



# Corporate and organisational diplomacy: an alternative paradigm to PR

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – A number of scholars including Benno Signitzer and Jacquie L'Etang have proposed public diplomacy as an alternative model to describe and/or inform the practices of public relations. However, international relations and political science scholars claim major differences between public diplomacy and PR, and few studies have sought to reconcile these claims and counter-claims. The purpose of this paper is to report a comparative analysis of key concepts and principles of public diplomacy.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This article reports a comparative analysis of key concepts and principles of public diplomacy and the “new diplomacy” as described by Shaun Riordan and public relations (PR) as defined in Excellence theory and other contemporary models of PR to identify commonalities as well as divergences, and discusses how these can inform PR theory and practice.

**Findings** – This analysis shows similarities between these fields of practice, as well as six unique concepts and principles of public diplomacy and “new diplomacy” that inform corporate diplomacy and organisational diplomacy as an alternative paradigm to “public relations”.

**Practical implications** – Reconceptualising PR as corporate and organisational diplomacy involves much more than a name change. It recasts PR within alternative theoretical frameworks that are significantly different to those of dominant paradigms of PR and informs new and refined approaches to practice.

**Social implications** – Adopting the concepts and principles of public diplomacy and “new diplomacy” also would provide a more ethical and societally-orientated approach to PR.

**Originality/value** – Most studies comparing public diplomacy and PR have focussed on commonalities with a view to expanding PR's territorial claim or gaining validation of PR. This analysis takes the opposite approach, identifying concepts and principles of public diplomacy and “new diplomacy” that contribute to an alternative paradigm of PR that is more effective, more societally-orientated, more ethical, and ultimately more publicly accepted.

**Keywords** Public relations, Public diplomacy, Corporate diplomacy, Organizational diplomacy, Communication management, New diplomacy, Communication

**Paper type** Conceptual paper

## Introduction

Comparisons of public relations (PR) and public diplomacy are not new, although they are mainly confined to public relations literature (see L'Etang, 2008; Signitzer, 2008; Signitzer and Coombs, 1992; Signitzer and Wämser, 2006). Literature on public diplomacy in the disciplinary fields of international relations (IR) and political science is primarily dismissive of any comparison and any theoretical or practical overlap between the fields, as we will see in a moment. Benno Signitzer, who has been among the most prolific PR authors on this topic, uses public diplomacy as a point of departure in his analysis. However, after exploring common conceptual ground between PR and public diplomacy (Signitzer and Coombs, 1992; Signitzer and Wämser, 2006), he focuses on the applicability of public relations thinking to public diplomacy (Signitzer, 2008). This argument, in summary, seeks to show that PR is largely the same thing as public diplomacy – or at least that it involves PR concepts and practices



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to a significant extent. It is this argument that IR and political science scholars particularly reject, and this claim has largely run into a dead end in scholarship as a result of an interdisciplinary stand-off.

Jacque L'Etang (2008) is one of a few scholars to take the opposite approach – to suggest that, while “there are clear similarities between the role of public relations and that of diplomacy” (p. 238), public diplomacy might have some different and unique concepts and principles which could be applied to benefit PR. However, she does not examine what these concepts and principles are in any detail. This analysis examines contemporary approaches to diplomacy and PR to identify significant differences in core concepts and principles, and examine how those might be used to reconceptualise PR and advance the field.

To bring this insufficiently explored approach back on to the agenda of research and debate, it is proposed – perhaps controversially – that such a reconceptualisation of PR could be renamed corporate diplomacy (for corporations) and organisational diplomacy (for organisations including NGOs) – a step that Signitzer (2008) was not prepared to recommend. Such a name change would be more than “window dressing” or “PR for PR”, as this analysis suggests significant changes to dominant paradigms of PR based on concepts and principles of public diplomacy and what is termed the “new diplomacy”.

