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An Audio-Visual Ethnographic Case Study of International, Rural, Nonprofit Public
Relations Geared Towards Sustainable Development

A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Communication

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Professional Communication

by

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May 2012

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Keywords: Intercultural Communication, International Development, Nonprofit Public
Relations, Nongovernment Organization, Northern Thailand

ABSTRACT

An Audio-Visual Ethnographic Case Study of International, Rural, Nonprofit Public Relations Geared Towards Sustainable Development

by

A. Chase Mitchell

This paper analyzes nonprofit public relations and its relationship to development communication. It evaluates previous attempts to integrate the two fields for development purposes. The author then offers an alternative approach, a so-called *public relations for community development* (PRCD) model.

The PRCD model is then tested in the form of a case study—including digitally recorded video interviews and observation—on *Warm Heart Worldwide, Inc. (WHW)*, an American-founded and operated nongovernment organization (NGO) in Phrao District, northern Thailand. The study aims to identify which elements of the PRCD approach *WHW* adheres to, and perceived efficacy of community development as a result.

The data suggest that although *WHW* does maintain an underlying PRCD *philosophy*, it does not implement public relations *practice* as outlined in PRCD. In addition to the paper, the audio-visual data have resulted in a video titled *Public Relations for Community Development: Warm Heart Foundation in rural northern Thailand*.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Emergence of ‘Development’

Development interventions have been defined as attempts at “educational, environmental, and economic improvements” (Morris, p. 225); historically, though, such programs have been founded in mostly the latter. After WWII and the Marshall Plan and up into the 1970s (Petersone, 2007), approaches implemented by agencies ranging from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), UNESCO, the FAO, and others both government and private to achieve development goals were largely founded in modernization and growth theories (Servaes, 2008). Modernization and growth theories are economically-oriented and characterized by “endogenism and evolutionism” (Servaes, p. 17). That is, the idea that Western values, practices, and cultures are evolutionarily superior to all others and should be disseminated among other, ‘uncivilized’ populations. Within this paradigm, development is defined strictly in terms of economic advancement. Although this perspective has been criticized for its top-down, one-way, Eurocentric approach—firstly and most notably by the Late Latin American scholar Paulo Friere (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1970)—the modernization approach remains strong in the proportion of development professionals who practice it.

There have been, however, despite the dominance of the modernization approach, criticism and alternative discourses advanced by development practitioners and scholars. At theory and research levels, even the policy, planning, and implementation levels, “divergent perspectives are on offer” (Servaes, p. 389). This has particularly been the case within the communication sphere of development, a burgeoning field in its own

right, referred to as *development communication* or *communication for development*.

Until very recently, communication was “the fifth wheel in the car of development, not even the spare tire, seldom part of the development process” (Gumucio-Dagron, p. 70).

Development agencies have since realized that where people have the option to change their ways of life, communication is essential in “informing, persuading, listening, data gathering, educating, training, and managing change” (Colle, p. 96). This understanding and appreciation for communication as a resource and a unique field led to *development communication*, a field distinct from all-encompassing ‘development.’

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Development Communication

The emergence of development communication (DC) as a unique entity within the larger framework of development was due to a growing sense in the field that “development should not involve simply the transfer of capital and technology, but also the communication of ideas, knowledge, and skills to make possible the successful adoption of innovations” (Petersone, p. 7). Media professionals, opinion-shapers, and development assistance policy makers realized that “while communication on its own will not bring about change and development, neither will change happen without development communication” (Servaes, p. 15). Petersone (2007) simplified the role of development communication, defining it as “a social activity with a goal to improve the living conditions of society” (p. 4). In other words, in order to successfully integrate Western innovations and ideas into target development audiences, communication (the *social* element) must play a key role.

Diffusion of innovation

Like any burgeoning field, development communication came under the scrutiny of academics and professionals alike in an effort to theorize and institutionalize its practice. One of the earliest models for implementation of development communication, dubbed *diffusion of innovation* (DOI) (Rogers, 1962), is largely in line with the modernization approach to development. DOI is top-down, one-way communication

aimed at disseminating economically-advancing information from perceived advanced countries to perceived uneducated populations (Servaes, 2008). The function of diffusion of innovation theory is explained by Sosale (2008):

Strategic pieces of a nation's natural resources that have profound influences on its economy are first secured and then converted to data; the data then constitute a type of 'manufactured' resource. Since this type of resource production requires large investments (possible, for the most part, for economically advanced countries), the poorer countries found themselves in the position of purchasing knowledge about their own resources from foreign sources. (p. 89)

In other words, Rogers (1962) grounded his theory and DOI-practice based on data constructed by the developers themselves. Development agents identify problems they perceive from accumulated data as defined by Western paradigms outside the sphere of the target audience's awareness or participation. The populations or nations to be *developed* are seen as uneducated *others* whom Western-constructed information is to be directed. Within orthodox diffusion of innovation models, target audiences have no input in the identification of issues, much less procurement of solutions. From a DOI worldview, progress can only be measured quantitatively, usually in economic terms. The perspective is pluralist in nature; the goal is to alter individual attitudes and behaviors in an effort to economically advance the larger population (Servaes, 2008). Messages, usually media driven, attempt to drive change through persuasion.

Diffusion of innovation is most often justified using one of two theoretical approaches. The first is *access theory*, which asserts that if individuals have access to information—through mass media or internet technology—they will adopt modern

practices based on that information (Thomas, 2008). DOI's method easily integrates with access theory; it also pairs well with *social marketing*, the preferred method of DOI adherents who attempt to apply corporate marketing ideas in social campaigns. In social marketing groups of individuals are segmented according to shared interests and targeted with tailored messages aimed at changing attitudes and behaviors (Wilkins, 2010). This is simply corporate marketing principles applied in social settings; instead of profit, returns are measured in individuals' behavior change.

Another defense of the diffusion of innovation approach is its effectiveness in procuring and sustaining outside funding. According to Coldevin (2008), "The only way to convince decision-makers to devote additional resources to communication [for development] is by providing them with concrete examples of the impact and cost-benefits of communication" (p. 249). Funding organizations, public and private, groups and individuals, require hard data verifying their investments' social returns. In other words, financial supporters want to know their money is contributing to real, measurable change if they are to continue their philanthropic donations. Diffusion of innovation development schemas serve this need well, as their nature lends to producing quantifiable, measurable results.

As the postcolonial era progressed, some scholars questioned modernization and diffusion of innovation (Freire, 1970; Schiller, 1991). One of the leading opposition stances became known as *dependency theory* (Schiller, 1991). Dependency proponents hold that pursuit of international modernization in fact perpetuates environments in which

undeveloped nations do not advance autonomously but become gradually more dependent on the developed countries; that modernization does not build nations but procures labor and commodity markets for the Western powers, a kind of *economic imperialism* (Servaes, 2008). Dependency critiques of modernization and its associated practices, including the diffusion of innovation model for development communication, recognized the importance of global contexts in understanding national development, and brought political interests and economic structures into focus (Schiller, 1991). With this wave of political awareness came a fundamentally different proposal for development communication—*advocacy communication*.

Advocacy Communication

Rogers (1962) and his DOI-disciples approach development pluralistically; that is, they believe change can be driven by changing the actions and behaviors of individuals, within the larger framework of society. As stated, diffusion of innovation adherents attempted this through social marketing. *Advocacy communication*, as proposed by Wilkins (2010), fundamentally altered the conversation about how communication should be used to achieve development goals.

Advocacy communication “posits communications as a process of asserting and contesting discourse within structures of power, rather than assuming a pluralist model of social change often dominating studies of communication for development” (Wilkins, p. 2). While the advocacy communication approach, like the DOI model, understands development as “planned, interpreted, and intervened from the perspectives of technology

and/or economics” (Sosale, p. 93), it differs in its proposed *method* of change. Instead of targeting individuals rhetorically via social marketing, Wilkins’s (2010) model emphasizes the importance of power structures in society. This model states that power structures do make a difference, in terms of ability to assert interpretations and allocate resources. Adherents of advocacy communication tactics prefer the term *communication for social change* as opposed to the more widely used *development communication*, the assumption being development is more likely to occur only after normative structural change takes place; that is *social change*, in the political sense, must happen and power must be redistributed before development can be successful (Servaes, 2008).

Advocacy communication, with its emphasis on normative structural change, asserts that retarded development and/or societal problems are not caused by individual, interior deficiencies, but rather pre-existing social, political, and economic structures. Structures, in this sense, refer to “the material reality as defined by policies and institutional networks that privilege certain sections of the population and marginalize others by constraining the availability of resources” (Pal & Dutta, p. 11). To combat identified formative and structural inequalities and subsequently drive development, advocacy communicators employ mostly mass media messaging *aimed at policy makers*. They assume that “media have the potential to influence social change, whether as a mechanism toward informing or persuading individuals, shifting normative climates and encouraging policy change” (Wilkins, p. 10). Instead of targeting individuals in the general population, however, advocacy communication disseminates messages to policy

makers via mass media. An example is the continuing so-called ‘Arab Spring,’ the combined popular democratic movements in the Middle East whose revolutionaries first used social media (to organize) and then international news media (to garner external support) in efforts to alter existing sociopolitical structures.

Whereas DOI stakes its success in access theory, advocacy communication relies on the *human rights model*, a more radical perspective asserting that all human needs, immediate and long-term, should be guaranteed to all within the system (Thomas, 2008). *Access theory*—the foundation for Rogers’s (1962) diffusion of innovation model—maintains that information on its own does not constitute knowledge, that access to information only makes change within the system possible and those capable will use it to their wellbeing. The *human rights model* strives for a system that meets the informational needs of all, to the absolute degree, stressing that it is not the individual, but the state and structure apparatus that is to blame if one or many are unable to access or comprehend information (Servaes, 2008).

Much contemporary research has focused on the texts of communication and political and economic structures associated with development communication (Wilkins, 2010). This might be due to development communicators’ attraction to large scale, political and structural communication campaigns (Colle, 2008). These kinds of campaigns are not always best and can often do more harm than good by “depleting the resources used to deliver important services on a regular basis” (Colle, p 136). Communication efforts that are “fully integrated with the existing structure and are

sustainable” (Colle, p. 136) are more commonly successful. In any case, this shift in rhetoric—from social marketing to normative and political discourses of communication—“may be more a part of academic and nongovernment organization communication discussion than represent actual shift in practice or within the development industry of bilateral and multilateral donors” (Wilkins, p. 5).

The Participatory Model

While advocacy communication is criticized for being too large in scope, too risky, too political, and largely unproven in terms of success, one of the more prominent criticisms of the diffusion of innovation approach to development is its overemphasis on “individualistic and instrumental motives” (Hanpongpanth, p. 3) and its neglect of “important ethical, moral, and spiritual aspects” (Hanpongpanth, p. 3). In this intellectual climate, development communication theory has evolved alongside postmodern, critical-cultural perspectives in other fields. Servaes (2008) describes the historical context in which this shift has occurred:

Media professionals, opinion-shapers, and development assistance policy-makers have often sought to utilize communication systems for social mobilization and change...a lack of understanding of the complexity of the behavioral, societal, and cultural factors on end-user consumption patterns has more often led to ineffective, or even counterproductive, outcomes. (p. 15)

The failure of many DOI campaigns might be contributed to the overwhelming permeation and misunderstanding of the term *globalization* in popular discourse.

Globalization implies that world populations are becoming homogenized as communication and transportation technology, alongside Western media and popular

culture, decrease diversity and extinct traditional cultures and values (Friedman, 2000). Modernization approach, and subsequently diffusion of innovation methods of development, took for granted consumption of information as universal and uniform. Globalization should be “restricted to describing the expansion and coverage of the means of communication, *not* its consumption” (Servaes, p. 64). After all, people still live in places and are subject to structural limitations: natural and material resources, geography, cultural standards, educational opportunities, etc. (Servaes & Lie, 2008). Interpretation of information by a given population, thus, is highly subjective, selective, and many times unaccommodating—ideologically or logistically—to externally generated data and media.

As a result of increasing awareness of the shortcomings of the modernization approach to development and a realization that diffusion of innovation is not effective in every socio-cultural climate, development communication theory began to shift towards a paradigm that is referred to as *participatory communication* for development. Advocates of the participatory approach argue that “instead of simply seeing the community as potential user [of information]...it should also be a provider of information and cultural parameters” (Gumucio-Dagron, p. 78). The idea that community members—the *target audience* within the modernization paradigm—should contribute to the research, planning, implementation, and evaluation stages of the communication process starkly contrasts with the diffusion of innovation model, which most often excludes community members from these processes.

This fundamental change in perspective is explained by Petersone (2007), “Participatory communication is not a theory; it is an umbrella concept for different perspectives that view communication as a people-oriented activity” (p. 8). In the participatory model, communication and cooperation between change agents and community members are stressed. It emphasizes that optimum communication effectiveness necessitates dialogue rather than advocacy and persuasion, values two-way communication rather than one way, balances the use of mass media and interpersonal communication, and applies ethical standards that integrate the needs of every communication participant (Grunig, 1992).

Most essential to the participatory approach to development communication is the research and planning stages. “Many well-intended projects are thought out in places far remote from the actual context in which they are supposed to be implemented” (Servaes, p. 27). Coldevin (2008) argues, “If the goal of development effort is to assist the poor, the endeavor should begin in their context, not in the planning office, not in the research station, and not from theories and constructs of far-removed institutions” (p. 246). Members of the community should be at the forefront of identifying problems and issues to be addressed. According to Pal and Dutta (2007), “Depending on the allocation of resources, which is determined by structural conditions, cultural members make meanings of their environment” (p. 14). The community members, as the logic goes, cocreate their own reality according to structural limitations—social, religious, economic—and within cultural parameters; they, therefore, are the only appropriate

source for identification of problems and, subsequently, solutions.

This postmodern, critical-cultural stance taken by the participatory model requires stakeholder participation not only at the research and planning stages but also in the programming and evaluation steps. Community members, it is argued, should be directly involved in the management and implementation of solutions. Also essential—and this is of massive significance concerning the difference between this and prior approaches—is that success should be measured via qualitative data collected from self-reflexive communication with the target audience (Servaes, 2008). That is, only the degree to which the community members relegate success should the external change agents be convinced of change. Quantitative measures of development are not valued to the degree they are in diffusion of innovation models.

Figueroa, Kincaid, Rani, Lewis, and Gray-Felder (2002) point out the flaws of previous models' evaluation, arguing that self-evaluation is often skipped over, especially by external change agents; in reality, this is the best measure of real change. The belief is that self-evaluation will not only provide truer perspectives of the level of success achieved, it will also foster participation. "The assumption is that if a staff is directly involved in the determination of the evaluation results, they will also be more committed to carrying out the recommendations" (Servaes, p. 215). Basing projects and programs on the recommendations and observations of the community will foster a sense of ownership as well as provide motivation for participation in collective projects.

Servaes (2008) sums up the difference between previous models of development communication (founded in the modernization paradigm) and the participatory approach—“Participatory communication is not creating a need for information one is disseminating, but rather disseminating information for which there is a need” (p. 120). However idealistic the participatory model seems, its level of practice in the field does not match its abundance in literature and theory. This is due to a variety of reasons, not least of which is the nature of bilateral and multilateral aid agencies, almost all of which operate on a budgetary models that require quantitative, hard-data evidence to justify their existence. Also, most proponents of the participatory approach “either ignore the issue of power or naively called for its general redistribution within and between nations” (Huesca, p. 189). In this way, participatory communication has been accused of being egalitarian to the point of stagnation. Not recognizing formative power structures within the community has led opponents of the participatory approach to discredit its practicality.

Ironically, some postmodern and deconstructionist critics, who would at first glance side with such a multiplicitous model, have attacked the ideas of equality and participation, claiming them as Western values, not to be imposed for development’s sake (Petersone, 2007). This line of thinking parallels the perspective forwarded in 1978 by Edward Said in his now seminal classic, *Orientalism*. Said’s argument, which has found popularity in academic development discourse as well as Asian studies, states that Eastern values, needs, wants, goals, and philosophical notions of existence are so

different from those in the West that it is unethical for Western individuals, groups, or institutions to commentate on Eastern policy or culture. More uncouth, the Orientalism perspective asserts, is Western intervention into Eastern affairs, especially under the guise of ‘development.’ As the logic goes, Western minds are incapable of understanding not only how Eastern psychology and sociology works (not to mention that concepts of psychology and sociology are inherently Western, and thus to be avoided), but also comprehending Asian endgames: that is, what are ‘they’ (Easterners) ultimately striving for? More about Orientalism, and a possible solution in relation to development, is to come in the findings and discussion section.

