political announcements and so on – and the standard of success is really how it is reported. But in the intensely competitive field of entertainment it is getting the coverage and getting it prominently which matters. That seems to take a special talent.

Expert positioning

While entertainment PR is about celebrity and creativity much mainstream PR is about expert positioning. This tactic is about positioning a spokesman for an organisation as an expert commentator. The idea is that after you promote them the media starts to come to

them automatically for comment with a favourable impact on the reputation and image of your organisation.

RMIT University, and most other tertiary institutions, have an online expert registry which any journalist can visit, enter some search terms and come up with the name and contact details of someone associated with RMIT who can give instant expert commentary on a subject. It works because someone will put out a media release or something will happen and the media wants some to quote as an authoritative interpreter of the event or saying. They don't want a reasoned academic argument but a quick quote or a brief radio interview. Being on the register in the communications field I get regular calls on subjects as wide-ranging as Microsoft's corporate image; whether there would be a market for John Howard's diaries; how people are reacting to the drought; political advertising; who won political leaders' debates; and, of course, what I think about how crises are handled.

The banks and broking houses do the same thing with their economists and traders – position them as experts so that the media comes to them for a quick comment. It is not that any of these people aren't experts, it's just that the media is aware of them because some PR person has helped position them as experts able to comment in the media.

They are promoted through other tactics as well. Organisations systematically seek out speaking opportunities for senior executives so that they can be show-cased, along with their thoughts and their organisation, in front of influential audiences. Appearing in front of the audience not only reaches the immediate attendees but is also used as news event which warrants coverage. Speeches at the Canberra Press Club are a classic example of this. Most speeches made at conferences are a result of expert positioning programs.

Naturally the expert positioning not only requires some expertise but also some on going intellectual property – reports, surveys, books, analyses – which can provide a platform for the positioning. David Maister, a Harvard academic and author, has specialised in how to manage and promote professional service businesses. Most of them want publicity and they and their staff and consultants are constantly thinking about how to get such publicity. Maister's teachings about developing some unique intellectual property and then promoting it are the cornerstones for most PR and marketing expert positioning strategies.

Working with the Federal Attorney-Generals Department I was asked by the international law section what could be done to promote their expertise which was largely unparalleled in Australia. My advice – write the standard book about the subject; go out on to the speaking circuit; issue media releases about what you do; organise seminars; and, then wait for everyone to come to you – was basically text book Maister.

When McCaughan Dyson, the broking firm, was a client we wrote a report for them on the likely policies of the incoming Hawke Government. Most business people, with memories of the Whitlam years, had an image of a heavily interventionist government as typical of the ALP. We thought things might be different. We also knew that everybody

else was pushing the traditional line and that McCaughan Dyson would stand out if it took a different tack and turned out to be right. We wrote a very lengthy report on what the new government would bring, in particular talking about pro-business attitudes, floating the dollar and de-regulation. Being a bit careful – on the basis of Keynes's observations that pundits prefer to be wrong in the herd than right on their own – we didn't take the predictions too far down the de-regulatory route. In fact, we were too conservative in our predictions. But it was still far enough in advance of the rest of the herd for McCaughan Dyson to be considered experts in the new government, and better policy forecasters than their rivals.

This expert positioning even extends to the honours list. Despite the best efforts of the Awards and Symbols branch to diversify the range of people who receive awards the bulk of them go to people who have organisations who draft their nomination with skill and experience. The individual may not know that they have been nominated but universities, big companies, public service departments, political parties, professional associations and not-for-profit bodies all systematically work at getting honours for their staff, employees, office holders and volunteers. The aim is partly to reward people for service but also to position the organisation and the individual as an expert and someone of weight and authority in the community. That's why you see so many academics, medicos, businesspeople and former politicians and so few artists, writers and community workers in the list.

Pharmaceuticals

There has been so much written about PR by pharmaceutical companies that it seems pointless to add to it. The journalism of Ray Moynihan, the website www.prwatch.org, and a host of publications detail funding for disease groups; publicity stunts; selective publicity for research results; entertainment and travel for medicos; and, disease-mongering. The total spending on the marketing of pharmaceuticals is greater than the big companies spending on research and development.

What is less well known is the extent to which the US State Department is an integral part of the companies' PR efforts. Facilitating a workshop once for a pharmaceutical industry association I was trying to tease out an overall strategy which would help their government relations efforts. Attending the workshop were several corporate affairs and regulatory affairs staff from the US. I was astonished that, however often new ideas came up about what to do, the US executives would dismiss them and simply say we will get the State Department to raise that with the government. It isn't only pharmaceutical companies that do this. In one case a confectionery company managed to get a US President to raise a trade matter which affected them with his Chinese counterpart.

In this respect the negotiations between the US and Australian Governments over the free trade agreement would always be limited by the reality of what US corporations and agri-businesses wanted. The critics were easily dismissed, particularly by the Murdoch media, as radicals, leftists, conspiracy theorists and anti-globalisation fanatics. They were right,

there is no conspiracy, but rather a conscious and fairly blatant effort to use US power to achieve narrow commercial goals.

Rural and remote

Unsurprisingly given Australia's geography and population distribution there are specialists in rural and remote communications. The majority of the Australian population live close to the coast but more than half the population of Queensland and New South Wales live outside the capital cities of Brisbane and Sydney. There are communities throughout rural areas – some of them small towns in farming districts and some of them provincial communities which are large and have well-established tertiary education and other institutions. Some of the larger provincial towns even have PR industries of their own and there are well-established PR companies in places like Geelong, Gippsland, Bathurst, Townsville, Cairns, and similar cities.

Porter Novelli in South Australia are the Australian experts in communicating with the people in these areas having worked for Elders Bank, grain and fertiliser companies, farm equipment makers and suppliers, cattle and sheep producers and governments who want to communicate with people in rural and remote areas. But there are other companies such as Cox Inall who also specialise in the field.

Porter Novelli Adelaide has won awards for campaign to discourage land clearing in rural areas; it has promoted specialised niche agricultural marketing exports; and it has worked extensively for the wine industry.

The major element of success in rural and remote communications is to recognise that the people in these communities are different because they believe they are different. They are more likely to be Anglo-Celtic in origin (and when they are not, for example Italian or German they are concentrated in particular geographic locations); more likely to wear hats; and more likely to be conservative in social and political outlook.

Successful communications with these audiences have tended to be through a combination of rural media (both specialist and general); working through established organisations such as farming and growing bodies; and, a great emphasis on networking and word-of-mouth contact. Whether it be agricultural shows, field days or stock auction days on the ground activity by people who sound like farmers, think like farmers and have some farming experience is crucial. At the same time not all rural and remote communities are wholly comprised of farmers and more conventional techniques are also used to reach the teachers, lawyers, retailers, accountants and other people in the bush.

Because of the high levels of Internet penetration in rural and remote areas – through satellite and wireless – online communications are crucially important. Most rural and remote communication involve an online component which might be email, partnerships with organisations with frequently visited websites, or the creation of special websites.

Radio and cassettes are also important tools. Radio works with dairy farmers for instance because they are in the milking sheds with the radio on. Two practitioners, Diana Dundon and Mike Jarvis, ran a campaign to persuade dairy farmers to sell their shares into a take-over offer through normal methods but also saturation radio coverage during milking times. Radio cassettes and CDs are important forms of communication for someone who may spend long hours on a tractor – a tractor which is also probably equipped with air conditioning and GPS.

But fundamentally it is tone that is important in this PR – the tone that authentically communicates that you are one of them and just not empathising to get the message across.

How to do it manuals

As I have said before, this book does not set out to replicate the standard textbooks on PR. There are a great number of introductory PR textbooks for students published in Australia and overseas which go into some detail on some of the above areas. Most of them cover similar territory to each other. But for readers wanting a good insight into just what the 1,000 students going through the PR education system each year are learning, there is a very useful (and entertainingly quirky) work, Kim Harrison's *Strategic Public Relations: A Practical Guide to Success,* which is more than just an introductory work and very good for the general reader.

CHAPTER SEVEN

PERSUADING PEOPLE TO BE HEALTHY AND GOOD

Social marketing

While critics of PR focus on how PR allegedly manipulates people into buying things they don't want and thinking and doing the wrong things, one branch of PR – social marketing - spends all its time trying to persuade people to be healthy, good and to do the right thing.

Most social marketing is undertaken by governments and not-for-profit health organisations, although the alcohol industry has set up a body, DrinkWise, which runs social marketing campaigns aimed at changing the Australian drinking culture; for many years the beverage and packaging industries supported anti-litter campaigns, partly as a means of avoiding the introduction of container deposit legislation; and, battery manufacturers link some of their marketing to fire safety campaigns.

Porter Novelli in the US was built on social marketing expertise and ran many campaigns for healthy eating, anti-smoking and other health messages. One of its most successful social marketing campaigns was the Florida anti-tobacco program which set out to reduce smoking rates among teenagers. Its originality lay in recruiting young people to actually produce the campaign – ads, stunts, videos and other materials.

Most social marketing campaigns research, or consult, the target audiences the campaign is directed towards. Often advisory committees representing the stakeholders in an area are set up to give campaign guidance. But the Florida campaign went further. It decided that the best people to talk to young people were other young people and it handed over responsibility for campaign development and execution to people who would normally be the ones that were targeted. The young people were provided with technical assistance, but basically what they created went to air.

The campaign – called the Truth campaign - has become legendary. One team camped outside Phillip Morris headquarters with a van and loudspeakers. They then filmed their attempts to get into the offices "to meet the Marlboro man." The Marlboro man, the actor who had appeared in the Marlboro ads for many years, had died of lung cancer. They also set up a mock Congressional hearing which interrogated tobacco company officials. Much of the creative work echoed, or pre-figured, the Michael Moore documentaries and the hit film, *Thank you for smoking.* All the materials were anarchic, subversive and very effective - reducing teenage smoking in Florida by 18% in one year.

In Australia we decided to try to sell similar techniques into government clients but faced resistance. We were invited to pitch by the Victorian Government for an anti-drugs campaign and proposed that they let people typical of the target demographic prepare the creative.

When we finished the presentation a half hour of mutual incomprehension followed. Do you mean get young people to advise on the campaign? No, we want young people to actually develop and implement it. But what sort of campaign would they prepare? Well we don't know but we do know it is likely to resonate with their peers. How would they do it? Well they'd get technical help but basically we'd let them brainstorm the ideas and come up with something they think would work? How would we control the messages? Isn't it risky? The idea is not to control the messages but to get the best messages. Wouldn't it look amateurish? No more than much of the stuff on the web. Let's get this straight: you wouldn't actually have the young people advising? No we'd have them conducting the campaign. By this stage it was clear we wouldn't get the job and that no-one wanted to go to the Minister with a proposal which might be 'courageous' in the *Yes Minister* sense.

Later we saw the preferred campaign which told people how bad drugs were and that it was a good idea to avoid them. The message was neither original nor arresting, and the campaign was obviously directed towards telling adult voters that the government was serious about drugs. But it was safe, predictable and ineffective.

With governments, the question is always present as to how much the campaigns are directed towards achieving real social change; and, how much they are about being seen to be doing something about whatever the problem the campaign is addressing. Equally, with industry campaigns are they part of their corporate social responsibility; do they genuinely want to make a difference to re-position their company or products; or, are they a means to avoid regulation or some other control.

Governments are not only driven by the need to be seen to be doing something, however. They have also been convinced, conveniently, that fear is the most effective form of social marketing. The worse the fear, the more dramatic and controversial the TV footage then, the logic suggests, the more serious the issue and the more courageous the government is for tackling it. Fear does work of course, as we will see later, but it has its limitations and can be counter-productive.

The campaign which exemplifies how failing to involve target audiences, and relying excessively on fear, can lead to ineffectiveness is the very first Australian Government AIDS campaign, the Grim Reaper campaign. The campaign featured, literally, the Grim Reaper scything his way through the population and brought forward memories of a medieval plague outbreak. The problem was not that AIDS was not serious and, in some countries, as disastrous as the plague. Rather it failed to engage the right people and encourage the right behavioural changes. The campaign was very successful in frightening the life out of middle aged middle class heterosexual men. Appearing around the same time as the film, *Fatal Attraction,* the two together probably temporarily reduced the number of extra marital affairs and one night stands. But it failed to reach those most at risk – intravenous drug users and gay men.

Reductions in rates of infection didn't really fall until campaigns were developed in conjunction with the gay community and began to target specific practices and specific

risks. These campaigns didn't use mass communications but instead used word of mouth and communication channels, such as posters and ads in gay bars and gay publications, specific to the target audience.

Those who developed the Grim Reaper campaign would argue that something dramatic was needed to make people aware of the problem. It was unknown and, even the gay community had been in denial about it. There was some validity to this viewpoint as I had come across it while freelancing in the early 1980s for the *Sunday Observer.* I had noticed a few articles in *The Economist* and *New Scientist* about a mystery disease affecting gay men. I thought it might make a story and contacted some of the gay activist organisations. At that stage, quite understandably given the cultural climate and state of medical knowledge, a couple suggested that it was probably not important and may be yet another manifestation of ongoing homophobia. I wrote nothing about it and it is has nagged at me ever since, demonstrating once again that you normally regret the things you don't do more than the things you do.

But whether shock was necessary was best exemplified by the contrasting approach of the Canadian Government. The team developing the first AIDS campaign in Canada had been doing focus group research on the issue. In one of the focus groups an older returned serviceman and a young gay man started to argue with the older man being threatening and angry. A third person in the group intervened saying: "Hey guys, calm down, let's talk". The research went on but one of the researchers was struck by the phrase and its effect. When it came to develop the campaign it was proposed that the advertising feature a cross-section of Canadians just saying "Let's talk about AIDS". The advertising was low key and non-threatening. It focussed on rationality and conversation, not fear and doom. Linked with other communication materials it brought an almost immediate reduction in the rate of infection.

Some organisations also have unrealistic expectation of social marketing. A few years ago I was invited along to a panel discussion organised by World Vision. At the panel were an assortment of medicos, media people, celebrities, ex-politicians and me. We were told at the outset that we had been invited along because World Vision wanted to devise a campaign to make all Australians aware of world poverty and the effect of AIDS on developing nations. There was a bit of pause around the table while the task was digested. Foolishly I blurted out: "and what do you want us to do next week?" Perhaps I could have been more tactful, but communication campaigns are never enough, on their own, to achieve social and behavioural change.

Early social marketing campaigns

Virginia Berridge has argued in Smoke Alarms (*History Today* August 2007 19-21) that social marketing campaigns are a product of changes in attitudes to public health over the past 50 years. "In the years following World War II it seemed that the fight against epidemic diseases had been won," she said. Bronchitis, tuberculosis, diphtheria, scarlet fever and similar diseases receded as causes of death due to vaccinations, improved

housing and sanitation. “Instead cancer and heart disease morbidity started to dominate the statistics and public health practitioners began to speak of an epidemic of affluence rather than one of deprivation.”

Berridge sees a number of factors which produced social marketing for public health campaigns including local health visitors counselling on children’s health; the breakdown of medical secrecy and conservatism; the advent of TV doctors; and a greater willingness to encourage public discussion of medical practices.

Berridge cites a 1950s radio interview with Dr Jerry Morris of the British Social Medicine Unit. “We are dealing with a different social situation. The 19th century epidemics, bred in poverty and malnutrition, arose from the failures of the social system….It is (now) becoming clear that in the modification of personal behaviour, of diet, smoking, physical exercise and the rest….the responsibility of the individual for his own health will be far greater than formerly. It will not be possible to impose from without (as drains were built) the new norms of behaviour better serving the needs of middle and old age. They will come about in a new kind of partnership between community and individual.”

These changes were illustrated by the anti-smoking campaign. In 1956 a medico, Francis Avery James, had asked the Royal College of Physicians to publicise the work of Richard Doll on the connection between smoking and lung cancer. The College President declined, doubting “very much whether that should be a function of the College.” Yet a year later, Berridge says, the College employed a PR consultant, Roger Braban, to conduct the College’s first ever press conference launching a College report on smoking. By 1964 the Cohen report on health education was arguing that centralised campaigns, as well as training health educators, were needed to change unhealthy behaviours. The same year the US Surgeon General’s report on smoking and health was launched.

Incidentally, years later our firm promoted an Australian visit by Sir Richard Doll to promote his then new research on the beneficial impacts of alcohol. The tobacco industry may have fought hard to discredit his original research but, in this case, it was the anti-alcohol lobby trying to discredit the work.

Australia was also involved in early social marketing campaigns. Some of them involved health but we also conducted, between 1947 and 1961, another social marketing campaign in a totally different area, through the Australian National Information Bureau and the Australian Government Film Unit to promote ‘the Australian way of life’. This was designed to persuade the million plus migrants who came to the country after World War II to assimilate and become part of an Australian idyll involving suburbia, families and consumerism. Anna Haebich (*Griffith Review* number 15 Autumn 2007) describes some of the campaign materials including a specially made film *The Way we Live,* public opinion polls, advertising and PR.

With the early health campaigns it was not only the tobacco companies which objected. In Britain, at Cabinet level, there was some old-fashioned reluctance to interfere too

much in people's personal habits and tastes. Even today libertarians worry about a form of soft paternalism implicit in social marketing campaigns. *The Economist* (April 8 2006) in a feature article on 'the new paternalism' said that "by helping people to make forward-looking decisions for themselves that the cannot easily renege on later, they enlarge their freedom…..Giving Ulysses the rope with which to lash himself to the mast adds to his choices." On the hand, said *The Economist,* do we want to regard "reasoning, judgement, discrimination and self-control….as burdens the state can and should lighten (?)."

So while social marketing has grown in significance there are still practical questions about its effectiveness and philosophical questions about where it encourages informed choice, and where it practices a form of social control.

What precisely is it?

Dr Ed Maibach, formerly of Porter Novelli and involved in the Florida teenage smoking campaign, is now professor at George Washington University in the US. In a series of talks during a visit to Australia he defined social marketing as the application of marketing principles, the marketing process and marketing tools to further a social goal. It is the use of integrated marketing communication techniques to encourage and enable people to alter a behaviour potentially harmful to themselves or society or to maintain a useful behaviour. He argues that marketing is not inherently good or bad but value neutral and that social marketing is a process which is not a miracle cure and that it will fail if focused on the quick fix or the quick and the easy.

He says that effective social marketing avoids the education fallacy – the mistaken belief that knowledge shapes attitudes and then brings about behavioural change as part of some automatic process. Similarly it doesn't focus simply on communication materials as such or on any one single component of the marketing process such as advertising. In today's media environment, for instance, government's favoured component, mass media advertising, is made less and less effective by the growth of online media, texting, social networks and other forms of communication between people. Maibach also says that social marketing must be based on rigorous and systematic audience research; is focussed more on the audience than on the sponsoring organisations, experts, intermediaries or the media; is guided by what we know about behavioural science; and is about long-term activities focussed on achieving measurable changes in social conditions.

