Able, affable, and available
Occupational culture of Aotearoa New Zealand's public relations consultants

Deepti Bhargava

A thesis submitted to
Auckland University of Technology
in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

2024
School of Communication Studies

ABSTRACT

The practice of public relations is a social field within itself which is shaped by the socio-cultural backgrounds, values and motivations, day-to-day interactions, behaviours, norms, and expectations of its practitioners. The occupational culture of public relations is therefore not universal but varies according to the context within which practitioners operate and is influenced by their lifeworld and routine practices.

Existing research has shown that external consultancy practice may vary from the way public relations is carried out within internal organisational departments. However, while there are generalised perceptions about the identity and practice of public relations consultants, little is known about the background and lived experiences of consultants in Aotearoa New Zealand. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to examine the lifeworld and day-to-day practices of public relations consultants in the country to gain a better understanding of their occupational culture.

To achieve this aim, the researcher applied a constructivist approach and observed two consultants at their respective workplaces using video ethnography. The data was analysed with the help of Ethnographic Communication Analysis (ECA) that examined verbal and non-verbal (such as gesture, gaze, posture, and proxemics) aspects of the routine interactions of these two public relations consultants with their clients and colleagues. The examined interactions included a problem-solving phone conversation with a client, job interview to select a prospective candidate, collaboration with a colleague, and a meeting with a client representative to manage staff turnover. Along with the participant observation, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 consultants (including one who was also observed) to add further validity and credibility to the interpretations.

.

The findings revealed that the occupational culture of public relations consultants in the country was about being *affable, able, and available*. Firstly, the consultants were found to be affable in that they used politeness strategies, valued social capital, and applied personal influence. Secondly, they believed that to do well in practice consultants must be able to write well, learn through experience and get the work done within the timeframe set by the client. Finally, consultants defined themselves through their flexible and extreme work ethos and empahsised the need to demonstrate availability to the client.

The findings of the study not only highlighted the occupational nuances specific to public relations consultants but also demonstrated the importance of their interpersonal relationships with clients and colleagues. Additionally, this investigation of occupational culture has raised various concerns about issues relating to identity and habitus of public relations consultants and what they imply for the advancement of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the occupation. With this study, the researcher hopes to inspire reflection on the current discipline, teaching and practice of public relations consulting.

This research has contributed to the understanding of public relations as an occupational field and advanced the application of social theory in the discipline. It is advised that future researchers continue to use ethnographic approaches to understand and make sense of the lived experiences of public relations practitioners, both consultants and those working in-house.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed:

Deepti Bhargava

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In acknowledging all those who have been an integral part of my doctoral journey, I draw from the ancient Indian Vedic philosophy of *Rin (ऋण)* or debt.

First and foremost, I acknowledge my *Dev Rin (देव ऋण).* I am indebted to the Almighty for everything. Thank you, again and again, for granting me the opportunity to do this research, removing the obstacles from my path and keeping me centred.

Second, I acknowledge my *Rishi Rin (ऋषि ऋण).* I am indebted to my supervisors Dr Petra Theunissen and Dr Helen Sissons, Associate Professors at Auckland University of Technology (AUT). Thank you for giving me honest feedback, keeping me focussed, not letting me lose my passion for the topic and most importantly being so patient. This thesis would not have been possible without your inspiration, encouragement, and mentorship.

Third, I acknowledge my *Pitra Rin (पितृ ऋण).* I am indebted to my parents (Bala and Naresh) and parent-figures (Shashi Prabha, Rajni and Ashwani) for always being there for me. Without your belief in me, I could not have dreamt of embarking upon this journey. Your wise anecdotes, hugs, smiles and warm meals have kept me going even during the toughest of times.

Next, I acknowledge my *Nri Rin (नृ ऋण).* I am indebted to the consultants who participated in this study. I am grateful that you were willing to share your time, space, and thoughts and be so welcoming and honest in your involvement. I hope that this thesis has done justice to your contribution.

I want to acknowledge my peers at the TOROA Centre for Communication Research. Thank you for being the community that I could lean upon. As I write this, I fondly remember Stephanie Sageo-Tapungu. We started this journey together and shared many notes and laughs. Stephanie, it saddens my heart that you are gone so soon, and I continue to pray for your soul's peace and that of the beloved family you left behind.

I am grateful for the support of the School of Communications Studies and the Faculty of Design and Creative Technologies for granting me Research and Study Leave (RSL) in my final year. This has been hugely helpful in dedicating the time that writing a thesis often demands.

Special thanks to my dearest friends and colleagues Justin Matthews and Associate Professor Dr Angelique Nairn. You have been by my side through all the peaks and troughs. Thank you for listening to my plans, drafts, and rants alike. I am glad for all our walks, check-ins, coffee conversations and phone calls that have ensured I retain my sanity and do not forget to smile. Thanks also to Garima and Vicki, my friends who are more like sisters, for cheering me on all the way to the finish line. I promise I will not be bringing a pile of readings and notes to our next trip. Thanks to all members of my beloved family in Aotearoa New Zealand and India for your constant support and wishes.

Last, but not the least, I acknowledge my *Bhoot Rin* (*भूत ऋण).* I am indebted to the blessings of the five elements—air, water, earth, fire, and ether—for nourishing my *being*.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 The context of research

"Given the scale and reach of public relations work, there remains a need for more comprehensive analyses of the occupation as a social and cultural practice in its own right" (Edwards, 2018, p. 2).

The normative paradigm of public relations addresses the practice, first and foremost, as a distinct management function within an organisation. It is concerned with upholding a metatheory (Grunig, 1992a; Grunig & Grunig, 2008, Grunig & Kim, 2021) that legitimises and defends the role and value of the internal public relations department in achieving organisational outcomes. This worldview, advanced predominantly by US-based scholars and grounded in a reliance on quantitative studies, has long dominated the disciplinary field (Bardhan & Weaver, 2011; L'Etang, 2013; Huang & Lyu, 2013).

While such a functional view has provided a foundation for both the theory and practice of public relations, it has overlooked the nuances of the social and cultural contexts within which practitioners operate (Edwards & Hodges, 2011; Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002; Ihlen et al., 2018). This implies that the varying day-to-day lived experiences of public relations practitioners have been largely unexamined, leading to little appreciation of their worldviews, interpersonal relationships, decision-making processes, conflicts, and power dynamics (Edwards & Ihlen, 2023; Ihlen et al., 2018; Theunissen & Sissons, 2018). Undoubtedly then, the ethnocentricity of the discipline has been "holding the field back" (Sriramesh, 2012, p. 21).

Scholars with alternative perspectives have increasingly called for a shift in focus towards exploring the interplay between public relations, society, and culture (Bardhan & Weaver, 2011; Curtin, 2021; Curtin & Gaither, 2007; Daymon & Hodges, 2009; Kent & Taylor, 2011; L'Etang, 2013; Macnamara & Crawford, 2013; Somerville et al., 2017; Sriramesh, 2012, 2020). In doing so, researchers have been urged to experiment with anthropological methods of data collection (Edwards & Hodges, 2011; L'Etang, 2011) and draw from social theory to broaden their analytical purview (Edwards & Ihlen, 2023; Ihlen et al., 2018). While this has prompted a burgeoning acknowledgement of the socio-cultural aspects of public relations practice, "applications of social theory to *empirical sites* [authors' emphasis], where its value as a means of understanding, challenging, and changing practice can be explained and illustrated more fully" (Edwards & Ihlen, 2023, p. 215) remain few and far between.

The current study aims at addressing this glaring issue by using an ethnographic method and applying a sociological lens of analysis to observe, examine, understand, and reflect upon a particular context of public relations practice in Aotearoa New Zealand. Although there were perhaps multiple occupational settings that could have acted as an empirical site for this study, in an attempt to avoid perpetuating the functional worldview, I chose to examine the day-to-day working lives of those practitioners who do not work in internal public relations departments but provide external advice as consultants.

While the public relations consultancy business has been steadily blooming across the world (Sudhaman, 2022; Wright, 2020), it remains largely invisible in the discipline (Pieczka, 2008). In fact, scholarly texts reflect a lack of understanding of consultancy terminology and practice and terms like service, agency, firm, and consultancy are often used interchangeably with little regard to any socio-cultural connotation (Verčič, 2012). The lack of acknowledgement and appreciation of the unique complexities of consulting, such as managing client-consultant relationships and billing clients for work and advice, has left it generalised under the same umbrella as in-house practice and gravely overlooked as an area of research (Pieczka, 2008). The few studies that have chosen to explore public relations consulting have mostly used interviews with consultants to illuminate issues concerning gendered representation (Fröhlich & Peters, 2007; Logan & Ciszek, 2021; Tsetsura, 2011; Yeomans, 2016, 2019) or tainted reputation (Grandien, 2017; Kantola, 2016; von Planten, 2016). Less than a handful of scholars (Sissons, 2014, 2015; Theunissen & Sissons, 2018; Williams, 2018) have attempted to pursue an ethnographic approach to observe and explain the lived experiences of consultants and their specific socio-cultural circumstances.

The current study aimed to contribute to a better understanding of consultants and consulting by taking a closer look at their worldviews and routine working lives. In doing so, it drew from Hodges' (2005, 2006, 2011) seminal work that offered an ethnographic account of the occupational culture of public relations practitioners in Mexico City. While her study did not differentiate between in-house and consulting, it did provide the only framework available for investigating occupational culture in public relations practice. Based on Bourdieu's (1990) sociological concepts, Hodges (2005, 2006, 2011) articulated the public relations occupational culture or public relations practitioner (PRP) culture as a combination of practitioner lifeworld (habitus, occupational identities, and experiences) and occupational practices.

Therefore, this study is based on the following research question:

RQ: What is the occupational culture (practitioner lifeworld and occupational practices) of public relations consultants in Aotearoa New Zealand?

1.2 The approach of the study

To address the need for an anthropological lens in public relations scholarship, the current study followed a constructivist approach and relied on participant observation (Bernard, 2017; DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011; Manolchev & Foley, 2021) and semi-structured interviews as its methods of data collection.

The participant observation was done through video ethnography (Pink, 2021), which included recording the researcher's observations using a video camera. This enabled the replay of the recordings for transcription and analysis and ensured that interpretations were not solely dependent on memory or the accuracy of fieldnotes (Shrum & Scott, 2017; Pink 2021). Two consultants, John and Karen[1], were observed carrying out their day-to-day public relations consulting work. John was observed for 10 working days at his consultancy (spread across 23 April and 14 May 2018), where he worked with two consultants who were his employees. One of his employees was leaving the consultancy and John was also in the process of hiring a contractor. Karen was observed for four days at her home office (21 – 24 Feb) from where she ran her self-operated consultancy business. Together, a total of 14 days of observation were conducted. The video ethnography offered an opportunity to gain extraordinary insights from the ordinary thoughts, interactions, experiences, and behaviours (Geertz, 1973; Erikson, 2018; Lincoln et al., 2018) of public relations practitioners that have remained overlooked and unchallenged in the discipline (L'Etang, 2011; Madden & Levenshus, 2021; Sissons, 2014).

As the researcher during the video ethnography, I took on the role of observer-as-participant (Bernard, 2017; Jorgensen, 2020). This role meant that I could immerse myself in the socio-cultural context of my participants, albeit for a limited time, to observe

[1] Names changed to protect the privacy of the participants.

their routine working lives. My identity as a researcher was made explicit to them, their co-workers, and clients. While my primary role was that of an observer, there were occasional and brief instances of participation in the practice of my participants (See Section 3.3).

Four key interactions were chosen from the data I collected, using the Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954; Keatinge, 2002; Watkins et al., 2022), which were routine occurrences that could be representative of the occupational culture of consultants.

These interactions were then analysed using Ethnographic Communication Analysis (Middleton, 2020; Sissons, 2014; Theunissen & Sissons, 2018), which drew from analytic approaches (see Section 3.4.2) such as conversation analysis (Jefferson, 2004a; Sacks et al., 1974; Schegloff, 2007; Schiffrin, 1987; Stivers & Sidnell, 2013), multimodal analysis (Harrigan et al., 1991; Kendon, 2004; McNeill, 2005; Mehrabian, 2007; Norris, 2019; Rossano, 2013), interactional sociolinguistics (Atkins, 1992; Bourdieu, 1984; Drew, 1992; Gumperz, 1982, 2018), ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967), dramaturgical analysis (Goffman, 1967), and critical discourse studies (Fairclough, 1995; Holmes & Stubbe, 2015; Machin & Mayr, 2012; van Dijk, 2018).

In conjunction with video ethnography, I also conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 consultants (including one who was also observed). These interviews added further depth to the data collected from video ethnography and field notes (Bernard, 2017; Jorgensen, 2020), enabled triangulation (Flick, 2018), ensured the interpretations drawn were valid and robust (Herrington, 2014; Wooffitt & Widdicombe, 2006), and widened the application of moderatum generalisations (Jorgensen, 2020; Williams, 2000) made from the analysis. These interviews were then analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

1.3 About the researcher and her inspiration to study

I was raised in a burgeoning Indian metropolis (Noida) that borders New Delhi, the country's capital city. I have always been fascinated by the cultural diversity of Indian people with varying languages, festivals, food, folklore, social norms, and ways of being. From this multi-cultural land, I immigrated into a place with bi-cultural foundations laid by the indigenous Māori people and the white settlers or *Pākehā* people through *Te Tiriti o*

Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi). It was here, in Aotearoa New Zealand, that I discovered public relations and ignited my interest in researching culture and diversity.

My journey began when I enrolled for a Master of Communication Studies in 2008, for which I interviewed and surveyed public relations practitioners to write a thesis on how the internet had influenced their practice. At the same time, I had the opportunity to get a closer understanding of the local industry through working with *Te Pūtahi Whakakakau Tūmatanui o Aotearoa* the Public Relations Institute of New Zealand (PRINZ) as its professional development and communications manager. Through my study, work experience, and personal interactions with practitioners it became evident that the industry was not very diverse and suffered from a homogeneous identity and stereotypical perceptions of being white, female, and fluffy (Sterne, 2008). Given the country's bi-cultural establishment and the arrival increasingly of multi-cultural immigrants (Mein Smith, 2012), this lack of diversity was intriguing. Fifteen years after my own arrival and first encounter with the public relations practice, the state of the industry in the country has not changed by much (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023a).

When I joined Auckland University of Technology as a lecturer in 2015, it made me wonder if this lack of diversity would create a barrier for those who did not see themselves represented or did not identify with their perceptions of the current occupational culture of the practice. To add to this, there was little known about the actual occupational culture, but generalisations were made based on popular stereotypes, which research had already suggested can deter students from choosing public relations as a career (Bowen, 2003; 2009; Dennison, 2012; Yoon & Black, 2007). In 2016, I began teaching on our communication degree's capstone work-integrated learning course where students planned and implemented public relations campaigns for non-profit clients as part of a student consultancy. In preparing course and reading materials, I further realised how little was known or written in the public relations discipline about *being* a consultant or the consultant's *way of practice* (Pieczka, 2008; Sissons, 2015; Verčič, 2012).

All these trepidations made me want to know more about the people who chose to practise public relations consulting: who were they, what was their worldview, how diverse were their backgrounds, what were their motivations and expectations, what did they do in their routine practices and how did they make sense of what their occupational culture was as consultants? Unsurprisingly then, as stated earlier, my doctoral study's research question became the following:

RQ: What is the occupational culture (practitioner lifeworld and occupational practices) of public relations consultants in Aotearoa New Zealand?

As a person and as a researcher, I have always been fascinated by and attempting to understand people and culture. One of the best-known Māori sayings summarises my inspiration for this study:

He aha te mea nui o tea o?
He tangata, he tangata, he tangata.
What is the most important thing in the world?
It is the people, it is the people, it is the people.

1.4 The structure of the thesis

This thesis includes nine chapters. They have been organised as per the directive stipulated in Auckland University of Technology's postgraduate handbook that requires the traditional format thesis to cover introduction, literature review, methodology, findings, analysis, discussion, and conclusion (Auckland University of Technology, 2023).

Following the current chapter which offers a prelude, Chapter Two provides an exhaustive review of the literature studied to understand the discipline, showcase the gaps, and help identify the research question. The chapter explores, examines, and articulates three core aspects of existing literature—the expanse of the socio-cultural paradigm in public relations, the terminologies, issues, challenges and perceptions of consultant life and culture, and the socio-cultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand. In doing so, the chapter draws not just from public relations scholarship but also from organisational sociology, management literature and historiography.

Chapter Three presents a comprehensive explanation of the methodology adopted by this study. The chapter explains the rationale behind the study's constructivist framework and ethnographic approach. It gives a detailed description of video ethnography and semi-structured interviews as the methods of data collection. Thus, the chapter explains the sampling methods, access issues, rapport-building techniques, and data management complexities. The chapter then explains how

Ethnographic Communication Analysis (ECA) and Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) were applied to analyse the data gathered.

Chapters Four to Seven present the findings of the study through the interpretation and analysis of four key observed interactions that help make sense of the occupational culture of public relations consultants. Traditionally, the findings are presented in a single chapter. However, I have chosen to share the findings of this study across four chapters as each of them highlights a prominent theme identified through the iterative analysis and triangulation of data collected from video observation, field notes and semi-structured interviews. Each chapter, therefore, delves deeper into the theme by offering further scholarly background, interpreting the video interaction that is most representative of the theme and integrating fieldnotes and interview quotes, as and where necessary, to support the narration of the findings.

Chapter Four, the first thematic chapter of the findings, attempts to make sense of who is fit to be selected as a consultant and what are the criteria for selection. The chapter begins by sharing findings from the interviews where participating consultants outlined how they perceived themselves and others in the field and what they expected from those they hired. The chapter then examines an observed interaction featuring an in-person job interview where two consultants interviewed a prospective candidate for their consultancy. Consultants seemed to value more subjective personality traits such as attitude and the ability to gain and maintain social capital than field-specific knowledge, skills, and abilities. The chapter demonstrates that while the consulting industry lacks ethnic diversity, consultants' discourse about themselves, their peers and their practice may be perpetuating existing stereotypes about their occupational culture.

Chapter Five explores the second theme of findings – the client-consultant relationship through the lens of their power dynamic during a problem-solving interaction. The chapter begins with findings from interviews where participating consultants articulated their understanding of their relationship with a client. It then presents an observed interaction where the consultant was seen engrossed in a problem-solving conversation with her client. The chapter shows that consultants rely on a demonstration of empathy, politeness, and other rhetorical devices to persuade their clients.

Chapter Six examines the third theme of the findings – the temporal and financial pressures of consulting work and how collaboration among consultants is used to ease them. The chapter starts with interview findings that explain the issues regarding client-servicing, billing, deadline management and collaboration. Next, it examines an interaction where two consultants were observed to be collaborating to complete a client-related task by a set deadline. The chapter concludes that true collaboration is only achievable when structured time is set aside for it in the consultancy, otherwise it can create additional interpersonal challenges and conflicts.

Chapter Seven investigates the final theme of the findings - how consultants manage turnover at their consultancy and what this implies for client-consultant relationships. It shares an interaction featuring a meeting between two consultants and their client to manage staff turnover. The chapter shows that consultants strategically employ small talk, humour, and politeness to demonstrate collegiality and save face in an effort to maintain client-consultant relationships that are the lifeblood of their work.

Chapter Eight discusses the implications of the findings of the study. It uses the analogy of being *able, affable, and available* to explain the occupational culture of public relations consultants in Aotearoa New Zealand. The chapter highlights a range of themes, including the existence of personal influence, politeness, persuasion, and a business-like culture that values personality traits that are a product of privileged socio-cultural circumstances.

Finally, Chapter Nine concludes the thesis. It summarises the study's aims, methodological approach, findings and implications of these findings for practice. It also highlights the significance of the study for public relations scholarship, practice, and education before concluding with a reflection on the study's limitations and offering practical and scholarly recommendations for the future.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

There is significant discussion and debate about which direction public relations scholarship should be further conceptualised, examined, and advanced (Bardhan & Weaver, 2011; Ihlen et al., 2018; L'Etang, 2013; Nothhaft & Zerfass, 2023; Pieczka, 2006a; Taylor, 2023; Valentini, 2021). While scholarly origins can be traced back to the 1980s and early 1990s in the predominantly American view of public relations as an internal function of management (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig, 1992a), there has since been a growing resistance to this worldview (Edwards & Hodges, 2011; L'Etang, 2013).

The alternative approaches have widened the disciplinary panorama to include exploring public relations from dialogic, rhetoric, feminist, relational, social, cultural, and various other critical standpoints (L'Etang, 2013). In fact, at present, there is a proliferation of perspectives leading to what Taylor (2023, p. 525) has labelled as a "buffet of theories" (p. 525).

In this muddled academic space, there has been a call for a more post-disciplinary approach, i.e., accepting the complexity, and perhaps the intra-disciplinary nature of public relations as an applied field, and using innovative methodologies to hypothesise, examine, establish, and critically reflect upon theories, concepts and frameworks about public relations and the 'real' world (Nothhaft & Zerfass, 2023).

The current study accepts the complex nature of the discipline. This literature review chapter begins by first explaining the rationale for resisting the dominant paradigm and instead opting for a socio-cultural approach that examines the lifeworld of practitioners and their interactions with each other and their environment. It then goes on to specifically explore the lifeworlds and practices of consultants. Finally, the chapter highlights the state of the consultancy practice in Aotearoa New Zealand. This review of the scholarship highlights two most glaring gaps: minimal consideration of public relations consultants and a lack of engagement with an ethnographic exploration of the culture of the practice. Addressing these issues therefore arises as the foundational purpose of the present research.

2.1 Resisting the normative domain of public relations scholarship

The dominant academic view in public relations was the one perpetuated by *the excellence theory* (Grunig, 1992a) that was developed in 1980s as part of an International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) study and published in 1992. This research, conducted predominantly by scholars based in the United States (US) and one practitioner from the United Kingdom (UK), integrated several middle-range concepts to create general public relations principles with *alleged* universal application. The theory specified prerequisites that enabled an internal public relations department to be excellent in contributing to its organisation's effectiveness (Grunig, 1992a). Among the most prominent of these conditions were for public relations to be practised in a strategic manner (Grunig & Repper, 1992), senior public relations practitioners to have a place and say in the organisation's dominant coalition (Grunig et al., 1992), public relations to not be relegated under any other department - such as marketing - but be empowered as an independent function within the organisation (Ehling et al., 1992), and for the organisation and their publics to communicate with each other as advocated by the two-way symmetrical model (Grunig, 1992a, 1992b, 1992c; Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Grunig & White, 1992).

The excellence theory was initially tested, using a quantitative survey, in 327 organisations in the US, the UK and Canada. Participants were public relations heads, chief executive officers and employees of these organisations. This was followed by qualitative interviews in 25 of these organisations (Grunig & Grunig, 2008). The focus, as stated by the lead researcher James Grunig (1992a), was on establishing a normative benchmark of best practice that public relations practitioners worldwide could strive towards.

> …this book sets forth a normative theory, a theory that prescribes how to do public relations in an ideal situation, and contrasts that theory with our predictions of how public relations generally is practised. We argue that excellent public relations departments will practice public relations in a way similar to our normative model, in contrast to the way public relations is practiced in the typical, less excellent department. (p.12)

This view, further propagated by the dominance of American textbooks and journals, has since proliferated as the discipline's most influential scholarly paradigm (Bardhan & Weaver, 2011; L'Etang, 2013; McKie & Munshi, 2005; Petelin, 2005; Pieczka, 2006a) to the extent that between 1992 and 2011, it had already received 1,862 citations (Huang & Lyu, 2013). These citations were recorded not only within public relations but also in other disciplines including business, economics, public administration, sociology, law, and philosophy (Huang & Lyu, 2013). It has been noted that public relations scholars rarely publish outside their field (Botan & Taylor, 2004) and therefore it can be assumed that the cross-disciplinary citation of the excellence theory exemplified its reign and reach as the normative view of public relations.

While the excellence theory has provided a firm grounding for public relations scholarship, it has been argued that alternative perspectives needed to be explored through “somewhat less rose-tinted glasses” (p. 9) to highlight the complexities of the discipline and the practice (Moloney & McGrath, 2020). There have been many concerns regarding the theory’s popularisation including (but not limited to) the idealisation of symmetrical communication as ethical and in doing so denouncing the role of persuasion (Miller, 2009; Sriramesh & Fisher, 2021) and ignoring the relevance of power (Weaver, 2021); paying little heed to the existence of interpersonal relationships, interactions and personal influence (Sriramesh & Fisher, 2021; Theunissen & Sissons, 2018); and not reflecting on the interplay of society and culture with (and within) public relations (Bardhan & Weaver, 2011; Chaidaroon & Hou, 2021; Curtin, 2021; Somerville et al., 2017; Sriramesh, 2012; 2020; Edwards & Hodges, 2011).

Critics of the normative mindset believed that it was a myth of the modernist paradigm (Brown et al., 2022; Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002; Petelin, 2005; Pieczka, 2006a), which oversimplified the universal application of ethnocentric concepts (Bardhan, 2003; Bardhan & Weaver, 2011; Kent & Taylor, 2007, 2011; Somerville et al., 2017). The notion that a metanarrative created by Western thinkers, and predominantly tested through quantitative techniques, should be accepted as the singular truth about public relations has been questioned repeatedly (Bardhan & Weaver, 2011; Curtin, 2021; Curtin & Gaither, 2007; Holtzhausen, 2000; L’Etang, 2013; Taylor, 2023). Since different social, cultural, economic, and political frames construct varying realities; no single viewpoint can be privileged as being normative (Holtzhausen, 2000).

The founders of excellence theory have continued to defend their worldview (Grunig & Grunig, 2008; Grunig, 2009; Grunig & Kim, 2021) and argue that they have acknowledged the role of human subjectivity and vastness of societal contexts and that critics have misinterpreted their worldview as utopian. Paradoxically, in contending that their presuppositions about *excellent public relations* were essential for building a metatheory which, in their opinion, their critics have failed at producing (Grunig & Grunig, 2008; Grunig, 2009; Grunig & Kim, 2021), they continue to perceive alternative voices as being inferior.

In contrast, their critics have argued that it was imperative for scholarship to not propagate metatheories, but instead focus on identifying "commonalities and incommensurabilities" (Bentele & Wehmeir, 2009, p. 341) among varying theoretical worldviews. Pieczka (2006) referred to such debates as a "battle of the paradigms" (p.341) and applauded the varying perspectives for contributing towards maturing the discipline. Overall, the growing voice of alternative perspectives has called for the use of more postmodern, qualitative, and interpretive approaches to showcase the diversity and complexity of public relations as a practice and a scholarly discipline (Bardhan, 2003; Bardhan & Weaver, 2011; Ihlen et al., 2018; Ki & Ye, 2017; L'Etang, 2013; Weaver, 2011; Taylor, 2023). One of these perspectives is the examination of public relations as a socio-cultural practice.

2.2 An alternative: the socio-cultural approach to public relations

What Edwards and Hodges (2011, p.3) coined as the "socio-cultural turn in public relations scholarship" was essentially a burgeoning interest in academia (Curtin & Gaiter, 2005, 2007; Daymon & Hodges, 2009; Hodges, 2006; Ihlen & Verhoeven, 2009) to examine public relations as a socially constructed cultural practice. This indicated a departure from the normative view of functional public relations to instead focus on understanding the socio-cultural implications of the identities, discourses, and behaviours of public relations practitioners (Edwards & Hodges, 2011). Adopting this lens meant that researchers were necessitated to look beyond management concepts and draw from the work of sociologists such as Bourdieu, Foucault, and Goffman to broaden their reflections about public relations (Bentele & Wehmeir, 2009; Curtin & Gaither, 2005; Edwards, 2011a).

Over the last two decades, this movement has gained momentum and is understood to be driven by the ambition "not to tell how things *are* [authors' emphasis] but to tell how they are understood and what different understandings means for the subject" (Ihlen et al., 2018, p. 417). Additionally, scholars have attempted to answer questions about social hierarchies and structures within everyday public relations to reveal concerns about the use and abuse of power (Edwards & Ihlen, 2023).

These investigations have all stemmed from an acknowledgment that society and culture cannot be separated from public relations. In fact, it was posited that the enormity and complexity of culture across different societal contexts was a core reason why it needed a more significant place in public relations theory and research (Waymer, 2012). There is now an increasing acceptance that the practice of public relations is affected by societal culture; in turn affects society and creates cultural meaning and is also a social field having its own occupational culture (Bardhan & Weaver, 2011; Sriramesh, 2012; 2020). Bardhan and Weaver (2011) explicated:

> Practitioners communicate with publics that belong to specific cultural groups, especially in multicultural societies and transnational settings; they are involved in the production of culture as cultural intermediaries who mediate between producers of culturally coded messages and consumers who make cultural sense of those messages; the organizations of clients that practitioners represent have cultural identities that espouse certain values that are usually reflective of the larger societies and ideologies they are embedded in; practitioners have their own cultural identities; and, the profession itself has developed certain dominant cultural values over time. Public relations is, then, cultural activity. (p.8)

The following sub sections (2.2.1 – 2.2.3) attempt to explain the expanse of socio-cultural thinking and research in public relations literature and highlight key contributions and gaps.

2.2.1 A practice affected by societal culture

With the foundation of the World Trade Organisation in the 1990s and the creation of trade agreements between several nations, cross-border business flourished as did the need to communicate with publics living across different societal contexts (Pal & Dutta, 2008). Therefore, the most widely discussed relationship between culture and public relations was the way in which cross-cultural challenges influenced the practice. In this realm, culture was part of the local-global/national-international discourse (Kent & Taylor, 2011; Sriramesh, 2012; Wakefield, 2011; Waymer, 2012) where it was essentially considered as a territorial construct.

2.2.1.1 Hofstede: a much tried, tested, and critiqued approach

Early research in exploring how society and culture intersect with public relations relied heavily on Geert Hofstede's work (Sriramesh, 2012; 2020; Xifra & Mckie, 2011). Hofstede (1984, p. 25) defined culture as the "collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another". In 1980, he published his Cultural Dimensions Theory which was developed empirically using a survey of IBM employees, initially from 40 countries and in 20 languages.

According to Hofstede (1984), the four dimensions of national culture were: individualism/collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity/femininity. He later added long-term/short-term orientation, which was developed originally as *Confucian work dynamism* by the Chinese Cultural Connection research group who found Hofstede's other four dimensions to be insufficient in the Chinese context (Courtright et al., 2011). The fact that Hofstede's dimensions were empirically tested, included more nations than any such study of culture, and could aid in predicting communication behaviour, was instrumental in their widespread application in early public relations research (Courtright et al., 2011; Xifra & McKie, 2011).

Verčič et al. (1996) tested Hofstede's dimensions in Slovenia and found that, with the advent of capitalism and competition, their culture (originally collectivist due to communist roots) was becoming increasingly individualistic. This seemed to influence how, as an example, ethics were practised in public relations. Similarly, Rhee (2002) and Kim (2003) corroborated that the revival of Confucian dynamism in the South Korean society, which in Hofstede's dimensions was known as 'long-term orientation', had a crucial impact on public relations ethics as it made practitioners value harmonious living.

In the above examples, researchers (Kim, 2003; Rhee, 2002; Verčič et al., 1996) were using their exploration of culture to investigate if, how and to what extent the general principles of Grunig's (1992) excellence theory could be applied in specific societal contexts. It may therefore be implied that over-reliance on Hofstede (1984) to test Grunig's (1992) dimensions of excellence further extended the hegemony of modernist metatheories and in return did a disservice to the socio-cultural exploration of public relations. Resenting the dominance of Hofstede's dimensions, Pal and Dutta (2008) lamented:

> Cultures exist in continuous flux, continuously interpreted and reinterpreted through human interactions, and embedded within the context of the lives of the members of the cultures. Culture is both a carrier of tradition and a site of transformation. It is within this dialectical tension between tradition and transformation that identities and relationships become meaningful,

> suggesting the necessity of conceptualizing public relations within an organic framework of evolving relationships rather than within a simplistic modernist framework that seeks to develop the best strategy for a national culture based on predefined markers such as individualism/collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity/femininity. (pp. 167-168)

In further research, critics such as Courtright et al. (2011) and Sriramesh (2020) raised other concerns that did not arise from the dimensions themselves but their application. These included acceptance by researchers that Hofstede's five dimensions sufficiently address all possible cultural aspects, applying the dimensions dichotomously (either/or) instead of a continuum (which they were originally developed as), and not contesting the notion that national culture is homogenous.

It is argued that these flaws of using the Hofstedian framework ignored the diversity that exists within a nation in the form of varying ethnicities, ages, education, class, sexual orientation, and even occupational cultures (Courtright et al., 2011; Wakefield, 2011; Weaver, 2011; Sriramesh, 2020). For example, in New Zealand the majority population identifies as white European and therefore, as per Hofstede's cultural dimensions, the nation can be characterised as having an individualistic orientation. However, the indigenous Māori people and the growing numbers of Asian and other ethnicities do not necessarily conform to this orientation, which conflicts with Hofstede's assumption of homogenous national cultures (Weaver, 2011). Similarly, China, a nation assumed to represent Hofstedian collectivist dimension, has an increasing youth population who have a more individualistic mindset and follow a pragmatic workplace culture that is driven by the pursuit of opportunities, innovation, and personal gains (Chen et al., 2023).

Courtright et al. (2011, p. 114) have referred to the Hofstedian assumption of applying the same cultural dimension to all individuals and groups within a nation as the problem of "*essentialization*". Public relations scholarship has therefore been urged to move towards a more *transcultural* schema, replacing the word *nation* by *space* where several cultural differences should be assumed to intersect (Bardhan, 2011). Overall, it is alleged that an over-reliance on Hofstede's dimensions has in fact "hurt the field" of public relations (Courtright, 2011; Sriramesh, 2020, p. 31). Instead, future socio-cultural researchers have been implored to conduct emic explorations that are not afraid of the heterogeneity of cultures but instead acknowledge the nuances of varying contexts and are therefore focused on investigating local sites and their micro-cultures (L'Etang, 2012b).

2.2.1.2 Focus on a *s*ocio-cultural nuance – personal influence

In an ethnographic exploration of southern Indian organisations, Sriramesh (1996) found prevalence of Hofstede's (1984) power-distance dimension. It was observed that practitioners in subordinate positions deferred to the authority of their superiors, and the root of this phenomenon was traced back to societal culture. However, an even more substantial finding was the existence of the *Personal Influence Model* as a relationship building tool used in Indian public relations. Sriramesh (1996) proposed that it be added to Grunig's (1992a) existing four models of public relations.

Sriramesh (1996) defined personal influence as including "various techniques such as hospitality, giving gifts, and brokering of influence to build lasting friendships with strategically placed individuals with the aim of seeking favours in return" (p. 186). He argued that personal influence may have its roots in specific societal conditions, such as high levels of regulation, bureaucracy, and class distinctions. Sriramesh (1996) emphasised that further research, of ideally an ethnographic nature, was required to explore its possible existence in other cultures to broaden the understanding. Following his lead, initially scholars investigated personal influence across other Asian countries (Wakefield, 2013).

In a mixed-method cross-cultural comparison of India, South Korea, and Japan, Sriramesh et al. (1999) found that public relations practitioners relied heavily on personal influence as a way of building relationships with media, government and tax officials. Participants across the three countries stated that it was common for them to entertain strategic publics using food, drinks, and gifts. Participants claimed that their organisation's image and reputation was dependent on such *hospitality* and therefore it was an essential part of their public relations work. Such social norms were neither illegal nor culturally inappropriate, therefore not viewed as unethical public relations (Sriramesh et al., 1999), even though they may be perceived as unprofessional from the normative point of view.

Similarly, other studies conducted in some parts of Africa (Kiambi & Nadler, 2012; Wu & Baah-Boakye, 2009) as well as Eastern and Southern Europe (Braun, 2007; Taylor, 2000, 2004; Valentini, 2010) found that practitioners relied on personal influence to build good relations with media. It was argued that this could be related to the socio-cultural structure of these countries. For example, it was found that Bosnia's communist past had led to two parallels in the media industry – one that was state controlled and predominantly reporting the government's messages, and the other that was mostly funded by international humanitarian organisations and acting as self-appointed watchdogs (Taylor, 2000). Though these alternative media shared the agenda of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in promoting stories that attempted to foster civil society, they faced financial and resource constraints. In this social context, it was therefore not considered unethical for public relations practitioners from NGOs to use personal influence and/or pay for publicity in alternative media. Taylor (2000) concluded, "It would be too easy, and ethnocentric, to expect media relations in Bosnia to resemble American practices. As economic, social, and political factors change, so too will the media relations function" (p. 11). Taylor (2004) found similar traces of personal influence in the public relations practice of Croatian NGOs and emphasised that it was essentially applied as a relational strategy.

This relational aspect of personal influence was also seen at work in Chinese public relations practice in the form of *Guanxi.* Among cultural nuances Sriramesh (2012, 2021) felt that *Guanxi* had been explored the most in public relations. In a broad sense, *Guanxi* is a social relationship or connection that is traditionally built from the foundation of existing kinships (such as friends, people from the same native area etc.) that are assumed to be trustworthy and reciprocal (Huang, 2012). According to Hou et al. (2013), it was this trust that allowed the use of a relationship for individual benefit as long as the use was subordinated by the effort to nurture the relationship.

In a study conducted by Hou et al. (2013, p. 320), a Chinese public relations practitioner was cited as saying, "China is a *guanxi*-rooted society. It entails acquaintance with one another by means of banquets, giving gifts, or networking…". It is argued that *Guanxi* is essentially based in Confucian principles and therefore deeply rooted in traditional Chinese social life. Confucianism emphasises that to achieve and maintain harmony in society, order must be respected. Part of this reflects in the regard shown to social hierarchies and the reverence of close relationships such as the ones with family friends, members of a shared club etc. (Huang, 2000; Chow & Ng, 2004). Therefore, unlike the American public relations ideal of symmetry (Grunig, 1992), Chinese cultural values appeared to reproduce asymmetrical relationships (Huang, 2012).

Like *Guanxi,* the Korean concept of *Cheong* was also based in Confucian principles and elevated the role of interpersonal relationships and consequently personal influence (Berkowitz & Lee, 2004; Jo & Kim, 2004). This was observed to be mostly practised in media relations, with public relations practitioners building and maintaining personal connections with journalists, sometimes through gift-giving and social outings (Berkowitz & Lee, 2004; Jo & Kim, 2004). However, with the passing of the Improper Solicitation and Graft Act in 2015, it is argued that the application of personal influence might weaken, and start being perceived as both illegal and unethical in Korea (Kim & Heo, 2018). Interestingly, while giving free meals, money and gifts is now deemed as illegal, the law may not be able to govern aspects of interpersonal relationships that go beyond these. Further research would be needed to determine any change in application of personal influence (Kim & Heo, 2018). In contrast, Arab countries continue to practise personal influence in the form of a societal norm called *Wasta.* This implies that people unequivocally leverage their familial contacts and personal networks to gain access to opportunities and favours that could help get public relations work done (Almutairi & Sriramesh, 2020; Dhanesh & Avidar, 2023).

In response to the more recent studies, Sriramesh and Fisher (2021) have emphasised that bribery was essentially transactional as opposed to relational and therefore should not be equated to personal influence. They suggested that public relations practitioners in countries with relatively lower corruption could also be applying personal influence and have challenged researchers to examine the concept in the West.

Interestingly, in Aotearoa New Zealand, a country where corruption is perceived as being non-existent and transparency is highly valued and upheld (MarketLine, 2022), Theunissen and Sissons (2018) found evidence of personal influence being applied in all aspects of public relations practice. They argued that the relevance of the model was apparent in the interactions observed between public relations practitioners and their colleagues, clients, journalists, and other publics; where discursive strategies were applied for relational effect (Theunissen & Sissons, 2018). This suggests that the personal influence model was neither specific to media relations nor limited to Asian countries or those deemed as having seemingly corrupt societal constructs (Theunissen & Sissons, 2018). Instead, interpersonal relationships, and consequently personal influence, were perhaps an inevitable part of public relations practice everywhere in the world (Theunissen & Sissons, 2018).

However, it was advised that such a proposition could only be authentically investigated through ethnographic studies instead of the current reliance on quantitative and mixed methods approaches that populate public relations scholarship (Theunissen & Sissons, 2018).

Additionally, it was contested that scholarship needed to broaden its horizons by not only examining how socio-cultural nuances affected public relations practice but also how public relations practitioners influenced society as cultural intermediaries (Bardhan & Weaver, 2011; Curtin, 2021; Curtin & Gaither, 2005; Sriramesh, 2012, 2020).

2.2.2 A practice affecting society - cultural intermediaries and power

The concept of cultural intermediaries itself is not new. It was first introduced by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984, p. 359) in his book *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste,* where he claimed that, "the new petite bourgeoisie comes into its own in all the occupations involving presentation and representation (sales, marketing, advertising, public relations, fashion, decoration and so forth) and in all the institutions providing symbolic goods and services."

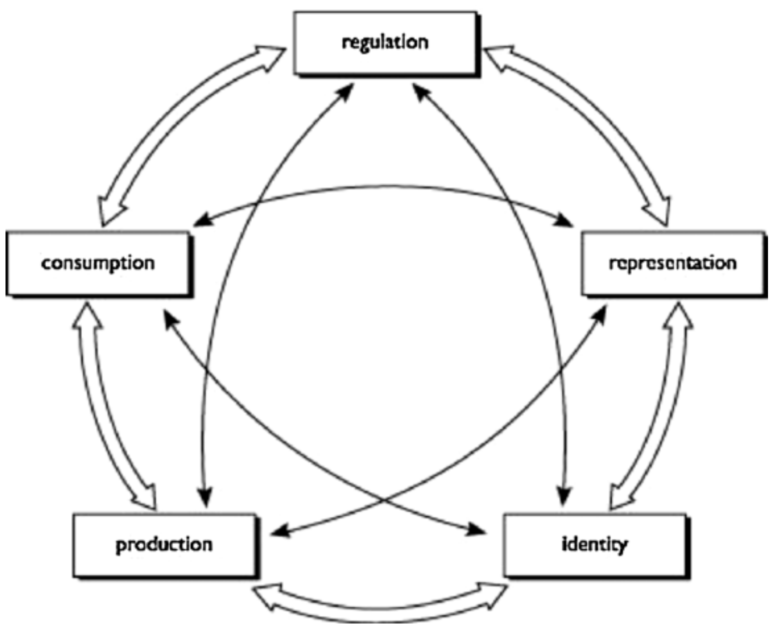
The above was adapted by Curtin and Gaither (2005) and refined to suit the socio-cultural public relations context. In response to growing criticism about the dominance of public relations' functional paradigm, they proposed the circuit of culture as a theoretical framework, whereby public relations was a "cultural practice of meaning making that encompasses contested identities, relational characteristics of difference, and the primal role of power" (Curtin & Gaither, 2005, p.97). This view positioned the public relations practitioner as a cultural intermediary who used discourse to construct cultural meaning (Curtin, 2021; Curtin & Gaither, 2005; Curtin & Gaither, 2007).

Curtin and Gaither's (2005, 2007) understanding of the circuit of culture was based on the model developed by du Gay et al. (1997), a group of cultural scholars at Britain's Open University. Du Gay et al.'s (1997) model depicted five moments: production, consumption, representation, regulation, and identity. These moments were believed to continuously overlap at infinite points called articulations, where power and identity combined in a meaning-making process (Curtin & Gaither, 2005, 2007). Each of these moments was seen as a component of culture and understood as a discursive concept (Curtin & Gaither, 2005, 2007; Schoenberger-Orgad, 2011). This resonated with Geertz's (1973) definition of culture as being a "historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitude toward life" (p. 89).

In simple public relations terminology, production can be understood as the creation of symbolic goods (such as campaigns) that build meaning by inclusion of organisational values and logics; representation is the encoding of meaning in campaign content such as by delineating specific publics and using deliberate key messages; consumption is the decoding of these messages by publics using semantic interpretation; identity is the moment where practitioners create, assign, interpret and represent the identities of their organisations, publics and themselves; and finally regulation is the context (culture, institution, laws, governing bodies) in which practitioners operate (Curtin & Gaither, 2007).

Figure 1: Circuit of Culture

(du Gay et al. 1997, p. xxxi)



A group of public relations scholars (Benecke et al., 2017; Han & Zhang, 2009; Hodges, 2006; L'Etang, 2006; Gaither & Al-Kandari, 2014; Macnamara &

Crawford, 2013; Schoenberger-Orgad, 2011; Terry, 2005; Tombleson & Wolf, 2017) have applied these concepts in their exploration of the practice's influence on creating culture.

Corroborating Curtin and Gaither's (2005) views, L'Etang (2006) elaborated on the cultural intermediary role played by public relations practitioners in the sports industry. She suggested that public relations helped create an image of the symbolic product — the sport spectacle — whether it was through promoting sport celebrities or mega-events like the Olympics. She believed that sport now had a significant impact on society as it used public relations to become a cultural symbol of ideologies, nationalism, gender, age, elitism etc. Similarly, in their qualitative case-study analysis of Australia Day, Macnamara and Crawford (2013) found public relations activities (events, publicity, promotional films, political speeches etc.) to be at the heart of orchestrating the symbolic cultural meanings associated with the country's national day.

Schoenberger-Orgad (2011) combined the circuit of culture with Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (2013) to explore how NATO's spokesperson Jamie Shea framed the messages to legitimise NATO's military intervention in Kosovo in 1999. She claimed that by "framing the Kosovo campaign as a humanitarian intervention, Shea was presenting the campaign in mythic terms and was developing a transcendent discourse which could resonate with diverse publics" (Schoenberger-Orgad, 2011, p. 381).

In these examples, the symbolic negotiation between the practitioner's messages and activities and the public's interpretation of them created a new cultural meaning for Australia Day, the Olympics and NATO's military intervention. What may be observed is that such a discursive nature of public relations separates practitioners from their role as functional representatives and instead places them at the heart of culture creation. Consequently, this appeared to contest the normative stand of symmetrical relationships between organisations and their publics and raised questions about the application of persuasion and power by public relations practitioners (Curtin & Gaither, 2005; Curtin, 2021).

Curtin and Gaither (2007) relied on Foucault's concept of power (1980) as being inherent in a relationship itself, therefore inseparable from the relationship discourse. Additionally, it is understood that power is not fixed in favour of any one party and might shift based on the circumstance. The authors (Curtin & Gaither, 2007, p. 209) cited Foucault (1976) to explain that "discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it."

This notion and application of power also resonated in the work of other public relations scholars (Berger, 2005; Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002; Place & Vardeman-Winter, 2013; Weaver, 2001, 2021) who have further argued that in discursive practices (such as public relations), practitioners also apply power derived from personality, knowledge, political astuteness, and expertise. It is claimed that such power can ideally be exercised for what the practitioner considers as a positive gain for society (Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002). For example, this power could be valuable for practitioners who were working in non-governmental and activist organisations or acting as the internal moral compass of their own organisation (Weaver, 2014). Assertions of their own power were perhaps necessary when public relations practitioners were either not part of the dominant coalition or resisting the coalition's unfair decisions (Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002).

In fact, public relations practitioners who acknowledged their own power could apply it to benefit publics whose voices were being marginalised (Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002) and even to bring about positive social change (Toledano, 2016). For example, Robi Damelin, an experienced public relations practitioner working for *The Parents Circle – Families Forum (PCFF),* applied her persuasive power and advocacy skills through media, public meetings, posters, demonstrations, and film productions to promote peace efforts between Israel and Palestine (Toledano, 2016). These examples imply that while public relations may be negatively perceived as power-yielding propaganda that is used by influential organisations to control publics, it is in fact possible to use public relations to give power to (and with) publics (Berger, 2005).

On the whole, Somerville et al. (2017) stressed that power could not be ignored and was "inherent in any public relations activity" (p. 2) of all kinds of organisations whether corporate, government, activist, or terrorist. They cautioned public relations researchers and scholars to take a more reflective and reflexive approach in examining issues of practitioner power. Additionally, Curtin (2021) emphasised that public relations needed to be more transparent about what it was, who practised it and how, to ensure that the discussion of power and control were not seen in isolation from day-to-day practice. Unfortunately, this aspect of socio-cultural public relations scholarship has had the slowest advancement.

2.2.3 A practice and a social field – examining habitus and capital

L'Etang (2011) complained that the biggest knowledge gap in the socio-cultural paradigm of public relations scholarship was in the examination of the practice as a social field. She highlighted that culture lay beyond the boundaries of nationalities and ethnicities and that public relations had its own occupational culture, which was scantily researched and barely understood. Sriramesh (2012, 2020) corroborated this view and over time has continued to suggest that it was vital to look at the occupational culture of public relations practitioners as it consisted of norms and rituals that were not the same as those of other communication practices such as marketing and advertising. Sriramesh (2012, 2020) urged researchers to investigate individual-level practices to ascertain what comprised the occupation's way of practice. Unfortunately, there has been a lack of studies in this area (Sriramesh, 2020). Pieczka (2002, 2006b, 2006c, 2008, 2011) was amongst the first of a handful scholars to explore this aspect and unlike earlier frontrunners of the discipline, her interest was not in ascertaining the professional legitimacy of public relations.

Being *professional* is generally understood as practising a profession, i.e., a general occupation having an elevated status due to its specialised body of academic knowledge, expertise and practical tasks, strict entry criteria determined by formal credentials, regulation of ethics by a professional association, and idolisation as an essential service to the society (Friedson, 2001). These conditions create privileges for certain occupations, such as medicine and law, that bestow on them "power and importance in our culture" (Abbott, 1988, p. 318). Professions can guard their jurisdictional extent from other occupations, claim a higher value of the expertise and consequently gain higher pay, and enjoy an esteemed status in society (Abbott, 1988). Functional public relations scholarship (see Section 2.1) has been obsessed with gaining this privileged status, and professionalism is perceived as their "loudly articulated group goal for public relations practitioners" (Pieczka & L'Etang, 2006, p. 271). However, Pieczka (2002) inspired a slight shift towards valuing and understanding public relations first and foremost as an occupational field.

Pieczka (2002) sought for the field of public relations to be comprehended as "what an individual public relations worker does and, perhaps more emphatically, as tasks and techniques shared by the occupational group" (p.302). During her three-week observation of a British training course offered to international practitioners, she found that in public relations (unlike professions such as medicine), expertise was based in abstract knowledge, and created and transferred through practice. It relied on the practitioner's past experiences and current conditionings, which were then moderated by ongoing work and training (Pieczka, 2002). She argued that a practitioner's ability to utilise discourse strategies, apply charisma to gain trust and build relations, and exercise persuasiveness were crucial in presenting their expertise and convincing their clients and managers of their occupational value (Pieczka, 2002, 2006b, 2006c, 2011). As a framework, Pieczka (2002) drew from sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's (1990) *theory of practice* and embedded the concepts of *field, habitus, and capital* in public relations scholarship.

Field is understood as "a separated social universe having its own laws of functioning independent of those of politics and the economy" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 162). Social actors in a field are believed to take interrelated but unequal positions defined by the uneven distribution of the different forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1993). Bourdieu (1986) defined capital as "accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its 'incorporated', embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor" (p. 15). In simple terms, Bourdieu (1986) argued that in any social field, there were value accumulations that went beyond economic concepts of wage and labour. Bourdieu (1986) suggested that besides economic capital (monetary assets), there was struggle for acquiring two other forms of capital, namely cultural capital (social norms and cultural activities that an individual is exposed to because of elite upbringing, travel, or education) and social capital (durable networks of relationships and acquaintances). He further added that when a form of capital was recognised as being valuable to a field, it became more prestigious and turned into the field's symbolic capital. Such symbolic capital was argued to transfer its prestige, and consequently symbolic power, to the actors who owned it (Bourdieu, 1990). Actors in a field were therefore constantly struggling to gain and keep up symbolic capital and power (Bourdieu, 1990).