In spite of its various paradoxes and shortcomings in the eyes of development practitioners, policy-makers, and agencies, the participatory approach to development has accrued much attention from scholars and theorists. Pal and Dutta’s (2007) *integrated approach to development communication* is an effort to reconcile modernization models with participatory approaches. *The Rockefeller Foundation* has devised an integrated approach to use in evaluation of funding development initiatives (Figueroa et al., 2002). One of the more unique approaches to devising development communication theory, however, has been the adoption of public relations theories and strategies for use in development communication. Before comparing or combining the two—development communication with public relations—it is first necessary to understand the term *public relations* and its relational position within the communication fields.

Public Relations' 'True Value'

Public relations as a profession is most often considered within a domestic, corporate, or government context. Most current public relations theorizing, as well, emphasizes the organization and its practices (Pal & Dutta, 2007). Its function is usually defined as the mouthpiece of organizations—either internally residing or hired from without—whose interests are largely dependent on consumers' perceptions of the company, or constituents' approval of an administration. Within for-profit companies, public relations professionals are largely relegated to a lump of communication professionals including advertising professionals, designers, salespeople, and marketing specialists. Many times, the only element these skill sets have in common is their function to the company or corporation; that is, their influence on the bottom line.

Whereas corporate interests are dominated by monetary gains and losses, government agencies and administrations are more concerned with image equity. Votes, and more importantly support monies needed for elections, are what shape the public relations strategies and practices of politicians and the organizations or interests they represent. Neither for-profit nor government PR can be integrated with development communication—at least absolutely—because private and government public relations agents exist to serve the interests of the organization, not its publics. Although the *Public Relations Society of America's* (PRSA) Code of Ethics suggest that public relations practitioners serve the interests of the public *by serving client's or organization's*

interests (PRSA, 2011), the field as a whole has been criticized for sacrificing constituent interest for organizational gain (Stauber & Rampton, 1995).

The practice of public relations in the nonprofit sector, however, provides deeper and broader insight into the capabilities of public relations—in a most fundamental way—and provides a framework for a mutually beneficial marriage with development communication. By attending to the differences and complexities of nonprofit PR, one can understand “the *true value* of public relations...to understand human interaction under certain conditions and providing a message, which is significant to the participants, in a particular form, for the purpose of social order” (Hanpongpanth, p.6). This ‘true value’ is strikingly similar to the aims of development communication and provides a starting point for discussion as to how best practices from both fields (public relations and development communication) can be combined to achieve a shared ‘true value’.

The lack of study of nonprofit PR might be due to the popular narrow view of the field. Despite the PRSA’s significant strides in establishing the profession as a management position best suited to facilitating dialogic, constituent-benefitting relationships, the phrase *public relations* is sometimes synonymous with spin, cover-ups, and negativity (Stauber & Rampton, 1995). In this light, nonprofit organizations, by their very nature, are usually not thought to practice PR in the traditional sense of the term, as they are many times associated with charitable causes. In reality, public relations is *the function* of nonprofits, in the profession’s purest form. Although political entities and organizations have been accused of *Astroturf* techniques—creating fake front groups,

many of which pose as benevolent nonprofits (Stauber & Rampton, 1995)—nonprofit organizations largely exist to empower publics of varying interests and backgrounds to exist and prosper within larger communities, fairly and democratically.

While public relations is sometimes thought, then, to serve the interests of *the organization*, PR practices of nonprofit agencies exist to secure the interests of *its publics*. The goals of nonprofits depend largely on location and issues addressed—education, healthcare, microenterprise, environmental preservation, etc.—but the means by which these largely budget strapped organizations exist, subsist, and improve the lives of their target publics are founded in communication strategies, specifically public relations.

Public Relations Theory

Three major biases permeate dominate public relations theory: “the illusion of symmetrical dialogue, explicit and implicit corporatism, and Western managerial rationalism” (Hanpongpanth, p. 1). Dominant discourse has rendered the term *public relations* as an ideology or a form of maintaining organizational power structures (Hanpongpanth, 2003). Public relations theory attempts a reconciliation of the profession’s negative reputation. The most popular model for PR best practices is one integrated with Grunig’s (1992) excellence model and Hofstede’s (2001) five dimensions of culture.

Grunig (1992), a prominent public relations scholar, proposed an excellence model that is founded in direction of communication (one-way, top-down v. two-way),

balance of communication (symmetrical v. asymmetrical), form (mediated v. interpersonal), and ethical communication. However, despite the rhetoric of symmetry, the excellence model ultimately perpetuates the autonomy of the organization by aiming to avoid friction with the publics in order to increase the bottom line (Servaes, 2008). This might be because “one of the goals of early theorists was to professionalize and advance the field as a management function” (Pal & Dutta, p. 5), as the struggle to establish the profession did influence practice (Sharp & Pritchard, 2004). The other half of the integrated model to PR excellence, Hofstede’s (2001) observations on the five dimensions of culture, ranks cultures in terms of power distance, uncertainty avoidance, collectivism v. individualism, femininity v. masculinity, and long-term v. short-term orientation. Hofstede asserts that communication (including PR) strategies and tactics should be accommodating to the target culture specific to where it lays on each continuum.

The integration of public relations theory has proven successful in corporate and government communication initiatives (Servaes, 2008). However, public relations theorists interested in its application in the nonprofit sector have come up wanting because the model ultimately serves the interests of the organization adopting its use; even though it takes into account the specificity of culture, it does so only to craft messages that advance the organization. These frustrations with existing public relations theory, combined with a lack of balance within development communication theory (between diffusion of innovation and participatory models), has led to attempts at mixing

the two fields in an effort to pave a road to the aforementioned, shared ‘true value’ of public relations and development communication. In doing so, the term *public relations* has been fundamentally altered, and a new field, a so-called *public relations for development* (PRD), emerged.

Bridging the Gap – Attempts at Integration of PR and DC

“Public relations as a field, that is dominated by functionalist approaches, is currently witnessing new perspectives—postmodern, critical cultural, and postcolonial” (Pal & Dutta, p. 1). As has been shown in this paper, development communication has evolved in the same manner, adopting the participatory model. This shift, in both fields, towards a critical-cultural perspective, is not only a reaction to the negative consequences of modernization and perceived efficacy of dependence theory; it is also part of an epistemic shift of Western thinkers. According to Anholt (2003), “During the last decade, there has been a pronounced shift in Western tastes and fashions towards ‘asianization’—a yearning for the values of older, wiser, more contemplative civilizations than our own” (p. 152). This move towards Eastern ways of thinking brings with it a more egalitarian foundation not in line with traditional Western pluralism. Within this new paradigm, theorizing commonly takes the side of the indigenous; culture becomes paramount and only the subject knows best (Servaes, 2008). It is this intellectual environment in which the first public relations for development models were proposed.

The Culture-Centered Approach

Pal and Dutta's (2007) *culture-centered approach* to public relations has its roots in this movement. The authors confirm their intentions to reframe the field of public relations—"the culture-centered approach provides an entry point for alternative definitions of what constitutes public relations, what ought to be understood as public relations, and the possibilities of resistance that challenges the dominant practices of public relations that seek to maintain and reinforce the status-quo" (Pal & Dutta, p. 4). The culture-centered approach pulls from development communication theory in its participatory element. The model assumes that problems and issues are cocreated and perceived by community members within its structural conditions, and that they, thus, are the only ones capable of identifying and implementing solutions.

The concept of *agency*—which is defined as the capacity of human beings to engage with the structures encompassing their lives (Servaes, 2008)—is crucial. That is, community members can exercise freewill to manipulate their situation as they navigate the complexity of their contextual existence. The questions asked in the culture-centered approach are: What are the issues that are important to the cultural members of the community? What are the structural barriers that are responsible for those issues? And, what are the solutions that the cultural community feels are meaningful to them? In other words, knowledge is created from the ground up not disseminated from the top as is the case with diffusion of innovation.

Buddhist Public Relations Model

Taking a step further on the critical-cultural continuum, Hanpongpanth's (2003) Buddhist public relations model is founded in the idea that social reality is too complex for theories and grand narratives. The Buddhist public relations model argues that most PR theories seek to minimize complexity and differences in search of consensus and symmetry, when in reality place, culture, and structure have more to do with community development than what is considered traditional PR. Careful not to discredit public relations' use, however, Hanpongpanth maintains that while "some people see public relations as a dirty business, serving mainly to fulfill organizational economic goals" (p. 22), it can be used for effective community building, and to disassociate the profession from its current state, one that usually represents "the downfall of spirituality, or lack of the moral dimension" (p. 22).

Buddhist public relations proposes a true bottom-up development, communicative process, even more so than Pal and Dutta's (2007) culture-centered approach. The process is grounded in Buddhist religious and philosophical teachings—including the concept of *burangarn*, which entails holistic integration, balance, and strong community and civil society—as well as the faith in local agents and resources to empower themselves, outside dominant influence of external change agents (Hanpongpanth, 2003). Buddhist PR prefers an environment in which "community development evolves in the co-operative experiential setting wherein scholars, community-based organizations, social practitioners, and community members are situated as co-actors

within the social learning process” (Hanpongpanth, p. 27). In such a model, external agents are argued to be ineffective unless they place themselves, ideologically and functionally, on the same plane as the community members, the so-called (in other models) ‘target audience.’

Hanpongpanth (2003) admits his Buddhist public relations model is “not meant to draw a universally applicable model” (p. 26)—in fact, his argument maintains the opposite, that universal models cannot and should not be attempted—saying his aim is “more to initiate some thought and further analysis of public relations in the community development context” (p. 26). However, regardless of its deconstructionist and critical-cultural leanings, Buddhist public relations does present a framework for functionality; that is, how it should be practiced and operate within a community. Based on the definition of community as “a foundation unity operating in a social system in connection with environmental constituencies” (Hanpongpanth, p. 8), Buddhist PR focuses on the following as a basis for functionality: the nature of social settings, the networks of social interaction, power relationships, conflict resolution, and cultural understanding. It does so in an effort to leverage local assets, to enhance community resources rather than being relegated to obtaining power from organizational dominant coalitions (Hanpongpanth, 2003).

Hanpongpanth (2003) goes as far as identifying five stages to put the model into action. The first is to establish a local base and conduct a context diagnosis; this is largely referred to as research and should be, argues Hanpongpanth, grounded and

wholly conducted within the community and based on its members' observations. The second stage, facilitating a co-operative setting, should be undertaken mostly through interpersonal channels, providing the development practitioner has access to linguistically capable and cultural relevant contacts within the community. Getting valid information and data, much less establishing relationships, from rural communities without knowing them in person or being introduced to them by someone they know is generally difficult, if not impossible (Hanpongpanth, 2003). The third, fourth, and fifth stages—fostering communicative activities, linking community networks, and encouraging collaborative alliances, respectively—should be conducted via combination of interpersonal and mediated channels, dependent on contextual circumstances, including local media outlets, infrastructure, linguistic barriers, and geographic dispersion, to name a few.

Buddhist public relations does not completely discredit traditional, Western-oriented public relations practices; to do so would be to eliminate its association with the field entirely. Instead, it holds that the degree to which Western rationalism may be applied alongside Buddhist PR depends upon the eclecticism of the target culture (Hanpongpanth, 2003); that is, how willing and able the community cultural members are to adopt *modernization approach*—which does have its place—recommendations from Western external change agents.

Besides the aforementioned framework, Buddhist PR holds to its name by suggesting the awareness and use of the Buddhist principles of *looking from within* (on

the individual level) and *dhammic socialist society* (on the social level), which emphasize the importance of the balance and interrelatedness of all things. Instead of external change agents disseminating information from the top, down to the lower ‘uneducated target’ community, this model suggests that change can only originate from within, subject to cultural, social, and economic factors outside the complete understanding of external change agents; that development practitioners do more to implement solutions presented by the populace, not vice versa. The idea of a dhammic socialist society aligns development goals with collective agendas, not pluralist approaches as has been the case for much of the history of the field (Hanpongpanth, 2003).

In essence, external community development change agents—Buddhist PR posits—should catalyze “collaborative alliances...that will lead those involved to ‘reciprocal relationships’” (Hanpongpanth, p. 24). This perspective on the appropriate position and agency of external change agents is founded in the assumption that true democratically forwarded development initiatives, necessarily and fundamentally, must take place within “a reciprocal relationship-based community, not a democracy of individualism that fosters self-centeredness” (Hanpongpanth, p. 24). In order to do this, development organizations need to “experience the nature of the complex conditions in a given locality” (Hanpongpanth, p. 30).

In line with the nature of the research and implementation, the proposed evaluation process of Buddhist PR is similar to Pal and Dutta’s (2007) *culture centered approach*, suggesting experiential interviews of community members. As community

members are the only ones capable of identifying problems, they are also the only legitimate sources of perceived development success (Hanpongpanth, 2003). This is described as a *holistic* and *dynamic* process; in this model, the concept of *projects*, so common in traditional development initiatives, is replaced with an aim towards continual, complex-adaptive evolution of both aims and practices. This approach presents problems in the real world, though. As has been discussed, funding from external agencies requires hard-data, measurable and timely. The Buddhist PR approach certainly does not lend itself to this need.

Hanpongpanth's (2003) theory is grounded in this unveiling of his philosophy behind the Buddhist PR approach: "The shift of values from self-interest and competition to cooperation and social justice, from material acquisition to inner growth would be prime importance in creating a new world order" (p. 31). While admirable, his model's disregard for most traditional public relations practices belittles the profession's ability to accommodate real change and also makes it difficult to justify his model as one of public relations at all. At best, the Buddhist public relations model provides a perspective and insertion point for PR for social change professionals. Buddhist PR, taken together with the cultural centered approach, while keeping development communication paradigms in mind, might benefit from the introduction of a previously unincorporated element of public relations theory.

CHAPTER 3

INTEGRATED ROPE

A New Proposal for Public Relations for Development

As this paper has shown, there have been multiple scholarly attempts at development communication theory, public relations theory, and integrations between the two to reconcile theory and practice in a culturally sensitive and effective way. Past and current “debate and research about development communication have been divided between two schools of thought—diffusion of innovation and participatory communication—that both reveal conflicting results about the role of communication in improving living conditions for people in the developing world” (Petersone, p. 2). Rogers’s (1962) diffusion of innovation approach was largely criticized by scholars like Friere (1970) on the grounds that the former’s model was culturally and socially insensitive, top-down, one-way communication largely grounded in modernization theory of development. Friere and others asserted that although globalization had expanded the reach of communication and information, it had not altered the ways in which different cultures receive, interpret, and use the information; essentially, it questioned the efficacy of the previously discussed *access theory* that holds that populations exposed to educational information will readily adopt it. The participatory approach advocated for a model that stresses community member participation, cultural sensitivity, and two-way, horizontal communication. According to Servaes (2008):

In contrast with the more economically-oriented approach in traditional perspectives on modernization and development, the central idea in

alternative, more culturally-oriented versions of multiplicity and sustainable development is that there is no universal development model which leads to sustainability at all levels of society and the world, that development is an integral, multidimensional and dialectic process that can differ from society to society, community to community, context to context. (p. 205)

The goal of development communication practitioners, according to this perspective, should be to create “an enabling environment” (Servaes, p. 210) in which local resources can act autonomously. From this perspective, “culture is text, not context...a situation cannot exist without culture” (Lie, p. 286)—approaches to development should be wholly grounded, implemented, and evaluated from a community standpoint. This bottom-up view, however, like its predecessors founded in modernization approach, has been the subject of criticism; this has particularly been the case because of the model’s inability to produce hard-data to accrue funding. Even those scholars who admire the participatory model ideologically tend to eschew its use in the real world for its lack of pragmatism.

In lieu of perceived shortcomings of diffusion of innovation and participatory models, Wilkins’s (2008) proposal—coined *advocacy communication*—approaches development from a more political point-of-view. This model places value on communication that is directed at media professionals, policy makers, and opinion shapers, rooted in the belief that these audiences have the best chance to alter existing structural and power frameworks. Proponents of advocacy communication insist that social and economic inequalities are the result of formative power structures, that marginalized peoples are entrenched within a system that fundamentally cannot allow for

social mobilization, and the only way to fix this is to appeal to the aforementioned groups, usually through mass media outlets. As previously discussed, this approach has found little success in the field or much support in terms of practice because it is seen as too time-consuming, resource draining, risky, and mostly ineffective.

