

# Introduction: Critical Thinking and Interdisciplinary Perspectives

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## ***BEFORE YOU READ A SINGLE WORD...***

Take a pen and write down your response to the following:

- What should a public relations text do and why?
- What do you want to learn?
- How do you want to change?
- What would you like to change about the world?
- Why are you interested in public relations?

Keep your answers somewhere safe. (You could set them up as a blog.) Do not change them. But do add to them or record any changes in perspective as this happens. This is a form of *research diary* in which you keep reflections and personal observations and record change. Here you are researching and observing yourself!

### **Key concepts**

Assumptions

Functionalism

Critical theory

Interdisciplinary

Critical thinking

Paradigm

Dominant paradigm

Reflexivity

### **What's this book about and where is it coming from?**

This is a textbook with a twist! It aims to achieve two objectives: to introduce key concepts in public relations using a wide range of interdisciplinary sources and to stimulate reflexive and critical thinking which can inform academic and professional work in the field.

The book was inspired by the desire to share some alternative perspectives with student readers and by the ambition to write a text which not only challenged assumptions, but showed how and why it is important for public relations practitioners to do so. Challenging received truths has long been seen as important to public relations practitioners in the workplace. See Box 1.1 for examples.

#### **Box 1.1 Practitioners' perspectives on challenging norms**

resourceful, direct and prepared to challenge the status quo (Peter Brooker, *PR Week*, 30 June 2006) a driving force, not afraid to challenge change (James Lundie, *PR Week*, 30 June 2006)

Energy, presence, sensibility, a broad orientation, and, most of all, 'guts' is what a practitioner needs to succeed. (Top head-hunter from the Netherlands) (van Ruler, 2005: 159–173)

What I look for [when I'm recruiting] is: have they got critical abilities? Have they got a critical mind? Are they persuasive in writing and oral communication? Can they bring people along with them? Thirdly, integrity, and here I look for evidence that they're likely to have personal courage – that is to take their hat off the peg and to stand up and talk for themselves, or get the hell out of it – have they got real courage? (Interview, senior practitioner, 1998)

Part of my job here is if there are problems of morale or if people, however senior, are not doing their jobs particularly well, for example if a board director doesn't seem to be communicating and inspiring, then it's up to me to tell the very senior management that I'm not actively happy with this. That's often quite difficult but someone has to do it because organizations are constantly changing organisms and if they don't understand what's driving change, whether it's good or bad – they won't go forward. (Interview, senior practitioner, 1998)

A key ideal for public relations consultants is that if asked to work on an account of which they did not approve, they should act according to their ethical principles and leave. Why is this so important for public relations? One might suggest that precisely because PR as an occupation has been critiqued by the British media since the 1950s, and apparently has a poor reputation in the UK, it

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is all the more important for individual practitioners publicly to espouse integrity and appear as authentic and truthful as possible in order to establish trust.

**Book aims**

By the end of this book readers should be able to:

- describe, discuss and critique theoretical and applied (practical) approaches to public relations at campaign, societal and global levels
- apply the key theoretical concepts that are required to construct and deconstruct public relations practice
- understand the reasons for the emergence and growth of public relations in a variety of cultural contexts
- understand how public relations has emerged as a discipline, its conceptual roots and main paradigms
- apply critical thinking to concepts and cases

**Does this book have an agenda?**

Yes, this book is written to encourage you to explore diverse perspectives and to reflect critically on your own opinions. This book is also written from a particular point of view: it is critical, and written within the European context from the periphery of Great Britain (Scotland). As with my other articles and books, it has been written partly in response to those from the dominant paradigm. In this book I explain something of that debate and how academics in public relations approach the subject from different perspectives. I write within the critical tradition and this approach is explained later in this opening chapter. As you encounter the various arguments and read other books alongside this one, you should start to develop a sense of your own opinions, where you sit in relation to debates and why.