Good introductions to social marketing are the works of Alan Andreason (see *Marketing Social Change)* which proposes a four stage model for social marketing. The first stage: pre-contemplation is the seeing stage in which people become aware of an issue; the second, contemplation when they start to think about the issue and form attitudes; third, when they are moved to action; and, further, maintenance, the programs which re-inforce and maintain their changed behaviour. This is commonly known as see, think, act , re-inforce.

A good Australian social marketing overview is *Social Marketing – Principles and Practices* by Robert Donovan and Nadine Henley which contains a range of case studies and discusses the predominance of fear arousal and threat appeals in social marketing communications. They trace the history of social marketing back to campaigns in Greece and Rome to free the slaves and bring out some very interesting information about social marketing propaganda in Nazi Germany in the 1930s. Among the campaigns pioneered by the Nazis was the first major anti-smoking campaign. It also looks at the 1970s role of social marketing in developing countries and details campaigns about family planning, hygiene and sanitation, agriculture and attitudes towards women. In developed countries in the 1980s and onwards there were campaigns on injury prevention, drinking and driving, seat belt usage, illicit drugs, smoking, quarantine laws, litter, exercise, immunisation, violence against women, gambling, safe sex, alcohol abuse, sun protection, breast screening, Chlamydia tests, immunisation, the environment, nutrition and heart disease prevention among others.

Donovan and Henley see social marketing as providing information (educating), persuading (motivating) and advocating (socio-political action) to change individual behaviour and bring about social, physical and legislative structural change. They stress that in such campaigns the receivers of messages have to be an active processor of incoming information; that different audiences react to different messages; that all social marketing is underpinned by careful research; that campaigns need to be comprehensive and co-ordinated; multiple channels and sources should be used; interpersonal communication needs to be stimulated and campaigns must be sustained.

The scale of the campaigns is large. According to ACNeilsen Media Research the biggest spending campaigns in 2003 were by the NSW Road and Traffic Authority ($11.2 million); Victorian Transport Accident Commission ($5.9 million); Victorian Workcover Authority ($3.1 million); Melbourne Water ($2.5 million); Victorian anti-gambling ($2.4 million); NSW Workcover Authority ($1.8 million) NSW Environmental Protection Agency ($1.7 million); Sydney Water Corporation ($1.6 million); WA Water Corporation ($1.2 million); and, the Victorian Anti-Cancer Council $1.1 million). Since 2003 there have also been big increases in spending on water conservation advertising and large scale Federal Government spending on anti-drugs advertising. (*B&T* February 2004)

Most of the claims for social marketing are positive but there is often a distinction between a campaign's effectiveness in changing attitudes and intentions and of actually changing behaviour. Overall smoking rates are down but growth is still occurring in some market segments (particularly the young); total alcohol consumption is static and declining in real terms but there are patterns of binge drinking; excessive sun tanning is still prevalent. It is not so much a lack of knowledge among the population but more an unwillingness to change lifestyles.

Jo Previtte and Susan Dann in a paper (*Confronting the Challenges in Social Marketing Theory and Practice)*given at a 2005 ANZMAC conference on social not-for-profit and political marketing point out that governments (with limited government and ministerial tenure and budget allocation cycles) simply can't take on long-term campaigns. Worse, as

Kroger points out (Government's Brand of Social Marketing *Journal of Health Communication* Vol 2 pp312-314, 1997), bureaucracy and political interference can limit effectiveness. Public servants or politicians can pull pieces from publication or distribution or extensively re-write them. During the Howard Government years any campaigns on drugs had to start from the Prime Minister's zero tolerance position with no other options considered.ochure, distributed to every Australian household, was predicated on the

How effective is it?

Overwhelming these challenges is the fact that there are serious doubts about the effectiveness of the dominant form of Australian social marketing – fear campaigns.

Some years ago the Australian Government ran an advertising campaign directed towards young people. It featured scenes at parties where young people were vomiting and collapsing. It was dramatic but subsequent research showed that many young people, rather than being appalled, took the attitude that these were the sort of parties they'd like to be at.

Patrick Shanahan found *(Evaluation of the Health Warnings and Explanatory Health Messages on Tobacco Products* (2000) for the Department of Health and Aged Care) that familiarity with labels had resulted in them being taken for granted. There is some more recent evidence that the very graphic large images on tobacco packets have been somewhat effective in changing attitudes among younger women (a recent growth area for smoking). This may because the gruesome images are hardly fashion accessories which match the mobile phone and purse placed on the barroom table. Shanahan also found that the use of fear and threat appeals may not be effective because, rather than changing behaviour, they simply increased anxiety levels. This finding has been supported by other researchers in areas such as encouraging young women to undertake breast screening.

In a later report Shanahan and Barry Elliott (*Review of public information campaigns – addressing youth risk-taking* (2000) for the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme) found that public health campaigns sometimes work as a double-edged sword by initially raising awareness and then curiosity, eventually culminating in increased experimentation with the behaviour they set out to prevent. For evolutionary, genetic and physiological reasons young males are risk takers. Reminding them of risks is, therefore, perhaps more encouraging than discouraging.

Some case studies

Be alarmed

The Howard Government's be alert but not alarmed information campaign about terrorism was a prime example of a campaign designed for political reasons and unlikely to be effective unless fridge magnets could magically defuse bombs.

A lower key campaign under the *Be alarmed* title is, on the other hand, a more modest example of how social marketing works and what makes them effective.

The late Pat Jackson, a US PR practitioner, was one of the first to focus on the need for social marketing campaigns to have a trigger mechanism which helped people move from awareness to action. An early campaign of his was to get people to check their fire alarms and the trigger for doing so was the beginning of daylight saving. In a similar way, working with the Monash Centre for Mens Health, we developed a program to try to encourage men to visit the doctor. Men notoriously visit the doctor less often than women, partly because women need to for themselves or children. In this case the trigger was the male 40th birthday and the program was around the concept of encouraging women (wives and daughters) to give their husbands and fathers a gift for that significant trigger point in their lives by arranging a visit to the doctor for a major check-up.

The Australian *Be alarmed* campaign has been run for Duracell Batteries (extending the Jackson trigger mechanism insight) by Tango Public Relations. In this case the campaign was a cause-related marketing campaign in which Duracell battery sales were linked with fire risks. The program involved partnerships with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade and the Country Fire Authority in Victoria. The Victorian fire services had estimated that 15% of household smoke alarms were not in working order. Together Duracell and the fire services ran a campaign called Change your Clock, Change your Smoke Alarm. Media coverage was sought; there were in-store posters; press and radio advertising was undertaken in conjunction with the fire services; and, batteries were donated to elderly citizens living alone and the smoke alarm batteries were change by fire fighters. The campaign increased battery sales by 140% and won the company a Community Service Award. It represented a convergence of community and commercial interest and a demonstration that behavioural change is helped where some event, idea or activity can be used to trigger that change.

TAC and road safety

The most famous Australian social marketing campaign has been the Victorian Transport Accident Commission road safety campaign. In 1989, with the police and VicRoads, TAC launched a series of graphic road safety television commercials depicting road accidents and their consequences. The early ads focussed on drink driving under the tagline: “If you drink, then drive, you’re a bloody idiot.” The campaigns were created in conjunction with one of Victoria’s major centres for road trauma treatment, the Royal Melbourne Hospital. Since then other ads have been screened about speeding, seat belts, driver fatigue and other safety risks.

The initial ads were controversial but over the years there has also been controversy about just how successful they were. The raw figures suggest that they led to sharp declines in the number of road fatalities and injuries although by the 21st century the toll tended to plateau. Transport South Australia felt that the decline was already occurring and that general economic factors probably played a role. The Monash University

Accident Research Centre believed they were effective. The RACV, a large motoring lobbying group, supported the campaign but suggested that more needed to be spent on roads and safety infrastructure rather than relying mainly on changing behaviours. The campaigns have been adapted and adopted in other States and in New Zealand.

We can never be precisely sure of causes and effects but it appears that the great success in reducing drink driving was probably the enforcement, and visible enforcement, of random breath testing. The perception of the risk of being caught was enhanced by the presence of booze buses on the road, the frequency of being stopped and TV advertising saying that it was inevitable that you would be caught if your drank and drive. Like the AIDS campaign it has been most effective with the more mature and the more middle class although young people have changed drinking patterns and behaviour through the designated driver system. However, the statistics still indicate that the incidence of accidents is still highest among young males and, is growing among young females. Risk taking seems to be inherent in youthful behaviour and no amount of social marketing is going to change it. Nevertheless, social marketing is most successful when it combines education with enforcement.

Immunisation

One of the greatest public health successes of the post-World War II period has been immunisation against polio, measles, mumps and other diseases. In the late 20th century immunisation rates started to fall around the western world. The Australian Bureau of Statistics found in 1995 that only 33% of Australian children aged up to six years old were fully immunised. In 1997 only 76% of children 12 months of age were fully immunised. If the rates had kept falling Australia would have been at risk of the sorts of epidemics it experienced before immunisation. Two leading Australian social marketing practitioners, Tom Carroll and Laurie Van Veen, analysed an immunisation campaign conducted by a consultancy, Royce, (Public Health Social Marketing: the Immunise Australia Program, *Social Marketing Quarterly* (2002) Vol 3 (1); pp55-62).

This program included a social marketing campaign in conjunction with improvements in immunisation delivery; establishing a National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance; negotiations with State and Territory Governments to make school enrolment dependent on immunisation; financial incentives for doctors and parents; and a specific measles control campaign.

The campaign was successful because it was integrated with policy and structural changes. But in particular it used research to understand why people weren't immunising their children and what would motivate them to do so. Rather than resorting to fear, the campaign balanced messages to increase parents' awareness of the benefits of immunisation, the risks of not immunising, and the reduction of fears about side effects and pain. The campaign used advertising, posters, awareness days, a national telephone information line, publicity, expert spokespeople, specific strategies for non-English speaking parents and a systematic campaign to involve general practitioners through

interactive satellite programs, newsletters, a new handbook on immunisation and other resource materials.

By 2001 the immunisation rate for children aged under 12 months was 91%, demonstrating that behavioural change is possible when the target audience is understood; they are communicated with in a variety of ways; and when other structural factors are integrated into the campaign.

Snake condoms

The breadth of social marketing activities is illustrated by a successful campaign to launch Australia's first indigenous socially marketed condom brand. The condoms, called Snake Condoms, were launched in Mildura Victoria in March 2004. Rachel Molloy, Bev Greet and Ken Knight (*Aboriginal and Islander Health Worker Journal* November/December 2004 Vol 228 Number 6) describe how the launch was part of a broader campaign to encourage safer sex practices, reduce unwanted teenage pregnancies and help reduce the incidence of sexually transmitted infections.

The brand name was suggested by young indigenous people (similarly to the success of the Florida tobacco campaign) as the snake is symbolic of indigenous culture but also "lends itself to some fun and cheeky innuendo to which teenagers can relate" the authors said.

The condoms were flavoured and came in the colours of the Aboriginal flag. The retail price was subsidised and were distributed not only through supermarkets and chemists but also through late night eateries, burger vans, pubs and cafes as well as through peer networks. The advertising, posters and materials were all irreverent just as the Florida campaign materials were. The results were equally impressive with increases in condom usage identified by surveys and greater awareness of Snake condoms than other condom brands such as Ansell and Durex. In a bit over eight months 15,000 condoms were sold within a total indigenous Mildura population of 3,000 to 5,000 people.

Firearms

After the Port Arthur Massacre in 1996 the Federal Government introduced bans on some sorts of firearms and a national firearm buy-back program.

Our company had been short-listed for the Federal campaign (and recommended as the preferred candidate by the Attorney-General's Department) but the newly-elected Government was demonstrating early in its life that it was determined to use the government tendering process as part of the perks of power and the job went to someone else. (See Chapter 8) Their contract was later terminated by the department while we were employed by the Victorian Government to conduct the communications for the State firearms buyback campaign. This campaign was the most successful in Australia and got back 225,291 prohibited firearms - a third of all the firearms handed in nationally. It was a tough job for the responsible Minister, Bill McGrath, who was a

National Party MP, when most of the opposition to the plan was coming from rural areas but he played a crucial public role in the entire campaign. Unlike the Prime Minister, John Howard, Bill would never have been forced into wearing a bullet proof vest when addressing rural areas, although people who had played football with him joked that it would take an anti-tank round to penetrate his body.

We started the campaign by working with the police, and a departmental team led by Karen Cleave, to analyse exactly how many firearms were out there and where they were. What was clear was that there were clear geographic and ethnic patterns to gun ownership - working class western suburban males, farmers and southern European ethnic groups were more likely to be gun owners. We needed therefore to conduct a community wide campaign while also targeting specific groups without 'ghettoising' them. Two major campaign aspects were getting Danny Southern, a star Western Bulldogs AFL player, to be an advocate for the program and an endorser in advertising; and, working with ethnic community groups to distribute material.

We used unpaid media more than in most such campaigns. First, because the story was already regarded as newsworthy by the media; and, second, because the program itself generated many newsworthy events. There was a mass destruction of the first 5000 firearms to be collected; wooden stocks from surrendered firearms were donated to a Victorian charity to make toys; a display of historic firearms (including machine guns) surrendered was organised and then donated to an Army Museum; and replacement gunnery was given to volunteers restoring a Second World War B24 bomber.

Given the Port Arthur events, the backing of police enforcement, the involvement of every government in Australia and the offer of compensation the campaign was always going to be successful. The only question was how successful. But the success was probably also due to careful targeting. We did communicate with all Victorians (most of whom didn't have guns at all) to create a conducive climate of opinion but we focussed mainly on the targets we needed to reach to get the guns back.

For the campaign participants the most amusing (frightening) development was to be exposed to the full force of the US gun lobby. There was a firearms lobby in Australia, and the Victorian groups had campaigned strongly against an earlier Cain Labor Government policy to restrict gun ownership, but the lobby was small and not as well-organised as the US National Rifle Association (NRA).

As part of the program we made extensive use of the Internet and had a website and email discussion forum. Each morning the team would come into work and be see a tidal wave of emails from US citizens telling us what a terrible mistake we were making.

We knew about the NRA power and influence in the US but none of us knew that they also operated internationally pressing for gun rights at the United Nations and helping local groups around the world whenever gun controls were discussed or introduced. The Australian Shooters Party which won a seat in the NSW Parliament in 1995 was formed

following a 1992 visit to Australia by then NRA President, Robert Corbin. The NRA also had links with the Australian Sporting Shooters Association.

But we hadn't anticipated quite so many emails telling us how we would be undefended when the communists came down from Asia to take us over, and criminals started to roam the streets uncontrolled. The Queenslander campaign was also besieged by complaints from locals about how we wouldn't be able to defend ourselves against invaders if the guns were taken away. We found the emails useful and regularly released them to the media as an indication of how some sections of the gun lobby thought. We judged that in the Australian context the extremism of the NRA would be counter-productive.

But the release of a few NRA emails had far less impact than the intervention of a Queenslander, Keith Payne, a returned serviceman who had won the Victoria Cross in Vietnam. When the cries about defending the country reached a crescendo Keith gave an interview which was reported nationally. He said: "If they want to defend Australia they ought to join the Army…….(long pause) if they can pass the psych test".

CHAPTER EIGHT

POLITICS – JUST PR?

Fiction and reality

In the US television series about the New Jersey Mafia, *The Sopranos,* characters spend much of their time imitating the characters in *The Godfather* film trilogy. They strike the same poses and use the same phrases. While this is a case of art imitating art, it appears that life also imitates art among real Mafioso who now have both the films and the television shows as behaviour models.

Something similar is happening in politics with many political staffers addicted to the US television series, *The West Wing.* Whether ironically or inadvertently the same imitation of postures and phrases is seeping into the political process just as *The Godfather* and *The Sopranos* seeped into the world of the Mafia.

Part of the attraction for both political staffers and Mafioso is that the on screen version of their life romanticises their activity and gives an honourable context to the dishonourable. More importantly the whole process epitomises the blurring of lines between reality and appearance, presentation and substance. As in Umberto Eco's world of hyper-reality the artificial becomes more real than the real.

Yet at some stage almost every politician dismisses an opponent's policies or actions as 'just PR'. The purpose is obvious – to characterise the policy or action as without substance and undertaken merely for its appearance – although the phrase often has more of an air of Freudian projection than anything else.

Former ALP Cabinet Minister, Barry Jones in *A Thinking Reed* says:

On major issues it is depressingly common to hear the mantra, 'There is no alternative' (TINA). The task of government and its advisers is to find a formula, or sales pitch, try it out on focus groups, call in consultants, put a spin on it and use all the propaganda resources that our taxes can provide to sell it. The concept of the dialectic, or the Socratic dialogue, where an argument is proposed, supporting evidence led, a contrary position put, then examined rigorously and a conclusion or verdict reached, is now confined to the law courts, or royal commissions. It has dropped out of politics. (pp515-516)

David Deacon and Peter Golding in *Taxation and Representation: the Media, Political Communication and the Poll Tax* originally coined the concept 'The PR State' to describe the way modern politics was spin-drenched and how communication and presentation had come to dominate politics. In Australia Ian Ward in *Politics of the Media* and other articles and publications has explored how the concept applies in Australia.

But politics has always been about presentation. The colourful Benjamin Disraeli is probably better remembered than his opponent Lord John Russell, even though Russell's introduction of Reform Bills had greater significance for British parliamentary life. My own first real exposure to politics – the one that got me hooked for life – was basically exposure to the power of presentation and words.

In 1963 three of us, all in our final years at Glenroy High School, went along to the Progress Hall to heckle the then Premier, Henry Bolte. There were very few people in the hall, a clutch of Liberals at the front and us at the back. We heckled in a half-hearted way, still finding our hesitant way as protestors. Bolte ignored us for much of his speech until towards the end he said: "Even those teachers at the back understand that…." We, of course, almost certainly looked like the students we were. Worse our political cynicism was insufficiently developed at the stage not to be charmed by the skilful way Bolte had given us a status we didn't have. After the speech he took the trouble to come up and say a few words, expressing almost convincing surprise that we were only students. He was a ruthless and cynical operator whose political presentation was rough and tough, but Disraeli could not have been more charming nor Russell more earnest if they had been in the Glenroy Progress Hall that night.

Four years later I was at University involved in the Student Anti-Hanging Committee campaigning against Bolte's determination to hang Ronald Ryan. I caught the bus from home to Pentridge Prison to join the vigil outside the prison on Friday 3 February 1967 at 8.00 am when Ryan was hanged. At the last minute I couldn't do it and instead of walking up Sydney Road to the prison gates I caught the tram into Melbourne instead. Sitting on the tram I thought that it was ironic that I may not have been involved at all if I hadn't been hooked on the power of words and political presentation by the politician I despised because of the hanging.

The power of words

We shouldn't be surprised by the power of words in politics. Nor should we be surprised by politicians' capacity to confuse speaking with action. Most theologies – Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism and others – have all been infused with the concept of performative utterances. The phrase originates with the British philosopher, J.L. Austin, but it is applicable to theology as well as linguistic philosophy. In essence such sets of words are, in Austin's words, 'not truth-evaluable'. In religious settings people frequently utter words which can't be defined as true or false but which, by their very utterance, perform a promise. So, after centuries of religious use of utterances to perform and affirm promises, we now see our politicians doing exactly the same thing as priests and worshippers once did. Now, just as priests and worshippers complemented the utterances with icons, images and rituals, so politicians use technology to disseminate words and images in new ways.