To review, the present state of the field of development communication is mired in a battle between diffusion of innovation approaches and participatory models, with a brief appearance by advocacy communication. While the former two find a home, to varying degrees, in research and practice, the current state of the field remains conflicted, as Colle (2008) demonstrates:

A revitalized modernization perspective in which some of the errors of the past are acknowledged and efforts are made to deal in new ways, as outlined in the multiplicity view, remains the dominant perspective in practice but becomes increasingly more difficult to defend in theory. On the other side, while multiplicity theory is gaining ground in academic spheres, in practice it is still looked upon as a sympathetic though idealistic sideshow. (p. 176)

As mentioned previously, the field of public relations, particularly theory, has mirrored that of development communication to a significant degree. The above-detailed culture-centered and Buddhist public relations models were constructed, as was the case in development communication, in response to an emerging sense that traditional public relations theory and practice were too Western oriented, too capitalistic, and were not culturally sensitive enough to be exercised in community development programs, especially in international contexts. Tilson and Alozie's (2004) *Toward the Common Good: Perspectives in International Public Relations* is a collection of essays that details

several cases in which American PR practitioners, and subsequently their clients, suffered from this a lack of cultural sensitivity. Meanings lost in translation, worker rights, environmental preservation, and ‘crony capitalism’ have created problems when Western PR professionals don’t mind their cultural surroundings (see Beer & Mersham, 2004; Blankson, 2004).

Despite these inadequacies of international public relations, or maybe because of, a reconciliation of the two fields—development communication and public relations for community development—has done much to reframe public relations’ reputation (as a field in general). It has done little, though, in the way of providing so-called *public relations for development* (PRD) with a conceptual model that is at once both culturally sensitive and results driven, at least in the capacity required for real-world development agencies to accrue funding. The following is a new proposed model for development, using PRD as its framework for change. The proposal builds from the literature above, pulling from established best practices of both development communication and PR, and incorporates Hendrix’s (1995) ROPE model of public relations to fill the gaps in previous proposed approaches. The aim is to construct a more complete model, a so-called *public relations for community development* (PRCD) approach that will then be tested with audiovisual, ethnographic research in the form of a case study.

Dag Hammarskjold + ROPE

One of the most influential forces driving development in the early years of this century has been the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set by the United Nations

(Servaes, 2008). Among them, to cut world poverty in half, provide access to universal primary education, reduce child mortality rates by two thirds, and reduce the proportion of those without clean drinking water by two thirds by 2015 (Colle, 2008). Notable concerning the MDGs is their measurability; the goals are quantifiable, and development projects can be managed according to their success in relation to set numbers. Although this method coincides with modernization—which, as detailed, has been widely criticized in academia and theory—this new proposed PRCD model appreciates the need for hard-data accumulation in development initiatives and will not abandon its use. This path is justifiable, in the least degree, because of the reiterated importance of funding, though more reasons are forthcoming. The importance of Western modernization approaches to PRCD established, the contributions of critical-cultural approaches cannot be overlooked, nor excluded from an inclusive model for development. A middle ground must be calibrated between western-rationalism and critical-culture-centered approaches. In doing so, it is hoped the new model will provide not only a conceptual framework to be discussed in theory but an integral praxis to be used in the field.

The *Dag Hammarskjold Foundation* has, to date, provided the most succinct, complete, and accurate model for development, what that organization refers to as *another development*. The *Foundation* defines development as geared towards the satisfaction of needs, beginning with the eradication of poverty, as endogenous and self-reliant (bottom-up and sustainable), and in harmony with the environment (*green*, to use the popular heuristic) (Servaes & Malikhao, 2008).

This definition, more than any other, effectively balances and incorporates the principles of both modernization and critical-culture approaches to development. The first pillar—the eradication of poverty—acknowledges the wisdom of modernization approaches to development at a fundamental level. However, the latter pillar—development in harmony with the environment—insinuates the need to take into account all factors, including cultural and contextual, the core of critical-cultural, participatory approaches. Although silent about frameworks for practice, the overarching goal of development provided by the *Foundation* serves as a great starting point for incorporation of development communication and public relations in this new model.

PRCD grounds its theory, thus, in the above definition of development. It then adopts a traditional public relations model—Hendrix’s (1995) ROPE model—for practical and technical implementation into PRCD. The ROPE model’s flexibility allows for contextual adjustments within cultural parameters, while its structure provides clarity in how to go about using communication for development, in all its forms, for various publics, and through different channels. The following is an explanation of the ROPE model, how it is incorporated with *another development*, and its functionality within the PRCD proposal.

Elements of the ROPE Model

Hendrix (1995) provides PR professionals with a framework for practicum. The ROPE model—an acronym for *research, objectives, programming, and evaluation*—is meant to cut a path to excellent public relations. While various attempts have been made

in theory to incorporate public relations practices with development communication—as has been discussed in this paper—there has been no mention of the ROPE model in those reconciliations or how it might be used in pursuance of developmental goals.

The *public relations for community development* (PRCD) model proposes the aggregation of the ROPE model with the *Dag Hammarskjold Foundation* approach to development. In short, the goal of *public relations for community development* is to satisfy needs and eradicate poverty by using endogenous knowledge and resources, to do so in harmony with *the environment*, while using the ROPE model as a guide for practicum. PRCD hopes to successfully adopt, therefore, a PR model approach to communication—one that has until now not been forwarded—that will improve development practices of international, rural, nonprofit agencies.

The elements of the ROPE model are to be executed chronologically (respective to the acronym), and each includes under it a subset of practices that qualify specifics and guide practice. The first stage of the ROPE model, *research*, refers to the need for public relations practitioners—and in this case PRCD practitioners—to broadly and deeply research the various players situated within the development arena. Hendrix's (1995) ROPE model, in its traditional form, calls for the identification and research of the organization being represented (usually a company or government entity), including its past public relations practices, its reputation within the community, region, or nation, and the various 'publics' the organization maintains communicative ties and/or economic and political interests with. It also requires research into the demographics, cultural specifics,

opinions, beliefs, attitudes, and tendencies of the various publics who maintain ties with the organization, as well as those publics' attitudes concerning the organization. The aim is to become knowledgeable about the surrounding environment, so the practitioner can construct messages that minimize friction with those publics and maintain the image of the organization (Hendrix, 1995; Swann, 2008).

PRCD, on the other hand, aims to provide a way for *nonprofit* change organizations (including international ones) to maintain communication and craft messages directed at the 'target' audience for development. Instead of practicing PR to minimize friction between a capitalistic organization and its publics, this model adopts relevant elements of PR to pursue development, *not* profit-driven, goals. Public relations is still being practiced in the sense that an autonomous entity is using communication to relate to and work with its publics, but the concept of public relations is expanded within the PRCD paradigm. So, as per research portion of the ROPE model—in corporate and government PR ventures the goal is to decrease friction and maintain image equity; in PRCD, research needs to be reexamined so it aligns with development, not capitalistic goals.

First, it should be noted that research, as presented in ROPE's traditional form, was theorized in an environment in which much corporate and government PR is outsourced to external firms. Subsequently, Hendrix (1995) placed much emphasis on researching (from the firm's perspective) the hiring organizations' past PR practices. In PRCD, which applies to international community development, public relations is usually

practiced internally, as budgets do not typically allow for such outsourcing. Instead of a firm researching its clients' PR past, then, PRCD substitutes *research by the organizational change agent into the community's reaction to its presence*. It should be noted, here, that some developing nations do employ Western firms to conduct PR campaigns for development (Tilson & Alozie, 2004). However, in most cases of this kind, it is the developing state government that does the hiring (Anholt, 2003); this paper is concerned with *nongovernment* organizational intervention.

Thus, in the PRCD model, the research should focus on the latter subgroup as detailed in ROPE's traditional use—that is, the publics that the nonprofit is striving to benefit. This is arguably one of the most important elements of ROPE in the PRCD model, as the ultimate goal of the approach, aforementioned, is to relate with constituent publics in development settings to advance *public interests*. At first glance, and in stride with the modernization approach to development, international nonprofits (many times referred to as NGOs) might mistake economic gains as the ultimate and supreme goal.

However, while economic advancements should not be ignored as many social, health, even environmental problems arise from poverty, change agents should understand that community members' subjective perception of development is as, if not more, important (Servaes, 2008). As per the PRCD model, founded in the *Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation's* qualification of 'another development,' understanding the complexity and nuances of a community's history, political structure, economic base, religious beliefs, and cultural traditions is essential to real development. Therefore,

research—specifically of the various publics within the community, both their distinctions and similarities—is of paramount importance to PRCD. The idea of ‘community’ is not all inclusive except in the most remote arenas of development. Most of the time, “communities are not homogenous entities but are comprised of subgroups with social strata and divergent interests” (Figueroa et al., 2002). Research into a given population then, must be mindful of diversity and take those differences into account. In PR parlance, these community subgroups are referred to as ‘publics.’

This line of reasoning is accommodating to both modernization and participatory approaches to development. While nonprofits should recognize the crucial part economics plays in every aspect of life, they also need to understand that efficacy of projects will be limited if not founded in community research. PRCD does not discriminate against diffusion of innovation, either. While it discredits its use prior to research, diffusion of culturally relevant and comprehensible information, on community members’ terms, can lead to real and positive change.

The research stage of PRCD carries with it one more important element. That is, its use in accruing resources and talent that can be put to use in subsequent implementation of projects. If possible—and in line with participatory approaches to development—community members, members of the different publics, should be directly involved with the organization. On a practical level, this might (should?) mean hiring qualified locals to work alongside change agents. The benefits of such an arrangement, particularly in an international setting, are innumerable—translation, navigation,

networking, political liaison, cultural knowledge, etc. As previously mentioned, successful integration into a foreign community, especially on the level required for true development communication to work, is nearly impossible without prior contacts. Maintaining local staff can provide contacts and entry points for such relationships that otherwise would be difficult to initiate. In the context of international development, “social trust precedes task trust” (Servaes & Malikhao, p. 170).

Before moving to *objectives*, it’s important to reiterate that community research should always be conducted on the ground, in the location where development agents plan to work. As stated earlier in this paper, development and development communication strategies and tactics cannot be effectively planned outside the sphere of the ‘target’ community. Gumucio-Dagron (2008) argues that the only way to report and understand people, places, and culture, is to actually be in the field and “try to capture at least some of the context and culture” (p. 72).

The setting of *objectives*, the second task required of the ROPE model, doesn’t require as much alteration as does the research portion of PRCD—in relation to the model’s traditional structure. Hendrix (1995) proposed the compartmentalization of objectives according to specific, qualifying functions. Instead of simply assigning objectives, the ROPE model assumes differences and subsequent relevance of what Hendrix calls *output* and *impact objectives*. Both types are to be measurable, time-oriented, and stated as infinitives. Both are valued as crucial to the communicative process, however fundamentally different each is in comparison to the other. The former,

output objectives, identifies those tasks that should be set and measured as *actions or tasks taken by the communicator*. In the case of public relations in its traditional sense of the term, an example of an output objective might be: To send x amount of press releases concerning x product to x media outlets by x time (x being quantifiable). If output objectives are adapted to PRCD, an example might read: To distribute 1,000 preventative health pamphlets to three villages by January 1st.

Impact objectives, on the other hand, refer to *ultimate goals* of a public relations endeavor. In the case of traditional PR, goals revolve mostly around financial gains and losses; that is, focus is on maintaining or altering beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, or purchasing habits in an effort to increase the communicative source's fiscal standing. An example of an impact objective—in this sense—is: To increase sales of x product by x percent by the end of x quarter. Like output objectives, impact objectives should be measurable, time-oriented, and stated as infinitives. If ROPE may once again accommodate PRCD, impact objectives can follow the same formula, but instead focus on development goals instead of capitalistic ones. As such, an example of an impact objective suited to PRCD could be: To increase condom use of all male villagers by 25% within the year.

It should be noted here, however, and will be expounded on later, that PRCD does not totally eschew financially-oriented communicative goals. As is especially the case with nonprofit organizations, funding depends on crafted messages designed to illicit monies from external sources. This underlines the important fact that *nonprofit*

organizations must navigate *not only* target development audiences but also include communication programming essential to their existence—those needed to acquire donations, both private and government. What’s made clear (Hendrix, 1995) in the original model are goals’ need to match organizational interests. In PRCD, this is the case only when raising funds needed to operate—i.e. remaining open and functional should be a nongovernment organization’s only ‘self-promoting’ agenda. The focus should be, instead, shifted to meeting the public interests as identified in the research.

Objectives, both output and impact, it should be reiterated, under the proposed PRCD model need be founded in the reduction of poverty and satisfaction of needs, while also respecting the environment. This fact only reinforces the importance of the research stage; that is, *objectives should stem directly from research*. Although most development projects inherently include poverty-reduction schemas, other subjective, community-identified issues and perceived solutions unearthed in research should be subsequently addressed with suitable objectives, both output and impact.

The next stage of the ROPE model to be incorporated with *another development* in the construction of a PRCD approach is *programming*. Programming refers to the implementation of set objectives. This stage, like objectives, must be directly founded in its predecessor; that is, programming should be tailored to previously identified objectives, which are set according to research—each builds from the previous. It is unnecessary to elaborate on programming here, as unique development situations call for equally unique programming schemas. The common bond between all ROPE

programming, which may be summarily qualified, is communicative strategies used to achieve set objectives. Channels of communication vary according to changing environmental and situational factors as well as intended audience. Interpersonal and mediated communication fluctuate in comparative use according to infrastructure (including political system, level of economic development, and the extent of activism), culture, and the media system (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2003).

In its accommodation of participatory development, PRCD asserts the importance of listening to and using local resources in programming, as well. While acknowledging measurable, poverty-reduction programming as an important element in the development process, PRCD also recognizes—as has been alluded to in this paper in relation to participatory style—that including, even basing development on community perception and insight improves efficacy of projects. Taking it a step further, communication for social change (in this case PRCD) is valued as a process in and of itself: “When a village or group uses the communication for social change process to address a critical issue they have already affected positive outcomes” (Figueroa et al., Foreword). Accordingly, PRCD proposes a ROPE interpretation of programming that bridges the modernization and participatory approach models.

While the former is more attune to *measurable outcomes* and the latter the *process*, PRCD eschews such orthodox perspectives in favor of an integrated approach that adopts only best practices from each paradigm. PRCD programming, then, allows critical-cultural perspectives to coexist with modernization approaches to development.

In practice, this puts PRCD in a position to catalyze economic and other developmental (structural, social, health, etc.) gains through communication between external sources with know-how and locals who maintain resources, both material and intellectual. PRCD programming, it is argued, should stem directly from set objectives, which stem from research, which stem from the community. Subsequently, variables within the programming stage are molded in accordance with local formative structures, infrastructure, culture, religious beliefs, and the like.

The Rockefeller Foundation's 'Communication for social change working paper series'—which was developed by that organization to standardize procedures for philanthropic funding—identifies communication for social change as “a process of public and private dialogue through which people define who they are, what they want and how they can get it” (Figueroa et al., Preface). PRCD programming acknowledges the participatory element in this statement. However, *public relations for community development* asserts that programming must include some element of modernization approach. Otherwise, the inclusion of public relations in the identification of PRCD undercuts the field's value in relation to development.

Another reference to *The Rockefeller Foundation* sheds light on the final stage of the ROPE model—*evaluation*. While modernization approach advocates measurable change, as does traditional interpretations of the ROPE model, and participatory styles of evaluation are concerned chiefly with subjective, holistic methods (mostly community member self-report interviews) of evaluation, PRCD again integrates the competing

perspectives, particularly in relation to its understanding of community change organizations and the eclecticism they must navigate in terms of varying and fundamentally different audiences. According to aforementioned paper series composed by *The Rockefeller Foundation*, although self-evaluation by community members is important and the best measure of real change, successful change organizations, because of their dependence on external funding realize that “a rigorous, systematic investigation of the process and outcomes may be undertaken...and even surveys with statistical analysis may be conducted” (Figueroa et al., p. 14).

This paradox—that both measures of evaluation, quantitative-economically-founded statistics and subjective-holistic-qualitative data are essential to evaluation—is the best defense for the integration of the ROPE model of PR with development. Hendrix’s (1995) ROPE allows modernization approaches to thrive in the evaluation of development as it concerns external funding while also leaving room for qualitative, subjective approaches to evaluation so valued by the participatory approach proponents. PRCD also fundamentally shifts the definition of public relations as a profession. While the term *public relations* evolved in an environment that defined its purpose as the defense and maintenance of organizational-driven interests, the co-option of the ROPE model (developed for use in PR, in its traditional sense) by nonprofit organizations—and the proposal of the PRCD model—broadens the horizon of the *functionality* of the public relations as a profession. By using a model (ROPE) that was designed for organizational, largely financial interests, the PRCD practitioner can reconcile competing schools of

development thought—modernization and participatory—and further development through an integrated and flexible approach.