**CHAPTER AIMS**

On completion of this chapter you will be able to:

- understand the benefits of 'critical thinking' and be able to apply the concept to texts and case studies
- define critical theory
- understand and explain the concept of 'paradigm'
- notice assumptions that exist in writing and arguments in texts or broadcast media
- explain why critical thinking is important in public relations

## Chapter contents

The chapter begins by defining critical thinking and critical theory before explaining how to develop critical thinking skills. This is followed by a short reflection on the nature of public relations as an academic subject and questions that are raised as to its status. The notion of 'paradigm' is then introduced in the context of public relations concepts and research, and subsequently linked to the notion of assumptions that underpin arguments and the ways in which we can uncover these so as to better determine the motivation that lies behind a piece of communication, whether academic, professional or journalistic.

### Critical thinking

There are at least two rather different ways of conceiving **critical thinking**. The first is to define such work as emanating from critical theory, which emerged in the 1920s from Western Marxism which highlighted mal-distribution of power and sought to change society. Work in this tradition:

- challenges existing assumptions
- analyzes and critiques policy or practice
- alters boundaries of or between fields and thus changes the agenda by introducing new topics or approaches or ways of thinking about a field

**Critical theory (CT)** particularly focuses on power, its distribution and elucidating the structures and processes which limit human potential. Critical theorists tend to write with a view to highlighting unfair practices in order to change society (L'Etang, 2005).

Another way of thinking about critical approaches is in terms of developing intellectual skills to tackle such work. Critical work assesses ideas and arguments, working through the pros and cons. It is critical, but not necessarily negative – better to think of it as the surgeon's rather than the assassin's knife.

But how should one start? Where to begin? In fact a good start is to question our own beliefs and motivations and being clear about our own assumptions and biases. Only then are we in a position to ask:

- Does this author present their view as one of several options, as factual information or as morally right?
- Is the author fair or do they reveal a bias? If they reveals a bias, are they open about this and explain their reasoning for this position? (Ruggiero, 1996b: 6)
- How does this relate to my own views – how can I or should I accommodate this new information? (Paul and Elder, 2004: 1)

## Developing critical thinking skills for reading and writing

Drawing on Paul and Elder (2004) and Cottrell (2005), it is useful to ask:

- Is the purpose clear?
- What is the scope of the main and subsidiary questions (aim and objectives)?
- What assumptions are made – are they implicit or explicit?
- What sorts of arguments are used and how much evidence is presented with them?
- Are alternative views presented or is a reason stated for their exclusion? (Cottrell, 2005)

Critical thinking analyzes arguments and 'unpicks' concepts. It often looks at 'the other side of the coin' or plays 'devil's advocate' to test an argument. Sometimes it will take a minority or unpopular view, criticising those in power or exposing unfair practice.

In short, critical thinking demands:

- a healthy scepticism
- patience to work through someone else's argument
- being open-minded
- being cautious with personal emotional responses such as anger, frustration and anxiety
- juggling a range of ideas for purposes of comparison
- supporting arguments with evidence and experiences from 'the real world'.

## Interdisciplinary perspectives

You, as a PR student, may have been asked by family or friends: 'How can you study that? It's not a proper subject – why don't you study psychology or sociology?'

Such questions challenge the notion of public relations as a legitimate subject to study. Yet subjects such as psychology and sociology started in the same way, borrowing concepts from other areas to build new disciplines. For example, psychology evolved in the nineteenth century from the disciplines of ethology, physics, statistics and philosophy. And sociology emerged as a 'scientific study of collective human behaviour', the consequence of nineteenth-century philosophers, faced with the massive upheaval of the Industrial Revolution, asking questions about how society evolved (Ruggiero, 1996: 1). Key ideas which emerged to explain developments included: natural progression; survival of the fittest; conflict; and consensus. These assumptions also influence the way that different historians explain the emergence of public relations in various cultures. So in a way, public relations can be seen as a form of sociology even though *sociology of public relations* is a term barely heard. (Pieccka, 2006c: 328–329)