My life in politics as an activist and political staffer, however, really bridged that transition period in which politics moved from just words as promises, to a world in which words and images combined and new ways of using words developed. My

experience over the Special Branch abolition while working with Opposition Leader, Frank Wilkes, (see Chapter 4) was my revelation that the world was changing and that presentation was not just about speeches and utterances, but more about how good the television visuals were. Our generation's preferred political television had been *Yes Minister* where the sets and settings were minimal and the art was in the words. We broke news stories in the print media knowing that they would be followed up on radio and television the next day or that night. Now it is common to use television or the Internet to release stories which the print media then analyse, rather than report on, the next day.

The political TV or web image, like Henri Cartier-Bresson's decisive moment, defines much of what we think politically. Walking along Treasury Place in Melbourne, after a meeting with the Federal Arts Minister, three of us from the Melbourne International Arts Festival, accidentally came across the Victorian Arts Minister, Mary Delahunty (who had been a wonderful Minister for the Festival), getting out of her car and being interviewed by TV stations about speculation that she would be opposed for pre-selection in her safe seat. The cameras and car were behind bollards in Treasury Place and it was obvious that once the interview was over the next footage would be of the Minister making a lonely walk into the office where a Cabinet meeting would be held. I immediately rushed over to Mary, and while the cameras were still rolling, gave her a hug, kissed her on the cheek and wished her well. That night the footage was not of an embattled Minister on a lonely walk but of a Minister being wished good luck by random passers-by. The 'optics', as the media minders call them, of the story had been changed.

But that was in the 21st century. Back in the 20th century, going to Maryborough in country Victoria to campaign we were advised by former Opposition Leader and local Maryborough MP, Clive Stoneham, that it was easy to campaign there because you could just do the rounds of the local hotels, have a beer in them and catch up with almost all of the voters. Today the visit would be for less than an hour, it would be a photo-opportunity and most politicians would be reluctant to be seen with a glass of beer in their hand. The real political contact today would be through carefully targeted direct mail.

In that transitional period political life was so technologically limited as to be primitive compared to today. While Clyde Holding was Victorian ALP Opposition Leader the Government introduced Essential Services legislation which restricted the right to strike. Clyde could be a great orator and on the day in Parliament when he replied he gave a quite brilliant speech. We decided in the office, to Clyde's bemusement, to get copies of the speech out to all the Victorian trade unions. We roneoed off the speech, addressed envelopes and put copies in the mail as well as getting some hand delivered to Trades Hall. The whole process probably took a week. Today the speech in its entirety probably wouldn't be distributed and, if it was, it would more likely be distributed as an email attachment; a posting on the party website; or an addition to Clyde's social networking site. A week later today the news cycle would also probably have moved on to another issue altogether.

Clyde's bemused response to our reaction to the speech was not unusual. Politicians give so many speeches that often they fail to realise how significant they are or to understand

the reaction they get. In 1992, as Chairman of the National Book Council, I was at the official table for the Australian Book Fair annual dinner and the presentation of various National Book Council and Australian Book Publishers Association prizes. Paul Keating was there sharing the stage with the British writer and barrister, John Mortimer. Sitting at the table Keating seemed uncomfortable and uncommunicative. The only animation he showed was in answer to a question about Sydney bookseller and old Trotskyite, Bob Gould. Keating's eyes lit up, he grinned and told us how he remembered "giving Bob a touch up" at ALP Conferences.

Then he got up to speak. He didn't read the speech very well. It covered Australian identity, the republic and Australia's place in the world. The speech had the crowd cheering wildly and jumping to their feet for a standing ovation. There were people in the audience crying. Keating came back to the table looking as bemused as Clyde had almost 20 years before. He looked surprised at the response. The next day the report on the speech was on the front page of most Australian newspapers.

We now know much about the background to the speech and other famous Keating speeches because of his speechwriter's, Don Watson, book *Recollections of a Bleeding Heart.* Watson talks about the enduring power of words and speeches in the book saying: "A speech is a gesture towards order and respectability in a world which prizes spontaneity and tends towards chaos. A speech is a whole thing, it is an artefact, a kind of proof that we have not submitted to modernity or barbarism." (p 53)

Reviewing Watson's book for the Brisbane *Courier Mail* (June 6 2002) I pointed out that speeches were, for millennia, more artifice than artefact. Classical oratory, Cicero, for instance, is almost totally concerned with effect. Alexander the Great and Nero used speechwriters to help them create effects – in Alexander's case drawing on Aristotle for ideas. Julius Caesar probably didn't write *Veni, vedi, vici* but took the credit. But most post-classical oratory was ecclesiastical until, in the West at least, monarchs pioneered a new declamatory style such as Mary Tudor's address to Parliament on her proposed marriage and Elizabeth I's Armada speech at Tilbury. Later the ecclesiastical and the declamatory fused, as illustrated in Oliver Cromwell's speeches.

Not that any of the declaimers of the time were above soundbites, as shown by Martin Luther's "here I stand'; Elizabeth's "I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king"; and, Cromwell's "In the name of God, go."

That combination of preaching and declamation continued until as late as the 1960s. Gladstone was a great exponent in the 19th century and the major speaker at the Gettysburg commemoration, Edward Everett, resorted to a fusion of the classical, ecclesiastical and declamatory. Of course Gettysburg is now remembered for the other speaker there, Abraham Lincoln, whose 270 words were precursors of a new style even though Gary Wills in *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The words That Re-made America* finds technical echoes of Pericles' funeral oration in Lincoln's words. Churchill, the Kennedy brothers and Martin Luther King brought this new style to its peak. The new style, with

its juxtapositions, hendiadys, repetitions and Wildean reversal of word order became formulaic and is now easily mimicked.

Today speeches are more likely to be full of economic jargon or managerial speak although a plainer, unadorned style has emerged in Australian with ALP leaders such as Kevin Rudd, Steve Bracks, Peter Beattie and Anna Bligh. It is as if there is new power in ordinary words, marked by the banishing of jargon and the avoidance of rhetorical flights. Even old clichés get recycled in this style, particularly by Kevin Rudd, because the clichés resonate and seem more real to ordinary Australians than more original rhetoric.

Nevertheless- echoes of Pericles, Martin Luther King, the Kennedys or Churchill notwithstanding – politicians still turn first to words and speeches even if the speeches are just decoration around a few key soundbite phrases designed to generate media coverage and position the speaker as doing something.

Government PR

The PR state concept obscures the relevance and legitimacy of much government PR. I have discussed this in detail in a chapter *Perspectives on Government PR* in a collection *Government Communications in Australia* edited by Sally Young. Instead of using a catch-all PR state explanation I suggested that it was probably more useful to categorise government PR according to functional outcomes. The categories are:

Propaganda and political marketing: This covers media management undertaken by press secretaries and media units, plus all the political policy promotion undertaken by government. During the Howard Government PR campaigns were undertaken for proposed tax changes, the GST introduction, Work Choices and health insurance. Most of this is just blatant political propaganda paid for by taxpayers. The campaigns were often handed out to favoured consultancies, often with links to the Liberal Party, and were designed to support the massive advertising undertaken. All governments of all political persuasions indulge in propaganda and political marketing and the budgets for them get larger the longer they are in power and the greater the risk of them being defeated. Total Federal, State and Territory spending on PR, advertising and parliamentary entitlements used for promotional purposes is certainly much more than $1 billion a year in most years.

Economic promotion: Tourist promotions to encourage international tourists to come to Australia and Australians to travel within Australia or within their own State are a very visible form of this sort of promotion. However, there are regional economic developments promotions, ‘clean and green’ food promotions, overseas investment missions, promotion of Australian banknote-printing technology, and numerous events and campaigns to promote investments in States and Territories. Whenever you see a Premier from another State on television visiting your State for a business event it has been organised by PR people engaging in economic promotion. How much of this is well-spent is debatable. In the 1980s we were approached by a regional Queensland city

to pitch for a campaign to attract Melbourne businesses to be re-located. We recommended advertising which promoted the Queensland climate (both the weather and investment) during the Melbourne winter and immediately before the weather forecast on the evening news. We also recommended a speaking program through local service clubs. Instead they went for a media stunt suggested by another consultancy – a cane toad race in the Melbourne City Square. It was cheaper and got more publicity. Given the other powerful economic and demographic forces driving net migration figures between States both our, and our competitors', proposals were probably irrelevant.

Information programs around rights, entitlements and obligations: Generally speaking this is the most legitimate form of government PR. It is designed to help people access their entitlements, become aware of new laws and obligations and negotiate government services more easily. These programs might cover pension or veterans entitlements; DIY superannuation regulations; tax laws; community grant programs; and, health entitlements. The problem is that, at times, promoting the entitlements becomes a form of propaganda and marketing rather than a means to empowering citizens. Today much of this information is available on departmental websites, but the websites are still complemented by a myriad of brochures and leaflets.

Behavioural persuasion: These programs are mainly social marketing campaigns (see Chapter Seven).

Consent: These are normally community consultation programs designed to get people and communities to accept developments or policies. They can also be designed to get input from the community although the focus here has also been skewed to marketing ends as well (See Chapter Six).

The formal process by which these programs are developed and implemented is outlined in *Government Communications in Australia* and most of the standard PR texts which mention government campaigns so I don't propose to replicate them. Equally there are so many books on political spin that it seems pointless to replicate them either except when I can illuminate the process by personal experience.

Much of government PR work is not political spin as such, but is undertaken in-house by departmental staff. Larger campaigns often involve employing PR contractors or consultancies. The bigger ones go through a process which involves Ministers and Ministerial staff and this is where, with a few exceptions, things get political. In my time working with governments the only really major exception was during the Hawke-Keating Governments when the Minister in charge of the process, Bob McMullan made it transparent, focussed and very successful. McMullan tended to rely on professional assessments by the relevant departments. He was also immensely considerate. It was common, before his time, for presentations on big campaigns to be scheduled at night. Given the difficulty of getting flights in and out of Canberra, this normally meant flying to Canberra early in the morning, hanging around for hours, giving a 15 minute presentation and then staying overnight. Under McMullan presentations were scheduled

during the day, expenses for travel were re-imbursed and presentations took 45 minutes after which he asked intelligent questions.

The first time I presented to the Government Ministerial committee deciding on campaigns it was chaired by Senator Graham Richardson. We won, largely because of the rural and remote experience of our Adelaide office, a major Landcare campaign. The problem for us was that we were also working for the forest industry and, through a Richardson friend in our Sydney office was trying to patch together a compromise on the proposed World Heritage listing around the Daintree area. The compromise was probably never going to work largely because of the intransigence of Queensland Premier, Jo Bjelke-Petersen, but it might have had some merit. Whatever slim chance there may have been was destroyed by some angry timber workers who jostled Richardson outside the Ravenshoe Town Hall. These were big men, much bigger than Richardson, and the television footage showed that they unnerved him, as they would anyone.

We were told, after we had been awarded the Landcare project but before we had signed any contracts, that Richardson had apparently decided we should have it taken away because we were allegedly a National Party front which had organised people to attack him physically. We called in everyone we knew who could influence the government and got the decision reversed. In Richardson's defence he was never hypocritical about these things. "It wasn't personal maaaaate" just a straight 'payback', was a comment (perhaps apocryphal) which got relayed back to us after it was all over.

The involvement of politicians also skewed communication channel choices, particularly because most of them put heavy emphasis on media relations as important parts of campaigns. We were pitching for a program with the Department of Veterans Affairs who were planning to shift the long-standing Repatriation Hospitals for ex-servicemen and women over to the management of State Governments. The original brief for the job placed a heavy emphasis on direct mail. This was obvious and appropriate because the most affected stakeholders were returned servicemen and women and the department knew who they were and where they lived. Writing to each of them personally; monitoring the media to ensure any outrageous claims were refuted; and dealing with the health and State officials responsible for hospital management were the logical campaign steps to take.

At the very last minute, just before the short-listed companies went in to pitch, the Minister in charge of the tendering process, Ros Kelly, was persuaded to take the direct mail out of the brief and opt for a publicity campaign. Just before going into the room to present an official the then Office of Government Information and Advertising (OGIA), asked for a quiet word and warned us that we would be asked about the change. He did the same with the other agencies. He never directed us to answer it in a specific way, but did hint that it would be counter-productive if we made a fuss and caused embarrassment to OGIA staff and the Minister. I suspect he was concerned that I might say something provocative or aggressive about the subject that would have achieved nothing and merely harmed the consultancy and perhaps OGIA. We went in and sure enough the Minister asked us whether it was a good idea to shift the focus from the direct mail to the publicity

campaign. There was a silence in the room as the public servants breathed in wondering what I might say - whether I would speak truth to power as I was always advocating to others. In the end I mumbled some cowardly reply and kicked myself for weeks after for not telling the truth. After that I made it a practice to say what I thought to the Ministerial committee and sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn't.

The vagaries of politics and circumstances were highlighted by another group of firms' experience with another Minister who kept some of the people waiting because the Minister was dining with John Farnham. Some pitched before dinner and some after. The group pitching last got the job because the Minister couldn't remember the others.

My worst experience was with the new Howard Government and the firearms campaign (see Chapter Seven) when the committee's operations made Senator Richardson look subtle, courtly and concerned. We were recommended for the job but got passed over when the Prime Minister's media adviser, Graeme Morris, and others insisted that with the delicate issues management involved, a 'big-hitter' was needed on the campaign. What that apparently meant was that one of the agencies was encouraged to involve a Canberra PR person who had worked on many Liberal election campaigns. The decision took a while to be made – apparently because it took a while to make the new arrangements – and in the early days of the Howard Government many public servants still thought they should abide by proper processes, rather than just giving the government what they wanted. We suspected something was up straight after we pitched because Graeme Morris was particularly effusive and was free with the 'maaates'. We then got many calls from the department seeking further information and we wondered if there was a move to over-turn the initial recommendation. In the end we lost the pitch as did another agency, Rowland. We got the Victorian firearms buyback campaign and they got the Queensland Government program. Rowlands and our firm ultimately shared an award for the two campaigns. There was a Senate estimates committee inquiry into the entire contract as the advertising also went to the group who had done the Liberals election campaign. The Government appeared to search around for a scapegoat and an OGIA staff member, Deb Keeley, who had been totally blameless and professional throughout the whole process was punished. This time I didn't stay quiet and made a number of speeches on the subject, including one at a PRIA Conference in Brisbane in 1998 when I shared a platform with the Minister in charge of the process, David Jull. He was fundamentally decent, and possibly a bit embarrassed, but it was the first time one of the consultancies had condemned the government and the process publicly. Needless to say we didn't get many more jobs, with the notable exception of projects for Health Minister Michael Wooldridge and his chief of staff Ken Smith. Eventually, I stopped going to the committee altogether as it was obvious that it was just reducing the firm's capacity to win work.

Journalism and politics

Rodney Tiffen in *News and Power* said that "the most heartening feature of political public relations is how often it fails." (p 85)

However, much writing about political PR is predicated on the assumption that spin is omnipresent and omnipotent. Much of it also focuses on how political staff manipulate the media to achieve political goals. Yet the striking thing about political spin is that the media staff are often journalists themselves who worked at various times with the journalists they are now spinning.

Sometimes there are even journalists who become politicians although as a general rule they often get worse treatment from press galleries than do other politicians - witness the fate of Harry Holgate the Tasmanian Premier who was dubbed 'headline' by his former media colleagues. It may be envy, or it may be that the journalists see the short-term focus and the headline-hunting reflection of themselves. One distinguished Australian journalist and writer, Sir Paul Hasluck (Minister for Foreign Affairs and Governor-General) wrote many observations on his time in politics. Many of the best of them were collected in *The Chance of Politics*. In one of the pieces he describes his experience in standing for the Liberal leadership after the disappearance of Harold Holt. He complains about the negative briefing of journalists by the John Gorton supporters. The negative briefings were probably mild compared to those done today but they were still nasty, dishonest and directed at a decent and honourable man. In a wonderful riff Hasluck says: "What dismays is the calibre of the press gallery in Canberra itself. They just do not know enough about the job in which the profess to be experts and they are, as a consequence of their ignorance and the poverty of their minds, open to any suggestions or prompting…..In some moods I think the journalists in Canberra are venal. In my more charitable moments I can only say that they are foolish and ignorant." (p 157)

Hasluck was harsh, but he probably missed a more important point about the gallery. Rather than being "open to any suggestions or prompting", they tend to be more likely to be guilty of groupthink which makes them less likely to accept suggestions which challenge the conventional wisdom. If you look at the Gallery consensus in the Keating years the Gallery generally believed that Keating wouldn't beat John Hewson in 1993. He did and the consensus switched. He was immediately heralded as a genius who would stay in power to the new millennium and usher in a republic. The consensus was that it was Hewson's FightBack plan and the GST which had brought about the result. This was partly correct but an almost equally significant factor was public fear that the Liberals would do away with Medicare. In 1996, the consensus was that the election would be close because the Gallery had memories of being wrong in 1993. I was working on a project for Deputy Prime Minister, Brian Howe, in the lead up to the election and it was obvious that his staff were convinced they would lose. After Howard was elected by a landslide in 1996 the consensus was that he would be two or three term government. It turned out to be right in the longer term but not before a very narrow squeak when the PM lost the popular vote and just scraped in. The Gallery consensus was that the GST would be a problem for the PM when he promised to introduce it if elected. In fact the party research showed that the GST commitment before the election partly neutralised the public belief that Howard didn't stand for anything and wasn't going anywhere.

Media advisers, who often come out of this groupthink environment, also wield great power because they are seen as the arbiters of how to get news coverage or manage

coverage. In some cases this comes from experience but often it is more a matter of attitude than analysis. Michael Gurr's *Days Like These* tells of his problems with journalists turned political staffers discussing a speech he was writing for Steve Bracks. "Meeting for the speech. I'd asked for the meeting to be kept small but there were about ten of us. The media office hadn't read the speech – but immediately started flicking through it dismissively. "I can't write a press release from this. There's no substance – this is all emotional." (p 47) Later the media advisers object to some introductory words to a speech because they are "warm and fuzzy" and not "punchy." Another media adviser objects to the use of the word "ethos" but is over-ridden by Steve Bracks, although later Gurr hears two of the advisers talking: "What's with this fuckun ethos stuff?" (p189)

Media advisers journalists often put everything through this filter of "where's the press release in this?" and are equally obsessed with the need to respond to the media at all times (see Chapter 6). They are particularly sensitive about talk radio and the shock jocks, and not only curry favour with them but pander to their prejudices as well. While President of the Melbourne International Arts Festival I saw this at close hand. The Artistic Director, Robyn Archer, had scheduled a French production, *I am Blood,* for the Festival. It was about medieval Europe and, being medieval, had the normal quota of blood, gore, rape, loot and pillage. Victorian talk radio presenter, Neil Mitchell, was considered to be very powerful by the Victorian Government. He appeared to me to be a philistine who seemed to attack the Festival every year for some allegedly outrageous act. One year it was having a Japanese drumming group within earshot of the Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance. This year it was how terrible it was that taxpayers' money was being spent on bringing blood and gore to Victorian audiences. No doubt it would be have been okay to bring a sanitised medieval version of pageantry, chivalry and troubadour songs but not menstrual blood and religious violence. When Robyn had showed us a video of the production when outlining the year's program, I joked with her that just as William Golding's Lord of the Flies made little boys out to be nicer than they are, this play made the Middle Ages and the medieval Catholic Church out to be nicer than they were too.