This assertion directly contrasts the previous delineation between nonprofit public relations and development communication. Gumucio-Dagron's (2008) commentary on this subject sheds light on popular perspectives concerning the previous nonoverlap of the two fields:

We may find a small budget for the 'promotion' of the overall project, which is more related with public relations than with development communication...A neat line needs to be drawn between information activities that aim to build the external 'image' of a program or project, and the communication activities that should be inseparable of program activities at the community level. (p. 79)

While PRCD supports the notion that communicative strategies are different, both in form and in aim between and among differing 'publics,' it rejects Gumucio-Dagron's (2008) assertion that public relations practices and development communication practices of a given organization cannot pursue development using one model. The proposed PRCD model not only integrates modernization and participatory approaches to development, it reconciles public relations with development communication, allowing nonprofit communicators to construct messages in both areas using the ROPE model, which is flexible enough for every audience and message aim.

In order for the proposed *public relations for community development* to become praxis, it must first be tested in real-world environs. To do so, this paper now moves to development in the context of northern Thailand and *Warm Heart Worldwide, Inc.* First, the setting is detailed with a brief overview of the socioeconomic variables that make up

rural northern Thailand. Next, *Warm Heart Worldwide*, an American-run nongovernment organization (NGO) located in Phrao District, northern Thailand, is introduced—its philosophy, mission, projects, and of methods of practice within aforementioned cultural environment. Last, to test the efficacy of the proposed PRCD model, research questions are introduced in an effort to understand how closely *Warm Heart* adheres to practices emulating the proposed model and subsequent perceived successes and failures as a result.

CHAPTER 4

THAILAND IN THE 21st CENTURY

Thailand is one of 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Bordering Myanmar (formerly Burma), Laos PDR, Cambodia, and Malaysia, as well as the Andaman Sea and Gulf of Thailand, it is a major economic player not only in SE Asia, but Asia as a whole and, increasingly, the world. Formerly known as Siam, it spans over 513,000 square kilometers and houses an official population of 65 million (ASEAN, 2011). With a well-developed infrastructure, free-enterprise economy, generally proinvestment policies, and strong export economies—mostly agricultural (rice, cassava, rubber, coconuts) and industrial products (textiles, electronics, automobiles and parts)—Thailand maintains a relatively healthy annual economic growth rate (up to 7.6% in 2010) and in 2010 its GDP was \$580 billion (CIA World FactBook, 2011).

Although Siam/Thailand was unified as a kingdom in the mid 14th century, and is the only country in the region that has not at one time been colonized by a European power, it is not, like all ASEAN countries, ethnically, religiously, or culturally homogenous. According to the CIA World FactBook (2011), 75% of the country is ethnically Thai, 14% Chinese, and 11% designated ‘Other’. The 11% includes several hilltribe minorities located largely in the rural periphery of the country as well as migrant populations streaming across the border from neighboring Myanmar as a result of the latter’s continual political strife.

Burmese nationals as well as hill tribes including the Karen, Hmong, Ahka, Lisu, Lahu, Mien, Padaung, and others constitute a patchwork population that historically existed on the fringe of the Siamese/Thai state (Lewis & Lewis, 1984). Even within each ‘tribe’, diversity—religious, cultural, even linguistic—is the rule, not the exception. The Hmong, for example, are divided into the White Hmong and Green Hmong; the Karen, into the Sgaw, the Pwo, and the Kayah—others parallel this trend. Within each group, language, culture, religious practice, subsistence routines, and familial and political organizations can vary, historically creating nightmares for anthropologists and would be state-makers (Scott, 2009). This heterogeneity is especially prominent in the rural north of the country, an area diversely populated with the aforementioned hill tribe groups that are plagued by poverty, socioeconomic marginalization, and extremely limited life-prospects compared to urban Thai dwellers.

The Rural North, One Third of the ‘Golden Triangle’

While there are competing arguments as to why indigenous hill tribe peoples originally remained in—or retreated to (see Scott, 2009)—the mountains, it is broadly accepted that these groups’ geographic locations, subsidence patterns, linguistics, and lack of access to education, basic healthcare, modern technology, information and resources largely keeps them there. Despite said groups’ historical aversion to state integration, a trend has emerged in which hill tribe youths descend the mountains to work in the cities (Lewis & Lewis, 1984). Whether out of economic need to earn money for their families, a youthful urge for discovery, or flat boredom from subsisting in one

place—most often the former—it is unfortunate and common that such persons are forced to survive in the cities in most undesirable circumstances. Most often, they’re faced with work as prostitutes, drug traffickers, and in other illegal rackets—the only ones available to them inside the periphery of state influence because of educational, linguistic, and even political factors (Lewis & Lewis, 1984).

In Thailand, particularly the rural north, one third of the infamous *Golden Triangle*, there have been efforts, both Thai and international, to integrate hill tribe ‘immigrants’ into the cities via adult education programs, language education, and economic aid (FAO, 2011). What is becoming increasingly clear, though, is the strength of barriers excluding successful integration of hill tribe populations into urban centers (Puginier, 1999). As a result, aid agencies and grassroots organizations have fundamentally shifted their approach from integration to sustainability of hill tribe culture *within their home environment*. That is, aiming for the improvement of living conditions in the hill tribe villages so that young people will no longer need to leave their home in search of money.

This endeavor—creating sustainable environs while maintaining cultural integrity of hill tribe groups—has proven difficult for sundry reasons, not least of which populations of marginalized groups are often dispersed across wide geographical areas, and many times separated by natural barriers—mountains, marshes, swamps, etc. (D.M., personal communication, August, 2011). This makes it difficult for collective action, resource management and provides substantial challenges to healthcare, trade, and

education. Physical barriers are not alone in complicating collective action between local villages to achieve sustained, improved living; minorities subsisting on the outskirts of developing nations—including the hill tribes of northern Thailand—many times speak different languages, espouse different faiths, subsist via varying agricultural techniques, and maintain diverse cultural practices (Scott, 2009). It makes it difficult, then, for organizational change agents, especially those imported from nations unfamiliar with local culture, language, and traditions, to effectively catalyze, drive, and monitor development.

In spite of said barriers, efforts abound to establish grassroots movements designed to mobilize and empower those groups who are marginalized, oppressed, or ignored by popular politics. Government agencies like the Peace Corp., the United States Institute for Peace, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and others, exist to work in underdeveloped countries—or in underdeveloped regions of largely developed nations—to do just that. There is also a large body of private, nonprofit organizations that pursue the same objectives. Popularly referred to as NGOs (nongovernment organizations), these international organizations' missions range from HIV/AIDS prevention, environmental preservation, education, microenterprise, to human rights. NGOs must navigate multilingual environments, where resource management, transportation, and even subsistence are complex logistics. Such are the challenges facing *Warm Heart Worldwide, Inc.*, an American-founded and run NGO operating in Phrao District, Chiang Mai Province, northern Thailand. The organization and its various

projects will serve as a case study to test *public relations for community development* (PRCD) and to highlight issues discussed above.

CHAPTER 5

WARM HEART WORLDWIDE, INC.

Warm Heart Worldwide, Inc. is an American-registered nonprofit organization based in Highland Park, New Jersey. Founded in 2008 by Professor Emeritus of Political Science at Rutgers University, Dr. Michael Shafer, the organization serves as the umbrella organization to *Warm Heart Foundation (WHF)*, a Thai-registered nonprofit organization based in Phrao district, northern Thailand. *WHF*, also founded by Dr. Shafer, began in July 2008 as a nonprofit, community-based NGO aimed to stimulate and support community development initiatives in Phrao district and surrounding areas. Phrao District is located in Chiang Mai province, northwest Thailand. The region is part of the Golden Triangle, infamous for trafficking, both human and narcotics. Dr. Shafer and his wife Evelind Schecter, Co-Founder and Treasurer, knew they wanted to start an NGO in Thailand, the question was just ‘where?’ According to Dr. Shafer:

You might think that deciding to start a nonprofit and picking where to start it would require a long and complicated decision process. Not true. Warm Heart began as a discussion among four people interested in the same problem—how to raise the floor of absolute poverty high enough that families didn’t need to send their daughters to the city to sell sex. We agreed that arresting ‘bad guys’ and deporting sex workers don’t address the real issue that we saw every day—degrading poverty. So we decided we would start our own nonprofit to provide a sustainable solution to the kind of poverty that sent fourteen year old girls into brothels. (Warm Heart Worldwide, 2011)

After considering several possible sites in Thailand, Shafer’s Thai founding partner (which is required in Thailand—foreigners starting any kind of organization cannot hold more than 49% stake) suggested his home district—Phrao. Phrao is certainly

characterized as poverty-stricken, especially by Western standards, and even in Thailand. One third of families live on less than 75 cents a day; the hill tribe communities that inhabit the mountain regions of the district survive on less. The average per capita monthly income is 70 dollars. In Phrao, approximately 54,000 people share four doctors, one emergency medical team (EMT), and two dentists (Warm Heart Worldwide, 2011). In reality, geographical dispersion and impossibility of transportation to and from the mountains limit the percentage of the population who actually benefit from these limited services. Together, these factors lead to decreased life expectancy, lower quality of life, and extremely limited economic prospects.

WHF's slogan succinctly summarizes the organization's philosophy: *Honoring the past, Building a better future*. As stated on their website (2011), Warm Heart is a grassroots organization that empowers rural Thai villages; it is community-based, hands-on, self-sustaining, and inclusive. Each one of these elements is examined in later parts of this paper in relation to development communication and public relations models, particularly *public relations for community development* (PRCD). By comparing *WH's* approach to the PRCD model proposal, it is hoped that efficacy of practices might be improved. Before comparing *WH's* practices in relation to PRCD, however, it is necessary to describe the organization's structure and projects.

Structure and Projects

Structurally, the operating Thai organization (*Warm Heart Foundation*) is headed by a Thai-national board and Dr. Shafer (President), Mayor Meryl Frank (Vice

President), Evelind Schecter (Treasurer), Dr. Gabriela Ferreira, MD (Secretary), and Prachan Jakeo (Chief of Staff). Warm Heart pursues development with a staff fluctuating around 20—the majority of whom (16) are Thai—alongside a steady stream of international volunteers. *Warm Heart Worldwide, Inc.* the New Jersey based umbrella organization, is a registered 501c3 organization. Maintaining this status, among other things, allows for American *WH* donor tax breaks. Functionally, the organization has constructed an approach to development by categorizing its work into three distinct project types. These are *health*, *education*, and *microenterprise*.

The health initiatives driven by *WH* are numerous and diverse, from constructing a ‘Clinic in the Clouds’—a facility for remote hill tribe communities to conduct emergency medical care—to eye exams for a local population who had previously never had them. The organization liaisons with local health authorities to identify chronic and acute issues and devises solutions that are many times implemented by a continuing stream of medical student volunteers from abroad. Aside from providing testing, medical supplies, and facilities, *WH*’s health projects also include emergency medical training courses to hill tribe community members too remote to reach the hospital—nor comfortably or timely enough—in cases of emergency. Snake bites, motorbike accidents, malaria, dengue fever are all common in the mountains, yet each can be fatal or disfiguring in lieu of the lack of care available. *WH* has also teamed with *Engineers without Borders* to design and install a water-delivery system to remote villages, and is in the process of realizing green, biomass energy solutions. Finally, the organization

provides free prenatal vitamins to every pregnant woman in Phrao, a district that chronically suffers from newborn malnutrition.

Education is another major focal point for *WHF*. In the Phrao Valley, 15% of school-aged children live 2-3 hours away from the nearest school. As a result, in combination with other factors, the average education in Phrao is 4th grade. The cornerstone of *WH*'s education initiative, the Children's Homes, originated from a realization that most of the hill tribes are inaccessible in the rainy season (not to mention too far, even in dry weather), which lasts for a large portion of the school year. Subsequently, village kids cannot make it to school. Warm Heart combats this problem by providing housing and care for over 40 hill tribe children during the school year in a facility located in the Phrao valley only minutes-long bus ride to school. They feed the kids and provide accommodation as well as further educational opportunities by teaching English after school and providing a library and access to multimedia technology. *WH* also facilitates a Saturday-school/Teen Club for local kids and teenagers.

The Children's Home is not the only education initiative taken on by *WH*. The organization also provides English teaching volunteers to local schools, a valuable resource in an environment in which English learning is stagnated because a lack of native speaking instructors. Most recently, *WH* has purchased an old, long abandoned school building and refurbished it using donated funds to use as a job training center for disabled and elderly members of the community.

As health and education overlap—as in health education and emergency medical training—so do education and the third development initiative, microenterprise.

Microenterprise, in general and in the case of *WH* catalyst programs, fundamentally begins with education: how to create value-added product, how to market the product, and how to manage a business. In Phrao, these skills are lacking to some degree, and *WH* works to improve upon existing business models or to catalyst a new venture, product, and innovation.

The Phrao valley has abundant natural resources to create products ranging from handicrafts, to silk, to coffee. And, some capital is generated in the region using these resources already; however, *WH* organizes co-ops—of weavers, growers, artisans—and uniforms product to increase market value. Then, *WH* buys the product at market value (what product would bring if sold in Thai markets), and markets them abroad at higher, international prices. Half the proceeds go back to the weavers, growers, or artisans; the other half back to *WH* for administration costs needed to continue the venture. So, the businessmen and women have guaranteed buyers for their products in *WH*. The producers also gain the advantage of extra income for revenue generated when the goods are sold internationally.

CHAPTER 6

RQs AND METHODOLOGIES

Now that *public relations for community development* (PRCD) has been defined as a new, integrated approach to nonprofit public relations founded in ‘another development’ and the ROPE model, and Warm Heart has been introduced, the paper now turns to analyzing the ethnographic data. First is a presentation of research questions to elicit information regarding *WH*, its past and present public relations strategies (in relation to PRCD), and perceived successes or failures as a result. Using ethnographic, qualitative analysis of digitally recorded observations and interviews of the organization and its constituent parties, some light might be shed on the practicality of the so-called PRCD model.

The following ‘publics’ have been defined by Dr. Shafer as the primary ‘communities’ *WH* works within and alongside. As per the Thai side of the operation: the general public, including the district of Phrao and surrounding villages; hill tribe communities—Lahu, Lisu, Karen, and Ahka; national, regional, and local government; healthcare providers; microenterprise constituents (weaving cooperatives, coffee growers, artisans); local school administration and teachers; the police force; the Thai military; the disabled and elderly; school children and parents; hill tribe leaders; *WH* employees (Thai and foreign); and other NGOs, international and regional. As for the Highland Park, NJ, side of the operation, *WH* deals with: the American federal government; donors—private and public; volunteers (from all fields, including medicine, marketing, engineering, etc.);

philanthropic organizations such as *Doctors and Engineers without Borders*; various universities who maintain official and unofficial relationships with *WH*, and handmade and organic goods shops and boutiques (D.M. Shafer, personal communication, August, 2011).

The eclecticism and sheer number of unique publics *WH* must navigate allows for a comprehensive analysis of public relations' practices, and efficacy of adherence (aware or unaware) by *WH* to the PRCD model. With the interviews and observations—which are filmed—the researcher aims to identify real practices; i.e. what is actually taking place, how those practices are founded in public relations literature and theory, if at all, the development paradigm or philosophy underlying said practices, any overlap between real practice and the PRCD proposed model, *perceived* efficacy of the PRCD model (by *WH*), and intent to use or not to use such a model in the future. In short, this study aims to compare *WH*'s public relations strategies and tactics to the PRCD model in order to test the latter's practicality in the real world, and the former's success as a result of its use.

Data will come from two sources: one, interviews with Warm Heart Director Michael Shafer and Chief of Staff Prachan “PJ” Jakeo, and two, observations of the organization's agency within the Phrao community—which includes communicative patterns and relationships of constituent publics to the organization as well as to each other—in relation to above research queries. Both interviews and observations are audio-visually, digitally recorded. The resulting footage, while referenced in this paper, is also included in the production of a short video to accompany the written portion of the

project. The video is meant to fulfill two functions. One, to provide the reader with images of the case study to accompany and enliven the discussion of the research; and two, to exist as a stand-alone-capable production—that is, to be able to screen as a whole, separate entity independent of the paper to audiences unfamiliar with discussions surrounding public relations in nonprofit, international, rural settings.

All of the data were collected (filmed interviews and observations) between March and September, 2011, in two locations: Highland Park, New Jersey, the U.S. base of operations for *Warm Heart Worldwide, Inc.*, and Phrao District, Chiang Mai Province, Thailand, the operating base of *Warm Heart Foundation*. For more information concerning East Tennessee State University's Institutional Review Board's (IRB) approval of the research, as well as research criteria, publics and individuals involved, and specifics concerning participant privacy, see the video treatment at the end of this document.

