

Johnston, J., & Zawawi, C. (Eds.) (2009). *Public relations: Theory and practice* (3rd ed.) Sydney, Australia: Allen & Unwin.

Chia, J., & Synnott, G. (Eds.) (2009). *An introduction to public relations: From theory to practice*. Melbourne, Australia: Oxford University Press.

Reviewed by: [Donald Alexander](#)

Academics, practitioners and undergraduate students in Australia have been fortunate since 2000 to have Jane Johnston and Clara Zawawi's *Public Relations Theory and Practice* (Allen & Unwin) as a core text, now in its 2009 third edition. Not only is it written by experienced professionals with strong academic backgrounds, but the case studies are relevant to public relations practice in Australia. Some of the contributors also appear in the newest addition to the bookshelf, *An Introduction to Public Relations*, edited by Joy Chia and Gae Synnott, who are as equally respected in the academic world as the authors of the earlier text, and this addition to the literature also covers Australian and New Zealand academic research and public relations practice.

It was a very difficult task to review both texts as they cover very similar ground, and I have used Johnston and Zawawi as the core text for the Public Relations and Organisational Communication degree at Charles Sturt University for the past five years. So the Chia and Synnott text (Oxford University Press) was subjected to a very detailed analysis.

One area where the Chia and Synnott book delivers more in-depth information is in the impact of technology on public relations practice and also the development of global trends on public relations with in-depth accounts of how cultural values and beliefs influence practice, especially in Asia. Also the editors and all contributors in this book use a wider range of academic journals and texts as an authoritative foundation for their discussions, which is lacking in the Johnston and Zawawi book. This makes the newest addition to the academic library a stronger reference source.

The similarities between the books are in the chapters on theory (the Chia and Synnott book cites researchers such as L'Etang, Cheney, McKie, Motion and Zorn, many of whom have an Australasian perspective, making the information very relevant to academics and students on both sides of the Tasman; Steve Mackey has updated his Johnston and Zawawi chapter with material on structuration, process communication and stakeholder theory), ethics (both take a very similar approach, except Elspeth Tilley in Chia and Synnott takes the subject deeper and provides many useful reflect and discuss points that take the reader through ethical issues and case studies from the region), research (both texts emphasise the importance of a mindset that is research-focussed), and strategy (media relations, issues-crisis and organisational communication). Both publications also include detailed discussions on theory in relation to their respective research chapters which indicate how sophisticated the study and practice of public relations has become.

The Johnston and Zawawi book, unlike its competitor, has specific chapters on the legal environment (a valuable reference on dealing with regulatory and privacy); a chapter on

sponsorship and event management (a growing field of employment and also the focus of new degree subjects in many university courses); government relations (a subject that is a challenging career option) and public relations in the third sector, another growing area of expertise that is developing its own field of practice. The government relations chapter by Stephen Stockwell has a very thorough assessment of the role of political media minders, government information officers, lobbying and the development of campaign strategies.

The Chia and Synnott text makes a substantial contribution to the literature with chapters on new media and Asian public relations management. The Kate Fitch chapter on new media correctly identifies the major transformation occurring in the field through the development of new technologies. The radical shift from practitioners being able to manage publics and the media, to everyone being a publisher, a critic and a relationship manager is thoroughly discussed. Research by Anne Gregory (Leeds Metropolitan University) into the use of technology in public relations refers to communication management developments where the power balance between organisations and publics is creating a whole new area of research and practice. Fitch strongly argues for the need for practitioners to understand these changes and to be able to grow and develop their understanding of their impact on practice (and in the face of a lot of research in New Zealand and Europe that internet and social media use is not highly developed, is something of a worry). Fitch covers the topic thoroughly and provides a range of case studies that highlight the damage that poor monitoring of social media sites can create and she also covers the role of online ethics, astroturfing, blogging, podcasting and the value of corporate sites to develop dialogues with customers, suppliers, the media and communities.

Another Chia and Synnott contributor is Richard Stanton, who leads a detailed discussion of the principles required to have an understanding of public relations practice in the rapidly developing countries of Hong Kong, Singapore, Vietnam, Malaysia, Laos, Japan, China, Taiwan, Indonesia, South Korea and Japan. He quotes Sriramesh (2004) about the need to have a multicultural perspective when looking at the region and also argues that culture, ideology, politics and the economy need to be taken into account when developing regional public communication strategies. A country by country summary is also provided that will assist in teaching and practice development for academics and practitioners from Australia and New Zealand.

One area that both books lack depth is in monitoring and evaluation and while both have chapters that adequately cover research, there is little coverage of the important aspect of how to evaluate all forms of the public relations process. Students, both at the undergraduate and postgraduate level, would have to use the referencing section of the research chapters of both books to find any more detail of evaluation practice.

Overall both books cover the basics of public relations practice thoroughly and they provide sufficient detail for undergraduate students to understand what underpins research oriented and ethical practice. Both are worthy contenders for space on an academics bookshelf.

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and course coordinator for the undergraduate Public Relations and Organisational Communication degree. Donald holds a law degree from the University of Otago (1971) and an MA (Communication-Organisational Communication) from CSU (awarded in 1997). He is currently enrolled in the CSU PhD programme where he is researching leadership communication.

Prior to CSU Donald was at Central Queensland University, where he was also coordinator of the Public Relations and Organisational Communication degree and sub-dean for the Faculty of Informatics and Communication at Mackay. While at CQU he was responsible for obtaining PRIA accreditation for the CQU undergraduate degree. Donald has worked at senior management levels for AMP, American Express, Nissan Motor Company, Australian Industry Group and Comalco, and also was principal of two consultancies, Network Communication in Melbourne and Pacific Strategies in Sydney. He has also been a journalist for a morning newspaper in Christchurch, was editor of a bi-weekly in Alexandra and a radio and television reporter in Dunedin.