Needless to say Mitchell, who had not seen the show, projected outrage on behalf of ordinary Melbournians aided and abetted by the Liberal Shadow Arts Minister who bemoaned the fact that the Festival was not reflecting decent community values. The Shadow Minister subsequently had to resign his position after allegedly drunkenly smashing into several cars after a grief-filled drinking session prompted by his break-up with his lover.

The government media office was insistent that the Festival go on the Mitchell program. I didn't want to, believing that on talk radio you get monstered if you go on in such circumstances and monstered if you don't – the outcome being exactly the same. Mitchell was also going to Canberra later in the week to cover the visit of US President, George W. Bush. Under the circumstances the issue was sure to go away within 24 to 48 hours and masterly inaction was the answer. Instead we were directed to get Robyn to go on the show. She did well, but it was always inevitable that Mitchell would just use it as an opportunity to regurgitate his opinions.

I'm not sure that as a young political staffer I was that different from today's media advisers – although I did manage to avoid my leader going on the Derryn Hinch program for the same reasons I was reluctant for Robyn to go on the Mitchell program. Indeed, when I was a political staffer I was also arrogant, if not yet that cynical, but conscious of trying to both manipulate journalists and respond to their needs. The problem is that you can't afford to suspend belief or challenge the conventional wisdom about relations between staffers and journalists because you quickly become lost and ineffective. You can't say what you really think because it may well get reported. When Rodney Tiffen was researching his book *News and Power* we spoke at some length about the problems of political communication and how political media relations were developing. At the time I was grasping towards understanding what was going on. Most days in Opposition were a never-ending round of drafting speeches (we all had to be multi-skilled); talking to journalists in the gallery; answering media queries; drafting media releases; going to political functions; and trying to protect my under siege boss from those who were trying to get him out of the leadership. Long hours, awful physical working conditions, rampant mistrust were part of the pressures.

There were constant tactical demands. One of the supporters of John Cain, who was planning to challenge Frank Wilkes for the leadership, let slip that Cain was planning to make a speech at the weekend State Conference about nuclear power and uranium mining. This was part of a ploy to prise the left away from Wilkes. We immediately wrote a media release calling for Victoria to be made a nuclear-free State which gazumped the speech and appeared in the Saturday morning papers. From my point of view it was a great opportunity to promote a policy I believed in but it was done for purely tactical, and not strategic or moral, reasons.

The relationship between journalists and media staff was deeply incestuous. In the years in Opposition the Victoria ALP was given its first real chance of victory for decades by the Victorian Government land deals. A team including Jack Simpson, John Cain, Steve Crabb and David White had been researching a range of deals which were ultimately condemned by an inquiry. The ongoing campaign was attracting attention nationally and one night I got a telephone call from a Canberra Press Gallery journalist who had been given some tax records which indicated that then Federal Liberal Treasurer, Phillip Lynch, had been involved in a land deal in an area called Stumpy Gully. I went through the usual drill of thanking him, asking him for his details and phone number and then making a few inquiries about him; ringing him back through the paper's general phone number and generally trying to establish his bona fides.

The problem for the journalist was that he didn't want to take the risk of a writ; Federal Parliament had risen for the election campaign; and he needed to get it our under parliamentary privilege. We decided, to help the Federal ALP campaign and to add to the general sense of Liberal sleaze we were trying to create, to drop the material into the parliamentary record during an adjournment debate. Lynch was forced to stand down although it made no difference to the election result. The most profound outcome of the entire affair was that one John Winston Howard got his first Ministerial posting.

Together the conditions, the stresses and the tactical obsession made reflection difficult. It was only some years later when the Tiffen book came out, and he sent me a copy, that I realised what the fundamental problem with the process was. He called it a problem of 'coterie communication' in which the coterie operated in a 'hall of mirrors' in which they are "audience one minute, actors the next; targets of some messages, sources of others." (p 93) It was a precise description of the incestuous relationship with the Canberra journalist. It was also a precise description of the media adviser's job. If I had known it at the time I might have been even worse at my job.

Business and politics

Other players have always been part of the political mix (see Chapter 1) but in the past few decades overt political campaigns funded by, and conducted by, businesses and business organisation have become a much more important part of the political scene.

Traditionally business impact on politics has been more covert – background briefings, dinner in the club, private meetings – are the normal channels for this covert activity. This is partly due to the simple fact that, for much of the 20th century Australia was governed by conservative parties, and their members mixed with, were influenced by, thought like and were friends with business people. The role of the Institute of Public Affairs, its director C.D.Kemp, and it business supporters, in creating the modern Liberal Party exemplifies how business provided organisational skill and policy input to the conservatives. Overt business political campaigns had really only been directed at Labor Governments with the anti-bank nationalisation and anti-rationing campaigns conducted against the Chifley Government being early indicators of this.

What has changed is that overt political campaigns are now just as likely to be directed against conservative governments as against ALP governments. They are also more likely to be directed towards specific sectional interests.

In 2000 the Australian brewing industry and the hotel industry were opposed to the Howard Government's plan to impose GST on draught beer. The GST was to be imposed on top of existing excise duties, and would have increased draught beer prices. Initially the industry lobbied the Government but got very little response. It was decided to run a more public campaign and a PR person, Gabriel McDowell, then working with Lion Nathan put together the campaign, *It's Your Shout*, in conjunction with Gavin Anderson & Co. It was a spectacularly bruising campaign with prime time emotive ads effectively accusing the Prime Minister of not telling the truth, and the Treasurer of personally picking beer drinkers' pockets. In conjunction with the Australian Hotels Association a petition was organised and was said to have obtained more than a million signatures in hotels and bars around Australia.

The campaign 'won' in that the Government backed down and reduced the excise. But it was a victory which came at a cost with the industry's relationship with the Prime Minister, the Treasurer and much of the government front bench shredded for several

years. As a brewing industry executive said to me after it was all over: “It is an interesting case study of what happens when everything goes to custard and you have to go public and go nuclear. It also shows that it is possible to win, but also lose at the same time.”

The campaign was very similar to many business campaigns run in the US such as those against the proposed Clinton administration health care changes. These campaigns are conducted by professional political consultants and use emotive advertising and all the techniques, direct mail and coalition-building, which are used in political campaigns.

Before the 2007 Federal election campaign, Telstra conducted a quintessentially US campaign against government regulation of the dominant telecommunications provider. Speeches, websites, corporate blogs, mobilising staff and their families were just some of the PR techniques used. Not surprisingly the campaign was conducted by Dr Phil Burgess, a US corporate affairs professional, who had run anti-regulatory campaigns in the US with other members of the new Telstra management team.

The campaign focus was ostensibly about the needs of shareholders and the need to ensure Telstra had the incentive to introduce a world-class telecommunications network. At base, however, the campaign was really stating that there should be no regulatory restraints on the carrier and that its dominant market situation should not be curtailed.

While that campaign was unfolding various business groups were funding a major advertising campaign against the then ALP Opposition’s industrial relations policies. That campaign, unlike the brewers’ and Telstra’s, was more about the national impacts. It was never likely to be successful given how effective the ACTU campaign had been in linking the Howard Government’s industrial relations legislation to impacts on individuals and their families. Campaigns which feature real, believable individuals with whom other individuals can empathise, will always be more effective than those which appeal to a broader, less definable interest.

Before the 1993 Federal election campaign the Housing Industry Association ran a high profile campaign in marginal electorates attacking the Keating Government. It specifically urged people to defeat the government. The government won and the Housing Industry Association was banned from visiting Minister’s offices for three years. The brewers were not banned after their 2000 campaign but the principle is the same – if business gets into politics the problem is how to win and retain good relationships. As politicians see zero sum games where businesspeople see something else altogether the capacity for ill-feeling and mistrust is immense.

The problem for PR practitioners is where to draw the line in such campaigns. Governments rely heavily on the fact that interest groups don’t want to get too far off-side with them. The capacity of government, without seeming to act vindictively, to be vindictive is remarkable and can extend from regulatory change to exclusion from policy discussions. But if campaigns are conducted within the polite and courteous ways which avoid a government backlash they are easier to ignore.

When the Cain ALP Government was in power the Victorian Police Association approached me about helping them with a campaign to introduce early optional retirement. The Association, along with fire-fighters and other emergency services, had been arguing for such a scheme for some time. The rationale was that people in such stressful and risky occupations needed the opportunity to retire early, with reasonable pensions, in the interests of their health. The Association had put forward submissions, lobbied quite hard, and had generated some publicity but had got nowhere. The members were concerned and there was talk of industrial action which would have been a version of the brewing industry option of going both public and nuclear. Some minor industrial action was agreed and there were rallies and meetings. A full scale strike, while hinted at, would almost certainly never have eventuated as too many of the rank and file members would have baulked at such a final and radical step. But the action, and the strike threat, worked in conjunction with the way we re-framed the issue more dramatically around the health of police. We prepared posters and stickers with the slogan: *How many police have to die before Mr Cain acts?* The posters featured a coffin with a police cap sitting on top of it.

The Premier, despite the residual courtesy involved in referring to him as Mr Cain, was furious and apparently, we were told, regarded the campaign as accusing him of effectively being a murderer of police. The Police Association campaign was successful but it soured relations with the government, didn't do much for our relations with the Premier, and possibly entrenched in the Association an aggressive approach to negotiations with governments.

There is no doubt that politics is infectious. Once business groups or other groups get involved in political campaigns they often want to use them in many different ways.

We had the Real Estate Institute of Victoria as a client. They were concerned about a 1980s government plan to amend residential tenancies legislation which would reduce the Institute members' income and shift the balance between tenants and landlords.

Any political campaign by the REIV had to recognise that there were more tenants than landlords, although the landlords were probably better organised. We recognised that the REIV had one great asset which could be used in the campaign – a large number of members based in every electorate. They had a second asset – large numbers of landlords in every electorate with whom they communicated regularly about rents and other things. The key to the campaign was to harness this grassroots organisation and direct it towards lobbying their local members. We provided lobbying kits which provided details of how and when to lobby MPs; how to mobilise landlords; how to generate local publicity; how to visit Parliament to see your local member; and what messages to convey.

In particular we persuaded the REIV to dump their usual free enterprise ideological rhetoric and re-cast the debate around how the legislation would result in fewer rental properties being available, thus creating a rental accommodation crisis. We took out press

and radio advertising and ran a sustained media relations campaign based on the knowledge that real estate is always news in Victoria's print media outlets.

The result was that the Minister, who was my former employer, had to put on more staff to respond to the thousands of letters received and the news requests from metropolitan, regional and suburban media. Local MPs were also swamped with letters, deputations and media queries. One local ALP MP told me, during the campaign, that he was astonished at a local branch meeting to be questioned by a branch member, he thought he knew quite well, but didn't realise was a major landowner in his electorate. In the end the Opposition agreed to block the legislation in the Upper House which forced the Government to negotiate and amend the legislation.

The network we established for REIV became a permanent structure called the Political Action Network designed to both lobby MPs on an ongoing basis, to promote policies about real estate, and also be ready for major campaigns.

The campaign attracted interest in NSW and we were invited in 1985 to set up a similar structure there. This occurred at the time the Hawke Government had repealed negative gearing on investment properties and this became the Real Estate Institute of New South Wales' equivalent of Victoria's residential tenancies campaign.

We followed the same model as in Victoria. The framing was also about the dangers of a rental accommodation crisis aided by the fact that rental vacancies were at an historic low in Sydney and rental accommodation was almost impossible to find. Whether this was due to negative gearing abolition or Sydney population growth or a combination of both was a moot point. Similarly, a senior Victorian public servant pointed out that police health problems might be just as much caused by eating junk food and drinking too much as by work-related stress. The advantage for the police was that no Victorian MP would have taken the risk of saying that while the disadvantage for NSW real estate agents was that the alternative explanations could be promoted more easily by the Government.

In the end the campaign in NSW the issue achieved so much prominence and publicity that the Prime Minister, Mr Hawke, couldn't go on Sydney talk radio without being asked about the rental crisis and the impact of negative gearing. The REINSW, in fact, discovered they had won when the PM announced, on talkback radio, that negative gearing would be allowed again. NSW continued to conduct political campaigns around other issues and political action became an important service the Institute was providing to its members. It involved them, gave them something engrossing to do and encouraged not a few of them to move into politics.

Ultimately we introduced a political action network for the national body, the Real Estate Institute of Australia, and all the State Institutes were involved in ongoing lobbying at both State and Federal levels.

Campaigns need not be high profile to succeed. And sometimes they can be conducted by business in association with governments. The campaign, revealed by Richard Baker in

The Age (January 26 2008) to promote the dredging of Port Phillip Bay in Victoria was conducted by government in conjunction with shipping companies, business groups, exporters and importers, the Port of Melbourne and an agency of the government, the Victorian Freight and Logistics Council. This Coalition co-ordinated media relations around a common message that channel deepening was essential to jobs and prosperity. The government co-operated because it "was desperate to show its pro-business credentials" and could use it to impress "farmers, stevedores and manufacturers all at once."

Other campaigns are just anodyne. During the privatisation of State assets under the Kennett Government many of the bidders for the assets ran soft PR campaigns designed to position themselves as good corporate citizens. Sponsorship money flowed to sporting, community and cultural groups with a lot of it going to the arts on the grounds that it provided an opportunity to network with key decision-makers. PR companies generated fees arranging these demonstrations of corporate social responsibility and advised on the networking opportunities. It is impossible to begrudge the sponsorships – they were a good thing for the receiving organisations – but as I told one prospective client the only key to whether they would succeed or not was how much they bid and that such corporate campaigns were largely a waste of time.

There is, however, no right answer to what sort of political campaign business and other organisations should run and how to make them effective. Sometimes conventional representations are enough, other times the nuclear option looks to be the only alternative. Perhaps the answer lies in the nature of the government and the personalities of the leaders of those governments. When considering a campaign against political leaders such as Paul Keating and John Howard, for instance, it is not enough to win. It is also necessary to consider what the next stage of the campaign – dealing with the retribution which will be dealt out to you – will involve.

What I learnt?

Looking back over the campaigns in government, for governments and against governments it is difficult to decide what lessons there are for PR practitioners and the public.

Good PR campaigns can make a difference to the quality of life of people. The Be Wise with Medicines program conducted for the Department of Human Services and Health reduced risks with medication storage and consumption. It contributed, in a small way, to building support for the idea that not every health problem could be solved with a pill. The citizenship program for the Keating Government Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs resulted in a 700% increase in the number of eligible citizens seeking information on applying for citizenship. Many more followed through to become citizens. It promoted the idea we wanted newcomers to know that we wanted to "welcome to our family" as the campaign tagline said. But the success seemed ephemeral when the new Howard Government made it clear that newcomers weren't welcome. The guns buyback program probably made Victoria safer and irritated the US gun lobby a great deal. The

1993 Medicare entitlements program when Brian Howe was Health Minister contributed to making it impossible for the incoming 1996 Liberal-National Government to scrap the system.

On the other hand, working with John Phillips (then a Victorian ALP organiser) to set up the first business observers program at an ALP Federal Conference probably contributed to the increasing importance of money in the political system, and the constant search for new ways to get business and others, to contribute to party funds in ways which don't seem to be a straight donation. I was also part of the team which promoted the opening of the first Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet in Australia. I sometimes think both might be interesting debating points for critics of the PR industry.

The involvement with campaigns, through campaign slogans, probably illustrated how there is little new in politics. Shortly before I went to work with Clyde Holding the Victorian ALP had run an election campaign around the slogan *A Better Way* provided by advertising man, Philip Adams. Unfortunately the campaign took place around the same time as the Robert Redford film, *The Candidate,* came out in Australia. The film featured the slogan *A Better Way.* Years later, when a colleague asked me to provide some advice to the WA Labor Opposition, the slogan seemed particular apposite for their position. Research showed that the Court government was unpopular but the Gallup Opposition was not being embraced. I recommended a modest slogan, *A better government.* The slogan offered something better, but not too much. It had worked for Robert Redford in the film, didn't work for Clyde Holding but did work for Geoff Gallop.

During the Kennett years one of our staff, Michael O'Connell, was working on a voluntary basis with John Thwaites, then ALP Deputy Leader. Michael had helped him get elected to South Melbourne Council and was helping him now he was in Parliament. Michael brought John to our office for some advice. John said the problem was that they simply couldn't get heard above the Kennett voice. I had recently been reading an *Economist* article about a British Tory party campaign called "we listen" which was designed to suggest that the Tories had learnt the lessons of their defeats. Having been heavily influenced by Saul Alinsky's ideas as a student activist, I had been thinking about how the 'listening' concept might work at a grassroots level. I suggested to John that the ALP could develop a grassroots campaign by going out to local community groups around the slogan *Labor Listens.* The message was a contrast to the fact that many people thought Jeff Kennett didn't listen to anyone and it also meant that rather than wasting their time trying to get media coverage MPs could reach out to community groups. The ALP, under John Brumby's leadership, took the idea and actually made it work. The problem I had foreseen was that they would probably never be able to sustain the long grind to make it more than a slogan. But some time later, when John Brumby was in government, he was the guest speaker at Leadership Victoria (an organisation whose Board I was on) welcoming a new group of 32 young Victorians who were about to undertake a year long leadership program. As he read out the names of the participants, who came from all around Victoria, it became clear that he knew or had met almost all of them. He did it through the days and nights spent out listening to people. The slogan went on to be used by the ALP in a couple of election campaigns and over the years I have

been amused by the number of people who claimed credit for developing it. There didn't seem much point in saying that they hadn't because I hadn't either. I picked it up from another country. Recounting the episode to Kevin Luscombe, a legendary Australian marketing man, he laughed and said that the Tories had probably stolen it themselves, because he remembered the slogan being used in a Pennsylvanian Senate campaign.

I also learnt another lesson about the total professionalism in modern politics. Sally Young, the leading academic scholar of political advertising, once told me she had volunteered to work for the ALP during a campaign. They knocked her offer back because they couldn't see how her talents could contribute to the campaign effort. Just as Test Cricket has become a different game to the game played in parks, so political and campaign operations have become more and more specialised and more remote from traditional community-based politics. That, of course, makes them vulnerable to people prepared to play politics by Saul Alinsky's rules, rather than those of the market researchers and the communication specialists.