Additionally, a social field was also understood to have a certain habitus, which was a pattern of behaviour displayed by the social actors. Bourdieu (1990) defined habitus as:

> …systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures that is as principles which generate and organize practices, and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. (p.53)

According to Bourdieu (1990), a practice had certain dispositions, created because of past experiences, that become a predictable pattern over time and could be seen as almost a "second nature" (p. 56) to the actors of the field. These conditionings are assumed to reflect in both conscious and unconscious mannerisms and are often more reliable than any formal norm in defining the *way of practice* in a field. Bourdieu (1990) hypothesised that a habitus itself was homogenous, but its members also brought their varying personal habitus, therefore making it homologous, i.e., having "diversity within homogeneity" (p. 60).

Bourdieu's (1984, 1990) theory of practice has received criticism on a key account. It is lamented that he oversimplified the complexity of a practice by theorising its habitus as systemic and predetermined, thereby undermining the scope for individual decision-making (Chandler, 2013; Ihlen, 2009). However, the contrary argument is that it is also possible for social actors to be so comfortable in their conditionings that they begin to "act without thinking" (Chandler, 2013, p. 474). Therefore, instead of completely departing from Bourdieu's concepts, it is suggested to lay them as a foundation in understanding social dispositions of practice and then applying reflexivity as a mediator (Chandler, 2013; Ihlen, 2009). Even in the most recent public relations scholarship, it continues to be emphasised (Edwards, 2018; Ihlen, 2018; Edwards & Ihlen, 2023) that Bourdieu's sociological approach benefits the discipline by accentuating the implicit role of social hierarchies among practitioners, their relational exchanges with one another, and their constant struggle to gain and uphold capital. While it is grieved that only a limited number of studies have examined the everyday lives of public relations practitioners from Bourdieu's sociological lens (Edwards & Ihlen, 2023), there are strong foundations in the work of Lee Edwards, who, according to Ihlen (2018), has been the "most true to the work of Bourdieu" (p. 125).

Edwards (2006, 2008, 2009, 2011a, 2011b, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2018) has been prolific in applying Bourdieu's (1990) concepts to public relations practice and has focused on the relationship between capital ownership and symbolic power. According to her, "the discourses that public relations practitioners produce and the priorities that shape their practice are coloured by a particular view of the world, defined by their occupational and personal habitus and the social structures in which those habitus emerge" (Edwards, 2011a, p. 73). Her arguments were based on three key studies that explored public relations practice in the United Kingdom.

Edwards (2008) first conducted a survey of practitioners in the UK to compare the cultural capital held by them with national data obtained from the Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion Survey (CCSE). It was concluded that public relations practitioners had high levels of cultural capital. They were found to be more educated, more likely to have membership of private clubs, and possessing greater art literacy. Edwards (2008) argued that ownership of such cultural capital gave them symbolic power which could be exercised to network with, and gain, reputable clients (having similar elite tastes) and even in getting access to influential groups on behalf of their existing clients and organisations.

Edwards then built on these findings in her three-month participant-observation of a corporate affairs team (Edwards, 2009, 2011a), and another year-long study (Edwards, 2011a, 2013, 2014) comprising interviews with practitioners from Black, Asian, and other Minority Ethnicities (BAME). These studies discovered that the symbolic capital valued in public relations became pronounced in how the practitioners talked about themselves and their practice, whether it be on their websites, industry association's promotional content, or in interactions with each other (Edwards, 2011a). For example, websites of public relations consultants often referred to their "past experience with high-profile clients" (p. 64), thereby elevating the value of clients and connections and turning social capital into the field's symbolic capital (Edwards, 2011a).

Overall, it was ascertained that industry awards, eminent clients, and reputable social connections were the most prominent forms of symbolic capital held by public relations practitioners. Ownership of such symbolic capital bestowed symbolic power upon those who possessed it and therefore privileged their position in the field (Edwards, 2011a). However, the paradox was that such capital was not accessible to all equally and often necessitated the existence of a particular personal habitus. For example, elite social networks were only possible if a person had the "wherewithal to fund socialising" (Edwards, 2011a, p. 66). This meant that those who were successful in public relations were often products of similar socio-cultural conditions, therefore resulting in a *typical* occupational identity and habitus for the field (Edwards, 2011a, 2015).

Edwards (2011a, 2015) posited that a *typical* public relations practitioner (at least in the UK) was perceived as an elite white female who was confident, charming, connected to influential people, and had a prestigious university degree. This implied that those who did not *fit* this archetype were not perceived as *ideal* for the practice and therefore found it difficult to enter and navigate the occupation (Edwards, 2011a, 2014, 2015). This was most apparent at the entry-level where such symbolic capital was implicitly assessed and led to *occupational closure* for those who did not possess it (Edwards, 2011a, 2014, 2015).

Bhargava and Theunissen (2019) corroborated this sentiment and found entry-level job advertisements in Aotearoa New Zealand's public relations practice to enforce occupational closure by creating implicit expectations about *fit.* They found that in accentuating the demand for *charismatic* practitioners and portraying public relations work as *fun* and *flexible*, these advertisements perpetuated a stereotypical occupational identity of being white, female, and fluffy and in doing so created bias towards hiring those who identified with this projected habitus.

Furthermore, Edwards (2011a, 2015) lamented that reinforcement of specific occupational habitus not only affected entry but also success in the field by influencing day-to-day work, interactions, and perception of self and others. While BAME practitioners were not necessarily victims, they were certainly "outsiders-*within*" (Edwards, 2015, p. 99) as they had to continuously work towards managing their identities in a way that resonated with the *white middle-class* occupational identity. A statement by one of the BAME participants cited by Edwards (2013), reflects the awkwardness in peer relations that results from this:

> They *assume* that I won't have had any of the experiences or the background that they've had. And then they think, 'Well, you know, she won't have gone skiing over Easter, or she won't have popped down to Prada to buy a new…so what are we going to talk about?... (p.249)

Additionally, BAME practitioners often found themselves being less sought after (than their white colleagues) and their authority questioned, regardless of their level of professional skill or seniority (Edwards, 2013, 2015). This raised questions about the power struggles within the field that were being caused by privileging certain identities and habitus (Edwards, 2015, 2018). If the public relations' occupational habitus continues to stay homogenous, or at the most homologous, there will be challenges in creating an inclusive occupational culture that is welcoming and supportive of practitioners from diverse backgrounds (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2019; Edwards, 2011a, 2011b, 2015, 2018).

Overall, from the above discussions, it is apparent that the occupational culture of public relations is affected by the identities, background, experiences, discourses, and worldviews of its practitioners. This was substantiated by the pioneering work done by Caroline Hodges (2005, 2006, 2011) whose ethnographic exploration of the practice in Mexico City confirmed that public relations' occupational culture was created from practitioner lifeworlds and occupational practices.

In creating a model for examining occupational culture in public relations, Hodges (2005) drew on Graeme Salaman's (1974) concept of *occupational community*. Salaman (1974) proposed that the self-image of practitioners belonging to an occupational community revolved around their occupational roles to such an extent that they identified themselves as having "specific qualities, interests and abilities" (p. 16). In Salaman's (1974) view, occupational identities infused the lives of an occupational community's members in a way that made it challenging to distinguish their idea of leisure from work. This meant that even their non-work socialisation originated from work-based relationships and thereby became an extension of their occupational community.

Furthermore, Salaman (1974) argued that members of an occupational community had staunch beliefs about the way of being and practising in their occupation – whether it be skills, personal qualities, or general norms. These were further perpetuated and normalised through constant socialisation with other members who had similar beliefs. In this regard, Salaman's (1974) concept of the occupational community is reminiscent of Bourdieu's (1990) conceptualisation of habitus.

Hodges (2005) merged the concepts of occupational community and habitus and defined public relations practitioner (PRP) culture as

> …the totality of practitioners' thought, concepts, values and assumptions about their occupation (referred to collectively as 'habitus') and their

> occupational experiences and identities that guide their behaviour, which will evolve with contact with other practitioners (occupational socialisation) and with wider social and cultural influences. (p. 49)

Hodges (2005, 2006, 2011) found that PRP culture in Mexico City was reflected in the values, identities and discourses of practitioners who saw public relations as a social occupation having a "utopian vision" (Hodges, 2011, p. 43). Mexican practitioners valued relationships, even with colleagues, and saw their work as being relational more than anything else. Practitioners often used politeness and face-saving strategies to build connections and maintain trust. For example, one of Hodges' (2011) participants explained how she personally greeted all her colleagues in the morning to ascertain their moods and saw it as her way of life as a public relations practitioner.

Overall, Hodges (2011) discovered that acquisition and maintenance of social capital was an integral part of Mexican public relations practice and dictated how much authority and power a practitioner had. While this mostly echoes Edwards's (2008, 2009, 2011a, 2013) finding in the UK about social capital being the field's symbolic capital, this is also somewhat like the use of personal influence (see Section 2.2.1.2) by practitioners elsewhere in the world. However, it has been cautioned (Daymon & Hodges, 2009; Hodges, 2011) that access to this social capital could be dependent on the practitioner's individual conditions, such as social class, and therefore at risk of privileging a certain habitus.

While ethnographic studies drawing from sociology, like the ones by Hodges (2005, 2006, 2011), have the potential to enrich the scholarly understanding of public relations as an occupational culture, they remain few and far between. Researchers have been urged to apply a sociological lens to observe the routine working lives of practitioners (Edwards, 2018; Edwards & Hodges, 2011; Williams, 2018). Doing so is seen to help understand how identities and interactions of practitioners shape their public relations practice and define the occupation's culture, which is inevitably connected to the socio-cultural environment in which it exists (Edwards & Ihlen, 2023; Fredriksson & Ihlen, 2018).

The following quote by Edwards and Hodges (2011) does well to summarise these sentiments:

> The messiness of day-today practice, with its contradictions and inconsistencies, should not be regarded as a 'difficulty' of public relations, but part of its ontology, of the continuous flow of transactions that is public relations reality, simultaneously producing, enacting and feeding back into, social and cultural norms. (p. 8)

Regardless of the value of investigating routine practices, a key hurdle in advancing the scholarship appears to have been a lack of willingness on the part of researchers to swap comfortable and distant methods of data collection for ethnographic ones that require immersion into the worlds of practitioners. Edwards (2018, p. 221) advised that "displacing ourselves is essential, since to be displaced is to be out of place, which necessarily removes one from one's comfort zone and introduces uncertainty", and in this uncertainty is where we can discover the nuances of the mundane.

Additionally, it has been emphasised that such ethnographic explorations need to focus on specialist micro-cultures within the practice, such as consultancies or even a particular type of consultancy, to truly highlight the similarities and disparities of various contexts and what that means for public relations as a socio-cultural practice (L'Etang, 2011).

The ensuing sections (2.3 and 2.4) of this chapter examine the existing scholarship in one such micro-culture of public relations: the consulting practice.

2.3 Public relations consultancies – the black swans of the discipline

The known history of public relations consultancies dates to the year 1900, with the establishment of the Publicity Bureau in Boston, America. Its success inspired Parker & Lee, a consultancy co-founded by Ivy Lee who is often regarded as the founder of modern public relations (Wright, 2020). In the years that followed, independent consultancies proliferated in the sector and often partnered with (or were taken over by) advertising agencies (Wright, 2020). However, Hill & Knowlton became an exception and was amongst the first to successfully expand overseas to Paris and London (Miller, 1999). Today, it is among the world's top 10 consultancy businesses (Holmes Report, 2023) operating across various parts of the world through more than 80 offices (Hill + Knowlton Strategies, n.d.). Nonetheless, it no longer operates as an independent consultancy as it was bought by publicly listed conglomerate—WPP group—in 1987 (Wright, 2020).

Global holding companies, such as the WPP group and Omnicom Group are seen as the frontrunners of the public relations consulting business. They usually include multiple consultancies offering multifarious communication services such as public relations, advertising, marketing and experiential, brand management, and media planning and buying (Wright, 2020; Omnicom Group, 2022; WPP, 2023).

However, interestingly, the top public relations consultancy, as per global rankings, continues to be an independently held American consultancy called Edelman (Edelman, n.d.; Holmes Report, 2023). As per PRovoke Media's global industry report, consultancy business showed financial growth in 2021, with the top 250 consultancies reporting a business of $15.3 billion USD (Holmes Report, 2023; Sudhaman, 2022). The majority of this business continues to come from American consultancies such as Edelman, Weber Shandwick and Ketchum (Holmes Report, 2023). However, the sector is also known to have bloomed across the UK, Europe, and Asia-Pacific through prominent publicly owned as well as mushrooming independent businesses (Sudhaman, 2022). In analysing the current state-of-affairs, Sudhaman (2022) noted that

> …the market is more fragmented than ever, and growth is faster for independents. The obvious explanation is that clients are increasingly unwilling to sacrifice quality for convenience—in most circumstances, they want the best specialist agency available in the relevant market, sector, or practice area, and not a jack-of-all-trades.

While the above statistics indicate the expanse of the consultancy practice, the latter has largely been ignored as an area of examination in public relations scholarship. In fact, there is such a limited visibility of consultancies in public relations theory and research, that Pieczka (2008) coined the phenomenon as their "disappearing act" (p. 1). This dearth of attention to consultancies has limited the understanding of public relations (and consequently occupational culture) to be about internal public relations departments. Pieczka (2008) argued that normative scholars deliberately did this for upholding professional legitimacy by disassociating public relations from the negative reputation of consultancies. A consultancy, according to her, symbolised the stereotypical perception of public relations as a glamourous but deceitful practice (Pieczka, 2008).

These stereotypical views are known to be cultivated and reinforced largely by popular culture (Dennison, 2012; Nairn & Bhargava, 2021; Yoon & Black, 2007). For example, in the show *Call My Agent!*, the head of a publicity consultancy was seen advising his junior to not reveal the *truth* in a client-related matter, indicating a detachment from ethical behaviour (Nairn & Bhargava, 2021). Additionally, these popular culture portrayals tend to focus on the attire and presentation of their characters thereby propagating the stereotype of public relations consultants as being "styled with branded apparel but lacking in substance and morals" (Nairn & Bhargava, 2021, para 13).

While stereotypes abound, little is known about the real working lives of consultants because normative research has mostly explored public relations as practised in internal departments within organisations (see Section 2.1). It is entirely possible that the lifeworlds and practices of a public relations consultant vary from that of an in-house practitioner, but this cannot be established unless the consultancy sector is better understood.

In fact, according to Verčič (2012), the word *consultancy* itself is not well-understood and used interchangeably with *service* and *agency*, whereas they comprise of fundamentally different occupational cultures.

2.3.1 Consultancy, service, agency, neo-PSF – what is in a name?

Given the confusion in terminologies (Verčič, 2012) and the lack of information in public relations scholarship (Pieczka, 2008), this thesis draws from organisational sociology and management literature to present a more comprehensive understanding of consultancies. To do so, I explain core concepts and highlight key gaps in the literature within this chapter and then further explore more specific aspects of this scholarship in later chapters (see Chapters 4 - 7) when introducing and contextualising the themes of the findings (see Sections 4.1, 5.1, 6.1 & 7.1).

Consultancies belong to a broader category of organisations called Professional Service Firms (PSFs), which are marked by a) *knowledge intensity,* i.e., being reliant on the intellectual capability of their workforce, b) *low capital intensity*, i.e., not requiring a high investment in tangible and intangible assets such as factories, machineries and patents, and c) *professionalised workforce,* i.e. a workforce that utilises and applies their knowledge, regulates entry and strives for ethical conduct (von Nordenflycht, 2010).

The above categorisation was mostly based in the traditional understanding of professions (Abbott, 1988; Friedson, 2001) and therefore limited application to the likes of law, accounting, and architecture consultancies (Nikolova, 2007/2019; von Nordenflycht, 2010). It was contested that there were other knowledge-intensive neo-professions (such as advertising, management, and public relations) that were also organised as PSFs and could be labelled distinctly as neo-PSFs (von Nordenflycht, 2010). While this label has not been widely adopted in organisational sociology and/or management scholarship, there is acknowledgement that neo-professions do not always enjoy the same privileges as the classical professions and the same applies to their PSFs (Nikolova, 2007/2019). For example, neo-PSFs must constantly be mindful of "how to demonstrate to client organisations that they possess the necessary expertise to solve management problems, and how to distinguish themselves from non-qualified consulting providers" (p. 26). This implies that the battle for professional legitimacy is rife in the scholarship on neo-PSFs, with public relations being no exception.

Neo-PSFs are perceived as knowledge-intensive and task-oriented services (Alvesson, 1995, 2000, Alvesson & Karreman, 2006; Deelmann, 2019; von Nordenflycht, 2010) that are provided by knowledge-workers labelled as consultants. These consultants are hired by organisations, referred to as 'clients', for a specific purpose and period (Broschak, 2015; Kubr, 2002; Nikolova, 2007/2019; Röttger & Preusse, 2013). Kubr (2002) explained consulting in the following way:

> Consulting is a temporary service. Clients turn to consultants for help to be provided over a limited period of time, in areas where they lack technical expertise, or where additional professional support is temporarily required. This may even be in areas where the requisite skills are available in the organization, but managers or staff specialists cannot be released for a major problem or project. Consultants can not only provide the expertise required, and give undivided, 100 per cent attention to the problem at hand, but will leave the organization once the job is completed. (pp. 8-9)

Additionally, consultants are also sought for their objective outsider view on critical organisational matters and for providing support during fast-approaching deadlines that may not warrant time for upskilling internal employees or hiring new ones (Wood, 2002).

Consulting is essentially seen as a business where consultants sell their knowledge, expertise, and service in return for the fee paid by clients. This fee may be charged on an hourly, project or ongoing retainer basis. Since consultants and their neo-PSFs rely on clients for monetary growth and stability, consulting is first and foremost a client-service business. The consulting work they undertake needs to be a “financially feasible and profitably commercial undertaking” (Kubr, 2002, p. 9).

Consequently, it is argued that the bedrock of success for neo-PSFs lies in a consultant’s ability to secure, manage, and expand these client relationships (Brock et al., 2014; Broschak, 2015; Hinings et al., 2015; Kubr, 2002; Maister, 2005). Unfortunately, much like in public relations literature, the scholarship on neo-PSFs also lacks attention on relationships (Broschak, 2015; Nikolova, 2007/2019). What is agreed upon, though, is that the client-consultant relationship is mostly asymmetric (Nikolova, 2007/2019), with either clients or consultants deemed as having more power dependent on the scholarly worldview (see Section 5.1). However, without further research, little can be ascertained about the true nature of this client-consultant relationship. In this regard, researchers have been urged to study the interactions between clients and consultants for a better understanding of the trust and power dynamics between the two (Nikolova, 2007/2019).

While public relations consulting would be considered as a neo-PSF, it appears that the need to examine critical aspects of the consulting lifeworld has not necessarily transgressed to public relations scholarship. In fact, the limited number of textbooks dedicated to public relations consulting were mostly written by former or current practitioners and as normative practical guides for managing the consulting business and being a successful consultant (Darnell, 2022a, 2022b; Luttrell & Capizzo, 2019; Pritchard & Smith, 2015). Additionally, there are scholars such as Wright (2013, 2020) who have focussed on explicating the billing and organisational structures of neo-PSFs in public relations and the state of the global consulting business (see Section 2.3). While these texts should be lauded for providing valuable information and insight about a sector that has been largely ignored by mainstream scholarship, there is much left to be desired in terms of research.

Overall, these texts suggested that (much like other consultancies) public relations consulting was about providing external knowledge-based skills and expertise that were not available within an organisation and objective counsel on critical problems that needed urgent solving (Darnell, 2022a, 2022b; Pritchard & Smith, 2015; Luttrell & Capizzo, 2019). Additionally, they highlighted public relations consultants as being sought for their media connections, creativity, and efficiency (Luttrell & Capizzo, 2019;

Pritchard & Smith, 2015). The emphasis on *connections* may indicate reverence of social capital as the consulting field's symbolic capital or perhaps even the application of personal influence. However, this cannot be determined due to the lack of a wider scholarly engagement by the texts.

Additionally, in these texts, the terms PSFs or neo-PSFs are never mentioned. This reflects the lack of cross-disciplinary approach in public relations consulting literature, which could perhaps limit the scope of future research and theory-building. Alternatively, it is possible that the jargon Professional Service Firm or PSF was replaced with its simpler iteration – *firm*. Whether it was due to lack of critical engagement with related disciplines or a mere preference for simplicity; the public relations texts instead used all kinds of terms like consultancies, agencies, firms, and services, and often interchangeably. Having said that, unlike other authors, Pritchard and Smith (2015) gave a rationale for their choice of terminology:

> Like an organization's relationship with its attorneys, the professional services we offer clients are not a "product," but counsel. And today, public relations encompasses much more than just media relations. Therefore the authors prefer (and will use herein) the term "firm" in place of "agency." We urge you to consider this semantics nuance when you seek your next relationship with a public relations firm. (p. 2)

Interestingly, the association of agency with media relations, as is apparent in the above quote, appears to be substantiated in how Luttrell and Capizzo (2019) viewed agency life. In their description of a routine working day of a consultant in a public relations agency, the authors repetitively referred to publicity-related tasks such as "you check your media alerts", "email two clients about stories that went live that morning thankfully both positive", "distribute a press release", "make some reporter follow-up calls", and "take care of an unexpected – but positive – media inquiry requiring client outreach" (Luttrell & Capizzo, 2019, p. 4). Later in that chapter, the authors even claimed that "the faster a junior team member can write a strong press release, the more valuable he or she to the agency" (p. 6).

It was Verčič (2012) who emphasised that there were three different categories of public relations firms, with each having its own occupational culture. Interestingly, his articulations were based on the McKinsey 7-S framework developed by organisational studies' scholars Peter and Waterman (1982), thereby accentuating the value of cross-disciplinary accommodation.

Verčič (2012) suggested that initially public relations *agencies*, such as Parker & Lee (see Section 2.3) were founded and run mostly by former journalists and focussed on media relations. Therefore, the occupational culture was fostered by a workforce which had journalistic values. This meant that the ability to write well and get publicity for the client was valued the most. Later in the 1970s and 80s, as public relations agencies started getting bought by conglomerates (see Section 2.3) and merging with advertising and marketing businesses, some independent ones renamed themselves as public relations *services* to highlight their distinction. To compete with advertising and marketing, these public relations services broadened their service from media relations to other communication areas such as community relations, investor relations, consumer relations, corporate communication and even lobbying (Verčič, 2012). Their occupational culture was therefore defined by their wide offering, competitiveness, and business-orientation. These public relations services achieved this by hiring younger and mostly female consultants, who brought a broader skillset, greater flexibility and more appeasement of client demands. Such an occupational culture valued efficiency and was driven by cost-effectiveness and profitability (Verčič, 2012). Finally, at the turn of the twenty-first century in early 2000s, some public relations services began operating more like management consultancies and positioned consultants as counsellors to their clients, especially in areas such as reputation management and government relations. Therefore, the occupational culture of public relations *consultancies* was about cultivating professionalism (Verčič, 2012). Verčič's (2012) ideas find resonance in the work by Fitch (2016), who presented a similar histography of public relations in Australia.

Furthermore, Verčič (2012) suggested that while the three types of occupational cultures might have been linear in evolution, they all still exist and often could be witnessed to varying degrees within the hierarchy of the same consultancy. He implied that at the entry-level public relations consultants (such as an account executive) typically practised the agency culture, further-up in middle management (such as account director) they practised the service culture, and finally at the top level (such as director or general manager) they practised the consultancy culture. Overall, this meant that, "public relations firms exhibit multiple cultures. They are varied and they are further differentiated each in itself" (p. 253).

While the above taxonomy acts as a valuable foundation for future research, it only offers a recounted view of public relations consulting with somewhat stereotypical presumptions about occupational culture. What is needed is a deeper examination of the discourses and interactions of public relations consultants to understand how they perceive their practice and the occupational culture they help nurture.

2.3.2 Culture of public relations consultancies: stilettos, small talk, and spin?

It is contended that besides influence from popular culture, perceptions about the culture of public relations consultancy practice get socially constructed by the discourse of consultants (Fröhlich & Peters, 2007; Grandien, 2017; Tsetsura, 2011; Yeomans, 2019).

Tsetsura (2011) conducted individual and group interviews with 25 Russian female participants to explore how they perceived their own consultancy jobs. The majority of the participants said they preferred a consultancy job to an in-house one as it was flexible and made them feel more valued as practitioners. They also felt that it was a *woman's job*, requiring and rewarding feminine traits, and not considered as attractive to men. The only exceptions were lobbying consultancies which were perceived to be more appropriate for men as they dealt with politicians who were also mostly male (Tsetsura, 2011). She also suggested that male consultants had access to larger and more influential networks, higher pay, and more power, as compared to their female counterparts who mostly worked with corporate clients and did not enjoy the same privileges (Tsetsura, 2011).

The perception that consulting was better suited for women has also been noted in previous studies that found consultancies to be a feminised field (Fröhlich & Peters, 2007) where it was presumed that communication and empathy were a woman's 'natural' skills. This discourse led to the creation of the consultancy stereotype of "PR Bunny" (p. 241). One of the 13 female German consultants interviewed by Fröhlich and Peters (2007) asserted:

> …it has also been proven by scientific research that women are just better at communicating; they love to chat and talk their head off, and that this is different for men. And in PR you have to talk a lot! This is absolutely crucial. (p. 241)

The researchers found this stereotypical occupational identity to be common across all interviews, and often regarded negatively. Participants used varying expressions including "PR clone", "PR waffler", "PR girly", and even "PR slut" (p. 241) to define a typical consultancy practitioner as being someone who was talkative, charming, stylish, and lacking in substance. A typical appearance was described as a blonde woman with pearls, branded bag, and stilettos. The German consultancy *way-of-practice* was also known to be marked by other norms such as late working hours, greater flexibility, work socialisation, and less bureaucratic decision-making (Fröhlich & Peters, 2007)—all of which were claimed to be preferred by women.

Similarly, Yeomans (2010, 2016, 2019) examined consultancy practice in the U.K. and found evidence of gendered identity work by consultants. For her phenomenological study of the consulting lifeworld, Yeomans (2016, 2019) interviewed six consultants twice and had them maintain an online participant diary to record events, activities and feelings associated with their routine working lives. This iterative and interpretive study provided valuable insights into their identities and lifeworlds, and consequently occupational culture (Yeomans, 2019).

Her descriptions of consultancy life suggested that consultancy work was dominated by the execution of *emotional labour*, i.e., management of the emotions of the people consultants interacted with the most, such as clients and journalists. Yeomans (2019) postulated that there was an expectation, especially from female consultants, to foster emotional aspects of interactions through building rapport, being empathetic, and safeguarding the impressions of others. Yeoman's (2019) argued that this meant there was emphasis on what Bourdieu (1990) would see as maintaining social capital and what Goffman (1959) would frame as *face-saving* or helping others manage and safeguard their impressions.

Having said that, Yeomans (2019) highlighted that the male consultants (who were fewer in number compared to females) often felt challenged as their gender identity did not always align with the occupational identity embodying feminine traits and emotional labour. She argued that male consultants tried to "reconstruct the occupation as masculine, while re-negotiating their own male identities within the workplace" (Yeomans, 2019, p. 100). Yeomans (2019) indicated that working in an occupation that had a dominant feminine occupational identity could dissuade those men from entering the occupation who were concerned about "the external image of the profession and the way they were perceived among friends and potential partners" (p. 100).

In saying so, Yeomans (2019) has also cautioned that the present understanding of gendered occupational identity of public relations consultants may be arising from a more normative view of gender and sexuality. She urged future researchers to unravel stereotypes about occupational identities and culture through constructionist approaches. However, it appears that public relations scholarship has failed to address (Bardhan & Gower, 2023; Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017) the fact that an individual's identity is not limited to gender but has various layers, such as (but not limited to) race, ethnicity, age, education, physical ability, sexual orientation, and religion (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2021). This implies that there needs to be a more nuanced understanding of the multiple identities of consultants, that may also be intersecting with each other. *Intersectionality* advocates for the acknowledgement of the multiple dimensions of an individual's identity, especially when some dimensions intersect to heighten marginalisation (Crenshaw, 1991). For example, for women of colour in shelter homes, gender and race intersected in a way that led to heightened discrimination against them for employment and housing (Crenshaw, 1991).

It has been over 30 years since the publication of Crenshaw's (1991) article and the disciplinary field of intersectionality has substantially expanded (Carbado & Harris, 2019; Hancock, 2016) but the concept has not yet been adequately addressed in public relations scholarship (Bardhan & Gower, 2023; Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017) pertaining to either consultants or in-house practitioners. Vardeman-Winter and Place's (2017) examination of public relations research published between 2005 and 2016 indicated that intersectional issues had a negative impact on the growth of diversity and inclusion in public relations practice. From their assessment, public relations was a "lily-white field of women" (p. 326). For example, practitioners of colour had to struggle with sexism due to their gender and marginalisation due to their ethnicity (Pompper, 2007, 2012) while at the same time, white lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) practitioners also complained of harassment (Tindall, 2013; Waters, 2013). This implies that the occupational culture of public relations should ideally not be perceived from a heteronormative gendered lens (Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017).

This call for more intersectional research has been somewhat answered by researchers such as Logan and Ciszek (2021) who applied Bourdieu's (1990) concept of habitus along with queer of colour (QOC) and intersectional critique to examine the lifeworlds of transgender people of colour in public relations in the U.S.

Although the study was not limited to consultants, it did include some who were and offered an understanding about their values and priorities (Logan & Ciszek, 2021). The study showed that transgender practitioners of colour (whether consultants or in-house practitioners) were driven by an imperative to advocate for their communities' rights, challenge stereotypical representations in media and call for a more intersectional view of representation of minorities, and work towards empowering their communities by mobilising any existing resources and privileges to battle discrimination (Logan & Ciszek, 2021).

While Bourdieu's (1984, 1990, 1993) theory of practice was not applied in all the above-mentioned studies, it may be implied that the public relations consultancy field might have a misrepresented occupational culture by highlighting the perceived personal habitus and occupational identity of its female practitioners. In addition to reducing female practitioners to sexist images of stilettos and small talk (Fröhlich & Peters, 2007; Tsetsura, 2011; Yeomans, 2019), keeping the perspectives of male and LGBTQ consultants invisible (Logan & Ciszek, 2021), and doing little to highlight the intersectionality of identities (Yeomans, 2019), the gendered discourses have also led to a devaluation of the consulting sector by negatively affecting the reputation, professional status, and pay associated with it (Fröhlich & Peters, 2007).

In Finland, it was noted that public relations consultants used storytelling to build their legitimacy and project themselves as ethical experts, especially if they were operating in the political realm. However, this was also found to be contradictory (Kantola, 2016):

> The consultants present themselves as open and transparent professionals working against the shadowy and corrupt political practices. At the same time, however, their own practices of political advocacy are not transparent, they sell personal contacts to political elites and they are opposed to any democratic control or legal regulation of political advocacy and lobbying. (p. 48)

On the other hand, a narrative study of Danish and Swedish consultants revealed the challenges of constructing this expert role. Interviews with 19 participants from 11 established Scandinavian consultancies (von Planten, 2016) found that consultants had to constantly stay ahead of their savvy clients, creating a sense of anxiousness. This was worsened by the threat of other communication agencies (marketing, advertising) offering similar services. Such a choice was perceived to make it easier for clients—who often could not distinguish one communication service from the other—to switch if not satisfied. von Planten (2016) argued that “the fate of the professional role of the communication consultancy is unpredictable” (p. 364) and therefore it was imperative for researchers to explore the day-to-day interactions of consultants to enliven both the discipline and practice of public relations consulting.

Another Swedish study by Grandien (2017) posited that the occupation had a negative reputation in the country. It was revealed that consultants, in particular, had the perceived occupational identity of high-income earners with tainted morals. Consultants, however, often felt themselves strained due to long working hours that were not always compensated by the client fee. Conversely, it was also claimed that charging clients more would lead to poor decision-making. One of the participating consultants commented, “employees feel chased to bring in ‘their hours’ each week and consequently often do things that do not really create any value at all for their client” (Grandien, 2017, p. 84). This time-cost paradox therefore appeared to be a double-edged sword in consultancy life.

Consultancies were also criticised for being spin doctors and making poor media relations decisions during a crisis. Consultants, on the other hand, lamented that clients often did not listen to their advice in the first place. It was noted that a single public relations failure during a crisis could taint the reputation of all consultancies and the occupation itself (Grandien, 2017).

Like Grandien’s (2017) findings, Williams’ (2018) participant observation of a UK-based consultancy revealed that clients had power over the consultants. In observing the 21 staff members of the consultancy, Williams (2018) found that consultants lacked confidence in dealing with client demands and had normalised client appeasement. In fact, one her participants remarked that “part of our job is making the client feel important and you have to be seen to give them ‘special treatment’” (p. 60).

Additionally, Williams (2018) found that self-presentation was emphasised as a way of affiliating with the client. There was an implicit expectation for consultants to dress *smartly* for client meetings that would help create an impression of professionalism and competency. Furthermore, consultants were expected to be on their *best behaviour* so they could be perceived as being affable. While none of these norms were made explicit to new entrants, they were expected to assimilate in the occupational habitus by observing and replicating the behaviour of seniors (Williams, 2018). According to Williams (2018), the occupational culture of the consultants was centred around impression management and reflected what Goffman (1959) referred to as *performance,* thereby suggesting that:

> in putting client needs first and bowing to client pressures and expectations, professionalism is reduced to a set of performance criteria – dressing smartly, knowing the client's voice, having the right forms and systems – rather than a set of guiding principles. (Williams, 2018, p. 63)

Williams (2018) emphasised that more studies were needed to understand the daily working lives of consultants and the social field of public relations consulting. Unfortunately, research and scholarship in this area of public relations remains scanty and geographically limited to exploring the practice in the UK and Europe. Even though moderatum generalisations can be made across similar socio-cultural contexts, it is undoubtedly valuable to add more flesh to this area of public relations scholarship by exploring the lifeworlds and practices of consultants in other areas of the world.

2.4 Illuminating the socio-cultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand

Aotearoa New Zealand is an island nation located in the South Pacific and separated from its largest neighbour—Australia—by the Tasman Sea (Butler & Ortolja-Baird, 2017, Tourism New Zealand, 2022a). The country comprises of two main islands—the North Island and the South Island—but "is in fact an archipelago with over 700 offshore islands, most of which are very small and within about 31 (50 km) of the coast" (Butler & Ortolja-Baird, 2017, p. 12).

Its capital is a city called Wellington, which is in the North Island and home to the country's parliament since the first sitting in 1865 (Wellington City Council, n.d.). Another city in the North Island—Auckland—is seen as the country's business capital, being the largest contributor to its national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and "home to 36 per cent of the country's workforce" (Tātaki Auckland Unlimited, 2023, para 2).

Aotearoa New Zealand has a relatively brief history of human settlement as compared to other countries of the world (Mein Smith, 2012). It was discovered by Māori ancestors, who are speculated to have travelled from Polynesia and settled in the country in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century (Butler & Ortolja-Baird, 2017; Mein Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2020). Polynesian navigation was rooted in their deep connection to, and understanding of, the world of seas, stars, winds, birds, and clouds, among other natural occurrences (Mein Smith, 2012; Salmond, 2017). When these “star navigators” (Salmond, 2017, p. 2) reached the south-west Pacific, they are understood to have witnessed clouds over an island, that did not appear to be moving, and sailed in the direction of these clouds. Hence, on landing on its shores, they named the island *Aotearoa* or the *land of the long white cloud* (Mein Smith, 2012).

While Māori are regarded as the native or indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand, they became a *people* only after the arrival of the *Pākehā* (white people). Europeans are known to have arrived in 1642 and the land was subsequently colonised by the British in 1840 for New Zealand as a nation to come into being (Mein Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2020). Before that, Māori were living as kins, tribes or *iwi*, who occupied different parts of the country and were the *tangata whenua* or *people of the land* of those parts (Mein Smith, 2012; Salmond, 2017). In *te ao Māori* (the world of Māori), people and their relationships were, and continue to be, the core construct of culture. Salmond (2017, p. 17) explained that:

> a person is constituted by their place in the relational networks, and in speaking Māori, the state and nature of one’s relationships are constantly being negotiated. In addressing other people, for instance, you must decide whether your relationship with them is close (in which case, the inclusive pronoun is used) or distant (when the exclusive pronoun applies).

Strangers could become part of these relationships through “acts of generosity and alliance” (Salmond, 2017, p. 17) such as exchange of gifts that symbolise reciprocity. One such reciprocal act was between Māori Chiefs (who represented some of the *iwi*) and the British Crown in the form of the contested *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* (The Treaty of Waitangi). The signing of this treaty made Aotearoa New Zealand a British colony and relegated Māori to be subjects of the British Crown (Orange, 2023). *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* is considered as the foundational document of the country, acknowledging biculturalism, i.e., equal co-existence of *te ao Māori* (Māori worldview) and *Pākehā* culture (Nakhid & Devere, 2005; Orange, 2023).

However, both parties had disparate interpretations of the Treaty due to difference in terminology in the *te reo Māori* (Māori language) and English versions (Belich, 1996). This has been a reason for conflicts, protests, breaches, and negotiations ever since (Butler & Ortolja-Baird, 2017; Spoonley, 2005; Mein Smith, 2012; Orange, 2023).

Additionally, *Pākehā* identity, values, language, and practices have been alleged to supress the existence and advancement of *te ao Māori* (Belich, 1996).

Furthermore, at the start of the twentieth century, the government tried to create a unified national identity through various sponsored communication activities, including journalistic magazine articles, poetry and fiction stories, public information films, and advertising and public relations efforts (Mein Smith, 2012). The way of life was depicted as the “detached suburban house with a clipped front lawn and a more relaxed backyard where children could play, a rotary clothes line, vegetable patch, flowers for mum and a shed for dad” (Mein Smith, 2012, p. 195). This identity creation has been criticised for marginalising the lifeworld and perspectives of Māori, women, and the growing numbers of other ethnicities such as Chinese, Indians, Africans, and Eastern Europeans (Butler & Ortolja-Baird, 2017; Mein Smith, 2012). Essentially, the constructions of national identity and culture were based in a white-male perspective and consequently exercised exclusion (Kinnear, 2020; Mein Smith, 2012).

Over the years, the country’s postcolonial socio-cultural identity has also been challenged by increasing immigration particularly from other Pacific nations and Asian countries such as China, India, and Korea (Nakhid & Devere, 2005; Spoonley, 2005). At present, Aotearoa New Zealand is recognised as a multicultural society (Ministry of Social Development, 2016.) with over 160 ethnic groups and nearly a third of the population born overseas (Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa, 2020). As per the 2018 census data, while New Zealand Europeans continue to be the majority population group (70.2%), there has been a growth in Māori (16.5%), Pacific (8.1%) and Asian (15.1%) people (Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa, 2020). Therefore, the definition of “*New Zealand-ness* will vary from person to person” (p. 174) and should ideally not be limited to symbols, sports, or other national endeavours (Ministry of Social Development, 2016).

Regardless, efforts to promote (and utilise) a national identity continue. For example, in government communication during the SARS-COV-2 pandemic, the label *team of 5 million* was used to create a sense of solidarity by promoting an empathetic and collectivist identity (Theunissen & Wolf, 2023). Having said that, Theunissen and Wolf (2023) emphasised that, “regulation demonstrated by diverse voices and criticism from various ethnic, cultural and professional groups challenged the meaning that was encoded at a national level” (p. 112).

Irrespective of critique from the margins, texts referring to the society and culture of Aotearoa New Zealand typically hint at the existence of an egalitarian society, with friendly people who enjoy outdoor activities (Butler & Ortolja-Baird, 2017; Tourism New Zealand, 2022b) and have a self-deprecating and dry sense of humour (Harker, 2013). Additionally, the country is believed to value ingenuity, café culture, farming, and the arts (Tourism New Zealand, 2022b). It is also postulated that New Zealanders have a "small-world network, with any two random people able to be connected within four steps on average" (MacGibbon, 2009, p. 3). This implies that Aotearoa New Zealand is a highly networked society, and its *cliquishness* may have implications for increasing diversity and inclusion in the country's workforce (MacGibbon, 2009).

Furthermore, Yogeeswaran et al. (2019) examined data from the longitudinal New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study (NZAVS) to reveal that certain characteristics were given more prominence when articulating the identity of a *true* New Zealander. These included having the country's citizenship, speaking English, respecting national institutions and laws, and having Māori or European heritage (Yogeeswaran et al., 2019). The authors lamented that focus on having ethnic ancestry could negatively impact on people's attitudes towards those who did not belong to the ethnic groups deemed to be *true* New Zealanders (Yogeeswaran et al., 2019).

As per recent reports (Diversity Works New Zealand, 2022; New Zealand Parliament, 2022; Reid et al., 2022; Stuff, 2022), Aotearoa New Zealand faces several issues concerning diversity, equity, and inclusion. These include, but are not limited to, a widening pay gap between people from different ethnicities (New Zealand Parliament, 2022; Reid et al., 2022), underrepresentation of women in top-ranked jobs (New Zealand Parliament, 2022), lower employment rate for people with disabilities (New Zealand Parliament, 2022), and reports of bias and discrimination based on ethnicity, physical and mental ability, sexual orientation, and gender (Diversity Works New Zealand, 2022; Sibley, 2021; Stuff, 2022).

Unsurprisingly, these issues reflect to varying extents in the state of the country's public relations occupation as well.

2.4.1 Public relations – a homogenous industry

The history of public relations in Aotearoa New Zealand goes back to the decade after World War II, from 1945 to 1954. The first practitioners were press agents that worked within large government organisations. Alongside them were some independent consultants and consultancies such as Hugh Sumpter Associates and Dinniss Cherrington. The local industry association—Public Relations Institute of New Zealand—came into being in 1954 to provide a platform for practitioners to exchange knowledge, develop a code of ethics and advance the practice (Public Relations Institute of New Zealand [PRINZ], n.d.-b; Trenwith, 2010). More recently, it has been renamed as the Public Relations Institute of New Zealand *Te Pūtahi Whakakakau Tūmatanui o Aotearoa* (PRINZ) and claims to have more than 1,000 members (PRINZ, n.d.-a). It should be noted that there are likely to be more who practise public relations in the country but who are not members of PRINZ and therefore not accounted for. What is known, though, is that as per 2018 Census, there may be over 4,000 communications practitioners or *Ngaio Whakawhitiwhiti Kōrero,* diversely known as press secretaries, communication advisers, Māori liaison officers, and public relations professionals (Tertiary Education Commission, 2023).

Additionally, there is acknowledgement that there is a growing demand for public relations practitioners, and it is a job *typically* requiring more than 40 hours a week but boasts of work-life balance at the same time (Research First, 2021; Tertiary Education Commission, 2023). In fact, on a government website explaining public relations as a career, a practitioner Anaru Tuhi's testimonial stated, "there is definitely an aspect of working outside of work hours, but I don't think it's a job where you're hounded to work at the weekend or work long hours. You can get the work-life balance right" (Tertiary Education Commission, 2023). Interestingly, a 2021 report by PRINZ had highlighted that 88% of the practitioners who worked more than 40 hours a week reported feeling stressed and burnt-out (Research First, 2021). A quote highlighted by one the respondents explicated an example of what caused her stress:

> Managing a high pressure job with my home life and being a mum. I don't want my children to be negatively impacted because I'm working extra hours, have had a stressful day and take it out on them, and feel so exhausted I don't look after my own wellbeing. (p. 23)

The above statements about work-life balance appear to contradict one another. While it is likely that COVID-19 may have adversely affected working conditions and wellbeing (Research First, 2021), it cannot be completely overlooked that working more than 40 hours is considered the norm in public relations as practised in Aotearoa New Zealand. Interestingly, burn-out was reported as being higher among female practitioners and lower among independent consultants.

A recent report sheds more light on the make-up of practitioners in the country. According to the 2022 PRINZ Insights Report that examined the data collected from an anonymous survey of practitioners (members and non-members), the majority (58.7%) of the 160 respondents worked within organisations as in-house practitioners, some worked in public relations consultancies (16.9%) and as independent consultants (15.6%), while a few (7.5%) were engaged in other employment situations (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023a, p. 13). Like its historical origins, the current occupation is also dominated by practitioners (46.58%) working for the government and public sector (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023a, p. 15).

Much like other countries, in Aotearoa New Zealand, public relations is a feminised occupation (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023a). A majority (82.5%) of the 160 respondents of the 2022 PRINZ survey were female, only 16.9% were male, and 0.6% identified themselves as 'another gender' (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023a). In fact, it appeared that the gender gap has been widening since 2018 (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023a). While this is suggestive of gender homogeneity; Bhargava and Theunissen (2023b) lamented the overall state of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the occupation.

Eighty percent of PRINZ's survey respondents identified as New Zealand Europeans, whereas only 10.63% were New Zealand Māori (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023a, 2023b). Additionally, while Aotearoa New Zealand has over 160 ethnicities, with a growing Asian population (Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa, 2020), these were not fairly represented in the field of public relations. The report indicated that only 9.38% respondents identified as other Europeans, 4.38% as Asian, 3.13% as Pacific Peoples, 1.25% as Middle Eastern/Latin American/African (MELAA), and 4.38% as belonging to other ethnic groups (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023a, 2023b). Furthermore, there was evidence of a widening age gap among practitioners with increasing numbers being over the age of 50 and fewer being under 30 (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023a, 2023b). These demographics suggested that the typical public relations practitioner in Aotearoa New Zealand was a *white female* (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023b), which is not very different from the embodiment of public relations (see Section 2.3.2) elsewhere in the western world (Edwards, 2018; Fröhlich & Peters, 2007; Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017; Logan & Ciszek, 2021; Tsetsura, 2011; Yeomans, 2010, 2013, 2019).

Additionally, Bhargava and Theunissen (2019, 2023b) claimed that the lack of diversity in the country's public relations field has been accentuated by the recruitment practices of practitioners, who seem to value *fit.* While hiring for fit can have its benefits, it is “entirely subjective” (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023b, p. 26) and so “practitioners are hiring people like themselves who do not necessarily challenge or bring different perspectives” (p. 26). Therefore, the occupational habitus of public relations practitioners in Aotearoa New Zealand continues to be homogeneous (see section 2.2.3) due to the ongoing exclusion of those who do not match the personal habitus of existing practitioners (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2019).

Furthermore, some of the existing practitioners who did not identify themselves as part of the *white female* occupational habitus reported feeling excluded and discriminated against (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023b). This resonated with Edwards’ (2013, 2015) accusation that a lack of conformity with occupational habitus often leads to marginalisation (see Section 2.2.3).

Overall, it appears that the lack of visibility and inclusion of diverse perspectives has made the occupational habitus (and therefore culture) of public relations practice in Aotearoa New Zealand largely homogenous. Bhargava and Theunissen (2023b) advised the application of an intersectional lens on the practice “to fully appreciate its complexity” (p. 36). This requires illumination of disparate voices, perspectives and, most importantly, the lived experiences of practitioners, both members and non-members of PRINZ. Additionally, as advised by L’Etang (2012b), it needs an understanding of the micro-cultures within the larger practice. For example, attempting an exploration of micro-culture of public relations consultants in Aotearoa New Zealand.

2.4.2 Occupational culture of consultants: it pays to be polite

While the consultancy sector forms an integral part of the practice in Aotearoa New Zealand, little is written about it in scholarship originating from the country. This is not surprising, as it is akin to the pattern of neglect consultancy practice faces elsewhere in the academic world (Pieczka, 2008; Verčič, 2012).

Like in Sweden (von Planten, 2016), consultants in Aotearoa New Zealand appear to suffer from a stained reputation. Sterne (2008) explored senior management’s perceptions of public relations in Aotearoa New Zealand and found that while consultants were appreciated for their expertise and contacts, they were criticised for not providing sufficient value in return of their perceived exorbitant fees. One of the participating senior managers lamented (Sterne, 2008):

> …they charge a lot for what does not seem worth it. We don't use them because we don't see how they would add business…Anyone can put their shingle up as a PR practitioner…I get annoyed when they send a senior to negotiate the brief and then send a junior (who is not as competent) to deliver. (p. 35)

Sterne (2008) suggested that further research was required into understanding the PRP-client relationships as well as exploring how consultants made sense of, and created meanings about, their practice. Unfortunately, so far, only Sissons' doctoral study (2014), further developed by Theunissen and Sissons (2018), has managed to venture into this ignored space. Sissons (2014) examined PRP relationships with clients, peers, and journalists in a first-ever video ethnographic study of the practice in Aotearoa New Zealand. In her observation of the routine working lives of consultants, she found that they played the role of strategic and technical experts. However, much like the claims made by scholars elsewhere (Grandien, 2017; Williams, 2018; Yeomans, 2019), it was noted that consultants had relatively less power in juxtaposition with their clients. This was perhaps due to the lack of access to organisational information and clarity regarding client expectations (Sissons, 2014, 2015; Theunissen & Sissons, 2018).

Interestingly, it was highlighted that consultants attempted to create a balance by exerting their *expert power*, i.e., power gained from having specialised knowledge and skills that the clients lacked (Theunissen & Sissons, 2018). Such power was mostly applied in an ambient manner, using politeness devices in discourse, to address the client's need for *face-saving* and retain harmony in relationships (Theunissen & Sissons, 2018). This application of politeness echoes Yeomans' (2019) concept of 'emotional labour' (see Section 2.3.2), indicating that maintaining relationships was of top priority in public relations consulting. Consequently, it was acknowledged that it was in the interactions of the consultants with their clients, colleagues, and other external parties that this important relational work was carried out (Sissons, 2014, 2015; Theunissen & Sissons, 2018). These routine interactions became the crucial sites where consultants performed their identities as experts, used politeness strategies to maintain relationships, applied persuasion and personal influence and exerted ambient power (Theunissen & Sissons, 2018). Undoubtedly, consultant interactions are a valuable field of study and an ethnographic exploration with a constructive analytical lens can help elucidate the occupational culture of public relations consultants even further.

2.5 Conclusion

A review of the literature shows that departure from the normative functional paradigm of public relations scholarship has added significant value in understanding the crucial interdependence between public relations and culture.

A socio-cultural exploration of public relations could be done from three aspects – how the practice gets affected by society and culture, how the practitioners create and shape cultural meaning through their practice, and how the socio-cultural make-up of the practitioners creates the field's occupational culture. In examining the first two aspects, public relations scholars have often relied on certain socio-cultural theories, concepts, and models such as (but not limited to) Hofstede's (1984) dimensions of national culture, du Gay et al.'s (1997) circuit of culture, and Foucault's concept of power (1980). While this has expanded the richness and critical rigour of the discipline and offered perspectives beyond the ethnocentricity of normative worldviews, a true discussion of public relations, society, culture, and power is not possible without first looking at the socio-cultural make-up of the public relations practitioners (Edwards & Ihlen, 2023; Ihlen et al., 2018).

