

Wandren PD

A testing ground for new possibilities



PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

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The future of Public Diplomacy (PD) is likely to demonstrate a continuing divergence in approach. Much of this divergence can be conceptualised within two models; the hierarchical and network based approaches.ⁱ As Brian Hocking has argued;

“The reality is that there are in a sense ‘two worlds’ of public diplomacy that intersect, overlap, collide and cooperate in a variety of contexts. On the one hand we have a traditional, ‘hierarchical’ image of diplomatic systems, and, on the other, what has come to be termed a ‘network’ model.”ⁱⁱ

This article discusses the tension between hierarchical and network based models of diplomacy and the potential benefit that could be gained from network or even facilitative approaches to PD. Through the example of the work of the British Council, the potential development of PD towards a network-based model can be analysed, along with the potential for this approach to exist within the hierarchically conceived UK PD structure.

“Work aiming to inform and engage individuals and organisations overseas, in order to improve understanding of and influence for the United Kingdom in a manner consistent with governmental medium and long term goals.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Carter Report definition of Public Diplomacy, December 2005

Lord Carter used this definition of Public Diplomacy in his review of the PD system in the UK. In doing so he added to the plethora of definitions already available from academic and diplomatic perspectives.^{iv} Within this definition, “(t)he word ‘organisations’,” as Alan Henrikson has noted, “could include, of course, foreign official-governmental organisations too, but the emphasis would clearly seem to be on forming *societal* connections and gaining direct influence, for Britain, on target audiences *as wholes*”.^v Alan Henrikson argues that this neither privileges nor recognises “in explicit terms the intergovernmental or ‘diplomatic’ relationship that in most cases are considered to be the authoritative and controlling ones of the international legal order, or the interstate system”.^{vi} This resonates with the observation by Jan Melissen that “the interlocutors of today’s foreign service officers are not necessarily their counterparts, but a wide variety of people that are either involved in diplomatic activity or are at the receiving end of international politics”.^{vii} Furthermore, “one can observe converging interests among states and NGOs – actors that previously looked at one another with suspicion and as competitors”.^{viii} This provides the potential for UK PD to focus attention on a wider variety of groups than the traditional, elite focused diplomacy.

While the scope for UK PD is conceived in broad terms, the production of these operations is conducted, according to the Carter Report, “in a manner consistent with governmental medium and long term goals”.^{ix} This creates a hierarchical conception of the UK PD system. Brian Hocking has described the hierarchical approach as one in which “the foreign ministry and the national diplomatic system over which it presides act as gatekeepers, monitoring interactions between domestic and international policy environments and funnelling information between them.”^x In the UK, priorities and objectives for public diplomacy are conceived by the UK Government and are intended to be disseminated through the structure and organisations within the PD system.

The physical form of this hierarchical conception can be seen through the PD structure that was created following the Carter Report.



International Strategic Priorities



Public Diplomacy Board



Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO), British Council, BBC World Service

International Strategic Priorities (ISP) are set by the UK Government. The current White papers *Active Diplomacy for a Changing World: The UK's International Priorities* was published in March 2006.^{xi} Once the ISP have been set, Public Diplomacy Board has the role of considering these priorities to “ensure stronger leadership, strategic direction and ministerial accountability” within the UK PD structure. The hierarchical nature of this structure is emphasised by the Public Diplomacy Board’s terms of reference which state;

The aim of the Public Diplomacy Board is to improve public diplomacy effectiveness by:

- Setting the strategic direction of UK public diplomacy
- Monitoring and evaluating the outcomes
- Making recommendations on resource allocation^{xii}

The Board is Chaired by the Foreign Office Minister of State responsible for Public Diplomacy. As set out in the terms of reference, the board members;

“include senior representatives of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, British Council and BBC World Service (with observer status in view of the BBCWS’ editorial independence) with operational understanding of, and responsibility for, the delivery of public diplomacy.”^{xiii}

The specific objectives of the board include agreeing “geographical priorities, target audiences, priority themes” and ensuring “that each partner allocates resources to those priority areas”.^{xiv} As a result, the organisational structure adheres closely to the hierarchical model of diplomacy.