An important lesson in such a political environment is that you should never under-estimate just how cynical some political decisions are. A former ALP Legislative Council Leader, John Galbally, had introduced a series of private members bill to abolish capital punishment. John Galbally was deeply committed to law reform and constantly pursued ways to make the law fairer, more accessible and to rid it of anachronisms and cruelty. He had also started a review of ALP policy designed to get rid of laws such as those criminalising homosexuality. Jack retired and the policy was passed on to the new Shadow Attorney-General, Barry Jones, who then also retired from State politics to go into a Federal seat. The new policy was inherited by the new Shadow Attorney-General, John Cain. Unbeknownst to almost anyone outside the policy committee, the new policy also proposed de-criminalising bestiality (sexual relations with animals). John Cain came into the Opposition media office on a Friday afternoon just before the weekend ALP conference at which the policy was to be debated. He had become aware that some of the shock jocks knew of the policy and was concerned that it would develop into a controversy which would detract from the other law reform measures in the policy. The media office staff were also all clear that we didn't want a controversy in the media about whether, as it was going to inevitably be portrayed, the ALP was going to make sexual relations with animals legal and compulsory. After some thought a solution emerged, refer that section of the policy to the policy committee looking at animal rights to ensure that we were not righting one wrong only to create another. The policy disappeared into the committee and disappeared from potential public controversy.

Of course, cynicism is also a form of black humour to cope with the problems of politics. During the Whitlam Government Peter Blazey and Henry Rosenbloom were working for Moss Cass, the Environment Minister. At a lunch with journalists they were being roasted about the government plan to build a massive pipeline network right across the Australian countryside. What are you going to do about it several people asked? Get it painted green - and red when it went through the desert - was the reply.

Sometimes cynicism can also result in worthwhile policy changes. Reading the Government Gazette late one night in Parliament I saw a notice that CRA was applying for a mining permit. The permit covered a huge area of Victoria which stretched down to Coburg. It also listed a huge variety of minerals being searched for including uranium. The next day Frank Wilkes issued a media release about the State Government allowing CRA to search for uranium in Coburg – a release which made the front page lead of the Melbourne *Herald.* CRA sent two corporate affairs staff, David Thomson and Ken Gott, up to Parliament House to explain the situation and defuse the controversy. We had several meetings and then a nice lunch at The Society. We made it clear that we probably wouldn't be pursuing the issue because we couldn't see what other mileage we could get out of it. At that they explained that the problem was that they were not looking for uranium in Coburg but that a quirk of the legislation covering mining meant that they had to apply for huge areas and every conceivable mineral type. The answer was to change the act to allow smaller, more focussed exploration which would, incidentally, also help smaller miners. The end result: a variety of reforms were introduced by the ALP after it was elected to government.

Sometimes idealism is also useful as well. Looking back on the years in politics probably the only real, unalloyed satisfaction I had, was working with Frank Wilkes (at the prompting of the Victorian indigenous leader, Jim Berg) to introduce the first private members bill designed to give land rights to indigenous Victorians for the Lake Tyers and Framlingham areas.

However, whatever the shortcomings, the levels of cynicism and manipulation or the odd opportunity for idealistic action, government and political PR has one great advantage – it is one area where almost every aspect of PR comes together. It has also one great disadvantage – it is one area where many the ethical dilemmas facing practitioners are most pronounced.

CHAPTER NINE

PR ETHICS – AN OXYMORON?

Is PR inherently unethical?

The most frequent criticism of PR is that it, and PR practitioners, are inherently unethical because PR seeks to secretly influence and control people's actions and attitudes.

This criticism is rooted in a cultural studies perspective in which capitalist hegemony is maintained by a new opiate of the masses fashioned from persuasion, consumerism, false consciousness and media manipulation. It is easy to round up the usual suspects among PR practitioners and firms, and cite, some notorious case studies to demonstrate the view's validity.

While most practitioners would resist *any* suggestions that they are unethical, or that PR is inherently unethical, the view is not entirely wrong. Most practitioners are deeply concerned about ethical issues, worry about how to deal with them, and have a nagging suspicion that the criticism might be right. Having given hundreds of lectures, conference speeches and seminars to PR practitioners and students over the years I think that, if I calculated the nature of all the questions asked at these sessions, questions about ethical subjects would be more common than any other subject, although very closely followed by questions about how to get a job. At one level this show a degree of interests and concern about ethics. However, at another, it reflects practitioners' anxieties about questions and attitudes about PR from their peers, their friends and family and the community.

Activists challenge the very existence of the PR industry and its activities arguing that everything it does is illegitimate. Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber of PR Watch have summed it up as "the PR worldview – a belief that people are fundamentally irrational and that therefore a class of behind-the-scenes manipulators is necessary to shape public opinion for the public's own good." Nicky Hager, co-author of the book *Secrets and Lies,* about the New Zealand Timberlands case says: "I believe that PR is skewing the democratic process because it is based around people's ability to pay." Bob Burton says in an article in the Australia Institute September 2007 newsletter (No. 52) that: "What we needs as citizens is the ability to access information on which to make choices about our lives and our democracy. The most troubling aspect of the rise and rise of PR is the potential to erode two far-reaching changes that occurred in the 20th century to the idea of what made a healthy democracy. The first was the abolition of the property franchise…(and)… The second was the relatively recent acceptance that citizens were entitled to better access to government information in order to be able to be actively involved in shaping public policy. The rise of PR – overwhelmingly the preserve of deep-pocketed corporations and governments – threatens to effectively reinstate the property franchise by stealth and reduces the potential of citizens to shape public debate between elections based on quality information."

This view, as shown by the history of PR (see Chapter One) and the structure of the industry (Chapter 2) is clearly overly-simplistic. It also assumes that those who pay for PR are the only sources of the problem when NGOs and activist groups, such as Greenpeace, seem to me to sometimes play fast and loose with truth and tactics. An example of this was the apparently false and damaging claims made by Greenpeace in May 1990 about the Nufarm chemical plant in western Melbourne. After a raid on the plant Greenpeace claimed to have found enormous levels of dioxin outside the plant at levels, according to their media release, "100 million times greater than USA EPA standards." The plant was closed for three months while an independent investigation was carried out. The results of the investigation totally discredited the Greenpeace claims although Greenpeace totally denied that any of the allegations they made were incorrect. Nevertheless, in this case those who were paid to do PR for some of the protagonists in the case (the regulators - Melbourne Water and the Environment Protection Authority, Nufarm and the State Government) all combined to run a sustained campaign once the investigation was finished to re-assure the public and discredit Greenpeace. Industry groups picked up on the false Greenpeace claims and programs were run around the world to publicise the Greenpeace activities and the investigation findings.

Greenpeace would presumably argue that the ends justify the means in fighting for their environmental goals. The company and government would argue that they had an obligation to set the record straight and re-assure the public that the alleged threat was non-existent. The industry groups would argue that it was fair to expose Greenpeace as just another multinational more interested in fund-raising and brand-building than accuracy. However, whether you accept one, or part of all of these possibilities, it is clear that classifying the legitimacy of actions by who is paid and who is not is an over-simplification.

Of course, it shouldn't be forgotten that there are serious ethical problems with PR and that some PR practitioners are among their own worst enemies, showing an astonishing capacity to shoot themselves in the foot on ethical issues. In April 2005 the Institute of Public Affairs and the PRIA held a half-day workshop called: *Activists: How to beat them at their own game* run by a Canadian PR consultant, Ross Irvine. In the September 2005 (no 44) Australia Institute newsletter Katherine Wilson reported on the seminar which was attended by advisers to the then Federal Treasurer, Peter Costello, and then Special Minister for State, Eric Abetz, as well as a cross-section of corporate, government and consultancy PR people. Irvine recommends that activists be targeted as terrorists, talking about PR as war and that pursuing corporate social responsibility was a 'weakness'.

The UK publication, *PR Week,* reported February 21, 2007, that a majority of PR people attending a debate hosted by *PR Week* and the industry voted against the team supporting the proposition that PR practitioners have a responsibility to tell the truth. There are logical and social questions about telling the truth at all times. Is silence about confidential information the same as lies of commission? Japanese health professionals don't tell cancer sufferers the truth; people rarely tell their friends whether their bum does look big in something; and parents often encourage their children to tell white lies in the

interests of social harmony. But whatever logical and social quibbles about the concept of truth it is hard to imagine PR industry opponents being more effective in damaging the industry's reputation than a majority of PR practitioners voting in favour of lying.

However, except for a few specific cases I don't propose to replicate the many books about PR ethics, notorious case studies or more considered arguments about ethics from within the industry.

The best source for information about what critics of the industry say is wrong is the US website www.prwatch.org which is a rich resource of case studies, reading lists and shock horror stories of dishonest, dumb and disreputable PR behaviour. The best industry description of how PR practitioners should think about ethics is a chapter by Lelde McCoy, Ethical Practice, in *Public Relations: theory and practice,* Jane Johnston and Clara Zawawi. This chapter outlines the various codes of practice PR groups have developed; how they are administered; some of the philosophical background to ethical thinking; and some case studies about how to deal with ethical situations. A very useful book on PR ethics is Patricia Parsons' *Ethics in Public Relations* which looks at underlying ethical principles; how morality impacts on workplace decisions; looks at PR tactics in the context of business ethics; and, looks at the role of PR in the ethics of organisations.

PR Codes

Almost every PR industry association has a code of ethics – the International Public Relations Association, International Association of Business Communicators and all the national bodies in the UK, US and Australia. These are complemented by codes for wider industry groupings (eg banking and petrochemicals) and for specific companies within such industries. Not for profit organisations also create ethical guidelines which aim to set benchmarks for companies, industries and individuals. Accounting and legal firms, not-for-profits such as the St James Ethics Centre also offer guidance and training on ethics. These are further complemented by legal compliance training in every industry, including Trades Practices compliance and environmental compliance. The cynic would say that they are necessary because unethical behaviour is endemic. The very cynical would regard the codes as just window-dressing (or 'just PR'). But they also highlight that ethics is not an issue just for the PR industry but for everyone, and that discussions of PR ethics ought to be part of a broader debate about ethics in society.

PR ethical codes, nevertheless, are directed towards specific industry practices rather than the wider question of ethics in society. The PRIA ethics code, for instance, stipulates (among other things) that:

Members shall deal fairly and honestly with their employers, clients, prospective clients, with their fellow workers including superiors and subordinates, with public officials, the communications media, the general public and with fellow members of PRIA.

Members shall avoid conduct or practices likely to bring discredit upon themselves, the institute, their employers or clients.

Members shall not knowingly disseminate false or misleading information and shall take care to avoid doing so inadvertently.

No member shall represent conflicting interests nor, without the consent of the parties concerned, represent competing interests.

Members shall be prepared to identify the source of funding of any public communication they initiate or for which they act as a conduit.

There are also, as well as these provisions for individuals, guidelines for consultancies especially relating to how they list and disclose clients – a provision designed to ensure transparency but also to help people avoid infringing the Trade Practices Act or State Fair Trading Acts. These guidelines are necessary because some consultancies list every client they have ever worked for whether current, sacked from or for whom small amounts of work have been undertaken. The casual reader might, therefore, be mislead into believing that the consultancy has worked for every major listed public company or government department when in fact it may have been a very minor piece of work, by a consultant no longer at the company, for one small part of an organisation a long, long time ago.

Another curious clause is one that precludes members from proposing that their consultancy fees or other remuneration be contigent entirely on the achievement of 'specified results', or success fees. Originally the clause was largely a means of distinguishing the industry as a 'profession' which received professional fees rather than commissions. However, most consultancies charge commissions on work such as printing and out-of-pocket expenses they incur on client's behalf and in many projects – such as developments – success fees are common.

The PRIA College of Fellows issues practice notes which seek to interpret these code clauses. The notes use a mix of dictionary definitions (Concise Oxford) and simple examples to illustrate ethical dilemmas. For instance, the clause relating to discreditable practices uses bribing a public official as its example, although one would have thought that bribery was a more fundamental moral and legal problem than just bringing discredit on the Institute. Another example is that of a PRIA member who was expelled under this clause after being convicted of a serious offence and sentenced to imprisonment, even though the offence had nothing to do with his PR practice.

With the dissemination of false or misleading information the practice notes suggest that it is often the case that PR people have to take advice from clients in good faith and, that if the advice has not been in good faith, the practitioner needs to immediately make this known to whomever the information was communicated to. The extent to which this is practical is moot. When Hill & Knowlton was criticised for representing the bank, BCCI (which collapsed after its involvement in drug money laundering and other similar activities) the then CEO said it was unrealistic to expect PR consultants to know whether

or not the bank was sound and honest when they couldn't balance their own expense claims. It was perhaps not the best analogy possible, but it did raise a legitimate point.

With conflict of interest it is not only PR people who are a problem, clients and potential clients can also have strange ideas on the subject. In the 1980s I was working with the Port Melbourne Council in Victoria in opposing a major development on the beachfront. I was also actively involved in the local community campaigns. A senior government official approached us and asked whether we would be prepared to resign the Council account and work with the developer. Naturally we refused, but what was strange was that the official seemed to have no comprehension that they were asking us to do something which some people might define as unethical. A similar situation is when a large client approaches a firm which has a competitor client who bills less. My view has always been that you refuse the new offer and stay with the old client although many consultants think it is reasonable to shift allegiance. Equally some companies are not above having a host of consultancies on small retainers to prevent them working for competitors.

Codes are problematic. They can never cover every situation and in the case of the PRIA the ultimate sanction is expulsion from the organisation. As the PRIA represents a minority of the industry this is not much of a threat. Moreover, a member facing a PRIA ethical case can simply resign and avoid expulsion that way. Their proponents argue that they provide guidance and help protect the public interest. This argument is reasonable but codes can never be a substitute for a strong culture and a philosophically-derived set of values. The Christians have had to confront this dilemma for centuries. They solved it by having in their Bible a code, The Ten Commandments, and a series of guides to life in the form of stories, injunctions and parables. If codes were simple the Decalogue would have been enough. The great Talmud scholar, Maimonides, suggested that all the Torah could be reduced to the injunction about loving thy neighbour, but once again it proved not to be as simple as that.

I have had only one direct experience of the PRIA code. In November 1993 I gave a speech at the PRIA Congress in Hobart, Tasmania. The speech title (with 18th century length and many upper case letters in the title) was: *The Cancer Eating at the Industry Political Lobbying and Public Advocacy – the Erosion of Democracy and Ethics.* The speech canvassed a variety of activities, mainly in the US, which including astroturfing; the Hill & Knowlton Citizens for a Free Kuwait campaign; Burson Marsteller's work with Las Vegas casino and racing interests seeking to prevent Indians in California setting up a casino; and, some other case studies all of which can be found in the round-ups of the usual suspects literature.

The consultancy industry was outraged and there were threats that I would be taken to the PRIA for breaching the code by bringing the Institute and members into disrepute and threats of defamation actions. Nobody disputed the facts included in the speech, and all the facts and assertions had been published in other sources. At the time I was never sure whether the concern was competitive (that I was somehow trying to undermine the credibility of the firms mentioned for commercial reasons) or that they objected to

someone within the industry making the assertions. The commercial considerations had not been in my mind at the time, although later a consultant from Canada I met at a conference told me he regularly sent copies of *The Power House* by Susan B. Trento to potential clients for whom he was competing with Hill & Knowlton. The book was one of the major sources from which I drew material for the speech.

Being only a medium-size consultancy back then we were not keen to be involved in litigation against large US corporations. Even if we had won such a legal case the time and expense would have been disastrous. I was willing to fight any ethics case but those threats were withdrawn and there was a mediation managed by Peter Bartlett, a leading defamation lawyer, in which I agreed to write a letter making it clear I was not referring to any practices of the Australian subsidiaries of the companies mentioned. This was distributed, with a copy of the original speech, to all the delegates who had attended the conference. The opponents were satisfied and I felt justified in drawing attention to material which was on the public record.

Later, when Turnbull Porter Novelli had a difficult ethical and legal problem, many in the industry were delighted by our discomfort. The legal settlement makes it impossible to disclose all the details but one of our Directors was alleged to have instigated and executed a bogus, two year letter writing campaign designed to discredit a new radio station which was owned by a competitor, DMG, of our client Austereo. The settlement recognised that neither we nor Austereo had any knowledge of what had happened. Indeed, the first I heard of it was from a *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist who rang me while I was being driven to the airport after a meeting. My view from then was that, even though we knew nothing of the matter, we had to act as if it was our moral responsibility in allowing it to happen. Gerry McCusker in *Talespin – public relations disasters – inside stories & lessons learnt* and Bob Burton *Inside Spin: the dark underbelly of the PR industry* both give details of the case with their own interpretations. Both books are good examples of the usual suspects literature, although Burton seems to imagine that he is revealing for the first time a secret history of PR which has never previously been published anywhere; and, which supports his contention that PR is fundamentally illegitimate – except where it's involved in public health campaigns, and other 'harmless work.'

We didn't lose any clients as a result of the case although we received huge amounts of adverse publicity. I had tried to make it a practice never to speak to journalists about PR-related things, or about our company either on or off the record. My view was that we were like football referees – we were there in plain view and could be judged on our actions – but we had done a good job when nobody commented on our performance. Unfortunately, it was difficult to maintain that stance in the face of demands for interviews and between these, and the huge time taken up in meetings with lawyers, the case had a significant short-term effect on our financial performance. It also brought home to me that allegedly unethical behaviour is often not about money, as in this case the account was worth less than $2,000 a month to the consultancy.

Philosophical approaches

Another view of PR ethics is that it ought to stem from systematic philosophical bases or specific models of practice. Bentham, Rawls, Kant, Augustine, Hume and others provide insights into ethical values which can be applied to PR as they can be to any other aspect of life. The best of all is probably the best of all ethical guides, Kant's categorical imperative: "act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become universal law".

Simon Longstaff of the St James Ethics Centre, in *Public relations and the corporate conscience* (www.ethics.org.au), focuses discussion of PR ethics on simple words which can be discussed within a philosophic framework citing "values such as fair play and the public interest" and "honesty, truthfulness, courage (especially moral courage), integrity, diligence, loyalty and a capacity for independent judgment". Basically he is arguing that it all not that complicated as we already have well-established words, and values, which should equip us well to deal with ethical problems.

Philosophical approaches based on utilitarianism focus on asking the question as to whether any decision you take will provide the greatest good to the greatest number. From this PR decisions are not based on financial considerations but on the public interest. The Stoic philosophers can give us insights into how we can live virtuously and avoid the dangers of incremental ethical breaches and instrumentalism. Ethical approaches can also be derived from theories about rights, and actions are ethical if they do not violate human rights and treat humans with respect and dignity. Situational ethics are about making decisions on a case-by-case basis. This approach can run into a problem similar to that experienced by health professionals and known as "moral distress" wherein individuals have to make decisions within legal and ethical constraints adopted by an organisation but which conflict with their personal views. How to treat terminally-ill patients, or whether you will take part in an abortion procedure, are the sorts of case by case decisions which can cause moral distress for health professionals. It should be said that for health professionals these decision can lead to severe physical and psychological stress and there are few strictly analogous situations for PR people. While PR situations are again not directly analogous, the earlier discussion (see Chapter 6) about Stanley Milgram's torture experiments, suggest that we ought not make easy judgements about situational ethics without considering how strong our own moral courage would be in certain circumstances. We can deplore the Nuremberg defence but, if we are honest, we have to ask ourselves whether, in any given situation, we would have the courage to act differently.