Undoubtedly then, sociologist Bourdieu's (1984, 1986, 1990, 1993) concepts of habitus, field and capital are necessary in such an exploration. Bourdieu (1984) was the first to label communication practitioners, such as those in advertising and public relations, as cultural intermediaries (Bourdieu, 1984). His seminal work on capital (Bourdieu, 1990) suggested that it was the ownership and accumulation of non-economic forms of capital (such as social and cultural capital) that often led to the power inequity between practitioners of a field. Moreover, Bourdieu highlighted that power was often symbolic and implicit due to it being generated and preserved through unconscious ways of being and behaving that were challenging to articulate (Bourdieu, 1980, 1984, 1990). Therefore, to do justice to a socio-cultural exploration of the field of public relations, it is essential to draw from Bourdieu's theoretical framework.

While a handful of scholars (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2019; Chandler, 2013; Edwards, 2008, 2009, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2018; Hodges, 2006; Ihlen, 2009, 2018; Pieczka, 2002) have used Bourdieu's sociological approach for their research, there continues to be a need for both widening and deepening this exploration (Edwards & Ihlen, 2023).

Additionally, since the socio-cultural make-up of practitioners in a field—their habitus, occupational experiences, forms of symbolic capital, and identities—affects the nature of meaning they create, there may be significant differences in the way public relations is practised (and meaning about practice is created) across different occupational contexts. While public relations may be perceived as having a generalised occupational culture, in fact it comprises multiple micro-cultures.

The consultancy micro-culture has received surprisingly scant attention. Whatever little is known about consultancy life has to do with perceptions of reputation and the interplay of power in client-PRP relationships. Only a handful of studies so far have attempted to explore the values, motivations, working lives and practices, interactions, symbolic capital, and occupational habitus of public relations consultants. Additionally, advancement in the field remains obfuscated by stereotypical portrayals of consultants and geographical confines of the studies.

It is evident that the lack of ethnographic exploration is one of the reasons for gaps in scholarship. The first (and only) ethnographic examination of Aotearoa New Zealand's consultancy practice suggested that occupational culture was rooted in the day-to-day interactions of practitioners and reflected in their relationships with colleagues, clients, and journalists (Sissons, 2014, 2015; Theunissen & Sissons, 2018). It is evident that such rich back-stage knowledge is crucial for deepening scholarship in the field.

The aim of the present study, therefore, is to address the above gaps in literature by exploring the daily working lives of consultants in Aotearoa New Zealand and answer the following question:

> RQ. What is the occupational culture (practitioner lifeworld and occupational practices) of public relations consultants in New Zealand?

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Every researcher has a “basic set of beliefs that guides action” (Guba, 1990, p. 17). These may be simply put as their philosophical worldview (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) or more specifically referred to as their research paradigm (Lincoln et al., 2018; Mertens, 2018). A paradigm encompasses the assumptions (ontology), thought processes (epistemology) and ways of enquiring (methodology) about knowledge (Lincoln et al., 2018) that provide the researcher with a framework for the theory and practice of their study.

This chapter is concerned with the theoretical underpinnings and practical implementation of the present study. It delves into the constructivist paradigm, elucidating the rationale and relevance of the ontological, epistemological, and methodological decisions that laid the foundation for this qualitative study. It then explains how the study followed an ethnographic approach and utilised participant observation as the method of data collection. This included video observation of two public relations consultants and semi-structured interviews with 15 consultants (including one who was observed). Finally, the chapter explains how Ethnographic Communication Analysis (ECA) and Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) were used to investigate the data and answer the research question.

3.1 A constructivist paradigm

The normative metanarrative propagated in public relations scholarship by American scholars such as Dozier (1992) and Grunig and Grunig (2008), has projected the reality of public relations as an in-house management function (see 2.1). This view has been criticised for its ethnocentricity (Bardhan & Weaver, 2011; Holtzhausen, 2000; Kent & Taylor, 2007), dearth of consideration for the occupation’s socio-cultural aspects (Edwards, 2018; Edwards & Hodges, 2011; L‘Etang, 2013), ignorance of the consultancy sector (Pieczka, 2006) and lack of appreciation for the relationships and discourse of practitioners (Sriramesh,1996, 2012;Theunissen & Sissons, 2018). The researcher’s aim was therefore to address these gaps by exploring a different reality of practice - one that was local to New Zealand, specific to consultants, in context of their occupational culture, and constructed through their interactions with one another and their narratives about practice. Therefore, the current study situated itself in the constructivist paradigm of qualitative inquiry.

Constructivism is the view that “people construct their own understanding of reality” (Lincoln et al., 2018, p. 116). Constructivism, therefore, argues that there is no single form of reality; but instead, multiple realities exist dependent on the individual(s) seeking it and/or participating in their construction (Grbich, 2013; Lincoln et al., 2018; Mertens, 2018). Researchers of this worldview follow a subjectivist epistemology (Lincoln et al., 2018), i.e., believe that they need to interact with their research subjects to understand and interpret their reality and construct meaningful knowledge from it (Mertens, 2018; Silverman, 2013).

In asserting the need to interpret the environment they are interacting with, constructivists accept that knowledge is co-constructed (Lincoln et al., 2018) between researcher and participant(s). To enable and aid the researcher’s interpretations, constructivism follows a hermeneutic methodology whereby the researcher begins with a fundamental understanding of the subject matter and then undertakes a process of analysing and unequivocally explaining the phenomenon being studied, including aspects that may have been tacit knowledge so far (Grbich, 2013; Lincoln et al., 2018). This process implies that, due to fear of bias, the meaning constructed from the findings cannot be entirely separated from the knowledge of the researcher (Grbich, 2013; Howell, 2015). While this may raise concerns for the objectivity of such a study, constructivists argue that the researcher’s understanding of the social context helps improve the accuracy of interpretations made from data (Lincoln et al., 2018). It is, however, cautioned that the success of the research relies on the *reflexivity* of the researcher (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011; Howell, 2015).

Creswell and Creswell (2018) explained that reflexive thinking requires researchers to be cognisant of how identity aspects (such as age, gender, ethnicity, background etc.) and past experiences may “shape their interpretations formed during a study” (p. 183). Therefore, as the researcher of this study, I feel it necessary to acknowledge and share aspects about myself that may have affected my interpretations. I am a New Zealand citizen who has been living in the country for the last 15 years and was born and raised in India. I identify myself as a middle-class woman of liberal and spiritual mindset. I have university education in commerce, advertising, marketing, and public relations. I have also had the opportunity to interview some public relations practitioners (both in-house practitioners and consultants) as part of my master’s research that examined the internet’s impact on their practice.

My work experience in the communication industry ranges from copywriting and editing to non-profit, corporate, and online communication. I have been in academia for the last eight years, teaching and researching in the discipline of public relations. One of the courses I teach facilitates learning through a student public relations consultancy. This has given me the opportunity to be immersed in a simulated consulting environment, albeit pro bono, and witness the narratives and routine work experiences of our industry mentors, student consultants and non-profit clients. I am an Accredited Member and Fellow of the *Te Pūtahi Whakakakau Tūmatanui o Aotearoa* the Public Relations Institute of New Zealand (PRINZ) and currently the Chief Examiner of its accreditation programme. Overall, my education, work and other experiences have enabled me to form an understanding of the local way of public relations practice and sparked an interest in the specific examination of the working lives of consultants.

In aiming for reflexivity in the study, I positioned myself as a passionate participant observer (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011; Erickson, 2018) of the practice (see Section 3.3) and had limited discussions about my own views and experiences. Creswell and Creswell (2018) argued that doing so ensured that the researcher did not "override the importance of the content or methods in a study" (p. 184). In addition to reflexivity, the ethics of the researcher are vital in ensuring fairness of interpretations (Lincoln et al., 2018). In the case of this study, I have been guided by my adherence to the PRINZ Code of Ethics that requires me to be open, honest, professional, law abiding, mindful of privacy rights and providing disclosure of any conflicts of interest (Public Relations Institute of New Zealand [PRINZ], n.d.-b). Furthermore, I obtained approval (application number 17/64, approved on 23 March 2017, see Appendix I) from Auckland University of Technology's Ethics Committee (AUTEC) with respect to ethical data collection, storage, analysis, and dissemination.

3.2 An ethnographic approach

Since the aim of the current study was to understand and explain the occupational culture (i.e., the routine working lives) of consultants, it needed a research method that enabled the discovery of "what particular people do in their everyday lives and what their actions mean to them" (Erickson, 2018. p. 36). As guided by the constructivist paradigm, this necessitated the use of qualitative methods because they offer a deeper access to the thoughts and lives of the research subjects than what quantitative methods allow for (Crotty, 1998; Howell, 2015; Lincoln et al., 2018). In the search for an ideal method, I drew from the wisdom of scholars (Edwards 2011a;

Hodges, 2011; Everett & Johnson, 2012; L'Etang, 2011; Pieczka, 2006b; Sissons, 2014; 2015; Theunissen & Sissons, 2018) who had previously explored public relations as a socio-cultural practice and advocated for the use of ethnography.

The word ethnography is derived from the Greek words *ethnoi* (others) and *graphien* (writing) and translates to "writing about other people" (Erickson, 2018, p. 39). Ethnographers seek to understand and explain cultural phenomena by using methods that place them close to their occurrence (Markham, 2018; Schrum & Scott, 2017). Classical ethnography of the 19th century was about anthropologists providing "descriptive accounts" (p. 39) of people living in colonies. These accounts allegedly helped provide a more accurate understanding of non-Western cultures than what the colonial administrators and travellers had thus far projected. While it required the ethnographers to immerse themselves in the culture of observation for long periods of time (sometimes spanning over years), the interpretations made were of *the other* and by *an outside observer* (Erickson, 2018). Over time, this purist stance evolved, and ethnographers could also be insiders of the observed field, thereby having some understanding of it (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011; Gold, 1958). This latter approach resonated with me as I was not an absolute outsider to New Zealand's public relations consulting practice, my field of observation, and had a degree of existing knowledge about it.

My role as an ethnographic researcher was to inscribe and explain my observations of the naturally occurring phenomena of consulting practice and in doing so turn them into what Geertz (1973) would call "an account, which exists in its inscriptions and can be reconsulted" (p. 19). Geertz (1973) explained ethnography as *thick description* of the observation, i.e., descriptions of naturally occurring data based on the researcher's interpretation of the participants' constructions that make explicit any mundane "event, ritual, custom, idea, or whatever is insinuated as background information" (p. 9).

These thick descriptions, that can be gained from ethnographic research, are largely missing from public relations scholarship (Madden & Levenshus, 2021). In fact, L'Etang (2011) lamented that this absence was to be blamed for "so little flesh on the public relations academic skeleton" (p. 26). Undoubtedly, observation of specific contexts of public relations practice can help elucidate its structures, nuances, and complexity in a way that broad generalisations made from quantitative methods are unable to (L'Etang, 2011). In New Zealand, Sissons' (2014, 2015) use of video ethnography was a path-breaking attempt at explaining the micro-culture of relationships between public relations practitioners and journalists. Further to this, Theunissen and Sissons (2018) used this ethnographic data to provide an insight into the professional culture of the practice; made visible in discourses of practitioners and their relationships with clients, media, and peers. Inspired from these breakthroughs and calls for challenging methodological norms, I chose to apply an ethnographic approach to this study, by utilising its most defining method (Jorgensen, 2020; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) – *participant observation.*

3.3. Participant observation

In its simplest form, participant observation is a way of collecting data about "people and matters related to them" (p. 2) through some form of observation and/or participation in the field of study (Jorgensen, 2020). Amongst the earlier definitions of participant observation is the following one by Hader and Lindeman (1933):

> *Participant observation* is based on the theory that an interpretation of an event can only be approximately correct when it is a composite of two points of view, the *outside* and the *inside.* Thus the view of the person who was a participant in the event, whose wishes and interests were in some way involved, and the view of the person who was not a participant but only an observer, or analyst, coalesce in one final synthesis. (p. 148)

In the above view, a participant-observer was someone who would be seen as the present-day key informant or "participant trained to be an observer" (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2013) and was distinct from a pure researcher, who was seen as *outsider observer*. As the method evolved, it became apparent that there was not always a clear demarcation between observation and participation, or researcher and participant/informant (Bernard, 2017; Jorgensen, 2020). Researchers could, hence, choose from one of four roles - *complete participant, participant-as-observer, observer-as-participant, and complete observer* (Gold, 1958). In the present study, I assumed the role of observer-as-participant.

An observer-as-participant is a researcher who may moderately participate in some activities of the field they are studying, although their primary role is to conduct structured observation through taking field notes, interviewing participants, etc. (Bernard, 2017; DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011; Jorgensen, 2020). They are "identifiable as a researcher" (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011, p. 23) and their participation, when it happens, is limited. For example, when Sissons (2014, 2015) adopted the role of observer-as-participant in two public relations departments and two newsrooms in New Zealand, her identity as a researcher and her study's purpose were known to her participants. While she participated moderately in sharing her perspective as a former journalist and public relations practitioner, her main role was still that of an observer and perceived as such by her participants. Similarly, in the present study, my participants occasionally sought my view on and/or participation in their activities as a former public relations practitioner and current academic. However, they primarily identified me as a researcher who was observing their practice and they had also been provided with an information sheet that detailed the purpose of my study.

Gold's (1958) original conceptualisation of observer-as-participant was that of a researcher who spent a shorter period in the field and therefore managed to observe and engage with multiple key informants/participants. In Gold's (1958) view, this role had "less risk of *going native* [emphasis] than either complete participant or the participant-as-observer role" (p. 221). This implied that while the role provided a limited time to get accustomed to and understand the cultural practices being observed, it ensured that the researcher did not "over-identify with the informant" (Gold, 1958, p. 221) and lose the researcher's perspective.

Nowadays, most of the ethnographic research is based on this role and carried out in a relatively shorter span of time such as months, weeks or even a few days (Bernard, 2017; Manolchev & Foley, 2021). The rationale for this being that if researchers had some initial knowledge about their fields of study and a basic understanding of the "nuances of etiquette from previous experience" (Bernard, 2017, p. 278), then even a few days of "paying careful attention to what's going on around you" (p. 278) were sufficient.

Additionally, researchers who do not have the time to immerse themselves in long-term fieldwork benefit from being obligated to narrow their focus to a specific context or micro-culture and draw particularly from the learnings of earlier ethnographic studies in their field (Bernard, 2017). This is especially true for researchers conducting fieldwork within the time constraints of a university degree (Manolchev & Foley, 2021).

As a doctoral student, who was simultaneously working full-time, I too was conducting ethnographic research within a limited timeframe. Therefore, I sought direction from previous studies that had used participant observation for exploring socio-cultural aspects of public relations (Edwards 2011a; Hodges, 2011; Pieczka, 2006b;

Sissons, 2014, 2015; Theunissen & Sissons, 2018). Doing so helped condense my ethnographic scope to examining the occupational culture of public relations consultants in New Zealand. I further narrowed it down to focus on observing the consultants carrying out their routine public relations activities such as planning and creating content, interacting in work-related meetings with colleagues, clients, and journalists, interacting with colleagues at any culture-building activities at work, and networking with peers at industry events. Additionally, I had an initial tacit understanding of the field and so a total of 14 days of participant observation of two different consultants were adequate for fulfilling the purpose of the study. Overall, this ensured that I did not feel “overloaded with data, information, and details” (Manolchev & Foley, 2021, p. 3).

Data in participant observation can take various forms including (but not limited to) field notes, audio and video recordings of the observation, photos, structured and unstructured interviews, casual conversations, texts, and artifacts collected from the field (Jorgensen, 2020). No matter which way the data is collected, it is vital that there be a “log of activities in the field, unique experiences, and other matters of possible interest” (Jorgensen, 2020, p. 43). I chose to collect the data through recording my observations in the field on a digital video camera as well as conducting separate semi-structured interviews recorded on a digital voice recorder.

3.3.1 Video ethnography

Video recordings have become an established mode of conducting participant observation and “capturing events as they play out in space and time” (Komarova & McKnight, 2014, p. 3). This turn in ethnographic fieldwork has been enabled by the pervasiveness of video on social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram as well as access to technology such as digital cameras, camera enabled mobile phones and action cameras such as GoPros (Pink, 2021a). While the normative approach was to use video to make an ethnographic film or documentary, it is now acknowledged that video can simply be utilised as a way of recording the observation, as it happens, to complement field notes (Pink, 2007, 2021a). This implies that the researcher does not solely rely on their memory of the event or on the efficacy of their notetaking, but instead can replay the recordings to aid analysis and interpretation (Heath et al., 2010; Komarova & McKnight, 2014; Pink, 2021a; Shrum & Scott, 2017).

3.3.1.1 Strategy and technique for using a video camera

To record observations using video, researchers can opt for the camera to either be in a fixed position or roving to follow the activities of the participants. A fixed camera position is advisable in institutional settings where participants are expected to be more stationary, such as sitting at their office desks, conducting job interviews etc. On the contrary, a roving camera technique may be necessary in contexts where participants are mobile such as when travelling in cars, visiting worksites to meet with clients and colleagues, etc. (Heath et al., 2010). Based on Sissons' (2014) fieldwork in a New Zealand public relations consultancy, it became apparent that while most consulting activities were conducted in seated positions, some required site visits and/or meetings with clients and colleagues where consultants needed to be more mobile. Therefore, I bought a small portable digital video camera (Sony DSC W500) along with a mini tripod (JOBY GorillaPod Magnetic Mini Flexible Mini-Tripod) to intentionally employ a combination of fixed and roving camera set-ups. This enabled me to continue recording, easily and unobtrusively, with the camera when the participants were on the move. When they were seated, it was equally convenient to place the camera on the tripod to let it automatically shoot the action, without having to hold it, control it or look through the lens.

In both the above cases my recording strategy was to be *minimalist and* relatively *low in visibility,* i.e., keeping the camera gear limited and not drawing excessive attention towards it (Schrum & Scott, 2017). This is known to help with ensuring that researchers "get good footage, keeping participants happy" (Schrum & Scott, 2017, p. 37). Additionally, it is also important to not disrupt any naturally occurring action with overt efforts to position oneself as a researcher or adjust camera gear because a participants' attention to such movement may affect the data thus gathered (DuFon, 2002; Heath et al., 2010). It is argued that participants can never completely forget the presence of a camera and may be on occasion *performing* for it to manage their impressions that were being recorded (Schrum & Scott, 2017). However, being mindful of camera gear and researcher positioning can help mitigate this (DuFon, 2002; Heath et al., 2010; Schrum & Scott, 2017), which is what I endeavoured to do throughout the study. Furthermore, it should be noted that as a participant observer, I was using video simply to record the observation and was also taking field notes (that included reference to impromptu conversations with the participants) to get a better understanding of their perspectives, activities, and interactions. This meant that my interpretation did not rely solely on the video data but, as is advisable (Heath et al., 2010; Komarova & McKnight, 2014; Pink, 2021a; Shrum & Scott, 2017), was complemented by other notes that helped contextualise and explain the video data more effectively.

3.3.1.2 Gaining access and maintaining rapport

While it is argued that “a camera is less distracting than you are” (Schrum & Scott, 2017, p. 30), the biggest hurdle researchers face in doing video ethnography is getting access to the field (Pink, 2007). People and organisations may be sensitive to the idea of being filmed and perceive that it could lead to loss of privacy, risk of sharing confidential information and general disruption to practice (Heath et al., 2010). It is suggested that researchers meet with prospective participants to have a conversation about the purpose of the study, use of video, management of privacy and confidentiality, and how the study may benefit their practice to both understand and ease their concerns and build a rapport (Pink, 2021a). It is advisable to ensure participants understand that the intention of research is “not to develop a critical analysis of the participants or organisation, but rather to analyse their skills and practices; and more generally to understand the world from the perspective of the participants themselves” (Heath et al., 2010, p. 27).

For achieving informed consent from my participants, I used several documents (that were verified and approved by my supervisors as well as the university’s ethics committee) including a participant information sheet (see Appendix B), and a video observation protocol (see Appendix H) and consent form (see Appendix E). However, Bernard (2017) cautioned that the initial contact with participants should ideally not delve into the details of the research and any document shared at this stage should be brief, so as not to overwhelm the participants and/or their gatekeepers. Therefore, I also created a separate document that could be emailed to prospective participants (following an initial meeting, phone call or email exchange with them) as a brief introduction to myself and the research.

After gaining ethics approval for my study in March 2017, I began the search for my key participants. I relied on purposive and convenience sampling approaches as they are the most commonplace in ethnographic research (Bernard, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Miles et al., 2020). Purposive sampling allows a researcher to choose participants based on the purpose of the study. The sample therefore depends on what the researcher aims to explore and gain deeper knowledge about, and which participants can help provide these insights.

Additionally, convenience sampling ensures that the participants are easily available and willing to participate, and that the collection of data is convenient to the researcher and mindful of the place and time limitations they are operating within (Bernard, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I purposefully sought participants who were senior consultants working in and around the Auckland region of New Zealand's North Island. This was geographically convenient to me and a fair representation of practice as most consultants in New Zealand are based in Auckland (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023a). The reason for choosing senior consultants was Edwards' (2011a) argument that seasoned public relations practitioners influenced its occupational culture by setting standards about behaviour and practice, which new entrants were expected to imitate.

My first couple of attempts to secure key participants for the video ethnography were unsuccessful. While the consultants were interested in the study and appreciated how it might benefit the discipline and the practice, they were apprehensive about the presence of a camera.

This led to me to pause my search and focus instead on collecting data through audio-recorded semi-structured interviews (see Section 3.3.2), which consultants were happy to engage with. I always checked with my interview participants if they could be keen on partaking in the video ethnography, but they mostly declined. In December 2017, one of my interview participants - Karen[2] - accepted the research invitation and was happy for me to observe her practice. This highlighted for me that patience and perseverance were necessary hallmarks of a video ethnographer (Heath et al., 2010; Pink, 2007, 2021a, 2021b; Sissons, 2014; Schrum & Scott, 2017).

I shared the details of the video ethnography by emailing her the brief overview of my research, the information sheet, observation protocol and consent form. As discussed earlier (see Section 3.3), I only needed one or two working weeks with her. She gave her consent to participate, and we collectively decided on a week in February 2018, covering four days (21 – 24 February), to conduct the observation. Karen is a senior public relations consultant who at that time owned and operated her consultancy and worked from her home office in one of the North Island's main cities (outside Auckland). She hired contractors as and when needed for client work. Prior to setting up her own business, Karen had several years of experience working in another

[2] All names in this thesis have been changed to pseudonyms to safeguard the privacy of the participants.

consultancy in Auckland. For her own consultancy too, she has clients who are based in Auckland and therefore often travels to the city. Karen was open to being observed via video at her home office as well as most places she went for work-related matters. She was therefore filmed in her home office, in other places of her home when talking to clients on the phone, at the sites of an event she was managing, and in the car travelling to and from locations.

The participant observation continued in cafés and restaurants where she had her meals and beverages as well as at a networking event she attended. However, in these places, on her request, the video camera was not used and instead only field notes were taken. This meant that while the observation continued in such instances, no video was recorded. However, with her permission some photos were taken. According to Shrum and Scott (2017) this “switching of technologies (video and audio recorders) on and off with the rhythm of the situation” (p. 42) was called *deflection* and was necessary to maintain relational boundaries as well as rapport between the researcher and the participant. Turning off the camera in certain situations, such as at a social event, could relax the participant and even help build a more intimate connection with the researcher which eventually made them more comfortable to share stories of their practice (Shrum & Scott, 2017).

Researchers doing video ethnography need to exercise their discretion in knowing when the camera needs to be turned off to respect privacy and confidentiality or simply to make their participants feel more comfortable (Shrum & Scott, 2017; Komarova & McKnight, 2014; Pink, 2021a). These learnings gained from observing the first key participant were applied in the second observation as well where on some occasions (such as when the participant was compering an industry event) only field notes and photos were taken.

The second key participant, John, was a contact of the primary supervisor and known to me as an industry acquaintance. In April 2018, we both met John at his consultancy based in Auckland’s central business district. At this meeting, following Bernard’s (2017) advice about keeping initial introductions brief, I shared a concise overview of my study’s purpose and how video observation would be carried out. John agreed to participate, and he and I organised to meet again to go over further details. At this second meeting, he shared more about his consultancy and I about my research. John also gave me a tour of his consultancy, which was in an open-plan shared office space and introduced me to his colleagues. We mutually agreed that the observation would be done for the two working weeks that followed immediately. Eventually, I observed John for eight working days across 23 April and 4 May (which included time off for weekends and a public holiday) and then 2 days on 14 and 17 May. The last two days of observation had to be a week later than the earlier observation block to accommodate for my prior teaching and work commitments. Overall, I observed John doing public relations work at his desk, interacting with his colleagues, conducting job interviews to hire a new contractor, visiting client organisations for meetings, and travelling to and from these locations. John was comfortable with me using the video camera for all of these. However, like Karen, John too requested on a few occasions for the video camera to be turned off. Therefore, while the observation continued, it was not recorded on video. However, field notes were always recorded and on occasion (such as when John was being an emcee for a client's event) photos were taken.

The clients, and in John's case the colleagues, of my key participants were not central to my study but became part of it incidentally. They were thus considered incidental participants, provided with information sheets about the study, and invited to give written and informed consent to being observed and recorded as an incidental participant.

3.3.1.3 Managing video data

I diligently followed what Shrum and Scott (2017) refer to as *asset management*, i.e., storage and cataloguing of data in a way that ensures its safety and makes it easier to identify the critical incidents that need to be analysed. I was also cautioned by a fellow ethnographic researcher and colleague, Middleton (2020), who had lost a video clip in forgetting to double-check that it was saved on to the hard drive. So, I downloaded all the video data from the digital camera and the field notes taken on my iPad at the end of every day of observation and stored it on to a hard drive. I also created Word documents for any field notes written by hand. A folder each was made for both the key participants. Within it, sub-folders were made for each day. The data was copied on to another hard drive, which was stored in a locked cabinet in the primary supervisor's office.

I went through the data and field notes every night to ensure that I understood what had transpired during that day's observation. If there were any gaps, I engaged in conversations with the key participants the following day to check that I had made fair interpretations of their interactions and practice. This process of informal and unstructured interviewing is common in participant observation and vital in uncovering “new topics of interest that might have been overlooked” (Bernard, 2017, p. 163). This was at times done as part of casual conversations that were not video recorded, while on other occasions during filming.

Usually, it was common for both the participants to explain the activities as they occurred, straight after, or reflect on them the following morning. This was consistent with what Sissons (2014) had done while video recording public relations consultants. She had similarly found the consultants to be open and willing to explain and co-construct the interpretations (Sissons, 2014; Theunissen & Sissons, 2018).

All the video data was first transcribed verbatim onto Word documents and stored in the same manner. At a later stage, specific clips from the video data were transcribed further, using a transcription software called Express Scribe, to aid the multimodal interaction analysis.

3.3.2 Semi-structured interviews

It is common for interviews to be used in conjunction with observation to provide rich descriptions of the field and help construct more meaningful interpretations of the data gathered (Bernard, 2017; De Walt & DeWalt, 2011; Herrington, 2014; Jorgensen, 2020; Norris, 2011; 2019; Wooffitt & Widdicombe, 2006). Conducting interviews, along with observation and field notes, enables triangulation (Flick, 2018; Herrington, 2014; Norris, 2011) which “acts to consolidate the data and increases the validity and robustness of the data” (Herrington, 2014, p. 9).

My aim as a researcher was also to ensure that the data collected was valid and the interpretations made credible and representative of the field. This prompted me to conduct semi-structured interviews with 15 consultants (including one who was also observed). A semi-structured interview gathers narratives about the lifeworld and perspectives of the participants in a way that allows the interviewer to follow-up and further query “whatever angles are deemed important by the interviewee” (Brinkmann, 2018, p. 579). Although such interviews have a list of questions for the participants, they act more as a guide and flexibility is applied in the order and wording of questions (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Wooffitt & Widdicombe, 2006).

Some interviewers benefit from creating questions around key themes and leaving the scope open to the participant to develop. This can often lead to further forms of data collection to examine those themes (Wooffitt & Widdicombe, 2006). In the present study too, the data gained from interviews was helpful in supporting the findings of the video ethnography and aiding in the identification and interpretation of the core themes of ethnographic data.

I had a list of 13 indicative questions (see Appendix J) and, as is the case with semi-structured interviews, I did not intend to ask them in a specific order or using the same words. Based on earlier ethnographic studies exploring public relations as a socio-cultural practice (Edwards, 2011a; Hodges, 2011; L'Etang, 2011; Sissons, 2014; Theunissen & Sissons, 2018), the key aspects of occupational culture to be explored were: the consultant's background, motivations and values, view of daily working life, formal and informal norms in their practice, knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviours expected from new entrants, work-related relationships and socialisation, and views of the occupational culture of their practice and that of others in their field. To maintain a consistency in the interview approach, the pre-determined indicative questions remained the same regardless of whether the interviews took place before or after the video observations. The data collection schedule is outlined in Appendix K.

3.3.2.1 Accessing and engaging with interview participants

Just as in the case of video ethnography, I followed purposive and convenience sampling (Bernard, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Miles et al., 2020) for identifying the 15 participants needed for the semi-structured interviews. Since interviews were being used primarily to support the data collected from the video observation, there was no perceived need for drawing a larger sample. Additionally, Brinkmann (2022) advised that 15 is a number that usually "makes possible a practical handling of the data" (p. 49) and is preferable as the aim of interviews was not to be statistically representative but "to look in detail at how selected people experience the world" (p. 49).

The participants were senior consultants living in and around the Auckland region, in New Zealand's North Island. For the initial stage-setting, where researchers and participants engage for the first time (Brinkmann, 2022), I contacted the participants through email or a direct message on LinkedIn. This contact information was publicly available, and most of the consultants were professionally known to me. The interview participants were provided with the study's information sheet (see Appendix D) and consent form (see Appendix F) and given a period of two weeks to consider the invitation. All the consultants who were invited to participate agreed without any hesitation and/or delay.

The interviews were held over 2017 and 2018. To respect the participant's comfort and build a rapport (Brinkmann, 2022; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), they were held at locations convenient to the participants. This meant that some were held in a café, some at the participant's workplace and two online via Zoom.

During the interviews, I followed Merriam and Tisdell's (2015) recommendation in being "respectful, non-judgemental, and non-threatening" (p. 129) towards my participants. I did so by applying a *receptive interviewing* style (Brinkmann, 2022), whereby I enabled my participants to share their perspectives and experiences without aiming to control or direct their views, letting them take their time to answer, and not forcing any outcome. Much like most semi-structured interviews (Brinkmann, 2022), my interviews also lasted between 30 and 90 minutes and, as is advisable (Bernard, 2017; Brinkmann, 2022), ended with me offering the participants an opportunity to add further commentary.

3.3.2.2 Recording and transcription of interviews

Since it is recommended to not rely solely on memory or written notes (Bernard, 2017; Silverman, 2013), all interviews were audio-recorded using a digital voice recorder with the informed consent of the participants. The two interviews held online were audio-recorded via Zoom as well. Silverman (2013) pointed out that recording gave researchers "the advantages of being able to play back interviews". However, here it must be emphasised that audio recording should not become a substitute but rather be used in juxtaposition with notetaking (Bernard, 2017), which is what I did.

The recordings were downloaded and stored onto two external hard drives. Interviews were transcribed using an online tool called Otter.ai and the transcripts generated were manually checked and edited for accuracy as needed. These were exported as Word documents and also saved onto the hard drives.

3.4 Analysing ethnographic video data

Analysis is about systematically ordering, displaying, and summarising the data gathered from various methods so that meaningful patterns can be identified and interpreted to draw conclusions from it (Bernard, 2017; DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011; Mannik & McGarry, 2017; Miles et al., 2020). Bernard (2017) claimed that the analysis of data was a cyclical process.

> It starts before you collect data— you have to have some ideas about what you're going to study— and it continues throughout any research effort. As you develop ideas, you test them against your observations: Your observations may then modify your ideas, which then need to be tested again, and so on. (p. 355)

I too have found my ethnographic analysis to be iterative, i.e., requiring "oscillating back and forth between the research question, data, and analysis" (Mannik & McGarry, 2017, p. 105). Additionally, Ballestero and Winthereik (2021) argued that ethnographers needed to be creative in developing and applying techniques of analysis, so they can experiment with new ways of "noticing that which seems to be there in one's materials" (p. 3). I believe that my choice of doing a video ethnography accentuated this need for creativity and dynamism.

Analysing video data was not simply about describing and interpreting the recorded action using a single fixed method. Instead, it often needed a combination of techniques to pay attention to that which was not visible or apparent and making connections between the different pieces of data obtained from video recordings, field notes, and interviews (Pink, 2021a, 2021b). The onus was therefore on the researcher to follow their *ethnographic hunch* in interweaving data in a way that presented a meaningful narrative about the thoughts and experiences of the participants (Pink, 2021a). This ethnographic hunch was defined by Pink (2021b) as:

> that moment in research when I encounter something—a situation, something someone has said or shown me, a moment in a fieldwork video recording made by a co-researcher—that deepens what I think I know, sparks an ethnographic-theoretical dialogue, turns around my thinking, and creates a strand of investigation through my research, analysis, or both. Such insights are dispersed, not part of predetermined analytical processes or systems, yet in my experience they are among the most important moments in ethnographic analysis. (p. 30)

3.4.1 The examination of interactions

Following my ethnographic hunch, I realised that the naturally occurring phenomena that made me take notice, think deeper, examine further, and draw links between pieces of data were the interactions between the key participants and incidental participants such as their clients, colleagues, and journalists. In these interactions, the thoughts, values, behaviours, and relationships of the participants as well as the lived experiences and norms of the practice became evident. As such, these interactions opened a window into the occupational culture of the public relations consulting practice.

Goffman (1959) defined an interaction as “all the interaction which occurs throughout any one occasion when a given set of individuals are in one another’s continuous presence” (p. 26) and suggested that they were in fact a *performance* whereby the participants were seeking to influence each other to form and maintain intended impressions of themselves. Participants of an interaction were understood as performing *small behaviours* (using verbal expressions, gestures, glances, dress, manner, tact etc.) that were considered as dramaturgic rituals giving order to the interaction (Goffman, 1967). The analysis of interactions was therefore about examining these small behaviours to understand what they reveal about the social occasion in which the interaction(s) took place (Goffman, 1967).

Concurrently, Garfinkel (1967) focused on examining interactions as a way of making sense of the everyday life of the participants and how they constructed their realities. In his analytic framework, Garfinkel (1967) distinguished between “*what* [author’s emphasis] was said from *what* [author’s emphasis] was talked about” (p. 27) and argued that researchers needed to observe more than what was being said to interpret and explain what the participants were thinking or meaning. Garfinkel’s (1967) Ethnomethodological Analysis was centred on examining interactions in organised settings where participants were engaging in practical actions such as rationalising, planning, persuading each other and making decisions. To interpret the interaction, researchers were meant to outline what was being explicitly said as well as what was being implied and understood.

In addition to examining implicit communication, it was soon claimed that the analysis of interactions was also about giving insight into the larger communicative context. Gumperz (1982, 2018) drew from Bourdieu’s (1984) conceptualisation of *habitus* to argue that interactions could not be separated from the social context in which they occurred. His analytic method of Interactional Sociolinguistics was about identifying recurring patterns of interactions as representative samples that could then be transcribed in the form of *interactional texts* (Gumperz, 1982, 2018). These texts were meant to include verbal content along with prosodic composition and nonverbal cues that could help highlight the wider setting of the interaction (Gumperz, 1982, 2018).

This approach was adopted across various studies that analysed interactions that took place in institutional settings such as medical practice (Heath, 1992), schools (Button, 1992), and courtrooms (Atkinson, 1992; Drew, 1992). In these studies, the interactions (such as between a patient and a doctor) did not always take place face-to-face and/or in institutional settings but were sometimes over the telephone and/or at a private residence.

Therefore, the term *institutional* came to encompass any interaction where the "participants' institutional or professional identities are somehow made relevant to the work activities in which they are engaged" (Drew & Heritage, 1992, pp. 3 – 4). These institutional studies, through an investigation of audio and video, attempted to reveal more about the beliefs, working lives, and actions of various occupations (Drew & Heritage, 1992).

In New Zealand, this approach has been widely applied through the *Language in the Workplace Project (LWP)* that has analysed "approximately 2,000 interactions involving over 700 people in more than 30 different workplaces" (Holmes & Stubbe, 2015, p. vii). LWP's extensive research helped disclose the intricacies of workplace interactions, especially the management of problematic topics, use of humour and small talk, and application of power (Holmes & Stubbe, 2015).

In analysing power relations, Holmes and Stubbe (2015) also drew from Critical Discourse Analysis or CDA (Fairclough, 1995; Machin & Mayr, 2012; van Dijk, 2018) which has become instrumental in understanding how power is created, exerted, and re-enforced through interactional discourse. CDA, now increasingly referred as Critical Discourse Studies or CDS (Catalano & Waugh, 2020), is a multi-disciplinary approach that can be used to examine both the linguistic features and the context of an interaction to reveal the underpinning power relations between the participants (Fairclough, 1995). This approach is useful in understanding institutional culture as according to CDA, "culture is inseparable from language" (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 3) and "through language, certain kinds of practices, ideas, values and identities are promoted and naturalised" (p. 3).

Finally, Conversation Analysis or CA (Jefferson, 2004a; Sacks et al., 1974; Lester & O'Reilly, 2019; Liddicoat, 2022; Stivers & Sidnell, 2013; Schegloff, 2007; Schiffrin, 1987) has emerged as a defining methodology for examining interactional intricacies such as turn-taking, pausing, overlapping, repairing, adjusting, repeating, using discourse markers, and laughing. In developing CA, Jefferson's (2004a) transcript symbols have played a foundational role (see Appendix A). For example, in highlighting the turn-taking patterns in an interaction between participants, researchers can identify interruptive behaviour. This behaviour may further be examined from the context of the participants' gender, personal dispositions, and socio-cultural background to reveal the tacit implications of the interaction (Heritage & Clayman, 2010).

The CA transcript has been complemented by the analysis of non-verbal aspects of interaction such the gaze (Kendon & Cook, 1969; Rossano, 2013), gesture (Kendon, 2004; McNeill, 1992; 2005), posture (Matsumoto et al., 2016; Mehrabian, 1968, 1969; 2007), proxemics (Norris, 2004, 2019) and touch (Harrigan et al., 1991). These non-verbal conducts may appear naturalistic and insignificant but when methodically analysed can disclose latent thoughts, emotions and motives that add meaning to the interaction (Heath & Luff, 2013). For example, a momentary exchange of gaze between participants and their positioning of bodies towards each other could indicate mutual orientation (Goodwin, 2000). Some scholars even combined the various non-verbal modes of expression to conduct a multimodal analysis of interactions (Norris, 2004, 2019; Ledin & Machin, 2020). Overall, according to Heritage and Clayman (2010, "Talking Social Institutions into Being" section, para. 2), analysing interactions was about the following:

> …asking "why that now?" (why that action, why that word selection, why that hesitation, why that look, why that gesture, and so on, now). And we ask that question as a way into studying interaction, because that is the question the participants are always asking themselves as they navigate through their interactions with one another and build a social world together, and we want to find out how they are doing that. When you ask the question "Why that now?", you overcome the tendency to view interaction as familiar and "natural". At the same time, you very quickly come to see how methodical social interaction really is – how deeply it is based on methods of reasoning and action that the participants share.

In asking the above questions, the researchers are empowered to reveal the logic of the interaction. This logic is shaped by the setting in which the interaction takes place, the situations and actions involved, and the identities that the participants are required to enact and preserve (Heritage & Clayman, 2010).

Given the benefits of each of the above ways of analysing interactions, my instinct was to combine them. This ethnographic hunch evolved through my time in the field as well as in exploring what similar studies had done. In following suggestions to avoid reliance on a single method (Ballestero & Winthereik, 2021; Pink, 2021a, 2021b), I opted for a blended analysis. Middleton (2020), a fellow video-ethnographer, had referred to such an approach as the "ethnographic communication analysis" (p. 75). This combination of methods was first applied by Sissons (2014) in her analysis of the ethnographic data obtained from public relations departments and consultancies, and news media organisations in New Zealand. While she explained the way the analysis was conducted, Sissons (2014) did not label her approach. Following her lead, Sissons and Theunissen (2018) applied the same in examining relationship building in New Zealand's public relations practice and Middleton (2020) used it to examine Māori journalism. It was in these texts that Sissons's (2014) analytical approach was labelled as 'Ethnographic Communication Analysis' (ECA).

3.4.2 Ethnographic communication analysis

Ethnographic Communication Analysis (ECA) is an applied approach to analysing institutional interactions (i.e., interactions where participants are engaging in institutional talk and employing their occupational identities in doing so). These interactions could be carried out face-to-face or mediated through telephone, computer and/or other communication technologies. To use ECA, the interactions must be video recorded so that multiple modes of expression such as speech, gaze, gesture, posture, proxemics, and touch can be examined to reveal the meaning constructed (Sissons, 2014; Middleton, 2020). This meaning is then further analysed in the context of the interactional setting and the power-relations of the participants, as well as in the broader conditions of the occupation and society at large. In ECA, the usage of existing analytical methods (see Section 3.4.1) is not *pure* or as originally conceptualised and traditionally implemented. Instead, it is modified to suit applicability in the present study's context, i.e., participant observation to explore a specific institutional context of public relations consulting culture.

In selecting interactions from my ethnographic data, I followed the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) (Flanagan, 1954; Keatinge, 2002, Watkins et al., 2022). A critical incident was seen as any observed occurrence that was “sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predictions” (p. 327) and where the intention of the activity was apparent (Flanagan, 1954). Additionally, I was directed by Keatinge’s (2002) suggestion that the incident thus selected should be one that was a routine occurrence. This meant that I had to sift through my entire video data and extract interactions that encapsulated the essence of the observed activities (Watkins et al., 2022). This exercise was akin to Gumperz’s (1982) advice about identifying interactions that could act as a representative sample. For this study, I extracted four key interactions that were analysed using ECA. Each of these interactions (whether face-to-face or meditated) was a poignant example of the routine work and talk that the public relations consultants engaged in.

In the first instance, the chosen interactions were transcribed using Jefferson’s (2004a) CA transcript symbols. This meant that the interaction had to be carefully examined for aspects such as turn-taking patterns between participants; overlaps in their speech; changes in pitch, intonation, and amplitude; breathiness in expression; and emphasis on words and/or phrases. It also included marking any pauses and gaps in speech. As Middleton (2020) has claimed, this was a “painstaking process” that needed “a great deal of re-listening and checking” (p. 80). A CA transcript[3] looked like the following:

1. S: so if there’s any feedback on any
2. of that shoot it through to (.6)
3. C: yeah
4. S: through to m:e if it’s next week=
5. C: =yeah
6. S: didn’t meant to (.2) actually the
7. uhm (.3) >I finish up next week<
8. (.8) with:h (.3) In:finity.
9. C: do ↑you=

[3] See the full transcript in Section 7.3.1, Figure 6, interaction four.

Next, this CA transcript was juxtaposed with non-verbal modes that were taking place in the exchange such as gaze, gesture, posture, proxemics, touch etc. In the images that were used for displaying the multimodality, the faces (and any other identifiable aspects) of the participants were concealed to safeguard their privacy. The multimodal transcript of the interaction appeared like the excerpt shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: An example of a multimodal transcript

1. S: so if there's any feedback on any
2. of that shoot it through to (.6)
3. C: yeah
4. S: through to m:e if it's next week=
5. C: =yeah
6. S: didn't meant to (.2) actually the
7. uhm (.3) >I finish up next week<
8. (.8) with:h (.3) In:finity.
9. C: do ↑you=

Once the multimodal transcript was complete, the interaction was analysed line by line, mode by mode and frame by frame to draw a picture of what was being said and interpret what was being implied through these multiple modes of expression. In doing so, ECA drew from conversation analysis, multimodal analysis, interactional sociolinguists, and ethnomethodology.

Additionally, the multimodal transcripts were examined to check if the participants were displaying any behaviour that could be seen as the dramaturgy of creating and preserving occupational identities and impressions. The transcripts were also scrutinised to identify the application and negotiation of power relations between the participants and their colleagues, clients, and new entrants.

Furthermore, field notes and extracts from informal and semi-structured interviews were used to support the interpretation. The attempt was to explain the micro-setting in which the interaction was taking place and the wider context of routine occurrences in public relations consulting practice. This helped establish whether the interactions perpetuated or challenged the existing *habitus* of public relations consultants.

3.5 Analysing data from semi-structured interviews

The 15 semi-structured interviews were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2022) Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA). First and foremost, as advised by Braun and Clarke (2022), I intended to familiarise myself with the data. Therefore, I immersed myself in the data by listening to the audio recordings of the interviews, reading the interview transcripts obtained from Otter.ai, editing the transcripts for accuracy (which required re-listening to the interview audio) and then reading the edited transcripts.

As I read and re-read them, I highlighted extracts that linked to any occurrences in the video data. For example, I marked transcripts with the note *job interviews,* where participants were talking about the skills, knowledge, abilities, and behaviours (KSABs) they expected in new entrants. This linked to one of the key video interactions that was about a consultant conducting a job interview to test their candidate's KSABs. In doing so, analysis became an iterative process (Mannik & McGarry, 2017) of going back and forth between the interview and video data.

Following this, I uploaded the transcripts on to Delve (www.delvetool.com), which is an online qualitative data analysis software. In this, I systematically went through the transcripts again, this time assigning codes to datasets that were interesting and relevant to either the video data or the research question. In doing so, I once again followed Braun and Clarke's (2022) technique of coding semantic data, i.e., that which was explicit and apparent in the words used by the participants as well coding latent data, i.e., that which was implied.

Once these initial codes were established, I began identifying visible patterns and compiled clusters of codes under umbrella themes (Braun & Clarke, 2022). However, creating and refining these themes was not a linear process as it required me to cross-check with the video data and the key interactions extracted for ECA, reflect on the research question, consider my field notes, and draw from my own knowledge of public relations consulting. I engaged in this process until I reached a point of *saturation*, whereby no new insight or pattern was coming to the fore anymore (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

When finally defining and naming my themes, I had to ensure they were core aspects of occupational culture of public relations consultants and could be interwoven with the video interactions to narrate a coherent story of the entire ethnographic data (videos, field notes and semi-structured interviews). Since I followed the RTA approach; I intentionally reflected on my role as a researcher and how my identity, knowledge and experience influenced the patterns I identified, the themes I categorised, and the interpretations I made from them. However, my subjectivity was not an obfuscation in the analysis but instead in being “active, engaged and thoughtful” (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 9) I aimed to add more depth to the meaning thus constructed from the data.

3.6 A note on generalisation and transferability

Since I followed the constructivist or interpretivist paradigm, the intention of the study was not to offer a complete generalisation of the findings that could be transferred (Crotty, 1998; Howell, 2015; Creswell & Creswell, 2018) across the various contexts of public relations practice. Instead, the hallmark of such a study is to develop particularity or the construction of knowledge that is particular to a given setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), in this case that of public relations consulting in New Zealand.

However, with triangulation, a degree of transferability may be achieved (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Therefore, this study offers to provide what Williams (2000) calls *moderatum generalisations,* explained as:

> What it is that the researcher wants to understand, and of course if she can understand them then she will know something of the cultural consistency within which they reside and is then able to make her own generalisations about that cultural consistency. The interpretation of an action or utterance leads to an understanding of why it happened. This in turn will tell us something of its antecedents, which will be at least partially social. (p. 220)

This implies that through thick descriptions of the triangulated ethnographic data obtained from video observation, field notes and semi-structured interviews, *moderatum generalisations* can be drawn about the culture of consultants in New Zealand. These can be used by future researchers as a foundation to create or test theories and hypotheses for a wider generalisation to be achieved (Jorgensen, 2020).

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter explained the constructivist framework of my study and illuminated the theoretical and practical considerations that informed the use of video ethnography and semi-structured interviews for data collection. In this section of thesis, I have justified and exemplified the application of Ethnographic Communication Analysis (ECA) in analysing the video data. I have also discussed how ECA has been complemented with field notes and reflexive thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews to offer valid and robust interpretations. These thick descriptions provide moderatum generalisations that can help provide an answer to the research question:

> RQ. What is the occupational culture (practitioner lifeworld and occupational practices) of public relations consultants in Aotearoa New Zealand?

The next four chapters exhibit the application of analytic methodologies by sharing the findings of four interactions chosen as representative samples from the ethnographic data. Each of these chapters encompasses a prominent theme that emerged from the iterative process of analysing and triangulating the video data as well as the data from semi-structured interviews and field notes. Together, the analysis and interpretation of these four themes helps answer the research question.

CHAPTER 4: SELECTING A FITTING CONSULTANT

Selecting the right person for a role is crucial for any organisation, regardless of its nature and size (Cross, 2019; Picardi, 2020). In the consultancy sector as well, the foundation of a consultant's career is said to be laid at the moment of their selection for the role, which is often based on criteria specific to the sector (Kubr, 2002).

This chapter examines the criteria public relations consultants use to assess candidates when selecting them for a consultancy role. It shares excerpts of interviews (See Section 4.2) where consultants articulated their own values and perceptions of an archetypical consultant as well as the knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal behaviours required from an ideal one. These consultant discourses help shape what could be seen as the embodiment of the consultancy sector's occupational identity, which scholars (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2019; Gilch, 2022; Edwards, 2018; Rivera, 2012, 2015; Roulin, 2022) have argued as being used to assess *occupational fit*.

The chapter specifically examines a critical incident from the participant observation where this occupational fit was assessed to select the ideal candidate in a job interview at a consultancy.

4.1 Scholarly background – The interplay of fit and bias

The significance of selecting the right candidate for the job has been emphasised in human resource literature (Cross, 2019; Rashmi, 2010; Picardi, 2020). While recruitment is about promoting the job to "attract a diverse pool of qualified prospective candidates" (Picardi, 2020, p. 133), selection is about assessing which of those candidates align with the selection criteria and therefore should be hired for the job.

Generally, each occupational field has its own selection criteria - knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) - that are identified as essential for effective performance (Cross, 2019; Gilch, 2022) and are benchmarks for entry and success in the field (Friedson, 2001). However, the selection process is not only used to assess if the candidate's KSAs align with the job requirements but also if they will be able to meet the demands of the role and if their values are compatible with the organisation, supervisor(s) and peers (Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2011; Roulin, 2022). This combined assessment of personal and environmental factors determines if the candidate and the job are the right *fit* for each other (Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2011).

It is argued that both employers and candidates more specifically assess what Gilch (2022) refers to as the *occupational fit*. This includes judging not just against KSAs but, more importantly, evaluating the candidate's alignment with the occupational identity (Gilch, 2022), which is the embodiment of perceptions about personal behaviours and values of existing practitioners that have become the norm for the occupation (Bhargava & Thenuissen, 2019; Edwards, Gilch, 2022; Rivera, 2012). It is this occupational fit that makes employers decide which candidate should be selected for the job, and for the candidate to either accept or reject the job offer (Gilch, 2022; Roulin, 2022).

A job interview is considered as one of the most prevalent selection methods that provides candidates with a platform to showcase their alignment with the selection criteria and for employers to judge them against it (Rashmi, 2010; Roulin, 2022). It is essentially an interaction (face-to-face, online or via telephone) between candidates and employers (or their representative such as a recruitment agent) that gives them an opportunity to learn more about one another (Picardi, 2020). Since KSAs are usually pre-assessed through curricula vitae, online profiles and/or other cognitive tests, the job interview is focused more on examining occupational fit (De Keere, 2019; Rivera, 2012).