While Public Diplomacy strategy stems from a hierarchical structure, through the ISP and Public Diplomacy Board, this does not preclude current and future approaches that utilise the benefits that can be gained from network based PD in the UK. In contrast to the hierarchical model, Brian Hocking has argued that “the network model provides a fundamentally different picture of how diplomacy works in the twenty-first century”.^{xv}

Arguments for greater use of the network model focus on the recognition that “(m)odern public diplomacy is a ‘two-way street’, even though the diplomat practising it will of course always have his own country’s interests and foreign policy goals in mind”.^{xvi} In the conception of the interaction between post-modern states, produced by Shaun Riordan, diplomacy “must deal with the complex, multi-layered network of relations”.^{xvii} This requires a conceptual shift from the emphasis on a “top-down processes” that has been reflected “in post-11 September 2001 writings” about public diplomacy, “especially those coming out of the United States”.^{xviii} However, the network model does remove the need for setting priorities. While Laurie Wilson makes a valid point that;

it is important for practitioners to devote some time to identifying and building relationships, or they will forever be caught in the reactive mode of addressing immediate problems with no long-term vision or coordination of



strategic efforts. It is like being trapped in a leaky boat: If you spend all your time bailing and none of it rowing, you will never get to shore.^{xix}

Within the network model, defining objectives are still important, in parallel with identifying relationships, as it is vital to be sure toward which shore you are rowing.

Part of the conceptual shift towards a network based model requires interaction and engagement in a non-hierarchical manner which develops initiatives that are potentially beneficial to all participants. While it is possible to have a network in which there exist dominant participants, symmetrical relationships in which all participants are valued beyond their ability to transmit a pre-determined message, have the potential to multiply the impact of an initiative. This interdependence clearly carries certain risks, but also engages participant groups with an initiative to a greater extent than traditional or hierarchically conceived influence multipliers.

This conception of the network model incorporates concepts such as Robert Cooper's emphasis on the importance of "openness and transnational cooperation" within PD.^{xx} The creation of genuine cross border cooperation between civil societies and governmental organisations provides the means for greater influence and greater engagement toward the pursuit of common objectives. As Jan Melissen notes,

Public diplomacy above all thrives in highly interdependent regions and between countries that are linked by multiple transnational relationships and therefore a substantial degree of 'interconnectedness' between their civil societies.^{xxi}

As such, a network model that is more than a bilateral mechanism for the dissemination of a particular agenda can benefit from engagement with participants from various civil societies, each contributing to common, beneficial outcomes.

The attempt to produce symmetry and the "degree of interconnectedness" are vital markers of the genuine network-based model. Such methodology should not be confused with the use of networks of contacts for the dissemination of a particular agenda. In this case, while arguable still a network, contacts are acting as gatekeepers to a particular audience or transmitters of a pre-determined message. This can be seen in the use of networks of contacts in covert operations. Whether these were the CIA funded operations of the Cold War era or the contemporary discussions about the use of 'black' propaganda by the Pentagon both seek to exploit the appearance of independence to gain an audience for the dissemination of a government defined message.^{xxii} The plans for the Office of Strategic Influence, with the help of the Rendon Group, demonstrate this hierarchical approach to using a network.^{xxiii} A similar approach, according to the *New York Times*, has been pursued by the Lincoln Group who "paid newspapers from \$40 to \$2,000 to run the articles as news articles" without the publications disclosing "that the articles were generated by the military".^{xxiv} This approach was taken because, according to Col. James Treadwell, "We don't want somebody to look at the product and see the U.S. government and tune out." This is a direct hierarchical approach to disseminate a message through a network. As Col. Jack N. Summe, then the commander of the Fourth Psychological Operations Group said "We call our stuff information and the enemy's propaganda".^{xxv}

These programs may be successful in the short term, but the credibility of the network tends to be lost when the source of the covert support becomes known. Furthermore, the message or values which were being promoted may also lose credibility within the target audience. For example, as the *New York Times* reported, *Azzaman*, an Iraqi daily newspaper, ran an editorial in which it complained that “that the paid propaganda campaign was an American government effort ‘to humiliate the independent national press’.”^{xxvi} The extent to which opinion will engage with stories planted by the US Military, rather than the resistance from sections of the Iraqi press, is hard to judge. However, it is clear that this type of approach to a network is not only hierarchical in conception, but contains significant long-term risks in the pursuit of often short-term and occasionally fairly limited gains.

Networks that are hierarchical in conception are not limited to the covert sphere. Overt public diplomacy can also use a network for a hierarchical purpose. This point is illustrated by Alvin Snyder’s description of Fox News as “Public Diplomacy’s 10,000 pound Gorilla” and is further exemplified by plans outlined by Karen Hughes for, as the *Washington Post* described, “improving world opinion of the United States”.^{xxvii} This concept of public diplomacy included an attempt to “forward-deploy regional SWAT teams” and “create a rapid response unit ... at the State Department”. Karen Hughes intended the rapid response unit “to monitor media and help us more aggressively respond to rumors, inaccuracies, and hate speech whenever -- wherever they are engaged in around the world”.^{xxviii} These operations may rely on a network, but such a network is for dissemination, rather than engagement and the pursuit of genuinely shared goals.