Models

Working from models to derive PR ethics must start with the Grunig theory of PR as a two way symmetric form of communication. If you are in a conversation, if the communication is not asymmetric, then it ought to be ethical. The Public Relations Society of America Code of Ethics advances a theory of responsible advocacy, akin to utilitarianism, by defining advocacy as "We serve the public interest by acting as

responsible advocates for those we represent." This fits well with concepts of corporate social responsibility in which it seen as commercially-advantageous to do the right thing and be seen to do so. In contrast some PR practitioners compare themselves to barristers where they are 'cabs for hire' and have an obligation to take on anyone who comes along as a client. This view is disingenuous at best, and dishonest at worst. For a start there is no customary or legal reason why a consultant must take on a client. They do not have an agreed obligation as a barrister does. Nor do they face the sanctions for improper behaviour (unless they do something illegal and get caught) that a barrister may face if they act unethically or unprofessionally. It has always struck me as a nonsense argument for PR people, convenient as a means of justifying taking fees from anyone, but with no customary or ethical basis. PR people have agency, they can refuse clients if they want to.

Another model proposed by commentators on PR ethics is the Potter Box model devised by Professor Ralph Potter of Harvard University Divinity School. This is a square divided into quadrants labelled 'defining the situation', 'identifying values', 'selecting principles' and 'choosing loyalties'. Individuals or groups then fill in the quadrants with as many facts and ideas as possible resulting in them recognising a wider range of values, principles and loyalties and helping them make a critical judgement in the light of all the information.

At a basic practical level Professor Anne Gregory, past president of the UK Institute of PR, says that a useful step in making PR more ethical might be "a serious discussion about the rules of engagement between press and the PR industry" to address the situation in which journalists are spun by PR people, play a role in the promulgation of spin, and trade favours with PR people for information.

Many critics of PR would say that my career epitomises what's wrong with PR. I worked for the forest industries; sold petfood and confectionary; worked to retain negative gearing which contributed to the housing affordability crisis; and, worked for the plastics, chemical, petroleum and mining industries among others. On the other hand we refused work for the tobacco industry and the gun lobby. We would never have been asked to, but we couldn't have worked for the Catholic Church given their view on abortion although a practitioner I respect greatly, Peter Mahon, morally agreed with the Church and has worked for them for many years. We always took the stand that we were defined less by who we worked for and more by who we wouldn't work for. We also gave consultants the right to choose not to work on an account if they had some problem with it, although we always encouraged a robust discussion of why.

What is to be done?

Whether we use Kant's categorical imperative, a code of ethics or the Potter Box model all ethical questions get down to the basic question: it is right or wrong?

Simon Longstaff (*Is public relations a value free zone,* www.ethics.org.au 1994) points out that ethical issues occur on a daily basis. Do you pretend to be out of the office when

an unwelcome telephone call comes? Do you pay a bribe to a foreign official? Do you refuse a client's instructions and lose the account? Do you exercise critical judgement about goals or just tactical cunning about achieving them? All these questions, raised by Longstaff, are not heroic questions about moral courage but are simple every-day choices people make.

The problem for PR people - whether they like it or not and whether they work for a trade union, an environmental group, a government, a consultancy or a company - is that they get paid to influence the way people think and behave. Even the 'harmless work' Burton refers to ultimately has a persuasive purpose. It is not simply about providing information and promoting dialogue – partly because in a world in which people are bombarded by information and images, the job of the PR person is to get the particular piece of information they are promoting noticed. There is no way in the modern communications environment they can just build it and hope that others will come.

Most ethical problems arise from this reality – not through evil but through either instrumentalism or incremental ethical breaches. The worst cases of instrumentalism are the 'whatever it takes' form of politics practised by many. In essence an instrumental view PR practice involves that ideas and actions get judged by effectiveness - whether it works or not. There is a constant pressure in PR to focus on the outcome and effectiveness and it is easy to overlook that the process – the means – should be judged by values and not just whether they get the result or not. It is instrumentalism to regard people simply as targets, customers or audiences rather than as citizens or fellow human beings with whom we are having a civilised, tolerant and humane conversation. As I said in a speech on ethics at a PR conference, if you take this approach you wouldn't have got a job with some governments or the NSW ALP right wing, but you might sleep better at night. Indeed, whether you sleep better at night might sound corny but is not a bad guide to ethical behaviour. Consistent with the notion that stories and examples are better guides than codes, a friend, John Spitzer, once remarked to me that one of the great truths in Shakespeare was that the good in the plays slept soundly at night while the bad did not..

A client, Norman Huon of the Victorian Forests Product Industry, once used an example of how the sole focus on outcomes – instrumentalism - can lead to problems. There was an ongoing forest debate about logging in catchment areas. What was a complex scientific debate was being reduced to an argument about whether, if you stopped logging, the run off would be greater than if there was no logging and that more water would be harvested as a result. Norman pointed out that it was a dangerous argument for both sides because, logically, if the goal of increasing water run-off was the only outcome wanted, then the answer would be to concrete the catchment areas. His argument, that measuring things solely by effectiveness and outcomes lack the granularity which goes with the complex task of balancing values and options.

Incremental ethical breaches arise from many professional and personal situations: a desire to achieve an outcome to impress a client or an employer; fear of losing a job when you have just taken out a mortgage; or similar situations. The action taken seems

defensible at the moment but at some stage the person has slipped across an invisible line between the right thing to do and the wrong thing to do. Kant said: "no one can make another person virtuous". The first step in ethics is to recognise that codes and models are useful, but they are no substitute for personal values, culture and beliefs. In terms of corporate culture the PR practitioners can play a role in opposing corporate groupthink and bringing the outside to the inside as Peter Drucker described the role of PR.

Perhaps the best ways to always ensure actions are ethical is to re-conceptualise PR practice toward the goal of building trust in organisations and ensuring that all relationships between people, organisations and stakeholders are based on trust. Building trust is about being authentic and practising transparency and ethical behaviour is an axiomatic corollary of authenticity and transparency.

But the best tool for behaving ethically is the little bell in most people – other than those with a tendency to psychopathy – which goes off when we step over lines we shouldn't. Listening to the inner signal that tells us what is right or wrong may be more useful than any other technique. And if that doesn't work there are always some political parties, consultancies and companies who will have a job for you.

CHAPTER TEN

SOME CASE STUDIES

Case studies are the core of both PR education and training and the anti-PR literature – both sometimes featuring the same case studies but with a different spin put on them.

The PRIA (www.pria.com.au) has a case study section on its website which features award-winning case studies collected through their Golden Target Awards over the past 10 years. Many of the basic PR texts (see the bibliography) have major case studies or mini case studies at the end of each chapter. McCusker, Burton, Sharon Beder, Nicky Hagen and others have all written books and articles (referred to elsewhere) about PR and its problems.

What this chapter seeks to do, however, is to look at a limited number of case studies (both historical and contemporary) to illustrate the pervasiveness of PR and its long history. They are case studies into how Australians came to believe in a particular view of Gallipoli and the Anzacs; how some of the best and most expensive PR in the world for the forest products industry failed in the face of community activism; how attitudes to indigenous Australians and issues such as land rights were shaped and contested; and, how nuclear energy became 'an answer to global warming' after being promoted by those who denied most strongly the reality of global warming. They are not meant to be exhaustive studies and many will disagree with the emphasis placed on different aspects of them I was directly involved in two of them as a consultant, was a volunteer campaigner in parts of another, and a watcher from the sidelines for another.

THE ANZAC MYTH – COMMEMORATING TO FORGET

In Alan Bennett's play *The History Boys* one of the characters says: "The best way to forget something is to commemorate it." Nothing exemplifies the statement's truth more than the way that commemoration of Anzac Day has resulted in Australians either forgetting what they knew about Gallipoli, or never learning the truth.

For many returned servicemen and women and their families Anzac Day is a solemn day of remembrance, but much of what Australians believe about it, and what images and ideas it inspires, have been created as a result of conscious PR and propaganda.

The life, and how he was characterised, of Alec Campbell the last Australian who served at Gallipoli is an example of what can happen. Campbell was a socialist, trade unionist and republican. He was Tasmanian President of the Australian Rail Union, Launceston Trades and Labour Council President and a member of one of the unions which amalgamated to create the CFMEU. He campaigned for the Launceston City Council in Tasmania on a campaign for slum clearance, low rental public housing, anti-pollution measures and anti-monopoly measures. He was quoted as saying "war is stupid" and was a strong peace campaigner. Yet his status, as the result of being the last Gallipoli veteran, was almost deified by the conservative government lead by John Howard. Without any

mention of his political record and beliefs he was held up as a model for Australians – not because of what he believed in – but because he was a Gallipoli veteran. Indeed, his beliefs and political record were never mentioned by conservatives who urged Australians to revere him. As he said near the end of his life: "I wonder if Howard would give me a State funeral if he knew what I really stood for?" (*Workers Online Issue 137; Lest We Forget)*

This tendency to airbrush history, to erase the personal reality and replace it with a commemorative legend, was also seen with John Simpson Kirkpatrick, the famous Simpson and his donkey who survived 40 days at Gallipoli. In August 2005 the then Education Minister, Brendan Nelson, announced a program to teach Australian values to students. It featured a poster showing Simpson and his donkey and a set of values – care and compassion, a fair go, freedom, honesty, trustworthiness, respect and tolerance – which Nelson said were key Australian values. Nelson told the ABC on 24 August that teachers not prepared to teach Australian values ought to "clear off."

The problem for Nelson, as many historians and journalists quickly pointed out, was that Simpson was not strictly what he appeared and, while he may have represented some of the values in the list, was most certainly not the sort of citizen the government was trying to encourage. Alan Attwood in *The Age* (27 August 2005) and Ben Cubby and Jordan Baker in *The Sydney Morning Herald* (25 August 2005) summarised the facts. While there was some disagreement about the precise background it was generally agreed that Simpson was not the man's name (it was Kirkpatrick); that he was Geordie, a drinker and a brawler; jumped ship and came to Australia as an illegal immigrant; was a bit of a slacker at times and probably acquired the donkey as a way of avoiding working with anyone else; was in favour a revolution to 'clear out millionaires and dukes'; and, had enlisted so that he could get back to his family in Britain. Once again the reality was stripped out in favour of a sanitised version of reality designed to promote a political agenda. As Alan Attwood asked: "Who is the real donkey, Dr Nelson?"

The Gallipoli legend

The basic facts about Gallipoli are also well-known but seemingly feature little in either Anzac iconography or political rhetoric. For a start Australia suffered 8,709 casualties at Gallipoli (Department of Veterans Affairs Anzac website) compared with 86,692 Turks, 21255 Britains and 9,798 French. There were also 1,358 Indians and some 49 Newfoundland casualties. In other words Australia was a minor player. Gallipoli has been a battleground for millennia and its modern significance is probably mainly due to Kemal Ataturk commanding the Turkish troops there and its, and his role, in creating modern Turkey. Yet Australians have been lead to believe that its significance is primarily Australian through a process which framed the event as a founding national event; promoted it as a unique opportunity to express Australian patriotism; and then commercialised it through tourism and other activities.

The legend was shaped from the very beginning by the British journalist, Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett; the Australian war historian C.E.W. Bean; Sir Keith Murdoch; and, C.J.Dennis in *The Sentimental Bloke.* The first Anzac Day was in 1916; RSL pilgrimages to the site were organised from 1929; and, the experiences of World War II kept the Anzac spirit alive.

Why it became iconic is a puzzle. Professor John Hirst, the historian, writing in *The Monthly* (February 2008) recorded how he had started a section on 'Diggers' in a proposed Australian history curriculum unit for the Australian Government. He wrote: "Except for small-scale battles between settlers and Aboriginal people, Australia has been a remarkably peaceful country. There have been no civil wars or revolutions. It is strange, then, that it has a very strong military tradition and that the ordinary soldier, the digger, is the national hero."

Another historian, Henry Reynolds, speaking at the 2008 Adelaide Writers Festival questioned why it was claimed that Gallipoli had made us a nation. We had been pioneers in male and universal suffrage; establishing a basic welfare system; creating a high standard of living; and, been a leader in trade union rights. Why didn't we celebrate these things as the things which 'made us a nation'? Perhaps, he suggested, it was simply a matter of rationalising the sacrifice which was made. It may have been relatively small at Gallipoli, compared to others, but throughout World War I, in terms of percentage of casualties to numbers in uniform, we had the highest proportion of all the British Empire nations; and, the second highest (after the UK) number of troops as a proportion of total population. Ken Inglis in many richly suggestive articles and books has explored whether Anzac represents the 'sacred' for a secular society.

Yet despite the legend, by the 1960s numbers at Anzac Day parades were falling significantly; Alan Seymour's 1965 play *One day of the Year* encapsulated changing attitudes to the commemoration and the generational gap in perceptions of Gallipoli and war; Vietnam War protests and the changing Australian culture began to make Anzac Day seem less relevant to Australians.

The 1990s PR campaigns

In the 1990s the trend was reversed. It started with the Anzac day 75th anniversary and Prime Minister, Bob Hawke's speech at Anzac Cove. It was consolidated with the Australian Remembers campaign in 1994-95 to mark the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II. And it culminated in the Howard Government's deification of the digger and militarism.

While the speeches, events and commemorations were the public face of a memorial campaign behind them all were PR and marketing campaigns. For instance, Stuart Rintoul, writing in *The Weekend Australian* (22-23 April 2006) reported that the Western Australian branch of the RSL had employed PhD business students at Curtin University to develop a 'corporate-like strategy' to market the RSL to young people.

The Australia Remembers campaign was set up to honour veterans, servicemen and servicewomen. A central campaign was run by the Minister for Veterans Affairs, Con Sciacca; his chief of staff Greg Rudd; John Engledow, deputy head of an Australia Remembers Taskforce; Peter Thomas OAM as a Roving Ambassador; and, an Australia Remembers Committee whose executive was Emeritus Professor Kay Saunders.

There were also State and Territory Australia Remembers Committees; local committees based on Federal electorates journalists and media company managers working in advisory roles; veterans; the Federal Government; the RSL and its local branches; the AIF and Defence Force staff; historians and community representatives working on the campaign in a voluntary basis.

Peter Thomas, a former Army officer, and an experienced PR practitioner who had headed Telstra PR, said in a case study summary of the campaign (provided to the author), that it was "possibly the last opportunity for many veterans, servicemen and servicewomen to be honoured. These people, and those who served but are no longer with us, have a special place in the history of Australia. They are an enduring beacon for us all. They represent the embodiment of the Australian spirit, which was born in Gallipoli and carried through World War II: a spirit of individuality, mateship and national pride exemplified by courage, sacrifice, tenacity and daring. This spirit, which was so consolidated in World War II, inspired our soldiers in subsequent conflicts in Korea and Vietnam, and in other more recent theatres such as the Persian Gulf and parts of Africa."

The campaign themes were: commemoration, paying tribute to those who contributed the war effort; celebration, recapturing the advent of peace; education, helping young people understand the World War II events and significance; and legacy, leaving a permanent memory in national history.

Almost every aspect of the campaign, except national and state private sector sponsorship, was successful. The lack of sponsorship was a puzzle, although organisers, at the behest of the RSL, did preclude any sponsorship by Japanese companies which reduced the number of available sponsors somewhat.

A range of national ceremonies were organised such as an official launch. These were complemented by activities and celebrations in each State and Territory. In Victoria the program was launched with a re-enactment (with vintage steam train, flags and bunting) of troops departing Spencer Street station for World War II service. A Back to the Track convoy marking the building of the north-south road that stretched from Alice Springs to Darwin went to Alice Springs, Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide. Grants of up to $20,000 for each electorate were made to local communities to conduct events. A major element of these were simple community events around local Anzac Day services which, instead of the main Anzac Day March, became (and continue to be) the focal point of Anzac Day services around the country. Forty years ago there were fewer and fewer marchers and fewer and fewer onlookers. After the Australia Remembers campaign there were thousands of small community events involving hundreds of thousands of people.

Veteran pilgrimages were organised to Europe and North Africa, Papua New Guinea and Borneo. Nationally 390 unit reunions were sponsored; 26 unit histories were published; a Freedom Wall with thousands of bronze plaques was erected in Brisbane; merchandise including flags, lapel badges, clothing, posters and bunting were produced; there were commemorative stamps and coins; certificates of appreciation were made available to veterans; Cadbury's chocolates came out in wartime wrappings; and Toohey's beer cans reproduced old recruitment posters.

Two other initiatives with local impact were an education package for primary and secondary schools; and, a program called Operation Restoration which was responsible for refurbishing many of the nation's war memorials, remembrance driveways and national parks.

All of these activities and events were almost standard PR techniques. They were an immensely successful use of those techniques because they tapped into the patriotism which had been kindled as part of the 1988 Bicentennial celebrations; the 75th Anzac Day anniversary; and, because they operated at a grass roots level and gave local people an opportunity to develop forms of commemoration distinctive to their community.

They also produced a platform for the new nationalism; distrust of foreigners and refugees; and, the military adventurism of the Howard Government. Like the Bush neo-conservatives in the US, known as chicken hawks because of their willingness to wage war around the world, despite evading the draft during the Vietnam War or avoiding dangerous military service. All the techniques used in the US to promote war - farewells for troops; the concept that criticising the wars was wrong because it was disloyal to 'our troops'; symbolic visits to the troops in combat zones – were also used by the Howard Government. The propaganda was not as widespread, possibly because of lack of resources compared with the US military, which is the world's single biggest employer of PR people. It was also carefully anodyne. Frank Walker reported in *The Sunday Age* (January 1 2007) that the Australian Defence Force had dropped, from recruitment advertising, famous wartime film footage of two diggers on the Kokoda Trail crossing a river. The advertising was aimed at 'harnessing the spirit of Anzacs" but according to Captain Cameron McCracken "the researchers and marketers felt it was overdone". When *The Sunday Age* asked if the image of a wounded soldier was inappropriate for recruitment purposes he said: "Exactly." Politicians, and PR people working for them, are keen to get the benefits of appealing to the Anzac spirit but don't want too much reality to intervene.

The play, *One Day of the Year,* features the inter-generational conflicts between a grandfather who was a Gallipoli veteran, a father who is a fervent commemorator of Anzac Day and a son who is opposed to the celebration of militarism. The father is horrified but the grandfather, who actually experienced what was being commemorated, was not. Those who actually experience the horrors of war are also more realistic about patriotism and nationalism. The sacrifices they make are rarely for the flag, more often for their comrades. As James Bradley (son of the US servicemen John Bradley who was

one those who raised the flag in the Iwo Jima PR stunt) said "they fought for their country but died for their friends."

