

Parkinson, M.G., & Ekachai, D. (2006). *International and intercultural public relations: A campaign case approach*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education



Reviewed by: Kate Fitch

In a book review in a previous issue of *PRism*, Tony Jaques (2005) identified one of the main weaknesses of case studies: they tend to be produced by, or based on information supplied by, organisations or public relations consultancies with the express aim of showcasing their public relations efforts, often for the purposes of awards. This tends to mean that most case studies are presented as 'success stories'. This new book, *International and Intercultural Public Relations*, addresses this problem.

Parkinson and Ekachais book offers 19 case studies from a range of countries. Each study is written by a different author and is drawn from various sources which – in most cases – are outlined in the chapter opening. For example, Michael Parkinsons discussion of the protection of drug patents in Africa by large U.S. pharmaceutical companies is drawn wholly from public records without the co-operation of companies involved; Steve Mackeys Australian study on community resistance to a biosolids plant is based on a series of interviews with key players; and Virginia Kreimeyers exploration of internal communication with an international peacekeeping force in the post-war Balkans is developed out of her personal experience.

The case studies tend to be detailed and would probably be more suitable for a higher level public relations student or practitioner. They make fascinating reading, in part because they offer a critical evaluation of public relations campaigns and include the 'failures' as well as the successes. They go some way to conveying the sheer complexity and challenges of communicating in the modern, globalised world. These are not studies of simple media relations campaigns, or of isolated communication problems. For instance, Parkinsons study of pharmaceutical companies clearly articulates the ethical dilemma for a company which invests heavily in pharmaceutical research precisely with the aim of creating profits; however, maintaining profits may mean the lifesaving medications remain out of reach of the worlds poorest citizens.

The case studies encompass diverse campaigns such as increasing breast cancer awareness in the Philippines, finding ways to engage Columbian coffee growers in dialogue, and the difficulties in, and resistance to, establishing an English language version of the Aljazeera website. It is difficult to categorise these studies; the preface offers a traditional grouping which includes internal relations, community relations, media relations, and lobbying or governmental public relations and so on. But this does little to capture the breadth and range of the cases on offer: Burson-Marstellers depression awareness campaign in Thailand, the Bhopal Carbide disaster, the international campaign to ban landmines, a health campaign in Brazil designed to improve the survival rate of children with cancer, and Nikes attempts to salvage its corporate reputation. The complexity of each case, and the emphasis on the multiple stakeholders, are the books strengths.

Six early chapters discuss ROSTE (yet another acronym, but a useful one: research, objectives, strategies, tactics and evaluation - this is the structuring device for each case study) as well as intercultural and international public relations. At times, these introductory chapters appear to address U.S. practitioners and/or students rather than a wider international audience (see for instance the guide for U.S. practitioners on dealing with foreign reporters on p. 93-4, or comments comparing aspects of 'our (i.e. U.S.) culture and other cultures on p. 81). Although from culturally diverse backgrounds, the contributors are nearly all academics at universities in the U.S.

Mostly, the authors call for sensitivity towards the diverse cultures of clients and target publics, and an awareness of the limitations of the practitioners own culture. I would like to see a more critical discussion of the complex relationship between culture and public relations and/or communication, particularly in a book with this title. The verdict: I like the case studies in *International and Intercultural Public Relations* but have reservations about setting it as a textbook for my Australian, Singaporean, and Malaysian public relations students. However, I would recommend it as supplementary reading for a course on campaign management or international public relations.

**Purchase information:** This book is available from all good booksellers, or can be purchased direct from Pearson Education at <http://www.pearsoned.co.nz>

**About the reviewer:**

*Kate Fitch lectures in mass communication and public relations at Murdoch University, Western Australia. Her research interests include ethical communication, media relations, and the links between public relations theory and ideas about community and democracy. She has more than ten years' industry experience, and worked as a*

*PR consultant specialising in the arts and community sectors. Kate has a first class Honours degree and is a member of PRIA.*