In the 1960s, sociology was seen as a trendy, radical and a rather subversive discipline that suggested particular political allegiances. Now it is established as part of the academic elite and has spawned other sub-disciplines and fields such as *media studies* and *sociology of the professions* (something to which I'll return later). So disciplines emerge and develop and atrophy and die over time according to the current *zeitgeist* and fashions of the day. These processes may be influenced by funding and resources, so it is not just a question of the best ideas lasting, but of national policy and educational politics in funding councils and universities. Those in established disciplines do not want to see resources draining away into newer areas. Academic disciplines operate as a system of hierarchies (a class system in effect). They distinguish themselves partly through the efforts of individual academics who may develop 'guru' status either as 'media dons' or as behind-the-scenes experts, called upon to advise outside bodies such as think tanks or governmental committees. For such work they are rewarded by membership of renowned societies such as the Royal Society of Arts. Academic disciplines are also judged by the production and quality of journals in relation to those in more traditional fields (and there is a distinct pecking order!) and internally to each discipline. There is nothing particularly 'natural' about current relationships between disciplines: they are arbitrary and based on power. Therefore, the relationship between disciplines is both intellectual and political. In inter-disciplinary work, concepts are borrowed and shared between related disciplines to broaden understanding and to develop theory. Disciplines may be seen as families sharing gene pools. Inter-disciplinary work draws on a mixture of sources, for example, PR has drawn on psychological concepts (persuasion) and methods, ethical concepts (from moral philosophy), and sociological concepts (power and gender). It is also possible to draw together different disciplines (tourism, religious studies, sports studies) in a creative way to bring about new understandings on all sides. Inter-disciplinary thinking draws upon a wide range of subjects to try and understand a problem. It is central to public relations education and to its practitioners who need to engage with multiple interested parties, perspectives and relationships.

### **Box 1.2 Academic journals publishing articles on public relations**

#### **Specialist journals**

*Journal of Public Relations Research* ([www.erlbaum.com/](http://www.erlbaum.com/))

*International Journal of Strategic Communication* ([www.erlbaum.com/](http://www.erlbaum.com/))

*Public Relations Review* ([www.elsevier.com/](http://www.elsevier.com/))

*Corporate Communications: an International Journal* ([www.emeraldinsight.com/ccji.htm](http://www.emeraldinsight.com/ccji.htm))

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*Journal of Communication Management* ([www.emeraldinsight.com/ccji.htm](http://www.emeraldinsight.com/ccji.htm))  
*PRism* ([praxis.massey.ac.nz/prism\\_on-line\\_journal.html](http://praxis.massey.ac.nz/prism_on-line_journal.html))

**Non-specialist journals publishing articles on public relations**

*Media, Culture & Society* ([msc.sagepub.com](http://msc.sagepub.com))  
*European Journal of Communication* ([ejc.sagepub.com](http://ejc.sagepub.com))  
*Australian Journal of Communication* ([www.anzca.net/](http://www.anzca.net/))  
*Asian Journal of Communication* ([www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles](http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles))  
*British Journalism Review* ([www.bjr.org.uk](http://www.bjr.org.uk))  
*Journalism Studies* ([www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles](http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles))

At present public relations is an emergent discipline with porous boundaries to a range of other disciplines: marketing, management, organization studies, communications, journalism, media studies. All of these have their own journals, paradigms, concepts, theories, 'gurus' – and a sense of what it means to do good work in the field.

Disciplines have boundaries although these are often subject to negotiation and realignment. Throughout this text, key disciplines of importance for public relations are highlighted in 'Discipline boxes' (but nothing to do with punishment!).