Rivera's (2012) study, comprising interviews with employers as well as participant observation of job interview committees across 120 Professional Service Firms (PSFs) in the US, showed that employers believed KSAs could be taught on the job and therefore behavioural aspects of occupational fit were the deciding factors in selection. Similarly, management consultancy authors (Kubr, 2022; Maister, 2005) emphasised that it was not just the technical skills but personal behaviours and attitude that were more important markers of selection of the ideal candidate. These behaviours may include having appropriate social skills, being passionate and proactive, being flexible and able to withstand pressure, receiving feedback without feeling embarrassed, having personal influence, giving advice without being patronising, observing seniors as role models, being driven towards excellence, being honest and conscientious as well as having the necessary physical and mental health to withstand the demands of the occupation's lifestyle (Kubr, 2002; Maister, 2005; Müller-Bellé, 2020).

In public relations too, practitioners focus on assessing a candidate's occupational fit based on them being allied with client needs, having related industry experience, being flexible and able to work long hours, having emotional intelligence, being friendly and sociable, being entrepreneurial and creative, and having a particular embodiment including specific attire and self-presentation (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2019; Edwards, 2011a; Fitch, 2016; Yeomans, 2019). These images of occupational fit are often projected in the discourse of existing practitioners about their occupational identity, i.e., how they perceive themselves and their practice (Edwards, 2014). These perceptions are reflected in practitioners' descriptions about themselves on consultancy websites (Edwards, 2014), in their interactions with peers and clients (Theunissen & Sissons, 2018), and more specifically in their expectations of the ideal candidate mentioned in job advertisements (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2019) and advocated by industry associations (Fitch, 2016). In Aotearoa New Zealand, as per a report prepared for the *Te Pūtahi Whakakakau Tūmatanui o Aotearoa* the Public Relations Institute of New Zealand (PRINZ), Bhargava and Theunissen (2023b) found that 'team fit' was the second highest (83.46%) criteria in recruitment and selection after skills and capabilities required by the role (91.73%).

Edwards (2018) argued that expectations of fit help verify if the candidate would behave like the elite of the occupation to "serve occupational interests and communicate professionalism to clients" (p. 151). Furthermore, Rivera (2012) found that one of the key reasons for prioritising such identity facets in the larger PSF sector was that consulting work demands long working hours and people prefer to spend this time with those who have similar dispositions (Rivera, 2012). Müller-Bellé (2020) argued that it is usually perceived that "people working in such groups of like-minded people would show a positive working attitude, gaining a certain vibe, and being pleased about the feeling of belonging to a larger group and contributing to its success" (p. 129).

Therefore, in seeking occupational fit, interviewers tend to favour candidates who exhibit the existing occupational identity in their own personal behaviours, values and even lifestyle preferences (De Keere, 2019; Rivera, 2012, 2015). For example, interviewers who perceived their consultancy's identity to be more 'boring' would not see someone who was too passionate about outside-work activities as the right fit (Rivera, 2012).

However, these assessments of similarities are often subjective and seen to lack reliability and validity (Russell & Brannan 2016; Rivera, 2012, 2015; Rashmi, 2010) as the same interview interaction could be interpreted in varied ways depending on the nature of the people involved, time and/or context (Rashmi, 2010). This is further exacerbated by the fact that interviewers do not always follow a structured format and may not have a standard set of questions they ask every candidate (Rashmi, 2010; Roulin, 2022). If the format and questions vary from candidate to candidate, the information thus received is difficult to compare as some candidates may have received a chance to highlight their fit whereas others may not (Roulin, 2022). Since subjective judgements are more challenging to articulate (Russell & Brannan, 2016), people often label them as a gut-feeling (Cross, 2019; Koppman, 2016). In fact, De Keere (2019) claimed that the aim of the job interview was "to test the almost untestable. Those elements of the individual that cannot be written down on a C.V. such as personality, demeanor, ways of communicating, and discourse" (p. 2).

Additionally, some scholars (Ashley & Empson, 2016; Bhargava & Theunissen, 2019; Donnelly & Gamsu, 2019; Edwards, 2011a, 2018; Mavridopoulou & O'Mahoney, 2020) have warned that often such similarities are only possible if the candidates have the same *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1984, 1990), i.e., access to the same socio-cultural environment, as their employers. For example, assessing candidates on behaviours such as "drive, self-presentation, deportment, being well-rounded, feeling at ease with the elite culture, behaving appropriately when interacting with top leaders" (Mavridopoulou & O'Mahoney, 2020, p. 18) may rely on them having been raised, educated and socialised in the upper-middle class echelon with access to a "network to obtain advice and access" (p. 18).

As discussed in the literature review (see Sections 2.2.3 and 2.3.2), in public relations specifically, the embodiment of occupational identity (thereby occupational fit) is perceived to be a white middle-class female (Edwards, 2011a; Fröhlich & Peters, 2007; Fitch, 2016; Wolf, 2016; Yeomans, 2019). This embodiment is also true for Aotearoa New Zealand where 82.5% of the respondents to the industry survey identified as female and 89.38% identified as European (80%) and other European (9.38%), whereas only 10.63% identified as the indigenous New Zealand Māori (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023a, 2023b).

Undoubtedly, occupational fit is laden with subjective bias and may lead to exclusion of those candidates who are capable but lack similar socio-cultural backgrounds (Edwards, 2011a, 2014, 2018; Mavridopoulou & O'Mahoney, 2020). This implies that reliance on occupational fit as a selection criterion is like gatekeeping that inadvertently perpetuates the homogeneity of the occupation and consequently limits diversity (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2019; De Keere, 2019). This is certainly disadvantageous as consultancies are increasingly expected to be more diverse and innovative, as well as work with other multi-cultural teams within large projects (Mavridopoulou & O'Mahoney, 2020).

Unfortunately, it appears that in selecting on the basis of occupational fit, job interviews become interactional sites of gatekeeping as “selecting is eventually also rejecting” (De Keere, 2019, p. 8). In doing so, they afford the power of occupational closure to the employer and make the employer-candidate interview interaction asymmetric (De Keere, 2019).

Interestingly though, the “likeability of a candidate is strongly determined by his or her capacity to topple over the initial power balance and arrive at a situation of more equal co-membership” (De Keere, 2019, p. 6). This is claimed to depend on the candidate’s interactional skills (Rashmi, 2010) and more specifically the ability to correctly interpret the meaning behind the interviewer’s multimodal interaction signals (De Keere, 2019) such as shift in eye contact, facial expressions, etc. Paying attention to such cues helps candidates successfully engage in *other focused* tactics such as *ingratiation* (Roulin, 2022) whereby candidates establish their occupational fit by flattering the interviewers and highlighting similarities. For example, Roulin (2022, pp 85 - 86) explained:

> Let’s imagine that Kareem enters Louis’s office for his interview and immediately notices a shelf populated with a number of small robots. Kareem can logically infer from this collection that Louis likes robots…For example, he might choose to directly mention his passion for robots during the initial rapport building phase of the interview, in the hope that Louis will initiate some small talk around that topic, which might create a positive initial impression. Or, Kareem could strategically use his robot competition experience when answering a question later on in the interview. Furthermore, Kareem could try to praise the interviewer (e.g., by stressing his admiration of Louis’s impressive robot collection) or conform with his opinion (e.g., by agreeing with Louis’s statements that robots are the future of engineering).

De Keere (2019) conceived “in that sense, the job interview is a well-orchestrated interaction ritual that asks from the job seeker a performance that allows emotional energy to flow freely” (p. 29).

Unfortunately, in public relations scholarship specifically, little has been written about the interactions between practitioners (Theunissen & Sissons, 2018), let alone in the context of assessing occupational fit in a job interview. The findings from the current study discussed in the sections below attempt to address this gap by examining the perceived occupational fit for the consultancy sector and sharing an example of how this is currently assessed in the interactional ritual of the job interview.

4.2 Who is fit to be a public relations consultant in New Zealand?

This section provides an overview of the projections of occupational identity gathered from the discourse of consultants who were interviewed and observed for this study. It shares excerpts of interviews where they articulated their own identity and values, what they perceived of others in the consultancy sector, and what they expected from those they hired.

4.2.1 Images of self – *ethical people, doing good work and living a full life*

There were 16 consultants who participated in this study (eight women and eight men) and only one of them, Aroha[4], was Māori. While the consultants were drawn based on convenience sampling, the selection is still a fair representation of the lack of ethnic diversity in New Zealand's public relations occupation and aligns with the findings of the PRINZ report (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023a, 2023b).

Five consultants had emigrated to New Zealand (three from the US and two from the UK), while four others had also worked overseas in places such as the UK, Australia, Southeast Asia and mainland Europe. There was a conspicuous overrepresentation of Western countries. Hugh, who had worked for a while in Southeast Asia, had done so in a multinational communication company. It may be plausible that overseas experience was valued only if gained in the West or at a multinational organisation.

Furthermore, all consultants had some form of university education, although only five (of 16) had any training specifically in public relations and communication management. Others had degrees in a range of disciplines, including journalism, English literature and language, law and politics, business administration, special education, philosophy, and arts. Some of the more senior consultants acknowledged that there were no options for public relations at the university level when they did their degree and therefore, they had to learn on the job and/or apply transferable skills gained from other disciplines. This could perhaps be one of the reasons why consultants tend to believe that KSAs could be taught on the job (see 4.1) and therefore specialised education was not a prerequisite for entry into consulting (Rivera, 2012). Contrastingly, in the 2023 PRINZ report, 46.62% respondents rated public relations education and skills as a key

[4] To protect their privacy, all participants have been cited using pseudonyms.

criterion for entry. In saying so, it was still strikingly below ‘team fit’ at 83.46% and experience at 72.18% (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023b).

Most of the consultants had worked in other occupations such as in journalism (9), marketing (3), events (1), entertainment (1) and teaching (1). It appears that there was only one consultant who both studied and then worked in public relations right from the outset, whereas all the others moved to public relations from other disciplines or simply ‘fell into it’ as that was the only job available. Interestingly, those who moved from journalism were often driven by their discontent with the profession and assumed that they could still apply their writing skills in public relations. In that sense, it becomes evident that *being able to write well* was seen as important in public relations and former journalists were assumed to possess this transferable skill. The following comment encapsulates this sentiment:

> While it [Journalism was] was great, I found I couldn’t do it forever. It’s very emotionally draining. I once knocked on the door of a man who had had four members of a family killed in an accident the night before and we were there to get some comment from him on the story and it was at eight in the morning. It was emotionally torturous and quite combative. You always have people who are unhappy with you, both within and without the organisation and it’s a very defensive kind of industry in some ways. I could see the writing on the wall that it’s not as big an industry as it was. I didn’t think it was my thing going forward. I still love the writing, I love the storytelling, I just get to do it in a different way. (Madison)

Consultants were attracted to public relations because they liked *working with people* and perceived that they would get the opportunity to do so in public relations. Here, what seemed to work in favour of former journalists was their existing media network. One of the consultants recalled:

> What I loved about journalism was meeting people. I didn’t get a thrill out of getting a front-page lead but for all my colleagues that was the thing – they would kill their grandma to get a front-page lead and I didn’t care. So, I knew early on that it wasn’t forever and I wasn’t that kind of a journalist. But what triggered for me was a) I had that background and b) I thought I like meeting people. (Hugh)

Hugh acknowledged that even when he was a journalist, he “put in a lot of work in the networks, so it is kind of a key part of what I give [to clients as a public relations consultant]”. This aligns with Edwards’ (2011a) argument that being sociable and having a good network, i.e., requisite social capital, was desirable in public relations.

Furthermore, participants indicated that they preferred being a consultant to working for in-house public relations. In fact, many chose consulting over other disciplines or in-house work as they valued a more flexible lifestyle. This was especially true for the female participants who were driven towards it due to maternity and other familial responsibilities or simply for the want of a better work-life balance. These comments reflect the same:

> I realised I didn't want to go back to full time work [after having a child] in an office environment working 40 hours a week, leave kids in day-care and that sort of thing. (Hailey)

> For most women of my time, even if you were going to return to work [after having a child], they made it so difficult for people to come back to work, it was virtually impossible. The expectations were such that there was no flexibility at all…I wanted to be able to be in a position where I could manage both the time for my family and my working life as well. The best way of doing that was setting up something on my own… I didn't want to apologise for looking after my child, looking after my family. My mother was really unwell. So, you know, those were the considerations. So, I set up my own consultancy, and that was 27 years ago. (Gracie)

> What's really nice is that I work from home…I've become really conscious and aware that if I work really really hard for five or six hours a day, that's all I really need to do, and rest is really nice. I have a beautiful garden and it's important that I have the chance to enjoy my life. (Karen)

The male consultants also valued work-life balance and wanted to only be part of a consultancy that allowed for it.

> I really do get a lot of work-life balance. I know not all consultancies are like this one where we're all parents. We all have kids, and we want to spend time with them. (Liam)

Participants who were consultancy owners wanted to provide a family-focussed and supportive environment to their employees as that's what they valued themselves.

> …then there are the more emotional rewards like when you see an employee prepared to take on a mortgage. They're confident enough and they see themselves as having a reliable support. They're placing quite a bit of trust in their employer; it's fulfilling in a way that as a business owner you are creating something that allows them to create their financials and family. So, that's nice. Likewise, when you see employees celebrate like getting engaged or married or whatever, you feel that they're enjoying their life celebrating these things while

> being part of this. You feel like you're creating something [consultancy culture] that allows people to fulfil their life goals. (Ethan)

> It is very family oriented. We have a whānau day, which is when people are encouraged to bring a family or friend to enjoy lunch with us. It is just to encourage seeing another side to the colleague you sit next to every day, which helps break down barriers. So, it's very family focussed and supportive. I'd say those are the two most key things for us. (Demi)

Additionally, consultants voiced that they valued having a lifestyle where the work environment itself was not distressing but fun, engaging, and full of variety.

> We actually schedule fun. We have a quarterly thing where we have some goals that we set for ourselves. We are not too incredibly stretched. We are talking about doing cheese making this July. (Charlotte)

> It is ever changing, and I never get bored. I don't necessarily like just working on one client or one type of activity…I like being able to use a whole variety of different skills over a week rather than it just being media management or one aspect of what we do. (Madison)

> I like clients that I can have some fun with, I really don't just want to work with a client because they have a big brand. I've worked with really big organisations at an international level and sometimes it's really hard work…there's some awful things that go on in big brands. I want to work with people that I can have fun with, do stuff that interests me and work that fits what I can do for them, and that they value me. (Hugh)

> Motivation has always been to do some good work, make some money, and have some fun. Yeah, because I can't sustain the doing good without making the money…and having some fun is important, because otherwise it's all just too much. (Gracie)

The values expressed above are similar to what has been described in earlier scholarship (Fröhlich & Peters, 2007; Tsetsura, 2011; Yeomans, 2019) where public relations consulting was preferred for its variety of tasks and clients and had a fun atmosphere. This could imply that if consultants were to select candidates based on this image of occupational fit, they would likely be impressed with those who had similar ideas of work. However, it must be noted that consultants also included *making money* or *being secure financially* as part of the equation, which highlights the entrepreneurial nature of consulting that differentiates it from in-house work. One of the consultants, Oliver, remarked, "I like the business of running a business".

Consultants also saw themselves as professionals who were strategic and good at providing expert advice (see chapter five for more on advice and expertise).

> The other thing I enjoy about PR consulting is the strategic side of it. Getting to know a business or a project where I can make a contribution at a reasonable senior sort of strategic level. (Nathan)

> It's that professionalism I think that happens in a consultancy setting because that is the only thing you are focused on is the public relations toolkit and how to develop it further and make it unique to your agency and have a point of difference. (Demi)

Furthermore, consultants emphasised that they valued righteousness and wanted to make a positive difference through their work.

> We love working on projects that are making a difference. That is our ethos as an agency. (Charlotte)

> I guess I care about the work I do. We were potentially approached by someone who wants to mine iron sands and we said no thanks. I couldn't do that. I'm an immigrant, I really do love this nation and I don't want to screw up the seabed, I like it the way it is. (Liam)

> For me it's really important to absolutely do the right thing all the time even if it goes outside what the client originally thinks they needed or wanted. (Aroha)

> I think PR people are often perceived as spin doctors and it's not something that's ever sat with me particularly well. If I ever felt that was the job, then I wouldn't be doing it. It's important to be honest, upfront, and transparent. (Madison)

> In terms of values, it's the core stuff of being ethical, honest, and trustworthy. (Hugh)

This contrasts with the existing stereotypical portrayal of consultants as being fluffy and morally ambiguous (Grandien, 2017). However, Kantola (2016) postulated that often consultants projected themselves as ethical but worked in practices such as lobbying that were not always transparent. Given that participants of this study claimed to refuse work that challenged their integrity and values implies that consultants in New Zealand (or at least those who participated in this study) care about ethical practice. What is important to note, though, is what these consultants perceived about others in the occupation and how that discourse reaffirmed existing stereotypes about occupational identity and, consequently, fit.

4.2.2 Perceptions of others – *fluffy white middle-class females in high heels*

Participants' perceptions of a typical public relations consultant drew a stark contrast with how they saw themselves. Their descriptions of others in the field created an embodiment of a white middle-class female who dressed well but did not have any expertise, and therefore perpetuated the existing stereotype that exists in the Western world (Edwards, 2018; Fröhlich & Peters, 2007; Tsetsura, 2011; Yeomans, 2019).

> A typical PR consultant in Auckland is inevitably a woman, a well-dressed, quite trendy woman who is up with the play, up with the times and who does things well. But I'm not sure if they deliver on level of expertise that their client can't get elsewhere, to be honest. Sounds terrible, doesn't it? [laughs]. (Madison)

> Perception would be that you're well dressed, really confident and cute [laughs]. (Charlotte)

Consultants felt that there were *other* consultancies, especially the larger ones, that hired young women who fit this stereotype and felt that it was a disservice to their occupation.

> It's coming from a few other agencies that really do prance around girls with clipboards and I have heard a few times [from clients] that 'if I see another kid with a clipboard, with blonde hair, and if they parade four of them in front of me, I swear to you…'. Now that's not someone you want to be giving you advice. If you have the right credentials and education, it doesn't matter what you look like but there's a lot of people that do hire a lot of kids for various reasons and it works sometimes. (Liam)

> My wife works for a not-for-profit and they've been working with a PR agency recommended by the sponsors and that agency has lived up to every single stereotype. They've delivered bugger all for money. She's found herself dealing, for the most part, with junior women who fulfil the PR agency stereotype and it's been a very negative experience. (Nathan)

> It [perception] would be predominantly white middle-class background. It would be tertiary qualified. I'm thinking big consultancies here—that's where there will be a big level of junior and mid-level PR people. So, it's an entry level issue and then becomes like a pyramid. (Hugh)

According to the female consultants, this stereotype was etched in the minds of the clients and therefore they had certain assumptions about the appearance and attire of consultants. How clients reacted to consultants who mismatched their perceptions was dependent on the sector they worked in. For example, corporate clients allegedly preferred the stereotypical *slick* consultant (regardless of gender) whereas those in the infrastructure sector were happier if you were not like the stereotype. One of the consultants, Charlotte, commented on not being considered for crisis communication work by their district health board and wondered if perhaps they did not look as if they could deliver *serious work*.

> There's something about people [client representatives] that they expect you to look slick. We have reached a point in the game where we are expected to look the part…it's part of it whether you like it or not. The issue comes when peers look the part but don't deliver. That's not good for the industry. Then it's just a pretty face and no substance. (Charlotte)

Another female consultant, Madison, felt that the focus on self-presentation was frivolous.

> I'm much more casual than what I used to be, but it depends on who I'm going to see. Depends on the client, still needs to be tidy enough for a client to come here…the emphasis on dress is a disservice to the expertise. We set-up ourselves up to be judged, which if we want to be seen as spin doctors is fine, but if we want to be taken seriously for a seat at the top table then appear differently. (Madison)

Meanwhile, Aroha, claimed that her clients were "pleasantly surprised" that she wasn't the archetypical white blonde in high heels.

> I've actually had pretty much everybody [client representatives] when I meet them face-to-face being pleasantly surprised. When they see my name, they obviously think 'OK she's hopefully part Māori' but when they see you it's different to see someone who is not necessarily white or middle-aged or there's definitely a perception that you're going to look a particular way. They're pleasantly surprised because maybe they value diversity a bit more than what we expect, or they like to see something different… Then working together, it doesn't take long for them to figure out that 'she knows what she's doing' and they value it and listen to you and it's great but yeah the initial surprise is quite funny. (Aroha)

Hall (1996) has argued that identity is not just who one claims to be but also images of the other that one rejects: "throughout their careers, identities can function as points of identification and attachment only because of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render 'outside', abjected" (p. 7). Therefore, in contrasting themselves from the stereotypical occupational identity of the *PR girl* (Fröhlich & Peters, 2007), female consultants appear to be actively managing their own impressions (Goffman, 1959) and projecting themselves as being less fluffy. It appears that what matters here is how their self-presentation, and therefore occupational identity, is perceived by the clients and whether it obstructs or aids their ability to exert influence. This further implies that the idea of occupational fit is also influenced by the clients of the consultancy.

Consultants also believed that portrayals in popular culture had helped perpetuate some of these stereotypes about consultants and their work.

> When I think of people that I've worked with who are successful and effective, they are so contrary to the caricature of a PR consultant. By and large, I think they all have a great degree of soft skills, are empathetic and read people well…that's certainly not the classic TV caricature. (Ethan)

> We've got so many issues with perception. Everyone thinks we're like Sex and the City. That show ruined us. The way every student comes in with a resume and says, 'I want to do fashion PR'…I'm like 'you didn't even read our website, did you?'. (Liam)

These sentiments confirm the issues raised by scholars (Dennison, 2012; Lambert & White, 2012; Miller, 1999; Nairn & Bhargava, 2021; Yoon & Black, 2007) who have lamented about how public relations practitioners are often misrepresented in popular culture as fashionable and unscrupulous. Research (Bowen, 2003, 2009; Dennison, 2012) has already shown that such portrayals can create and reinforce a stereotypical perception and cause those who don't see themselves as being represented by it to self-select themselves out of studying or practising public relations.

Interestingly, as previously observed by Bhargava and Theunissen (2019), consultants did not reflect on the possibility that their discourse about other consultants and their expectations from recruits could *also* contribute to perceptions of occupational identity and in doing so define who was fit or unfit for the occupation.

4.2.3 Expectations from entrants – *be good with words, people, and pressure!*

In articulating the Knowledge, Skills and Abilities (KSAs) expected from consultants, participants of this study emphasised the importance of being a good writer.

> I think pretty much anyone hired by us has to be a good writer, full stop. At the end of the day writing really matters in PR firms and if you're not a good writer you're not going to sustain. We cannot hire bad writers. (Julia)

> They need to get into a role where they can keep writing. It's such a critical skill that they're developing. Can't stress that enough. Even in this day and age, the writing is absolutely critical. (Demi)

> Writing is the basic bedrock of everything we do. If you can't write and you can't think, this job isn't for you. It has to be about writing. It doesn't matter whatever cool groovy strategies you come with, you still have to execute and that involves word 99 times out of 100, even if it's an infographic. (John)

One of the consultancy owners (Demi) felt that while writing was important, consultants also needed to be good at verbal communication.

> So, they have to develop their critical thinking. They have got to be able to do it orally and in a written format, but the written thing gets thrashed in a certain format but the oral presentation I don't know if that is as strong as it could be. (Demi)

These comments confirm Bhargava and Theunissen's (2019) finding that written and verbal communication skills were the most valued KSAs, as judged by an examination of public relations job advertisements, in New Zealand.

Additionally, consultants also specified that they expected their recruits to be strategic thinkers:

> It's a combination of hard and soft skills. So, all the hard skills that you need – be analytical, think strategically. All those things. (Ethan)

> I would like to say that the common thread is that you need to be a strategic thinker. (Julia)

> Brains! The smarter you are and the better you are at discerning complicated things, the further you'll go. (Liam)

These comments differ from Bhargava and Theunissen's (2019) study that showed being strategic was amongst the least mentioned skills in entry-level job advertisements. However, the findings of the current study align with the Global Capabilities Framework (Global Alliance, n.d.) wherein it is advocated that practitioners must have strategic skills. It may therefore be deduced that while consultants have specific expectations from candidates, these are not necessarily translating into their job advertisements, especially at the entry level.

Surprisingly, while all the participants of this study had university qualifications themselves, they did not mention specialised knowledge and training as a core requisite. In fact, one consultant stated that "the rest of the stuff, what marks they got, what subjects they studied is all irrelevant. I'll be looking for the other stuff and trade off all that other stuff with those kind of attributes" (Hugh). This could perhaps be because they themselves have had training and work experience in areas other than public relations and see skills needed in the occupation as being easily transferrable from other disciplines (see Section 4.2.1). Participants mostly mentioned behavioural attributes as being important determinants of who was *fit* to be a public relations consultant. Of these, a key attribute was someone who was proactive and able to get the work done under pressure and/or in the absence of supervision:

> Just getting stuck-in and doing what needs to be done to get the stuff done and anything to get the job done and not worrying about 'oh I'm not going to do that'. I'll happily go and talk to a local board executive but then I'll be at an event at five in the morning putting up flags…you need to be self-motivated. You can't be an employee type person who comes along in a consultancy unless you're running it. (Hailey)

> For me you look for someone who has a work ethic, who can operate under pressure. Someone who's got initiative, someone who can figure out a problem and not ask me every five seconds what to do, so that self-starting ability. (Hugh)

> I think my management style was to have people who could pretty much get on and just do it. So, they had to be pretty independent and pretty capable. (Chris)

Statements like the above are reminiscent of Bhargava and Theunissen's (2019) findings that *proactiveness* was one of the desirable behaviours that defined occupational fit in public relations. It does, however, raise the question if consultants were either time-poor, unable to provide structured training, or perhaps even lacking in training and supervision skills.

Another behavioural trait cited as being crucial for consultants was being proficient in interacting with people, especially clients and senior consultants:

> I know lots of practitioners who are introverted but they need to be reasonably extroverted because it's PR and it's a people-facing role…you've got to be comfortable dealing with people. (Julia)

> I guess how to report to people. So, something that I think doesn't happen quite so much is that understanding of political nous, diplomacy how to navigate different personality types and I think there's some discovery on the type of person you are and more emphasis on how to relate with others. (Demi)

> I guess being in an agency, it's a special kind of a person, as they need to be really good at relating with people, they need to have that demeanour with clients…I've probably made one bad hire in my time and that person had some cringe-worthy moments with clients. I guess I hire people who I feel good about modelling my behaviour in front of a client. (Charlotte)

> [Must have] Confidence—an ability to not get overwhelmed by people who are older than you. When you are young and you know that they know more than you but still just feel confident enough to own a little pocket of excellence which is what you get paid for as a PR consultant. (Oliver)

> Linked with this trait was their ability to be sociable enough to be "well-connected" (Chris).

> Just being able to pick up the phone and say, 'oh do you know someone at Air New Zealand?' and then you get to have a conversation with the right person. I wish I had learnt that earlier on and that's what I tell my team. I wish I had learnt the value of developing a robust and valuable network early on in my career. (Oliver)

> For the work that we do, it's a combination of both what you know and who you know. But it's not in context of moving up or moving on but balancing out those connections so that you can help others build the relationships they need. (Gracie)

> Not just from a networking perspective, but it's about relationships. What we do is all about relationships. We have to maintain that. (Karen)

It appears that consultants' networks are seen as their social capital, that can be drawn from to gain more clients and/or seek favours for existing ones. This implies that a consultant who can help gain, retain, and grow a consultancy's client-base is desirable. Therefore, amplifying the notion that *occupational fit*, to some extent at least, is dependent on the client.

> What my clients really value in my work is my network. (Hugh)

> The work we are getting is through our own direct networks…Colleen [Julia's partner in the consultancy] is a better networker than me. She's much more social. So, we have agreed that she is to be more strongly focused on business development. (Julia)

Furthermore, participants also expected candidates to have the nous to adapt their behaviour according to the clientele.

> Soft skills are needed to suit our particular client environment, and, in our case, we have developers and artists…so to join our extended team you've got to be accepting of a broader base of personality types and conversations skewed towards technology…every agency is going to be very different and that's the DNA of our one. (Ethan)

As discussed earlier in this chapter (see Section 4.2.1), it is evident that being *good with people* is desirable in a public relations consultant. While participants in this study did not necessarily articulate it as such, it may be argued that this behavioural trait is not so much about *being sociable* but rather about *having interpersonal skills* that can help consultants better manage the interactional needs of core relationships, for example those with colleagues and clients (Theunissen & Sissons, 2018).

What is interesting to note is that while *being sociable* may be a behaviour ingrained because of a person's personality and/or socio-cultural circumstances (Edwards, 2011a), interpersonal skills can be both learned and managed (Hargie, 2017). This implies that perhaps a more nuanced discourse about the value of interpersonal skills is needed in public relations to shift focus from *who you are* to *what you can do*, i.e., from identity to capability. Unfortunately, there is limited scholarship examining how public relations consultants interact with clients and each other (Theunissen & Sissons, 2018). The following section hopefully addresses this gap by examining a consultant's interaction with a prospective colleague during a job interview.

4.3 Interaction one – a recruitment interview

One of the key participants in this study, John, was in the process of interviewing candidates to replace his account manager, Stan, who was leaving the consultancy in two weeks' time (see Section 7.2). John, therefore, needed to hire someone and was looking for a contractor who could work at least 50 hours a month for their consultancy.

Akin to what has been highlighted earlier in this chapter about desirable KSAs and behavioural traits, John was also looking for a consultant who was a good writer and proactive. He wanted to select a candidate who could "assume the reins from day one".

> In this instance, not only competence across the discipline [but also] social and ad management. They've got to be interested in writing but most of all—are they proactive, do they want work? (John)

John explained that he wanted a candidate who had the skills to serve his consultancy's existing client business. He acknowledged that once a consultant left, it became necessary to hire someone with similar or broader skills and behaviours to retain clientele.

> When I was first employing someone, it was frightening. Do you employ somebody and then hope the work comes or at what point does the workload get so full that you need to employ them, and I took the decision then that you must employ somebody and then get the work and have fun. Plus, if the person is good, you're recruiting on attitude more than anything else, then work develops around that person and skill set as well and that is challenging when they leave because Stan has a great skill set in ad management and so I need someone now to maintain those client relationships.

This aligns with the discussion in Section 4.2.2 where it was posited that a candidate's occupational fit was reliant on the consultancy's clientele.

While John was concerned about attracting and retaining talent, he felt his consultancy had a lot to offer as a place of work:

> I like to think or hope that we offer people really great opportunities, you can see the range of activities going on here, it's varied, everyone gets to do everything, there's a strong educational learning opportunity as well as the fun.

Bhargava and Theunissen (2019) highlighted that public relations employers either portrayed their organisations as being business-like by referring to opportunities for learning and growth or presented themselves as supportive places of fun. It is interesting to note that John mentioned both, with perhaps a bit more emphasis on being business-like. His above comment also relates to the finding of existing studies (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2019; Engstrom et al., 2017) that organisations tend to use superlatives, such as ‘great’ and ‘strong’, to create unrealistic expectations and attract overachieving candidates.

Surprisingly, John did not explicitly mention being sociable or having networks as a requisite skill, something that appeared to be commonplace (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2019; Edwards, 2018; Maister, 2005; Müller-Bellé, 2020) in recruitment and selection discourse (as discussed in Sections 4.1 and 4.2).

On the day of the critical incident discussed further in this chapter, John interviewed two candidates; both were women. He was joined by his wife Elaine, who does not work with them as a consultant, but is a co-director in their consultancy business and in this case was involved in the recruitment and selection process.

Elaine shared John’s opinion that attitude was a key criterion to be assessed in the interviews. She believed that the candidate’s mindset and work ethic should be to “say yes to things and get it done”.

John chaired the interviews and began by sharing a consultancy presentation explaining their range of work, nature of clients, approach to public relations and expectations from the role. This was followed by a conversation with the candidates about their skills, interests, previous experience, etc. John stressed that the interview process was quite “relaxed”. For him, this informal style of interviewing was a way to “introduce us [consultancy], find out more about you [candidate] and just understand how it fits, see how it would work”. While he preferred this informal style, scholarship on job interviews suggested that a more structured format was necessary for interviews to be effective in assessing candidates individually and drawing valid comparisons between them (Cross, 2019; Rashmi, 2010; Roulin, 2022).

John was not convinced about the first candidate they interviewed. He felt that she was essentially skilled at writing. While John valued writing, he contemplated that he wanted a consultant who could replace or broaden Stan’s skillset, which included social and digital communication. Since the first candidate was not very comfortable in that space, she did not convince John as being someone who could effectively replace Stan. The second candidate, Serena, had experience in this area and therefore appeared to be more apt as Stan's replacement. While comparing the candidates to Stan may have been instrumental in making the decision, Cross (2019) has labelled this as *contrast error* and warned that such a comparison often "artificially inflates or deflates the evaluation of the candidate" and that "each candidate should be judged independently" (p. 159).

Having said that, what may have been instrumental in selecting the second candidate, beyond comparison to Stan, was her ethnic network (see Section 4.3.2) and attitude towards flexibility (see Section 4.3.3).

4.3.1 Scene setting

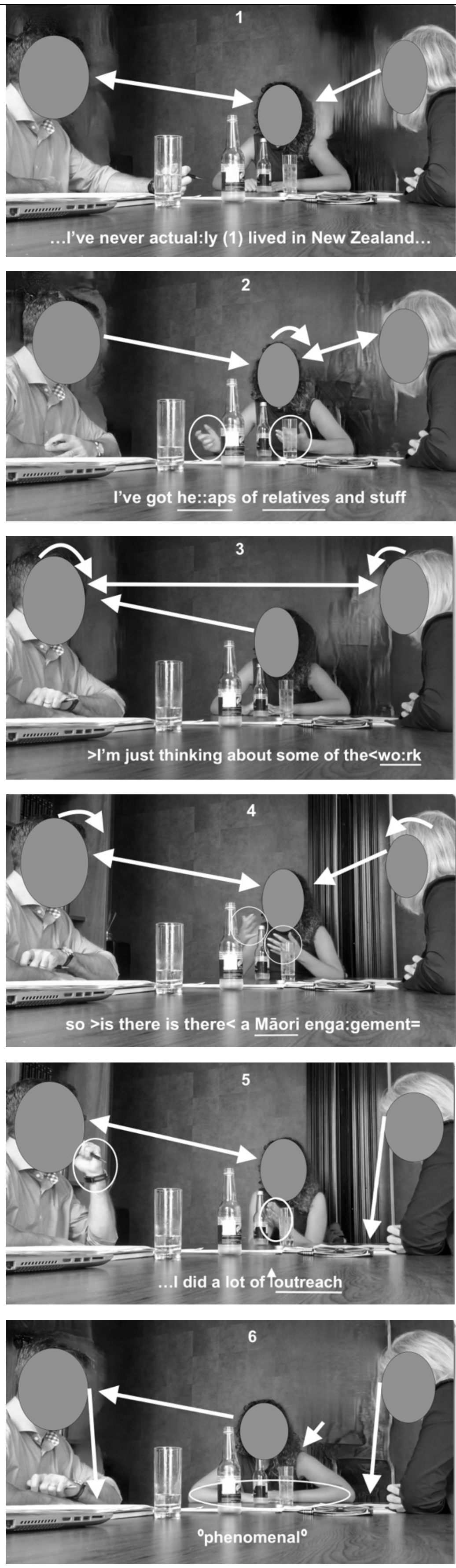
The second candidate, Serena, appeared to be prepared for the interview. She had a website with all her information on it, which she had already shared with Elaine and John. She also mentioned that she had read the documents about the consultancy, emailed to her prior to the interview, "quite thoroughly". In explaining her background, Serena mentioned that she had trained as a journalist and worked in news media for four years before "turning to the dark side". Referring to public relations as the 'dark side' is commonplace among journalists and indicative of a stereotypical perception of the practice being unethical (Macnamara, 2015). Serena, then went on to explain her experience in writing, strategic digital campaigns and social media content creation. She mentioned that her experience was mostly gathered overseas and that she had worked with some prestigious clients, something that is valued in the public relations consultancy sector (Edwards, 2011).

The critical incident from the interview, presented in Figure 3, took place when John asked Serena what drew her back to New Zealand and found out that she was Māori (indigenous people of New Zealand). This resonated with John as he was, at that time, working on a project which included communication and engagement with a particular iwi[5].

[5] The term iwi in te reo Māori (Māori language) refers to "a large group of people descended from a common ancestor and associated with a distinct territory." (Te Aka Māori Dictionary, n.d.).

Figure 3: Transcript of interaction 1 - a recruitment interview

1. S: so (.6) I'm *Māori* (.2) my dad's *Māori*
2. *ah* I've never actual:ly (1) lived in New
3. Zealand (.9) >I was born in< Australia: and:
4. never really connected with my own
5. culture. my ro:ots.
6. E: hmm yeah
7. S: and I really felt the need to ↑come back
8. here and connect with them
9. E: yeah
10. S: I've got he::aps of relatives and stuff
11. E: yeah (.7) how do you ↑find it?
12. S: I love it (1.1) yeah I absolutely love it
13. E: yeah
14. J: that's pretty cool (.2) >I'm just thinking
15. about some of the< wo:rk we've got
16. because a lot of the work w:e do is about
17. connecting people to the land and creating
18. opportunities to see how ((indistinct)) uh:m
19. we've got a large project that's kicking off
20. next month which is EXACTLY about that.
21. there's going to be a ((indistinct)) to it
22. S: so >is there is there< a *Māori*
23. enga:gement=
24. J: =been underway for a little while
25. S: hm::m I have a lot of connections in the
26. *Māori* community here ((indistinct)) in my
27. ↑previous role I did a lot of ↑outreach to
28. the different (.8) *Māori* communities that
29. ((indistinct)) so I might be able to leverage
30. that
31. J: °phenomenal°



4.3.2 Having personal networks is 'phenomenal'

The interviewers, John and Elaine, and the candidate, Serena, were sitting in close proximity to each other at the table in what could be seen as a triangle formation. Serena's eyes, head and torso were aligned with John, as opposed to Elaine (see Figure 3, image 1). Serena's gaze and posture, therefore, conveyed that her attention and receptivity were focused more towards John (Müller et al., 2013; Heath, 1984). She appeared to be listening intently, so she could promptly respond and keep the conversation flowing (Ford & Stickle, 2012). This shows that while there were three of them present, John and Serena were having what Goffman (1963) called a 'focussed interaction'. This is perhaps because, so far, John had been doing the most talking. It is also possible that even though Elaine was part of the selection process, Serena knew that she would be working with and reporting directly to John and so was appealing to his perceived status and authority (Holmes & Stubbe, 2015). Interestingly, all three of them were leaning forward, with John and Elaine leaning towards Serena. This posture projects their favourable feelings of openness, warmth and liking for Serena (Mehrabian, 1968, 1969), indicative of the interview going well. On her part and throughout this extract, Serena could be seen sharing a positive rapport with them as her arms appeared to *mirror* or move and rest in symmetrical alignment, i.e., both arms being in "identical positions" (Harrigan et al., 1985, p. 100). Harrigan (1985) found that such mirroring was an indicator of positive sentiment and stronger rapport.

At the start of this extract, John asked Serena what drew her to New Zealand. This appears to be an opening statement (Goffman, 1981), made with the intention of initiating a conversation that might carry on "beyond the hoped-for reply" (p.49). This approach was consistent with John's idea of keeping interviews informal and conversational (see quotes in Section 4.3).

Serena's answer to John began with the discourse marker 'so', followed by a pause of .6 seconds (line 1), which could mean that she was collecting her thoughts to say something important (Jefferson, 1988; Schiffrin, 1987). She then announced, "I'm *Māori"* (line 1), and paused again for .2 seconds. Goffman (1981) called such an utterance a "reference response" (p. 50), a statement preceding *the actual response to* a question. Usually, such statements are used to get listeners to pay attention to information the speaker was about to convey next (Goffman, 1981). Serena's emphasis on the word 'Māori' suggests that she was not only about to say something important, but that it was about her being Māori.

She then rushed her reference to being born in Australia (see Figure 3, line 3) and stressed the word ‘culture’ (see Figure 3, line 5). This reveals that Serena perhaps did not want them to focus on her Australian life but on the fact that she had returned to New Zealand to connect with her culture. This could imply that she wanted to claim her Māori roots and appear as being aware of the local context.

From this point onwards, Elaine began employing backchannels such as “hmm yeah” (line 6) and “yeah” (see Figure 3, lines 9, 11, 13). These verbal cues could have been Elaine’s way of showing affiliation and reassuring Serena that she was being heard, understood, and agreed with (Kjellmer, 2009). John in comparison, did not interrupt Serena’s talk. This is consistent with existing scholarship (Holmes, 2006; Kjellmer, 2009) that women employ more backchannels than men to provide supportive feedback and play the role of a facilitator in interactions. Interestingly, Elaine’s first utterance of “hmm yeah” makes Serena cognizant of her presence as Serena turns her head to look at Elaine, while continuing with her story (see Figure 3, image 2). This shows that backchannels can also be employed as a discourse device to get attention from the speaker (Holmes, 2006; Kjellmer, 2009).

Serena stressed that she had “he::aps of relatives” (see Figure 3, line 10), lengthening the vowels in ‘heaps’, to mark emphasis (Akinnaso & Ajirotutu, 1982) on the number of family members she had. Naim et al. (2018) referred to terms like ‘heaps’ as quantifiers and claimed that candidates who used them were perceived more favourably by their interviewers.

It certainly appeared to appeal to John, who remarked that he was thinking about some of the work his consultancy was about to begin “which is EXACTLY about that” (see Figure 3, lines 14 – 20). It may be assumed that John’s loud emphasis on ‘exactly’ projected that he perceived Serena’s Māori connections to be an exact fit with his work. In saying so, John turned and exchanged a long mutual glance with Elaine (see Figure 3, image 3) or formed what Goffman (1963) called “an eye-to-eye ecological huddle” between known participants (p. 97). Such a non-verbal exchange is known to heighten the relevance of the situation and create an opportunity “to monitor one another’s mutual perceivings” (Goffman, 1963, p. 97). This might imply that in that moment (see Figure 3, image 3) John and Elaine, by virtue of knowing each other well, had judged each other’s perspective on Serena having access to an established Māori network.

However, Serena interrupted their mutual exchange by explicitly asking John if their work had a Māori engagement component (see Figure 3, lines 22 – 23), elongating the word 'engagement' to highlight its importance (Akinnaso & Ajirotutu, 1982). She also raised and rotated her hands in the air (see Figure 3, image 4) to perform a metaphoric gesture demonstrating the idea of the process (McNeill, 1992) of engagement. She was further observed peppering her talk with the quantifier "a lot of" (see Figure 3, lines 25 and 27), reiterating how many connections she had in the Māori community and that she *did "↑<u>outreach</u>"* (see Figure 3, line 27) in a previous role, something she could leverage for John (line 29). When stressing the word 'outreach', Serena clasped her hands together (see Figure 3, image 5) in an iconic gesture of pointing ahead (McNeill, 1992). Her gesture symbolised extending outwards (Kendon, 2004). Here, Serena can be seen displaying a co-expressive "artful use of both stress and hand gestures" (Ford & Stickle, 2012, p. 17). This framing of her Māori outreach experience could be her effort in self-presentation as a valuable employee (Barrick et al., 2009).

At this point (see Figure 3, image 5) John too raised his hand and rested it on his chin to show heightened processing (Barroso et al., 1978) of what Serena was saying. He then softly uttered °phenomenal° (see Figure 3, line 31, image 6). This favourable assessment marked closure of the topic (Heritage, 1984; Schegloff, 2007) and indicated pivoting into a "disjunctive matter which eventually emerges as the new question" (Button, 1992, p. 225). Additionally, when uttering 'phenomenal', John began looking down at his notes. Elaine had already been doing the same. Their withdrawal of eye contact from Serena appeared to imply the end of this part of the interaction (Goffman, 1963) and perhaps their acceptance of a desirable response (Button, 1992) to John's initial question.

The above findings reinforce that eye contact, posture, gesture, word-choices and speaking style are important cues in an interview setting *(*Acarturk et al., 2021; Akinnaso & Ajirotutu, 1982; Harrigan et al., 1985; Naim et al., 2018*)* often carrying "all kinds of implications and meanings" (Goffman, 1981, p. 1). While all speakers in a job interview use multimodal displays to convey their thoughts, a prolonged mutual glance (Goffman, 1981) between the interviewers might be a point of significance for their decision-making. Therefore, the mutual eye contact between the interviewers in image three (when John referred to his upcoming work aligning with Serena's Māori connections) may be assumed to be a crucial point in assessing Serena as a desirable candidate. It may as well be treated as the moment in which Serena's ethnic network was perceived as useful in supporting John's client work, and thereby Serena assessed as having occupational fit.

This further shows that even though John did not explicitly mention in the job interviews (or in interviews with the researcher) that he expected the candidates to have networks, he certainly valued that Serena had them. This corroborates the findings of the researcher's interviews with other participants who emphasised the importance of a consultant's networks (see Sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.3), especially in gaining new clients or supporting existing ones.

According to Bourdieu (1986), when social capital (in the form of networks) was valued by a practice, it converted into 'symbolic capital'. Members of the practice, in this case Serena, who possessed such symbolic capital could claim symbolic power and use it to further their positions (Bourdieu, 1986). This adds to earlier public relations research by Edwards (2011a) who wrote that networks "lend their owners power and influence" (p. 64) and the "access to more opportunities, more quickly" (p.65). In saying so, Edwards (2011a) posited that the symbolic capital of public relations was also dependent on the wider social context.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, networking is highly valued because of the notion that people in the country have only "two degrees of separation" (Robert Walters, n.d.), i.e., you are on average only two steps away from another by way of introduction. Business and employment advice often focuses on the benefits of networking and relationship building (Robert Walters, n.d.; Seek, n.d.). Additionally, the Māori worldview supports the role of *whānau* (family) as well as extended family networks which are culturally supported, and developed, in accordance with the principles of *Te Tiriti o Waitangi*[6] (Foley, 2008; Tompkins, 2015). Research also acknowledges the value of these networks in the growth and success of Māori (Haar et al., 2021). In public relations, there is also a lot of importance attached to understanding the Māori worldview and engaging with Māori while respecting the Treaty's principles. Therefore, a person who can offer such support, Serena in this case, is bound to be considered valuable. This is evident in the blurb for a professional development course on 'iwi engagement' offered by PRINZ:

> Relationships are at the heart of engaging with Māori. For those who have never operated within te ao Māori—the 'Māori world' or 'Māori way of doing things'—it

[6] Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi) is Aotearoa's (New Zealand's) founding document. It was an agreement made between the British Crown and Māori chiefs on February 6 in 1940, at Waitangi. It includes principles on which the bi-lateral foundations of New Zealand were created (New Zealand History, n.d.).

> can be daunting. Consulting with the right people, in the right way, is never more important than when working with Māori and iwi groups. (PRINZ, n.d.-c)

The above discussion corroborates the claim by Theunissen and Sissons (2018) that the use of personal networks of influence (Kiambi & Nadler, 2012; Sriramesh, 1992, Sriramesh et al., 1999; Taylor, 2000; Valentini, 2010) is not limited to Asian, African and East European countries or confined to application in media relations. It is, in fact, prevalent in various aspects of public relations work in New Zealand as well (Theunissen & Sissons, 2018). Unfortunately, even with several scholars advocating for a change, the dominance of the four functional models continues to obstruct the personal influence (see Section 2.2.1.2) model's "development as a strong and relevant theoretical construct" (Theunissen & Sissons, 2018, p. 201). The findings of this chapter reiterate that the personal influence model deserves more credit in public relations scholarship and education.

The current study also adds a new perspective to Edward's (2011b) argument that symbolic capital creates occupational closure for ethnic minorities as it is mostly possessed by the dominant white middle-class. Serena, although raised in Australia, had moved to Aotearoa New Zealand and identified as Māori. While Māori are the indigenous people of New Zealand, they were estimated to form 16.7% of the total population as per the 2018 census data (Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa, 2020) and are therefore an ethnic minority compared to the European population (70.2%). However, Serena could be seen exercising her personal discursive power to make her voice heard in the interview. This kind of power was perhaps gained by virtue of her interactional skills, previous experience, and networks (Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002) and considered as impactful as that held by a dominant party. As discussed earlier in this chapter (see Section 4.1), interviewers are impressed by candidates who can balance the initial power asymmetry that favours the interviewer (De Keere, 2019). Therefore, John's admiration of Serena was perhaps an example of this. However, Haar and Martin (2022) warned that relying on Māori employees to "draw on personal relationships and reputation in their cultural world" can create a *role conflict* for them. For example, one of the participants in Haar and Martin's study about the work of Māori scientists explained:

> The *mahi* (work) I undertake is important to me—but my tribe wants me to take the role of being their *whakamāori* [interpreter] in one area of science that is not my speciality at all. I can't refuse—they are my people! But I feel the responsibility to my paid *mahi* (my employer), I feel the pressure from my *iwi* to represent them, but I also feel the pressure from my (science) field. I can't say no, but I sure feel the pressure. It's like I am walking a tightrope! (p. 1010)

Haar and Martin (2022) argued that undertaking cultural labour as part of a job can create additional demands on an employee's time and energy, causing them to feel pressured. Cultural labour, in this context, was any work done as part of drawing on their Māori identity as opposed to fulfilling role requirements. For example, communicating with *iwi*. Since it requires additional time, those performing cultural labour tend to feel that they are performing "a double-shift…which ultimately limits their careers and leaves them feeling burnt out" (p. 1022).

Therefore, while John may have advanced the diversity in the industry by selecting a candidate who did not fit the stereotypical embodiment of 'white female' (Fröhlich & Peters, 2007; Grandien, 2017; Tsetsura, 2011; Yeomans, 2019), it may not be sufficient. Attention must also be given to their wellbeing and career progression by not overwhelming or limiting them with responsibilities of cultural labour.

4.3.3 Attitude is the deciding factor

Following the extract in the above section, John gave some examples of the work they were doing and prompted Serena to talk about her experience in digital marketing. Serena explained at length her previous work creating and implementing digital strategies. She gave examples of creating content, collaborating with influencers and bloggers and managing social media advertising. John appeared pleased about this as one of his core requirements was that the candidate should possess social media skills to successfully replace Stan in his current role. John expressed:

> I am not an expert in this. I am happy to be told. I need to be told. I would love to be told [what to do in social media campaigns]. I am really interested in doing it well, doing it properly and succeeding really.

Elaine and John stressed that there would be a range of work for Serena to do in the role apart from social media. In response, Serena affirmed that having a broad variety of work to do was what she loved about being a consultant.

From here on, Elaine directed the interview towards more process-oriented talk, which according to Holmes (2006) was a typical feminine interactional style in workplace meetings. She wanted to gauge Serena's attitude towards flexibility in working hours and if she was willing to dedicate time to the consultancy work. Serena claimed that she was "flexible" and that she believed there was "no such thing as a 40-hour work week" if you loved your work. John agreed and contemplated that even though he did not want to think of himself as a workaholic, he probably was. Serena concluded this part of their interaction by exclaiming, "when you're passionate about it, it doesn't feel like work."

John reminded Serena what while flexibility was key for him, it was also important that "all consultancy staff work together to fit-in around each other's demands." He and Elaine checked with Serena if she would be keen on this role and comfortable working in their shared working space or going to face-to-face client meetings. Serena continued nodding and smiling and reassured them that she was alright with everything they were saying and "very very very excited to be involved in this".