In overt hierarchically conceived networks, engagement with other potential perspectives happens prior to transmission. This is a form of internal negotiation which is intended to make the message more palatable for the recipient rather than making representatives of the target audience part of the developmental process. This approach is similar to the expression of brand values within different cultures described by Simon Anholt.^{xxix} Simon Anholt and Karen Hughes have both emphasised the need to know the audience and the importance of responding differently in different cultures. However, this is still a system that provides policy and image makers with feedback from the field. As important as this type of input is to policy making, it still remains a discussion about targeting an audience rather than the creation of a network and symmetrical relationship that engages target groups in a genuine dialogue. This process of dialogue is evident in the approach taken by the British Council to the development of relationships as part of UK Public Diplomacy.

Working within the hierarchical conception of the UK PD structure, the British Council has sought to develop a genuinely network based approach. This approach is highlighted in the statement of purpose; “to build mutually beneficial relationships between the UK and other countries and to increase appreciation of the UK’s creative ideas and achievements”.^{xxx} While the increase in perception of the UK retains elements of a hierarchical approach, the focus on mutual benefit from relationships enables the British Council to work toward common goals. Mutual benefit stems from the identification of potential projects in which other groups can engage for their own benefit, rather than from benefit which is gained through merely being a conduit for the prescribed message of a dominant collaborator.

Projects based on mutual benefit are in line with the need to develop greater “openness and transnational cooperation” in Robert Cooper’s phrase.^{xxxix} This is also organised within the context of “highly interdependent regions... multiple transnational relationships... and a substantial degree of ‘interconnectedness’ between their civil societies”, as described by Jan Melissen.^{xxxix} In the vein of interconnectedness and transnational cooperation, the British Council has organised its “overseas networks into 13 regions, each headed by a regional director based on the ‘hub’ office for the region”.^{xxxix} As a result, the “business unit of the British Council is now the overseas region rather than the individual country”.^{xxxix} This organisation provides the British Council with the ability to work and coordinate programs at a transnational level.

The work on a transnational level is important to promote interaction between civil societies in various countries. However, it is still vital that the various communities and countries within the transnational region consider the project to be of particular significance to their specific needs. The network based approach in which participants seek mutual benefit through dialogue ensures that a program maintains relevance to the various local groups engaged within a transnational project. This can be achieved through the creation of “global networks for the free exchange of ideas” identified as one of the challenges within the British Council Strategy 2010 and is particularly evident in ‘The Network Effect’ organised in Northern and Central Europe.^{xxxv} “The Network Effect is a venture set up by the British Council to create and nurture networks between the next generation of European leaders” through providing a forum for engagement between governmental and civil society representatives of various nationalities.^{xxxvi} In addition, ‘Connecting Futures’ is intended “to build mutual understanding, learning and respect between young people from different cultural backgrounds in the UK and other countries” and is focused on 15 to 25 year olds.^{xxxvii} In both examples the project promotes a network rather than the dissemination of a specific prescribed message.

The importance of a symmetrical approach to the creation of a network is evident in the production of *British Muslims: Media Guide*. This involved the creation of relationships with representatives of numerous groups. The preface to the book carries the message that “the Muslim organisations that are involved in the project, and the British Council, all felt to be central”:

that we need to understand each other better, to dispel as much as we possibly can the fog of false assumptions, both innocent and malicious, which hang over relationships between ‘mainstream Britain’ and its Muslim minorities.^{xxxviii}

The preface also notes; “Mutual knowledge and friendship has paid dividends in a book that neither of us could have published, in this form, without the other”.^{xxxix} This statement not only provides evidence of the existence of the symmetrical nature of the relationship but demonstrates the potency of this approach. These projects fit into British Council strategy and may be seen to match certain International Strategic Priorities, but they are not based on the dissemination of a particular message to an audience, but an engagement with participants. This distinction is important to the participants, the success of the project, and the analysis of a network based future of public diplomacy.

