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Citation:

Willis, P (2015) From humble inquiry to humble intelligence: Confronting wicked problems and augmenting public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 42 (2). 306 - 313. ISSN 0363-8111 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2015.05.007>

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Document Version:

Article (Accepted Version)

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**FROM HUMBLE INQUIRY TO HUMBLE INTELLIGENCE:  
CONFRONTING WICKED PROBLEMS AND AUGMENTING PUBLIC RELATIONS**

## **Introduction**

This study introduces a new form of intelligence and applies it to public relations (PR). It seeks to upgrade Schein's (2013) concept of *humble inquiry* into *humble intelligence* (HI) to address a particular set of seemingly intractable challenges known as *wicked problems* (Rittel & Webber, 1973). The article argues that, because of their ubiquity within organizations and across communities, wicked problems have implications for PR. It further contends that many of PR's functional challenges within organizations can be characterised as "wicked" and addressing them as such aligns with the discipline's strategic interests. The article also argues that PR has a wider role to play in helping others in society tackle wicked problems (WPs).

Despite these issues and opportunities the article identifies how PR has yet to recognize, let alone engage systematically with the challenges conceptualized as wicked problems. To confront them, the article sets out Schein's (2013) notion of humble inquiry which is based on a form of "here-and-now humility" (p. 5) that recognises the interdependence of organizations as well as individuals. This concept is then developed and advanced as *humble intelligence* (HI), considered as a cluster of multiple and interacting capabilities that, in concert, forge a form of collective

intelligence amongst a wide range of stakeholders. In this coalition, HI can harness the dispersed knowledge that exists in communities and organizations to go beyond traditional, hierarchal, and, often, isolated forms of expertise. This re-orientation engages wicked problems productively by deploying multiple perspectives, extending networks, and building the social capital required for collaboration.

HI's particular value to the field lies in articulating a set of capabilities useful to PR's functional role in organizations, as well as informing debates around the discipline's wider impact on society. HI generates a vocabulary and mindset capable of bridging the two different approaches. The traditional, dominant one focuses on understanding PR as a managerial practice, while the other is concerned with "the more-encompassing role of public relations in society" (Vujnovic & Kruckeberg, 2010, p. 671). This article locates humble intelligence at a point of intersection between these two perspectives and, therefore, offers important unifying potential, as well as practical relevance to the field.

The term wicked problem is used widely and has gained in popularity across a range of disciplines and sectors. The article situates the idea in its foundational literature to ground the term, provide a theoretical underpinning, and considers strategies associated with the resolution of WPs in other disciplines. These perspectives reinforce the relevance of the concept to PR while, at the same time, highlighting the field's lack of engagement on the subject. The article then presents humble intelligence as a way of engaging PR scholars and practitioners on the issues surrounding WPs. It suggest how, as well as gaining traction on seemingly intractable challenges, HI both complements and adds value to dialogic theories of PR.

## What makes a problem wicked?

The term wicked problem was first referred to almost fifty years ago by C. West Churchman, a philosopher and systems scientist. He noted that Horst Rittel from the University of California's Architecture Department had suggested in a seminar that the term be used to classify a type of problem which is "ill-formulated", characterised by "confusing" information, as well as "thoroughly confusing" ramifications (Churchman, 1967, p. B-141). The adjective "wicked" was used to describe "the mischievous and even evil quality of these problems, where proposed "solutions" often turn out to be worse than the symptoms" (Churchman, 1967, B-141). It was Rittel with his colleague Melvin Webber (1973) who went on to develop the first systematic conceptualization of wicked problems. Their research was motivated by the realisation that many public policy challenges, such as those they encountered in urban planning, cannot be resolved by the application of a linear and rational approach to problem solving.

To illustrate their thinking Rittel and Webber (1973) developed a set of ten characteristics (highlighted in italics below) that differentiate WPs from difficult but ordinary problems. These have since been applied and contextualized to challenges in the private as well as public sector (Conklin, 2006). First, *there is no definitive formulation of a wicked problem*. Rittel and Webber (1973) note this "*is the problem*" and the information required to understand the WP also depends on the "*idea for solving it*" (p. 161, italics in original). As

Conklin (2006) highlights every solution that is offered merely serves to expose new aspects of the problem. Second, *wicked problems have a no stopping rule*. Although it may be possible to tell when you have reached a solution to an ordinary problem, “with a wicked problem, the search for solutions never stops” (Camillus, 2008, p. 101). They instead require on-going action and commitment. Indeed, the problem solving process ends only when those involved in the process have run out of resources, “such as time, money, or energy, not when some optimal or ‘final and correct’ solution emerges” (Conklin, 2006, p. 7).