It is interesting to note that Serena's answers appeared to echo John and Elaine's attitude towards flexibility. Such opinion conformity is usually considered as an act of impression management by candidates, whereby they tactfully emphasise similarities with interviewers and use truthful flattery to draw liking from them (Barrick et al., 2009; Arsenault & Roulin, 2021). However, it must be noted that while such impression management may be successful in positively influencing the outcome of the interview, it does not affect assessments about actual job performance (Barrick et al., 2009).

In deciding the outcome of the interview, after Serena's exit, John and Elaine appreciated not only her digital skills that could benefit the consultancy but also (and perhaps more importantly) her attitude. Overall, it appeared that Serena provided the right cues, both verbally and non-verbally. She did so by nodding, smiling, conforming to their opinions, projecting flexibility, maintaining eye contact, using symmetrical gesturing and explaining how her networks and past experience could add value to the consultancy. Interviewers perceive these as signs of the candidate's assertiveness, warmth, and competency, resulting in a positive assessment of attitude (Feiler & Powell, 2016). Both John and Elaine felt they had found whom they were looking for, with John concluding their recruitment decision in saying:

> She's got the technical skill but she's got the attitude. She's got the rate. Yup, yes please…I love the iwi dimensions as well. Couldn't have been better suited. Could not be better suited…heard Simon Senek on LinkedIn today saying, 'you recruit on attitude, skills can be taught'.

As a result of the discussions between John and Elaine, Serena was hired for this role. She was offered a handover by John and Stan to help her learn more about the existing clients, projects, and the current work-in-progress. It should be noted that at the time of writing this thesis, Serena was no longer employed with John's consultancy and had left the role after one year in it (as per the publicly available information on her LinkedIn profile).

The above findings highlight that besides Serena's skills and abilities, her attitude, especially towards flexibility and long working hours, also appeared to please John and Elaine and was crucial in their decision to hire her. Public relations scholars (Fröhlich & Peters, 2007; Bhargava & Theunissen, 2019; Edwards, 2018; Yeomans, 2019) have warned against the hidden dangers of such discourse. This kind of fit assessment not only leads to subjective bias in recruitment (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2019; Edwards, 2011a, 2018) but also creates unrealistic expectations about the degree of emotional labour expected (Fröhlich & Peters, 2007; Yeomans, 2019) in consultancies. The demands of such emotional labour may eventually lead to anxiety and burn-out among female staff as they are more likely to have additional non-work responsibilities such as family care (Yeomans, 2019). This indicates that becoming a consultant is not just a career choice but a lifestyle, reaffirming Kubr's (2002) statement that only those candidates succeed who can withstand the demands of a consulting lifestyle.

4.4 Conclusion

The findings presented in this chapter highlight that consultants value personal behavioural traits—such as being flexible with working long hours, being sociable and having usable personal networks—more than field-specific knowledge, skills, and abilities. Since these behaviours can only be judged subjectively (Russell & Brannan 2016; Rivera, 2012, 2015; Rashmi, 2010), relying on them to assess a candidate's *fit* can lead to implicit bias and discrimination (Mavridopoulou & O'Mahoney, 2020) and consequently limit the advancement of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the occupation (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2019; De Keere, 2019).

The chapter demonstrates that public relations scholarship and practice need more emphasis on understanding inclusive recruitment and selection.

CHAPTER 5: MAKING CONSULTING ADVICE MATTER TO CLIENTS

While consultants are expected to provide advice and specialised service to their clients (Alvesson, 2000; Kubr, 2002; Röttger & Preusse, 2013; Theunissen & Sisson, 2018), the acceptance of this advice by clients and the sanctioning of consultants to act on clients' behalf might not be a given (Gregory & Willis, 2013; Nikolova, 2007/2019; Place, 2012). Since the consultants are dependent on the client for financial sustenance, they need to remain mindful of maintaining harmony when offering critical advice because the relationship could be crucial for securing future work (Broschak, 2015; Nikolova, 2007/2019). This implies that consultants must possess and apply significant interpersonal skills, especially when advising clients on delicate matters (Berger & Reber, 2005; Theunissen & Sissons, 2018; Yeomans, 2019).

This chapter presents a client-consultant interaction where a consultant was observed advising her client on a critical issue in which the two had different perspectives on its solution. The findings shed light on client-consultant relationships in the face of problematic situations and help understand the nature of knowledge exchange and power between the two.

5.1 Scholarly background – whose power is it anyway?

Nikolova (2007/2019) examined relationships between client organisations and Professional Service Firms (PSFs) and categorised the client-consultant interactions during problem-solving into four models: the expert model, reflective practitioner/social-learning model, critical model, and interpretive model. These four models offer different perspectives on the interplay of knowledge, expertise, and power in the interactions between clients and consultants (Nikolova et al., 2009; Nikolva & Devinney, 2012).

The *expert model*—based on the work of management consultancy scholars such as Gallessich (1982) and Kubr (1996) —is where consultants are seen as experts who have the technical knowledge and expertise that their clients lack (Nikolova, 2007/2019; Nikolova et al., 2009; Nikolva & Devinney, 2012). The consultants are therefore considered autonomous and competent in defining and solving the client's problems, with the client being more like a lay person and having limited or no participation in the process. The client-consultant interactions are used to transfer raw information to the consultant and final solutions to the client. Beyond this, there is little knowledge transfer and therefore a knowledge asymmetry persists in their relationship. Since clients are dependent on the knowledge and expertise of the consultants, they rely on them for problem-solving and accept their authority. Consequently, power is seen residing with the consultant (Broschak, 2015; Nikolova, 2007/2019; Nikolva & Devinney, 2012; Nikolova et al., 2009).

In the *reflective practitioner/social learning model*—based on Schön's (1983) concept of the reflective practitioner—both the consultant's expertise and the client's understanding about their organisation's cultural context are needed to solve the problem (Nikolova, 2007/2019; Nikolova et al., 2009; Nikolva & Devinney, 2012). Their interactions are focused on exchanging and combining their knowledge to overcome the mutual knowledge asymmetry to benefit both. In this model, the client-consultant relationship is about reflecting on their own state of knowledge and accepting that each has something to learn from the other (Schön,1983). They are seen as being interdependent with a balance of power between of them (Nikolova, 2007/2019; Nikolova et al., 2009; Nikolva & Devinney, 2012).

In the *critical model*—based on the approach of critical management consultancy scholars such as Alvesson (2001) and Clark and Salaman (1998) —knowledge is constructed during the client-consultant interactions, is reliant on the consultant's rhetoric of stories and metaphors and is mostly ambiguous. Here, knowledge is not considered as objective or rational but more as a matter of belief, whereby the consultants persuade the clients of their value through a *performance* of expertise (Alvesson, 2001). In doing so, they act like gurus transforming the client's organisation with their abstract and "almost magical cure" (Clark & Salaman, 1998, p.138) to the problem at hand. Consultants are not seen as transferring any expert knowledge but simply creating an impression of doing so, therein legitimising their existence. Goffman (1959) contended that such impression management was necessary for professionals to convey the significance of their work to others. The model expects the consultants to appear authoritative and sees clients as being passive receivers who are distracted by insecurities and power struggles within their own organisation. Clients, therefore, rely on the impressions created by the consultant to gain success in their own organisation. Like the expert model, power resides with the consultants as well as their ability to perform their parts (Goffman, 1959; Nikolova, 2007/2019; Nikolova et al., 2009; Nikolva & Devinney, 2012).

Nikolova (2007/2019) argued that while the above models make valid points, they also have notable shortcomings as they treat the client-consultant relationship as being simplistic and “do not account for the multifaceted and complex nature of this interaction” (p. 6). Nikolova (2007/2019) argued that clients have power because the consultant is reliant on them for payment and future work and because of their legitimate and hierarchical position within the client organisation. The clients exert this *positional power* (Scott, 2001) to select and evaluate consultants, define the problems, accept or refute advice, provide or withhold key information and order deadlines (Nikolova, 2007/2019). In contrast, consultants have power that stems not only from their expertise (Gallessich,1982; Kubr,1996) but also from how they communicate this through the use of rhetoric (Alvesson, 2001; Clark & Salaman, 1998; Nikolova, 2007/2019).

Nikolova (2007/2019) therefore proposed the *interpretive model* in which the client-consultant interaction aims to develop a solution that is the most appropriate for the problem context being discussed. The model supposes that both clients and consultants have varying specialised knowledge, practical experience and worldviews and therefore form different interpretations of the same topic. This is expected to lead to disagreements—not only about the problem definition but also about the best solution for it. To reach and implement a decision efficiently, it is necessary that the client-consultant team endeavour to develop a shared interpretation (Nikolova, 2007/2019). However, this requires one of the parties to persuade the other to alter their stance. Whoever has the most persuasive ability to influence the other therefore holds the power (Nikolova 2007/2019).

According to Scott (2001), *persuasive influence* “operates through the offering and acceptance of reasons for acting in one way rather than another” (p. 20). It could either be gained from personal charisma or drawn from arguments that provide impetus to follow a certain approach from a cognitive, moral and/or emotional standpoint (Scott, 2001). Nikolova (2007/2019) concluded that it was “important for clients and consultants to be aware of the different power dynamics within the client-consultant teams and the way different power types influence problem-solving” (p. 243). She argued that further research was needed in the sphere of PSF client-consultant relationships to further elucidate the role of knowledge and power (Nikolova, 2007/2019).

In public relations, too, there is limited scholarship on client-consultant interactions during the problem-solving process (Sissons, 2014, 2015) and an even more scanty examination of power relations (Berger & Reber, 2005; Theunissen & Sissons, 2018). There is, however, agreement that there is no certainty to the client accepting a consultant's advice and therefore there is an inherent asymmetry in their relationship (Place, 2012; Gregory & Willis, 2013; Theunissen & Sissons, 2018). Public relations consultants are, therefore, always seeking to influence the problem-solving and decision-making processes in the client-consultant relationship (Place, 2012). While they are expected to "show the client how your advice can resolve the problem" (Capozzi, 2015, p. 374), scholarship has mostly highlighted knowledge and expertise (acquired through specialised training and practical experience) as a way of doing so (Gregory & Willis, 2013; Pieczka, 2006, Place, 2012; Yeomans, 2019). Expertise has been hailed as being strategic, practical, and power yielding (Gregory & Willis, 2013; Pieczka, 2006). This is likely due to the discipline's interest in legitimising the practice as a profession and gaining further societal recognition, financial rewards, and occupational jurisdiction in juxtaposition to similar occupations such as advertising and marketing (Pieczka & L'Etang, 2006; Edwards, 2018; Fitch, 2016). Such a view aligns with the expert model of PSFs (Nikolova, 2007/2019).

Interestingly, some scholars (Sriramesh, 1996, 2012; Taylor, 2000; Wakefiled, 2013) have also highlighted the use of personal relationships, based in socially and culturally prevalent norms, as a means for exerting influence. This is referred to as *personal influence* (see Section 2.2.1.2). Theunissen and Sissons (2018) added that as part of acquiring and exerting personal influence, public relations practitioners often asserted a "subtle, low-key power" (pp. 205 – 206) called *ambient power*. Here the power is not exerted forcefully but politely applied in interactions by using rhetorical strategies and adhering to the face-saving needs of the clients. This type of power, combined with the consultant's expert power, is used to influence the client during problem-solving interactions. These assertions arguably align with Nikolova's (2007/2019) interpretive model. They also corroborate Gregory and Willis' (2013) and Yeomans' (2019) emphasis on using empathy as the foundation for problem-solving with clients:

> A key part of being an effective consultant is having the ability to convince others that a recommended course of action is the right solution. Winning this battle for hearts and minds is not just about accumulating relevant data but being able to contextualise these insights in a way that is empathetic to the client's current situation. (Gregory & Willis, 2013, p. 149)

There is no denying the importance of persuasion as part of client-consultant relationship and consequently influence (Theunissen & Sissons, 2018). There are two intertwined perspectives at play here. First, that the consultants could use persuasion to advise their clients to follow a certain approach (Gregory & Willis, 2013; Reber & Berger, 2006; Theunissen & Sissons, 2018) and second, that the consultants' advice could persuade the clients of their legitimacy (Pieczka, 2006; Yeomans, 2019). Persuasion has historically been looked down upon in public relations as a result of idealising Grunig's two-way symmetrical model that was devoid of persuasion (Fawkes, 2007; Moloney & McGrath, 2020).

In response to the criticism, Grunig (2022) claimed that the two-way symmetrical model always included persuasion but wanted it noted that the public relations practitioners needed to be willing to apply "self-persuasion" (p. 4) to alter their own views. While this may signal more acceptance for persuasion, it only accounts for its application at the organisational level of changing attitudes and behaviours through public relations messages rather than at the micro-context of interpersonal relationships held by a public relations practitioner. The findings discussed in this chapter aim to showcase the role of influence through examining the micro-context of a client-consultant interaction during the problem-solving process.

5.2 Problem-solving as a fusion of expertise and empathy

Consultants who were observed and interviewed in this study believed that their job was to provide expert advice to help solve their client's problems. One of them explained:

> Another thing I've learnt over the time is that people hire you because they want you to solve a problem they have. You are the expert. They are hiring you and they're paying you a consultancy fee because they want you to fix it. So, I tried really hard to never go to a client and say, 'oh look I've got a problem with blah blah' without also saying that here are some suggested solutions. They want you to take the problem off their hands. I remember long time ago I had a client and we were discussing some issues and I said 'what do you think?' and he said 'I'm paying you to tell me what you think, what I think is kind of irrelevant'. I've never forgotten that. (Julia)

In fact, another participant, Gracie, believed that providing advice was what earned one the title of consultant. She articulated her perception of a consultant as:

> Someone who provides sound advice to an organisation on the state of its relationships and reputations with key stakeholders. And if, as a consultant, all you're trying to do is tick a box or get an output there that's not really consulting. No, that's not giving people advice on how things can improve or how it can be better. (Gracie)

Participants went as far as to suggest that their ability to retain a client, which was key to their financial sustenance, relied on the quality of advice they provided.

> Companies come to us for advice and there is a commercial exchange between clients and consultancy. As long as you deliver value in what [advice] they want, they keep paying you. It shouldn't have to be hard or challenging, sometimes it is of course and that's again part of being in the consultancy environment. (Oliver)

There also appeared to be an understanding that this expertise stemmed from acquisition and application of specialised knowledge about public relations. Participants felt that this knowledge was what the clients lacked and consequently valued in their consultants. This sentiment appears to align with what Nikolova (2007/2019) termed 'the expert model' of client-consultant interactions whereby clients deem the consultants as possessors of expert knowledge and therefore revere their advice. Participants also assumed that perhaps the clients' in-house public relations teams lacked this knowledge, creating a need for external support. This implies that public relations consultants perceived themselves as having a wider range of knowledge than their peers who worked in-house.

> The main difference [between consultant and in-house practitioner] to me is that your knowledge and skills are valued far more because people reach out to you, they know they have a skill gap or competency gap and they really genuinely don't know how to involve their stakeholders. They know what they want to do, they really don't know how to approach it. (Aroha)

> I figure in-house everyone only has a limited range of experience, they always seem to be or can be kind of, not ham-strung but, not knowledgeable about certain areas whereas in an organisation like this [consultancy] we've got a variety of talented people who have all come through to PR from various different areas, so you've got a broader knowledge base to work with. (Frank)

It is interesting to note that majority of the participants did not have any university or technical education in public relations and claimed to have acquired this knowledge, and consequently expertise, through their work experience.

> It was virtually by being in the deep end without any safety net and that's how I learned…I didn't know anything. That was a very stressful first few years but I learned. I had never written a communications strategy before. Someone taught me how to do that and I thought, yes I can do this. I was there for about three years and then I quit and thought maybe I'll just do some writing and here I am owning an [public relations] agency. (Charlotte)

It became apparent that this knowledge acquisition process, over time, was so implicit that it appeared to have become what Bourdieu (1990) would call a habitus that is “internalised as a second nature” (p. 56).

> I forget all the industry knowledge that I have picked up or absorbed via osmosis, I forget how much I know. Not that I’m different to any other consultancy head but collectively we all probably forget how much we know and do stuff really fast. We just go ‘what’s the brief? Right we need that, that and that. (Oliver)

Additionally, participants believed that the clients saw value in hiring consultants as they had experience solving similar problems in the past, therefore further accentuating the value of experience.

> One client I’ve got now has been a long-term client since four years, going on five years, and it’s a really great one. A lot of other consultancies would kill to have this client. But, they came to me because of my expertise. Not because of what we did well, but because of the problems we’ve encountered. They said ‘we’ve got these similar problems, we’re going through similar stuff that you guys did and I need your help as we’ve never had to deal with this before’. (Hugh)

This may imply that experience is seen as having a symbolic value attached to it (Bourdieu, 1986) and therefore is considered as the field’s symbolic capital, bestowing symbolic power upon those who own it. This is similar to Edwards’ (2011a, 2011b) finding that consultancy websites in the UK promoted the experience of their consultants as a means of attracting and retaining clients, thereby acting as symbolic capital.

Although the participants valued experience, they did acknowledge the role and importance of ongoing professional training, such as the one provided by industry associations:

> I think I believe very strongly, because I have not had any academic training in PR, that training is significant and essential. Training is really big and I encourage staff to seek out different things they wanted to learn. So, we had a learning environment and a good culture like that. (Karen)

Participants also felt that their perception as having more expertise than in-house public relations staff put pressure on them to stay abreast of the latest knowledge in the field, something which required a fair amount of investment.

> When you are giving a PR opinion, people want to know what that is but that's also pressure. That's probably also why we have that 'continuing to learn' as people are looking at you for expertise… everybody [in my consultancy] gets a yearly budget, I take everybody to the PRINZ conference…that's a huge investment for a little firm. We're not like rolling in cash or anything. So, they all do it, it's part of the contract. Then there's another budget apart from that to do other stuff as well, senior people have a little more than the junior people. It's important in a consultancy that you are seen as being on top of the trends, you got the latest knowledge and experience. You go to an agency because they should have that top-notch ability than someone in-house and you have got to stay on top of that. (Charlotte)

However, even with their claims of expertise through knowledge and experience, participants acknowledged that their advice was not always accepted by the client. This finding aligns with claims in existing scholarship about clients exerting their positional power to refute advice from consultants (Nikolova, 2007/2019; Sissons, 2015).

> The worst is when you give good advice and it's consistently not taken. Then you get to the point where you just start to switch off…as a consultant, my strategy is to give a piece of advice once, I'll give it twice, but I generally won't go to a third time unless I felt really strongly about it. If they're not taking it twice then you're just starting to piss them off. (Julia)

The participants agreed not having their advice accepted by clients was an issue for consultancies, and sometimes they had to even implement a "watered down version" (Aroha) of their advice. Ultimately, if the clients repeatedly ignored the advice, they felt compelled to fire the client.

> Honestly, I have given up a client because they were initially making all the right sounds or noises but eventually it became quite clear that they weren't necessarily deeply committed to doing what they thought they wanted to do. That for me was problematic. I won't sit with a client to make money. I'd rather sit with a client that I'm aligned to my values and if they genuinely take my advice. (Aroha).

This is an interesting finding as existing scholarship appears to suggest that the decision (and power) to end the client-consultant relationship mostly rested with the clients (Karantinou, 2003). Perhaps in New Zealand that is not the case and clients accepting their advice is as important to consultants as them paying the bills. Participants did, however, suggest that consultants needed rhetorical skill to navigate a difficult problem-solving interaction with their clients. They highlighted the need to use the interaction to "redirect what they're [clients] thinking" (John) and influence them to consider the consultant's approach. This resonates with the application of the interpretive model of client-consultant relationships whereby consultants use persuasive influence through rhetorical strategies to get their advice accepted (Nikolova, 2007/2019).

Additionally, participants stressed the importance of being empathetic in such interactions. They claimed that doing so helped them genuinely understand the client's perspective, gain the client's trust, help the client understand the consultant's advice and ensure the client continued to work with them long-term. This aligns with assertions in existing literature (Gregory & Willis, 2013; Nikolova, 2007/2019; Yeomans, 2019) that empathic communication skills were necessary for being a consultant.

> I think empathy plays a huge role. So, when you've got an understanding of who they [client] are, where they are, what they're trying to achieve, the difficulties that they have; because you've got to know them and you've not just landed on them and you are not making some snap judgments and stuff….and framing things in such a way that they can understand that there are other drivers that they have to consider. (Gracie)

Consultants also felt that such conversations were better had in person or over the phone.

> Ultimately the more conversations you can have, and body language is a huge part of it, in person is best, phone's kind of second, you never want to do it via email because there's no nuance. Yea, you might as well just write to them 'stop being an idiot'. (Liam)

Participants felt there was no definite answer to dealing with a client who would not take on the consultant's advice and it took discretion to know whether the situation demanded a firm response or a polite and empathetic one. Finally, it was apparent that all decision-making was delicately intertwined with consultants being financially dependent on their clients. This could imply that if a particular client required more investment in effort (over-servicing) and convincing than the financial reward received for doing so or if there were other well-paying clients to sustain the business, the consultants would be more likely to stop working with clients that did not take their advice.

> Everyone decides which battles to fight. I think everyone makes a commercial decision about which are the expenses that you need to put your foot down and really argue. We're talking a couple of things—when the relationship is in difficulty,

> versus the case where there's some bad news. In all of those cases, the context is important, and presenting something in a time of plight and stress, you'll approach differently when you're face to face in a different time. (Ethan)

> I had to fire one client because they were not doing what they said they were going to do. They were making my life miserable and I thought 'no, I don't need this.' I'm very grateful that I have the [financial] ability to do that. (Karen)

5.3 Interaction two – more trouble than it's worth!

Karen, one of the key participants in this study, is an independent consultant running her own public relations consultancy in one of the cities in New Zealand's North Island. She used to employ consulting staff but now she hires contractors as and when she needs to. Karen works from her home office.

During the period of observation, one of the projects she was working on was a community theatre event taking place at the city's botanical garden. She was hired by the garden trust's chair to manage the event and its associated publicity. The play was having its opening night on Thursday, followed by performances on Friday and Saturday. However, Karen was presented with an unexpected problem when the weather was forecasted to bring rain to the region. Since the performances were scheduled to be outdoors, this was a cause for concern. It had been raining on Tuesday and Wednesday, but it was meant to be clear on the weekend.

Karen visited the event site on Wednesday afternoon to do a venue recce and met the production assistant Tracey. By then, the rain had stopped, and the ground and set did not appear to have been damaged by the rain and wind. Nick, the groundsman, also came to speak with Karen and Tracey and check if they needed any further support. Karen took a photo of Tracey at the set and exclaimed, "that photo is going to the chairman of the board [Karen's client] and the director and we may put it up on Facebook to say *the set survived*".

Later that afternoon, Karen reflected that she was spending more time and effort on the project than she had intended and was considering not doing it again. She explained:

> It is community theatre, there is so little money. So, what I agreed to was part pro bono part fee. So, it is just a monthly retainer, and it is not a lot. But I want to make sure this is the best event they have had, and I do not need to do it again.

> That's coming up later. I haven't said that to him but, no, I'm not doing it again. He knows I'm spending too much time on it. I've already told him that. But it's also interesting as some people get that and some people don't. So, it's how you say it, when you say it, who you say it to.

It appears that Karen's intention to stop working with the client was rooted in the issue of over-servicing and wanting to receive a fair return for her time spent on the project. It did not help that she was also having to manage the issue of the rain creating problems for this project that she wanted to end well.

The discussion in the sections below is from her interaction with her client Jerry, who was very concerned about the rain and determined to cancel Thursday's performance.

5.3.1 Scene-setting

The client-consultant interaction, presented below, took place on Thursday morning when it had started to rain again. Karen felt that the ground had been dry the day before but if the rain did not stop soon, it could be too slippery for the audience and create issues with using electrical equipment. She was concerned about it being a safety hazard and was thinking of waiting till noon to make her decision about whether the event would go ahead.

While she was contemplating this, she received a text from her client that rain was going to stop by lunch, but the ground would be wet, so he (Jerry) would "seriously consider" cancelling that night's performance.

Karen replied that she would make the decision at noon whether to cancel the event. She was asked if it would be best to post a message on social media that the prospect of the event running was questionable, and Karen replied with a firm "no, we make one call only". She explained "if we put out that it's questionable and the sun comes out, it will confuse everyone".

She then texted Nick, the groundman, and asked him about the condition of the ground, with the intention that "the more information you have the better decision you make". This reinforces application of the *interpretive model* of consulting whereby the consultant's knowledge is not just a product of their individual education and competence but also acquired through interactions with others (Nikolova, 2007/2019). In this case, Nick, had more expert knowledge about the ground and therefore his opinion helped Karen form hers before she could interact with the client. This also meant that Karen had more information to exert persuasive influence (Scott, 2001), if needed.

Karen then rang the production assistant Tracey to “get a feel from her what she thought”. Karen told her that she will not be posting any messages saying that the event was questionable. She reinforced that “there’s only one message” that would be posted at noon once the decision had been confirmed and nothing prior to that. Karen and Tracey decided to meet at the venue at 10 am to do another recce.

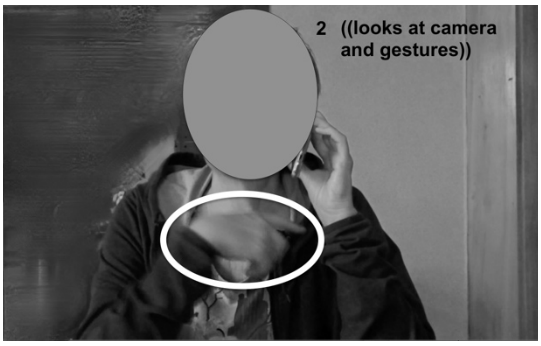
Following this, Karen rang Jerry. The interaction discussed below is of their phone call, where we can see and hear Karen’s side of the call.

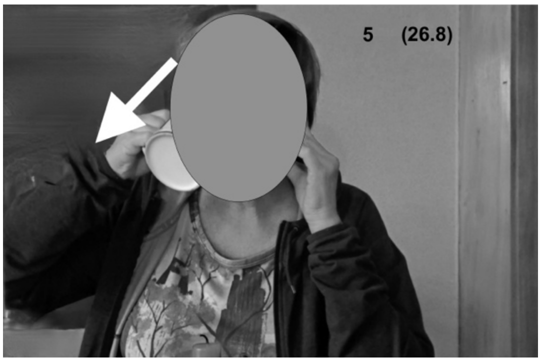
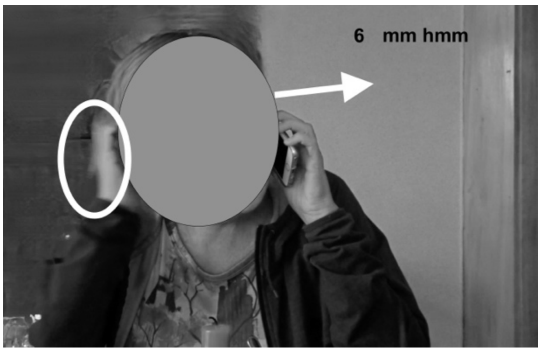
Figure 4: Transcript of interaction 2 - more trouble than it’s worth!

<table>
<tr>
<td>1. go:od mo:rning Jerry how are you↑
2. (2.5)
3. I: am good thank you:: (.4) >what do you reckon<
4. (2.2)
5. really↓ ((frowns))

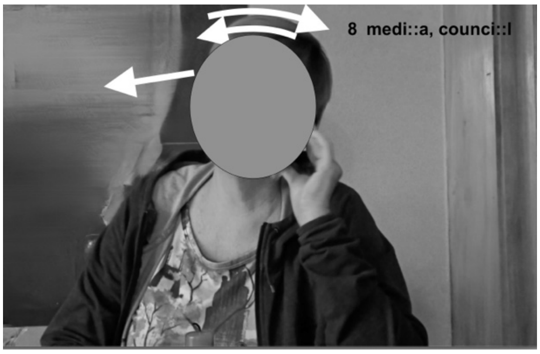
6. (10.7) ((looks at camera and gestures))

7. uh huh
8. (9.3)
9. mm hmm
10. (11.8)</td>
<td>

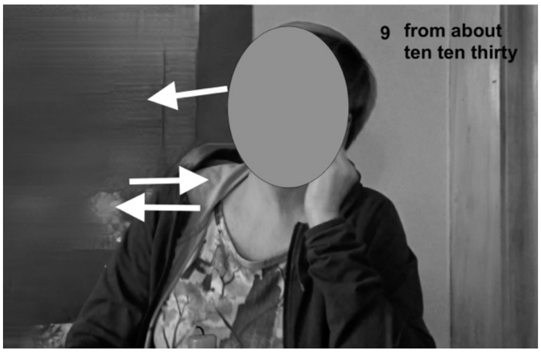

</td>
</tr>
</table>

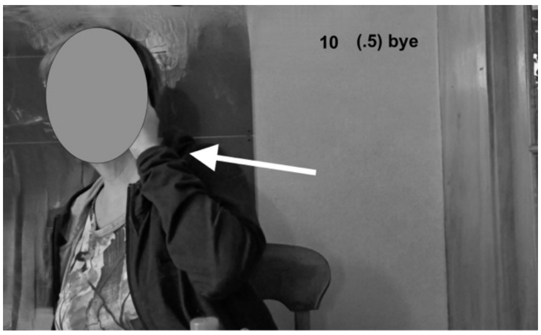
11. yup 12. (9.1)	
13. >No exactly so< ↑I've actually just sent 14. Nick a text coz I wanted to know the 15. same thing (.4) and he said at the moment 16. it's okay (.3) <because it was ↓dr:y> (.4) 17. it was dry yesterday so (.8) ↑but if it 18. continues to rain then I think that's a 19. ↓challenge and a and ↓a °problem° so::	
20. (26.8)	
21. mm hmm 22. (8.2) 23. mm hmm 24. (.5)	

25. >alright I’m going to go out there before I
26. make that ca:ll< beca:use (.2) there are
27. (.5) uhm other ramifications for doing that
28. so we’re going to have to refund a lot of
29. people that can’t come on Friday or
30. Saturday (.7) uh::m >we will::< (.3) >you
31. know getting in touch with the
32. ticketholders is< fi:ne because the Royal
33. Fabulous Opera House get in touch with
34. people that have purchased the tickets
35. ↑for tonight? (1.2) then ↑we:: get in touch
36. wit:h (.2) medi::a, counci::l (1.6) on social
37. media so that’s fi::ne (.3) uhm
38. (.9)
39. correct.
40. (5.7)



41. ↑so we’re gonna head out (.5) for- even
42. before that ↑so >we’re gonna go out<
43. with one port-a-loo (.6) a::nd: help (.8)
44. Tracey with the set from about ten ten
45. thirty uhm and then I’ll ca:ll you from there
46. (.9) >unless you’re gonna<-
47. (.8)
48. okay. fantastic. awesome.
49. (3.1)
50. ↑thanks Jerry
51. (.5)
52. bye





5.3.2 Putting negotiation on the agenda

Karen opened the interaction with a greeting and *‘Howareyou’* sequence (see Figure 4, line 1), which is a typical beginning in phone conversations between known people to establish a common ground (Arminen & Leinonen, 2006; Schegloff, 1986). However, Karen did not prolong this sequence and straight away asked “>what do you reckon<” (see Figure 4, lines 3 – 4). Her prompt question, asked with accelerated speech, indicated what Schegloff (1986) would refer to as the speaker’s intention to “preempt control of first topic, and, with it, potentially the shape of the rest of the conversation” (p. 117). In doing so, Karen highlighted the urgency of her topic (Arminen & Leinonen, 2006; Zimmerman, 1992) and marked it as the agenda or *reason for the call* (Schegloff, 1986).

Generally, setting the agenda for the interaction is considered as a way of exerting influence and “controlling the discourse” (Holmes & Stubbe, 2015, p. 73), indicating the locus of power. While this person typically tends to be the one with positional power, in problem-solving situations it can also be an expert who wants the interaction to focus on their preferred solution (Holmes & Stubbe, 2015). This may imply that Karen had premediated the need to steer the interaction from the very onset and influence the problem-solving process with her perceived expertise.

Her emphasis on the word “reckon”, could be seen as her seeking Jerry’s assessment of the situation regarding the event. Its position in the interaction is suggestive of “preparing ground for a delicate or otherwise complicated action” (Arminen, 2005, p. 174) before proposing anything that may require negotiation. Here, Karen may have been trying to be empathetic and show consideration for Jerry’s perspective but at the same time preparing to offer her disapproval for cancelling the event that night.

On hearing Jerry’s response, Karen frowned and uttered “really↓” (see Figure 4, line 5) with a lowered pitch. This subdued response could be symbolic of feeling disappointed (Ruusuvuori, 2013). Additionally, Zadeh et al. (2016) claimed that the utterance of ‘really’ with a frown is understood to be an *emphasizer* (p. 86) that marked a change in the person’s sentiment towards being more negative. Clearly, Karen did not appreciate whatever Jerry reckoned about the event. Furthermore, ‘really’ is often used as a *delaying device* (Pomerantz, 1984a, 1984b) when someone requests clarification on an assessment that they are about to disagree with. Overall, it could be summarised that Karen was not pleased.

The reason for this became evident when Karen looked straight at the camera (see Figure 4, image 2), doing what Goodwin (2007) referred to as momentary disengagement from the interaction by shifting direction of gaze, and gestured with her index finger. The metaphoric gesture was symbolic of striking off. Doing so in proximity of her throat could also visualise throat-slitting, perhaps representative of Jerry killing the possibility of the event going ahead.

Following this, Karen kept listening to Jerry and uttering occasional backchannels (Kjellmer, 2009) such as “uh huh”, “mm hmm” and “yup” (see Figure 4, lines 7 -11) that are common among women to project empathetic listening (Kjellmer, 2009). However, it is also acknowledged that these backchannels are a form of weak agreement (Davidson, 1984), which could indicate that while Karen was projecting active listening, she did not necessarily agree with what was being said.

5.3.3 Persuading with positive accounts

Karen’s response to Jerry started with a “no” (see Figure 4, line 13), which—when appearing at the start of a turn (as in this instance) —is demonstrative of the speaker “denying the relevance of the other’s perspective” (Arminen, 2005, p. 187). This, therefore, marked the start of Karen’s explicit rebuttal of Jerry’s proposed solution of cancelling the event. She then gave an account of her earlier conversation with Nick, the groundsman at Jerry’s botanical garden, to justify her preferred solution. Schegloff (2007) explained that such account-giving is used when people are aware that their response will not be preferred by the other party. This means that Karen was conscious that Jerry would not accept her advice without an accompanying reason.

As she let Jerry know that the ground was dry at that moment, she nodded her head and said, “it’s okay” (see Figure 4, line 16). Doing so is a sign of applying persuasiveness in approval-seeking by acknowledging something as being positive (Harrigan & Rosenthal, 1983). This meant that Karen considered her account of having spoken to Nick already about the state of the ground as something that Jerry would perceive positively and so could be used to obtain his affiliation. She also elongated her speech when mentioning the ground being dry (see Figure 4, line 4) to let it register with

Jerry that the ground was dry and, perhaps consequently, his concern was unsubstantiated. The fact that Karen checked with Nick before ringing Jerry shows that she gathered information that would be useful in negotiating with him (Jerry). This approach confirms the adage that *information is power* and that information is often used to exert persuasive influence (Scott, 2001; Nikolova, 2007/2019). It also aligns with the findings of existing scholars, who argued that persuasion was part of a public relations consultant's problem-solving work (Gregory & Willis, 2013; Reber & Berger, 2006; Theunissen & Sissons, 2018). It is also evident that Karen's effort in building a personal rapport with Nick meant that she could draw information and support from him, when needed. This reinforces the idea that consultants need to build and maintain personal relationships to accumulate social capital (Edwards, 2011a, 2018; Theunissen & Sissons, 2018). Since this social capital may be utilised to draw knowledge and seek favours (Bourdieu, 1986), it has become one of the desired forms of capital in public relations (Edwards, 2011a) thereby bestowing significant symbolic prestige and power to those consultants who have it (Edwards, 2011a; 2018; Ihlen, 2009). In this case, Karen appeared to use her social capital to influence her client's decision-making.

She did, however, offer a contrasting perspective marked with a high pitched "↑but" (line 17) to acknowledge that ongoing rain could be a challenge. Her acceptance of it (the rain) being a "°problem°" was spoken so softly that it almost appeared to be verbalisation of her inner thoughts. This gave way to Jerry's response, and Karen continued listening and repeating the backchannel "mm hmm" (see Figure 4, lines 21 and 23). This could have been her way of showing that she was listening and understood what he was saying, without expressing any sign of alignment (Kjellmer, 2009). Karen's disagreement was also given away by turning her head and shifting her gaze to the opposite direction while touching her head (see Figure 4, image 6). Such self-touching, when accompanied by changes in posture and/or gaze, is understood to be symbolic of a negative stance and even an expression of distraction or disinterest (Harrigan et al., 1991). This could suggest that Karen, at that point, was starting to get restless—perhaps because Jerry was still unconvinced by her persuasive efforts.

Their interaction, thus far, corroborates Nikolova's (2007/2019) argument that both clients and consultants enter a problem-solving interaction with their own knowledge and perspective. In such a situation, disagreements are not unexpected.

5.3.4 Directing explicitly towards a solution

In response to Jerry's stance on the matter, Karen began with the discourse marker "alright" (line 25), which commonly precedes negotiations (Holmes & Stubbe, 2015). It is also a "topic control strategy" (Holmes & Stubbe, p. 74) that aims to maintain focus on a particular topic in work-related meetings or to express a significant viewpoint before the discussion moves away from it. This implies that Karen was keen on interjecting with her perspective and negotiating with Jerry before he assumed his idea of cancelling the event was the final decision. Karen then stated explicitly that she will make her final decision only after visiting the venue. This type of account-giving is understood to be a way of disagreeing with what the other party may expect as the preferred response in the interaction (Schegloff, 2007). In this case, Karen was expressing her disagreement with Jerry's intention to cancel the event. In doing so, she enlisted what Arminen (2005, p. 187) would call "practical implications" of not following her advice, something which is meant to strengthen a persuasive argument. She began with stating the financial repercussions by laying emphasis on <u>"lot"</u> (see Figure 4, line 28) and highlighting that many people would need to be refunded. Karen then paused and stretched her "uh::m" (see Figure 4, line 30), which could signify that she was thinking of something significant to add to her account-giving and perhaps searching for the right words (Jefferson, 1988; Schiffrin, 1987). Following this reflection, she began using the collective pronoun "we" (see Figure 4, lines 30 and 35) in enlisting all the stakeholders they would need to communicate the decision to.

While communicating with stakeholders was Karen's job as the public relations consultant, her use of "we" could be seen as her attempt at indicating the client and consultant's joint responsibility in managing the ramifications of any decision. As per Holmes and Stubbe (2015), collective pronouns like 'we' are also used to soften the force of a directive, implying that while Karen was trying to direct Jerry towards accepting her advice, she was wary of being forceful and was applying direct but polite persuasion. Karen's use of practical implications as well as rhetorical devices to persuade Jerry is an example of Nikolova's (2007/2019) interpretive model in action, whereby consultants use a combination of their expert and rhetorical power to influence problem-solving.

After letting Jerry respond to her account-giving, she began to close the conversation with a high pitched "so" (see Figure 4, line 41), which usually marks the intention of stating something noteworthy (Schiffrin, 1987). This means that Karen wanted Jerry to pay attention (and consequently accept her advice) to her announcement that she would be visiting the venue later that morning and will let him know her decision. Such a declarative towards the end of a conversation is an example of ensuring that next steps are agreed upon and that the other person will do as the speaker wishes (Holmes & Stubbe, 2015). Karen paused (line 46) and checked if Jerry was also planning on being at the venue. When Jerry responded that he would be (as confirmed by Karen after the phone call), she replied with “okay. fantastic. awesome.” (see Figure 4, line 48). This positive assessment composite (Heritage, 1984; Schegloff, 2007) can be understood as Karen’s way of indicating that she felt positive about Jerry’s agreement to visit the venue and was therefore marking the end to their interaction. It could also be assumed that she felt positive as she had prevented Jerry from cancelling the event by persuading him to wait till noon to decide. In a follow-up interview, Karen explained, “that phone call and then meeting him [Jerry] on site was to make sure that it was the right decision but I kind of already knew that it was”. She also affirmed that her understanding of the situation and how to advice the client came from experience in managing such events. Karen felt that a consultant’s advice depended largely on “different levels of experience people [consultants] have and how they react to it [the problem]”.

5.4 Conclusion

The findings in this chapter suggest that while public relations consultants may draw from their knowledge and experience to offer perceived expert advice during problem-solving interactions, they still rely on rhetorical devices to persuade their clients. This aligns with Nikolova’s (2007/2019) interpretive model suggesting that while consultants would like to believe that they have expert power, the clients may not always concede as they have their own interpretation of the situation. Therefore, to find a common solution, they need to persuade one another and the one with stronger rhetorical skills has more power to influence the outcome (Scott, 2001). Consultants try to do this by gaining control of the topic from the outset and demonstrating empathy and politeness even when explicitly disagreeing with the client’s decision. These discussions extend the current public relations scholarship (Edwards 2011a, 2018; Theunissen & Sisson, 2018; Gregory & Willis, 2013; Pieczka, 2006; Reber & Berger, 2006; Yeomans, 2019) on client-consultant power relations by accentuating the role of experience, social capital, empathy, and rhetoric during problem-solving. The chapter signals that public relations scholars and educators should not ignore the role of persuasion in managing client-consultant relations.

CHAPTER 6: GETTING WORK DONE, TOGETHER AND ON TIME

Consultants, across all disciplines, are often expected to solve urgent and critical client problems, thereby legitimising "a fast response in a short time frame" (McGivern et al., 2018, p. 1009) along with the delivery of quick and quantifiable outputs. This time-sensitive client work is sometimes too large or complex to be managed by a single consultant. Therefore, it is common for them to collaborate on one or more projects at any given time, before disintegrating the project team and moving on to the next (Gardner, 2015).

While individuals are often required to share their knowledge to meet tight deadlines and achieve collective high-performance goals for their consultancy (Kaiser & Ringlstetter, 2011), it is not always easy (Gardner, 2015). In public relations consultancies too, consultants manage deadline-oriented work and often rely on a collaborative environment to ease the pressure thus created (Capozzi, 2018; Fröhlich & Peters, 2007).

This chapter shares findings from the interviews that explain the temporal challenges of public relations consulting and how collaboration helps manage them. It also specifically examines an interaction between two senior members of a public relations consultancy who were collaborating to meet a task-related deadline.

6.1 Scholarly background – collegial work in an extreme environment

Consultants see their work as being rewarding, meaningful, collaborative, and full of exciting challenges that help in their professional development (Ipsen & Jensen, 2012). However, this is accompanied by their consultancy's expectation to exhibit greater responsibility, commitment, and appeasement to the client (Humle, 2014; Mühlhaus & Bowmeester, 2016). This results in consultants working long hours in a high-pressure environment to satisfy the demands of clients across various projects and multiple deadlines (Mühlhaus & Bowmeester, 2016). This is so embedded in their identity (Ipsen & Jensen, 2012; Humle, 2014; Yeomans, 2019), that Hewlett and Luce (2006) referred to the phenomenon as "the extreme ethos" (p. 53).

The authors (Hewlett & Luce, 2006) explain that those working in professional services, such as consultants, tend to love their jobs and do not necessarily see themselves as “workaholics in need of rescuing” but instead “wear their commitments like a badge of honour” (p. 56).

Public relations consultants too increasingly see their work as an expression of their identity and so fail to objectively view it from a critical lens as they continue to labour for the love of their job (Yeomans, 2019).

The danger here is that slavery to client projects camouflages as an individual’s passion for work (Bunting, 2004) and becomes what Yeomans (2019) lamented as being an unequally requited form of emotional labour. Moreover, it is overlooked that long working hours “can only be fulfilled under particular social circumstances” (Edwards, 2011a, p. 66), such as (but not limited to) “freedom from family constraints” (p. 66). This project-based environment can therefore become a hinderance for achieving a balance between work and life (Kaiser et al., 2011; Noury et al., 2017) and eventually lead to exhaustion (Hewlett & Luce, 2006).

Shen (2019) argued that work-life balance was perhaps “an elusive myth” (2019, p. 167) in public relations, especially for those who were in more senior positions and/or having a higher load of responsibilities. Having said that, this is only a reflection of the wider society in which practitioners operate, which in most urban and Western contexts is an increasingly “neo-liberal economic field, characterised by a focus on profit and the primacy of individual choice…” (Edwards, 2011a, p. 71). However, Shen (2019) suggested that having supportive supervisors and a flexible work-environment can help practitioners cope with temporal stresses.

Undoubtedly, ‘time’ is at the core of this extreme project-based work pattern. Mohammed and Nadkarni (2011) argued that such an environment creates ‘temporal challenges’ for consultants, especially when working on team projects. Usually in consultancies, team members work together for a defined period to complete a specific task aimed at achieving a client goal (Sydow et al., 2004). They may have different areas of knowledge and expertise and so a collaborative approach has the possibility of utilising these diverse capabilities in serving client needs and ensuring repeat business (Gardner, 2015).

In these situations, for individual consultants to thrive and avoid burnout, it is important to promote a shared temporal cognition or consensus (Gevers et al., 2006; Gevers et al., 2009; Li et al, 2022). This implies that the team members have a common understanding of the importance of project deadlines as well as a shared adherence to completing each task as per requisite time and pace (Gevers et al., 2006). However, this is not always easy to achieve and requires team leaders to play a crucial role in enabling all members to coordinate efforts in response to the time pressures (Mohammed & Nadkarni, 2011; Maruping et al., 2015). This certainly is imperative for consultancies because “efficient use of time is inherent to much consultancy work, which epitomises a ‘time is money’ temporal orientation” (McGivern et al., 2018, p. 1011).

One of the key hurdles in coming to a temporal consensus is when senior members of a consultancy need to collaborate. As peers, with little or no formal authority over each other, they offer collegial task support (Sias, 2008) by exchanging knowledge and working together on delivering the client project. While they benefit from this support, they are also known to prefer autonomy and may challenge or ignore authority, which makes it problematic to get work done (Epson, 2019). In such situations, Epson (2019) advised, consultancy leaders need to “take time to build consensus but be ready to assert control” (p. 120). Epson emphasised that enabling such collaboration required considerable negotiation between asserting power and allowing autonomy.

According to Holmes and Stubbe (2015), this negotiation mostly takes place in team meetings which are embedded with the interplay of power and politeness, so much so that members need to “carefully manage the interaction” (p. 42). Therefore, it appears that maintaining collegial relationships and getting work done on time are “frequently perfectly compatible” (p. 53) as they create the tension between meeting transactional versus interpersonal demands.

Findings from the current research, shared in the sections below, help understand the interplay of time management and collaboration in the working lives of public relations consultants in New Zealand.

6.2 The consultant’s ABC – ability, billables and collaboration

Consultants who participated in this study laid significant emphasis on having the ability to work hard, sometimes for long hours, to get the client-work done by the deadline.

> Everyone in the consultancy deals in how to deliver for the clients…that may vary from time to time and there may be ups and downs but at the end of the day you need to know how to deliver. (Nathan)

> Work is primary. If you deliver what you promised to do, you're going to prove yourself [to the client] and that's really important. (Ethan)
>
> Busy, always busy. I'll define a typical day as busy and ever changing. For me, obviously, I've got a to-do list that is broken by client and then by the tasks for each client and the timeframes those things need to be done within, probably 60-70% of my day is planned but 30-40% will be things that just pop-up or you have to react to. (Madison)
>
> I feel the biggest effect of what is going on in the society that affects consultancies is busyness. Sped-up busy busy busy lifestyles. I think both Wellington and Auckland would be the same…our lifestyles are busy. I actually blame email, internet and social media because it affects fast turnaround [for clients]. (Julia)

These comments exemplify the notion in existing scholarship (Humle, 2014; Mühlhaus & Bowmeester, 2016) that being diligent in meeting deadlines imposed by the client is integral to consulting work. In fact, consultants claimed that working in a consultancy required *more* hard work than working in-house.

> In-house you can think 'oh I can come to work today, I can be lazy, don't have to work too hard, my brain is somewhere else I can't do too much today'. Can't think like that in a consultancy. (Charlotte)
>
> I think people who work in-house I reckon a lot of the time they think 'oh I'm really busy' but they have no clue, no idea. It's pretty cruisy I reckon. But that's my experience. By and large, consultancy landscape is faster-paced. (Oliver)

It is likely that this idea that consultants worked harder than in-house public relations practitioners may simply be their perception as narratives of long working hours, unrealistic deadlines, work-life conflict, and work-related stress are common in public relations practice as a whole (Shen, 2019; Research First, 2021). However, it has been pointed out that one of the most prevalent forms of billing a client, the *hourly rate model*, adds significant pressure on consultants (Pritchard & Smith, 2015). In this model, consultants invoice or *bill* the clients for their time spent on a project. This billing process creates demands on consultants to finish work within a designated timeframe as taking longer would mean the consultancy has to negotiate for more time (and consequently more money) from the client, to stop work on the project, or continue doing the work without getting paid for the excess (Pritchard & Smith, 2015).

Additionally, clients may feel dissatisfied if they must pay more for the consultants they perceive as being "slow people" (Pritchard & Smith, 2015, p. 47). Having said that, concerns for over-servicing, i.e., doing more hours of work on a client-project than what was initially agreed upon, can also occur in other billing models due to errors in estimating the amount of work (and therefore time) involved (Pritchard & Smith, 2015).

Overall, the findings confirm that since consultants are dependent on clients for ongoing work and financial sustenance, they may be overruled by the client's positional power when negotiating timeframes (Nikolova, 2007/2019) and therefore need to have the ability to manage their billable time effectively.

The following interview excerpts exemplify the above discussion:

> It's about the commercial exchange. You're selling time—so it's how long have you spent on it. It's an unfortunate part of the industry…if you're doing 40 [hours] and getting paid for 20, then it's a problem. (Oliver)
>
> You tend to work long hours in a consultancy because of the billables…the thing that would probably throw them [people from other disciplines or those who work in-house] out of it, the biggest, is the time management, the billable nature. (Hugh)
>
> Ultimately, it's a business, right. If you're not achieving those things that you get paid for then you're not doing it. Me personally, it took me ages to get good at prioritising my time. I was terrible. We do count our hours to make sure we're servicing people appropriately. (Liam)
>
> They [consultants] were hired because they love to write and now they were like 'why are we talking about goals and financial stuff'…I kept saying to them 'if you don't bill time, we can't pay people' and that's the real difference in a consultancy. People know that 'if I don't work hard today, we don't have the financial ability to do what we need to do as a business'. (Charlotte)

Interestingly, this idea of working hard to manage billable time conflicts with the work-life balance that consultants had acknowledged as being valuable to them (see Section 4.3.1) although they admitted that consulting workflow varied from time to time and that once the work was accomplished, consultants were not desk-bound and had the flexibility to focus on other aspects of life.

> It can be crazy busy because work comes and goes in ebbs and flows. You can be really really busy and then you have your downtime which is really nice and I leave and go pick up my kids and someone rings and I just say, 'I'm picking up my kids, I'll email you back tomorrow'. It's nice to be able to walk out and not having to say anything to anyone. (Hailey)
>
> …the working day fluctuates quite a bit and if there's an issue that comes up, you need to work longer on those days—peaks and troughs. (Ethan)

In fact, participants who were consultancy owners felt that it was important to provide an environment where long-working hours were an exception, not the norm.