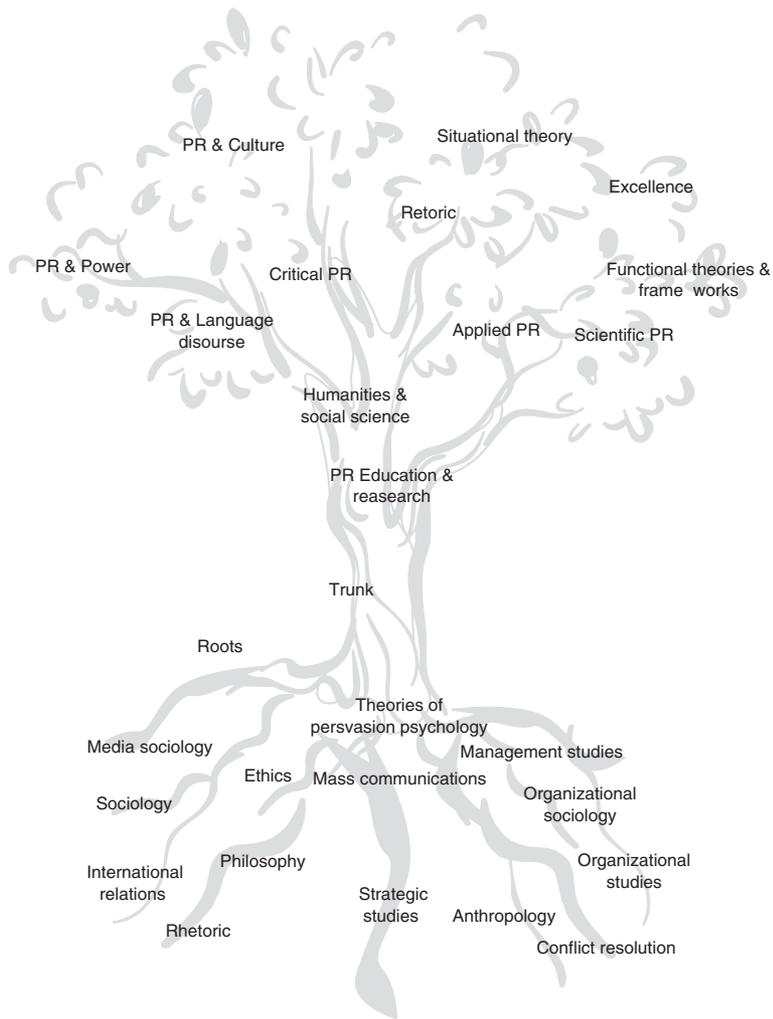
It is because public relations cuts across these disciplines that it is important to read beyond public relations books and journals and think more broadly about problems. For example, can we really think properly about 'strategy' without reading some sources in *strategic studies*, the host field? Can we talk about 'persuasion' without reading *psychology* and *political science*? Can we learn about techniques of media relations without studying research into media processes and considering the role of media in society (*sociology of the media* or *media sociology*)? There is a danger that public relations academics and students can be too introspective or 'navel-gazing', working convergently within rigid railway grooves rather than wandering freely and creatively in search of useful insights. As Curtin and Gaither pointed out, there's much for public relations to learn about itself by stepping outside of comfort zones and its traditional knowledge base, provided largely by Western scholars and global public relations enterprises (Curtin and Gaither, 2007: 261).

Thinking divergently can help our creativity (a facility much prized in public relations) by forcing the pathways in our brains to work in unusual ways. Working in different areas is challenging, hard but rewarding. Public relations students need to be curious and intellectually brave, not just clever!

Public relations has a potentially complicated family tree and one version of this is depicted in Figure 1.1.

Studying public relations usually means picking up a completely new subject. This can be scary as one needs to adapt to a new discipline's language and

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**Figure 1.1** PR's family tree

conventions, which may be quite different from the subjects in which we have first been educated (either at school or at first degree level). If the first subject degree is communications or marketing, there is less work to be done (though you may have to work harder to challenge your assumptions). But if the first degree is science or maths or engineering, it is much harder – it can take some weeks to adapt from the particular rigour and ways of working in formal science to the apparently (and only apparently) 'wishy-washy' approach in social science. Conversely, those from

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humanities (languages, history) may find the social science emphasis on spelling out 'methodology' in articles completely unnecessary if not alien. In my own case (I studied for an MSc in Public Relations in 1988/1989) I had a background in history (BA American and English history; MA Commonwealth history) and remember struggling with some management terminology (especially 'models'). While I was used to narrative being presented in a discursive linear fashion, I was unused to breaking down workaday actions into boxes and arrows.

This shows that different disciplines inculcate their own ways of thinking and seeing the world (paradigms) as well as introducing different (not better or worse, just different) points of view. We are therefore comfortable in one intellectual space (the familiar) and out of our comfort zones elsewhere. It is perhaps more positive to think of ways in which we can explore our 'development zone', where we can achieve intellectual growth and broader perspectives by listening and understanding views that are not our own. This applies as much to public relations practice as it does to academic debate (and life).

**What is a paradigm?**

A **paradigm** is a worldview that frames and influences our approach to everything we see. It is like a lens which may be tinted light brown or blue. In some ways it is a sense-making tool which enables us to interpret information. Examples of paradigms include vegetarianism, astrology, capitalism, Marxism, fascism, traditional religious systems, new religious movements, sects, feminism, ethnicities, qualitative research paradigm, quantitative research paradigm. A paradigm comprises taken-for-granted values, assumptions and approach to the world. A paradigm in the academic context will be apparent by reference to the same names or concepts which will be presented as basic knowledge of a field, that does not require to be explained in detail each time or defended.