CHAPTER 7

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Interviews and observation conducted at the Warm Heart Highland Park, New Jersey, office and in Phrao, Thailand, of staff and administration shed light on the research queries. Dr. Shafer made clear from the beginning that Warm Heart as an organization does not practice public relations as he knows they should. First, he addressed his knowledge of the field, saying:

In my career as a university professor I had to engage in public relations quite a bit, in different capacities. So my understanding of public relations is probably a bit broader than some peoples'. I know it's more than Madison Avenue and sales. I really do understand that public relations is about establishing and maintaining the reputation and credibility of an organization. I also know that its practice should be planned, systematic, and evaluated. (D.M. Shafer, personal communication, August, 2011)

Although Shafer recognizes and understands best practices of public relations, he acknowledges Warm Heart's inability to adhere to such practices, admitting that after 3 years of operation, the organization is "not big enough and not developed enough to have a dedicated PR capability" (D.M. Shafer, personal communication, August, 2011). That is, Dr. Shafer does not say WH does not practice public relations; what he says is they don't engage in the full spectrum of activities that excellent public relations requires. Just from this statement, it is safe to infer a failure Warm Heart's *absolute adherence* to public relations practices like those presented in this paper, specifically the PRCD integrated approach.

While *WH* does perform public relations tasks and constructs strategic messages

aimed at specific audiences, Dr. Shafer admits that although he “usually tasks one or two of the volunteers with getting something out, honestly it’s basically me... and that means that the amount of real research and planning and certainly evaluating that gets done is essentially nil” (personal communication, August, 2011). In spite of this, however, Warm Heart has engaged its various publics with success. If not evaluated in terms of message construction and efficacy as change agent and instead judged solely by success in partnering and working with various individuals and groups within the community, *WH* seems to have done relatively well. On July 4, 2011, Dr. Shafer and the *Warm Heart* staff hosted the organization’s third year anniversary party of its founding at the Children’s Homes in Ban Hoi Sai, a village in Phrao. *WH* invited more than 300, but on the night welcomed more than 400 locals, including government administrators, land-owners, farmers, hospital workers, teachers, friends and families of *WH* staff, police officers, military personnel, and shop owners.

If the basic premise of public relations is to relate to and communicate with an organization’s publics, Warm Heart proved on that night they have succeeded, at least in ways that generated one of the largest public gatherings within the Phrao community’s history; also in ways that allow for quantifiable net gains in striving to meet their various project goals. So, if Shafer himself admits that *WH*’s public relations capacity is limited and does not include much in the way of research, planning, or evaluation, how have they succeeded in gaining the trust and support needed to operate within a foreign environment that historically has not seen much success via alien-organizational-agency?

PJ, *WH* Chief of Staff and Shafer's right-hand-man (Phrao native and 25 year veteran of U.S. Air Force, fluent in English, Thai, and Lanna), seems to think it's because *WH* has done well where other organizations failed in the past. More specifically, they have built trust with the villages *in spite of* past relationships, ones that were usually dictatorial—with information flowing from the 'educated foreigners' to the 'developing locals.' When talking about *WH*'s coffee microenterprise project, PJ acknowledged the difficulty of language barriers but gave more credence to trust-building, saying, "In the past, people come up here and do stuff with them, but they say 'here is your coffee,' then they disappear for the rest of their life" (P. Jakeo, personal communication, August, 2011). PJ went on to clarify the nature of those relationships, explaining that relationships did exist—that is, a lack of communication did not prevent foreigners and locals interacting—but it spoiled the relationship and spoiled the Thais, literally:

Thais have been spoiled by NGOs and missionaries in the past. For example, when we had the EMT training sessions for a couple days, first thing that came out their mouth, they wanted to know how much they're going to get paid. We give them free education, but they want money too. It's frustrating. I told them flat out, our volunteers come all the way across the world on their own dime. We don't pay them anything, and you guys want money? (P. Jakeo, personal communication, August, 2011)

That mindset, that every *falang* (foreigner) in Thailand is out to give away money and resources to the poor, with no expectations in return, only deepens and expands a cycle that keeps rural peoples living below the poverty line. Shafer blatantly expressed his discontent with organizations that perpetuate this paradigm, saying:

There's nothing sorrier, and you see this all over the world, than big organizations going into communities and saying 'this is who we are, this is what we do, and this is what you need,' because you can see these

communities in many instances responding ‘well, if that’s what you have then we’ll take that, if this is what it takes to get money.’ (D.M. Shafer, personal communication, August, 2011)

Such an arrangement between development agencies and its constituent communities, however, is not sustainable. It does not fit with *WH*’s concept of true development, which Shafer clarifies as “sustainable improvements in quality of life, with sustainable meaning, and sustainable within the grasp of the people you’re talking about... Not requiring outside resources of any sort, also respective of the environment, and not being measured solely in economic terms” (D.M. Shafer, personal communication, August, 2011). *WH*’s definition of development, then, parallels this paper’s proposed PRCD approach. And, it shows—Warm Heart does adhere to this concept or philosophy of development, if not yet this kind of public relations practice.

Addressing Orientalism

Warm Heart understands the importance of respecting and working within traditional and cultural parameters. If Said’s (1978) *Orientalism* must be directly addressed in the context of international, rural development by Western agencies, especially in Asia, it becomes necessary to functionalize a development process that borrows its wisdom and discards its dogma. Warm Heart, in its first 3 years, has applied a philosophy and method that at the same time appreciates and leverages cultural heritage, evident here:

The past is extremely important in community development because people in communities, even communities that are developing, understand themselves as complete entities... they don’t see themselves as desperately in need of development. They see themselves as the children and grandchildren of people who they grew up respecting. If you can let them

know, that what they know can help us, to help them, that's where success lies. (D.M. Shafer, personal communication, August, 2011)

In spite of one's preconceptions about what constitutes better quality of life, thus, development practitioners must "start with the community" (D.M. Shafer, personal communication, August, 2011). Warm Heart realizes that:

Absolutely the first thing you have to do when you practice community development is to recognize that the community you're working with understands itself as complete, as adult, and not need of any outside 'help.' Those people see themselves as members of an entire world, defined by music and dance and stories and so on. (D.M. Shafer, personal communication, August, 2011)

Shafer acknowledges that any preconception about development, even from an experienced development professional, is subject to interpretation by a whole new set of rules, by the 'developing' group:

I come into a community and have, of course, a whole set of assumptions of what development might mean and what would be a better life for these people. But it should be an iterative process, one that involves asking yourself and asking others what it is exactly you're seeing. And by others I don't mean other development workers, I mean your organization's constituent groups, those individuals you aim to help. (D.M. Shafer, personal communication, August, 2011)

The best way to avoid a crippling, dogmatic Orientalist viewpoint, then, is to base development initiatives in the community knowledge pool, both planning and implementation (the former lends to development locals actually desire, the latter to projects locals can realistically sustain). In other words, community members fundamentally must be directly involved in development initiatives, even and especially in the research stage. According to Figueroa et al. (2002), while social change can be driven by external change agents, individual behavior change, social influence, or

community dialogue and collective action, only the latter consistently leads to enduring, sustainable development. Such an approach, one that involves careful engagement of community and village members in the identification of problems and assignment of solutions, is difficult especially when “extreme poverty, the drastic consequences of a flood or famine, or even the distance between homes in a community make it difficult to engage in a participatory process” (Figueroa et al., p. 10). The communities of the Phrao Valley are no stranger to any of these. In fact, one of *WH*’s biggest problems is the wide physical dispersion of communities across mountainous terrain accessible only by primitive dirt roads, ones rendered impassable during the rainy season:

In many of our villages there’s not even cell phone connection. So unless somebody’s walked up to a ridgeline and called somebody we know and we’ve told them in advance that we need to pass a message up, it’s get in the truck and go. (D.M. Shafer, personal communication, August, 2011)

Another challenge is the diversity of unique, many times politicized publics within the community. When navigating within an environment as a change agent, it is essential for organizations to ask: are there conflicts within the community concerning the solution to a given problem (Figueroa et al., 2002)? Dr. Shafer acknowledged this fact in his interview, admitting:

To be perfectly blunt about it, there’re some things you need to say to one public that you can’t say to another, at least not in the same way. So there’s the problem of messages bleeding. Especially here in Thailand, almost every group has a certain political leaning. To get anything done, we have to walk a fine line, and make sure we say the right things to the right people. We’re not lying, we simply have to adapt messages to different individuals and for different purposes. (D.M. Shafer, personal communication, August, 2011)

This makes the practice of Hanpongpanth's (2003) *collaborative action approach*—part of the of the previously discussed Buddhist public relations model for Thai community development and essential element of PRCD—difficult, which requires community members to act as coactors and cocreate meaning. Dr. Shafer and his colleagues have, however, managed to do so, by practicing *intercultural transformation*, the process of changing one's behavior *beyond the norms of the home culture* (Knutson et al., 2003). The highest Thai cultural values are those associated with social harmony and interpersonal relationships (Knutson et al., 2003). Only by integrating itself into the community, by becoming a nonforeign actor in Phrao, has Warm Heart successfully navigated what Shafer refers to as “a very complex environment, both politically and logistically” (personal communication, August, 2011).

Shafer does recognize that the concept cannot be so abstract and subjective as some theorists have argued, acknowledging the importance of quantifiable and concrete initiatives:

I should be clear. Yes, community member's interpretation of their own wellbeing, their subjective identification of problems and solutions is critical to development. But, you can't be so wishy-washy that you don't appreciate your own wisdom and skill set. After all, what are we doing here if we don't contribute our own knowledge and approaches? Some of the postmodernists, the purist relativists who practice development, should not be doing what they're doing. Just because poor communities don't understand that burning trash is bad for the environment and bad for them, doesn't mean we shouldn't teach them that. We have good ideas too, but some people think everything Western is oppressive and coldly quantifiable. I've been doing this kind of work for twenty-five years, and there is nothing wrong with projects whose results can be measured, just as there is not nothing wrong with projects that are more abstract. As long as the community is moving forward, as per the members' interpretation, it's a good thing. (D.M. Shafer, personal communication, August, 2011)

While Shafer acknowledges here the necessity of participatory development, he clarifies his meaning and directly attacks ‘wishy-washy’ development practitioners that don’t appreciate their own knowledge. A best practices model of development should be integral, combining the diffusion of innovation model with the participatory approach; this kind of approach adds a new level of flexibility to development communication (Petersone, 2007). Shafer explains his line-of-thinking, how he builds on what community members tell him:

I look at ‘what’s the quality of the diet that children are eating?’ ‘What’s the quality of life that elderly people have, are they able to get around or are they stuck in one place?’ I look at the quality of sanitation and ask myself, ‘Are these people making themselves sick?’ There are a lot of very practical things that you can ask. But at the same time you really have to stop and ask people ‘what is the most important thing that you would like to see changed in your community?’ (D.M. Shafer, personal communication, August, 2011)

According to Haque (2004), levels of literacy and socioeconomic development affect how PR practitioners employ specific techniques and channels of communication. So how does one identify which method should be used for respective publics within the community? According to Petersone (2007), “In development settings, communication goals and infrastructure determine the appropriateness of each communication channel” (p. 16). That is, the intended result of the individual or group at which the message is aimed, alongside available or most appropriate communication channels, should determine how the message is constructed and delivered. In most Asian countries, Thailand included, “communication practitioners have to engage in development communication [including PR] that requires employing the available channels of media,

including interpersonal, to mobilize public participation” (Haque, p. 342). Shafer (personal communication, August, 2011) makes *WH*’s situation in Phrao clear on this matter: “Here, in our community, it’s all about face-to-face, it’s absolutely about face-to-face communication.”

Servaes (2008) expresses that “in the information age, there is an increasing gap between the info-rich and the info-poor” (p. 23). Unfortunately, the diffusion of innovation approach discussed earlier has perpetuated a development industry in which closing that information gap is many times done using technologies and delivery systems not suited to its audience. Warm Heart understands that while its constituent communities abroad—i.e. its donors, supporters, and volunteer pool—are used to absorbing mediated communication via the internet, the people of Phrao are best reached using face-to-face communication. They simply do not have the broad and constant access required, much less the skills, to be reached by modern communication technology (with the exception of local radio, which is used occasionally).

This being the case, it becomes important to note that Thai culture is described as a “village culture with mutual trust and informal social relationships among the inner-groups, but with distrust and formality or business-like positions towards the outer groups” (Servaes, p. 298). Without integration into the community, into the inner-group, Warm Heart cannot hope to implement programs or elicit cooperation of locals. The organization is achieving many of its goals in the first 3 years of operation because Dr. Shafer and his staff make concentrated efforts of cultural understanding and respect, and

more importantly inclusion of community members into programs and projects. Shafer describes the community's influence on his preconceptions concerning Warm Heart in the beginning:

I thought I had a pretty good idea of what Warm Heart was going to look like until I got on the ground and started talking to the locals. Everything went up in the air—what we thought the projects were going to be, out the door. What we thought the organization was going to look like, structurally, out the door. What I thought my job was going to be like, totally out the door. I like to think that we've hued pretty close to our original core principles of being small, community-based, of being grassroots. I just didn't understand at the time how much of an influence our community was going to have on us. (D.M. Shafer, personal communication, August, 2011).

Warm Heart has been successful by allowing the community to drive change, while at the same time programmatically responding to needs and sticking close to its original core principles.

It has been established that *WH's development* philosophy mirrors the principles of the PRCD approach. However, it is also clear that its public relations practices do not. As stated earlier in this paper, the *public relations for community development* (PRCD) approach integrates the *Dag Hammarskjold Foundation's* 'another development'—which defines development as geared towards the satisfaction of needs, beginning with the eradication of poverty, endogenous and self-reliant (bottom-up, sustainable), and in harmony with the environment—with Hendrix's (1995) ROPE model of public relations. Even though *WH's* overarching development philosophy, as has been shown, is struck from the same mold as PRCD's underlying principles, Dr. Shafer admits that the organization's public relations strategies do not adhere to the ROPE model. Key to the

ROPE model, and thus PRCD, is the idea that public relations should be conceived and implemented strategically, and should “combine a series of elements—extensive use of data, careful planning, stakeholder participation, creativity, high-quality programming, and linkages to other program elements and levels, among others—that stimulate positive and measurable behavioral change among the intended audience” (Colle, p. 97).

Dr. Shafer does understand and appreciate the importance of public relations in nonprofit settings even though “most NGO’s and nonprofits don’t understand how critically important it is for them to establish in the public eye who they are and what it is they do” (D.M. Shafer, personal communication, August, 2011). Again, though, *WH* is not developed enough and does not have access to the expertise needed to practice excellent public relations as defined by PRCD. Shafer lends some insight into his dilemma:

If I could do it, I would reduce current programming and dedicate more resources to research and setting time-specific, quantifiable objectives. I would also concentrate more on evaluating the success of messages we send out. In the long run, we could grow back into programming, in other words we would back off to go forward. But I just can’t do that. We have too many messages to send to too many people for me to slow down. (D.M. Shafer, personal communication, August, 2011)

If such a scenario were possible, though, what might PRCD look like in the context of this organization? Warm Heart could stick to its development *philosophy* in its approach to public relations, but its *methods* (at least in accordance to certain publics) would have to change. That is, Shafer and his staff need to develop a distinguished praxis—the idea of self-reflexive, theoretically guided practice (Huesca, 2008)—that

allows for systematic and sustainable creation and implementation of messages. As is evident by *WH*'s sensitivity to community needs, the organization is solid in its self-reflective, bottom-up development approach. If it begins to use the ROPE model in its public relations practice, it might begin to practice PRCD. That would require a dedicated public relations professional—not a task person—but an individual or individuals who operate at the managerial level, that can navigate environmental factors such as local, regional, and national legislation, cultural and socioeconomic factors, infrastructure and physical terrain, and sparse financial resources to plan and implement public relations strategies grounded in research, aimed at time-specific, quantifiable objectives, and follow through with execution of both mediated and interpersonal communication, as well as evaluate its success (McKee et al., 2008).

In the case of Warm Heart in Phrao, of course, communication with the organization's publics, at least the local community publics, is *intercultural*. In Thailand sociopolitical, and more deeply, Buddhist religious tradition affects communicative style and interaction of Thais, particularly their dealings with foreigners (Verluyten, 1997). Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimension rankings, which place different nations along five cultural dimension continuums, consistently ranks Thailand in the middle range, most likely due to Buddhist philosophy's emphasis on balance and its general aversion to all extremes in life (Verluyten, 1997). This characteristic also applies in communication, as Thais react negatively to people losing their temper, criticizing others in public, and generally losing emotional equilibrium. Thus, Westerners in Thailand, especially those

attempting to change Thai behavior, have to adhere to that cultural parameter if they want to be successful.