As long as wars go on politicians continue to think of new ways to commemorate them, new PR gestures, and new ways to 'honour' those who served. People I served with in Vietnam are still fighting to get better health and pension entitlements, but we have now been awarded more medals in the past ten years than we were awarded for serving in the first place. With every one of these additional decorations we were all given the opportunity of having presented by our local MP or getting them through the post. Most chose Australia Post.

INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIA – PERSUADING PEOPLE TO FORGET

A simple view of relations between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians is that the first Europeans were racist and the legacy continued on down the generations. While it is true that there were many racists and arrogant assumptions about 'white racial superiority' it is also true that many of the attitudes to non-indigenous Australians developed as a result of the process described in the Rodgers and Hammerstein *South Pacific* lyrics: "You have to be carefully taught to hate." The 'teaching' was largely due to sustained campaigns in the media, Parliament, lobbying the British Government, and in schools to produce quite specific views of indigenous Australians. This is not suggesting that the process was some sort of conspiracy – rather that the methods used were typical PR methods. Those methods, while constantly contested by opponents, were based on framing and promotion.

How the debate has been framed

Despite attempts by the conservative commentariat to discredit the historian, Henry Reynolds, there is ample evidence in his books that from soon after European settlement, attitudes to indigenous Australians were honestly, if brutally expressed. Punitive expeditions, dispossession, murder, shootings and other atrocities were openly talked about in early 19th century newspapers. There were objectors, from people such as Watkin Tench of the First Fleet onwards, but generally indigenous Australians were regarded as some sort of sub-human, savage threat to the Europeans (see Henry Reynolds *Frontier* pp42ff) As the 19th century progressed this was re-framed as a more subtle form of de-humanising in which indigenous Australians were portrayed in images and words as primitive people doomed to die out. Henry Reynolds in the final chapter of *The Law of the Land* discusses the propaganda used to combat the ongoing belief by the British Government that Australia was not *terra nullius.* In the later 19th century the Australian Natives Association, a friendly society, effectively re-defined the concept of who was Australian around white, native born people. When by the 20th century, despite the best efforts of missionaries and settlers, the indigenous Australians hadn't disappeared, the debate was re-framed around depicting them as colourful and exotic - but marginalised. Not quite dying out but not really part of Australia or mainstream Australia either. Anna Haebich in *The Griffith Review* (Autumn Number 15, 2007, pp251ff) describes the government PR tools used in this campaign, including the film,

Fringe Dwellers, which Soviet leader, Nikita Krushchev, used at the United Nations in 1959 to attack Australia for racism. The artworks of Destiny Deacon frequently use examples of the 'merchandise' which re-inforced these exotic but marginalised stereotypes. For much of the 20th century indigenous Australians fought to end the paternalistic administration of Federal, State and Territory campaigns and ran campaigns around specific social, economic, cultural and constitutional rights, such as the right to vote and the right to be paid fairly. In 1932 William Cooper founded the Australian Aborigines League which aimed to win the human and civil rights indigenous Australians had been denied. By the end of the 20th century they had begun to win many of these rights and many non-indigenous Australians recognised that they had, in the words of Sir William Deane in the Mabo case "inherited a legacy of unutterable shame". At this stage opponents of indigenous rights re-framed the debate again, once again focussing on the threat (this time that land would be taken away from non-indigenous Australians) while simultaneously mounting a 'blame the victim' campaign based on the degraded conditions in which many indigenous Australians lived.

This history of framing and promotion is being continued today in the so-called history wars waged in Australia over the stolen generations; European massacres of indigenous Australians; and, the dispossession of the original inhabitants from their lands are not just about history. They are as much PR campaigns in which the debate about indigenous Australians is framed, contested and promoted as they are historical studies. The major difference is that those who attack Reynolds and others for a 'black arm-band' view of history find it easier to get their views into the Murdoch media than most PR people do.

The 1967 Referendum

In 1958 the Federal Council for Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI) was set up, aiming to push for a referendum to remove discriminatory provisions from the Constitution and to enable the Federal Government to make legislation that would apply in the States and Territories. For the next 10 years a number of campaigns were conducted and victories won. In 1962 indigenous Australians in all States (except Queensland) were given voting rights and in 1965 voting rights were extended to all Commonwealth territories and all state elections. In February 1965 Charles Perkins, and some 30 university students inspired by the US civil rights movement, undertook a 3200 kilometre Freedom Ride bus tour of NSW. The Freedom Rides generated huge media attention in Australia and overseas, partly fuelled by the hostile reactions of local papers and verbal and physical abuse from some white people in the towns visited. In 1966 the Wave Hill strike by the Gurindji people gave impetus to the land rights movement and in the same year Australia signed the UN International Accord for the elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. FCAATSI, with effective campaigning by people such as Faith Bandler, Doug Nicholls and Labor Shadow Minister, Gordon Bryant, collected more than a million signatures to petitions and presented them to Parliament over the ten years.

At Gordon Bryant's prompting I had a small part in the campaign. With Colin Benjamin, both of us being involved in the Melbourne University Student Action for Aboriginal

Advancement, we organised, among other things, a sit- in for half a dozen students in a small square alongside the Melbourne GPO on the night of the 1966 Census. Similar protests were held elsewhere to highlight the fact that the Census excluded indigenous Australians. Finally in May 1967 90 per cent of Australians voted to remove clauses which discriminated against indigenous Australians from the Constitution. The referendum achieved a majority in all six States.

The referendum campaign was framed in a number of ways. First, that this was a unanimous decision of the Federal Parliament indicating overwhelming Australian support. Second, that the move would improve Australia's international image. Third, that it would remove excuses for inaction on indigenous Australian needs. For many of the campaigners the referendum itself was probably less important than its role as a platform for campaigning for programs to address indigenous Australians' disadvantages and inferior status.

The actual campaigning, according to Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus in *The 1967 referendum, or, When Aborigines didn't get the* say the Government campaign was 'lacklustre' and most of the campaigning 'fell to FCAASTI' which organised a broad coalition of support including "trades unions, churches and students, and a range of community organisations such as the Jaycees."

The 1972 Whitlam election campaign is often argued to be the first modern Australian political campaign. But, despite its limited resources, the 1967 Referendum campaign had features which pre-dated the 1972 campaign. There was a campaign song written by a folk singer Gary Shearston, based on a poem by Kath Walker, and similar to the US civil rights anthem *We Shall Overcome.* Publicity covered major metropolitan newspapers, magazines such as the *Australian Women's Weekly*, and appearances on radio and television programs such as Channel Seven's *Beauty and the Beast.* Pamphlets, posters, leaflets, community out-reach were also included in the campaign. Until the 1960s campaign most civil and human rights campaigns for indigenous Australians had mainly followed traditional lobbying routes – petitions, deputations, reports and submissions. From the Freedom Rides to the 1967 referendum campaign the full range of modern PR tools began to be used.

Reconciliation

From September 1991 when the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation was set up the use of PR tools was commonplace. From 1993 there were public education activities, consultation processes, production of videos and publications and in 1996 the first National Reconciliation Week.

In 2000 the Council established an NGO, Reconciliation Australia and this launched an even wider variety of activities with more and more organisations joining in. The Body Shop designed and distributed pamphlets about reconciliation; 25,000 Australians (including Federal Treasurer Peter Costello and Business Council Australia leaders) marched across Sydney Harbour Bridge during Reconciliation Week.

In 1997 the Sea of Hands concept was developed as an alternative to petitions, largely in response to the government's planned legislation on the Wik decision (see below). Australian Artists Against Racism developed coloured hands (light, flexible, recycled plastic hands) in the colours of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait flags. Initially 70,000 – each carrying a signature from a petitioner – was installed in front of Parliament House Canberra. In 2000 a major policy blueprint Six Steps to Coexistence, was launched at a Sea of Hands site in Sydney's Botanic Gardens. Major sites were erected around Australia in capital cities, country towns and suburbs.

In 2007 National Reconciliation Week coincided with the 10th anniversary of the 1967 Referendum campaign and the 15th anniversary of the Mabo judgment. Evangelicals had invented modern PR in the 19th century; commercial interests had developed it further; and, the techniques used by Reconciliation Australia by 2007 fused the two.

Land rights

All the victories, and all the campaigns, were hard fought because they operated in an environment in which old style racists, economic interests and conservative politicians were resisting, and often using their own PR techniques to combat the growing support for reconciliation.

The 1992 Mabo case had recognised land rights and rejected the concept of *terra nullius.* The subsequent Wik decision in 1996 declared that leases did not extinguish native title. There was an extreme reaction by National party politicians, farmers and some miners. The National Farmers Federation demanded that the Government expropriate Aboriginal property rights across vast tracts of Australia and called for legislation to extinguish native title on all pastoral leases. Australians for native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR) was formed by a coalition of NGOs and concerned citizens to coordinate community education and awareness campaigns to combat the NFF push.

The anti-Wik campaign was a masterpiece of framing and dog-whistle politics. First, the NFF and the Government mounted a massive scare campaign falsely claiming that suburban houses were under threat from native title. Second, portraying the anti-Wik legislation as 'fair and balanced', when it appeared to be blatant sop to vested interests, and apparently an appeal to those who had been supporting Pauline Hanson. In an address to the nation John Howard said: "Tonight I want to talk to you about striking a fair and decent balance in this very difficult debate about Wik or Native Title. You all know there has been a lot of debate and a lot of differences of opinion but I think we all agree on one thing and that is the sooner we get this debate over and get the whole issue behind us the better for all of us." Third, it was visually framed with a map, displayed by Howard during the address to the nation, which purported to show that 79 per cent of the land mass of Australia was subject to land right claims.

The Liberal Party had been running grass-roots campaigns against Mabo for years. Lyndall Ryan in *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* told how local Tasmanian Liberal Party

branches were organising public meetings and telling attendees that Aborigines wanted "to remove white people from many areas of Tasmania." (p 300)

The antiWik campaign was a success and the Howard Government legislation was passed.

Indigenous Australians and their supporters had used sophisticated and creative techniques. Their opponents relied on a more visceral approach, framing the debate in terms of fear, threat and latent racism. In the short-term the latter often works, in the longer-term it creates wider social and political problems for the nation, the people who use the technique and frequently causes a back-lash..

CHUTZPAH AND THE NUCLEAR LOBBY

The nuclear industry's campaign to position nuclear power as the answer to global warming would have to take a prize in any global PR chutzpah award.

Chutzpah is Yiddish word which conveys gall and brazen effrontery. The classic explanation of its usage is to describe a man who has murdered his mother and father throwing himself on the court's mercy because he is an orphan. In the case of the nuclear lobby they have spent years and millions of dollars financing organisations and scientists who deny the reality of climate change, while at the same time claiming nuclear power is an answer to global warming. Many of these same US energy companies contributed campaign funds to Republican Senator, James Inhofe, who has declared climate change to be "the greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people."

Things nuclear have always been subject to hyperbolic claims. Lewis Strauss, US Atomic Energy Commission Chairman, said in 1954 that; "it is not too much to expect that our children will enjoy in their homes electrical energy too cheap to meter." In 1953 US President Eisenhower, told the UN that nuclear power could be "rapidly transformed…(into)…a universal, efficient and economic usage" and promised the world an 'Atoms for Peace' program to allow the world to prosper and develop.

A number of things went wrong with the predictions. First, the technology was far from cheap. Proponents have argued recently that the high costs are due to the planning difficulties created by opponents but the reasons were more fundamental and design-based. Second, all references to nuclear power automatically made people think of the destructive power of nuclear weapons. In their book, *The Nuclear Power Deception*, Arjun Makhijani and Scott Saleska point out that the very first draft of the Eisenhower UN speech focussed on the destructive nature of atomic and thermonuclear weapons. The speech was re-drafted, presumably with help from various PR people, to balance the parts about nuclear weapons with a part which "spoke in glowing terms about the promise of the peaceful atom." Third, the Three Mile Island (1979) and Chernobyl (1986) nuclear power plant accidents re-inforced public fears about the dangers of nuclear power. There had already been a major nuclear accident in the UK at the Windscale plant in Cumbria where a fire had caused a large release of radioactive material. In that case one of the

responses was to get rid of the problem by changing the plant's name to Sellafield. By the time of the Three Mile Island (TMI) and Chernobyl accidents a more substantive campaign than a simple re-branding had become necessary.

Immediately after TMI, before the partially melted core at TMI had cooled, the nuclear industry began planning a long-term campaign to undo the PR damage and make nuclear power more acceptable. Robert Pool in *Beyond Engineering* says the Nuclear Power Oversight Committee (NPOC) developed a phased plan to do so which involved technological, regulatory and attitudinal elements. The NPOC comprised the heads of power utilities, reactor manufacturers and other nuclear organisations. The plan listed 14 'building blocks', or goals, which needed to be met if nuclear power was to be revived. Pool revealed that the NPOC plan also focussed on the "social, political and economic environment for nuclear power" to improve public acceptance of nuclear power. By the mid 1990s the industry believed its time would come again and that: "if nothing else, the threat of global warming may eventually force the US and other countries to burn less coal, oil and gas and look for alternative ways to generate electricity. When that day arrives, the nuclear industry plans to be ready." (p 305)

At the same time as the US nuclear industry was planning for a nuclear comeback lobby groups in Australia and the rest of the world were undertaking similar campaign planning. The Uranium Information Centre was set up in 1978 and became part of the new Australian Uranium Association in 2006. Its purpose is to "increase Australian public understanding of uranium mining and nuclear electricity generation." The Centre now produces email and web weekly digest summaries of material; a bimonthly newsletter; Nuclear Issues Briefing papers; colour information brochures for schools; and, provides information to the media.

The AUA Director Information is Ian Hore-Lacy who is also Director of Public Communication for the World Nuclear Association (WNA) in London. The AUA and the WNA also work with the Nuclear Energy Institute (NEI) in the United States which has been carrying on the work planned by the NPOC back in the 1980s. The NEI has also funded a Clean and Safe Energy Coalition co-chaired by Christine Todd Whitman, a former US Environmental Protection Agency head, and Patrick Moore, a co-founder of Greenpeace. There are also similar groups in the UK including Supporters of Nuclear Energy (SONE), the British Nuclear Energy Society, and the Energy Industries Club.

A number of newspaper articles have discussed how these groups operate. Liz Minchin in *The Age* "Fission expedition" June 28 2005 discusses Ian Hore-Lacy's role in the global PR campaign. Jonathan Leake and Dan Box "When PR goes nuclear" *AFR* May 27 2005 describes some of the media activities undertaken by the UK industry. PR Watch www.prwatch.org also features a number of detailed articles on how the nuclear industries' PR campaigns work.

Essentially the PR tactics are co-ordinated – not directed – globally, but all the campaigns share similar features, similar messages and similar tactics.

A major one is placing articles in the media. In Australia, many of them are by a prominent scientist, Leslie Kemeny. Typical of them is an *AFR* article (April 15 2005) which discusses the history of nuclear power; how Australia operated a nuclear plant in the 1950s; quotes Patrick Moore as an example of how environmentalists are changing their attitudes on nuclear energy; restates the arguments about nuclear power as a solution to climate change; attacks opponents of nuclear energy for over-stating risks; and, suggests alternative energy sources such as windfarms are "driven mainly by European manufacturers who possibly suspect their markets elsewhere might dry up within a few years". Kemeny also makes speeches, gives conference papers and contributes journal articles.

The framing of the debate is sophisticated – beyond just the climate change assertion – ranging over the need for better skills training and the fact that Australia is not training nuclear engineers; the emergence of a new generation of nuclear reactors which will be safer and more efficient (a claim NPOC also made some 25 years ago); and the need for energy security in Australia in a "potentially turbulent 21st century." The article concludes "for at least the next 100 years Australia's sustainable development and economic health will depend substantially on this greenhouse friendly technology."

The sentence is a masterpiece of framing: appropriating environmental language such as 'sustainable'; defusing the negative connotations of nuclear power by terming it 'greenhouse friendly technology'; and, speaking of 'health' in respect of a technology which most people associate with health risks.

The campaign features more than speeches and articles however. There are coalitions of interest groups. In the UK the Confederation of British Industry supports the lobby loudly. Politicians such as Bob Carr, former NSW Premier, and then British PM, Tony Blair, have been persuaded to support the cause. It also aims to co-opt government as an active ally. In Australia the Howard Government set up, in 2005, a high-level steering committee to develop and oversee a Uranium Industry Framework. Part of the group's recommendations relate to public awareness and information campaigns saying that "The establishment of a sustainable and successful industry in Australia requires an appropriate and effective communication strategy. This will help the industry to raise public awareness of uranium mining among its stakeholders and the community leading to community decisions that are based on informed understanding." Recognising that "information sourced from the (uranium) industry in the past has been perceived as reflecting the self-interest of uranium producers" the recommendation ns envisage a broader "multi-faceted communications strategy" on which the industry will collaborate. (See www.industry.gov.au)Translating this from bureaucratese into PR operational reality, this means using all available PR techniques, under some form of government imprimatur, to persuade the community that there are no problems with uranium mining and, the nuclear cycle more generally.

Other nuclear lobby campaign elements include re-assuring people about the dangers of nuclear power. A film, *Nuclear Nightmares,* made by Dox Productions for BBC

Television and screened on SBS in January 2007 is an example, suggesting that Chernobyl's health impacts were limited.

Another strategy is discrediting alternative energy sources. This started in the UK when Margaret Thatcher's former media secretary, Sir Bernard Ingham, fronted major local campaigns opposing wind farm construction. Sir Bernard is also involved in promoting nuclear energy through Supporters of Nuclear Energy. Wendy Frew in *The Sydney Morning Herald* May 19 2006 investigated the links between Australian anti-wind farm groups known as Landscape Guardians or Coastal Guardians which relies on the tactics Sir Bernard used with his British group Country Guardians.

One of the key elements of the NPOC plan developed after Three Mile Island was to change the regulations relating to nuclear power siting. The industry wanted to be able to build power stations, faster, more cheaply and with less interference by local residents and environmental groups. In the US the industry recruited US Vice President, Dick Cheney, to support such regulatory change. Yet, in Australia, confronted with wind farms, the lobby supported the local residents making it as difficult as possible to establish the farms. The residents or the lobby campaign may have persuaded the then Federal Environment Minister, Ian Campbell, to block a Victorian wind farm because it allegedly threatened a rare parrot. He also tried to establish regulations and guidelines to make it harder to build wind farms anywhere in Australia.

Like framing nuclear power as a means of fighting climate change; organising, in conjunction with governments means to help community groups block local alternative energy sources while seeking fewer controls on nuclear power site development is a special form of chutzpah.

FORESTS: WHEN MONEY CAN'T BUY YOU LOVE

The suggestion that PR tilts power towards the rich and powerful because they have the money to pay for it, seems an incredible claim when you consider the long-running campaigns around forestry in Australia. Despite joint action by trade unions, industry, governments and timber communities – and annual PR and advertising budgets of millions of dollars - the industry has been losing battles over forest resources for almost three decades to voluntary environmental groups.

Many of the environmental groups would argue that they have not won because they have failed to eliminate forestry in all native forests and that the timber industry is paying too low a price for the resource it uses. Whether such a total ban is an achievable or environmentally desirable aim is contestable – if only because wood products would then be imported from countries with less strict controls than Australia. They have, however, reduced the size of parts of the industry; significantly increased the amount of forests in national parks and reserves; stopped major pulp and paper developments; and, reduced the amount of land available to the forest products industry.