### **Understanding diplomacy and public diplomacy**

Public diplomacy has been primarily researched and studied within the discipline of IR, along with some examination in political science. In much of the literature, all forms of diplomacy are concerned with and restricted to “the relationships among the world’s national governments” (Goldstein, 1994, p. 1). Within IR, two main types of diplomacy are practised and explored by scholars. Traditional diplomacy involves “conducting negotiations between governments” (Deutsch, 1966, p. 81) – that is, direct government-to-government negotiations and relations which are carried out by government leaders, appointed diplomats such as ambassadors, and a range of diplomatic missions, embassies, and their staff. Second, with the growth of global media and systems of mass communication, governments increasingly have extended diplomacy to mediated forms which speak to the citizens of other countries and a range of political and civic “actors” such as journalists and cultural, social, political, and economic organisations and opinion leaders in order to influence their government through public opinion (Habermas, 2006). This form of diplomacy is variously referred to as media diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, or more commonly, public diplomacy.

Manuel Castells (2010) has proposed that, in the information age and network society that he describes, there is a “new public sphere” – that space between the state (government) and society in which citizens, “civil society”, and the state interact and communicate to decide policy and manage public affairs. Drawing on the work of IR and political science scholars including Mary Kaldor (2003) and Peter Dahlgren (2005), he notes that the traditional public sphere and traditional communication with governments and other nation states have been replaced by a global public sphere and global civil society in which communication flows through global technological and media networks. Castells (2010) says that the idea behind public diplomacy is “not to assert the power of a state”, but “instead, to harness the dialogue between different social collectives and their cultures in the hope of sharing meaning and understanding” (p. 45).

Public diplomacy today is based largely on the notion of soft power espoused by Joseph Nye (2010a) who identified three ways to influence others and achieve

outcomes: first, coercion or force (sticks); second, inducements (carrots); or third, attraction. He described the latter as soft power, explaining that “this soft power – getting others to want the outcomes that you want – co-opts people rather than coerces them” (2010a, p. 333). It does so in three key ways, according to Nye (2010a): first, daily communication, particularly involving interpersonal communication; second, strategic communication which typically involves mediated public communication; and third, “the development of lasting relationships” (p. 338). Nye (2010a) summaries: “the world of traditional power politics is typically about whose military or economy wins. Politics in an information age may ultimately be about whose story wins” (p. 337).

A number of PR scholars argue that the second and third approaches of soft power are directly related to PR as defined in dominant paradigms such as Excellence theory which focuses on strategic communication and relationships (Grunig *et al.*, 2002) and the personal influence model of PR which incorporates elements of the first approach outlined by Nye (see Falconi *et al.*, 2009; Toth, 2000). Postmodern models of PR also share characteristics with contemporary approaches to diplomacy, as will be examined later.

In its early uses, public diplomacy referred specifically to activities designed to influence the policies of foreign governments, particularly by the USA. For instance, documents of the US Information Agency (USIA) which was in “the business of public diplomacy for more than 40 years” before being disbanded in 1999 state:

Public diplomacy seeks to promote the national interest and the national security of the United States through understanding, informing, and influencing foreign publics and broadening dialogue between American citizens and institutions and their counterparts abroad (cited in Public Diplomacy Alumni Association, 2008).

In one of its early brochures, the Edward R. Murrow Center for Public Diplomacy defined public diplomacy in the following terms:

Public diplomacy [...] deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies. It encompasses dimensions of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy; the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with those of another; the reporting of foreign affairs and its impact on policy; communication between those whose job is communication, as between diplomats and foreign correspondents; and the processes of inter-cultural communications.

Central to public diplomacy is the transnational flow of information and ideas (cited in Public Diplomacy Alumni Association, 2008).

The 1987 US Department of State *Dictionary of International Relations Terms* (p. 85) defined public diplomacy as follows:

Public diplomacy refers to government-sponsored programs intended to inform or influence public opinion in other countries; its chief instruments are publications, motion pictures, cultural exchanges, radio and television (cited in Public Diplomacy Alumni Association, 2008).

These definitions clearly identify public diplomacy as activities undertaken to influence citizens in foreign countries as well as foreign governments and as government-sponsored activities including media communication as well as direct government-to-government or initiatives.

