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# Introduction to configuring intelligences for 21C public relations

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## ABSTRACT

The Call for Papers (CFP) for the Barcelona International PR Conference and for this special issue claimed that many in public relations “acknowledge the present as a time of rapid change, turbulence, and even transformation.” Then, citing Howard Gardner’s work on multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983) and minds for the future (Gardner, 2008), the CFP asked for contributions exploring “what configurations of knowledge might best prepare the field to meet these challenges.” In responding to the call, the articles that follow range across different disciplines, cover different times and spaces, and include collisions as well as collaborations. In the process they confirm, even in intelligence controversies, the constitutive nature of communication and they put forward ideas with implications for practice as well as theory.

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## 1. Introduction and intelligences

These special issue articles begin and end with authors not only configuring intelligences but including outcomes for practice, pedagogy, and problem solving. Appropriately, given the iconoclastic nature of many Barcelona conference participants, the first of the special issue articles opens with a direct challenge to the whole project. Jim Macnamara’s “Multiple Intelligences and Minds as Attributes to Reconfigure PR: A Critical Analysis” takes on board the CFP’s promotion of Gardner’s (1983) work on intelligences but also “takes it on” in the sense of critiquing it conceptually and discursively. In considering what he terms the “alleged discovery of multiple intelligences,” Macnamara asks “why not simply call them abilities rather than refer to them as new types of intelligence?” since the “descriptions of each of Gardner’s eight intelligences explicitly refer to skills, capacities and potential. . . , it can be legitimately argued that they are applications of human intelligence as described in other definitions – not a particular form of intelligence.”

Macnamara reinforces the challenge in his question in summarizing the associated views of Eysenck and other supporters of traditional IQ as the sole intelligence and in dismissing Gardner and other plural intelligences writers for having no adequate categorization and/or empirical evidence and therefore no valid claim to use the plural. With typically engaging and forceful prose, Macnamara buttresses this case by associating the intelligences plural writers with Briers’ (2012) *Psychobabble: Exploding the Myths of the Self-help Generation* and marketing hype. Nevertheless, while presenting the IQ side of the debate, Macnamara points out an associated theoretical absence in PR:

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While public relations theory building has recognized many elements of context (e.g., power) and contextualizing theories such as framing, priming, and orientation, it has curiously largely ignored one fundamentally important theory related to where one stands socially, culturally, politically, economically, and ideologically in making assessments, undertaking learning, and developing and applying skills.

Although careful not to call it an intelligence, Macnamara helpfully revives and repurposes “standpoint theory” to engage with this omission and to argue “that the central tenets of standpoint theory. . . can usefully inform the intelligence/s (ways of thinking) and mindfulness applied in public relations” since “all learning, thinking, reasoning, and one’s ability to perceive, feel, empathize, and understand others are determined by one’s standpoint.”

Macnamara ends in two ways. The first outlines a substantial reconfiguration emerging in businesses through growing pressures on them to apply “the collective intelligence of their employees and customers” with associated needs “to operate as a ‘social business.’” The second concludes that standpoint-influenced theories and concepts “defy dismissal as Leftist philosophy and point to the future of organization-public relations and communication in the 21st century.”

## 2. From standpoint theory to futures intelligence and competitive intelligence

In contrast to Macnamara’s approach, Juliet Roper’s “Futures Intelligence: Applying Gardner to Public Relations,” concentrates not on contesting Gardner’s ideas but on applying, extending, and synthesizing them into what she calls “Futures Intelligence.” Accepting that [Gardner’s \(2008\)](#) five minds can be taught, Roper identifies opportunities to teach them to Business Schools in general and to public relations students in particular. One of her key questions is how do Gardner’s concepts “feature in our teaching of public relations students, most of whom will enter the business world but are frequently trained in communication or journalism faculty and/or enrolled in narrowly focused programs?”

Roper also draws from the common view in futures and sustainability thinking that if you do not create your own future, you’ll be condemned to live in someone else’s. From this perspective, Roper states that “If a barrier to teaching public relations differently is an inability to imagine a world where current ways of doing business will not be possible, and certainly not legitimate.” She addresses this by proposing that “futures intelligence,” can be built from Gardner’s minds and, by “adding a futurist dimension, may well provide a platform for change.” More specifically, she calls for more widespread use of scenario planning as part of this process and illustrates the gains in education from her classroom experiences. These align with her belief that not only do we “have a responsibility to do what we can to equip future leaders – in business or in any other field – for an increasingly dynamic and uncertain world” but we “also have a responsibility to help these leaders – our students – to critically envision what sort of world they want for their own future and for that of their children.”

Roper concludes that in “practical terms for public relations, in developing futures intelligence we are also creating a future for the industry that is central to organizational strategic planning” and by thus “developing futures intelligence based on Gardner’s disciplined, synthesizing, creating, respectful and ethical minds with the addition of futurist perspectives we provide tomorrow’s public relations practitioners with the critical tools necessary for building a sustainable industry and society.”

The article that follows Roper’s article, Rubén Arcos “Public Relations Strategic Intelligence: Intelligence Analysis, Communication and Influence,” is also forward-looking albeit with a more short term outlook. In addition, it has a more institutional approach focused around interdisciplinary clusters in ways appropriate to Arcos’ position in the Rey Juan Carlos University’s Centre for Intelligence Services and Democratic Systems in Madrid. Arcos’ article is also one of the most business oriented pieces in the special issue as he sets PR alongside other processes in organizations.

Arcos conceptualizes intelligence as the “corporate function and management process consisting of the legal and ethical systematic collection, analysis, interpretation and timely communication of relevant information to internal clients and other intelligence consumers for facilitating their decision making processes.” He goes on to explore how it can contribute to the practice of PR and strategic communication “by enabling a superior relationships management capability through information and analysis that might result in a competitive advantage.” He cites [Fleisher’s \(1999\)](#) allied idea of “Public Policy Competitive Intelligence (PPCI) as a type of competitive intelligence activity that develops actionable intelligence about the public policy environment that could affect the competitive position of a firm (p. 27), and that provides early warning of threats and opportunities emerging from the global public policy environment, and analyzes how they will affect the achievement of a company’s strategy” (p. 24).

Not content with just defining his concept, Arcos circles around different senses of intelligence in different contexts and disciplines. Using this approach he sets up lots of comparisons and contrasts between business methods – it is unusual to see references in public relations to Porter’s famous five forces but rare indeed to add “Baron’s Four-I’s framework, [([Baron, 1995](#)) and] Bach and Allen’s (IA)<sup>3</sup> framework [([Bach & Allen, 2010](#)) to the mix” and tabulating them to make the relationships clear.

Arcos argues for PR Intelligence to become a component of competitive intelligence and sees particular value in moving away from issues management as it is a more loaded term than intelligence. At points, his work overlaps with Roper especially as he concludes that “Stakeholder analysis, issue analysis, Porter’s Five Forces industry analysis, or STEEP/environmental analysis constitutes a part of the analytic frameworks and techniques that are used in Competitive Intelligence (see [Fleisher & Bensoussan, 2003](#))” and selects specific areas for synergies – “structured analysis, foresight, estimative intelligence and

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