Fortunately for Western organizations wishing to implement professional public relations in Thai settings—including Warm Heart in Phrao—Thais are adept at adopting new, even Western, ways of doing things. According to Verluyten (1997), Thais maintain “a high degree of ‘eclecticism’ and syncretism (religious and general); the capacity of combing and integrating elements from Westerners seemingly incompatible or contradictory doctrines or philosophies” (p. 4). According to a survey administered to Thai business executives, “85% said traditional Thai values must be “adapted to the needs of the modern world...and 66% said the influence of American values and lifestyle upon contemporary Thai society is an ‘opportunity,’ if combined with our culture” (Verluyten, p. 9). This mindset prevalent in the Thai business community, while lending credence to the efficacy of Western-style public relations in Thailand, must be taken with a grain of salt if applied outside of Bangkok. While the capital is home to affluent urbanites that have been exposed to Western business techniques and organizational structures for some time, the majority of Thais outside the capital find integration more challenging.

Such is the case in Phrao—Shafer understands the difficulty, and even impracticality of, Western style public relations in such an environment:

In America, a large portion of public relations is done using mediated communication. You write press releases, build an interactive website, use social media, send out snail-mail, and so on. Of course, there is an element of face-to-face as well, but the proportion largely favors mediated

methods. Right, so these kinds of things apply to us as well, but only for our audiences in America. We have a website and use social media, but it's directed at donors and potential volunteers. It would be silly to say our constituent communities in Phrao ever see those things, it just doesn't happen. (D.M. Shafer, personal communication, August, 2011)

This being the case, Shafer and his team rely on face-to-face, interpersonal communication. So, while “you certainly want to emphasize your projects and the fact that you're delivering on those projects, you have to appeal to each audience in different ways” (D.M. Shafer, personal communication, August, 2011). In practice, this means concentrating communication efforts through what would seem unorthodox methods in western countries:

I'm constantly out there, and my wife is constantly out there (in the community). We sometimes go to two or three funerals a week. I know that sounds morbid, but it's a hugely important way to be seen and known in the community. (D.M. Shafer, personal communication, August, 2011)

It is this kind of adaptation to immediate, local, and cultural factors that allows *WH* to operate in Phrao with measurable success, if not *measurable public relations success*. Although Thailand is a middle income country, its wealth distribution is such that a small middle class necessitates few rich and many poor (CIA World Factbook, 2011). While Phrao sits at the unfortunate end of that paradigm, *WH* realizes that although state apparatus and geographical location does have a significant impact on opportunity, “It is not necessarily the nation in which one resides that matters most, but rather one's access to material, political, and social resources for healthy living” (Wilkins, p. 8). Dr. Shafer and his team understand their role within the community as “a provider of ‘knowledge interface’ so people can interact with global markets, so they can change the way they articulate themselves beyond the mountains that rim the Phrao

Valley” (D.M. Shafer, personal communication, August, 2011). Whether by increasing labor worth via education, cooperatives’ product value by marketing in American and Europe, or improving quality of life of community members through low cost healthcare and medication, *WH* strives to make Phrao a better place to live.

The organization does not adhere to professional standards of public relations as they are defined in the West or to the proposed PRCD approach put forth in this paper. However, it does operate as a community change agent by adapting to community needs and fostering Figueroa et al.’s (2002) pillars of social change: leadership, degree and equity of participation, information equity, collective self-efficacy, sense of ownership, and social cohesion. The highest Thai cultural values are those associated with social harmony and interpersonal relationships (Knutson et al., 2003). While Western standards of communication continues to construct and evolve mediated communication environments where public relations messages are projected, rural Thais exist in an environment where interpersonal communication is king, and needs, in fact wants, are fundamentally different.

WH knows, by asking and through experience, that community members don’t want an *efficient* economy, they want a *sufficient* one. Excess is frowned upon, as can be seen in the Thai king’s—King Bhumibol, the longest reigning monarch in the world and highly respected by all Thais—concept of “sufficient economy, an endogenous approach (to development) based on the Buddhist philosophy to become self-reliant by integrating strong communities, the environment, culture, quality of life, generosity, compassion and

local intellect” (Malikhao, p. 308). By practicing the Thai concept of *nam jai* (‘water of the heart’) (Knutson et al., 2003), by adapting to community needs and relating to its publics, Warm Heart has aided an impoverished community against the challenge of globalization—that is, “for countries and individuals, to find a healthy balance between preserving a sense of identity, home and community and doing what it takes to survive within the globalization system” (Friedman, p. 42).

It has done so not by strictly adhering to any public relations model, including the proposed PRCD approach, but instead by understanding that it’s not a small world, after all, and each message must be adapted, in content and form, to individual audiences. Dr. Shafer explains the genesis of this practice in himself and at *WH*:

Crucial to my life as a professor was something my father said to me when I finally convinced him that I really did want to be a professor. He said, ‘Well, when you’re standing in front of a large class, look out there and recognize and remember always that every one of those student thinks he or she is special, and even though there’s only one of you and there are a lot of them, if you ever lose sight of that, you’re going to lose your class.’ I think that sort of extraordinary sensitivity to audience, if you will, has really influenced the way I wanted the management organization of Warm Heart to be, and also the relationship between *Warm Heart* and its community. (D.M. Shafer, personal communication, August, 2011)

That sensitivity to audience is essential to all public relations but perhaps more so to international, rural, nonprofit organizations. This paper constructs the *public relations for community development* (PRCD) approach and compares to *WH*’s real practice. The data show that *WH*’s communication with some publics requires systematic, quantifiable, standardized procedures that use modern mediated communication—for example with potential donors and volunteers in America and Europe—while the organization’s local

publics require mostly interpersonal communication and less quantifiable measures of success. Shafer admits *WH*'s shortcomings concerning the former and defends its practice of the latter:

We do need real public relations expertise to help. As of now, we don't measure things that should be measured, I mean with our international publics. But I think, and maybe this goes against what I should say, our communication within Phrao doesn't need to be changed. Really, I think it would be a bad idea to change it. How would we do it anyway? I don't know a way to quantify three hour, translated conversations at a hill tribe village council. You know, I don't want to quantify it. (D.M. Shafer, personal communication, August, 2011)

Dr. Shafer also has an interesting perspective concerning *WH*'s supposed nonadherence to PRCD, saying:

If you include in the practice of development a required adaptation to specific environments, you can also justify each of the elements of the ROPE model as being adaptable to the environment. I mean, each step of the process should be changed, fundamentally, to go with the 'environment,' whatever that might be. So, for us here, I think we practice all those (research, objectives, programming, evaluation), we just do so in a way that fits in this place. (D.M. Shafer, personal communication, August, 2011)

In this way, it seems Dr. Shafer is correct, if one allows for such leeway in interpretation of the term 'environment.' Addressing this ambiguity is only possible through a systematic construction of a public relations campaign for Warm Heart, using PRCD as a guide and holes in practice provided by the research as road signs for improvement.

CHAPTER 8

MOVING FORWARD BY GOING BACK

Research

From two findings of this research—one, public relations for community development (PRCD) might provide international, nonprofit agencies a model for practicum and two, *Warm Heart Foundation* does not yet adhere absolutely to such practice—the next logical step from both a practical and theoretical perspective would be to construct a PRCD campaign for Warm Heart. That is, in doing so, theory underlying PRCD might be further clarified while at the same time providing *WH* a tangible way forward.

As has been established, Shafer and his team do not practice public relations as required by PRCD. The organization does, however, adhere to a development and communication philosophy mirroring that of PRCD, one that requires comprehensive, on-the-ground research, intense sensitivity to community member needs, wants, and cultural values, community-member identification of problems, and stakeholder participation in the implementation of solutions, with the overall aim improved quality of life, starting with the eradication of poverty—i.e. *The Dag Hammarskjold Foundation's another development*, one-half of PRCD. The way forward, then, is to construct *audience-and-environment-specific* communication strategies and tactics using the ROPE model that builds on this already underlying philosophy. In doing so, the practicality of PRCD in real-world scenarios might be legitimized.

The first step of PRCD necessarily begins with ROPE's *research*. Alluding to identified subheadings of that part in accordance with PRCD, *WH* needs to research their surrounding environs (including socioeconomic structures, culture, literacy level, linguistic barriers, geographic dispersion, education system, etc.) and, using local intellect and an understanding that perception many times trumps reality, also research *the community's reaction to WH's arrival and existence in their community*. Remember, this second requirement in PRCD differs from ROPE's original structure, in that it requires research of the organization's past and present PR strategies and tactics (as well public attitudes directed at the organization) by, usually, an externally hired firm. The research proposal in PRCD differs, as sated before, because nonprofit public relations are most often practiced internally as a result of budget constraints.

According to the research, *WH* has adhered to excellent PRCD *research* requirements, if only as per the local (Thai) side of the operation. "When we got on the ground, we spent a long time just visiting with people, asking them what they wanted, what they needed...in almost every instance, the replies were the same: 'we need jobs, we don't have a market for our products, our culture is dying'" (D.M. Shafer, personal communication, August, 2011). Based on these conversations (not, importantly, observation only), *WH* has been able to identify public perception in ways needed to build sustainable projects the people actually want and need. The organization also quantifies many of these issues with comprehensive statistical analysis of population,

ethnic and cultural diasporas, agricultural trends, trade and economic trends, prevalent health issues and their causes, literacy rates, etc.

The second requirement of PRCD ROPE *research* is understanding the community's reaction to its presence. That is (in this case, in the local sense), what are peoples' attitudes toward foreign intervention in their lives, their knowledge of foreign aid organizations and how they work, have they experienced similar development initiatives in the past? WH, again, excels in this area. Prachan "PJ" Jakeo, Phrao native and WH Chief-of-Staff, provides the organization with insight into the region's past experience with NGOs:

Most of these villages, especially the ones up on the ridges, they've had dealings with foreigners in the past. Some have been successful, but most burn out after a few years. So, you know, the locals, they get frustrated but are always excited when a new project comes around because most of them operate as charities. They just give money and products away, without any requirement from the villagers except for, you know, being poor. So, we have to overcome those preconceptions and let these people know that it's not going to come free. We're going to ask you to be a part of the process. You know, if they don't learn anything from us, the projects aren't sustainable, they won't last. (P. Jakeo, personal communication, August, 2011)

Warm Heart also operates in an area long-populated by Christian missionaries. Even the most remote villages have been exposed to Methodists, Baptists, Lutherans, and Roman Catholics. A large portion of the villagers have accepted the religion readily, many times incorporating the Holy Trinity into preexisting animistic beliefs. It's been argued that popular conversion in these areas might be due to highland peoples' disassociation with lowland-living, ethnic Thais, who practice Theravada Buddhism and

discriminate against their hill-dwelling neighbors. Another possible reason, according to Shafer, is the economic benefits that come with association to the Christian Church:

When we first came here, almost every time we introduced ourselves, there was this question from the locals, sometimes implicit but many times explicit, of ‘Are you Christian?’ And when I told them no, we’re not affiliated with any religious organization they were taken aback. They were even more surprised that we didn’t require, you know, conversion to a creed or code to benefit from what we do. I think maybe, that’s because there’s been such an historical trend in northern Thailand, and all over the world, really, of Christian missions requiring some ideological movement of local populations to receive services or knowledge. (D.M. Shafer. Personal communication, August, 2011)

WH’s *local* research, it seems, is in line with PRCD, both ideologically and tactically. Shafer and his team base their research in the knowledge and perceptions of locals, and complement that information with objective, scientific-measures research that overlap. However, *WH* has not been so thorough in its application of PRCD ROPE research to its *external publics*—i.e. potential donors, volunteers, other NGOs, university programs, grant giving foundations, etc. To be sure, *WH* works with each of these in different degrees and capacities, but its research of them is lacking as required by PRCD.

To complete research requirements for this model, *WH* needs to ask questions like: ‘What demographics are most likely to donate to a cause like *WH*?,’ ‘Which degree type of university student would be interested in volunteering at *WH*?,’ ‘What universities, schools, and departments would be interested in partnering with *WH*, possibly starting their own organizational chapters on campus?,’ ‘What other NGOs in the area would be interested in collaborating with *WH* on projects?,’ ‘What organizations and foundations give grants to organizations like *WH*, what are their application

requirements, deadlines, etc.?,’ and ‘What are the best channels of communication to reach these audiences?’. Warm Heart already communicates with these audiences to a degree, evidenced by an in-construction online database of operating nongovernment organizations in northern Thailand, informal relationships with a few university public health programs to send volunteers, a growing volunteer alumni database and blog, and a Rutgers University *Warm Heart* chapter that hosts fair trade shows featuring *WH* microenterprise products and also conducts fundraisers. However, rarely is the process dialogic (Rice & Atkin, 2004) or systematic; it also has much room for expansion and standardization.

Following are a few suggestions for *WH* to closer adhere to PRCD with its external publics: a focused research campaign aimed at identifying potential donor demographics and compiling contact information and communication methods most appropriate, identification and compilation of universities that have public health programs, pre-med and medical schools, engineering faculties, and nonprofit management degree programs, study abroad programs that might be interesting in incorporation of *WH* into their offerings, as well an extension of the nonprofit organization database to include all of Southeast Asia, and also intense research and compilation of potential donor organizations (i.e. grants, public and private), including application requirements, deadlines, etc. Finally, *WH* needs to make an effort to figure out which kinds of communication methods are most effective in reaching each of these audiences. Whether that is a content analysis of previous research, or conducting original

empirical research, *WH*'s aim should be to decide which communication mediums best suit each audience in respect to intended action (donate, volunteer, collaborate, etc.)

Also important to note here is Grunig and Rapper's (1992) distinction of four types of publics inherent in all public relations campaigns: *active* publics (active on all issues), *apathetic* (inattentive and inactive on all issues), *single-issue* publics (active only a single or limited issues), and *hot-issue* publics, those that become active when extensive media exposure makes an issue salient to everyone. If the communication context of *WH* is divided into internal and external publics, as above, each can be further distinguished into one of these four categories. Doing so allows *WH* to more appropriately focus messages, in both content and form. An *internal, apathetic* public, for example, might be best reached by interpersonal communication initiated in the village, while a an *external, hot-issue* public might respond first to messages they come across in the news media, which would require more traditional, press agency public relations tactics.

Objectives

After researching the various publics influencing their existence and operation, *WH* must set objectives, both *output* and *impact*, in relation to each identified public. These, of course, should be founded directly in the research, be measureable, time oriented, and (technically) stated as infinites. Messages should be crafted specifically to each audience, both in form and content. Kaplan and Manners's (1972) concept of *techno-economics*, as well, must be considered. *Techno-economics* refers to societal conventions used to apply technical equipment and knowledge to the production,

distribution, and consumption of products and information. In rural northern Thailand, such arrangements are complicated by linguistic, logistical, geographic, and cultural barriers. Construing messages, then, requires careful setting of objectives, subject to research, even more so than in other environments.

With such limitations in mind, output and impact objectives must be tailored to specific audiences, both internal and external. In *WH*'s case, following is a sample of output objectives directed at internal (local) publics: To hold biweekly meetings with local government administration, indefinitely; to distribute one Thai/English-language newsletter per month in Chiang Mai (the large provincial capital) chronicling *WH*'s projects and potential for opportunities and collaboration (5,000 print number); and to broadcast a weekly summary of *WH*'s work on local radio. Each output objective, of course, has a corresponding impact objective. That is, the ultimate aim of the output. For the aforementioned three, the three impact objectives would be, respectively: to raise government administration participation in *WH* projects by 10% each year of operation; to secure two partnerships per year with Chiang Mai based organizations to work with *WH* on projects; and to raise awareness of *WH* agency in the area by 50% within the first year of implementation. Necessarily, every objective needs to be realistically evaluative—that is, time-oriented and quantifiable, as ROPE, and thus PRCD, require so in the final stage, evaluation.

Alongside internal publics, external publics of *WH* require crafted messages based on the research. Following is a sampling of potential *output* objectives directed at *WH*

external publics: To distribute two press releases chronicling *WH* projects to select universities in the United States per month; to submit one grant application to money-granting institutions every six months; and to produce an annual volunteer-generated publication with stories about their experience at *WH*, details concerning projects and how others might get involved. Again, output objectives should tie directly to *impact* objectives. In that case, respective impact objectives for these external publics output objectives would be: to secure at least five feature stories in U.S. university publications each year; to receive one grant from foreign institution to apply towards *WH* project of at least \$5,000 each year; and to increase the number of university volunteers by 10% every subsequent year of operation.

The above output and impact objectives are merely hypothetical examples and are only a sample of the total picture. Similar tactics should be implemented in relation to *every* identified public *WH* maintains ties with—financial, social, collaborative, etc.

