

**Chaos, Nature and A New Meaning to Human Relations From a Public Relations Perspective: can we support the future of multicultural integration by applying the ‘generic principles and specific applications paradigm’ ?**

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When western scholar Lord Anthony Giddens, the world’s most cited living sociologist - speaking at the Madrid Dircom conference in 2004, first noted that this more recent globalisation process -instead of, as many had expected, standardizing the world - had instead greatly contributed to a universal awareness of diversity, there was great hope, at least in some western countries such as the UK and the Netherlands, that, by investing in the development of their own cultural integration model, those efforts would be effective.

And so they seemed to be for a few years.

Basically, while the intercultural model implies that migrant ethnic and religious minorities be incentivated by the receiving State in order fully to integrate into the dominant values and cultures of a specific territory, the multicultural model implies that incentives be focused towards the improvement of:

- welcoming,
- worshipping,
- schooling,
- housing
- and, working conditions and processes of *each* ethnic minority.

The late 2004 assassination of a film director in Amsterdam (Theo Van Gogh) and the 2005 terrorist attack in the London subway provoked an impressive and unexpected backlash in the public opinions of both the UK and Holland.

It is a fact today that very few (if any) western leaders are ready publicly to lend their voice in favour of a multicultural approach to integration, and it is also difficult to find traces of support for this approach in Asian, African or Latin America countries.

At the time of those two events, I had the privilege of privately consulting the EU commissioner for multicultural integration and investigated the dynamics of those backlashes.

I suggested a hypothesis that both countries’ multicultural investment patterns, in implementing their policies, had followed a similar model that privileged the areas of welcome and worship (akin to softer and immaterial values), rather than those of school, housing and work (akin to harder and more material values).

Basically we concluded that it is possible that, had there been a different investment mix, there would likely not have been such a sudden collapse of both multicultural edifices.

As all architects and builders of 'spaces' know, an edifice relies on structured hard walls (in our case: school, housing and work) rather than on soft ones (in our case: welcome and worship).

When an edifice suddenly collapses because of an unexpected event, it might be because the soft walls had received more care than the hard ones.

From a public relations perspective, we could interpret this by thinking that both the UK and the Dutch governments focused excessive attention, money, and communication to 'showcase' the softer variables, than in actually creating better schools, homes and working conditions.

This, as we very well know, is a typical feature of societies (and organisations of all sorts) that more heavily rely on a '**communicating-to**' model of public relations than a '**communicating-with**' one. This would imply that leaderships failed to develop their policies and implement their decisions by listening to and by correctly interpreting their stakeholder expectations **before** those decisions are taken and implemented.

In any case, at least in the EU, the multicultural approach to integration is, today, a dead-end.

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**From a societal perspective**, a contemporary and global public relations interpretation implies the search for common characteristics to cultural integration that may effectively fit into a relationally-based public relations equation. The latter ought to be capable of satisfying (or, at least, *not dissatisfying*) the diverse communities that, in almost every single country today, face the dilemma of a migration tsunami that in these last 15 years has spread across the globe and is provoking dramatic social, political, economic and cultural tensions, often appearing untenable and unsustainable.

Of course, this very much relies on the principle that societal public relations are fundamentally based on *diverse values* and, maybe even more importantly, on *the quality of **diverse** relationships systems and networks*.

From an **organisational perspective**, organisations strive to improve the quality of their relationship systems with stakeholders by communicating their values, general aims and specific objectives and engaging with those stakeholders to define, pursue, mediate and compromise in order to achieve common objectives within a determined time frame.

**Time** and **space** have thus become a **qualitative** performance indicator for any effectively-managed organisation, whichever its nature: social, private, public sector.

Twentieth-century persuasion approaches are increasingly obsolete as stakeholders increase their voice, their resistance and their distrust: they prefer and demand information, as well as access to representing their own interests and expectations, before accepting to contribute or decrease their resilience to the organisation's objectives, licence to operate and overall sustainability.

Negotiation, conversation and dialogue may well mean different things to different cultures, but the bottom line is that political, religious and organisational leaderships become recognisably *effective* when and if they **listen** to stakeholder expectations before making decisions; the structural quality of those leaderships can be

identified in pursuing solutions that carefully balance often conflicting expectations and by implementing those solutions in the shortest possible period of time.

Public relations, as a social (and management) science that aims to develop effective relationships with an organisation's stakeholders and to improve the quality of its decisions by accelerating the time of their implementation, is today a possible and positive answer to many (certainly not all) of our outstanding differences and dilemmas.

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The question I would like to discuss today -in recognising the amazingly disappointing failures of these recent attempts to cultural integration- is if these may be only the consequence of mistakes and of an overestimation of the power of *political correctness* and of a *public-visibility-oriented* approach to public relations.

Or, even more importantly, if we could not put together our knowledge and experiences in applying contemporary public relations to the cultural integration issue from all over the world to define very few agreeable **generic principles** (those global molecules that apply wherever, but only if and when inextricably integrated with **specific applications**) and public relations infrastructural systems of a specific territory : i.e.

- legal,
- economic,
- political,
- socio-cultural,
- active citizenship
- and, media characteristics that, in order for public relations to be effective, need to be always and equally inextricably associated, territory by territory, with the [generic principles](#).

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Recent globalisation trends, again, have accelerated human transition in the west from an industrial, to a post-industrial and (today at a global level) to a **network society** (Jan Van Dijk 1991 and Manuel Castells 1995).

Of course there is no doubt that society has always been based on many forms of relationship networks, but time and space had, so far, been major constraints.

Today, these two variables have been largely re-conceptualised and *the network society has established itself as the most widely-spread and global characteristic of contemporary life.*

Thus, organisations are rapidly rethinking their structural patterns, and the essence of their value to society very much relies on the quality of internal/external/boundary networks that are increasingly fuzzy.

The strategic planning and policy-making processes are no longer only material, nor are they only linear.

In the late Seventies, HBS professor Michael Porter developed the value chain model for successful strategic planning.

A good number of organisations around the world adopted this model, but they are now beginning to adapt to a new *network approach to value creation*, where the quality of relationships within each network and amongst the various networks, identifies the added value created by the organisation.

This also because today, contrary to when Porter developed the value chain, a good 70% of an organisation's material value is based on immaterial features.

However, the public relations' global body of knowledge has, for many years (Hon, Grunig, Bruning 1995), established that *the quality of a relationship may be assessed and evaluated* by investigating four principal indicators:

- commitment to the relationship
- trust in the relationship
- satisfaction in the relationship
- and, power balance in the relationship.

The role of public relations has therefore become central and topical.

So, to conclude my remarks, this is **a call** to all our more concerned global scholars and professionals to accelerate the already vibrant efforts of many from around the world to develop more descriptive and normative paradigms that may prove capable of better supporting the global growth of our profession, and *firstly* to identify and study those **generic principles and specific applications related to the [cultural integration issue](#).**