However, public diplomacy has further evolved in recent decades and some say that its changing nature brings the practice even closer to PR. In a recent online paper, Joseph Nye (2010b) stated that “the greater flexibility of non-governmental

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organisations in using networks has given rise to what some call ‘the new public diplomacy’. The University of Southern California (USC) Center on Public Diplomacy at the Annenberg School (2011) describes the new public diplomacy in the following terms:

As distinct from the “narrow” traditional, state-based conception of public diplomacy [...] recent scholarship has offered a “broader” conception of the field’s scope by developing the concept of the *new public diplomacy* which defines public diplomacy more expansively than as an activity unique to sovereign states. This view aims to capture the emerging trends in international relations where a range of non-state actors with some standing in world politics – supranational organisations, sub-national actors, non-governmental organisations, and (in the view of some) even private companies – communicate and engage meaningfully with foreign publics and thereby develop and promote public diplomacy policies and practices of their own [original emphasis].

Illustrating this broadening concept of public diplomacy, veteran US public affairs[1] officer, Hans Tuch (1990) says:

Public diplomacy, in its attempt to affect the attitudes and opinions of foreign publics, involves the entire communications spectrum, modern communication technology, as well as such other methods of intercultural communication as cultural and educational exchange, libraries, publications, and people (among them professional qualified Foreign Service officers) (p. 10).

These views of public diplomacy see it as no longer state-centric and no longer confined to official governmental interactions, but as a broad field of interpersonal and public communication and engagement between representatives of organisations, cultural institutions, and companies internationally. In these definitions, public diplomacy remains confined to the international sphere. However, in his explanation of the “new public diplomacy”, Joseph Nye (2010b) describes it as:

[...] no longer confined to messaging, promotion campaigns, or even direct governmental contacts with foreign publics serving foreign-policy purposes. It is also about building relationships with civil-society actors in other countries and facilitating networks between non-governmental parties *at home* and abroad [emphasis added].

The views of the USC Center on Public Diplomacy, Tuch, Nye, and others illustrate the evolving nature of public diplomacy to increasingly include both domestic and international communication and relationships between a wide range of government and non-government organisations, companies, and other actors in civil society facilitated through a range of mediated as well as interpersonal methods.

Veteran British diplomat Shaun Riordan (2003) discusses what he calls “the new diplomacy” in slightly different terms which further shift its focus away from traditional diplomatic processes and toward public communication. In Riordan’s terms, “new diplomacy” is that practised by “postmodern states” in an increasingly networked, globalised, media-saturated world. It is the latest and still evolving stage of four stages of diplomacy identified by Duška Jerman (2005) as traditional diplomacy, followed by the “new diplomacies” of the Cold War, post-Cold War, and Riordan’s “new diplomacy” practised through multi-level communication and relationships between multiple actors in the networked globalised world identified by Castells. Riordan (2003) says that, along with government agencies, “multinational companies are also players in the diplomatic world”. He argues that “their interventions are no longer limited to narrowly confined commercial interests” and adds that diplomacy is now mixed with promotion (p. 7).

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Riordan's concept of new diplomacy and Nye's (2010b) description of "the evolution of public diplomacy from one-way communications to a two-way dialogue" and building relationships with a range of civil actors brings public diplomacy further into theoretical and practical proximity with PR as it is conceptualised in Excellence theory and other dialogic and relationship-orientated models.

### **Comparing public diplomacy and PR**

PR is most widely used term to describe the field of organisation-public relationship management and related public communication (Cutlip *et al.*, 2006, p. 64; Wilcox and Cameron, 2006, p. 11), although it has to be noted that a range of other terms are used to describe the same or similar functions including public affairs, corporate communication, corporate relations, and public information (Broom, 2009, p. 23; Macnamara, 2005, pp. 22-3). Public affairs, in particular, is relevant to this discussion as it is closely associated with public diplomacy in IR literature, and is also seen as a specialisation of PR that includes "building public policy relationships between organisations" (Toth, 2006, p. 499).

While deployed in IR in parallel with public diplomacy, a sharp distinction is nevertheless drawn between public diplomacy and public affairs in early definitions of the USIA. The agency noted that:

Public affairs is the provision of information to the public, press and other institutions concerning the goals, policies and activities of the US Government. Public affairs seeks to foster understanding of these goals through dialogue with individual citizens and other groups and institutions, and domestic and international media. However, the thrust of public affairs is to inform the domestic audience (Public Diplomacy Alumni Association, 2008).