Programming

Programming, or, the actual implementation of programs to reach stated goals, requires strict adherence to set objectives that are founded in research. This requires the practicing organization (i.e. Warm Heart) to dedicate focused effort, ideally at the managerial level and performed by a professional public relations professional hired specifically for that purpose. At present, *WH* PR programming is not founded in research, quantifiable objectives, nor does the organization employ a full-time public relations professional. Again, this is due to budget constraints; as a result, Shafer performs most of

the higher level PR tasks—composing and distributing a quasi-monthly newsletter, attending meetings with local village leaders, government officials, and businesses, and generally working to maintain an image (both internally in the community and externally abroad) reflecting sustainable, bottom-up development aimed at raising the floor of poverty.

WH has been successful in securing volunteers, funding, and community participation to some degree probably because Dr. Shafer has much experience in audience-centered, culturally sensitive communication as a result of his career as a professor. Unfortunately, no matter how skilled, Shafer does not have the time, as evidenced in his interview, to focus enough time or resources on public relations practices necessary to adhere to PRCD. Currently, *WH* lightens the load by using university volunteers. This is difficult and largely inefficient, however, for a few reasons. Most of the volunteers come during the summer months as their school schedules allow. As a result, it's extremely difficult for *WH* to maintain sustained research that is uniform, quality-assured, and constant. Shafer spends much of his time retraining and re-explaining to new volunteers the work past volunteers have done, how to build on it, and making sure the work is quality enough to actually distribute. Simply put, student volunteers, while useful and certainly welcome at the organization, are amateur public relations technicians that rely heavily on the big-picture guidance of the already overloaded Dr. Shafer.

The solution? Hire a full-time public relations professional who can oversee and execute PRCD-quality practice. However, the challenge, again, is money. *WH* is a nonprofit agency that already employs 16 Thai staff and supports over 40 hill tribe children at their Children's Homes. Barring they can find a young professional who can afford to work for free, there is one other option that might work. Chiang Mai, the provincial capital of northern Thailand and only 90 kilometers south of Phrao, is home to an estimated 50,000 expatriate foreigners. A large portion of this number is made up of European and American retirees, drawn by value for money, year-round warm weather, and overall quality of life. These individuals in many instances volunteer at local NGOs or as English teachers, part-time journalists, etc. Perhaps the solution would be for *WH* to recruit such a person, possibly a retired public relations practitioner or journalist familiar with the field, to work part-time as the PR 'manager,' responsible for research and planning, quality assurance, PR volunteer coordination, and evaluation. This would free up Shafer for his other responsibilities as director and would provide that constant source of uniform, evaluative growth *WH* lacks.

The bus ride from Chiang Mai to Phrao is only 1½ hours, and *WH* already employs two 'retirees' (that is, they volunteer) in a similar fashion. One is an Australian lawyer-expat who now commutes from Chiang Mai 5 days a week to teach English as a *WH* representative at the local high school. The other is a retired purchasing agent in the U.S. aeronautical industry, who now shuttles *WH* university volunteers from the Chiang Mai airport to Phrao as well as works on volunteer orientation materials. If Shafer could

find a retiree willing and capable of implementing PRCD at *WH*, the organization, as well as its publics, would benefit. Without such a person, it simply is not possible.

Evaluation

The *evaluation* stage of PRCD refers to the comparison of stated objectives with real results. Evaluation allows an analysis of efficacy of PR strategies and tactics as well as a guide for future practice. This stage is why objectives must be quantifiable and time-oriented. Without those characteristics the organization has no way of declaring success or evolving practice.

As per output objectives directed at internal publics, *WH* would simply answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the questions (in respect to the aforementioned objectives): Are we consistently holding biweekly meetings with local government administration? Are we producing and distributing 5,000 monthly Thai-English language newsletters in Chiang Mai detailing *WH* projects? And, are we broadcasting a weekly summary of *WH*’s work on the local radio? ‘Yes’ to these questions, of course, indicate success.

Evaluation of the impact objectives corresponding to these outputs requires more research. The first one, for example, ‘to raise government administration participation in *WH* projects by 10% each year,’ requires a definition of ‘participation’ and subsequent measuring criteria. That is, does *WH* measure ‘government participation’ in terms of number of officials in attendance at each meeting, or by annual amount of financial contribution by local government to *WH* projects? While both would work, the latter is better suited to measuring real progress, as financial contributions signify participation

more than simple attendance of meetings. These kinds of decisions should be made in the research and setting of objectives—even if measures of success are not explicitly stated in the objective, as is the case with this example, it should be understood and defined elsewhere.

Other impact objectives are more easily measured for success. The second in this hypothetical campaign, ‘to secure two partnerships per year with Chiang Mai-based organizations to work with *WH* on projects,’ only requires an affirmation of acquired partnerships—i.e. ‘Did we partner with two Chiang-Mai based organizations for collaboration with *WH*, or not? The third, ‘to raise awareness of *WH* agency in the area by 50% within the first year of implementation necessitates preemptory and follow-up research. Before the campaign begins, that is, *WH* could take a sample survey of locals to measure their knowledge of the organization; then Shafer and his team would perform the same survey after the first year of the campaign, then after the second, and so on.

The evaluation of PR success in relation to external publics (donors, potential volunteers, federal aid agencies, potential grant-giving institutions) also harkens back to the set objectives. Again, for outputs, simply ‘yes’ or ‘no,’ ‘Are we sending out two press releases to select American universities per month?,’ ‘Are we writing and submitting a grant application every 6 months?,’ and ‘Are we producing an annual volunteer-generated publication with *WH* experiences and volunteer opportunities?’

Again, for impact objectives, measurements uniform over time must be established. For external audiences, in line with the running hypothetical, the first impact

objective would be ‘to secure at least five feature stories in U.S. university publications each year—in this case, evaluation is straightforward. The second, as well, ‘to receive one grant from foreign institution to apply towards *WH* project of at least \$5,000 each year,’ although possibly difficult to achieve, not so to evaluate. The third, ‘to increase number of university volunteers by 10% every subsequent year of operation,’ also is simple, only requiring a tally of volunteers and small calculations at the end of every year.

CHAPTER 9

ADDRESSING AMBIGUITIES

PRCD, if practiced correctly, should lend to development that is bottom-up, sustainable, results-driven, beginning with the eradication of poverty, and that is in harmony with the environment. It should also adhere to the ROPE model to develop a self-reflexive praxis that is at once mindful of socioeconomic variables, cultural nuances, and universal quality-of-life-inducing schemas. The above examples are just a few hypotheticals used to illustrate how PRCD might be applied to *WH* in Phrao. A full scale PRCD campaign would need to address each identified public, internal and external, their communicative needs, life-goals, technological competence, and any other factor that might influence their interaction with *WH*.

Although neatly quantifiable, time-oriented, evaluative programs are most desirable, as long as they acknowledge and incorporate local belief structures, customs, and values, there are instances in which such techniques cannot be applied. For example: *WH* is working with local hill tribe farmers in an effort to introduce cash crops in place of either subsistence farming or opium cultivation. The coffee plant, in particular, grows well in those climes and can bring large returns for such a poor population, “even at the bottom of the coffee price cycle” (D.M. Shafer, personal communication, August, 2011). All of the communication between *WH* and these farmers is face-to-face, after a 10 kilometer but 2 hour truck ride up steep, dirt roads that turn to mud when it rains. Instead of making a formal presentation, as an investment banker might make to with

PowerPoint, Shafer has to get his points across to a handful of village leaders who speak a wide range of local dialects and languages unintelligible except to PJ and do so in a way that confirms participation without any form of written contract. Many of the hill tribe languages don't even have scripts, and those who do don't understand the idea of a contract anyways.

This kind of complexity, uncertainty, and nonconventional communication pattern between an organization and a public crucial to its work, requires some flexibility that traditional ROPE proposals allow. PRCD incorporates western concepts of PR in development settings, but it also encourages critical cultural approaches to communication, depending on the environment (as in *Dag Hammarskjold's* 'another development'). The environment *WH* practices within is not the West, nor are many of their publics capable of consuming information in ways practitioners in developed countries are used to. Something as seemingly simple as a survey can be worthless in contexts where the participants have no concept of how one works or their role in it.

In place of quantifiable methods, PRCD's 'environment clause' gives the communicator room to acknowledge local philosophies and belief systems and to use them to their advantage. In Thailand, Buddhist culture (even in Christian-mission areas) has culturally evolved through the centuries so that Thais value holistic integration of the individual into community works, family ties, loyalty, and self-reliance (Malikhao, 2008). *WH* has done well in playing off these virtues in their presentation of proposals. Shafer understands that any project that's going to be successful has to fit within the

locals' way of doing things. Consequently, *WH* pushes projects that advance the community as a whole, not individual households, that allow for familial collaboration and mutual benefit, that foster trust between themselves and the communities and even between villages (who otherwise steer clear of one another for lack of preexisting mutual benefit), and most importantly those that once initiated, do not require excessive help from *WH* to continue and sustain.

The realization of subjective local perception of development, as well, not simply economic advancement, is crucial to any success *WH* finds. This means spending a tremendous amount of time in village homes, attending social events such as weddings, festivals, and funerals and maintaining a continual *dialogic* (Rice & Atkin, 2004) communication with the community. Even though quantifiable research might suggest rising incomes, more jobs, better access to education, and a healthier population, quality of life is subjective. *WH* must confirm that those things that would seem to indicate progress make a positive difference in community members' interpretation of what's happening. An example may illustrate: *WH* maintains a contact in Sip Lang Ahka village named Lu, a 30-something-year-old wife, farmer, and de-facto leader of the village. Much of the communication between *WH* and households in Sip Lang go through Lu, as she is the only villager to speak both Ahka and Thai (although she only has a sixth grade education). In a September 2011 discussion with Dr. Shafer and PJ, Lu confided the following (in Thai, English translation by Prachan Jakeo):

One of the bigger problems we have is our young people don't want to stay here. They go down to the city [Chiang Mai], and see what it has to

offer, even if the jobs and the pay are not good, they consider anything better than staying here and farming for the rest of their lives. (P. Jakeo, personal communication, August, 2011)

Sentiments like these shed light on the importance of first identifying what exactly it is that locals want and need, not what the developer thinks they need. If *WH* took for granted that going to the city for work is a good thing, as many might after seeing living conditions on top of the mountain ridges surrounding the Phrao Valley, they could overlook the fact that most ‘*mao*’—as hill tribe members are referred to by lowland ethnic Thais, a derogatory term roughly equivalent to English ‘*hillbilly*’—take menial jobs because of lack of education and ethnic discrimination, and many are forced into prostitution or drug trafficking, the only options available to them. So, should *WH* address the core issue and try and make young people’s home villagers more attractive to work and live in, or should they focus on education with the goal of successfully incorporating the new generation of ethnic minorities into the modern Thai cash economy. This is where research becomes paramount, argues Shafer, in relation to *WH* situation:

You have to look at two things, here, that are really important. Ideally, we could provide an education for the young people who could then find good jobs in and around the city, at least not on top of the mountain, and they in turn could support their parents and grandparents. Unfortunately, this is unrealistic and also goes against what the communities really want. We, as Americans, go to these villages and ask ourselves ‘how can anyone live in circumstances?’ But, you have to realize, the Ahka, and the Lisu, the Lahu, the Hmong, all these groups are very proud of their heritage, their history and the parents and grandparents they grew up respecting. They are afraid that if all the young people leave, their culture will die. And even if we could somehow give these kids the skills necessary to succeed in Chiang Mai or Bangkok, it would be extremely difficult because of historical contexts and, frankly, discrimination. There’s no such thing as

affirmative action in Thailand. So we have to find a compromise. (D.M. Shafer, personal communication, August, 2011)

That compromise has taken the taken a form similar to the vocational versus university paths set out for American high school students. That is, *WH* is building microenterprise programs that allow villagers to stay where they are and make money from growing coffee or growing and weaving silk. For those few who want to and have the capacity to extend their horizons, *WH* provides access to education, including Thai and English language skills, as well as university preparation for the older students. Adaptability and sensitivity to important complex local structures, systems, and values essential to PRCD is the only way to overcome challenges like these.

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION

According to Haque (2004), “The level of literacy and socioeconomic development clearly affect and influence how public relations practitioners employ specific techniques of communication...In most Asian countries, communication practitioners have to engage in development communication that requires employing the available channels of media, including interpersonal, to mobilize public participation” (p. 342). And interpersonal communication is, in some instances like the one described above, more difficult to quantify, at least in ways relevant to the participants. PRCD, then, pushes a contextually-based model of public relations aimed at driving development grounded in local belief systems and perception, driven by local resources and knowledge, and evaluated on the terms of the community members. In the case of *WH*, they have done well adhering to this philosophy but will find further success if they incorporate more Western PR into their Southeast Asian operation.

In any case, it is clear that in international, rural, nonprofit public relations nothing, in fact, is absolute, except the importance of adaptability and excellent communication skills. Beauty may be found in such places, where cultures grapple with each other to determine what is progress and how to reach it. Sometimes, the sad irony may be, the ‘developer’ gains more than the ‘developing,’ as people “strive for the ideal in a dialogic engagement with others in order to develop a unique and identifiable self... through recognizing and accepting diversity we come to have a clearer sense of our own

identities” (Reynolds, 1995). One of the qualities of interaction, especially intercultural, is the realization that *what we’re striving for* depends on who the *we* is; that the concept of development is not universal, nor the processes of communication and public relations objective. It seems, to compromise, that systematic communication is preferred—other times, ‘simple’ communication will do.

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APPENDICES

Audio-Visual, Ethnographic Video

Title

Public Relations for Community Development: Warm Heart Foundation
in rural northern Thailand

Video Links

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8YsCSY-yic> (Part 1)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jAiJm1jbnNw> (Part 2)

(note: videos are ‘unlisted’ on YouTube, only those with links can view)

Summary

The function of the video is to supplement the accompanying paper—*An audio-visual ethnographic case study of international, rural, nonprofit public relations geared towards sustainable development: ‘Warm Heart Worldwide’ and social entrepreneurship in Phrao District, northern Thailand*—and to highlight the main points of the research and findings in an audio-visual, digital video composition. Both the paper and video are part of the author’s Masters thesis project, approved by the East Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board (IRB #c0411.6s). For ETSU IRB contact information and further explanation of research process, see information below.

This video is set in two locations—Highland Park, New Jersey (where *Warm Heart Worldwide Inc.*’s home office is located), and Phrao District (including the Phrao valley, Phrao municipality, and surrounding villages, both lowland ethnic Thai and minority hill tribes), 90 kilometers north of Chiang Mai and the home of *Warm Heart Foundation*, the Thai-foundation-registered organization operating under the New Jersey-based, US-registered 501c3-umbrella organization.

Phrao is a poor district relative not only to international standards, but Thai standards as well. Over half of families survive on less than the equivalent of \$0.75 a day. Agriculture supports the majority of the population, while infrequent access to education makes for low literacy rates, high HIV infection rates, and limited life prospects. While lowland dwelling ethnic Thais in Phrao have it hard enough, their hill-dwelling minority ethnic group neighbors have it much worse. The Ahka, Lisu, Lahu, and Karen peoples do not enjoy Thai citizenship, don't speak Thai, live so far into the mountains that basic education and healthcare are alien, and do not even own the land they live on.

Warm Heart Foundation, a nonprofit, American-founded nongovernment organization (NGO), tries to address some of these issues by implementing projects aimed at wider and better education, preventative healthcare and treatment options, and economic gains through adult-training and microenterprise solutions. The ultimate goal is to raise the floor of poverty so that families don't have to send young women to the city to sell their bodies and young men to traffic drugs and women; to raise the quality of life, but to do so in accordance with local culture and values, not only universally accepted development measures.

The video then, highlights the most important parts of the research and findings by providing the audience with faces, voices and images to pair with the written word. The questions asked and answered in the film are the same as those presented in the paper. That is—How have the development communication and public relations industries evolved historically in both theory and practice? Who is Warm Heart, where do they operate and what do they do? And to what degree does *WH* adhere to the proposed model, intentionally or unawares?

The paper and video will be presented to the researcher's thesis committee, and will be cataloged in the ETSU Graduate School electronic thesis library for future researchers to access. The video is a more succinct, visual parallel to the accompanying paper, and aims to inform lay audiences about issues surrounding international nonprofit management, social and economic issues in rural northern Thailand, communication for development, and nonprofit public relations.

The video will take a utilitarian form, in that artistic style will be substituted with straightforward, signposted segments that parallel the research paper and highlight its most important points. Again—while the paper is an in-depth look at the history of development communication, public relations, and integration of the two fields, as well a detailed assessment of *WH*'s adherence to the proposed public relations for community development (PRCD) model and proposals for successful implementation—the video is more succinct, meant to supplement the paper for audiences unfamiliar with nonprofit PR discourse. For more detailed outline, see the *Voiceover* section following this treatment.