> For my team, I have a really good work-life balance. If you come in at 5:15 pm, it's very rare to see anyone in office and you won't see me here before 9 am. We have a really good work-life balance that I have driven coming from my own experience after being in an environment where I was working till 9pm and then if there's an mail at 2 am you reply by a certain time…I never wanted anyone to have that. (Charlotte)

> We work 8 am to 5 pm. It never goes overboard. It can't. Because then it goes into that issue of work-life balance. I've got a young family, my husband has his own business. We stick to our hours. Everybody does. It's unusual to see people working outside hours. It's occasional and if I'm still here I'll kick them out and say 'the office is closed, goodbye'. I obviously work the most hours in managing this business but still there's a degree of flexibility. (Demi)

> You don't need to be here exactly between 8:30 am and 5:30 pm everyday just tapping on keys. If you are done with your work, if the clients are happy and they are paying their bills, if you are justifying your existence here, go! It's a beautiful day, just tell us 'I'm done, I have nothing further to do today, it's 4 pm and I want to go have a beer or watch a game', it's cool. But, the second we get a call [from client] saying, 'where is that piece of work', well, now you're in the shit. (Liam)

It is clear that while work-life balance was important to consultants, they must first be able to complete their client work within the billable consultancy time. Therefore, as identified in earlier literature (Pritchard & Smith, 2015; Luttrell & Capizzo, 2018) this conundrum creates an expectation from consultants to be fast-paced and efficient. As assumed by Luttrell and Capizzo (2018), consultancy work therefore may appear to be better suited to a Type A Behaviour Pattern (TABP) popularly known as *Type A Personality* (Hisam et al., 2014; Scott, 2022) i.e., someone who has traits "including competitiveness, time urgency, and a tendency toward workaholism" (Scott, 2022). This raises once again the question about *who* is perceived as being *fit* for consulting (see Section 4.3) and whether such conditions may affect the entry, inclusion and success of consultants who do not match this criterion.

What should be noted though is that participants acknowledged that consulting work made collaboration indispensable and having the ability to discuss and share tasks with colleagues helped manage workflow more effectively. The owners and senior members of the consultancy had a crucial role in enabling this collaboration and often relied on the Work-In-Progress (WIP) meeting to assess consultant requirements and provide support.

> We are not the kind of place that would leave a person struggling with their really busy load…it's a supportive and collaborative culture…the way we make decisions around workflow is that we have a weekly work-in-progress meeting on a Monday, which I jointly chair [along with the consultancy owner], where people share what they've got coming up that week. What it does is it gives a snapshot of who is busy, who is under enormous pressure, who may have capacity, what

> support staff is needed—such as our account executive and office manager may be able to help out that week. What that allows me to do is see what we need to shift around workload, what I can do is if someone is struggling with workload but someone else has capacity then that's how we can juggle things. Don't know how it is in other consultancies. I suspect it's quite different. Here there's very much a belief that there's work-life balance, so we don't have people working till seven, eight or nine at night. We are able to support each other, get quality work done, deliver it to clients, and still be able to go home to our families at five or 5:30 pm. (Nathan)

While formal processes may help manage workflow, most consultants acknowledged the value of informal conversations *across the hall*.

> We are a really collaborative agency here. Any thought, idea, written piece of work has been through at least two pairs of eyes. If we have a question, because we are a good bunch, we just yell out 'I need some help!' and you know everyone chips in their two cents. (Liam)

> Ours is not like a work environment where there's a boss and there are expectations. It's one of mutual respect, trust, laughter and helping each other out—collaborate, collaborate! (Hailey)

> Maybe if you have 100 people on a floor ten times ours, you might get a bit lost in your way first time. I don't think we need that. We are within ear-shot of one another. Most days it's pretty easy just to take someone aside and check-in with them. (Oliver)

It was interesting that participants who were solo consultants or working as an independent contractor with a consultancy (as opposed to being in permanent employment with them) also agreed that working in open and/or shared spaces facilitated collaboration with peers in the industry.

> More and more people are working from home or in collaborative shared space environment…I'm really excited about this because there's going to be a different level of energy, ability to be across the table and say 'what do you think about this or who do you know who does this'. (Karen)

> We are in a shared office space…so we talk to each other a lot about opportunities that we can share among each other, insights about clients, you know anything. Obviously, within reason, but anything we could do to help each other out, we do. (Aroha)

The above comments may suggest that having a more *open-plan* office design, one where co-workers are not separated by walls and partitions (Yunus & Ernawati, 2018), possibly has a role in enabling such collaboration. However, Yunus and Ernawati (2018) warned that while open-plan offices foster collaboration and boost productivity through informal information exchange, the constant distraction from colleagues can also disrupt the flow of work.

Apart from office design, another factor that affected collaboration was the different roles that consultants had within the consultancy. Often owners and/or senior members of a consultancy are tasked with business development (Pritchard & Smith, 2015; Luttrell & Capizzo, 2018), i.e., finding new clients and securing their business, and therefore are not always available to support or collaborate with other consultants.

Additionally, consultants usually have specific client accounts that they service and manage. This account management equips them with a stronger understanding of not only the project and its related tasks but also the client's expectations (Mart & Jackson, 2005; Yeomans, 2019). Over time, clients build trust with the consultants responsible for their accounts. It may not always be easy for them to transfer this trust to another consultant (Vafeas, 2010, 2015), thereby affecting the scope for collaboration on a client account. Similarly, consultants may have varying skill sets or may even be contracting with the consultancy for specific hours in a week, all limiting the possibility of collaboration. The following interview excerpts offer examples of such situations:

> I think it's all very well to talk about the rest of the team and your ability to pick out different bits of work, the reality is quite different. The reality is that you've got an account, and there's not much room for expecting others to give you a hand because they're busy themselves and they don't have the knowledge that you do across that particular client. So you know how in-house you can get into silos and things, it does happen in consultancy as well. (Madison)

> It's got senior people getting on with their own thing [business development] but otherwise it's collaborative and supportive. (Nathan)

> I [as the consultancy owner] have become more of the face of this business—meeting people, doing business, writing proposals, schmoozing. While my team are the ones doing all the work. (Charlotte)

> We have certain clients where only one of us would have a strength in the area. For example, Colleen is better at and has more experience in marketing communications stuff and I'm not interested in that, never done it, it does not interest me. I've made it very clear I don't want to do it, so she just automatically gets on with stuff like that. (Julia)

The consultants felt that more effort was needed to better manage billable time to avoid overwhelming the consultants with work.

> I think it's a matter of not just collaborating, but allocating time so everyone is across the business and that it's dead time that we can't charge the client for. It's not the client's fault that I only work 20 hours a week. We need to ensure that we can dedicate some time to get someone else up to speed each week across things. (Madison)

> What I found is that consultancies that had the best and the most interesting client work were not the best to work for and the ones that were the best to work for didn't have fantastic clients, but they really knew how to look after their people. I've always found those two things to be mutually exclusive…I couldn't figure out why those things can't live together…so some have a very high billable ratio and therefore are driving their people really hard. Some are relaxed, so have a lower profit margin. (Hugh)

It appears that while collaboration is desirable, it may not always be easy to achieve. The following sections of the chapter provide a closer examination of one such scenario where two consultants were observed to be collaborating on a client project to meet a tight deadline.

6.3 Interaction three – collaborating to meet a deadline

John, one of the key participants of this study, was working with Mike, Senior Account Director at John's consultancy, to launch a property development project for a client. The work included organising an information-sharing event (which was three weeks away), doing media and stakeholder relations as well as creating relevant content.

At their Monday Work-in-Progress (WIP) consultancy meeting, John had stressed that he was keen for Mike to take the lead on this project, for which they were also collaborating with a design agency. John offered to meet with Mike separately to go over the project details before they interacted with the designers. He was observed as saying to Mike:

> There's so many different things that we need to get our head around. These things are all being discussed. Chris [one of the designers] is very good project manager so he's already racing leaflets, advertising all these things are underway. But what we need to do, I need to just fill you in on the detail on every stream those things before you take them over…I'm keen to re-integrate you [Mike] into the project as thoroughly as possible and so we might just need to have bit of a WIP on that whole project so we can cover all the working streams so you understand where we're at…so when we go into the meeting [with the designers], you don't go 'huh?'.

John wanted to ensure Mike knew about all the components and deadlines of the project. During the team WIP, he said to Mike:

> I guess what we need to do is get back on the whiteboard and examine what needs to happen and when.

So, later that day, John and Mike had a separate meeting where John shared more (using a whiteboard) about the tasks involved in the project and the timeline he had for the various components. He let Mike know that at the meeting with designers, they needed to get clarity on what content was needed from them for the public information displays that will be put up at the launch event. This meeting was evidently John's way of offering collegial task support (Sias, 2008) to Mike by sharing all the project information with him and enabling him to be the key account liaison from here on. In doing so, it also ensured that they would have a shared understanding of the project and could effectively cooperate in being what Goffman (1959) called a *performance team* when meeting with the designers.

According to Goffman (1959), it is essential for team mates to cooperate, so they can project a single "definition of the situation" (p. 88) to a particular audience. In this case, the audience being the designers and the situation perhaps being a shared understanding of project tasks and timeline. Since any public disagreement or lack-of-knowledge display can embarrass the united impression of the performance team (Goffman, 1959), it was essential for John to bring Mike up-to-speed and ensure he could be "trusted to perform properly" (p. 95). Later the same day (Monday), they went to meet with the designers that their consultancy was working with on this project.

In the meeting with designers, John had emphasised the importance of having an agreement about what was needed to be delivered to the client and by when. In John's opinion this helped him, and Mike have clarity about what was required from their consultancy's share of the work.

John opened the meeting with saying to the designers and Mike:

> So, today, we're here to talk about prepping for the info day and get cracking on what we need. I tell you what, ideally, we'd like to walk away from it [this meeting] knowing exactly what we need to be doing and when so that we can just get on with that and do it.

At the end of the meeting, it was agreed that Mike and John will add copy to the design framework created by the designers and share with them by Monday. John suggested to the designers, "If you were to give us the structure that you're happy with, we can start populating it and bring it back". John also requested the designers to check the project plans, summarise their meeting notes and confirm the timelines around the content requirements. On John's part, this could be seen as a typical act of building consensus (Epson, 2019) in the inter-agency collaboration by creating a shared understanding of work and deadlines (Gevers et al., 2006).

A key part of the work to be done was for John and Mike to write the content for a project leaflet and display panels (led by Mike) that were due to the designers by following Monday (a week later). John explained to the researcher afterwards that working towards the event required a quick turnaround on both planning and execution of public relations work:

> …we're trying to [cover all ground] in a very short period of time…normally we have months to get to this point, now we have two or three weeks, which is a hugely reduced timeframe…

Even though John, at that point, had a total of 40 active client accounts, he was confident of being able to manage the work. He added:

> We just spread out our resources as required, we've got highly competent people and so yeah I'm not worried, we're part of a good team and I work late.

In John's reference to "competent people", the assumption is that Mike, his account director leading the client project, is capable of (and expected to) managing the workload. Additionally, John's mentioning his 'working late' could be seen as an example of Hewlett and Luce's (2006) concept of 'extreme ethos' observed in professional service firms, where long hours are seen as a laurel. It is interesting to note that John used the singular "I" as opposed to the collective "we", corroborating Yeomans' (2019) point that public relations consultants consider working late as an extension of their identity. It may also imply that since John owns the consultancy, irrespective of who leads a particular client account, he will always feel individually responsible for ensuring that the tasks are completed on time.

Furthermore, in expressing such a disposition, John is projecting his *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990) wherein 'working late' is not considered an anomaly. According to Bourdieu (1980), habitus is often "internalised as a second nature" (p. 56) and so acted upon without any conscious attention to it. However, in doing so it may become an unconscious precondition (Bourdieu, 1980) of what working in John's consultancy demands. Edwards (2011a) argued that such preconditions have a tendency of being used as assessments of whether a person is ‘fit’ to enter and be successful in the practice (see Section 4.2). This indicates that being able to work long hours could be an unsaid assessment of fit for working in John’s consultancy, and perhaps in this particular case an evaluation of Mike’s competency.

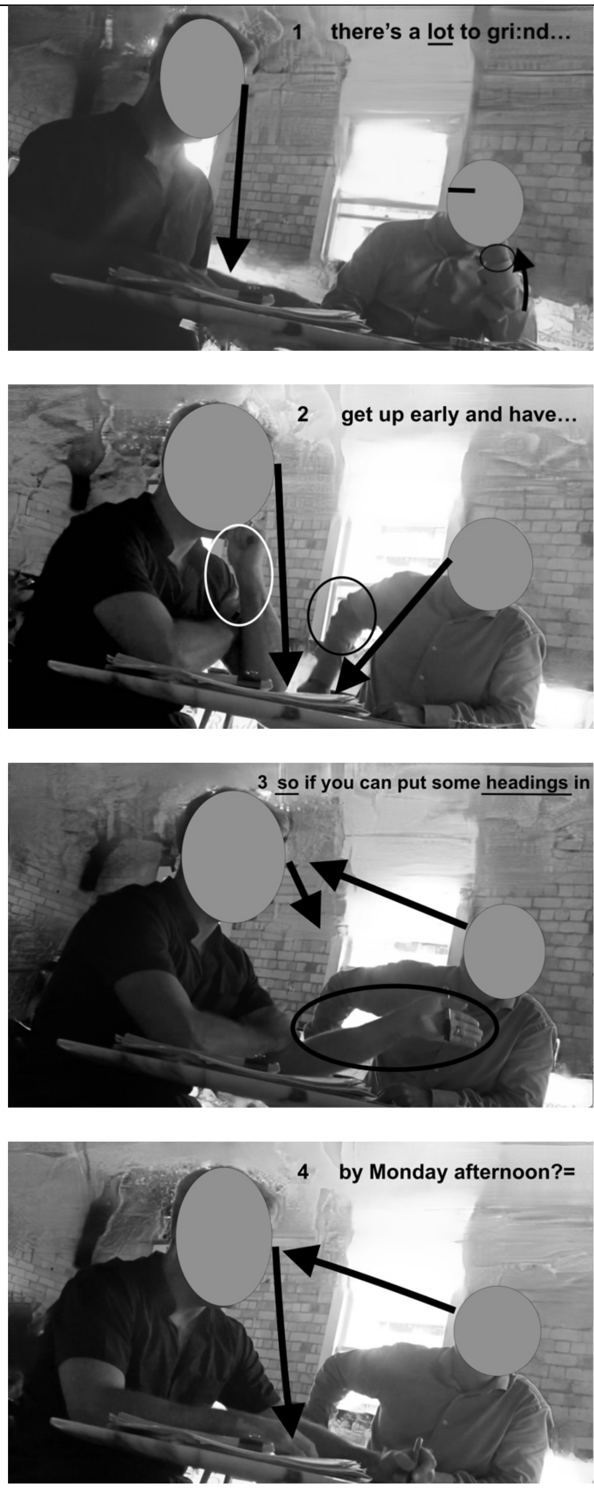
The discussion in the sections below is from John and Mike’s meeting about content writing for the client project, which had a quick turnaround and so perhaps demands such working outside office hours.

6.3.1 Scene Setting

On Thursday of the same week, two days after John and Mike’s initial meetings about the client project, they met again to collaborate on the content writing task. Mike shared the progress he had made so far and sought John’s feedback. Together, they discussed what content was needed to be written and sent to the designers by the following Monday. While Mike took notes, John was observed visualising the discussions on paper and drawing drafts. The critical incident—the interaction—discussed below happened towards the close of the meeting, 40 minutes into it, after completing all the exchanges about the content writing.

Figure 5: Transcript of interaction 3 - collaborating to meet a deadline

1. J: alright. cool. (1) so how are you
2. ↑feeling about it [>I realise< it's a] bit of a
3. slo::g?
4. M: [I like to say] yeah
5. there's a there's a
6. lot to gri:nd well a lot to gri:nd through
7. °it's all in there° but it's just >chucking it
8. together< so my (.7) ↑plan is is ahm (2.2)
9. M: >yeah I've got to< mix >I don't have a
10. perfectly clear< day tomorrow but yeah
11. get up early and have a good crack at it
12. with the aim of getting (.9) a good (.6)
13. chunk of it (.8) ↑done and then may and
14. then might as well °((indistinct)) two on
15. the weekend°=
16. J: ↑so if you can put some headings in as
17. well just to really cement it up?=
18. M: =ye:ah=
19. J: =ahm=
20. M: what's what's [Lara's]
21. J: [they would] ask about hiera:rchy and I
22. just don't ↓kno:w=
23. M: =what's Lara's expectation (.3) so she
24. >was she saying she needs< ↑copy and
25. layout from us by Monday afternoon?=
26. J: =↑we're not laying it out. (.6) ↓they
27. are.=
28. M: =yeah but just copy from us by
29. Monday afternoon=
30. J: =ye::ah so=
31. M: =and we can forward something on
32. the lines of this (.6)



33. so she doesn't she doesn't need to
34. submit the first draft to
35. the board by °Monday afternoon eh°
36. She's just asking for
37. J: well no they I think they want it done?

38. in very early next week °coz it goes to
39. printing° yes so
40. M: yeah
41. J: would you be >kind enough< just to
42. send her a message saying you're
43. working on it with me and just to=
44. M: =yeah of course
45. J: cla:rify exactly what she needs
46. M: yeah coz=
47. J: =coz we've ↑got this (.9) but yeah
48. M: it's good °it's gonna have to°=

49. J: =uh:m I've I've blocked out time on
50. Mon:day as well? (.3) so if it gets to the
51. point where (.4) you're tackling two or
52. three and I'm tackling two or three=
53. M: =yeah
54. J: oka::y. cool.

6.3.2 Let's not talk trouble!

At the start of the interaction, Mike and John were not looking at each other and John's posture was not directed towards Mike (see Figure 5, image 1). This showed that while John was present for this interaction, he was displaying a lack of recipiency (Heath, 1984) towards the forthcoming topic.

John used a discourse marker 'so' to precede his question about how Mike was feeling about 'it' (see Figure 5, lines 1-2). 'It' here was in reference to the content writing task that Mike had to complete by Monday. Such an inquiry about the other person's welfare is often meant to demonstrate that the speaker is paying attention to the listener, showing involvement in their lifeworld, and even encouraging them to engage in trouble-telling (Bolden, 2006).

This 'other-attentive' (Bolden, 2006) question's late placement in the meeting also indicates that it had been on John's agenda for a while, but he had managed to defer Mike's trouble-telling until this point in the conversation. John's unengaged gaze and posture imply that he was not looking forward to receiving Mike's response (Goodwin, 2007; Rossano, 2013). Overall, this commencement of the interaction highlights that while John was attempting to appear attentive and supportive, he was sensing trouble and not pleased about it.

Mike, in turn, hedged his response with "I like to say" (see Figure 5, line 4). According to Holmes and Stubbe (2015), starting with a hedge is a sign of avoiding a problematic topic, especially one which might threaten face needs and question the competence of the speaker. This indicates that Mike was perhaps conscious that his competence may be challenged if he were to accept feeling overwhelmed with the task being discussed.

It is also likely he was feeling hesitant to raise this issue as it might mean asking for more time, which could be a cause for embarrassment as the deadline had been mutually agreed upon. Further on, Mike's self-repetition of "there's a lot to grind" (see Figure 5, line 5) hinted that he felt his task required a fair amount of information processing. This statement, although not well-articulated or directly answering John's question, seems to provide an *account* for how Mike felt about the task and the deadline. It is common for people to engage in *account-giving*, i.e., explanation of behaviour (Firth, 1995), before articulating the core issue as it helps delay the onset of a topic that might be dispreferred by the other party (Schegloff, 2007). Mike's hedging and lack of articulation, combined with self-touching of the forehead and eyes (see Figure 5, image 1) indicates that this topic was making him uncomfortable (Harrigan, 1991; Jefferson, 1980).

Mike then paused (figure 5, line 7) and appeared to alter his response by referring to his "plan". However, this was followed by a longer pause (see Figure 5, line 7) which could mean that he was searching for words (Jefferson, 1988) to explain his plan or that he was still cognitively processing what his plan would be. The use of the word 'plan' could indicate that instead of focussing on the trouble that may displease John, he wanted to save face by offering a solution. Although, instead of explaining the plan, Mike rushed another account by saying ">I don't have a perfectly clear< day tomorrow" (see Figure 5, lines 8 – 9). This seems to be another attempt by Mike to hint to John that he may not have enough time to complete the task by the Monday deadline.

However, this account was quickly followed by a functional contrast (Schiffrin, 1987) "but yeah" (see Figure 5, line 9), highlighting that Mike was trying to respond to the multiple expectations that he perceived to be embedded in John's question (Schiffrin, 1987). Mike can be observed as using hedges and accounts to downgrade his true response. This helps save face (Holmes & Stubbe, 2015) for both consultants as Mike avoids appearing incompetent and John is saved from the embarrassment of looking inconsiderate. Clearly, the topic of a tight deadline was not an easy one for either of them to talk about. This corroborates findings of earlier studies that it can be challenging to address temporal factors among collaborating consultants (Mohammed & Nadkarni, 2011; Maruping et al., 2015).

6.3.3 Just get the work done, please.

As part of his plan to meet the deadline, Mike suggested that he would "get up early" (see Figure 5, line 10) and get major part of the work done the following day but may need to do some on the weekend as well (see Figure 5, lines 13 – 14). He does so while looking at the drafts of paper lying on the desk. His continued downward gaze (see Figure 5, image 2) suggests that his attention was narrowed on the documents, and he was perhaps comprehending (Barroso, 1978) how he will manage all the work. Additionally, since eye contact represents shared-attention, synchrony, and engagement between interactants (Wohltjen & Wheatley, 2021), Mike and John's lack of eye contact could be perceived as problematic.

John did not wait for Mike to finish and latched on with the discourse marker 'so', indicating that he wanted to exit the topic of Mike's trouble-telling and launch a different—more important—one (Jefferson, 1984a). At this point, John also raised his hand in Mike's direction (see Figure 5, image 3) and directly addressed him to "put some headings in" (line 15). In doing so, he seemed to be delivering an overt directive to Mike, which according to Holmes and Stubbe (2015) happens when it is realised that there is an urgency in the matter. It is also clear that John did not acknowledge Mike's reference to weekend work, thereby not only ending that topic but perhaps implying that it was not extraordinary in the given situation. This once again reiterates the habitus of 'working late' and puts an expectation on Mike to demonstrate his 'fit' by adhering to it.

At this point, as the receiver of the directive, Mike began looking at John (see Figure 5, image 3). John perhaps sensed Mike's gaze and softened the force of his directive by using "just" (see Figure 5, line 16) and ended his sentence with a rising intonation. Holmes and Stubbe (2015) argued that these linguistic strategies are a way of "lowering the heat" (p. 36) when directing people to get work done, which helps maintain collegiality.

Mike provided a favourable acknowledgment of the directive by saying "ye:ah" (figure 5, line 17) but continued to look at John, thereby nudging him to stay engaged in the conversation (Goodwin, 2007). He then explicitly sought confirmation from John if Lara was expecting "copy and layout from us by Monday afternoon" (see Figure 5, line 24). John continued to avoid Mike's gaze (image 4) and emphasised his negation "we're not laying it out" (see Figure 5, line 25).

In doing so, he also chose to ignore giving a response to Mike's conundrum about the timing of the deadline. This is what Lee (2013) called a 'term-transferring response', whereby resisting addressing part of the question is used to invalidate it. This may imply that, for John, the Monday deadline was non-negotiable and therefore did not warrant any discussion.

However, Mike appears to be pursuing a response by twice repeating his reference to "Monday afternoon" (see Figure 5, lines 28 - 34) and re-confirming if the deadline was in any way negotiable. Such response-pursuing is common when a person expects the other in the interaction to offer some form of “support or agreement” (p. 161) but has not received it so far (Pomerantz, 1985b). Clearly, Mike was hoping either to get an agreement from John to negotiate the deadline or perhaps support in helping complete the task on time.

At this point, it seems that John could not escape the trouble-talk any further. This became evident when he stroked his forehead (see Figure 5, image 6), which could be interpreted as his discomfort and frustration with Mike pursuing this topic (Harrigan, 1991). He began his answer with “well” (see Figure 5, line 36), which in this case could indicate that what he was about to say was not going to match Mike’s presupposition (Hayano, 2013; Schiffrin, 1987) that the deadline could be negotiated. He then explicitly negated Mike’s point and emphasised that “they want it done” but did so with the hedging device “I think”. John then looked directly at Mike and provided an account (Schegloff, 2007) for why he thought it needed to be done by Monday in softly saying, “°coz it goes to printing°” (see Figure 5, lines 37 – 38).

While John’s direct gaze at Mike (see Figure 5, image 6) was to ensure he registered what John was saying (and perhaps stopped pursuing the matter of the deadline), John’s use of hedging and account-giving once again shows that he used politeness strategies to assert his position on the matter. This is also the point at which Mike withdrew his gaze (see Figure 5, image 6) from John and uttered an affirmative “yeah” (figure 5, line 39), which could be interpreted as a sign of him withdrawing his engagement from the deadline topic and calling for closure (Rossano, 2013).

This finding adds to existing scholarship (Epson, 2019) by corroborating that looming deadlines can create tension in teamwork and consultancy leaders will need to carefully assert control to ensure the work gets done on time. In this case, John asserted his position as consultancy owner by avoiding talk about the deadline and providing an account for why it cannot be moved. While it was evident that he did not want to engage in deadline negotiation with Mike, he did so politely (using hedges and accounts) to maintain collegiality and harmony in the relationship with Mike.

6.3.4 Collegial task support as a closing offer

On receiving an affirmative from Mike, John considered the deadline matter closed and launched an imperative by saying “would you be >kind enough< just to send her a message" (see Figure 5, line 40 – 41). Directing colleagues and confirming agreement on the next steps is a common way to signal the end of an interaction and is usually done by the person holding the most power in the meeting (Holmes & Stubbe, 2015). However, John's use of "kind enough" (see Figure 5, line 40) is once again a hedge that mitigates the degree of his command (Holmes & Stubbe, 2015).

It can therefore be interpreted that while John was eager to confirm the next steps and end the meeting, he was also ensuring Mike did not feel offended at being told what to do. Furthermore, it could be implied that this was John's way of declaring that Mike was the lead on the client project and therefore it was his responsibility (as opposed to John's) to clarify with the designers about task and time expectations.

Towards the end of this interaction, John said that he had "blocked out time on Mon:day as well" (see Figure 5, lines 48 – 49), which could be seen as him suggesting that he had allocated time in his own calendar to offer collegial task support (Sias, 2008) to Mike. This supports existing literature that says that consultancy leaders need to enable and support their teams when performing under the pressure of tight deadlines (Maruping et al., 2015; Mohammed & Nadkarni, 2011). It also corroborates what other participants of this study had indicated about allocating specific time for collaboration (see section 6.2).

At this point, Mike turned his head towards John, and they briefly exchanged a mutual look (see Figure 5, image 8). This was the only time in the entire interaction when the two looked at each other. This shows that John's offer of support aligned well with Mike and helped establish a sense of "mutual involvement" (Heath, 1984, p. 263). This was perhaps a response Mike was hoping for while pursuing the deadline topic earlier.

When Mike responded with the affirmative "yeah" (see Figure 5, line 52), John and Mike both looked away, almost as if the matter had reached agreed closure. This was when John exclaimed "oka::y. cool." (see Figure 5, line 53), which is a positive assessment composite commonly used to indicate that a decision has been reached and the meeting can end (Heritage, 1984; Holmes & Stubbe, 2015; Schegloff, 2007).

What is interesting to note here is that Mike deferred discussion about the deadline and only offered this support towards the end of the meeting. This implies that consultancy leaders prefer their senior consultants to manage trouble-talk about tasks and deadlines directly with external parties as opposed to expecting them to negotiate on their behalf. At the most, they are willing to offer support in helping complete the task so the consultancy can maintain its impression as a performance team.

Such a situation is tricky for the consultancy leader as not being able to meet deadlines would negatively affect the consultancy’ reputation. Since consultancies rely on reputational capital to gain and retain client work (Edwards, 2011a), it could have an adverse effect on their financial sustenance. This perhaps explains why having the ability to work long hours is expected from consultants and seen as an assessment of their fit for the practice.

6.4 Conclusion

The findings discussed in this chapter show that while consultants value collaborating with each other, it is not always possible given the temporal concerns of the consulting lifeworld. It is especially challenging for consultancy owners and/or senior managers to offer their time for collaboration as they have additional demands on their time in the form of business development and talent management. The chapter also revealed that in situations where further collaboration may not be possible, consultants rely on politeness strategies, such as hedging, to maintain face and retain harmony with the peers.

Therefore, to ensure that consultants are available to offer collegial task support (Sias, 2008), consultancies must allocate structured time for collaboration and support. This will not only help avoid burn-out caused by working long hours to meet deadlines (Gevers et al., 2006), but also mitigate interpersonal conflicts among consultants.

CHAPTER 7: RESTRUCTURING CLIENT-CONSULTANT RELATIONSHIPS

Much like an interpersonal one, the client-consultant relationship experiences relational phases of growth and decline and warrants careful management through appropriate communication, behaviour, and interactions (Bruning & Ledingham, 2002). The relationship may deteriorate due to conflict, dilemma, or change (Bruning & Ledingham, 2002). This chapter focuses on change.

Changes in the client-consultant relationship may occur when the contracted work has been completed or if either the client or consultancy representative leaves the role, causing the relationship to require restructuring (Theunissen & Sissons, 2018). Typically, these representatives are responsible for relational management through continuous one-on-one interactions with each other (Harrison-Walker & Coppett, 2003). The consultancy representative is often called the *account manager* (Madill et al., 2005) and seen as the custodian of the relationship between the client and the consultancy (Yeomans, 2019). When an account manager leaves the job, it can cause significant disruption for the consultancy and necessitate turnover management (Madill et al., 2007; Mart & Jackson, 2005; Vafeas, 2015).

This chapter presents and discusses findings from the current study that relate to a situation when an account manager decided to exit the consultancy, causing the need to manage this turnover and make changes to the client-consultant relationship.

7.1 Scholarly background – account manager turnover

In public relations consultancies, usually, it is the account manager who does day-to-day liaising with the client representative whereas the more senior members work on finding and winning business for them to work on (Yeomans, 2019). The clients often have high expectations regarding the nature and frequency of interaction with the account manager and therefore this role is critical to the client's assessment of "good service" (Yeomans, 2019, p.58) and performance (Mart & Jackson, 2005) by the consultancy.

Additionally, client representatives prefer working with account managers with whom they are familiar as it reduces uncertainty and fosters trust. In fact, an account manager's likeability, expertise, and rapport with the client's representative are often considered more influential than organisational factors such as size, resources, and capabilities in determining the continuity of the relationship (Vafeas, 2015).

Markedly, management consultancy literature suggests that the real value of account managers is realised when they leave the consultancy (Vafeas, 2010, 2015) as there may be loss of client-specific knowledge. Vafeas (2010, 2015) who studied design consultancies in the United Kingdom (UK) warned that trust, and therefore the client relationship, may be damaged during such account manager turnover. This was especially true if the consultancy's size, culture and even office layout prohibited cooperation and knowledge exchange (Vafeas, 2010). Furthermore, in their study of advertising consultancies in New York, Broschak et al. (2019) found that the relationship between client representatives and account managers is such a "sticky and enduring asset" (p. 30) that clients often transfer their business to the account manager's new consultancy. This is termed as *client-tie circulation* (Broschak et al., 2019) and is undoubtedly a cause of anxiety for consultancy owners.

Since turnover is inevitable for any organisation, what truly matters is how it is managed by the consultancy (Madill et al., 2007). Such situations necessitate a proper management of turnover that should include timely communication, handover from current to the new account manager, account handling by the owner of the consultancy or a senior manager while the new account manager is being recruited, and client involvement in the new account manager's recruitment (Vafeas, 2015). It is argued that these strategies "are confidence-building contexts, offering reassurance and ensuring minimal disruption and performance gap" (Vafeas, 2015, p. 79).

In public relations consultancies too, account manager turnover is perceived to be detrimental for the client-consultant relationship. This is especially concerning if the consultancy owners and/or senior management are not acquainted with the client representative and not up to date with client project that was managed by the exiting account manager (Mart & Jackson, 2005). Clients were understood to be more forgiving in case of turnover if the consultancy owners/senior management were able to take the reins and maintain communication and minimise project disruption (Mart & Jackson, 2005). Clearly then, account manager turnover and its consequent management are critical for consultancy business. However, this issue has received little to no attention in public relations scholarship.

The findings from a critical incident as well as an interview with the key participant, presented and discussed in the sections below, are examples of such turnover management by a public relations consultancy.

7.2 The need for turnover management

John, the owner and director of a public relations consultancy in Auckland, was observed having a work-in-progress meeting (WIP) with his two employees Stan and Mike. At this meeting, it became evident that Stan was leaving the consultancy in two weeks' time and moving to an in-house role elsewhere. For the last 18 months, Stan had served as an account manager for several of John's key clients. Therefore, John needed to perform what Vafeas (2015) referred to as *turnover management*.

In an informal interview (done before the critical incident discussed later in this chapter), John explained his perspective on staff turnover and its effect on the consultancy and clients.

> … the number one thing is always conversation, keeping the discussion going. Ultimately, it's about relationships and work is almost incidental because ideally what we're always looking to do is build long term relationships with people. (John)

John confirmed that several of their client relationships were initiated by him and then he brought in either Stan or Mike to manage the account and preferred to simply stay updated with all developments. It appeared that John did not have the time to manage all the client relationships as he emphasised, "I can't be across everything".

He stressed the importance of being mindful of who is managing the client relationship and that it was crucial that the initiator of the relationship (him) did not undermine the relationship manager (Stan). In John's view, the ownership of the relationship belonged to the key account handler (which was Stan in reference to the current turnover situation). John reminisced:

> When I first arrived in NZ my boss had a personal relationship with all the design and brand people and she kept going behind my back even though that was my relationship to hold. I'm conscious of that always. It would be disruptive to Stan [name changed] if I was going around Stan's back to always talk to the boss in the organisation when he holds the relationship as the account manager**.**

Additionally, the ownership of the relationship at the consultancy's end is a client-led and financially driven decision. John acknowledged that:

> This quote seems to address the "why I don't attend the meetings" rather than the end of the consultancy. Why would John charge the client in this case? It is not the client's fault that the account manager is leaving and so John has to attend the meeting. (John)

> …people don't like paying twice. If I go and he [referring to Mike as an example] goes, if we both go, we've got separate timesheets, right? So, they [clients] don't like it unless it is specifically agreed. So, if we both turn up, they will be thinking 'it's a waste of money'. So, it's a tricky balance to strike. (John)

> It's always a challenge because they don't want both of us to go to meetings. You've got an account manager in Stan [name changed] whose role is to service and manage that account, so I need him to build relationships. There is always a risk when someone wants to go because in his role your job is to build him up with as much interaction with the client as possible. When he wants to go, you have got to take it on…I want people asking for my people, not me, you know.

He pointed that turnover was inevitable in the industry and was not limited to consultancies but also prevalent at the client's side with representatives exiting the roles/jobs or going on maternity leave.

John, however, was concerned about Stan's departure. He contemplated that Stan's resignation might create the threat of the client considering ending the relationship. This clearly echoes the fear of *client-tie circulation* mentioned by management consultancy scholars (Broschak et al., 2019; Vafeas, 2015)

7.3 Interaction four – turnover management in a client-consultant meeting

In managing the turnover, John planned on meeting with all the clients served by Stan, sending them a follow-up email to confirm the change, having a handover meeting with Stan to get an update on all the projects, and having a handover meeting with Stan and the consultant replacing him. This chapter is about one of the client meetings.

Stan had been the account manager for this client and the work mostly included social media content, blog posts, monthly newsletter, ad hoc organisational media announcements, and additional content writing as and when needed.

John had initiated this work with the client organisation's founding director Glenn. The relationship, however, was manged by the client representative, Giselle, and consulting account manager Stan. Giselle had recently gone on maternity leave and Catherine had been the interim client representative for the past 12 weeks.

Stan alerted John at the Monday WIP that Glenn was apprehensive about a blog post Stan had written and wanted to talk about it before signing it off. John felt this was an opportunity to have a conversation with the client team about Stan's departure. So, an in-person meeting was organised and both Stan and John headed over to the client's workplace later in the week for a client-consultant meeting.

7.3.1 Scene setting

On the way to the client's office, John explained why his presence at the meeting mattered:

> There's a couple of purposes to this meeting really, there's a blog that's causing some trickiness, they need to get past and I'm keen to be part of it because I want them to know that much as they've relied on Stan's excellent work over the last 18 months, I want them to know that I haven't forgotten about them. (John)

At this meeting, after discussing and resolving the blog post concern, John let Glenn know that Stan was leaving his consultancy. Glenn joked that now John was "going to have to be back on the tools", and John reassured Glenn that they are "trying to get a clean-up done before he's [Stan's] away" and that he was "obviously aware" of what had been happening on the client account.

Approximately 20 minutes into the meeting, Glenn excused himself and left the room and his client representative —Catherine—joined the meeting to talk to Stan about the content of the monthly newsletter that Stan had been working on. Since Catherine had been liaising with Stan so far, she had not met John. On his part, John did not explain his presence but did give his business card to Catherine as she settled in her chair. The majority of the four-minute conversation that followed immediately after was between Stan and Catherine about how he could optimise a news story about the organisation donating to a local charity. She also checked if Stan was "waiting" for any approvals from her as she was cognisant that the blog post sign-off was pending. It was only after this project work had been discussed that Stan mentioned that he was leaving John's consultancy and John joined the conversation with Catherine.

The critical incident discussed in the sections below highlights how John communicated with the client representative to manage the turnover at his consultancy.

Figure 6: Transcript of interaction 4 - turnover management in a client-consultant meeting

1. S: so if there’s any feedback on any
2. of that shoot it through to (.6)
3. C: yeah
4. S: through to m:e if it’s next week=
5. C: =yeah
6. S: didn’t meant to (.2) actually the
7. uhm (.3) >I finish up next week<
8. (.8) with:h (.3) Cl:arity.
9. C: do ↑you=
10. S: =yeah (.2) s:o
11. C: °o::hh°
12. J: hence=
13. S: =I’ll cop:y=
14. C: =<THAT’S WHY ↑YOU’RE
15. HERE JOHN>
16. J: hhh Ye::s=
17. C: huh huh huh [huh huh]
18. S: [I’ll cop:y]
19. J: [because] (.3) it
20. may (.2) it may ahm you may not
21. be aware but (1.7) uhm my history
22. is long with Glenn=
23. C: =yes I think yeah yeah °yes I
24. do° ((indistinct))
25. J: so uhm (.9) you know I was just
26. (.) you know letting (1.6) beauty
27. before ↑a:ge

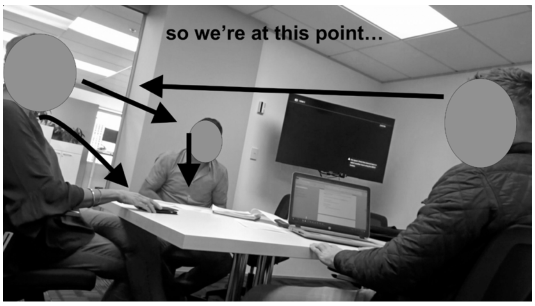
28. C: hah hah hah hah hah hah huh
29. huh

30. S: not quite (.2) but ↑uh::m (.7)

31. >yeah so< John will uhm be the
32. the contact=
33. C: =OKAY cool
34. S: uhm (1.1) there's a new
35. >contractor coming on board as
36. well< but ahm (.4) there yeah=
37. J: =>for now< I'm the (.6) the

38. S: the
39. C: you're the key contact for now=
40. J: =ye:s ple:ase if poss↓ible=
41. C: =>yeah yeah yeah< absolutely=
42. S: =so I'll copy you in to >[things I'll
43. be   here next
44. week] if there are any changes<
45. C: [yeah
46. (.8)   yeah]

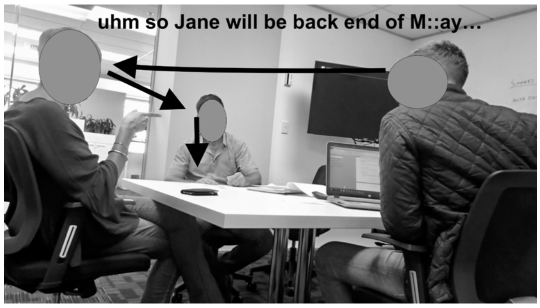
47. C: so we're at the point now two of
48. you we've got the newsletter pretty
49. much ready to go

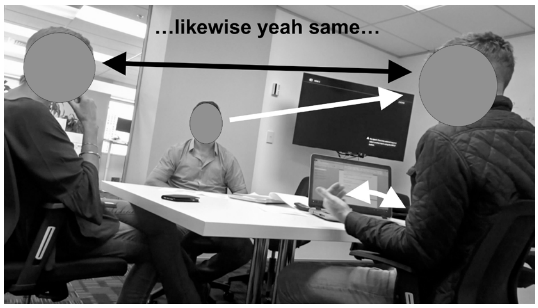


50. J: yeah
51. C: so then from o::ur si::de uhm I'm
52. here what's going to be 12 months
53. while Michelle is on maternity
54. le:ave
55. J: yes
56. C: now actually I'm going soon hhh

57. as we(hh)ll
58. J: yes
59. C: so in June [and then]
60. J: [and then] Jane's
61. coming back
62. C: yeah (.6) so I think maybe in
63. that transition time between Jane
64. and I
65. J: yeah

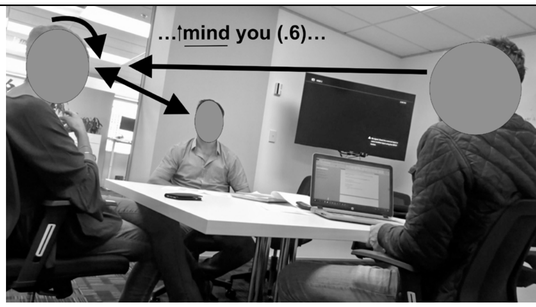
66. C: uhm so Jane will be back end of
67. M::ay and I then I'll be away
68. sometime J:une so (.6) you know
69. we should get together=
70. J: =that'll be good yes=
71. C: =you can meet Jane=
72. J: =yeah [and then I know Jane]
73. C: >[and at least we've got] a
74. newsletter< ready to g::o (.4) pretty much.
75. S: yeah.
76. C: well all the best we'll miss ↓you
77. S: [yeah thanks]
78. C: [all the best] for [whatever you
79. doing next] hhh hhh
80. S: [yeah likewise
81. yeah same] with you your new job
82. sounds cool so. (.5)
83. C: ↑yeah (.3) yeah ↓no I mean it'll
84. be good working for ↑mind you (.6)
85. °it's it's fun working here too
86. though they're a great team°=
87. S: =yeah they are good people=
88. C: =yeah yeah absolutely=
89. S: =yeah good stuff it's been nice





90. to see you ↑we'll have some <u>email</u>
91. <u>dialogue</u> next week ↓[but anyway
92. ((indistinct))]
93. C: [yeah] (1.3)
94. so when you] you've got one more
95. week
96. S: <u>yes</u>
97. C: OKAY (.2)
98. S: yeah (.3)

99. J: so please <u>do</u> copy me in↓=
100. S: =yeah I'll do that.=
101. J: =uhm I <u>do</u> know <u>Jane</u> so (.4)
102. that's good
103. C: OH <u>good</u> °excellent OKAY°
104. J: °y:up°



7.3.2 Who is *present* in the meeting matters

As can be seen in Figure 6, at the start of this critical interaction, Stan and Catherine were looking at each other while John was looking down at his notebook. Goffman (1963) claimed that in face-to-face interactions of more than two participants, there may be a possibility of one (or more) being "officially excluded from the encounter and not themselves so engaged" (p. 92). This bystander (Goffman, 1963, p. 92) might feel the need to stay separated from his co-participants through gaze avoidance. This could be if such a participant felt he was not ready to join the interaction or felt the others were pre-occupied (Goffman, 1963, p. 92). This is likely the case with John as he was in the meeting essentially to address the turnover, whereas Stan and Catherine were still preoccupied talking about client content related matters. It is interesting to note though that John did not straight-away explain his presence and announce Stan's departure. This was perhaps because he saw Stan as the custodian of the client relationship and preferred him to announce the change or because he was intending to downplay the seriousness of the matter by delaying the topic. Overall, it may be implied that, in the beginning, while John was in Stan and Catherine's physical presence, he was not yet in their social co-presence (Goffman, 1963).

Additionally, Catherine's posture (especially her head and shoulders), was oriented more towards Stan, symbolising recipiency of his talk (Heath, 1984) and assumably also a positive attitude of likeability (Mehrabian, 1968, 2007). It is likely that she was feeling anxious about John's unusual presence in the meeting. This could be because John was unfamiliar and Catherine was unsure of how to include him in the conversation or perhaps because she was intimidated by John's presence and assumed he had legitimate power (Raven & French, 1958) over Stan, and therefore more control over decision-making in the meeting (Hardy & Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998; Holmes & Stubbe, 2015; Nikolova, 2007). Catherine's internal state was inferred from her self-touching of the chin, which can be an indicator of anxiety (Mehrabian, 2007). Although, it could also be that she was simply trying to process information by focussing on Stan's talk and avoiding the distraction (Barroso et al., 1978) of John's co-presence. It is probable that both Catherine and Stan presumed that John was busy reading or writing as opposed to paying attention to their talk (Heath, 1984).

Stan soon initiated a pre-announcement (Schegloff, 2007; Terasaki, 2004) by making a noticeable time reference (Enfield, 2013) of "…if it's next week" in line four. Such talk is meant to alert the co-participants that noteworthy information is about to follow and requires assessment of being either good or bad news (Schegloff, 2007; Terasaki, 2004). In this case, it was perhaps not such good news when Stan announced, speaking faster than usual (line seven), ">I finish up next week<". On hearing this, Catherine dropped her hand on the table in a beat gesture (McNeill, 1992) which shows that her simultaneous verbal expression of "do ↑you" (line 9) was significant. Here *do you* could be seen not just as an exclamation but also as a tag question that was seeking confirmation (Hayano, 2013; Sacks et al., 1974) of what Stan said. This is a common practice among women (Glenn, 2003) to provide polite feedback to their co-participants when listening and encouraging them to continue (Hayano, 2013).

After Stan's confirmed "yeah" (see Figure 6, line 10), Catherine's soft and stretched °o::hh° (line 11) could indicate that she was registering the new information she had just received (Heritage, 1984) and possibly "noticing" (p. 300) something about her local knowledge. This may imply that Catherine got triggered cognitively by an understanding of the situation (Schiffrin, 1987), which in this case was John's presence in the meeting. Following this, Catherine turned her head towards John and gazed directly at him as she said in a louder volume, "<THAT'S WHY ↑YOU'RE HERE JOHN>". This may be understood as what Holmes and Marra (2002) call jocular insult (discussed more in the next section 5.3.3) as it could be Catherine's way of politely implying that John had ignored their client relationship so far by not being present in any meetings but was now attempting to repair that. John confirmed her sentiment with a smile, outbreath, and a "ye::s" (line 16), which made Catherine laugh (see Figure 6, line 17).

According to scholarship on turn-taking behaviour (Rossano, 2013; Sacks et al., 1974), Catherine's co-ordination of turned gaze towards John and explicitly addressing him in her question was to invite him to join the interaction by being the next speaker and sharing social co-presence (Goffman, 1963). It should be noted that Catherine only turned towards John when, based on Stan's announcement, she made sense of why John was there in the meeting. The above finding may signify that client representatives who have become accustomed to interacting with a particular account manager may exhibit uncertainty and anxiety when additional (unfamiliar and/or those possessing more positional power) consultants are present in a meeting, especially if their presence is not explained at the outset (which is what John had done). Furthermore, it may be inferred from Catherine's jocular insult that client representatives expect the consultancy's top management to show ongoing interest by having occasional presence in client-consultant meetings, as opposed to complete delegation to their account managers.

7.3.3 Bridge-building and face-saving through humour and history

When John started to speak, he said a few words and then paused for 1.7 seconds (see Figure 6, line 21) which might mean that on being questioned about his presence (and, implicitly, the lack of presence in earlier meetings), he was doing an internal cognitive search for the right words (Goodwin, 1980; Jefferson, 1988). He then resolved this silence by making eye contact with Catherine and making a default (first name only) person reference (Enfield, 2013) to Catherine's boss Glenn (see Figure 6, lines 21 – 22). This could mean that he was trying to draw a shared recognition without emphasising that he was doing it for a special reason (Enfield, 2013). However, it is likely that John deliberately mentioned his "history" (see Figure 6, line 21) as a way of demonstrating his credibility and track record, which according to Nikolova et al. (2015) is the "first step toward developing trust as it demonstrates consultants' ability and integrity" (p. 241). In doing so, John looked-up to make eye contact with Catherine which indicates that he wanted to elicit a response from her (Enfield, 2013). Part of her response included "yeah yeah" (see Figure 6, line 23) which function in discourse as backchannels*,* signifying that the listener has indeed understood the intended message and wants to speaker to keep proceeding (Kjellmer, 2009).

John prefaced the next sentence with discourse marker "so uhm" (see Figure 6, line 25) and paused for .9 seconds, which could imply that he was about to say something of significance (Schiffrin, 1987) but was again searching for the right words (Jefferson, 1988; Norrick, 2014). John ended the pause with "you <u>know</u>" (which he said twice in lines 25-26), which could have been his attempt at gaining affiliation from Catherine by signalling that his next statement is shared knowledge (Schiffrin, 1987) among them. Holmes (1990) found that in New Zealand, it was common among men to use *you know* as a hedge to show a sense of informality and express positive politeness. It is to be noted that such hedges also act as preparation to apply polite defensiveness and avoid face-threats in delicate conversations (Goffman, 1967). This suggests that John was preparing himself to avoid answering Catherine's question about his presence, which he may have perceived as face-threatening. According to Goffman (1967) *face* refers to an image of self that, "others may share, as and when a person makes a good showing for his profession or religion by making a good showing for himself" (p.5). Maintaining face is often considered "a condition of interaction" (p. 12), implying that people tend to feel threatened or embarrassed if there is any inconsistency in their projected image (Goffman, 1967). In hedging, John was perhaps attempting to compensate for his absence in earlier meetings and maintain his image as a professional who valued client relationships.

After another pause of 1.6 seconds, he did what is best described as a humorous formulaic expression or general truth telling (Schiffrin, 1987), stating that he was

"…letting (1.6) beauty before ↑ a:ge" and pointing at Stan when uttering the word "beauty" (see Figure 6, line 26). Here John's jocular answer appeared to be performing what Goffman (1967) called *corrective face-work*, a way for him to show that Catherine's question about his presence was a "…joke not meant to be taken seriously" (Goffman, 1967, p. 20), thereby offering Catherine an opportunity to laugh it off and re-establish the balance in the interaction.

John's attempt was successful at generating laughter from Catherine (see Figure 6, lines 28 – 29), at which point he once again looked up at her and smiled as they made eye contact. Her laughter might denote that she was giving him an affiliative response, which appeared to serve his joke's purpose (Glenn, 2003) and consequently, at least in part, that of his coming to the meeting.

The findings discussed here suggest that consultants are adept at employing discourse strategies such as humour and history-telling to display their credibility and gain the client representative's affiliation.