The next characteristic of WPs is the *solutions are not true-or-false, but good or bad*. The individuals and groups involved in addressing the problem will have different views about what an acceptable solution might be. Determining a way forward is therefore not an objective process but a question of judgement. Solutions are therefore assessed in a social context where a range of stakeholders will bring a host of different perspectives, values and goals. Their fourth attribute is *there is no immediate and no ultimate test of a solution to a wicked problem*. It is not possible to assess quickly whether or not a solution has been successful, while any attempt at resolution “will generate waves of consequences over an extended - virtually an unbounded - period of time” (Rittel & Webber, 1973, p. 163). This makes evaluating outcomes especially difficult.

Another attribute of WPs is that *every solution is a “one-shot operation”*; because there is no opportunity to learn from trial-and-error, every attempt counts significantly. This refers to the insight that all attempts at a solution leave a mark which cannot be reversed. They

create consequences which, in turn, generate their own wicked problems. Furthermore, *wicked problems do not have an exhaustively describable set of potential solutions, nor is there a well-described set of permissible operations that may be incorporated into the plan.* Their enigmatic nature suggests a feast or famine in terms of solutions. A range of remedies may be possible, or not possible; considered, or not considered. According to Conklin (2006) this aspect calls for creativity to devise potential solutions, as well as judgement to determine those that should be developed and implemented in an attempt to tame the WP.

An additional characteristic is *every wicked problem is essentially unique.* Given a complex cocktail of factors and conditions no two wicked problems are ever the same. This means that off-the-shelf remedies are not appropriate and salvation instead lies in tailored, custom-made solutions. Even if applying the same solution looks promising, a change of situation or personnel might ensure that an identical set of initiatives will not generate the same positive results. Conklin (2006) notes that while over time it is possible to acquire wisdom and knowledge about different approaches you are “always a beginner in the specifics of a new wicked problem” (p. 8). This point leads on to their eighth feature which is *every wicked problem can be considered to be a symptom of another problem.* WPs are essentially tangled up with other issues, none of which have a single underlying cause.

The next feature is *the existence of a discrepancy representing a wicked problem can be explained in numerous ways.* This insight recognises that a WP involves many stakeholders who will all “have different ideas about what the problem really is and what its causes are”

(Camillus, 2008, p. 101). Finally, Rittel and Webber (1973) stress that *the planner has no right to be wrong*. This statement refers to the importance of the problems under review. That is, those attempting to address the problem are often seeking to improve the world and are therefore held accountable by others for the actions they take.

### **The ubiquity of wickedness and the devil in the detail**

For Webber and Rittel (1973) a problem is not required to possess all ten of these characteristics for it to be considered as “wicked”. What is important about their typology is that by illuminating the intractable nature of many issues they add substance to their original frustration with traditional problem solving techniques. Because WPs cannot be defined, analysed and solved in sequential steps they are not amenable to traditional, linear approaches. As Pacanowsky (1995) highlights wicked problems essentially have an iterative nature to them that requires us to “cycle through the phases of problem definition, information gathering, solution and outcome” (p. 37).

Viewed through this lens many of society’s most urgent and intractable problems can be categorised as “wicked”. In the Developed World these include climate change, poverty, terrorism, drugs trafficking and public health issues such as obesity. Each of these challenges is moulded by a complex cocktail of social, political, psychological and economic factors which generate difficult questions for those seeking to address them. For example, why does someone endanger their own life and/or the lives of others by becoming obese, a

terrorist, or a drug user? Is poverty the result of failings in macro-economic policy, underpinned by prejudice, the result of a skills gap in the workforce, or a complex combination of these and other causes? Why have governmental attempts to tackle climate change become policy-making tragedies despite the need for urgent action? How is it that our political leaders “largely respond to short term horizons even when the catastrophic implications of doing so are far greater than any real or perceived benefits of inaction” (Levin et al., 2012, p. 124)?