**'The dominant paradigm'**

Within a specific discipline the **dominant paradigm** is that which is the most popular or majority approach to the subject. The dominant paradigm in a field comprises the framework and methodologies that guide most research in the field and which are regarded as the most important ideas. Ultimately these ideas become ingrained into a set of formal beliefs about what the discipline stands for. The dominant paradigm is supported by sets of assumptions or taken-for-granted beliefs, which may lead to blinkered thinking. Even if there are different perspectives, they are still likely to refer extensively to the dominant ideas as a reference point or as a starting point for disagreement. Thus alternative paradigms define themselves in relation to the dominant paradigm. The dominant paradigm shapes debates to such an extent that other points of view are drowned out or not heard. What is wrong

with this? Well, as Magda Pieczka rather famously remarked in her critique of the use of systems theory and functionalism in public relations:

Well, what is wrong with the Ten Commandments? Only that they make perfect and profound sense to the converted, but appear problematic to those who operate outside them. ... There is nothing wrong with choosing one [set of] views over another, as long as it is clear that as a result of the choice certain questions do not get asked. These might be questions about power and knowledge or power and language; or they might be questions about the position of the public relations practitioners and researchers, within the scheme of things: is knowledge independent of the one who knows? Could one not see society as organized not around consensus, but struggle. (Pieczka, 1996b: 154, 156; Pieczka, 2006c: 355)

The dominant paradigm has focussed on functional issues such as effectiveness, excellent, methods, evaluation, professionalism, PR roles and status. It has been criticised for its functionalism by a range of non-US scholars (Pieczka, L'Etang, Motion, Leitch, roper, Weaver, McKie).

### Functionalism and PR

Functionalism has been defined as 'any view which analyses something in terms of how it functions, and especially in terms of its causes and effects' (Lacey, 1976: 83). It emerged from research in anthropology and sociology that sought to understand explicit and implicit societal practices, for example, a Hopi rain dance may also be seen as a way of promoting social cohesion (Giddens, 1989: 697). Functionalism, 'views societies as integrated, harmonious, cohesive "wholes" or "social systems", where all parts ideally function to maintain equilibrium, consensus and social order' (O'Sullivan, 1994: 124).

A functionalist approach focuses on elements such as PR or the media which can assist societies or organizations to function as integrated sub-systems by maintaining equilibrium or consensus (O'Sullivan, 1994: 124). Functionalism appears to have first been linked to PR by German scholars who tried to understand PR as a societal as well as organizational function that could produce consensus, and the following discussion is heavily based on Heike Puchan's excellent review of the German literature (Puchan, 2006). Possibly the first was the German author Albert Oeckl who wrote in his *Handbook of Public Relations*, published in 1964, that, 'The decisive role for public relations is: public relations is two-way communication, it is information flow in both directions, it is dialogue. Hence, it has ... to achieve its threefold task: information, adaptation and integration' (Oeckl, 1976: 305 cited in Puchan, 2006: 117). Likewise, Carl Hundhausen, from the same era, argued that the most important goal for public relations was the achievement of 'harmony' through adaptation (Puchan, 2006: 117). Subsequently, in the 1970s, Professor Franz Ronneberger was one of the first academics to develop a comprehensive

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society-orientated theoretical approach to public relations arguing that PR negotiates competing interests (Puchan, 2006: 116–117). Together with professor Manfred Ruhl, Ronneberger developed 'the first comprehensive analysis of public relations within the context of its societal function' (Puchan, 2006: 119). Use of systems theory, on which much of this functionalism was based (see chapter page for discussion of systems) was also made by Ragnwolf Knorr in 1984, Ulrich Saxer in 1991 and Werner Faulstich and Anna Theis in 1992 (*ibid*).

Functionalism is an attractive ideology but it does appear to assume a consensual view can emerge and prevail. This raises questions such as: whose views dominate, how, and why? What some might see as 'functional' might be 'dysfunctional' for others. This dualism in itself might stimulate conflict rather than consensus.