Talking about shared history with noteworthy people appears to be what public relations scholars (Sriramesh et al., 1999; Taylor, 2004; Theunissen & Sissons, 2018; Valentini, 2010) have previously referred to as relying on existing personal relationships to exercise influence and gain further relational success.

Additionally, John's hedging behaviour and display of humour in the interaction indicate his attempt at maintaining face by keeping the matter polite and unserious (Goffman, 1967). Since humour is known to defuse anxiety-laden situations, ease problematic talk (Koester, 2012) and abate face-threatening talk (Holmes, 2000), it is clearly valuable to consultants in interactions like the one discussed here. This links to what has been confirmed by Holmes and Stubbe (2015) as "doing collegiality through humour" (p. 112), which plays a crucial role in creating social cohesion at workplaces, or as seen in this case, as "bridge-building" (p. 113) and face-saving (Goffman, 1967) in client-consultant relationships.

7.3.4 Being polite and staying in control

While Catherine had shown affiliation towards John with her laughter, Stan's response of "not quite" (see Figure 6, line 30) meant that he was categorically refusing to join the laughter-together (Jefferson, 1979, 1984). John's formulaic expression (see above Section 7.3.3) had been a combination of self-deprecating and teasing humour (Glenn, 2003; Koester, 2012) which made both John and Stan the 'butt' of the joke. However, John's attempt was met by Stan's negation of self-deprecation (Pomerantz, 1984a). Afterwards, Stan paused for .2 seconds as if to think of a repair for this disagreement with his superior, which may otherwise be perceived as impolite and dispreferred (Pomerantz, 1984a). Stan next uttered "but ↑uh::m", took another pause of .7 seconds (see Figure 6, line 30), and leant back in his chair. This hedging behaviour could imply that he was softening his negation as a matter of repair (Pomerantz, 1984a). Additionally, he appeared to be returning the conversation to transactional talk (Koester, 2012) by using 'but' as a functional contrast (Schiffrin, 1987) and reclining in his chair to create physical distance and show less of a positive feeling (Mehrabian, 1969) towards John's joke. Either way, Stan was ensuring he was not perceived as verbally defying his superior, even though his posture suggested otherwise.

At this juncture, Catherine was also observed orienting her body towards Stan and looking at him, indicating her acknowledgment of return to talk preceding (Jefferson, 1984) the joke. Stan kept looking at his laptop as he informed Catherine that John will be "the contact" (see Figure 6, line 32) and that a new contractor (it is implied this new person would be the client's account manager) was coming on board (see Figure 6, lines 34 – 36). At this point, John, who had been looking downward while Stan was talking, looked up at Stan to draw his attention and latched on (Jefferson, 2004a, 2004b) to his comment to ensure it was made clear that "for now" (37) it was him. In Catherine's confirmation, she emphasised "key" (see Figure 6, line 39) in a way of showing that she understood that John was her main point of contact at the consultancy until they replaced Stan. John's response of "yes:s ple:ase if poss↓ible" (line 40) is a hedge and a request (Schegloff, 2007) and may be seen as politeness strategy to downtone his decisiveness on the matter (Diani, 2014). It should be noted that John and Stan had already agreed on this prior to the meeting and part of John's presence at the meeting was to communicate this decision to Glenn and Catherine. It therefore implies that the consultants were like a team of actors staging a performance to manage their impression (Goffman,1959) before the client. This is perhaps why Stan could not afford to be impolite towards John as that, "not only incapacitates them for united action but also embarrasses the reality sponsored by the team" (p. 91).

The above discussion highlights that consultants apply politeness strategies in interactions to maintain face (Holmes & Stubbe, 2015), neutralise directives (Diani,

2014) and manage impressions (Goffman, 1959). This aligns with the finding by Theunissen and Sissons (2018) that New Zealand practitioners used politeness as a discourse device. The authors argued that politeness was a practitioner's non-threatening way of ensuring that the message was conveyed, and actions carried out, without negatively affecting the relationship.

7.3.5 Interrupting small talk with transactional talk

Further in the interaction, Catherine used the discourse marker "so" (see Figure 6, lines 47, 51, 59, 62) several times to highlight "the main informational" parts of her talk (Schiffrin, 1987, p. 198). These were all transactional utterances (Koester, 2012) to confirm that in her understanding Stan and John had finished the newsletter content, that she was leaving her organisation "as we(hh)ll" (line 57) and that another representative called Jane would be replacing her. Catherine exchanged glances with Stan as she said "as we(hh)ll" implying that she felt aligned with Stan's current position. Such nonverbal acts can help speakers establish "a state of mutual involvement if only temporarily without shifting the focus of attention from the topic or business at hand" (Heath, 1984, p. 263).

During the exchanges between Catherine and Stan, John had continued to cast his gaze downwards. He looked up at Catherine only to overlap with her talk and complete her upcoming utterance with "[and then] <u>Jane's</u> coming back" (see Figure 6, lines 60-61). This anticipatory completion could mean that John was once again making an affiliative move in showing that he had shared knowledge (Lerner 2004; Hayashi, 2013) about Jane and her return.

From here on, Catherine started making arrangements about getting together with Jane and John, which is usually a sign associated with strongly signalling closure of conversation (Jefferson, 1984). John interjected into this closure by making an assertion (Pomerantz, 1984a) about already knowing Jane (see Figure 6, line 72), but Catherine continued to talk over him, not showing any sign of recipiency towards his statement. Perhaps her lack of engagement prompted John to withdraw from the conversation momentarily and look downward. Catherine directed the conversation further towards closure by engaging in small talk with Stan (see Figure 6, lines 76 – 88), which ended with Stan saying "yeah" (see Figure 6, line 98) as a mark of closure. Small talk is an example of positive politeness, a common exhibit of *doing collegiality* (Holmes, 2000, p. 48) and maintaining social relationships. Towards the end of a meeting, this is often to indicate end of official interaction through an effort in re-orienting oneself towards social instead of role relationships (Holmes & Stubbe, 2015).

However, after the .3 seconds gap following Stan's closure, John spoke up. This deferred the end of the interaction and declined Stan the role of closing the meeting as the current account manager. Instead, John asserted, "so please do copy me in in↓" (line 99). While this utterance was a directive (a form of transactional talk) expecting the addressees to perform a certain action (Koester, 2012), his use of "please" downtoned it to come across more as a request (Koester, 2012). This is common in white-collar workplaces, especially when the nature of the directive is not routine (Holmes & Stubbe, 2015). So, it may be inferred that John was cognisant that it was not routine for him to be the key contact or to interrupt small talk, and therefore he could not come across as being too commanding about being copied in. On receiving a favourable response from Stan, John further announced, "um I do know Jane so" (line 101), a repetition of what he had said earlier (see Figure 6, line 72), but without acknowledgment. This time, however, he received a positive assessment composite from Catherine in the form of "OH good °excellent OKAY°" implying that she had received the information, assessed it favourably, and was marking an end to the interaction (Heritage, 1984; Pomerantz, 1984a, 1984b; Schegloff, 2007). To this, John nodded his head, without looking up, and softly said "°y:up°" (see Figure 6, line 104) almost as if he was speaking his mind aloud which acknowledged resolution of all matters and consequently the end of the meeting.

In the above section of the interaction, John appeared to be *pursuing a response* (Pomerantz, 1984b) to something previously said but not confirmed by his co-participants. The purpose of such pursuing acts is usually to receive a reliable reply to the assertions (Pomerantz, 1984b), in this case of the fact that John wanted to be copied in and that he knew Jane. This signifies that, to John, these points were too important to go unregistered and needed resolution before interaction closure as they were perhaps the reason for his presence in the meeting and indicated his *re-connection* with a long-standing client.

The above findings show that positive politeness in the form of small talk and requests (Holmes, 2000; Holmes & Stubbe, 2015; Koester, 2012) may be used in client-consultant interactions as a way of minimising face-threatening acts and maintaining the relationship. This adds to earlier public relations research (Theunissen & Sissons, 2018) arguing the value of small talk in being polite transition markers in interactions. However, the transition from small talk to meeting closure is not successful if a member feels the need to pursue a response on matters mentioned but not favourably acknowledged. This goes to prove that people in positions of power (in this case John had more positional power over Stan) have a stronger influence on deciding when a discussion was complete (Holmes & Stubbe, 2015).

7.4 Conclusion

The findings presented in this chapter demonstrate that during account manager turnover, the sustenance of the client-consultancy relationship depends on how the consultancy's owner/senior manager communicates with the client representative. Since client representatives are familiar with the account manager and have not been in regular contact with the consultancy's owner/senior manager, they may feel uncertain and anxious about the future of the client-consultancy relationship (Broschak et al., 2019; Mart & Jackson, 2005; Vafeas, 2015).

The interaction examined in this chapter shows that consultancy's owner/senior manager may need to employ small talk, humour, and politeness strategies to maintain reputation, avoid embarrassment and reestablish trust with the client representative.

It is therefore worthwhile for public relations consultancy owners/senior managers to ensure that they are familiar with every client's representative, up to date with all the client projects, and maintain at least some form of ongoing interaction with the client representatives to avoid need for face-saving during turnover. Overall, public relations scholarship, education and practice need a better understanding of what Vafeas (2015) termed as the *turnover management process.*

CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION

8.1 Affable, able, and available

The analysis of data illuminated various intricacies of the occupational field of public relations consulting in Aotearoa New Zealand. The findings revealed that personality traits, social networks and experience were valued over formal credentials. Consultants applied dramaturgic strategies (using multiple modes of expression) to exert influence as well as maintain harmony in relationships with clients and colleagues, while financial reliance on clients created various demands on the consultants and sometimes led to stressful, unpaid, and emotional labour.

The findings can be summarised with the following quote from John, one of the participating consultants:

> There's the three A's – able, affable, available. So, if you've got those three, you're in business [of public relations consulting].

Interestingly, the adage of the three A's has been popular in clinical practice (Gamblin, 2020; Kapadia & Kieran, 2020; McNevin, 2020) where surgical consultants are expected to instil a working lifestyle of being "friendly, present, and competent" (Kapadia & Kieran, 2020, p.E1). It is presumed that the success of the surgical consultant and their practice depends on how they prioritise the medical and communicative needs of their patients (Kapadia & Kieran, 2020). In doing so, the clinical practice is required to have timely processes, efficient communication, and a collaborative environment where collegial support can be provided if necessary (Gamblin, 2020). Likewise, surgical consultants are expected to be easily accessible to the patient, which can create challenges in balancing the time commitments of their professional and personal lives (Gamblin, 2020). Additionally, the surgical consultants need to have the ability to provide appropriate advice for solving the patient's critical problems (McNevin, 2020) for which they often rely on knowledge-based expertise and experience (Gamblin, 2020). Notably, consultants are obliged to be kind and polite in their interactions to develop trust with the patient and their families (McNevin, 2020). Consultants are also expected to be sociable, so they can build a professional network which may be called upon to seek opinion and expertise in complicated clinical cases (Gamblin, 2020).

In some ways the practice of public relations consulting, based on the findings shared in chapters four to seven, bears resemblance to the three A's of surgical consulting. For example, public relations consultants must prioritise their clients (see chapter six), make themselves accessible to meet client demands and deadlines (see Section 6.2), apply politeness and empathy in their interactions (see Sections 5.2, 5.3.2, 6.3.3 and 7.3.4), draw from their expertise and experience to solve client problems (see Section 5.2), and have networks that can be called upon for favours (see Section 4.3.2). Therefore, the three A's offer an appropriate analogy for discussing the findings. Additionally, it seems that while neo-professions (and their PSFs such as public relations consultancies) may not have the same privileges as classical professions (see Section 2.3.1), they do share some common traits in their occupational cultures.

Findings pertaining to the occupational culture of public relations consulting in Aotearoa New Zealand are discussed in this chapter.

8.2 Being affable

The term *affable* is used to describe a person who is "pleasant, friendly and easy to talk to" (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, n.d.-a). This study found that consultants strategically used their affability to build networks and maintain harmony in relationships. Affability, therefore, had multifarious implications for public relations consulting, as discussed in the sub-sections that follow.

8.2.1 Personal influence, served with caution!

Consultants felt that an affable personality was needed to create connections that could be useful in attracting clients and in seeking favours to achieve client-related outcomes (see Sections 4.2.3 and 4.3.2). In fact, consultants claimed that they often got client work through their personal and occupational connections and that clients too valued their existing networks, especially if these could prove to be beneficial in any way. It was part of the routine discourse of consultants to refer to the importance of being "well-connected" (Chris, Section 4.2.3), so that you could access "the right person" (Oliver, Section 4.2.3) when needed in your client work. Clearly, "who you know" (Gracie, Section 4.2.3) mattered in the consultancy lifeworld.

The current study therefore proved that Aotearoa New Zealand was like the UK (Edwards, 2008, 2009, 2011a, 2013), Mexico (Hodges, 2005, 2006, 2011), countries in

Asia (Berkowitz & Lee, 2004; Hou et al., 2013; Jo & Kim, 2004; Sriramesh et al., 1999), Eastern and Southern Europe (Braun, 2007; Taylor, 2004; Valentini, 2010), Africa (Kiambi & Nadler, 2012; Wu & Baah-Boakye, 2009) and the Arab world (Almutairi & Sriramesh, 2020; Dhanesh & Avidar, 2023), where public relations practitioners relied on the reciprocal nature of their networks to carry out their public relations practice. Therefore, these findings further substantiate claims made by Theunissen and Sissons (2018) that practitioners in Aotearoa New Zealand applied personal influence arising from their network.

The present study showed that personal influence was not limited to media relations, as initially proposed by Sriramesh et al. (1999), or to government relations, investor relations and social media influencer management as suggested by Sriramesh and Fisher (2021). The consultants who participated in the current study worked across a wide range of sectors and therefore performed varying public relations activities including, but not limited to, community and stakeholder engagement, organisational change management, events and publicity, marketing communication, digital communication, corporate social responsibility communication, investor relations, and corporate communication. It can therefore be deduced that personal influence was valuable to consultants regardless of their area of work.

It was not surprising to find that consultants valued networks that gave them the opportunity to apply personal influence as it echoes the wider socio-cultural context of the country. As discussed earlier (see Section 2.4), Aotearoa New Zealand has a "small-world network" (MacGibbon, 2009, p. 19) where reciprocity in relationships is valued (Salmond, 2017) and any two random people are understood to be able to connect with each other within two to four steps (McGibbon, 2009; Robert Walters, n.d.)—commonly referred to as 'two degrees of separation'. Furthermore, within the country's public relations industry networking is commonplace and encouraged by the professional association (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023a). It can therefore be argued that the existence of personal influence in the country's consulting practice reflects the local way of being, which supports the view held by some scholars (Bardhan & Weaver, 2011; Sriramesh, 2012, 2020) that culture affects public relations practice (see Section 2.2.1).

However, a cautionary note is offered as the possibility of misuse of personal influence by consultants cannot entirely be disregarded. Sriramesh and Fisher (2021) claimed that critics of personal influence saw it as being *transaction-oriented* and equated it to unethical exchanges such as bribery and corruption, whereas they saw it as being *relationship-oriented* and consequently ethical. Interestingly though, scholarship in the field of moral psychology suggests that only close relationships, such as family, friends, and romantic partners, garnered *communal* reciprocity of care and welfare. Whereas, other connections, such as between acquaintances, were mostly *transactional* (Earp et al., 2021).

> In some relationships, such as those between strangers, acquaintances, or individuals doing business with one another, each party tracks the specific benefits contributed to, and received from, the other. In these relationships, reciprocity thus takes a tit-for-tat form in which benefits are offered and accepted on a highly contingent basis. This type of reciprocity is transactional, in that resources are provided, not in response to a real or perceived need on the part of the other, but rather, in response to the past or expected future provision of a similarly valued resource from the cooperation partner. In this, it relies on an explicit accounting of who owes what to whom, and is thus characteristic of so-called "exchange" (Earp et al., 2021, p. 9).

Applying the above in the context of public relations consulting could imply that the reciprocal nature of a consultant's relationship with their network was perhaps more *transactional.* Unless, of course, their network entirely comprised of friends and family, which would be unlikely. As per Sriramesh and Fisher's (2021) stance then, being transactional could make the use of personal influence, arising from these networks, susceptible to ethical ambiguity. In Aotearoa New Zealand, *Te Pūtahi Whakakakau Tūmatanui o Aotearoa* the Public Relations Institute of New Zealand (PRINZ) helps mitigate unethical behaviour. Its former chief executive—Elaine Koller—highlighted that violation of ethics by its members was rare but there were numerous consultants who were not members of PRINZ and therefore not required to follow the association's Code (Laufer, 2021). While such limitations of ethical codes and governance bodies have always raised questions about their role and relevance for public relations practice (Parsons, 2016), they also indicate that the possibility of misuse of personal influence by *non-member* consultants cannot be ignored.

It is therefore suggested that neither disregarding personal influence as unethical and unprofessional (Kim & Heo, 2018) nor claiming that it is inherently ethical (Sriramesh & Fisher, 2021) is beneficial for public relations scholarship. Instead, it might be more useful to engage with these disciplinary disputes and develop a more "mature view" (Fawkes, 2015, p. 219) of the practice. Doing so needs an "initial acceptance of all aspects before any developmental activity can begin" (Fawkes, 2015, p. 219), implying that it is essential that we accept the benefits as well as reflect on the challenges of employing personal influence in public relations consulting.

It must be noted that to be truly reflective, research needs to surrender the normative constraints of an ideal universal practice and apply a more localised lens in examining public relations as a social field (Edwards & Ihlen, 2023; Ihlen et al., 2018). This is not possible without adopting a constructivist paradigm (see Section 3.1) and engaging with ethnographic methodologies (see Section 3.2), just as the current study has. Future researchers must ensure that their methodologies allow for a more nuanced understanding and reflection of the varying lifeworlds of public relations practitioners and their occupational practices (Edwards & Hodges, 2011; Williams, 2018), so they can "study public relations practice *as is* [authors' emphasis] in order to philosophize how it *should be* [authors' emphasis]" (Theunissen & Sissons, 2018, p. 213).

8.2.2. The problem with privileging social capital

In applying sociologist Bourdieu's (1984, 1986, 1990, 1993) theory of practice, this study ascertained that the value attached to being affable and having networks privileged social capital. This privileging suggested that consultants with social capital were likely to be in higher demand and attract more respect in comparison to their peers (Bourdieu, 1990, 1993). Consequently, the findings of this thesis corroborated Edwards' (2011a, 2018) claim that privileging social capital could lead to bias and discrimination.

In the current study, the symbolic privileging of social capital became evident in a job interview (See section 4.3.2), where Serena's connections in her Māori community and the idea that she could possibly leverage these for client projects, appealed to John and his consultancy's co-director Elaine. In fact, an Ethnographic Communication Analysis (ECA) revealed that Serena applied various discourse strategies, like emphasising key words ("I'm Māori" and "I did a lot of -outreach) and using quantifiers ("a lot of connections" and "he::aps of relatives") to project her desirability as a candidate. Unsurprisingly, John and Elaine's mutual glances indicated they found her iwi network as vital in forming their decision about selecting her for the job. Furthermore, John's subjective assessment of Serena's ability to leverage her social capital contributed to the decision of hiring her. However, there is no evidence whether Serena's social capital and outgoing behaviour proved to be as beneficial in her consulting role as initially imagined by John.

Human resource scholarship cautions that personality-based assessments made during the recruitment and selection process are completely subjective (Cross, 2019;

Koppman, 2016; Roulin, 2022; Russell & Brannan, 2016) and can be manipulated by candidates who have better interactional skills (De Keere, 2019; Rashmi, 2010). For example, in her interaction with John, Serena was able to pay heed to the multimodal cues (such as speech emphasis, gaze, posture, etc.) that hinted that her Māori connections would be desired (see Section 4.3.2). This led her to ask further questions about the project that needed Māori engagement and demonstrate how she could play a role in it.

These findings imply that recruitment and selection in public relations consulting perhaps lean more towards 'gut-feeling' as opposed to a more objective analysis of capabilities. Further studies in this area can certainly help to expand the understanding of talent management practices within public relations.

Currently, within Aotearoa New Zealand, PRINZ advocates for practitioners to follow the Global Capabilities Framework that is focused on field-specific capabilities as opposed to subjective personality traits (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023b). As per this framework, practitioners are expected to be *capable* of building relationships, engaging with stakeholders, and developing self and others, as opposed to simply being sociable and having social capital (Global Alliance, n.d.). The findings from the current study suggest that consultants were either not aware of this framework or had not adopted it in their practice. Since John was not a member of PRINZ, he was likely to have been unaware and/or apathetic towards the framework. However, other consultants who participated in this study were all members of PRINZ. Yet only two of them mentioned the framework, indicating that PRINZ needs to make a stronger effort in promoting it to both members and non-members. Consultants, especially those in hiring positions, need to develop adequate knowledge and understanding of public relations capabilities as well as human resource management. Doing so would ensure that they do not rely on subjective judgements, which according to human resource scholars can be misguided (Rashmi, 2010; Rivera, 2012, 2016; Roulin, 2022; Russel; & Brannan, 2016).

Furthermore, Edwards (2011a, 2014, 2015, 2018) argued that sociability and social capital were often products of a specific personal habitus which allowed for access to existing networks and wherewithal to engage in ongoing networking. In Aotearoa New Zealand, the networking events offered by PRINZ (PRINZ, n.d.-d), range from NZD10 (learning lunches) to NZD329 (awards gala). These costs are over and above the annual membership fee, which ranges from NZD10 for unwaged practitioners (such as students and those on unpaid parental leave) to NZD355 for waged practitioners (PRINZ, n.d.-e). While non-members can also join these networking events, they are expected to pay a premium (PRINZ, n.d.-d). Additionally, recruitment organisations across the country encourage people to engage in their own smaller-scale networking (Robert Walters, n.d.). This may include having informal conversations over coffee or connecting with people on networking sites like LinkedIn (Robert Walters, n.d.). This implies that ongoing networking requires a considered approach that demands both money and time (Humphries, 2019).

While monetary and time investment may not be an issue for some consultants, it may be for others such as those who are earning lower wages or have familial, education, or other time commitments. In the current study, only one participant—Madison—had identified time commitment as an issue as working part-time made it challenging for her to network with peers. Since the majority of consultants who participated in this study expected everyone in the consulting field to be sociable like themselves, it may be implied that they believed everyone in the field had the same personal habitus as themselves, which according to Edwards (2018) could indicate a lack of appreciation for diversity and the consequent marginalisation of minority groups.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, it was not considered easy for minority groups (such as ethnic minorities and migrants) to build social capital as they faced issues concerning equity and inclusion (MacGibbon, 2009; Yogeeswaran et al., 2019). In this regard, dependence on social capital is known to create cliquishness (MacGibbon, 2009) and limit employment and growth opportunities for people who may not be able to *fit* in existing networks. At PRINZ networking events too, research has shown that practitioners who did not identify as *white and middle-class* felt uncomfortable and excluded as "the attendees all seemed too homogenous" (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023b, p. 29). Therefore, demonstrating affability and building social capital was perhaps not as easy and equitable as consultants in this study assumed. Moreover, if people with similar personal habitus (white middle-class) were constantly networking with each other, they were likely to perpetuate a homogenous occupational habitus (Hodges, 2005; Salaman, 1974) and limit diversity even further (Edwards, 2011a; 2018).

Given the current lack of diversity (see Section 2.4.1) in public relations in Aotearoa New Zealand (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023b), John may be appreciated for hiring Serena, a Māori consultant. However, since his decision to hire Serena was partly influenced by her social capital in the Māori community (chapter four), there is always a risk that she would be expected to perform *cultural labour*. As discussed earlier (see section 4.3.2), it was commonplace for Māori employees to apply their time and energy towards engaging with the Māori community, which can cause them to feel pigeonholed and used (Haar & Martin, 2022). It may similarly be assumed that if consultants from other minority groups (such as other ethnic minorities, migrants, LGBTQ, people with disabilities, etc.) are hired for their social networks, they may also be expected to perform cultural labour. Consequently, it is argued that the stereotypical expectation of cultural labour limits practitioners from minority groups and as previously pointed by Edwards (2018) "puts them at a further disadvantage compared to their colleagues" (p. 170). This might be even more encumbering for practitioners whose intersectional identities (such as gender and ethnicity or sexual orientation and race) were already limiting their entry and inclusion in the field (Logan & Ciszek, 2021; Pompper, 2012; Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017; Yeomans, 2019).

Overall, further reflection is needed by consultants who expect sociability and networking as a norm in the occupational culture of public relations consulting. While there may be a possibility of accessing social capital for client projects, gaining new clients, or even getting hired for a new role, it can also create demands on time and money, lead to unconscious bias during recruitment and selection, create the burden of cultural labour and inadvertently marginalise consultants from minority groups.

Perhaps, consultants need to reimagine 'sociability' and articulate it more as the capability to build relationships and engage with stakeholders. Doing so will reduce emphasis on personal habitus and increase attention to building an interpersonal skill that can be fostered through education and training (Hargie, 2017) to be applied in relational work (Theunissen & Sissons, 2018).

8.2.3 Polite persuasion strategies in delicate interactions

In the occupational culture of public relations consultants in Aotearoa New Zealand, it was commonplace to demonstrate affability in interactions with clients and colleagues.

Consultants were found to be especially polite during what I would call *delicate interactions*, or what Holmes and Stubbe (2015) referred to as *problematic talk*. Examples of polite behaviour by consultants in such interactions included hedges (such as uh::m >we will::< (.3) >you know…" in interaction two, Figure 2), requests (such as "yes:s ple:ase if poss¯ible" in interaction four, Figure 6), humour (such as referring to "…letting (1.6) beauty before - a:ge" in interaction four, Figure 6), indirect imperatives (such as "would you be >kind enough<" in interaction three, Figure 5) and small talk ("your new job sounds cool" in interaction four, Figure 6).

Field notes and informal conversations with the consultants showed that they entered such delicate interactions with a desirable outcome in mind. For example, before meeting with clients about turnover management, John had explained, "I want them to know that I haven't forgotten them" (see Section 7.3.1). These findings implied that the consultants pre-meditated how they would approach an upcoming interaction, suggesting that their politeness was not a mere by-product of habitual behaviour but quite deliberate. Strategic politeness helped consultants maintain a positive impression in front of the client and retain trust (see Section 7.3.4), address the colleague's need for face-saving without adversely effecting collegiality (see Section 6.3.3), and assert influence while maintaining harmony in the relationship (see Section 5.3.4). Therefore, politeness was an especially valuable strategy for maintaining relationships in problematic circumstances.

However, politeness was not observed to indicate meekness and agreeability. In fact, consultants strategically used politeness to exert persuasive influence (Scott, 2001) on the other party. This indicates that in public relations consulting, as in other forms of consulting (Nikolova, 2007/2019), power was not always a product of the consultant's position or expertise, but often reliant on their ability to apply discursive skills. The findings of this study therefore support earlier research by Theunissen and Sissons (2018) who argued that politeness was used as a relational strategy to assert ambient power in public relations (see Section 2.4.2). It may consequently be argued that politeness, persuasion, and power were undeniably interconnected and permeated in the occupational culture of public relations consultants of Aotearoa New Zealand.

This finding may not be agreeable to normative public relations scholars who see the practice as devoid of persuasion and balanced in power relations (Grunig, 1992a). However, it corroborates alternative paradigms that have insisted that relationships were inherently asymmetrical and laden with exchanges of persuasion and power (Berger & Reber, 2005; Miller, 2009; Sriramesh & Fisher, 2021; Theunissen & Sissons, 2018; Weaver, 2021). Here, it should be emphasised that none of the consultants who participated in the current study applied persuasion for corrupt motives. In fact, they stressed that they valued ethics and were willing to forsake client-work that challenged their ethical compass (see Section 4.2.1). This finding may imply that persuasion is not innately unethical.

Having said that, as with applying personal influence (see Section 8.2.1), the possibility of other consultants using persuasion for unethical reasons cannot be discounted but the fear of its unethical application should not overshadow its value in the relational aspects of public relations consulting. Here too, the researcher would like to reiterate Fawkes' (2007, 2015) advice of being more accepting of all aspects and prospects of public relations practice.

Additionally, the findings of this study evidenced that consultants usually preempted the other party's perspective. For example, chapter five showed that Karen was aware that her client might disagree with her advice and in chapter six John had anticipated that his colleague might struggle to meet the deadline. The use of politeness strategies, therefore, signifies that consultants were aware that hedging, humour, small talk, indirect imperatives, and requests could help them manage the other party's emotions and maintain harmony and collegiality in the relationship. The findings of this study therefore support Yeomans' (2019) argument that consultants engaged in *emotional labour*, i.e., managing the emotions of those they worked with (see Section 2.3.2). However, contrary to Yeomans' (2019) findings, the current study did not find any gender discrimination in the expectations about emotional labour. In fact, both male and female consultants talked about being affable and were observed to engage in politeness strategies, consequently indicating that emotional labour is not a gendered construct and needs broader acknowledgment in public relations scholarship and practice.

It is plausible that since politeness is considered a norm in Aotearoa New Zealand workplaces (Holmes & Stubbe, 2015), it may not be specific to public relations consulting. However, its value for the practice, especially enabling consultants to navigate delicate situations, cannot be denied. Politeness scholarship began with seminal work by Brown and Levinson (1978/1987), who introduced *politeness theory* and the concepts of *positive politeness* (considering a person's wants) and *negative politeness (*avoiding offending a person). Brown and Levinson's (1978/1987) conceptualisation drew from Goffman's (1959, 1967) classical work on the dramaturgical rituals of an interaction (see section 3.4.1) that helped interactants manage their impressions and avoid face-threatening acts (FTAs). In more recent years, politeness scholarship has proliferated and expanded to the understanding of interpersonal interactions in not just English speaking but also various cross-cultural contexts (Culpeper et al., 2017; Holmes & Schnurr, 2017; Leech, 2014; Watts, 2003). Unfortunately, interpersonal concepts like politeness and face-saving do not find much mention in normative public relations scholarship and continue to be perceived as more of an Eastern construct, which can be limiting for the advancement of the scholarship (Theunissen & Sissons, 2018; Theunissen, 2019). This could perhaps be explained by the scholarship's obsession with understanding the relationship between an organisation and its publics as opposed to the intricacies of interpersonal ones that a practitioner has with client, colleagues, and journalists (Theunissen & Sissons, 2018).

Overall, the current study found that interpersonal relationships were at the core of public relations consulting lifeworld and practice and affability was both a desired behavioural trait and a strategic tool in building and maintaining these.

8.3 Being able to write for, serve and advise the client

The term *able* means "having the skill, intelligence, opportunity, etc. needed to do something" (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, n.d.-b). Consultants who participated in this study believed that they needed to be good writers, strategic thinkers, expert problem-solvers, empathic and influential communicators, efficient operators, and experienced practitioners. It therefore seems that the occupational culture of consultants in Aotearoa New Zealand witnessed a combination of the three cultures of consulting highlighted by Verčič (2012): journalistic, business, and professional (see Section 2.3.1).

8.3.1 Breadth of experience trumps journalistic values

The majority of consultants participating in this study were ex-journalists (chapter four) and valued writing skills (chapters four and six). This finding aligned with Verčič's (2012) conceptualisation of journalistic values in public relations occupational culture. However, there were caveats.

Consultants interviewed in this study had mentioned that writing was "absolutely critical" (Demi, see Section 4.2.3). The application of writing skills became evident when consultants talked about their routine work or were observed at their workplace. Their day-to-day work often required some form of writing including, but not limited to, media releases, social media and website content, sponsorship letters, newsletters, speeches, award entries, industry bids, business proposals, annual reports, opinion pieces, brochures, public relations strategies, and client emails. These writing tasks were not restricted to writing for the media. In fact, there was only one consultant (Frank) who had been a former journalist and continued to operate as a media relations specialist. All other consultants engaged in varied public relations activities.

Considering the wider context of the public relations industry in Aotearoa New Zealand, where a practitioner's time was evidently not preoccupied with media relations but instead spread across a range of activities (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023a; Research First, 2017), it was not surprising that the majority of consultants in this study were not solely focussed on it either. In this regard, the findings of this study suggest that unlike Verčič's (2012) assumption, being a former journalist or valuing good writing did not automatically imply that the consultants' occupational culture was centred around gaining positive media publicity.

In fact, while writing skills were seen as foundational, consultants felt having a broad experience and enjoying a variety of tasks indicated suitability for the consultancy lifeworld (see Section 4.2.1). This is in alignment with existing literature that suggested that consultants desired variety (Fröhlich & Peters, 2007) and needed a broad experience to be successful (Luttrell & Capizzo, 2018). This admiration for varied experience became evident when John chose not to hire the consultant who was focussed on writing as he felt she would not be fit for managing his consultancy's diverse workload (see Section 4.3). On examining Aotearoa New Zealand's public relations industry data, it was not surprising the 'breadth and depth of public relations experience' was the third most valued trait during recruitment and selection (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023b). Therefore, it appeared that unless consultants (especially those who came from other disciplines) embraced this breadth of experience by learning "on-the-job" (Charlotte, see Section 4.2.1) or engaging in ongoing professional development (see Section 5.2), their career would have a limited scope. Having said that, further research is needed to ascertain if the need for varied experience was also true for those consultancies that offered a niche service.

Overall, much like the UK (Edwards, 2011a; Pieczka, 2002, 2006b) *experience* was found to be the symbolic capital of public relations consultants in Aotearoa New Zealand and consequently, skills were assumed to be gained and transferred through practice or practical training. It is not intended here to dispute the value of experience. However, the paradox is that while experience is valued, there was no evidence of consultants providing structured training to new entrants which implies that consultants were simply expected to learn by osmosis.

What should be noted here is that *experience* does not always equate to *learning* (Beard & Wilson, 2018; Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 2015). *Experiential learning* is not merely about observing peers and performing actions but instead about being immersed in an environment that enables, supports, and provides an edifice for critical thinking, peer interaction and reflection (Beard & Wilson, 2018). However, if consultants do not have the time, understanding and/or inclination to engage in such experiential learning, then their reliance on experience (especially for new entrants) may be unwise. Furthermore, learning by observing could be problematic as it may lead to replication of normalised behaviours and thereby perpetuate the existing occupational habitus of the consulting field (Edwards, 2018); the result being a field whose practitioners fail to be reflective and reflexive and who get entrapped by unconscious habitus maintenance (Ihlen, 2018).

Additionally, continuous professional development requires time and financial investment which may not necessarily be possible for all consultants. For example, one of the participants—Madison—highlighted that having a young family and working part-time meant that she did not always have time to invest in networking and training. This finding verifies existing industry data that indicated that time and budget constraints were the biggest barriers in engaging with professional development (Research First, 2019). The current study found that only one consultant mentioned that she paid for her staff to attend events, courses and conferences organised by PRINZ and ensured they had the time away from work for doing so. It seems that others who expected learning to happen without support or structure assumed that people would do it in their own time and with their own money, which raises concerns about their lack of appreciation for diverse circumstances and needs.

Overall, if experience is to be treated as the consulting field's symbolic capital, further engagement is needed with the evolving scholarship in areas of *experiential learning* (Beard & Wilson, 2018; Kolb, 2015) to be able to provide meaningful learning experience through practice-based opportunities. Furthermore, as mentioned by Bardhan and Gower (2023), it is suggested that existing consultants need to exhibit deliberate leadership in recruiting, selecting, and training consultants from diverse backgrounds to genuinely support them in gaining experience.

8.3.2 A business-like culture with challenges aplenty

Given their desire for breadth of experience and variety of tasks (see Section 8.3.1), it may be assumed that the occupational culture of public relations consultants was about offering a wide range of services to the clients, thereby making it more business-like (Verčič, 2012). The study found existence of some aspects of business culture (Verčič, 2012) such as valuing the ability to attract and retain clients (Chapters 4 and 7), having a stereotypical occupational identity of young females (Chapter 4), and expecting fast and efficient work (Chapter 6). All these traits were found to be intricately linked to client appeasement for financial sustenance and therefore, as per Verčič (2012), demonstrate a business imperative. The detection of business culture creates both opportunities and challenges for the consultancy sector.

A business-orientation may facilitate the overall growth of the sector, which in return improves the positive likelihood of job opportunities, pay escalation, and career advancement (Wright, 2013). As discussed earlier in this thesis (see Section 2.3), the consultancy sector has witnessed steady financial growth across the world (Sudhaman, 2022) but in Aotearoa New Zealand its fluctuations seem to be related to the changes in government and the public sector. It has been acknowledged that the "State Services Commission lifting its cap on public relations staff in 2018 and [during] COVID-19" (Nielson, 2021, para 33) enabled the burgeoning of in-house public relations departments in government and the public sector and the extent to which independent consultants/contractors are hired to serve these departments.

It may be assumed that increasing job opportunities and high salaries offered by the government and the public sector (Nielson, 2021) may be causing public relations practitioners to choose in-house departments or contract work over consultancies. In this study (with data collected in 2017 and 2018), John was necessitated in 2018 to hire a new consultant after his account manager (Stan) had accepted an in-house role in a local government-controlled organisation. Therefore, it may be implied that changes in the country's social, economic, and political conditions influence its public relations consultancy sector, once again reiterating the point that an occupation's culture is influenced by its environment (Sriramesh, 2012, 2020).

Additionally, at the time of this study, four of the 16 participants were independent consultants/contractors working with various client organisations, while 12 were working in consultancies. In 2023, the consultancy market has fragmented even further with nearly half of the surveyed consultants (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023a) working as independent consultants/contractors. There is a growing concern about independent contractors/consultants who only work for one organisation (Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment [MBIE], 2019), bringing a host of issues for the consultancy sector that relies on these contractors.

For instance, since independent contractors/consultants are self-employed, they do not receive any employment benefits—such as sick leave and employer contribution towards superannuation—-and need to manage their own taxes and ACC levies which cover for injury treatment and support (Employment New Zealand, n.d.). While independent contractors/consultants may appear to have more control in terms of their work location and time availability (Employment New Zealand, n.d.), it is accompanied with the risk that they might be expected to be *available* like an employee without receiving any employment benefits. In the situation where independent contractors/consultants work with a single organisation and rely on it for income, they legally fall into the “grey zone” (MBIE, 2019, p. 8) of being a dependent contractor. Anyone who is either misclassified as an independent consultant/contractor or operating in the *grey zone* may become especially vulnerable to mistreatment and exploitation.

According to Riggs et al. (2019), the increase in contract work in Aotearoa New Zealand, popularly labelled as *gig work*, creates concerns not only about the welfare of workers while they are in the labour market, but also about their ability to retire with sufficient savings. While further research is needed to establish how factors such as COVID-19, government recruitment and the gig economy have affected the consultancy sector, it can be agreed that processes related to staff recruitment, management and turnover elicit more attention than they have currently received in public relations scholarship.

A high turnover in consultancies can be especially debilitating for business as consultants become the custodians of relationships with specific clients and act as their key account manager. As discussed earlier in thesis (see Section 7.1), because of the frequency of their interactions, account managers usually develop rapport, chemistry, and trust with the clients’ representatives (Broschak et al., 2019; Vafeas, 2015; Yeomans, 2019). While this finding verifies Yeomans’ (2019) argument that account managers need to perform emotional labour to maintain client relations, it also means that losing an account manager could eventuate in losing the client’s business (Broschak et al., 2019; Nikolova, 2007/2019; Nikolova et al., 2015).

As evidenced in chapter seven, when an account manager leaves, it becomes imperative for the consultancy owner to ensure that turnover is managed promptly so that it neither disrupts the client work nor adversely affects the client representative's trust in the consultancy (Broschak et al., 2019; Vafeas, 2015). For example, in managing turnover at his consultancy, John was personally meeting with clients served by his resigning account manager Stan (see Section 7.3), writing emails to clients to explain how turnover was being managed, having handover meetings with Stan to comprehend progress on client projects, and conducting job interviews to recruit a new consultant (see Section 4.3). These examples emphasised that turnover management required time, effort, process, and emotional labour. Furthermore, since interpersonal relationships required time to go through the various stages of development (Broschak, 2015; Crossman, 2023; DeVito, 2019; Goodwin, 2019; Hargie, 2017), it would take a while for the new consultant to build trust with the client representatives.

Overall, this study found that staff turnover exacerbates the demands made on a consultant's time and emotions. It is therefore argued that consultants would greatly benefit from being proficient in staff management and interpersonal communication. In this regard, public relations scholarship would certainly benefit from drawing on management consultancy (Broschak, 2015; Nikolova, 2007/2019; Nikolova et al., 2015; Vafeas, 2015), human resource management (Cross, 2019; Picardi, 2020; Rashmi, 2010; Roulin, 2022) and interpersonal communication (Crossman, 2023; DeVito, 2019; Goodwin, 2019; Hargie, 2017) literature to enrich the discipline and guide the practice of public relations consulting.

In terms of the causes of turnover in the public relations consulting sector, it is plausible that the current billing models, working environments, and stereotypical perceptions of consultancy lifeworlds were not helping. While consultants in this study boasted of nurturing a collaborative and supportive work environment, the findings highlighted that the hourly-rate billing model made it challenging for them to create time for said collaboration and support (see Section 6.2). To get the work done within the deadlines and billable hours being invoiced to the client, consultants prioritised speed and efficiency to avoid over-servicing. If all consultants are busy servicing their billable hours, then it is likely that they may not always have the time to interact with colleagues.

It seems that consultants relied on having *chatty* open-plan or shared offices as a way of demonstrating that collaboration was taking place. However, this seemed futile and symbolic as research has indicated that such work environments do not necessarily facilitate collaboration and, on the contrary, can reduce productivity (Yunus & Ernawati, 2018).Therefore, it is argued that in the occupational culture of public relations consulting, the impression of busy-ness and chatter was valued over providing authentic collaboration and support, which can perhaps adversely affect a consultant's job satisfaction and contribute to turnover.

It should further be noted that neurodivergent people (for example people who have autism, dyslexia, ADHD etc.) prefer work environments that are not visually stimulating, noisy and interruptive (Honeybourne, 2020). Open-plan offices, hot-desking, and informal interruptions from colleagues (all facets that were assumed to foster collaboration as per normative ideas of the consulting culture) make it challenging for neurodivergent people to concentrate and complete work tasks (Honeybourne, 2020). This implies that if consultants continue to normalise being speedy and efficient within busy and noisy workplaces, they may not only reduce productive and increase turnover but also create exclusion for the neurodivergent workforce.

One solution for this could be reducing the number of clients serviced and hours billed to keep the workload manageable. However, as identified by one of the consultants interviewed in this study (Hugh), doing so may restrict the financial flow and adversely affect the varied experience that consultants seemed to crave (see section 6.2). Therefore, it appeared that the occupational culture of public relations consulting in Aotearoa New Zealand was sitting at the crossroad of choosing between consultant wellbeing and client billables. Furthermore, COVID-19 has accelerated the need to find the right balance between work and welfare. After having gone through high stress, work-mode adjustments, job losses, health scares and personal tragedies during the COVID-19 pandemic, people now expect healthy, productive, and safe working environments where work is both meaningful and fair (Barling, 2023). Therefore, to respond to these demands and future-proof itself, the consulting sector will need to genuinely reflect on current practices that may be limiting its growth in this post-pandemic world.

Furthermore, the participating consultants' perception of a typical consultant being a young white female who is pleasing but not smart (see Section 4.2.2), is perhaps fuelling an embodiment that may be self-limiting the growth of the consultancy sector in the country. Such talk about occupational identity can normalise prejudices about age, gender, race, and appearance and consequently perpetuate negative occupational stereotypes that stigmatise consulting in the eyes of clients, news media and society

(Grandien, 2017; Pieczka, 2008; Sterne, 2008; Tsetsura, 2011; Yeomans, 2019). Furthermore, it dissuades those who do not see themselves as being represented by this stereotypical identity from entering public relations consulting (Bowen, 2009; Edwards, 2018), while at the same time prompting existing practitioners to hire those who fit this embodiment (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2019; Edwards, 2018). Therefore, engaging in discourse without being mindful can build "real and imagined" (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2019, p. 4) barriers to entry. It is argued here that instead of stigmatising specific attire, gender, race, and age, consultants need to consciously endeavour to make the consulting sector more diverse, equitable and inclusive.

8.3.3 Striving for a more professional culture

Interestingly, while business culture was found to be prominent in Aotearoa New Zealand's consulting sector, the consultants participating in this study aspired to be seen as professionals. In fact, they saw their role as being that of empathic advisors, strategic thinkers, ethical counsellors, and expert problem-solvers (see Sections 4.2.1 and 5.2). These virtuous perceptions of occupational identity indicated a closer alignment with management consultants (Nikolova, 2007/2019) and an effort to mobilise what Verčič (2012) referred to as the professional culture.

Professionalism in the public relations industry has often been equated to acquiring expertise through training and experience and providing ethical advice (Global Alliance, n.d.; Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023b). As discussed earlier in this thesis (see section 2.2.3), public relations scholars (Fawkes, 2015, 2021; Fitch, 2016; Pieczka & L'Etang, 2006) have debated the implications of such idolisation of professionalism and obsession with legitimacy. This study adds another perspective, and the researcher laments the lack of discussion on *how* to advice and *what* to train in to become better at counselling. These two could perhaps be especially crucial for consultants when faced with a delicate situation, ethical dilemma and/or conflict.

In this study, it became evident that negotiation skills were vital for consultants when Karen applied these skills to ensure that her client accepted her advice (see Section 5.3, interaction two). It became apparent that client-consultant interactions (such as interaction two) often necessitated the fine balancing of power and persuasion through explicit and implicit multimodal strategies such as active listening, changes in pitch and intonation, use of collective pronouns, topic control, account giving, and emphasising practical consequences (see Sections 5.3.2 – 5.3.4). These strategies echoed existing scholarship in public relations (Theunissen & Sissons, 2018) and management consulting (Nikolova, 2007/2019) that highlighted the value of discursive skills for consultants. It is argued that unless public relations scholarship shifts its focus from the macro work of maintaining organisation-public relations and sharpens its understanding about the micro work of building interpersonal relationships, professionalism will continue to be a challenge to achieve in practice. Whether it should be a goal in the first place is another question.

Furthermore, it appeared that female consultants felt that clients often judged their professionalism from their appearance (see Section 4.2.2). While some clients felt that being well-presented indicated professional ability, other clients despised slickly presented consultants and assumed them to be lacking in ability. The perceived association of appearance with professionalism appeared to make female consultants particularly conscious of their self-presentation, which is not something that was ever mentioned for (or by) male consultants. This finding aligned with the earlier complaints by scholars (Fröhlich & Peters, 2007; Williams, 2018; Yeomans, 2019) who felt that the gendered occupational identity of public relations consultants was leading to judgments about appearance and attire. Interestingly, some public relations texts and even university-based student consultancy blogs continue to stress the importance of *looking professional*.

The advice is generally to dress well, but more conservatively, with minimum jewellery, skirts or trousers paired with shirts and blazers, neutral colours, and no visible tattoos (Luttrell & Capizzo, 2018; Ren, 2019). Such expectations cannot be universally applied as they disregard the variations in the socio-cultural contexts of consultants. For example, in Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori practitioners may have cultural tattoos called *tā moko* and according to The Human Rights Commission they cannot be discriminated against in the workplace for wearing one visibly (Cullen, 2019). Having said that, a prescribed appearance is in no way restricted to public relations consultants as recruitment agencies (Glassdoor, 2021) generally refer to the importance of dressing appropriately to appear more professional. It is also argued that people should observe others at their work and conform to the implicit style norms as not doing so (such as over or under-dressing) can be damaging for professional success (York, 2022).

It would be therefore safe to conclude that while public relations consulting is not the only occupation affected by issues of self-presentation, over-emphasis on such aspects can result in what Goffman (1959) would refer to as a *performance* of professionalism, which may not be authentic. Furthermore, if a specific self-presentation is normalised as being professional, then it may lead to recruiting consultants and/or grooming them to fit this embodiment and thereby marginalise individual expression and limit the sense of belonging.

8.4 Being available for work

The term *available* denotes that which is "possible to get, buy or find" (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, n.d.-c). A person's a*vailability* is seen as them "being free to see or talk to people" (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, n.d.-c). In Aotearoa New Zealand's public relations consulting culture, having an attitude that demonstrated availability for work was found to be valuable (see Sections 4.2.3, 4.3.3, 6.2 and 6.33). It is argued here that the issue of availability has implications for the occupation's identity and business as well as the holistic wellbeing of its consultants.

First, it appeared that consultants in this study often defined themselves as *hardworking and busy people* who had to sometimes work for long hours depending on their clients' timeframes (see Section 6.2). Fuelling this further was the admiration of a *can-do* attitude on the part of a new entrant/candidate for a job that demonstrated a willingness to *say yes* to work and see it more as a learning opportunity to gain experience. For example, during a job interview to hire a new consultant, John (and his consultancy co-director) stressed that demonstrating a flexible attitude towards working hours was desirable (see Section 4.3.3). In fact, John agreed with his chosen candidate Serena's statement that working overtime did not matter if you loved your job. However, it also became evident in a separate interaction that some consultants did not cherish working outside normal hours (for example on weekends) as much as others (see chapter six, interaction three). In this vein, some consultancy owners, too, upheld that they did not expect (or encourage) their staff to work overtime or be constantly available to clients (see section 4.2.1).

Industry research has already highlighted that public relations practitioners (whether in-house or consultant) often exceed their regular working hours and as a result are often highly stressed and burnt-out (Research First, 2021). However, the fact that some consultants have started identifying themselves with what Hewlett and Luce (2006) called *the extreme ethos* (see Section 6.1) implies that workaholism is being normalised through their discourse about their lifeworld. This aligns with the existing scholarship on public relations consulting elsewhere in the world (Fröhlich & Peters, 2007; Grandien, 2017; Yeomans, 2019) that characterised consultants as strained from incessant prioritisation of work.

It is argued here that, as previously noted by Edwards (2011a, 2018), normalisation of workaholism is problematic as those who are unable to follow suit, such as consultants having family responsibilities, health issues, study commitments, cultural and/or religious engagements, or other circumstances that require their time and attention or those who do not share the same attitude of extreme ethos may find themselves either excluded or marginalised. Alternatively, it may be assumed (as discussed earlier in this chapter in Section 8.3.2) that consultants who do not align with this attitude of availability may resign from such consultancy roles due to either feeling overwhelmed or being made to feel incompetent, further worsening the turnover rates. While work idolisation and expectation of availability may be constructs of the neoliberal world in which we live, it is argued that the tribulations of the COVID-19 pandemic have accelerated the need to consider wellbeing at work as well as pay attention to other aspects of life (Macpherson et al., 2022). As discussed in 8.3.2, if consultants do not reflect on these societal changes, they will continue to be challenged by resignations or even *quiet quitting,* i.e., consultants "no longer going the extra mile and slogging away at work, going above and beyond" (Humphry-Jenner, 2022, para 4).

Future studies should examine specific aspects of the consulting lifeworld, such as employment contracts, billing models, client agreements, work-life balance, and wellbeing policies etc. to understand how availability of a consultant is expressed and managed.

8.5 Conclusion

This chapter presented a discussion of the findings of the current study. It did so by highlighting various examples, themes, and trends from the data and juxtaposing them with existing public relations literature and the wider socio-cultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand. The chapter interpreted these findings to help understand the current occupational identities and lifeworlds of consultants and share implications for the future. Overall, the chapter posited that public relations consulting in Aotearoa New Zealand had an occupational culture that focussed on affability, ability, and availability of the consultants. The concluding chapter will present a summary of this thesis, reflect on its contributions and limitations, and highlight recommendations for future research and practice.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

"Culture – so central to all human interactions – is arguably the most neglected concept in the public relations literature" (Sriramesh, 2020, p. 28).