Critical to this project were the Phrao community members' agency within the consent process. While the research proposal fulfilled the ETSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements and was approved prior to study commencement, the approval meant nothing unless community members' knowledge of the study, its assumptions, assertions, and their presentation in it were clearly communicated. Working with local translators and Prachan Jakeo (Warm Heart Chief-of-Staff), the PI spent significant effort to educate community members about how they might be involved in the project, how they might be presented in the research, and how they maintained full control over their (non)consent and (non)participation. This required careful consideration concerning what

to film, when to film, and discretion and cultural sensitivity when bringing a camera into a community or village.

Key was a core message: that community members would be presented in a *development* context, which would necessarily comment on their socioeconomic marginalization. To do so required sincere, culturally sensitive, interpersonal communication before and during every filming session. It became clear that acquiring consent requires more than a signature on a paper, it should be a dialogic process in which researcher and subject maintain understanding of what is being researched and for what purposes. A PI must be willing and able to answer questions like: Why are you filming my paraplegic son working in the rice fields? The answer in this hypothetical query might be ‘Because in developed places such a disabled person would have other, more suitable options for making a living.’ This kind of interaction can be uncomfortable, but it’s crucial that a researcher’s subjects know that this is the world, the worldview, the film will project and address. Anything less than full disclosure in such situations is unethical, and must be considered when researching (and especially filming) in developing places like Phrao.

Characters

- Dr. Michael Shafer: Founder & Director of *WH*, Professor Emeritus of Political Science (International Political Economy) at Rutgers University
- Prachan “PJ” Jakeo: *WH* Chief-of-Staff, Phrao native, US Air Force veteran, and English-Thai-northern Thai (Lanna) translator

- *Featured WH* volunteers: Patrick Short (undergraduate biological sciences major at the University of North Carolina) and Dmitry Ostrovsky (medical student at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey)
- *WH* staff: Tara DeWorsop (*WH* American-based {at the time of filming} Operations Manager, Microenterprise Director), Evelind Schechter (Director of Finance and Operations), Nuanladda Yawichai aka P'Thai (*WH* resident cook), Phaitoon Hajaturus aka P'Ton (Phrao native, previously Bangkok-based computer engineer, *WH* computer and network technician and after-school computer teacher to *Children's Homes* kids), as well as brief appearances from various other *WH* staff individuals including David Rose (Australian expat former lawyer, current *WH* Education Director), Peerapol Tanu aka Nong Nu (Assistant *WH* farm manager) and Sripan Tanu aka P'Paan (*WH* senior house mother)
- *WH Children's Homes* kids: over 20 (at the time of filming) hill tribe children living at the Ban Hoi Sai (village) *WH Children's Homes*—for individual names and consent forms, see IRB project approval packet
- 'Lu' (see IRB approval packet for name in Thai script): female Sip Lang Ahka village leader, *WH* coffee-farming liaison
- Minor appearances of members of the local Phrao community: including *WH* Thai Board members, local high schoolers, Phrao Valley and hill tribe farmers, hill tribe emergency medical training participants, microenterprise participants (including silk growers, dyers and weavers), hospital workers, local government administration, the Phrao police force, Thai military, over 400 assorted members of the Phrao community present at the *WH* 3rd anniversary party in Ban Hoi Sai,

and *WH* American constituents attending fundraiser dinner in Highland Park,
New Jersey

Recurring themes, central concepts explored

- the concept of development, what the term implies, its application by nonprofit agencies, culture's influence on development, and theoretical implications of the postcolonial, critical-cultural perspective on the field
- cultural influence on communication patterns, styles, and efficacy
- measurement of quality-of-life, particularly in international/intercultural settings
- the interplay of theory and application in third-world development initiatives
- modernization versus maintaining cultural heritage
- logistical, environmental, geographical and political effects on rural development

Institutional Review Board Information

- Research Host Institution: East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN
- IRB research approval number: c0411.6s
- Approved letter received by researcher on: May 23, 2011 by Chris Ayers, ETSU Campus IRB Chair
- Items approved (included in IRB approval packet, available upon request): Form 103; Permission from *Warm Heart Worldwide* to conduct research; Primary Investigator (PI) CV; Project Narrative; Informed Consent Document for Participants over 18; Parent/Legal Guardian Permission Document; Assent Script; Assurance Statement; Potential Conflict of Interest; Supplemental Submission for Studies with Children Participants; Email Correspondence; *note—details and*

*approval dates specific to each document can be found on the approval letter
included in the IRB approval packet*

Production Timeline and Budget

Pre-Production: January – May, 2011

- ✓ literature review, planning (first draft of film treatment), human subjects research application/approval, correspondence and planning with Dr. Shafer and *WH*
 - location: Bristol, TN
 - costs: equipment purchase (camera, microphone, computer and editing software) = app. \$3500

Production: May – September, 2011

- ✓ on-site filming (observational and interviews) of *WH* projects, constituent publics, and relationship between the two
 - locations: Highland Park, New Jersey; Chiang Mai Thailand; Phrao District, Thailand (including *WH* Children's Homes, *WH* office, Phrao municipality, Phrao's hospital, high school, silk-growing, dying, and weaving cooperatives, and various hilltribe villages that dot the ridges enclosing the Phrao Valley)
 - costs: travel to Highland Park, New Jersey (gas, accommodation), travel to Chiang Mai and Phrao, Thailand (roundtrip airfare), accommodation in Phrao (apartment, motorbike rental, food) = app. \$5500

Post-Production: October 2011 – March, 2012

- ✓ footage logging, treatment revisions, video editing and sound mixing, feedback from advisors, revisions, mastering

- ✓ March 14, 10am: Committee Defense

Technical Information

Camera – Panasonic 3MOS HD AVC

Microphone – Rhodes camera-mounted

Editing computer – MacBook Pro, 32 GB RAM, 120 GB hard drive

Editing software – Final Cut Pro 7

VO script

Note: (includes VO and interview quotes, but does not include scene descriptions or in-scene mono/dialogue)

VO: Phrao is one of the poorest districts in Thailand. Over half of families survive on less than 25 baht per day. That's roughly 75 US cents.

VO: Public health issues compound the economic situation. One hospital and four doctors serve a widely dispersed population of 54,000 people.

VO: Warm Heart Foundation is a non-government, nonprofit organization founded in 2008 by Dr. Michael Shafer, Professor Emeritus of Political Science at Rutgers University, and his wife Evelind Schecter, an MBA graduate from Columbia University and career veteran of business management and technology startups.

VO: According to its website, the organization's goal is to create an enabling environment among its constituent publics in Phrao, to drive development that is

grassroots, holistic, sustainable, green, and directly accountable to community member wants and needs.

Shafer (interview): Development comes down to a matter of sustainable improvements in quality of life, with sustainable meaning sustainable within the grasp of the people you're talking about, right, as not requiring outside resources of any sort...sustainable within the terms of environment that they live in, and quality of life understood much more broadly than simple economic measures.

VO: Dr. Shafer's take on development, that change agents like Warm Heart must pursue projects fostering change that has sustainable meaning from the perspective of the developing peoples, mirrors the philosophy of the late Latin American scholar Paulo Freire.

VO: In 1970, Freire published *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. His thesis was that "Developing third world countries are exploited by richer nations who extract raw commodities and cheap labor to their advantage, under the guise of development."

VO: Freire's argument was a reaction to historical approaches to development, specifically the *modernization approach*, which emphasizes economic growth but ignores local culture and values.

Shafer (interview): I think when you come into a community, it's a very sort of iterative process of asking yourself and asking others, what exactly you're seeing. I come into a community and I have, of course, a whole set of assumptions about what development would mean, and what would be a better life for these people. I look at, you know, what's the quality of the diet that children are eating? What's the quality of life that elderly people have, are they able to get around or are they stuck in one place? I look at the quality of sanitation and ask, are these people making themselves sick? I mean there are a lot of very practical things that you can ask, but at the same time, you really have to stop and ask people, what do *you* think is the most important thing that you would like to see changed in your community?

VO: Here, Dr. Shafer talks with Ahka hill tribe village leaders about their new microenterprise initiative. Warm Heart is trying to negotiate an arrangement in which the villagers replace subsistence farming with growing coffee.

VO: Warm Heart wants to buy the raw beans from the farmers, process and sell them in international markets as organic and fair trade, and return the profits to the farmers.

VO: Before they can do that, Warm Heart has to make sure and consult the farmers, to identify root problems from the locals' perspective, and figure out how and if their proposal might work.

VO: This kind of communication—interpersonal, intercultural dialogue—is necessary for nonprofit change agents like Warm Heart to not only drive development, but also to establish local definitions of what actually constitutes progress. That is, how do village members measure progress, and to what degree do they want to change?

Communication & Development – parallels and intersections

VO: Historically, the field of communication for development followed *modernization and growth theories*. According to these theories, progress is measured solely by economic gain.

VO: Communication scholar Everett Rogers developed a model in the 1960s called *diffusion of innovations*. Roger’s theory held that “Economically advancing innovations result from information being distributed by educated, advanced institutions and states, and consumed by uneducated audiences.

VO: Populations like those Warm Heart works with don’t access to even basic communication technology.

Shafer (interview): In many of our villages there’s not even cell phone connection. So, unless somebody’s walked up to a ridgeline and called somebody we know and we’ve told them in advance that we need to pass a message up, it’s get in the truck and go.

VO: Dr. Shafer recognizes the importance of taking local values and cultural and religious traditions into account when interacting in an environment like Phrao.

Shafer (interview): I think the past is tremendously important in community development because people in communities, even communities that are developing, understand themselves as complete entities. They don't see themselves as desperately in need of development. They see themselves as, you know, the children and the grandchildren of people that they grew up respecting, and they see themselves as members of an entire world, defined by music and dance and stories and so on. So, absolutely, the first thing you have to do when you practice community development is to recognize that the community you're working with understands itself as complete, as adult, and not in need of any outside help.

Reactions to & Opponents of Diffusion of Innovations

VO: Warm Heart operates at the grassroots level, and they do it not only by working closely with constituent publics. They take it a step further by hiring locals to fill full-time Warm Heart staff positions.

VO: Including Dr. Shafer and his wife, the organization employs only five foreigners full-time. The rest of the staff, sixteen in number, are local Thais from Phrao.

VO: Prachan “PJ” Jakeo, Warm Heart Chief-of-Staff, is a Phrao native and US Air Force veteran who handles the day-to-day operations and manages the large Thai staff.

PJ (interview): I never really wanted to go to the States, you know, ‘cause I’m a country boy. I didn’t want to go, my parents actually forced me to go over there. They promised me it’s only two years they’ll send me back to Thailand, but I ended up staying over there for thirty years. After finish high school over there, they said well, why don’t you join the military. So, you know, decided to join the military, the Air Force.

VO: This kind of approach to development has been called participatory communication. It implies community participation not only in the identification of problems and solutions, but also the implementation phase.

PJ (interview): In the past, people come up here and do stuff with them, then just left it out. You know, they say, here’s your coffee, then they disappear for the rest of their life. We really want to help them, not a business, we want to make them better.

Participatory Projects

VO: The Warm Heart Children’s Homes provide housing, care, and education to over thirty hill tribe children.

VO: The kids can't go to school otherwise, because their home villages are several hours away from the closest school. Not to mention the roads are unpaved, mud tracks. Even if their villages were closer, any kind of rain, which there is a lot of in northern Thailand, makes the trip too dangerous.

VO: The land, housing, and part of the funding are provided by Warm Heart, but the Homes are by-and-large run by locals, hired by Warm Heart to create an environment in which the kids will feel at home.

VO: They employ three house-mothers that come from the same villages as the children who cook, clean, and provide a home environment. The resident cook, P'Tai, is also from Phrao.

VO: Emergency medical training sessions that Warm Heart conducts on the mountain ridges surrounding the Phrao valley also facilitate local participation in their own improvement and development.

VO: In villages too remote for professional medical treatment, the only way to treat broken bones, snakebites, and malaria is to train the locals to do it in their home village. Otherwise, the injured and sick have to make a three-hour ride down the mountain, riding on a motorbike or strapped in the bed of a pickup truck, down to the nearest hospital.

VO: By providing such essential services as education and healthcare, Warm Heart has developed trust and working relationships with villages that allows them to take on more complex projects.

VO: Microenterprise projects have become Warm Heart's focus. Along with the coffee project, Warm Heart also works with local silk growers, dyers, and weavers to produce, market, and sell products internationally. The program has tripled the silk farmers' and artisans' profits in its first two years of operation.

VO: Getting people involved requires education. Whether it's increasing literacy, providing adult education programs, or organizing community co-ops and skill-training sessions, Warm Heart tries to encourage local participation in their own improvement and development.

Warm Heart, public relations & 'External Publics'

Shafer (interview): I spend a tremendous amount of time thinking about public relations for Warm Heart. The problem with public relations for Warm Heart is it's not entirely clear who the public is.

VO: Phrao community members are not the only publics Warm Heart maintains. The organization also has several *external publics* that are crucial to its existence.

VO: Dr. Shafer makes two trips to the US per year for fundraising purposes. In April of 2011, Shafer coordinated with the Rutgers University Warm Heart student chapter to host a fundraiser dinner they dubbed *Mission to Fruition*.

VO: Shafer and his wife Evelind called Highland Park, New Jersey, home for many years. They maintain friends and contacts in the area, many of whom they rely on for support.

VO: Tara, an ex-student of Shafer's at Rutgers, spent a year in Thailand when Warm Heart was getting started.

Tara (interview): I ended up going from a B.A. in anthropology to going to Thailand for a year, and falling in love with microenterprise, and just social entrepreneurship in general.

VO: After coming back to the States, she started the Rutgers Warm Heart student chapter, which raises support in a number of different ways, including fundraising and recruitment.

Tara (interview): I've met with people that are UN ambassadors, to people that are just Rutgers students, to high school students, we work with fundraisers, we work with people who are in all walks of life.

Shafer (interview): We sit here in Thailand, but our very existence depends upon donors who are primarily in the US and in European countries, it depends also very heavily on a steady stream of volunteers who by-and-large are university-aged young people who don't have any money, so who aren't donors, and aren't appealed to by the same kind of issues of reputability about value for dollar, but have to be appealed to in entirely different ways.

VO: Patrick Short and Dimitry Ovstrofsky are seen here providing emergency medical training to hill tribe villagers. Patrick is a nineteen year-old undergraduate biology major at UNC – Chapel Hill, and Dimitry is second year med student at New Jersey's state medical school.

VO: Volunteers like Patrick and Dimitry are part of a demographic among American university students who are increasingly searching out intercultural, real-world experiences to add to their resumes.

VO: Warm Heart has to adapt its messages in both content and form to apply to unique informational needs of different external publics.

Shafer (interview): You know, in the US, everybody deals with mediated communication. And so, the question is, who's the audience, what's the best mediation tool?

VO: Shafer does most of the legwork on this kind of message construction to ensure consistency and quality. He does allow volunteers to update the organization's website, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube page, but only after his review and approval.

Shafer (interview): I always try to have at least one or two of our volunteers tasked with getting something out, but to be perfectly honest it's basically me, and that means that the amount of real research, and planning, and communicating, and certainly evaluation that gets done is essentially nil.

VO: Although Shafer acknowledges Warm Heart's public relations limitations, the organization has found success in accruing funds and partnering with other organizations to pursue projects.

VO: Steve Frechette, Ara Cho, and Christina Feng recently founded FirstClicks, an organization whose goal is to provide computers and education to underprivileged kids in developing regions of the world. When they were researching for a place to begin their first project, they understood that they wanted to partner with an organization already on the ground. They decided Phrao would be the perfect place to start.

VO: As of October, 2011, FirstClicks had provided the Warm Heart Children's Homes kids with eighteen netbook computers, wireless internet, and teamed with P'Ton, Warm Heart staff member and ex-computer programmer, to give the kids weekly classes on how to use the computers and access the internet.

Audience is Key

Shafer (interview): Critical to my life as a professor was something that my father said to me when I finally convinced him that I really did want to be a professor. He said well, when you're standing in front of a large class, look out there and recognize and remember always, that every one of those students thinks that he or she is special. And even though there's only one of you and a lot of them, if you ever lose sight of that, you're going to lose your class. And I think that, sort of, extraordinary sensitivity to audience, if you will, has really influenced the way I wanted the management organization of Warm Heart to be, and also the relationship between Warm Heart and its community.

Shafer (interview): What we've really done, in many ways, is to respond programmatically to the community, while at the same time sticking very close to basic notions about how we ought to be operating, which is to be responsive and not... dictatorial.

VITA

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