However, the analyses of Nye (2010b) and others such as Nancy Snow (2009) show that public diplomacy and public affairs are converging in the "new public diplomacy". To the extent that public affairs and PR are synonymous in some contexts, or at least closely related practices, this means that there are close parallels between public diplomacy and PR as claimed by a number of authors (L'Etang, 2008; Signitzer, 2008; Signitzer and Coombs, 1992; Signitzer and Wämser, 2006). For instance, in *Public Relations Theory II*, Benno Signitzer and Carola Wämser (2006) state that both public diplomacy and PR are strategic communicative functions of organisations or nation states that engage in information distribution, advocacy with a view to persuasion, and relationship cultivation.

There is some support for this view within the field of public diplomacy. In the *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, Nancy Snow (2009) acknowledges that "public diplomacy's roots are in the persuasion industries of PR, marketing, and advertising" and she calls for a rethinking of public diplomacy that recognises similarities and mutual interdependencies between PR and public diplomacy (p. 9). Snow describes public diplomacy as relying heavily on the personal influence and relationship models of communication which are receiving increased focus in PR after a long pre-occupation with mass-mediated communication.

However, Snow (2009) also notes criticisms of PR that allegedly differentiate it from public diplomacy. She says that "a cottage industry of indictment continues to single out public relations as the most irresponsible of all the persuasion industries and thus most responsible for the public diplomacy mess we're in" (p. 9). She cites Joseph Duffey, former director of the USIA from 1993 to 1999 who says PR and public diplomacy are "not close cousins". While Snow argues that two-way symmetrical communication and relationship-orientated models of PR are closely allied to the goals and practices of

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public diplomacy, she cites Duffey who said to a US Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1995:

Let me say a word about public diplomacy. It is not public relations. It is not flakking for a government agency (as cited in Snow, 2009, p. 10).

US adviser and lecturer on public diplomacy, Matt Armstrong (2009) says that “the power to engage global audiences is a national security imperative and must not be a mere tool of public relations”. Joseph Nye (2010a) also presents a number of warnings about the use of “soft power” that are pertinent to PR. He says that “sceptics who treat the term public diplomacy as a mere euphemism for propaganda miss the point”. Also, echoing Duffey, Armstrong, and others, he warns explicitly: “Nor is public diplomacy merely public relations” (p. 338). He says:

Conveying information and selling a positive image is part of it, but public diplomacy also involves building long-term relationships that create an enabling environment [...] effective public diplomacy is a two-way street that involves listening as well as talking.

One of the reasons that many IR and political science scholars and practitioners reject comparisons with PR is that they hold a narrow, theoretically outdated, and pejorative view of PR, seeing it as synonymous with propaganda in the worst case, or as one-way transmission of information at best. In discussing public diplomacy, Nye is in fact discussing the same concepts and using similar language as Excellent PR theory (Grunig *et al.*, 2002, 2006), and other models based on dialogue, relationships, and engagement with a range of stakeholders and publics. For example, the term “two-way street” of diplomatic communication referred to by Nye is borrowed from early PR literature (Goldman, 1948; Grunig and Hunt, 1984). Similarly, in looking toward the future, Riordan’s “new diplomacy” which he sees as evolving in postmodern states parallels contemporary postmodernist thinking in PR (Holtzhausen, 2002; L’Etang, 2008; L’Etang and Pieczka, 2006; McKie, 2008).

It can be concluded from the first stage of comparative analysis that there is indeed much in common between public diplomacy – particularly the “new public diplomacy” practised today – and contemporary PR. Most discussions of corporate diplomacy agree that the process begins with understanding the environment. For instance, Steger says “the strategy for corporate diplomacy is highly contextual, industry and company specific” (2003, p. 7). The use of intelligence and monitoring of the local social, cultural, and political environment in public diplomacy closely parallels environmental scanning and audience research used in PR. Similarly, the focus on strategic communication, relationships, and dialogue in public diplomacy is equally emphasised in PR Excellence theory (Grunig *et al.*, 2002, 2006) and in specific dialogic theories (Kent and Taylor, 2002), strategic communication theories (Hallahan *et al.*, 2007), and relationship theories (Bruning and Ledingham, 1999; Hon and Grunig, 1999) in PR literature. Also, the need to deal with multiple individuals and groups with diverse and sometimes conflicting interests is common to both fields. These groups are referred to as “political actors” (Habermas, 2006) and “social collectives” (Castells, 2010) in the language of public diplomacy, and as “publics” and “stakeholders” in the terminology of PR (Eliasoph, 2004; Freeman, 1984; Spicer, 2007). Table I summarises these six key concepts and principles that are common to public diplomacy and PR.