The insights that can help us address these questions lie in the detailed and labyrinthine undergrowth of WPs, while their resolution often depends on a change of mindset and behaviour by the stakeholders involved. In the case of climate change this requires consumers, producers, politicians and policy officials reconfiguring their own thinking and practices at local, national or supra-national level. This emphasis on behaviour change is also why many of the operational dilemmas facing organizations are framed as WPs and the reason contemporary corporate planning processes struggle to cope. Camillus (2008), a seasoned observer of how companies create strategy, notes “wicked problems often crop up when organizations have to face constant change or unprecedented change” (p. 100). He goes on to highlight “they occur in a social context; the greater the disagreement among stakeholders, the more wicked the problem”, indeed, “it is the social complexity of wicked problems as much as their technical difficulties that make them tough to manage” (Camillus, 2008, p. 100). Sustaining innovation within a workforce, or encouraging people to model how they behave against a particular set of company values, are examples of the sort of organizational challenges framed by this type of social complexity. While the goals



associated with both issues might be easily expressed to be successful each objective is dependent on complex causal relationships between people. These are situations in which the stakeholders involved will view the problem differently, while the solutions and resources associated with addressing the problem are likely to evolve over time (Hall, 2013).

Whether from a public policy standpoint (Svara & Denhardt, 2010; Huggins & Hilvert, 2013) or a private sector perspective (Conklin, 2006; Camillus, 2008) the social complexity associated with WPs means they can only be addressed if organizations engage with and involve stakeholders. For Camillus (2008) “the aim should be to create a shared understanding of the problem and foster a joint commitment to possible ways of resolving it” (p. 102). While he recognises that not everyone will agree on what the problem is “stakeholders should be able to understand one another’s position well enough to discuss different interpretations of the problem and work together to tackle it” (Camillus, 2008, p. 102).

### **Wicked problems, public relations and dialogue**

This foundational focus on stakeholder engagement propels WPs into PR’s orbit in terms of both the discipline’s core functional preoccupations within organizations, as well as its role in society. For example, from a functional perspective it is helpful to consider how the social complexity associated with attending to an organization’s reputation and the task of building relationships with stakeholders can themselves be framed as wicked problems. In

addition, WPs have the potential to transform how we perceive of and position disciplinary specialisms such as employee communication. The issue of how an organization harnesses the intellectual assets of its employees is important for wicked problem solving. This aligns with Quirke's (2000) view of internal communication as a strategic organizational process concerned with generating knowledge through the intellectual assets of its people and their relationships. This perspective is supported by McKie and Willis (2012) who call on organizations to shift their internal communication orientation to more dialogic approaches that "emphasize individual and collective learning" (p. 848).

Despite such promptings the PR field has been slow to respond to this opportunity, a point supported by Linke and Zerfass (2011) who note the ability of internal communication to harness the intellectual and creative capacity of employees is an area that has been ignored in public relations research. The concept of wicked problems can serve as both a rationale and catalyst for just this sort of operational challenge. This is because the WP concept can be used to support the case for dialogic PR practice as an organizational imperative rather than a normative ideal. Taylor and Kent (2014) note that "many communication professionals erroneously conclude that dialogue is impossible because there is too much risk to organizations, because it is too time consuming, or because senior management does not see the value"; they highlight the last point is "the most telling" (p. 395). However, as we have seen from the previous discussion, wicked problems are increasingly regarded as an inescapable aspect of organizational life in many disciplines. Given dialogue in wicked contexts is presented as the only viable option for problem resolution it begins to align what

has been hitherto regarded as a normative conception of PR practice with a necessary condition of organizational resilience and sustainability.

This argument goes some way to answering Taylor and Kent's (2014) question of whether the public relations theory of dialogue is a theory of public relations or just a collection of idealized communication principles. The prevalence of wicked problems suggests the former by providing a strategic rationale for organizations to engage in practices designed to encourage dialogue and collaboration amongst stakeholders. Dialogue allows people to develop a common understanding of specific issues by converting tacit and individual knowledge into collective and shared knowledge (Cunliffe, 2002), therefore enabling new knowledge to emerge amongst the groups participating in the process (Tsoukas, 2009).

### **Opportunities for rapprochement**

In addition to providing insights for PR's management role in organizations the concept of WPs simultaneously adds value to debates around the discipline's wider contribution to society. It is through this synthesis that WPs generate a purpose and vocabulary with the potential to generate common ground between what Vujnovic and Krukeberg (2010) position as two opposing paradigms in the PR field. This opportunity for rapprochement complements Taylor's (2010) call for "a third way" (p. 7) in our understanding of the societal role of public relations. Her positioning of PR as one condition for the fulfilment of a civil society brings together both a functional and "a co-creational approach to public relations"

contributing to “a society where people, groups, and organizations have the desire and agency to make their community/society/world a better place to live” (p. 14). This call to arms complements the idea that collaboration and consensus should be the essence of ethical public relations practice (Spicer, 1997; Holtzhausen, 2013), a view supported by Heath (2001) who emphasised the emerging vocabulary in PR associated with building relationships, shared control, and collaborative decision-making.