This book is written within the *critical paradigm* in public relations, which comprises a small group of scholars mostly out-side the USA. The critical paradigm has partly positioned itself against what its authors have seen as the 'dominant paradigm', which consists of the bulk of the work published making extensive reference to systems theory, 'the four models', 'boundary spanning', and associated terminology. To give one example, many non-US texts present a model of public relations development and typology based on US history and culture as though the American experience can sensibly describe and explain events in non-US settings (L'Etang, 2004: 9–10).

The dominant paradigm in public relations has tried to build theory in a coherent way that is useful (*functional*) for practitioners. While there is nothing wrong with that, there are other ways of exploring and understanding public relations practice. Over the past decade there have been more academics exploring alternative approaches to public relations concerned with language, rhetoric, critique of various types. In Box 1.3 is an example of an open acknowledgement of *paradigm shift* and debate in public relations that appeared in *Public Relations Review* in 2004, edited by two important academics from The New Zealand School, Professor David McKie and Debashish Munshi.

**Box 1.3 Paradigm shift in PR?****Call for Papers**

Edge-happening maps: paradigm movement for public relations

Recent research suggests that significant trends can be identified early by exploring happenings at peripheral points. This special issue seeks to chart such explorations at the edge. This issue looks to the margins for signs of change, beyond the widely

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accepted current theories. As New Zealand educators we exist on an economic, geographical, political, and population perimeter compared with the demographic and disciplinary centers of Europe and the USA.

Accordingly, we particularly welcome contributions from geo-political peripheries and encourage researchers working on, for example, public relations history after the four models, specific historical accounts of regions and nations (which may diverge from the evolution of public relations in the US), untried or underutilized theoretical approaches, research influenced by scientific advances and thought and methodological innovations.

In order to chart diverse 'edge happenings', we invite contributions that may range from distinctive practice-informed theory and theoretically-informed practice, through different kinds of field research and iconoclastic speculation, to unexpected theory, expansive visions, and beyond.

Source: McKie and Munshi *Public Relations Review*, 30(3) 2004: 243

The 'Call for Papers' shown in Figure 1.4 also throws up another important aspect of the dominant paradigm in public relations, which is that it has tended to carry out quantitative rather than qualitative research. The 'Call for Papers' explicitly seeks alternative methods and perspectives which challenge the very nature of knowledge that is put forward by what is perceived as 'the dominant paradigm'.

When alternative ideas about public relations practice and the PR *research agenda* began to be articulated in the mid-1990s, those from the dominant paradigm were forced to defend their views and take account of different interpretations. For example:

Whenever a theory becomes as ubiquitous as the models of public relations have become, it also becomes the target of criticism by scholars who want to defend or develop competing theories. Therefore it is not surprising that the models have become the target of several critics. ... The misinterpretations of my idea ... suggest that I have not always been successful. (Grünig, 2001: 18, 27)

### **CRITICAL REFLECTION**

Read the quote above and consider:

- What do we learn about the state of the field of PR?
- What do we learn about the author?

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Although many academics seek to 'build PR theory' one might wish to question the existence of such. The very term 'PR theory' almost seems to imply there could or should be a single framework. This book suggests that utilising interdisciplinary approaches can contribute multiple perspectives to PR, some applied, some conceptual, some normative.

In summary, public relations is a field in which some alternative perspectives are beginning to be explored. This makes it a very exciting time to be studying public relations.

**Assumptions, reflexivity and motives**

Experts in critical thinking, such as Ruggiero (1996b), Paul and Elder (2004) and Cottrell (2005), highlight the importance of understanding assumptions, reflexivity and motives. As they point out, **assumptions** are taken-for-granted beliefs about the way the world is, an idea of the 'natural order', whether it is applied to international relationships, developing or developed countries, economic and political systems, social relationships and class systems. Reflexivity is a self-questioning and transparent form of writing in which the author acknowledges her presence, her interests and experiences. Assumptions are beliefs that seem so obvious that we rarely question them and can scarcely articulate them. Assumptions shape the 'knowledge' we think we have and they shape what we know, how we speak, write and use rhetoric to ensure a comfortable consistency. They are interesting for academics and important to public relations practitioners because by digging deeper and seeking what lies behind statements we can understand more fully motivations, orientations, values, and therefore put arguments into a broader context. In public relations practice this process can help us to understand better organizational stakeholders, senior management and the media.