However, as much as there are similarities, there are also differences between public diplomacy as it is defined and described by Nye (2010a), Snow and Taylor (2009), and Riordan (2003) on one hand, and PR even in its symmetrical, dialogic, and relationship-orientated forms on the other. Rather than ignore these differences, the

second and arguably more important stage of this analysis examined these differences to explore ways in which they may improve and enhance PR. Table II presents a summary of key concepts and principles which are significantly different. It is argued that in some if not all of these, public diplomacy and the “new diplomacy” could productively inform PR theory and practice.

Critical comparative analysis, identifies six key concepts and principles of diplomacy, particularly public diplomacy and the “new diplomacy” described by Riordan, that could substantially inform PR theory and practice as follows:

- (1) While evolving to increasingly include mediated communication, public diplomacy is deeply grounded in the use of interpersonal communication. PR studies such as those of Falconi *et al.* (2009), Rhee (2007), and Toth (2000) argue

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Shared public diplomacy and public relations characteristics

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Recognises a need to understand the environment (gained through intelligence, monitoring, environmental scanning, etc.)

Viewed as strategic communication

Prioritises cultivation of relationships

Sees dialogue as a core activity

Deals with diversity of interests and sometimes conflicts

Deals with multiple groups of “political actors”, “social collectives”, “publics”, and “stakeholders” including government and organisations

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**Table I.**  
Shared concepts and principles of public diplomacy and public relations

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Public diplomacy

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Prioritises interpersonal communication, supported by strategic-mediated communication  
Operates in and recognises an environment of competing interests, tensions, and conflict as the “norm” of human relations rather than breakdowns – including recognition that some disparate interests and conflicts may be irreconcilable (i.e. agonistic)

Maintains ongoing dialogue at all cost (except in war) – even in the face of complete disagreement and hostility. This is facilitated by patience and the following features

Develops and prioritises negotiation skills  
Establishes mechanisms for dealing with disparities in power (e.g. powerful nations may agree to one vote in international negotiations despite size; agree to work through arbitration bodies such as the UN, etc.)

Establishes and follows protocols for dealing with conflict and hostility including diplomatic etiquette and reciprocal arrangements such as return visits, equal size delegations, and turn-taking and equal time in discussions and negotiations

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Public relations

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Relies mostly on mediated communication except in the personal influence model  
Sees conflict as a “breakdown” of communication and/or relationships and views symmetry as a necessary goal

Maintains dialogue while consensus/ concurrence/win-win symmetrical resolution is possible but, if not, sees “withdrawal from dialogue” (Grunig, 2001, p. 16) and “no deal” as ethical (Hon and Grunig, 1999)

Primarily focuses on communication skills  
Has no effective mechanisms for dealing with disparities in power; relies on organisations pursuing “enlightened self-interest” and the moral values of practitioners

Has no formal protocols for dealing with conflict; relies on “professional values” (Grunig, 2000)

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**Table II.**  
Differences between public diplomacy and dominant public relations models

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that greater use of interpersonal communication could enhance relationships with stakeholders and make PR more effective than mediated communication which is the predominant focus of much PR practice.