Underpinned by theoretical perspectives such as dialogic theory (Kent & Taylor, 1998; 2002; Pearson, 1989) and fully functioning society theory (Heath, 2006), the co-creational approach is concerned essentially with how PR “*uses communication to help groups to negotiate meaning and build relationships*” (Taylor, 2010, p. 6, italics in original). This theoretical provenance highlights the importance of dialogue which, due to the need for stakeholder involvement, is also a vital aspect of the wicked problem solving process in society as well as organizations. PR has a growing body of research on dialogue and its role in organisations and society (Pearson, 1989; Botan, 1997; Kent & Taylor, 2002; Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012; Taylor & Kent, 2014). It is suggested this work presents an opportunity for scholars in our field to collaborate with researchers and practitioners in other disciplines to inform debates concerned with “taming” WPs through dialogue. Indeed, according to public management scholars such as Huggins and Hilvert (2013) creating the conditions in which people work together to tackle the WPs afflicting society “is a challenge that is wicked in and of itself” (p. 8).

Despite the insights and opportunities wicked problems offer to PR there has been little engagement with the concept by scholars in the field. This is different from the situation in other disciplines where thinking around WPs has influenced research in a diverse range of subject areas including public administration (Kettl, 2002; O'Toole, 1997; Roberts, 2000), project design (Conklin, 2006), leadership (Grint, 2006) and software development (De Grace & Stahl, 1990). In contrast, discussion of wicked problems has been largely absent from the PR field apart from passing mentions by researchers (Willis, 2012; Galloway, 2013) and limited attempts to apply their main characteristics in textbook chapters concerned with issues management (Black, 2014) and health communication (Willis, 2014). The response so far from scholars can therefore best be described as piecemeal.

### **Introducing humble intelligence**

To offset this lack of engagement the idea of *humble intelligence* (HI) is put forward to catalyse discussion in the field and to provide a focus for further reflection on PR's relationship with wicked problems. It is argued that drawing key themes together as a form of intelligence generates value by articulating a set of capabilities which have utility for both PR's functional role in organizations, as well as informing debates around the discipline's wider impact on society. By seeking to articulate the essence of humble intelligence the aim is to promote ultimately a common mindset, vocabulary and a particular set of practices for public relations.

Humble intelligence refers to a set of capabilities focussed specifically on the resolution of wicked problems. To develop this idea further it is necessary to unpack first what is meant by intelligence in the context of this study. In his overview of the field of intelligence studies Sternberg (2000) notes there is “no one overall” conception of intelligence (p. 7).

Conducting a tour around a landscape of lay, expert and culturally determined perspectives on its nature he highlights the concept’s essentially contested character. In a review of attempts to define intelligence during 65 years of scholarship Sternberg does though indicate some areas of overlap. These include attributes associated with “adaption to the environment, basic mental processes, and higher order thinking” such as reasoning, problem solving and decision making (Sternberg, 2000, p. 8).

The complex system model of intelligence (Davidson & Downing, 2000) highlights the interaction between these different attributes and suggests how intelligence can be viewed as a dynamic property able to change as and when environmental conditions change. It therefore views intelligence “as a complex system that includes interactions between mental processes, contextual influences, and multiple abilities” (Davidson & Downing, 2000, p. 42). This way of looking at the phenomenon includes Sternberg’s (1997) triarchic theory of intelligence, as well as Gardner’s (1983; 1998) research on multiple intelligences.

According to Davidson and Downing (2000) both these perspectives reject the conception of intelligence “as a unitary ability” (p. 44); seek to “explain how mental capacities develop and change over time and across situations” (p. 46); and “value adaptability of cognitive processing as an important aspect of intelligence” (p. 47). Regarding this last point, the complex systems model seeks particularly to “explain intelligence, or intelligences, as

adapting potential abilities to the values and demands of one's culture" (Davidson & Downing, 2000, p. 47).

