Practitioner-leaders' representation of roles: The Melbourne Mandate

Anne Gregory *

Centre for Public Relations Studies, Leeds Business School, Leeds Metropolitan University, 304, The Rosebowl, Portland Gate, Leeds Metropolitan University LS1 3HB, United Kingdom

A B S T R A C T

This paper critically examines the Melbourne Mandate (Global Alliance, 2012), an advocacy platform developed by the Global Alliance (GA), the umbrella organisation representing 67 professional associations and 160,000 practitioners worldwide. The Mandate contains a proposition on how public relations professionals and professional bodies might better represent and promote their roles.

The Mandate was created following a five-stage iterative process: first, a brainstorming session by GA Board members; second, a global survey of leaders of professional bodies identifying their opinions on issues requiring advocacy with key stakeholders such as business leaders, politicians, journalists and the public. Analysis of the 280 responses led to stage three, a three-strand 'prospectus' for discussion by the global public relations community. This led fourthly, to research and discussion by three global groups co-led by an academic and a practitioner drawn from the GA Board and from the pool of recognised leaders in the profession. These groups developed the three strands producing a draft Mandate which was then debated online before being discussed, in stage five, by 800 practitioners and academics attending the World Public Relations Forum in Melbourne, Australia in November 2012. Using face-to-face interactions, additional online observations, an on-site, online application and hard copy comments, the Mandate was refined and finalised in Melbourne.

The Mandate identifies three critical roles for professionals: defining organisational character and values; building a culture of listening and engagement; and the fulfilment of responsibility in all its dimensions. The results offer an interesting representation of roles which can be seen as essentially normative, but which, examples demonstrated, are being enacted by some leading practitioners.

The paper critically examines whether the Mandate furthers the GA's declared mission to advance the profession, and goes on to analyse both the process by which it was generated and the content. Among other topics the paper discusses whether the Melbourne Mandate could be proposed as a genuine attempt to capture the best representations of the practice and promote these for the benefit of the profession globally. Alternatively, it could be regarded as largely a distillation of the ambitions of the professions' elite since the process was led by and largely shaped by them. It could also be argued as a further attempt at imposing western norms on a profession whose non-western members are under-represented in such initiatives (Gregory & Halff, 2013). The paper concludes with observations on the value of such initiatives.

© 2014 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

* Tel.: +44 01138127520/7756013826.
E-mail address: a.gregory@leedsmet.ac.uk

1. Introduction

There has been a large amount written on roles in the public relations literature reflecting scholarship on the topic from various parts of the world. For example, there is the often quoted work of Broom (Broom, 1982; Broom & Smith, 1979) who developed a typology consisting of four roles – expert prescriber, communication facilitator, problem-solving process facilitator and communication technician. Dozier (1992) reduced these four-roles into a parsimonious two-role typology which is now widely quoted in research, namely, the communication manager and the communication technician.

Research in Europe (van Ruler, Vercic, Butschi & Flodin, 2004) pointed to four characteristics of the practice in Europe which defines the contribution that professionals make to organisations. *Reflective*: analysing changing standards, values and standpoints in society in order to adjust these attributes in the organisation accordingly. *Managerial*: developing plans to communicate and maintain relationships with public groups. *Operational*: preparing the means of communication for the organisation, and *educational*: helping all members of the organisation to become communicatively competent.

Findings of empirical work undertaken in the UK and US reported by Moss and Green (2001), DeSanto and Moss (2004) and Moss, Newman and DeSanto (2005) identified five elements to the communication manager role; four relate to managerial responsibility: monitor and evaluator; key policy and strategy advisor; trouble shooter/problem-solver; and issues management expert. There was also a technical aspect labelled communication technician.

Scandinavian researchers (Johansson & Ottestig, 2011) discovered three key roles for senior communication executives. The first is as organisational leader who has responsibility with other senior managers for all strategic decisions. Second, the communication leader whose responsibility covers communication strategy and issues, and finally the communication manager who is responsible for communication, but is not a member of the senior management group.

There has been less reporting of practitioner-led initiatives on roles in the literature, although there has been a great deal of work done by for example, professional bodies to identify the knowledge and skills required by practitioners and on developing curricula standards that lead to them approving academic courses (for example, Canadian Public Relations Society (CPRS), 2011; Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR), 2006; Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), 1993, 1999, 2006). There have also been papers published by some practitioner-led organisations such as the Arthur W. Page Society (2007, 2012) to frame the developing role of professionals in response to changes in the business and communication environment.

This paper seeks to remedy the gap in practitioner contributions to the literature further by describing and critically examining the Melbourne Mandate (Global Alliance, 2012), an international, collaborative project developed by the Global Alliance which proposes three ways in which public relations professionals and professional bodies might represent and promote their role. The paper examines whether the Mandate furthers the GA's declared mission to advance the profession and goes on to analyse both the process by which it was generated and the content. Among other topics it discusses whether the Melbourne Mandate can be seen as a genuine attempt to capture and articulate the best actual representations of the practice and to promote these for the benefit of the profession, which is part of Global Alliance's mission. Alternatively it could be regarded as largely a distillation of the ambitions of the professions' elite since the process was led and shaped mainly by them. It could also be argued as a further, albeit well-intentioned, example of western norms being declared on behalf of a global profession whose non-western members are under-represented in such initiatives (Gregory & Halff, 2013). The paper concludes with observations on the value of such initiatives.

2. Context

Before going into the detail of the Melbourne Mandate, it is important to give some brief details about the organisation that generated it, and a previous project which set the precedent for how it was produced and which was the platform upon which it was built.

The Global Alliance (GA) was formed in 2000 (Valin, Gregory & Likely, 2013) following discussions by national professional bodies including the public relations associations and institutes of America, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, Kenya, Mexico, South Africa, Sweden, the then Yugoslavia and the UK, and two international associations that represent individuals around the world: the International Association of Business Communicators and International Public Relations Association. It is now a global confederation representing 67 professional associations and 160,000 practitioners worldwide. GA's declared purpose is to advance the profession through its four-part mission (GA, 2013) which is:

- to unify the public relations profession,
- to raise professional standards all over the world,
- to share knowledge for the benefit of members,
- to be the global voice for public relations in the public interest.

Every two years since its inception GA has held a World Public Relations Forum in various places including Rome, Cape Town, Brasilia and in 2010, Stockholm. In Stockholm, at the instigation of one of its past Chairs, Toni Muzi Falconi, a legacy document called the Stockholm Accords was produced and endorsed by public relations leaders from 32 countries. The Stockholm Accords are a set of principles on the role of public relations in organisational governance and management, the operational value of public relations programmes for internal and external publics, and on the overall value of public relations