- (2) Public diplomacy, particularly post-Cold War with the growth of NGOs and multilateral instead of bilateral relations, offers and uses mechanisms to compensate for power disparities such as meeting on neutral ground, use of individual arbitrators or arbitration bodies, and one-vote-one-value negotiations. These and initiatives such as establishment of organisational ombudsman offices could be applied in PR to address criticisms of strategic management-orientated PR on the basis of power inequities that exist between organisations and many of their publics as noted by Holtzhausen (2002) and others.
- (3) Formal protocols to guide interactions during times of conflict and hostility modelled on diplomatic etiquette ensuring courtesy and civility in all interactions, turn-taking, and right of reply in all communications, could significantly improve the societal and ethical stance of PR.
- (4) Increased incorporation of negotiation skills and diplomacy skills in PR education and training could improve effectiveness in dealing with conflicts. Negotiation skills are currently covered in a number of PR courses, but are generally less emphasised than media and communication skills.
- (5) Recognition and acceptance of difference and plurality in interests and views advocated in postmodern notions of public diplomacy are necessary replacements to dominant PR paradigms based on an ideal of symmetry, or at least “win-win”. Even a “win-win” position can sometimes involve publics having to give up their position to move to a mutually acceptable position. Furthermore, Excellence theory of which is critically identified as the most established and dominant model of PR practice (L’Etang, 2008; L’Etang and Pieczka, 2006; Toth, 2007), advocates “withdrawal from dialogue” (Grunig, 2001, p. 16) and “no deal” (Hon and Grunig, 1999) when a “win-win” is deemed impossible. This is a limitation of PR that could be overcome with the diplomatic approach of maintaining dialogue even in the face of complete disagreement and hostility. It could be argued that public diplomacy is *agonistic*, grounded in “agonistic pluralism” (Mouffe, 2005), while PR is grounded in idealism and optimistic hopes for harmony and consensus achieved through dialogue and communicative action.’
- (6) Adoption of patience and a long-term view to maintain ongoing dialogue and respect even when no progress is being made as called for in PR by Yunna Rhee (2007) is also a feature of diplomacy that can productively inform PR theory and practice.

Sceptics may argue that these concepts and principles are already enshrined in postmodern models of PR such as communitarian, feminist, and sociocultural approaches. However, the latest review of PR theory concludes that critics of US-orientated symmetrical/excellence model “have limited their remarks to critiques and failed to conduct affirmative research” necessary to bring alternative ideas into general practice (Botan and Hazelton, 2006, p. 9). A number of critical PR scholars including Jacqui L’Etang (2008) and Magda Pieczka (2006) acknowledge that Excellence theory and its concepts of symmetry and strategic communication



management comprise the dominant paradigm of PR, although theories and practices are evolving. The findings of this analysis can positively contribute to such change.

It is proposed that alternative concepts and principles from public diplomacy and the “new diplomacy” could be applied not only to public affairs type activities directed at international and domestic governments and political actors (Harris and Fleisher, 2005; Toth, 2006), but to PR broadly including corporate and organisational PR interacting with a range of stakeholders. If applied broadly to PR, these concepts and principles open the door to a substantial reconceptualisation of corporate and organisational PR as corporate diplomacy and organisational diplomacy.

**Corporate and organisational diplomacy**

The term “corporate diplomacy” has been used at least since the mid-1990s. For instance, Robert Trice, Miyako Hasegawa, and Michael Kearns edited a book titled *Public Diplomacy: Principled Leadership for the Global Community* for the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, DC in 1995. Trice *et al.* (1995) saw corporate diplomacy as a result of a “corporate evolution” in which companies have been moving steadily toward a more socially responsible and engaged role. They identified four stages of “corporate evolution” as shown in Table III.

However, Trice, Hasegawa, and Kearns did not discuss corporate diplomacy in any detail. In the late 1990s, Michael Watkins introduced an MBA course called “Corporate diplomacy” at Harvard Business School and taught it for five years. He defined corporate diplomacy as “the role senior executives play in advancing the corporate interest by negotiating and creating alliances with key external players including governments, analysts, the media and non-governmental organisations (NGOs)” (Watkins, 2007).

In a 2003 book titled *Corporate Diplomacy: The Strategy for a Volatile, Fragmented Business Environment* that largely disavows scholarly research[2], Ulrich Steger from the International Institute for Management Development says:

Corporate diplomacy is an attempt to manage systematically and professionally the business environment in such a way as to ensure that “business is done smoothly” – basically with an unquestioned “licence to operate” and an interaction that leads to mutual adaptation between corporations and society (2003, pp. 6-7).