Viewing intelligence through the lens of the complex systems model adds value to this study's interest in how PR practitioners might encourage dialogue and collaboration when addressing wicked problems. The focus on values and culture is important given wicked problems require practitioners to adapt to a world in which the roles and responsibilities of the private and public sector are being reconfigured in terms of how communities govern themselves. This shift requires organizational cultures to evolve from being "hierarchical, narrow in scope and expert defined" to recognising the importance of the "widely dispersed expertise" which exists in different communities (Huggins & Hilvert, 2013, p. 7). Wicked problems require the encouragement of particular problem solving cultures and HI is a specific response to this contextual imperative.

Given this cultural emphasis a priority for humble intelligence is the development and encouragement of norms which support inquiry and collaboration. This focus on norms is influenced by Ostrom's (1990; 2003) research which illustrates the crucial role they play in generating trust and social capital in collaborative problem solving environments. Willis (2012) has contextualised these insights for PR and highlights how as members of a group acquire norms of behaviour their presence affects the expectations of others. Indeed, when norms are shared in a group, expectations can converge on acceptable forms of behaviour, leading to patterns of reciprocity as individuals become willing to forgo immediate returns

to gain larger joint benefits when they observe others following the same strategy. This emphasis on norms supports Taylor and Kent's (2014) insight that "dialogue is only possible when people spend time together interacting, understanding the rules of interaction, trusting the other person/people involved in an interaction" (p. 390). The promotion of particular norms, particularly given their role in the cultivation of social capital, is an important antecedent for the dialogic engagement required in wicked problem solving and therefore becomes an important attribute of HI.

### **Encouraging a spirit of humble inquiry**

When considering the specific norms associated with humble intelligence it is helpful to begin with Pacanowsky's (1995) research on how organizational teams tackle wicked problems. In his observations of people at work on WPs Pacanowsky notes the importance of promoting a spirit of inquiry. This is presented as a counterpoint to the usual situation in organizations where "through impatience or personal styles, a team tends to seek closure too quickly or to bog down with adversarial arguing of one position over another" (Pacanowsky, 1995, p. 39). A consequence of this is that dialogue is curtailed and alternative ways of tackling the problem get pushed aside prematurely. This study builds on the idea of encouraging a "spirit of inquiry" in wicked contexts by integrating Schein's (2013) more specific and insightful *humble inquiry*.



In his reflections on how leaders should cope in an increasingly complex and interdependent world Schein (2013) highlights the importance of a particular form of “here-and-now humility” (p. 5). This recognises that in such contexts we are wholly dependent on other people and should therefore become better at asking rather than telling. He notes, however, this kind of humility is not commonplace in contemporary organizational cultures where knowledge may be prized but is associated with status and power. Nevertheless, it is this type of humility which is essential for the encouragement of dialogue in wicked problem solving contexts. Not only does it openly acknowledge the reality of interdependence but acts as a first step in creating a climate of openness which is necessary to empower others. This leads Schein (2013) to conclude that in a complex world people should practice a particular form of questioning which he frames as humble inquiry. This is “the fine art of drawing someone out, of asking questions to which you do not already know the answer, of building a relationship based on curiosity and interest in the other person” (Schein, 2013, p. 2).

Schein’s insights lead to two conclusions. First, that humble inquiry, and its encouragement in others, is the hallmark of humble intelligence. Second, that HI should therefore favour practices designed to create collaborative environments in which people listen and learn from one another over time with the goal of taming wicked problems. Such a view complements Conklin’s (2006) belief that the repertoires required in wicked contexts must be “attuned to the fundamentally social and conversational nature of work” (p. 3).

## **Facilitation and the forces of fragmentation**

It is now necessary to consider the specific practices and skills associated with the application of humble intelligence. To inform this discussion it is helpful to highlight the framework developed by the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD) (2013) which is designed to help people decide which types of practices for encouraging dialogue provide the best fit for different contexts. The framework divides various techniques into four categories based on the primary intention of the process (exploration, conflict transformation, decision making and collaborative action) and combines them with the specific methods known to be effective in each area. For those individuals and groups tackling complex issues such as WPs (and taking responsibility for the solutions they generate) the NCDD suggests techniques such as study circles, appreciative inquiry and future search.

Humble intelligence not only requires practitioners to develop knowledge in how to use these and other complementary techniques but also emphasises the importance of facilitation skills. This is because HI focusses on processes that foster rather than direct discussion, preferring approaches that enable participants to find their own answers (Bens, 2006). This also complements a perspective from within our own field which argues that the focus of the PR practitioner should be on the process of decision-making rather than any particular outcome (Toth & Heath, 1992).