Since European settlement it appears, according to the *Australia's State of Forests Report* (produced by the National Forest Inventory (NFI) in the Australian Government Bureau of Rural Sciences) that about 33 per cent of the originally forest area has been cleared (mainly for agriculture and urban use) and another 40 per cent has been affected by harvesting at some stage. "On the other side of the ledger, new plantations have been established, and changes in fire and grazing regimes may have encouraged re-generation in some areas," the report says.

The report estimates that 21 per cent of Australia's land area is classified as forest and 13 per cent are formally protected in nature conservation areas. The protected areas increased by 22.2 per cent between 1998 and 2003 and the area of multiple-use forestry (ie available for logging) decreased by 14.6 per cent. The NFI found that between 1998 and 2003 the amount of forested area increased by 7 million hectares, although improvements in measurements make earlier estimates somewhat unreliable and may explain the difference. "Other data indicates that net forest cover is decreasing, due largely to clearing of woodland forests for grazing and cropping. The annual rate of clearing is now much lower than in the 1970s and 1980s" being less than half the rate it was. What is clear is that most forest clearance is due to factors other than forestry; that the amount of forest in protected areas is increasing; and, the forest available for logging is decreasing.

Our involvement

Turnbull Fox Phillips was right in the middle of the battles, and on the losing side many times. Our second client after we set up in the 1980s was Australian Paper Manufacturers (later Amcor) who were looking for advice on what the Victorian Cain government's election might mean for the APM Maryvale mill. From the 1980s to 2002 we worked, at various times, for Amcor, the Forest Industries Campaign Association, the National Forest Industries Australia, Victorian Association of Forest Industries, the Pulp and Paper Makers Federation, the NSW Forest Products Association and the Queensland Forestry Department. We were involved in a planned East Gippsland pulp mill which has still not been built; the APM takeover of APPM; the plans for an ocean outfall for the Maryvale Mill; the future of the Port Huon mill (now closed) in Tasmania; the Fairfield Mill alongside the Yarra River; the promotion of the Australian Paper Plan after the takeover of APPM by APM; Tasmanian election campaigns; and, hosts of spot fires around forest disputes in every State.

Our biggest involvement, and which drove most of our projects other than the Amcor-related ones, was with the National Association of Forest Industries (NAFI) and the Forest Industries Campaign Association (FICA).NAFI was set up in 1986 by the forest industry, State forest services, State forest associations, unions and the CSIRO. It aimed to provide a united industry voice and fight against rapidly declining resource access. FICA grew out of the Hawke Government's Australian Manufacturing Council (AMC), a tripartite body comprising union, government, employer and industry representatives. The AMC set up FAFPIC, the Forest and Forest Products Industry Council headed by Mark Addis, which set up FICA (headed by Paul Edwards) as a campaigning

organisation which was designed to influence public attitudes on forestry. A grassroots organisation, The Forest Protection Society (later called Timber Communities Australia), was also set up with industry funding for local timber communities, workers, trade unions and their families and friends to undertake local and national campaigns. Environmentalists have tried to characterise this Society as astro-turfing although there was no secret about industry involvement, and it provided a campaign organisation for people in remote communities whose livelihood was at risk. Indeed, the proliferation of acronyms and organisations was not a means of hiding the campaign – rather it reflected the variety of parties involved and the specific roles organisations took – and all the parties provided transparent information about what they were doing and how they were funded. Revelations by environmental groups and PR critics such as Bob Burton were hardly revelations as the organisations and their links were never secret. In his articles on PR Watch about the forest campaigns Burton managed to get the origins of the groups; the names of the people involved; the relationships; and, the names of consultancies involved all wrong. If he had consulted the public record, instead of starting from the position that it was all a set of secret front organisations, he may not have been so comprehensively wrong.

Initially another PR company worked for FICA but the work was put out to tender and we won the account. FICA ultimately moved into our offices and worked from there.

There were many aspects of the campaign which were effective. Advertising prepared for a Tasmanian election reduced the Green vote by about half what pre-polling suggested they would win. We tried to re-position the industry away arguments based solely on jobs and investment to one which was based on a totally renewable and recyclable resource. If forestry was unacceptable as an industry why weren't our opponents blocking the entrance to the Ford V8 plant in Geelong, Victoria? We argued that forests were not the primary environmental problem in Australia and that disproportionate attention, to the detriment of other issues, was being given to it. We pushed the need for more focus on 'brown' environmental issues. To her credit the then Australian Conservation Foundation CEO, Trish Caswell, tried to get the ACF to focus more on brown issues but the organisation quickly reverted back to forests when it needed to raise funds. By 2007, in its policy statements before the Federal election, it had finally got the balance back with emphasis on the other more pressing environmental issues. We published a series of well-argued position papers on forestry which had some impact on politicians and bureaucrats. We developed allies in politics through more lobbying and better government relations.

But there were always disasters. The first TV ads (before our time) featured a feral-looking greenie chained to a tree mouthing aggressive statements about stopping forestry. It made some people in the industry feel good but affronted all those solid middle class people who were concerned about logging. Later in the campaign a new approach, prompted by research by Hugh McKay, tried to soften the industry image by focussing on the beauty of wood; forest regeneration; and, the role of forest products in everyday life. The ads went to air shortly before the industry blockaded Parliament House Canberra with logging trucks, totally obliterating the impact of the soft ads with images of aggression and intransigence. We pulled together a kit for the media which listed all the

misinformation peddled by industry opponents. The opponents promptly went to the ABC with the claim that the industry was putting out misinformation kits as part of a black propaganda campaign. Without reading the document the ABC ran the story and refused to retract it.

What went wrong?

The context in which the industry campaign was being conducted was the worst possible. The 1960s environmental movement had moved into the mainstream and nearly all Australians were concerned about green issues. Environmentalists recognised, correctly, that targeting forests was the best way to win broader support. Forests were remote from the lives of many urban Australians; they were part of a folk heritage if not part of everyday life; stopping forestry didn't threaten urban jobs directly; and, they were romantic and mystical.

The industry simply didn't identify the trends early enough and regulatory and other measures to improve forestry practices were late in coming. The industry arguments focussed on jobs and investments. Male industry spokespeople were matched with young idealists who inevitably identified the forest in dispute as the last remnant of some forest type or other in Australia. Newspaper reporters listened to the idealists before the industry. We tried to convince some journalists that, if forestry was a problem, the best place to start in reducing its impact was with newspapers which were an environmentally irresponsible way of distributing hundreds of thousands of copies of the same piece of information which could, just as well, be distributed electronically.

We were also fighting on too many fronts at once. At one stage forest disputes included the South West forests in Tasmania, the Daintree in Queensland, the Otways in Victoria, the Kauri forests in Western Australia, an East Gippsland forest dispute and a dispute over a proposed pulp mill there, Port Huon, the Wesley Vale pulp and paper mill in Tasmania, wood-chipping in Eden NSW, Central Highlands forests in Victoria, National Estate and World Heritage listing proposals, election campaigns featuring forestry in every State. Senator Graham Richardson, the Federal Environment Minister, was planning to get the Hawke Government re-elected on green preferences; our most vocal political allies seemed to be Queensland Premier, Jo Bjelke-Petersen; Tasmanian Premier, Robin Gray; and the Queensland Forests Minister, Geoff Muntz, who subsequently went to prison after being convicted of corruption charges. Strong trade union support and support among all political parties was available, but their voices were drowned out by those who were convinced there were more votes in the other side of the case.

Company managers were reluctant to get involved politically as it wasn't their core business; managers also had a part-time focus on the issue compared with full-time energetic commitment by environmentalists; the campaign tried to fight emotion with facts and was often using the wrong language. The geographic diversity of the campaign left us open to regular ambushes as new fronts were opened.

The industry did, at the end, have a very significant win with the establishment of Regional Forest Agreement process. The process set standards for sustainable management of native forests used for timber production but, most importantly, it was a sort of peace treaty in which governments drew a line around what the limits of the forest debate were to be. There was a process to which all disputes could be referred. Now, except for Tasmania, forest disputes have disappeared and when it re-appears in Tasmania it is normally as a result of a celebrity being given a whirlwind tour of a logged area before holding a media conference condemning the destruction of Tasmanian forests.

Commenting on the RFA process in a media release (December 20 2000) the Chief of CSIRO Forestry and Forest Products, Dr Glen Kile, said "the debate seems to reflect an entrenched preservation philosophy towards forests, rather than one which allows for the natural vitality and resilience of our forests and the needs of the communities and industries which depend on them". He argued that the RFA process provided a new scientific basis for resolving forests disputes. He also said:

"The view that forests should be completely left alone in the mistaken belief they will remain in their present state without management ignores forest dynamics. The simplistic idea that preserving a forest will save it leads to every development that might use wood from native forests being opposed, even though such proposals may be sensible and sustainable.

"There's an important distinction, not always made evident in the public debate, between forest harvesting and land clearance. In the long term harvested forest remains as forest while land clearing for agriculture or other purposes, causes irreversible change.

"As a nation we need to move on to a deeper understanding of environment, people, communities and the economy."

We had been trying to get the same message across in the campaigns 15 years before the release. They got swamped in an environmental tidal wave. That Dr Kile's words could now be said, listened to, and form the basis of government policy was a victory of sorts. But in the meantime, whatever PR critics say about the power of PR and money, the forest debate showed that the Beatles were right and that money can't buy you love.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

WHAT NEXT FOR THE PR INDUSTRY?

The two best warnings about making predictions come from the science fiction writer, Arthur C. Clarke and the film producer, Sam Goldwyn. Clarke's first law of prediction says: "When a distinguished but elderly scientist states that something is possible, he is almost certainly right. When he states that something is impossible, he is very probably wrong." Sam Goldwyn law of prediction was: "It is very dangerous to make predictions – particularly about the future."

Sam Goldwyn was famous for such quotes (for example, "a verbal contract isn't worth the paper it's printed on") but is less famous for the fact that he employed a PR person to write them. Rather than thinking they made him look foolish, he knew they made him memorable and lovable.

Clarke and Goldwyn were both wise about the future – doubly so in Goldwyn's case because he understood another rule about prediction: whatever the claimed next big thing was, it is almost certainly being promoted by a PR person.

Whether it be technology, social trends, the structure of the industry or where the next stock market boom will come from you can be fairly certain that the concept is being promoted by a PR practitioner in the interests of themselves or some other party. Consultancies predict trends on the basis of their existing skill base. If they have recently hired someone with skills in biotechnology PR, that will be the next big thing; if they have someone with knowledge of social media that will be the next big thing; and, if their client wants to move into a new area, that will be the next big thing.

The surprising thing to me, after some 40 years in the industry, is how little the industry has actually changed. There are far more practitioners working in far more organisations. There are fewer journalists and more people from more diverse backgrounds – socially, ethnically and educationally. The Internet has been a massive change because of the speed and reach of the information dissemination it makes possible. It also means that massive amounts of information can be just made available in ways that people can seek it out for themselves. But fundamentally PR people today are doing very similar things to what I was doing 40 years ago – writing media releases, preparing information materials, doing staff communications, managing environmental and social issues, promoting products and all the other things discussed in Chapter Six. Some of the delivery methods and communication channels have changed radically – again the Internet - but the core of the activity is the same. Google has revolutionised information retrieval speed and convenience – but perhaps at the expense of information overload. Interestingly, shortly after I retired in 2002 I was asked to give a talk to the PRIA Registered Consultancies Group about the industry outlook. As part of the preparation I looked at the cross-section of clients I had in 2002 and compared them with those I had in the 1960s. While the names had changed, they were in similar areas to those I worked in when I started in the industry.

Speaking at a dinner in 1998 to mark the UK Institute of Public Relations 50th anniversary James Grunig said he believed there were two major, competing "theories of public relations both in practice and in the academic world……the symbolic, interpretive paradigm and the strategic management, behavioural paradigm."

Scholars and practitioners following the symbolic paradigm generally assume that public relations strives to influence how publics interpret the organisation. These cognitive interpretations are embodied in such concepts as image, reputation, brand, impressions, and identity….Communication tactics, this theory maintains, create an impression in the minds of publics that allow the organisation to buffer itself from the environment.

In contrast, the behavioural, strategic management paradigm focuses on the participation of public relations executives in strategic decision-making to help manage the behaviour of organisations…it is a bridging rather than a buffering function….designed to build relationships with stakeholders.

The paradigms are in many ways a reflection of Grunig's theories about symmetric and asymmetric communications about the difference between conversations with stakeholders and monologues directed at publics; and Habermas' communicative action theory. In other words, the essential features of successful PR practice in the future were the same as the foundation theories of PR Grunig put forward many years ago.

If you canvass the future of PR among PR practitioners you tend to find a slate of broadly similar predictions. The most common is the idea is this idea that PR is moving from a tactical to a strategic focus. Yet this debate was going on in PR in the 1960s and the most probable future outcome is that PR people will continue to do a bit of both. Trust, reputation management, being the conscience of organisations, cultural drivers are also frequently cited trends. These are arguably less about possible futures unique to PR but could be said to be challenges facing managers in many industries.

Another common prediction is based on globalisation and the belief that the industry will become global and seamless with PR executives shifting effortlessly between countries and between jobs. There is no doubt that there are more international PR people and more spend parts of their career overseas. This has been common among Australian PR people for some time, and practitioners I started my career with (such as Barry Whalen) spent much of their working lives overseas in places such as Asia and the Middle East before returning to Australia In the 1990s a US PR practitioner said to me that "globalisation was actually Americanisation." But the world is neither flat nor American, and any industry based on understanding relationships with stakeholders will always need to be aware of cultural, social and economic differences between countries and within countries

More short-term predictions focus on the difficulty of attracting staff, salary levels, costs, new areas of specialisation, increasing specialisation and growing professionalism – all concerns for much of the modern history of PR.

Technologically-driven predictions are most common. In this book we have talked about the significance of social graphing and small world theory for PR. Web 2.0 and social networking were the next big things in 2006, 2007 and 2008 although the slowing pace of growth in sites such as MySpace has surprised many, including Rupert Murdoch, who bought MySpace and found it losing market share to Facebook. Social networking sites, like email and discussion forums, do extend an electronic form of word-of-mouth communication around the world, but most of them are still working on closed, proprietary bases and don't have the universality which the Internet has achieved. The Web 2.0 phenomenon has already become the subject of jokes about the fact that nobody knows what it is, other than the next big thing.

IT has been transformational for PR, as for other businesses, but basically through its disintermediation capacity. A practitioner at home can replicate the systems bigger consultancies or companies have through the Internet. Media lists, data, Googled information is readily available to almost anyone, anywhere in the developed world and increasingly in the developing world. Word-processors were an instant productivity enhancer for PR people because one day one keyboard (a typewriter) was taken away and replaced by a word-processing keyboard which allowed staff to do more things more quickly than ever before. They also reduced the need for support staff. But these technological changes were about speed and productivity – important though they are – more than ways of thinking about PR. Just as plumbers kept doing basically the same thing from the days of the Roman sewers through the changing technologies of stone, pottery, lead, concrete, copper and plastic pipes, so PR people keep doing substantially the same things with different tools and using different channels.

Probably the safest prediction about the future or PR is that it will adapt slowly to the changing social, economic and political trends in society. Environmental consciousness has transformed PR practice in the past 30 years. Whereas once PR people airbrushed pollution out of polluting plant photographs, today they are more likely to be promoting how effectively a company meets accepted international benchmarks. Political change in any country, particularly with the strong partisanship among political parties, leads to changes of faces and shifts in techniques. As the political conventional wisdom changes, so PR practitioners change the frame in which they cast issues. Economic crises shift focus from nice things to do to survival skills. PR people in banks around the world in late 2007 and 2008 were focussed more on combating rumours started by hedge funds and short sellers than they would normally have been. Speechwriters for bankers, instead of warning against the welfare mentality and the need to reduce taxes and government spending, re-frame handouts to financial institutions as essential to protecting the viability of the financial system. The rise of China and India creates new demands for PR people able to understand, or work in, those societies. China and India are not suddenly emerging as new super-powers, they are merely returning to the dominant global position they held for centuries up until a few hundred years ago. The major difference is that the demand for PR practitioners in this return to dominance will be greater than it was during the Mughal and Ming dynasties. The PR practitioners for these new powers, will

however, probably need to be as tolerant of diversity as the Mughals, and not as exclusive as the Mings.

Perhaps the most important developments to impact on PR in the near to medium future are the ones which have been having most impact in the past decade.

First, is the question of trust as deference in society declines and mistrust of authority grows. To quote Groucho Marx again, as I did at the start of this book, all you need to succeed in life is honesty and sincerity, and when you learn to fake those you have it made. But PR techniques can't establish trust, because trust does grow out of authenticity and the quality of relationships. PR people, however, can help to open up dialogues which foster trust and avoid doing things which breed distrust of them and their employers.

Second, is the growing clutter in communication in which people are bombarded with information, images and ideas from a myriad of communication devices. Young people have become multi-skilled and can surf the net, listen to an I Pod and SMS their friends on their mobile all at once. But there are physiological, evolutionary and neurological limits on what we can absorb. We constantly fall back on small networks of colleagues, friends and family. Probably the most important PR challenge in this environment will be how to creatively identify the right communication channel to cut through the clutter, reach specific audiences, and then establish conversations with them. The capacity to succinctly frame issues and to construct narratives which make sense to audiences will also be important. The more fragmented life becomes, the more alienated people are, the more important traditional story-telling techniques will be.

Third, the complexity of the environment in which PR works means that PR people will need, to be successful, to develop strategic business management skills; learn to scan and predict future trends; and, look to the behavioural sciences for insights into what they are doing. In an article on PR education in the *Asia-Pacific Public Relations Journal* (Five hypotheses on an epistemology of public relations Vol 4, No 2, 2003) I suggested that new approaches to PR practice and theory "will be derived from the recognition that public relations is an activity which functions at the interface between best practice professional activity and all those disciplines which provide insights into human behaviours and attitudes."

Fourth, for much of my PR career I tried to abide by Epicurus' injunction to "live without being noticed". That is now impossible. The world may not be flat but it is connected. This means that anything a PR practitioner does in one place will be disseminated elsewhere. More importantly, while arguably some residents in this world have difficulty discerning differences between reality and unreality, they are much more conscious of how PR techniques work and how to recognise when people are trying to manipulate them. If they don't recognise it then someone else will, and will tell them all about it.

Hopefully this book, being directed towards both PR students and practitioners and the wider public, might help both sides of the communication process to understand better what is being done, why it is being done and how it works.

The unexpected will probably make these predictions wrong. But at the outset of this book I talked about whether cave paintings were an early form of communication, religious ritual, propaganda or what we would call a public awareness campaign. What cave painting says to me, however, is that the desire to communicate and persuade is as old as consciousness itself, and that means that PR, while changing techniques and tools as it evolves, will continue to be around for a while.

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