

The Challenge to Effective American Public Diplomacy

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Public Communication Hurdles

- Attention
- Comprehension
- Retention
- Action

Comprehension Problem

What America thinks is being communicated
is not what the Arab public understands.

Getting over the Comprehension Hurdle

- Think of public diplomacy as a *process* as well as a *product*
- Think of public diplomacy as an *intercultural communication process*
- Think of the *cultural barriers*
- Think of *multicultural strategies*

Intercultural Communication *Process*

It's not just about cultural differences – it's
how the differences interact

Why *cultural sensitivity* important

When you violate a cultural norm through cultural insensitivity you can trigger defense mechanisms in others – they may try to reassert their values more forcefully, or attack and discredit yours.

American – Communication is . . .

- Communication = Information
- Problem: don't have or don't understand information
- Solution: more or better information
- Agency: advanced technology
- Complaint: information overload

American – Approach

- Preferred Channel = Mass media
- Efficient
- Credible
- Familiar

American – Strategy

Focus = Message

Create idea

Produce appealing format

Disseminate efficiently

Arab – Communication is . . .

- **Communication = Relationships**
- Problem: strained or broken relations
- Solution: mend or sever relations
- Agency: mediator, negotiator
- Complaint: relationship overload

Arab – Approach

- Preferred Channel = Interpersonal Communication
- Effective
- Credible
- Familiar

Unshared Assumptions

- Mass media is an effective channel
 - Message is culturally neutral
 - Message speaks for itself
- Content is important*
- Mass media not a credible channel
 - Message *not* culturally neutral
 - Audience determine meaning of message
 - *Context is important*

Result of Intercultural Comm Process

- Achieved content goal – got the message out
- Neglected context – audience supply meaning and mass media not credible
- Distortion – what America thought it was communicating (message) was not what the Arab public perceived



Effective Public Diplomacy

an intercultural *communication process*

of overcoming *cultural barriers*

through a *multicultural approach*

(use multicultural approach to bridge cultural differences)

Multicultural Approach

- Start with your audience and work backwards to Washington
- Audience = relationship focused
- Washington = information focused

Getting the information out through relationship-building strategies

- multicultural approach = create innovative blend of different cultural styles and preferences

Types of Relationships

- Professional
- Personal
- Community
- Diplomatic
- Regional / Issue
- Personal
- Community
- (Stephen Bruning & John Ledingham, Capital University, Ohio 2000)

Goals of Relationship Building

- **Initiate**
 - create new relations through outreach, open functions, get to know visits
- **Develop**
 - build or expand existing relations by new projects, networking within circle
- **Enhance**
 - strengthen understanding, commitment, satisfaction
- **Maintain**
 - protect and preserve, demonstrate commitment

Benefits of Relationship Building

- Better predictor of audience behavior
(than message dissemination)
- Allows proactive approach later
(closer to needs and interest of audience)
- Acts as buffer if crisis occurs
(goodwill bank account)

SMART -- Relationship Building

- Scan – survey and assess current state of relationship
- Map – construct strategic plan focused on relationships goals and activities
- Act – field test strategic plan and assess initial effectiveness

SMART -- Relationship Building

- Rollout – implement revised strategic plan
- Track – monitor effect on public's perceptions and behavior
- (Stephen Bruning & John Ledingham, Capital University, Ohio 2000)

Relationship Building Mindset

- Focus on two-way / interaction / dialogue
- Add personal / social connection in activity
- Build trust (credible, reliable, stable)
- Find mutual interests & goals (win/win)
- Demonstrate interest & involvement
- Build commitment (continuity)
- Think reciprocity, both are “recipients”

Relationship Building Opportunities

- Speeches – refer to history, connections, people
- ‘Being’ vs ‘Doing’ Visits
- Communicate interest vs need; not all “selling”
- Pictures, gifts, symbolic tokens
- Highlight contributions, cooperation, ties
- Embassy website – spotlight relationship
- Press breakfasts, individual get-to-know lunches
- Highlight the “who” at functions, press releases

Mono-cultural vs. *Multi-cultural* Approach

- It's not about how I look (image)
- But, how you look at me (perception)

- It's not what I say (message)
- But, what you say also (dialogue)

- It's not what I do separately (action)
- But, what you and I do together (cooperation)



The Challenge to Effective
American Public Diplomacy:
Distortions of Culture

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