In writing, whether it is an academic essay, a piece of journalism or promotional writing, the challenge is to be aware of one's assumptions, which are the consequence of life experience and education, and to be transparent about our personal positioning in relation to other writers, thinkers and disciplines. Conventionally, in formal writing, whether academic or organizational, there may be stringent attempts to disguise agendas that may arise from assumptions and to present argument or opinion as rational, scientific and 'objective'. Why is this? Because contemporary culture is heavily influenced by rationalism and science. Acknowledging subjectivity is a practice that does indeed occur in social science within the qualitative paradigm, which stresses that all research is value-laden, that 'reality' is socially constructed and interpreted by readers, and where there is an interest seeking out *discourses* that shape our understanding. Such acknowledgement is termed **reflexivity** and has the

potential to bestow transparency. These rather philosophical issues show exactly why it is difficult for public relations academics or practitioners to claim that they present 'the' truth. Anne Surma, academic, editor and consultant, eloquently raised some key issues in her book *Public and Professional Writing*:

Is writing in the public domain inevitably about impersonality and detachment? Are writing subjects to be (always) absent as well as (sometimes) invisible when writing in a professional capacity? And if we aren't able to talk to ourselves when writing as professionals, how do we write to others meaningfully? The above questions challenge a common assumption about the conventions of professional writing. (Surma, 2005: 15)

Surma argues that public relations writing can be peculiarly difficult because the PR practitioner will often have to blend many voices into a fictional person or identity – the organization. For example, annual reports and corporate social responsibility reports are typically contributed to by many sources from within the organization, edited and re-written by the PR department and also include collages of interviews and personal perspectives. Combining and juxtaposing material in this way can pose problems of authenticity and believability in the text – problems that the public relations writer is supposed to overcome. Audiences may be wary of such public writing, as Anne Surma points out: 'It isn't surprising that many readers approach corporate and public texts with a sense of cynicism and distrust. Readers recognize self-serving rhetoric' (Surma, 2005: 3). Public relations practice, especially in entry-level jobs, consists of a great deal of writing and editing, often of texts for media consumption. It can be easy to assume that texts are read at 'face' value. But, as Surma's argument makes clear, there are many possible 'faces' and many possible motives behind them. Likewise, there are multiple 'readings' or interpretations of any one text, each of which depends on the worldview (paradigm), assumptions, beliefs and motivations of the reader or editor.

### **Techniques for identifying assumptions**

What questions should be asked about a piece of academic or professional (workplace) writing? Here are some suggestions:

- What does this author say about themselves? What is included or excluded? Are they written out of the book entirely?
- Is it possible to identify (for example) political allegiances? How are these made apparent? Openly? Or do they emerge subtly? Can one read between the lines?
- How satisfied is the author with the status quo?

### Exercise

Apply the questions above to Box 1.3.

### Apply critical thinking now!

Taking on board the suggested strategies of thought, read back over this opening chapter and also the preface. How successful have I been in explaining my approach? Have I, as author, been sufficiently reflexive? How legitimate does the approach taken in this chapter seem, and why?

### In conclusion

This chapter has reviewed some key ideas about critical thinking and its importance for public relations, both academically and in practice. It has introduced the notion of paradigm and the importance for all who study public relations being self-aware of their assumptions and approach to public relations ideas and practice.

### REVIEW

Return to the questions asked of you at the beginning of the chapter and consider:

- What do you think now about the questions?
- Did the chapter work for you and if not, why not?
- Has it changed anything about the way you think? If so, what, and were you persuaded or did you make up your own mind?

Again, write down your responses and keep your log, blog or diary to hand.

### RECOMMENDED READING

An excellent book on critical thinking is Cottrell (2005). There is also a very useful pocket guide (Paul and Elder, 2004) produced by the Foundation for Critical Thinking ([www.criticalthinking.org](http://www.criticalthinking.org)). The first public relations book which contained 'critical' in its title was Health and Toth (1992). This classic was a landmark work which I found immensely inspiring. It opened a lot of doors for me, and helped me to think about public relations as a rhetorical practice. Through reading this book and engaging with its arguments and perspectives, I began to develop my own personal take on public relations.