The analysis of a network based system through certain means of measurement or valorisation of projects presents an opportunity to assess the success of network based PD but also creates a potential barrier to their application. The question, which is central to the application of Public Diplomacy as well as its assessment is; what is PD for? If the answer is to promote the country; to draw a direct link between the program and a change in perception of the country, it is easier to make an argument for a hierarchical approach as this conceives the primary objective of PD as the dissemination of a particular perspective, image or brand. However, if the answer is to change behaviour within the target audience, a more effective argument can be made for an engagement with groups through a network, on the basis of mutual benefit. The future of diplomacy therefore, is not merely a question of which approach to take but also how the impact of that approach will be assessed.

Despite the potential power of a network based approach, Alan Henrikson has argued; it should be recognized that, nowadays, the burden of proof is on those who would maintain more loosely associated, more pluralistic, and more segmented approaches to governmental communication with other societies, for that would mean a public diplomacy that is less overtly ‘purposeful’, in a goal-oriented sense. The dominant trend clearly is in favour of integration, or tighter coordination.^{xl}

However, despite the burden of proof being on the network based public diplomacy it still offers an alternative future to a prescriptive and strictly hierarchical approach. Current metaphor imagines a conversation, with speaking and listening roles. However, the future development of public diplomacy may be conducted outside a bilateral conception of the direct conversation metaphor.

If PD develops in the direction of a network model the future may be one of facilitative operations, rather than bilateral engagement. This would require a further conceptual shift beyond engaging in projects for mutual benefit, to facilitating for the benefit of other participants. The benefit for the other participants would become the primary goal, with the facilitating State furthering its PD goals through enabling others to achieve their objectives. Developments toward a facilitative approach have already been evident through ‘niche diplomacy’ in which countries, usually with limited physical and cultural capital, have concentrated “resources in specific areas best able to generate returns worth having, rather than trying to cover the field”.^{xli} Countries using a niche diplomacy strategy;

even if not considered ‘middle powers’ in terms of military or other basic strength or in terms of international rank, they can sometimes play significant roles as intermediaries, as key providers of assistance , or in other precise ways.^{xlii}

In these cases, the ability to facilitate provides influence greater than that gained from the projection of a hierarchically conceived message. Mark Leonard has noted a twofold benefit in which Norway gains from its facilitative role in peace and conflict prevention.

Firstly, it does allow Norway to gain a general profile it might not already have which is beneficial to the country in broad terms. More specifically though, Norway’s reputation in conflict resolution ensures that it is regarded as relevant in multilateral forums, and by other important international players, and this affords it influence on the issue.^{xliii}

While this approach has largely been adopted by the countries that could not exert influence directly, this strategy could potentially be used by almost any country. As Alan Henrikson has noted, currently “the difference is that great powers, unlike small or middle-sized countries, lack either the necessity or the incentive to do so”^{xliv}.

If the future development of PD follows the conceptual shift required for a genuinely network-based model, States currently using a hierarchical approach may find benefit in pursuing facilitative diplomacy. As the nature of the new PD shifts; as the actions of participants are reconceptualised, perhaps into what Shaun Riordan refers to as the “diplomacy of post-modern states”; as pressure grows to develop new and innovative methods of engaging in PD; even powers which previously considered niche diplomacy the preserve of the smaller state, may come to view facilitation as a useful form of public diplomacy.^{xlv} This method, as an extension of a network conception, would have the potential to achieve pre-identified government goals, just as a network model can. However, it would do so outside the bilateral, a conceptual shift which is required for any genuine application of the network model, but which, in the case of facilitative diplomacy, is beyond symmetry to the realisation that the fulfilment of the goals of another group can also have a positive effect for the facilitating country.

In conclusion, while there will be many factors that influence the development of PD with each actor influence toward subtly different conclusions, five points are likely to impact on most discussions of the future of Public Diplomacy. First, the current dichotomy between hierarchical and network approaches to PD will continue, despite the areas of overlap between the two models. Second, whether PD is better conducted through a bilateral or multilateral approach. Third, whether the purpose of PD is to directly changing the impression of a country within the target audience or change the behaviour of that audience. Fourth, how the impact of PD will be measured as this has the potential to alter which programs will be deemed appropriate and how the dispersal of resources will be prioritised. Finally, the extent to which countries adopting a network model will focus on mutual benefit or a facilitative approach to PD will depend on the immediacy with which a country wants measurable results from their Public Diplomacy. While the approach which each country takes to these five points of tension will differ, Jan Melissen’s observation about the future of PD will remain valid; “The new public diplomacy moves away from - to put it crudely – peddling information to foreigners and keeping the foreign press at bay, towards engaging with foreign audiences”^{xlvi}.

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