An emphasis on facilitation also supports another core feature of HI. This is a commitment to the creation of networks rather than hierarchies. In their research on the knowledge challenges generated by wicked problems Weber and Khademian (2008) note how networks are displacing hierarchies and markets “as the foremost means to organize to address complex problems” (p. 334). Their perspective builds on Powell’s (1998) positioning of networks as innovative organising hybrids that help participants to accomplish an outcome together which could not have been achieved individually. Being guided by a network orientation is crucial to overcome what Conklin (2006) refers to as the forces of fragmentation. This describes a situation “in which the people involved see themselves as more separate than united, and in which information and knowledge are chaotic and scattered”. The essential DNA of a wicked problem, combined with the number and diversity of people associated with its resolution, work together to splinter “the perspectives, understandings, and intentions of the collaborators” (Conklin, 2006, p. 3). In such a context the aim is to create a sense of coherence amongst the stakeholders involved. HI’s focus on network norms associated with dependence on others, curiosity, questioning and listening cultivate the conditions under which this coherence can emerge through dialogue.

## **Conclusion**

This article makes the case for why an appreciation of wicked problems is important for public relations from both a functional and societal perspective. The framing of relevant

organizational challenges as wicked problems can help to change perceptions about the strategic role of communication, while the importance of dialogue in “taming” WPs signals the pivotal role PR can play in their resolution. Furthermore, the scope and magnitude of wicked problems means this role has the potential to extend beyond the functional concerns of organizations and into society. These insights provide a unifying purpose for the discipline which supports a growing body of research concerned with the enactment of dialogic strategies and practices.

The article introduces the idea of *humble intelligence* to provide a focus for a wider discussion of the specific developmental priorities this opportunity generates for PR practice. HI suggests ways in which PR can take a lead in collaborative problem solving settings although not in a traditional, hierarchical sense. The emphasis is instead on the cultivation of norms associated with encouraging inter-dependence, openness and dialogue in a network setting. Such an orientation is important as organizations and communities need to create viable and sustainable spaces where people can come together over time to address the wicked problems they confront. The application of humble intelligence is therefore closely associated with the development of social capital.

In summary, the article recommends humble intelligence as a requirement for PR professionals for three reasons. First, its application is important in those functional contexts where PR practitioners are required to address and resolve what can be framed as “wicked” communication problems. For example, the PR efforts associated with trying to

build and maintain an organization's reputation, the task of developing relationships with key stakeholders, and the internal communication challenges associated with organizational learning. In these and other "wicked" communication contexts the application of humble intelligence can help practitioners work with others to confront issues of strategic importance to the discipline.

The second justification for PR to focus on humble intelligence similarly relates to the discipline's functional role within organizations. However, instead of being concerned with tackling issues that may be regarded as specific "PR problems", the HI focus shifts to the development of a particular form of communicative capability to equip others in the organization to address wicked problems. The prevalence of wicked problems, and the emphasis on communication as a necessary coping strategy, provides a rationale for humble intelligence to be regarded not just as a functional PR attribute, but as a general organizational competence. This context requires PR practitioners, skilled in the art of humble intelligence, to assume an internal education role with the aim of informing and enabling others in the organization, such as senior managers, front line employees, technical or scientific staff. In effect, PR's relationship with humble intelligence includes a focus on building a communicative culture to support the resolution of wicked problems. Such an association is strategically important for the PR function and communication because it aligns both with addressing complex organizational problems.

The third and final justification for humble intelligence concerns how the practice of PR is perceived in society. Since many wicked problems have wide ranging impacts on our social world, progressive PR efforts associated with their resolution can highlight the discipline's positive role in society. Rather than focussing on promotion, publicity and presentation, the focus of HI-influenced PR is on community problem solving, collaboration, and dialogue. By associating the practice of PR with the enactment of humble intelligence, the combination has the potential to positively influence discourses about, and perceptions of, our discipline.

This refocus still leaves questions. These include how we think of and teach PR; how we practically equip practitioners for the future; how PR practitioners conceptualize their role; and how others see them. In addition, we need to model the way by confronting our own wicked problems and encouraging the development of humble intelligence in PR practice. Resolving this dilemma is important, however, as it can help to move PR from “the unseen to the seen” (McKie & Munshi, 2007, p. 145) with its allusion to Cutlip's (1994) history of public relations as *The Unseen Power*, and the profession's concealed influence. Humble intelligence can help bring PR center stage through progressive practices associated with dialogue and collaboration. Working cooperatively to shed light on shadowy wicked problems, PR can set its sights on an expanded organizational role and a more socially enlightened future.

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