
Book review:

Hendrix, J.A. (2004). *Public relations cases*. (6th Ed.). Belmont, California: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.

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Understanding public relations through the examination of case studies has a long and honorable tradition, although some universities are now moving away from case studies as a discrete course and are moving more towards adopting a 'case study' approach.

But there are important teaching and learning processes which lie behind the formal analysis of case studies and Jerry Hendrix's classic book *Public Relations Cases* has played a leading role in developing and supporting this formal discipline.

Hendrix himself, who teaches at the American University in Washington DC, has long been a champion of the ROPE method of analysis – research, objectives, programming and evaluation – and his advocacy of this approach continues in this sixth edition of his master work.

The longevity of his thinking is evident in the fact that his underlying principles have remained consistent through the various versions of his book, while the cases to be studied have changed in varying degrees between different editions.

In this new edition all the case studies except one are completely new, and two are recent enough to involve different aspects of emergency public relations on September 11, 2001.

As with previous editions, the case studies are American and are mainly simple restatements of award-winning entries in the Public Relations Society of America Silver Anvil Award programme.

This approach has the obvious drawback that cases are 'presented' by those most likely to embellish in their own interests or, in the case of

consultants, in the interests of optimising results for their client.

This challenge is of course by no means unique to Hendrix, and can equally be seen for example in *The New Australian and New Zealand Public Relations Manual* (Candy Tymson, Peter Lazar and Richard Lazar, 2002) where the local studies are unabashedly attributed to the companies concerned.

Similarly, good numbers of self-analysed Australian case studies can be seen in the Golden Target Award entries published each year by the Public Relations Institute of Australia, and these too are used in many of our universities as a learning resource.

The alternative is case studies independently analysed and published in academic journals, although there is a sad lack of such material about Australian cases. A body of such material is being built up in resources such as the *Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal*, but the pace is disappointingly slow and as a result students have little choice but to rely on the award-entry and corporate-written material available in sources such as Hendrix.

Using such material in formal case study courses has an advantage in that it provides student analysts with easy opportunities to identify and comment on the more obvious examples of self-serving evaluation and conclusions. But such studies can provide other students with a rather distorted view of perceived best practice.

Given this shortcoming, Hendrix is still among the best of the best. Not only are his case studies well chosen and very relevant to modern practice

but, as in previous editions, they are selected to highlight key issues in different areas of public relations practice, such as media relations, community relations, integrated marketing communications, international public relations, and so on. And in addition, Hendrix provides very thorough selected readings against each of these categories.

Furthermore, the new edition is linked to the InfoTrac college edition online library, and comes with a free four-month subscription.

Hendrix has proved a very reliable text for teaching case studies as a discrete course, or a source for good case studies within specific areas of public relations, and his latest edition enhances this reputation.