Bob Grupp made the terms public diplomacy and “corporate diplomacy” his theme during his presidency of the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) in 2008. In a paper on the Institute for Public Relations web site, Grupp (2008) says:

I believe that corporate diplomacy means at least two things. It means a company embeds the value of collaboration deeply into its operations and practices, and it means the company

	Labor management frictions	Social frictions	International frictions
Capitalistic companies	×	×	×
Companies sharing destiny	✓	×	×
Companies sharing local social responsibilities	✓	✓	×
Companies assuming global social responsibility	✓	✓	✓

**Table III.**  
Corporate evolution

**Source:** Price *et al.* (1995)

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extends the reach of its relationships to include groups, cultures, organisations, even governments, which don't necessarily involve the company or client directly but which ultimately affect the sustainability of the business.

Despite being discussed for more than 15 years, corporate diplomacy has received relatively little scholarly analysis, with the concept mainly proselytised in professional business and management texts, a handful of conference papers, speeches, web sites and blogs, while the concept of organisational diplomacy has received even less attention. For instance, a paper about "Public diplomacy" on Wikia (2011a) cites McDonalds as being involved with Businesses for Diplomatic Action, "a private organisation dedicated to redressing issues of anti-Americanism and public diplomacy which emphasises the importance of corporate and citizen diplomacy in changing perceptions of the US for the better". Wikia includes a heading "corporate diplomacy" and notes that since 1999, the US State Department has recognised companies that display "best business practices, strong community service programs, and exemplary corporate social responsibility practices abroad" with its Award for Corporate Excellence (Wikia, 2011b). However, it does not actually use the term corporate diplomacy in its discussion.

Jacque L'Etang states that PR practitioners are "organisational diplomats" (2008, p. 239), There is insufficient evidence to support this claim yet, but they could be if the six concepts and principles identified in Table II were applied to organisational communication and relationships.

Reconceptualisation of PR as corporate and organisational diplomacy would involve much more than a name change and window-dressing to make PR seem more socially palatable. As outlined in the list of differences between dominant PR theory and public/new diplomacy theory, corporate diplomacy would require corporations to engage in ongoing dialogue with publics guided by specific principles and with mechanisms in place to balance power, amortise conflict, facilitate negotiation, and maintain relationships even in the face of outright disagreement. Furthermore, these mechanisms would need to be given credibility and capability through specialist training and skills development in areas such as negotiation and conflict management (noting that "conflict resolution" implies that all conflicts can be resolved).

## Conclusions

Analysis shows that there are strong parallels and common ground between public diplomacy, particularly the "new public diplomacy" and Riordan's concept of "new diplomacy" and PR as defined in the dominant paradigms of Excellence theory, relationship theory, dialogic theory, strategic communication theory, and also emergent postmodern theories of PR. However, there are also significant differences between the fields. Rather than using comparisons simply to make territorial claims in the field of public diplomacy, or pointing to similarities as a form of validation, PR should embrace the divergent concepts and principles of ethical public diplomacy and "new diplomacy" identified in this analysis to develop new ways of thinking and new practices.

The future of public diplomacy and PR is predicted to continue to converge, according to the USC Center on Public Diplomacy, which states:

The debate about a new public diplomacy promises to be global in nature, rather than a debate about US foreign relations, as important as they are. The USC Center on Public Diplomacy at the Annenberg School (CPD) endorses this global approach and encourages a worldwide set of perspectives in its scholarly research, policy analysis and professional training activities. Moreover, the debate is taking on a multi-disciplinary character, with no

single discipline determining public diplomacy's intellectual agenda. Thus, CPD sees public diplomacy as an emerging, multi-disciplinary field with theoretical, conceptual and methodological links to several academic disciplines – communication, history, international relations, media studies, public relations, and regional studies, to name but a few (USC Center on Public Diplomacy at the Annenberg School, 2011).

PR has the opportunity to engage in the development of public diplomacy and the “new diplomacy” as well as borrow public diplomacy and new diplomacy concepts and principles in a transdisciplinary approach that will yield a substantially enriched paradigm for PR that is more effective, more societally-orientated, more ethical, and ultimately more publicly accepted.

### Notes

1. Public affairs is used in this context referring to international relations between governments as undertaken by diplomatic services.
2. In the preface of Steger's book under “Research methodology” he says “the least important source was [...] academic literature. Too much is either “preaching” to companies encouraging them to behave nicely, well-meant advice from an ivory tower, or pretty meaningless correlations of two variables that fit well into the “publish or perish” system as “the least publishable unit” (Steger, 2003, p. xvi).

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