This study intended to put culture in the spotlight and highlight its relevance for the practice and discipline of public relations. In doing so, firstly, the research needed to avoid reliance on normative thinking that propagated ideal ways of *doing* public relations and *being* its practitioners (Valentini, 2021) and instead be open to exploring and understanding the social field as it was (Ihlen et al., 2018). Secondly, since culture is an elaborate concept (Waymer, 2012) that permeates through public relations by affecting the practice, being affected by it, and existing within it (Bardhan & Weaver, 2011; Sriramesh, 2012, 2020); the study had to choose a specific micro-culture (L'Etang, 2011) to focus on.

A review of the literature (chapter two) helped identify the knowledge, trends and gaps in existing scholarship and narrow the focus to exploring the occupational culture of public relations consultants in Aotearoa New Zealand. However, such an exploration could only be justified with a constructivist approach (Crotty, 1998; Lincoln et al., 2018) and an ethnographic (Erickson, 2018; Jorgensen, 2020) methodology (chapter three) that helped observe and interpret the cultural meanings interwoven in the routine working lives and interactions of public relations consultants.

The findings (Chapters Four to Seven) displayed various aspects of Hodges' (2005, 2006, 2011) conceptual model of occupational culture such as the identities and experiences of the consultants, their values and assumptions about their own practice, and their occupational interactions with colleagues. Additionally, findings highlighted how consultants perceived others in their social field, what they expected from new entrants, and how they interacted with their clients.

This final chapter begins with a summary of the study's aims and methodological approach. It then summarises the findings and their significance for public relations scholarship and practice. As a researcher, I also take a reflective stance in acknowledging the limitations in the scope of the present research. Finally, I offer recommendations for future studies and hope that this thesis provides a solid foundation for the purpose of advancing research and theory-building as well as for reflecting on the education and practice of public relations.

9.1 The aims of the study

A review of the current scholarship in the socio-cultural paradigm of public relations (chapter two) indicated a dominance of normative worldviews and ethnocentricity in the discipline (Bardhan & Weaver, 2011; Edwards & Hodges, 2011; Moloney & McGrath, 2020; Somerville et al., 2017), a lack of exploration of public relations as an occupational field (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2019; Edwards, 2011a, 2018; Edwards & Ihlen, 2023; L'Etang, 2011; Pieczka, 2002; Sriramesh, 2020), a neglect of the consulting practice (Pieczka, 2008; Verčič, 2012), and scanty application of ethnographic methodologies that could reveal more about practitioner identities, discourses, interactions and relationships (Edwards & Hodges, 2011; Hodges, 2011; Sissons, 2014, 2015; Theunissen & Sissons, 2018; Williams, 2018).

The purpose of the study, therefore, was to address the above gaps and contribute towards advancing the understanding of public relations as a socio-cultural practice. The study sought to achieve this by focussing on investigating the occupational culture of public relations consultants in Aotearoa New Zealand.

It drew inspiration from the few scholars (Edwards, 2011a, 2011b, 2015; Hodges, 2005, 2006, 2011; Pieczka, 2002, 2006b, 2008; Sissons, 2014, 2015; Theunissen & Sissons, 2018; Williams, 2018) who had attempted to observe and uncover the daily working lives of public relations practitioners and examine their identities and interactions as social actors within an occupational field.

There has only been one prior research project (Sissons, 2014, 2015; Theunissen & Sissons, 2018) that has given any insight into public relations consulting practice in Aotearoa New Zealand. Sissons' (2014, 2015) doctoral study, further examined and interpreted in Theunissen and Sissons' book (2018), has offered methodological inspiration for the present study.

The thesis built on a conceptual model articulated by Hodges (2005, 2006, 2011), in which she proposed that occupational culture encompassed practitioners' lifeworld and practices. Here, the term 'lifeworld' was akin to Bourdieu's (1990) concept of occupational habitus, which Hodges (2005, 2006, 2011) claimed as being perpetuated through occupational socialisation with colleagues. Additionally, lifeworld was understood to influence practitioners' perceptions about the nature and purpose of their day-to-day occupational practices (Hodges, 2006).

Based on the above, the research question for this exploratory study was:
RQ: What is the occupational culture (practitioner lifeworld and occupational practices) of public relations consultants in Aotearoa New Zealand?

9.2 Summary of the methodological approach

The study situated itself in the constructivist paradigm (Crotty, 1998; Lincoln et al., 2018), which believed that the reality of public relations practice differed from one socio-cultural context to another (Bardhan & Weaver, 2011; Curtin, 2021; Edwards & Hodges, 2011; L'Etang, 2013; Somerville et al., 2017; Taylor, 2023). This implied that the occupational culture of consultants in Aotearoa New Zealand could not be investigated with quantitative methodologies, often used by normative scholars and which have led to claims about the practice having universal traits (Grunig, 1992a; Grunig & Grunig, 2008; Grunig & Kim, 2021).

Instead, as a researcher I needed to immerse myself in the local context to elucidate practices, behaviours, cultural nuances, and even challenges, which were specific to that context. Therefore, the research followed an ethnographic approach of participant observation (Bernard, 2017; DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011, Manolchev & Foley, 2021), which involved video ethnography and semi-structured interviews.

The data were collected through observing two consultants, Karen and John, carry out their routine public relations work and interactions. Karen was an independent consultant who had her own consulting practice, which she operated from her home office. She hired independent contractors to support her work as and when needed, although during the period of observation (21 - 24 February 2018) she was working on her own. Similarly, John also owned a consultancy practice but, unlike Karen, operated from a shared office space. At the time of observation (10 days across 23 April – 17 May 2018), he had two consultants working for his consultancy. Since one of them had resigned and was due to leave shortly, John was in the process of hiring a new contractor.

John and Karen, the two key participants, were observed using a small portable video camera. Alongside the video observation, I maintained field notes and had conversations with the participants to gain a better understanding of their observed activities. This enabled me to contextualise the video data and interpret the recordings more accurately (Heath et al., 2010; Komarova & McKnight, 2014; Pink, 2021a, 2021b; Shrum & Scott, 2017).

The video data was analysed using the novel Ethnographic Communication Analysis (ECA), an analytic approach first applied by Sissons (2014) and labelled as such in the present thesis (see 3.4.2). In applying ECA, I followed the Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954; Keatinge, 2002, Watkins et al., 2022) and chose four critical incidents that were representative samples of the video data collected. The selected incidents comprised of interactions that were reasonably complete in themselves and offered vital examples of consultants' routine working lives and, consequently, their occupational culture.

The chosen interactions included:

1. An in-person job interview of a prospective consultant by the hiring consultants (chapter four)
2. A problem-solving telephone interaction between a consultant and their client (chapter five)
3. An in-person meeting between two consultants collaborating to complete a client-related task by the deadline (chapter six)
4. An in-person meeting of two consultants and their client to manage staff turnover (chapter seven)

In analysing the above interactions using ECA, they were first transcribed as per Jefferson's Conversation Analysis (CA) transcription symbols (Jefferson, 2004a) which enabled the examination of interaction patterns such as speaking turns, overlapping talk, pauses, and changes in intonation (Sacks et al., 1974; Schegloff, 2007; Schiffrin, 1987; Stivers & Sidnell, 2013). Afterwards, these transcripts were tabulated with matching images that demonstrated the non-verbal modes taking place in the interactions. The multimodal transcripts allowed for an investigation of non-verbal behaviours such as shift in gaze (Kendon & Cook, 1969; Rossano, 2013), use of gestures (Kendon, 2004; McNeill, 1992; 2005), and adjustment of posture (Matsumoto et al., 2016; Mehrabian, 1968, 1969, 2007) among other things. Additionally, the multimodal transcripts were examined for any signs of dramaturgical behaviour (Goffman, 1959, 1967) displayed by the participants and for explicit or implicit assertions of power (Holmes & Stubbe, 2015). Finally, the transcripts were linked to the broader context in which the interactions occurred to provide a fuller interpretation of how the occupational habitus (Bourdieu, 1984, 1990) was shaped, preserved, and challenged (if at all) by the discourses and practices of the consultants.

Overall, ECA utilised CA (Jefferson, 2004a; Sacks et al., 1974; Lester & O'Reilly, 2019; Liddicoat, 2022; Stivers & Sidnell, 2013; Schegloff, 2007; Schiffrin, 1987), multimodal analysis (Goodwin, 2000; Kendon, 2004; McNeill, 1992; Matsumoto et al., 2016; Mehrabian, 2007; Norris, 2019; Rossano, 2013), interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz, 1982, 2018), ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967), dramaturgical analysis (Goffman, 1959, 1967) and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995; Machin & Mayr, 2012; van Dijk, 2018).

Additionally, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 14 other consultants to help triangulate the video data and field notes. Such triangulation added to the robustness of the interpretations, thereby improving the validity and reliability of the data (Flick, 2018; Herrington, 2014; Norris, 2011). These interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed with the help of an online transcription software called Otter.ai, and analysed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2022) with the help of an online qualitative data analysis tool called Delve.

9.3 Summary of the findings and their implications

This study found that public relations consultants in Aotearoa New Zealand believed in being affable and expected it from others in the field. In being affable, the use of politeness strategies (such as hedges, requests, small talk, and humour) helped consultants maintain harmony and collegiality in their relationships with clients and colleagues. Politeness was especially valuable for consultants in managing delicate interactions that involved face-threatening acts (Goffman, 1967) and/or necessitated urgent problem-solving. In such situations, consultants were found to be polite in attending to the face needs of all parties involved, even when expressing disagreement or persuading clients/colleagues to follow specific advice or a directive. This meant that consultants were not impetuous in their interactions but instead seen to assert a more understated form of power that Theunissen and Sissons (2018) labelled as *ambient power.*

Overall, the study corroborated assertions that consultants needed to be adept at managing interpersonal relationships with clients and colleagues (Yeomans, 2019; Theunissen & Sissons, 2018), which were neither symmetrical nor devoid of persuasion. Furthermore, given politeness was found to be a core interpersonal communication skill required by consultants, it needed to be further explored in the public relations discipline (Theunissen & Sissons, 2018; Theunissen, 2019).

Additionally, the consultants valued having an affable personality as it helped them in networking, or what Bourdieu referred to as *accumulating social capital* (Bourdieu, 1986). Being well-connected was seen as an integral part of practice as it helped consultants build reciprocal relationships with relevant people who could introduce them to new clients and/or be called upon when needed for a client project. This study therefore revealed that, much like some others parts of the world (Almutairi & Sriramesh, 2020; Berkowitz & Lee, 2004; Braun, 2007; Dhanesh & Avidar, 2023; Jo & Kim, 2004; Kiambi & Nadler, 2012; Sriramesh, 1996; Sriramesh & Fisher, 2021; Taylor, 2000, 2004; Valentini, 2010; Wu & Baah-Boakye, 2009), consultants in Aotearoa New Zealand also applied personal influence in their day-to-day practice. The application of personal influence further emphasised the centrality of interpersonal relationships for consultants and the value of nurturing interpersonal communication skills.

During the study, I did not find any evidence of unethical use of personal influence. In fact, consultants who participated in this study claimed to be ethically inclined and were not willing to work with those clients with whom their moral values did not align and/or the ones who expected them to pursue unethical behaviour to meet client outcomes. Therefore, it seemed that contrary to stereotypical perceptions (Grandien, 2017) and popular culture portrayals (Dennison, 2012; Nairn & Bhargava, 2021), consultants in the country were found to be conscious of ethical practice. It could also be said that, as argued by Sriramesh and Fisher (2021), personal influence was not inherently unethical. However, it is cautioned that personal influence's application (ethical or unethical) depended on the discretion of the individual consultant.

Following the analysis of a job interview, the study revealed that consultants preferred hiring those who had social capital. Such preferential value made social capital the field's symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). However, it is argued that, as previously signalled by Edwards (2008, 2011a, 2018), privileging social capital could give an unfair advantage to those who have the financial wherewithal and time to invest in networking (Edwards, 2008, 2011a, 2018). It is consequently alerted that appreciation and preference of social capital may favour the entry and success of people belonging to similar social, cultural and/or economic circumstances and lead to the perpetuation of a typical occupational habitus (Bourdieu, 1984, 1990). As previously indicated by Bhargava and Theunissen (2019, 2023b), such subjective selection of candidates can limit the advancement of diversity, equity, and inclusion in an already homogenous occupation. Therefore, it is argued that consultants needed to be more mindful during recruitment and selection of candidates and would benefit from training in human resource management.

The study found that along with being affable and having social capital, currently consultants expected new entrants (whether new to the occupation or new to the job) to have good writing skills, broad experience, an attitude of being proactive and ready to learn on the job, and an efficiency in getting the work done. In return, consultants believed that they offered a collaborative and fun occupational culture that valued work-life balance. These findings suggested that the consulting lifeworld exhibited what Verčič (2012) would refer to as being a business culture and what Pieczka (2002, 2006b, 2006c, 2011) would see as focus on learning through experience and practice. Such business and practice-based orientation could be conducive for the consulting sector's financial growth by ensuring more job opportunities and perhaps better pay for experienced consultants (Wright, 2013).

Paradoxically, the research also revealed that having a business culture meant that those who desired better work-life balance (and consultants participating in this study did) needed to efficiently manage their billable working hours or be compelled to work outside regular hours to meet client demands during peak business. Similarly, task collaboration, experiential learning and workplace fun were also only possible if there was structured time and effort assigned for these (Beard & Wilson, 2018; Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 2015; Maruping et al., 2015; Mohammed & Nadkarni, 2011) which the study found was not always the case. For example, consultants who only worked part-time, or alternatively those who were in senior positions and preoccupied with business development, could not always offer their limited time for participating in collaborative, learning, training, or fun activities. Consequently, it meant that the consulting lifeworld was perceived as being more suitable for neurotypical people who could be proactive, speedy, and productive in busy work environments. This archetypical identity was arguably counterproductive for advancing diversity and inclusion, ensuring consultant welfare, and limiting turnover.

Additionally, the study highlighted that while consultants worked with the above challenges of business culture, they aspired to be seen as professionals whose advice mattered to the clients. Unfortunately, female consultants, were found to be prone to judgements about their appearances from both clients and colleagues (both male and female). Much like elsewhere in the world (Edwards, 2018; Fröhlich & Peters, 2007; Tsetsura, 2011; Yeomans, 2019) the consultants' discourse about their own occupational identity reinforced negative stereotypes about young, white and female consultants, projecting them as being well-presented but lacking in professionalism. Finally, this study found that consultants saw their busy consulting lifeworld as an expression of their identity and in doing so invariably enabled the extreme ethos (Hewlett & Luce, 2006) of disguising workaholism as their love for public relations (Yeomans, 2019). Such identification is undoubtedly an issue for the holistic wellbeing of consultants and makes work-life balance challenging to achieve in practice. Consultants seemed oblivious to the possibility that varying social circumstances (for example family demands) could hinder the time availability expected in the consulting lifeworld, which is another reason for the preservation of typicality in occupational habitus (Edwards, 2011a).

9.4 Significance of the study

In using an ethnographic methodology, this study has offered a rare insight into the occupational culture of public relations consultants in Aotearoa New Zealand. Following the lead of the discipline's pioneering scholars (Sissons, 2014, 2015; Theunissen & Sissons, 2018), it is only the second study of its kind to use video ethnography for examining the interactions of consultants with their colleagues and clients. It was in these interactions that their daily practices, discourses, identities, norms, and challenges became apparent through what consultants explicitly verbalised as well as what they implied through non-verbal modes of gaze, gesture, posture, and proxemics. Such first-hand access to the *backstage* (Goffman, 1959) of public relations consulting has offered rich insights about this sector that has so far remained marginalised in the discipline due to lack of research (Pieczka, 2008; Verčič, 2012; Williams, 2018).

The current study has been the first to highlight the routine aspects of consulting practice such as hiring a new consultant, problem-solving with a client, collaborating with a colleague, and managing consultant turnover. In doing so, it has revealed relational aspects, processes, trends, and challenges that may be commonplace in consulting practice (such as *account manager turnover*) but are yet to be widely known in the public relations discipline.

Additionally, this study has answered the call of socio-cultural scholars (Bardhan & Weaver, 2011; Bentele & Wehmeir, 2009; Edwards & Hodges, 2011; Edwards & Ihlen, 2023; Sriramesh, 2012; 2020) by adopting a sociological lens in examining the micro-culture of consultancy practice in the country. Doing so has not only illuminated cultural nuances specific to this social field (such as personal influence, politeness, and business orientation) but has also helped understand the routine struggles of consultants (for entry, power, and success) as social actors of the field.

I also hope that the findings of this study will provide a basis for consultants to reflect on their taken-for-granted ways of practice and enable them to challenge the underlying assumptions of the norms and behaviours they propagate. Such reflection can help ensure that consultants do not become enslaved to habitus maintenance (Ihlen, 2009, 2018) and are more cognisant of the issues concerning diversity, equity, inclusion, and wellbeing.

For public relations educators, this study could be valuable in understanding how to prepare students for consultancy practice. The study has accentuated the worth of understanding not just the business of consulting but also the interpersonal relationships that are at the heart of it. Hopefully, the thesis will inspire educators to draw from other disciplines such as management consulting, interpersonal communication, and human resource management to further enrich the curriculum of public relations and enable future consultants to be even better critical thinkers, skilful communicators, and able managers.

9.5 Limitations of the study

This study's main limitation is that due to being an ethnographic exploration, it was restricted in scope and observed only two public relations consultants over a relatively limited period. As discussed earlier in chapter three (see Section 3.2), conducting ethnographic research as a full-time lecturer, and within the constraints of a university degree, made it challenging to consider engaging in long-term fieldwork with a larger number of participants. This limitation was overcome by interviewing an additional 14 consultants. Interviews not only added breadth to the data but are also argued

(Jorgensen, 2020) to help contextualise the findings of the ethnography and improve the robustness and validity of the interpretations.

While I acknowledge that my observations were done over a short period of time and with a small number of participants (total of 14 working days with two participants), the findings were not lacking in richness and depth of data. An ethnographic study, through its *thick descriptions* (Geertz, 1973), can help reveal various intricacies about the culture of the participants that may on the periphery seem mundane or routine. Additionally, it has been noted that if researchers have at least some knowledge of the field they are about to observe, then they can draw meaningful interpretations from observations made within a few weeks or even days (Bernard, 2017; Jorgensen, 2020; Manolchev & Foley, 2021). As a former public relations practitioner and current educator, I have been privy to interactions with consultants and was aware of their practice. Therefore, I was able to better observe and interpret the norms and nuances of their practice within the limited period that I gained access to their working lives. However, at the same time, I also acknowledge that this familiarity can sometimes create bias and over-identification with the research participants. As a researcher, maintaining a reflective diary and field notes helped in checking assumptions and reminding myself of my *observer-as-participant* role (Bernard, 2017; DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011; Jorgensen, 2020). Overall, while the challenges of conducting a video ethnography (within the constraints of a university degree) meant limiting the scope of data collection, I urge future researchers to continue to explore this methodology due to the richness of the data collected and the ability to identify significance in the ordinary work and life of participants that is otherwise left unexplored (Geertz, 1973; Jorgensen, 2020).

Additionally, as usual in ethnographic research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Miles et al., 2020), the participants of this study were drawn from purposive and convenience sampling and so were geographically limited to the Upper North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand. It is possible that consultants who work in the Lower North Island or South Island regions of the country may have some variations in perspectives and practices and consequently could have a different occupational culture. However, since the majority of the consultants live and work in the Upper North Island (Bhargava & Theunissen, 2023a), the findings and interpretations can be argued to be sufficiently reliable.

9.6 Recommendations for future studies

As evidenced in this study, a socio-cultural research lens can offer nuanced insights about specific contexts of practice and in doing so highlight aspects of public relations—such as interpersonal relationships, power and persuasion—that might generally be marginalised by normative thinking (Bardhan & Weaver, 2011; Curtin, 2021; Edwards & Hodges, 2011; Edwards & Ihlen, 2023; L'Etang, 2011; Somerville, 2017; Sriramesh, 2012, 2020; Waymer, 2012). It is, therefore, recommended that future studies continue to explore how society and culture intersect with public relations and what these intersections imply for the practice and the discipline. I hope that researchers will also endeavour to explain public relations from the perspective of interpersonal relationships in which practitioners engage as opposed to the normative focus on the work practitioners do and the outcomes they achieve.

Within this socio-cultural paradigm, it is recommended that researchers draw from the expanse of social theory to examine public relations practice as a social field and practitioners as social actors. In doing so, they could rely on seminal works by sociologists like Bourdieu (1984, 1986, 1990) and Goffman (1959, 1963, 1967, 1981), among others, to understand not only how practitioners act and interact but also how they are influenced by and influence the context within which they do so. Drawing from social theories will further enlighten the understanding about the *people* who practice public relations and how their identities, values, expectations, behaviours, interactions, and actions combine to define occupational practice and culture.

Specifically, it is recommended that future studies further investigate the recruitment and selection processes and behaviours of consultants. In the current study, the observation of a job interview revealed that selection was based on subjective assessments of personality, experience, and social capital, which could potentially restrict the growth of diversity in the field. Therefore, it would be useful to examine job advertisements and the subsequent interviews to better understand what images of occupational culture were being portrayed to candidates, what criteria made a candidate *fit* for selection, and what norms of practice the candidates were (explicitly or implicitly) expected to abide by. It may also be useful to compare the recruitment and selection processes of consultants with those of in-house practitioners.

Additionally, it would be beneficial to have studies that analysed how consultants facilitated *experiential learning* (Beard & Wilson, 2018; Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 2015) among new entrants. While this study found that experience was a valued commodity in public relations consulting, it did not find any evidence of a structured approach to training consultants at work. Future ethnographic studies could specifically explore what consultants considered as learning *on-the-job* and how this learning was imparted within the constraints of a consultancy lifeworld.

Furthermore, the discipline would benefit from an investigation into the co-relation between appearance and professionalism. Studies (Fröhlich & Peters, 2007; Grandien, 2017; Tsetsura, 2011; Yeomans, 2019), including the current one, have indicated that consultants' discourses about their embodied occupational identity perpetuated negative stereotypes. Future researchers could interview consultants to examine their perspective on the matter, analyse their self-portrayals on websites and social media pages, and even conduct focus groups with public relations students and clients to understand the effect (or lack thereof) of these depictions on perceptions of the practice.

Finally, it is recommended that public relations researchers continue to embrace ethnographic methodologies and experiment with novel analytical techniques to both broaden the disciplinary perspectives and deepen the understanding of specific contexts of practice.

REFERENCES

Abbott, A. (1988). *The system of professions: An essay on the division of expert labour.* University of Chicago Press.

Acarturk, C., Indurkya, B., Nawrocki, P., Sniezynski, B., Jarosz, M., & Usal, K. A. (2021). Gaze aversion in conversational settings: An investigation based on mock job interview. *Journal of Eye Movement Research*, *14*(1). https://doi.org/10.16910/jemr.14.1.1

Akinnaso, F. N., & Ajirotutu, C. S. (1982). Performance and ethnic style in job interviews. *Language and Social Identity*, 119–144. https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511620836.010

Almutairi, T. M., & Sriramesh, K. (2020). Strategic management of public relations in Kuwait. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, *26*(1), 192–204. https://doi.org/10.1108/ccij-01-2020-0017

Alvesson, M. (1995). *Management of knowledge-intensive companies*. De Gruyter. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110900569

Alvesson, M. (2000). Social identity and the problem of loyalty in knowledge-intensive companies. *Journal of Management Studies*, *37*(8), 1101–1124. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6486.00218

Alvesson, M. (2001). Knowledge work: Ambiguity, image and identity. *Human Relations*, *54*(7), 863–886. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726701547004

Alvesson, M. (2012). Managing consultants: Control and identity. *Oxford Handbooks Online.* https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199235049.013.0015

Alvesson, M., & Karreman, D. (2006). Professional service firms as collectivities. *Research in the Sociology of Organizations: Professional Service Firms,* 24: 203–230.

Angrosino, M & Rosenberg, J. (2011). Observation on observation: continuities and challenges. In N. K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp 467-478). Sage Publications.

Arseneault, R., & Roulin, N. (2021). A theoretical model of cross-cultural impression management in employment interviews. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*, *29*(3-4), 352-366. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijsa.12348

Arminen, I. (2005). *Institutional interaction: Studies of talk at work.* Ashgate Publishing.

Arminen, I., & Leinonen, M. (2006). Mobile phone call openings: tailoring answers to personalized summonses. *Discourse Studies*, *8*(3), 339-368. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445606061791

Ashley, L., & Empson, L. (2016). Understanding social exclusion in elite professional service firms: Field level dynamics and the 'professional project.' *Work, Employment and Society*, *31*(2), 211–229. https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017015621480

Atkinson, J. M. (1992). Displaying neutrality: formal aspects of informal court proceedings. In P. Drew & J. Heritage (Eds.) *Talk at work: Interaction in institutional settings* (pp. 199 - 211). Cambridge University Press.

Auckland University of Technology (2023, April 12). *Postgraduate handbook 2023*. https://www.aut.ac.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/510048/AUT-Postgraduate-Handbook-2023-V1.2-Apr-2023-Final.pdf

Ballestero, A. & Winthereik, B. R. (2021). Introduction: Analysis as experimental practice. In A. Ballestero & B.R. Winthereik (Eds.), *Experimenting with ethnography: A companion to analysis* (pp. 1 - 12). Duke University Press.

Bardhan, N. (2003). Rupturing public relations Metanarratives: The example of India. *Journal of Public Relations Research,* 15(3), 225–248. http://doi.org/10.1207/s1532754xjprr1503_2

Bardhan, N., & Gower, K. (2023). *The role of leadership in building inclusive diversity in public relations.* Taylor & Francis Group.

Bardhan, N., & Weaver, C. K. (2011). Introduction: Public relations in global cultural contexts. In N. Bardhan & C. K. Weaver (Eds.). *Public relations in global cultural contexts* (pp. 1-28). Routledge.

Barling, J. (2023). *Brave new workplace: Designing productive, healthy, and safe organizations*. Oxford University Press.

Barrick, M. R., Shaffer, J. A., & DeGrassi, S. W. (2009). What you see may not be what you get: Relationships among self-presentation tactics and ratings of interview and job performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *94*(6), 1394-1411. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0016532

Barroso, F., Freedman, N., Grand, S., & Van Meel, J. (1978). Evocation of two types of hand movements in information processing. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance*, *4*(2), 321-329. https://doi:10.1037/0096-1523.4.2.321

Beard, C., & Wilson, J. P. (2018). *Experiential learning: A practical guide for training, coaching and education (4th ed.)*. Kogan Page.

Belich, J. (1996). *Making peoples: A history of New Zealanders*. Penguin Books.

Benecke, D. R., Simpson, Z., Le Roux, S., Skinner, C. J., van Rensburg, N. J., Sibeko, J., Bvuma, S., & Meyer, J. (2017). Cultural intermediaries and the Circuit of Culture: The digital ambassadors project in Johannesburg, South Africa. *Public Relations Review*, *43*(1), 26–34. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2016.10.009

Bennett, T., Grossberg, L., & Morris, M. (Eds.). (2005). *New keywords.* Blackwell Publishing.

Bentele, G., & Wehmeier, S. (2007). Applying sociology to public relations: A commentary. *Public Relations Review,* 33(3), 294-300. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2007.05.009

Bentley, G. & Wehmeier, S. (2009). Commentary: linking sociology with public relations - some critical reflections in reflexive times. In O. Ihlen, B. Ruler & M. Fredriksson (Eds.), *Public relations and social theory (pp. 341-361)*. Routledge.

Berger, B. K. (2005). Power over, power with, and power to relations: Critical Reflections on Public Relations, the dominant coalition, and activism. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *17*(1), 5–28. https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532754xjprr1701_3

Berger, B.K., & Reber, B.H. (2005). *Gaining influence in public relations: The role of resistance in practice*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410616975

Berkowitz, D., & Lee, J. (2004). Media relations in Korea: Cheong between journalist and public relations practitioner. *Public Relations Review*, *30*(4), 431–437. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2004.08.011

Bernard, H. R. (2017). *Research methods in anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Bhargava, D., & Theunissen, P. (2019). The future of PR is ‘fantastic’, ‘friendly’ and ‘funny’: Occupational stereotypes and symbolic capital in entry-level job advertisements. *Public Relations Review,* 45(4), 101822. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2019.101822

Bhargava, D., & Theunissen, P. (2020, October 20). *Do internships help build professional capabilities? An examination of public relations internships in New Zealand* [Video presentation]. PRIA Research Symposium 2020, Sydney, NSW, Australia. https://web.microsoftstream.com/video/f687f735-c4af-40a0-a4a8-f1b5cec8e2b0

Bhargava, D., & Theunissen, P. (2023a, January). *Insights Report 2022.* Public Relations Institute of New Zealand [PRINZ], Auckland.

Bhargava, D., & Theunissen, P. (2023b, April). *Diversity, equity & inclusion report 2022*. Public Relations Institute of New Zealand [PRINZ], Auckland.

Botan, C., & Taylor, M. (2004). Public Relations: State of the Field. *Journal of Communication*, 54(4), 645-661. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2004.tb02649.x

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste.* Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). Forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241 – 258). Greenwood.

Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The logic of practice.* Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1993). *The field of cultural production: Essays on art and literature*. Columbia University Press.

Bowen, S. (2003). ‘I thought it would be more glamorous’: preconceptions and misconceptions among students in the public relations principles course. *Public Relations Review*, *29*(2), 199-214. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/s0363-8111(03)00012-2

Bowen, S. A. (2009). All glamour, no substance? How public relations majors and potential majors in an exemplar program view the industry and function. *Public Relations Review*, 35(4), 402–410. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2009.05.018.

Braun, S. L. (2007). The effects of the political environment on public relations in Bulgaria. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *19*(3), 199–228. https://doi.org/10.1080/10627260701331747

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. SAGE Publications.

Brinkmann, S. (2018). The interview. In N. K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 576 - 599). Sage Publications, Inc.

Brinkmann, S. (2022). *Qualitative interviewing conversational knowledge through research interviews*. Oxford University Press.

Brock, D., Leblebici, H., & Muzio, D. (2014). Understanding professionals and their workplaces: The mission of the Journal of Professions and Organization. *Journal Of Professions and Organization*, *1*(1), 1-15. doi: 10.1093/jpo/jot006

Broschak, J. (2015). Client relationships in professional services firms. In L. Empson, D. Muzio, J. Broschak & B. Hinings (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of professional service firms*. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9880199682393.013.4

Broschak, J., Block, E., Koppman, S., & Adjerid, I. (2019). Will we ever meet again? The relationship between inter-firm managerial migration and the circulation of client ties. *Journal Of Management Studies*, *57*(6), 1106-1142. https://doi.10.1111/joms.12522

Brown, R. E. (2014). *The public relations of everything.* Routledge.

Brown, R.E, Burton, St. J. & Hou, J.Z. (2022). The humanistic turn. In R. E. Brown, St., J. Burton & B., & J. Z. Hou (Eds.), *The global foundations of public relations: Humanism, China and the West* (pp. 1 – 6). Taylor & Francis Group.

Bruning, S., & Ledingham, J. (2002). Identifying the communication, behaviors, and interaction patterns of agency-client relationships in development and decline. *Journal Of Promotion Management*, *8*(2), 21-34. https://doi: 10.1300/j057v08n02_03

Button, G. (1992). Answers as interactional products: two sequential practices used in job interviews. In P. Drew & J. Heritage (Eds.), *Talk at work: Interaction in institutional settings* (pp. 212 - 231). Cambridge University Press.

Butler, S. & Ortolja-Baird, L., & Culture, S. (2017). *New Zealand - culture smart!: The essential guide to customs & culture*. Kuperard.

Bunting, M. (2005). *Willing slaves: How the overwork culture is ruling our lives*. Perennial.

Capozzi, L. (2015). Public relations consulting: Consulting and corporate communication – the nexus. In J. Doorley & H.F. Garcia (Eds.), *Reputation management: the key to successful public relations and corporate communication (pp. 357- 376).* Taylor & Francis Group.

Carbado, D. W. & Harris, C.I (2019). Intersectionality at 30: mapping the margins of anti-essentialism, intersectionality, and dominance theory. *Harvard Law Review*, 32(I), 2193 – 2239.

Catalano, T., & Waugh, L. R. (2020). *Critical discourse analysis, critical discourse studies and beyond*. Springer International Publishing AG.

Chaidaroon, S. & Hou, J. Z. (2021). Global public relations: multi-paradigmatic perspectives, key approaches and future directions. In C. Valentini (Ed.), *Public relations* (pp. 399-413). Walter de Gruyter GmbH.

Chandler, B. (2013). The subjectivity of habitus. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, *43*(4), 469–491. https://doi.org/10.1111/jtsb.12025

Chang, C. Y. (2013). *Confucianism: a modern interpretation.* Imperial College Pr.

Chen, Y.R., Flora, C., Hung-Baesecke, C.F. & Cheng, Y. (2023). Public relations theory development in China: in the areas of dialogic communication, crisis communication, and CSR communication. In C.H. Botan & E. J. Sommerfeldt (Eds.), *Public relations theory III: in the age of publics* (pp. 303 - 320). Routledge.

Chow, I. H.-S., & Ng, I. (2004). The characteristics of Chinese personal ties (guanxi): Evidence from Hong Kong. *Organization Studies*, *25*(7), 1075–1093. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840604045092

Clark, T., & Salaman, G. (1998). Telling tales: Management gurus' narratives and the construction of managerial identity. *Journal of Management Studies*, *35*(2), 137–161. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6486.00088

Courtright, J., Wolfe, R. & Baldwin, J (2011). Intercultural typologies and public relations research: a critique of Hofstede's Dimensions. In N. Bardhan & C. K. Weaver (Eds.). *Public relations in global cultural contexts* (pp. 1-28). Routledge.

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, *43*(6), 1241. https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039

Creswell, J. W. & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design. qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. SAGE Publications, Inc.

Cross, C. (Ed.). (2018). *Human resource management*. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

Cross, C. (2019). Recruitment and selection. In R. Carbery & C. Cross (Eds.), *Human resource management* (pp. 134 – 170). Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

Crotty, M. J. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process.* Taylor & Francis Group.

Cullen, P. (2019, April 3). Air New Zealand treads fine line between cultural tattoos and presentation standards. *Stuff.* https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/opinion-analysis/111491947/air-new-zealand-treads-fine-line-between-cultural-tattoos-and-presentation-standards

Curtin, P. A., & Gaither, T. K. (2005). Privileging identity, difference, and power: The circuit of culture as a basis for public relations theory. *Journal of Public Relations Research,* 17(2), 91–115. http://doi.org/10.1207/s1532754xjprr1702_3

Curtin, P.A. & Gaither, T.K. (2007*). International public relations: negotiating culture, identity, and power.* London: Sage Publications.

Curtin, P.A. (2021). Public relations and cultural theories. In C. Valentini (Ed.), *Public relations* (pp. 563-580). Walter de Gruyter GmbH.

Darnell, R. (2022a). *The communications consultant's foundation: Leveraging public relations expertise for personal and client success*. Routledge.

Darnell, R. (2022b). *The communications consultant's master plan: Leveraging public relations expertise for client and personal success*. Routledge.

Daugherty, E. L. (2011). The public relations internship experience: A comparison of student and site supervisor perspectives. *Public Relations Review, 37*(5), 470–477

Davidson, J. (1984). Subsequent versions of invitations, offers, requests, and proposals dealing with potential or actual rejection. In J. M. Atkinson & J. Heritage (Eds.), *Structures of social action: Studies in conversation analysis* (pp. 102 - 128). Cambridge University Press.

Daymon, C., & Hodges, C. (2009). Researching the occupational culture of public relations in Mexico. *Public Relations Review*, 35(4), 429–433. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2009.06.006

Deelman, T. (2019). Consulting: characterization of concepts and connections. In V. Nissen, (Ed.), *Advances in consulting research: Recent findings and practical cases* (pp. 31 – 52). Springer International Publishing AG.

De Keere (2019). The confessional jobseeker: moralizing occupational gatekeeping in the cultural and corporate field [Paper presentation]. Annual ASA Conference, New York, United States.

Dennison, M., (2012). *An analysis of public relations discourse and its representations in popular culture* [Master's Thesis Auckland University of Technology].

DeVito, J. (2019). *The interpersonal communication book* (15th ed.). Pearson Education Limited.

DeWalt, K. M., & DeWalt, B. R. (2011). *Participant observation: A guide for Fieldworkers*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education.* Macmillan.

Dhanesh, G.S. & Avidar, R. (2023). Culture and dialogic theory in public relations: the middle eastern context. In C.H. Botan & E. J. Sommerfeldt (Eds.), *Public relations theory III: in the age of publics* (pp. 321 - 337). Routledge.

Diani, G. (2014). Politeness. In K. Aijmer & C. Ruhlemann (Eds.), *Corpus pragmatics: A handbook* (pp. 169 – 191). Cambridge University Press.

Diversity Works New Zealand. (2022). *New Zealand workplace diversity survey 2022.* http://bit.ly/3U6guas

Donnelly, M., & Gamsu, S. (2019). The field of graduate recruitment: Leading Financial and consultancy firms and Elite Class Formation. *The British Journal of Sociology*, *70*(4), 1374–1401. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12659

Dozier, D.M. (1992). The Organizational Roles of Communications and Public Relations Practitioners (pp. 327- 356). In J. E. Grunig (Ed.), *Excellence in public relations and communication management* (pp 597-614). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Drew, P. (1992). Contested evidence in courtroom cross-examination: the case of a trial of rape. In P. Drew & J. Heritage (Eds.) *Talk at work: Interaction in institutional settings* (pp. 470 - 520). Cambridge University Press.

Drew, P., & Heritage, J. (1992). Analyzing talk at work: an introduction. In P. Drew & J. Heritage (Eds.) *Talk at work: Interaction in institutional settings* (pp. 3 – 65). Cambridge University Press.

Drew, P., Raymond, G., & Weinberg, D. (2006). *Talk and interaction in social research methods*. Sage Publications.

DuFon, M.A. (2002). Video recording in ethnographic sla research: some issues of validity in data collection. *Language Learning & Technology*, 6(1), 40-59.

Du Gay, P., Hall, S., Janes, L., Madsen, A. K., Mackay, H., & Negus, K. (1997). *Doing cultural studies: The story of the Sony Walkman*. Sage.

Eagleton, T. (2016). *Culture.* Yale University Press.

Earp, B. D., McLoughlin, K. L., Monrad, J. T., Clark, M. S., & Crockett, M. J. (2021). How social relationships shape moral wrongness judgments. *Nature Communications*, *12*(1), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-021-26067-4

Edelman (n.d.). *Our history.* https://www.edelman.com/about-us/our-history

Edwards, L. & Hodges, C. E. M. (2011). Introduction: implications of a (radical) socio-cultural 'turn' in public relations scholarship. In L. Edwards & C.E.M Hodges (Eds.), *Public relations, society & culture: theoretical and empirical explorations* (pp. 1 – 14). Routledge.

Edwards, L. & Ihlen, ø. (2023). Social theory in public relations: insights and directions. In C.H. Botan & E. J. Sommerfeldt (Eds.), *Public relations theory III: in the age of publics* (pp. 213 - 227). Routledge.

Edwards, L. (2006). Rethinking power in public relations. *Public Relations Review*, *32*(3), 229–231. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2006.05.013

Edwards, L. (2008). PR practitioners' cultural capital: An initial study and implications for research and practice. *Public Relations Review,* 34(4), 367–372. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2008.06.004

Edwards, L. (2009). Symbolic power and public relations practice: Locating individual practitioners in their social context. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 21(3), 251–272. http://doi.org/10.1080/10627260802640674

Edwards, L. (2011a). Public relations and society. A Bourdieuvian perspective. In L. Edwards & C.E.M. Hodges (Eds.), *Public relations, society & culture: theoretical and empirical explorations* (pp. 61 – 74). Routledge.

Edwards, L. (2011b). Diversity in public relations. In L. Edwards & C.E.M. Hodges (Eds.), *Public relations, society & culture* (pp. 75 – 89). Routledge.

Edwards, L. (2012). Public relations' occupational culture: habitus, exclusion and resistance in the UK context. In K. Sriramesh & D. Verčič (Eds.), *Culture and public relations: Links and implications* (pp. 142 – 162). Taylor & Francis.

Edwards, L. (2013). Institutional racism in cultural production: The case of public relations. *Popular Communication,* 11(3), 242–256. http://doi.org/10.1080/15405702.2013.810084

Edwards, L. (2014). Discourse, credentialism and occupational closure in the communications industries: The case of public relations in the UK. *European Journal of Communication,* 29(3), 319–334. http://doi.org/10.1177/0267323113519228

Edwards, L. (2015). *Power, diversity and public relations*. Routledge.

Edwards, L. (2018). *Understanding public relations: Theory, culture and society*. SAGE Publications.

Ehling, W.P., White, J. & Grunig, J.E. (1992). Public relations and marketing practices (pp.357- 64). In J. E. Grunig (Ed.), *Excellence in public relations and communication management* (pp 357-393). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc

.

Enfield, N.J (2013). Reference in conversation. In J. Sidnell & T. Stivers (Eds.), *The handbook of conversation analysis* (pp. 433 - 454). Wiley Blackwell.

Epson, L. (2019). How to lead your fellow rain-makers. *Harvard Business Review*, 114-123.

Erickson, F. (2018). A history of qualitative inquiry in social and educational research. In N. K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 36 - 65). Sage Publications.

Employment New Zealand (n.d.) *Contractor versus employee.* https://www.employment.govt.nz/starting-employment/who-is-an-employee/difference-between-a-self-employed-contractor-and-an-employee/

Everett, J.L. & Johnston, K. A. (2012). Toward an ethnographic imperative in public relations research. *Public Relations Review,* 38 (2012), 522-528. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2012.05.006

Fairclough, N. (2013). *Critical discourse analysis the critical study of language*. Routledge.

Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis*. Longman.

Fawkes, J. (2015). *Public relations ethics and professionalism: The shadow of excellence*. Routledge.

Feiler, A. R., & Powell, D. M. (2015). Behavioral expression of job interview anxiety. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, *31*(1), 155-171. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-015-9403-z

Firth, A. (1995). ‘accounts’ in negotiation discourse: A single-case analysis. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *23*(2), 199–226. https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166(94)00003-w

Fitch, K. (2016). *Professionalizing public relations: History, gender and education*. Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Flanagan, J. C. (1954). The critical incident technique. *Psychological Bulletin*, *51*(4), 327–358. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0061470

Flick, U. (2018). Triangulation. In N. K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 444 - 461). Sage Publications, Inc.

Foley, D. (2008). Does culture and social capital impact on the networking attributes of Indigenous entrepreneurs? *Journal of Enterprising Communities: People and Places in the Global Economy*, *2*(3), 204-224. https://doi.org/10.1108/17506200810897204

Ford, C. E., & Stickle, T. (2012). Securing recipiency in workplace meetings: Multimodal practices. *Discourse Studies*, *14*(1), 11–30. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445611427213

Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972 – 1977*. Pantheon.

Fredriksson, M. & Ihlen, ø. (2018). Introduction: public relations and social theory. In ø. Ihlen & M. Fredriksson (Eds.), *Public relations and social theory: key concepts and developments* (pp. 1 - 16). Routledge.

Friedson, E. (2001). *Professionalism: The third logic.* University of Chicago Press.

Fröhlich, R., & Peters, S. B. (2007). PR Bunnies Caught in the Agency Ghetto? Gender Stereotypes, Organizational Factors, and Women's Careers in PR Agencies. *Journal Of Public Relations Research*, *19*(3), 229-254. doi:10.1080/10627260701331754

Gaither, T., & Al-Kandari, A. (2014). The cultural-economic model and public relations in the Middle East: An examination of the Islamic banking system in Kuwait. *Public Relations Review*, 40(1), 33-41. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2013.11.003

Gallessich, J. (1982). *The profession and practice of consultation: A Handbook for Consultants, trainers of consultants, and consumers of Consultation Services*. Jossey-Bass.

Gamblin, T.C. (2020). Building a successful academic practice using the three A’s: Availability, affability and ability. In T.S. Wang & A.W. Beck (Eds.), *Building a clinical practice* (pp. 3 - 7). Success in academic surgery [SIAS]. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-29271-3_1

Gardner, H. (2015). Teamwork and collaboration in professional service firms. *Oxford Handbooks Online*. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199682393.013.21

Gardenswartz & Rowe. (2021). *Why Gardenswartz & Rowe?* www.gardenswartzrowe.com/why-g-r

Garfinkel, H. (1967). *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Polity Press.

Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures: selected essays.* Basic Books.

Gevers, J. M. P., Rutte, C. G., & van Eerde, W. (2006). Meeting deadlines in work groups: Implicit and explicit mechanisms. *Applied Psychology*, *55*(1), 52–72. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.2006.00228.x

Gevers, J. M., van Eerde, W., & Rutte, C. G. (2009). Team self-regulation and meeting deadlines in Project Teams: Antecedents and effects of temporal consensus. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, *18*(3), 295–321. https://doi.org/10.1080/13594320701693217

Glassdoor (2021, June 29). *How to Dress Professional: What It Is and Why It's Important?* https://www.glassdoor.com/blog/guide/how-to-dress-professional/

Glenn, P. (2003). *Laughter in interaction.* Cambridge University Press.

Gilch, P. M. (2022). Occupation-specific recruitment: An empirical investigation on job seekers' occupational (non-)fit, employer image, and employer attractiveness. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *13*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.937116

Global Alliance. (n.d.). *Global capability framework.* https://www.globalalliancepr.org/capabilitiesframeworks

Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Penguin Books.

Goffman, E. (1963). *Behavior in Public Places: Notes on the Social Organization of Gatherings*. Free Press. Social Theory database.

Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction ritual: Essays on face-to-face behavior*. Pantheon Books.

Goffman, E. (1981). *Forms of talk.* University of Pennsylvania Press.

Gold, R. L. (1958). Roles in sociological field observations. *Social Forces*, *36*(3), 217–223. https://doi.org/10.2307/2573808

Goldberg, S., & Rosenthal, R. (1986). Self-touching behavior in the job interview: Antecedents and consequences. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, *10*(1), 65-80. https://doi.org/10.1007/bf00987206

Goodwin, C. (1980). Restarts, Pauses, and the Achievement of a State of Mutual Gaze at Turn-Beginning. *Sociological Inquiry*, *50*(3-4), 272-302. https://doi:10.1111/j.1475-682x.1980.tb00023.x

Goodwin, C. (2000). Action and embodiment within situated human interaction. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *32*(10), 1489–1522. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0378-2166(99)00096-x

Goodwin, J. (2019). Communication accommodation theory: Finding the right approach. In M. Brown & L. Hersey (Eds.), *Returning to interpersonal dialogue and understanding human communication in the digital age* (pp. 168– 186). IGA Global. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-4168-4

Grandien, C. (2017). Pulling together and tearing apart – The occupational branding of public relations and the management of tainted work. *Public Relations Inquiry*, *6*(1), 73-98. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/2046147x16682986

Grbic, C. (2007). *Qualitative data analysis: an introduction.* London: Sage Publications.

Grbich, C. (2013). *Qualitative Data Analysis: An introduction*. Sage Publications.

Green, J. (2021, January 18). Reflections, Reputation Management & Positivity for 2021. *Public Relations Institute of New Zealand [PRINZ].* https://prinz.org.nz/reflections-reputation-management-positivity-for-2021/

Gregory (2021) *Planning and managing public relations campaigns: a strategic approach* (5th ed.). Kogan Page.

Gregory, A., & Willis, P. (2013). *Strategic public relations leadership*. Routledge.

Grunig, J. E. (2009). Paradigms of global public relations in an age of digitalisation. *Prism,* 6(2). http://praxis.massey.ac.nz/prism_on-line_journ.html

Grunig, J., & Hunt, T. (1984). Managing public relations. Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Grunig, J.E. & Grunig, L.A. & Ehling, W. (1992). What is an effective organisation? In J. E. Grunig (Ed.), *Excellence in public relations and communication management* (pp 65-90). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Grunig, J.E. & Grunig, L.A. (1992). Models of public relations and communication (pp 285-325). In J. E. Grunig (Ed.), *Excellence in public relations and communication management* (pp 285-325). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Grunig, J.E. & Grunig, L.A. (2008). Excellence Theory in Public Relations: Past, Present and Future. In A. Zerfass, B. van Ruler & K. Sriramesh (Eds.), *Public relations research: European and international perspectives and innovations* (pp. 327-347). Springer ebooks.

Grunig, J.E. & Kim, J. (2021). The four models of public relations and their research legacy. In C. Valentini (Ed.), *Public relations* (pp. 277-311). Walter de Gruyter GmbH.

Grunig, J.E. & Repper, F. C. (1992). Strategic management, publics, and issues (pp.31- 64). In J. E. Grunig (Ed.), *Excellence in public relations and communication management* (pp 117-157). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Grunig, J.E. & White, J. (1992). The effect of worldviews on public relations theory and practice (pp.31- 64). In J. E. Grunig (Ed.), *Excellence in public relations and communication management* (pp 597-614). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Grunig, J.E. (1992a). Communication, public relations, and effective organizations: an overview of the book. In J. E. Grunig (Ed.), *Excellence in public relations and communication management* (pp 1-28). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Grunig, J.E. (1992b). What is excellence in management? In J. E. Grunig (Ed.), *Excellence in public relations and communication management* (pp 219-250). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Grunig, J.E. (1992c). Symmetrical systems of internal communication. In J. E. Grunig (Ed.), *Excellence in public relations and communication management* (pp 531-575). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Grunig, J., (2022). Negotiation and conflict management: Two valuable tools in the public relations toolbox. *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research* 15(1). doi: https://doi.org/10.34891/20220215-542

Guba, E.G. (1990). The alternative paradigm dialog. In E.G. Guba (Ed.), *The paradigm dialog* (pp. 17 – 30). Sage.

Gugerty, C. A. (2011). *Internships in public relations and advertising: the nature of the experience from the student's perspective.* Graduate Dissertation. University of South Florida. Retrieved from Scholarly Commons.

Gumperz, J. J. (1982). *Discourse strategies*. Cambridge University Press.

Gumperz, J. J. (2018). Interactional sociolinguistics: a personal perspective. In D. Tannen, H. E. Hamilton & D. Schiffrin (Eds.), *The handbook of discourse analysis* (2nd ed) (pp. 309 - 323). Wiley Blackwell.

Hader, J. J., & Lindeman, E. (1933). *Dynamic Social Research*. Routledge.

Han, G. (K., & Zhang, A. (2009). Starbucks is forbidden in the Forbidden City: Blog, Circuit of Culture and informal public relations campaign in China. *Public Relations Review*, *35*(4), 395–401. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2009.07.004

Hancock, A.-M. (2016). Intersectionality: Intellectual property or meme? *Intersectionality*, 1–36. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199370368.003.0001

Haar, J., & Martin, W. J. (2021). *he Aronga Takirua*: Cultural double-shift of Māori scientists. *Human Relations*, *75*(6), 1001–1027. https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267211003955

Hardy, C., & Leiba-O'Sullivan, S. (1998). The power behind empowerment: Implications for research and practice. *Human Relations*, *51*(4), 451-483. doi: 10.1177/001872679805100402

Harrigan, J. A. (1985). Self-touching as an indicator of underlying affect and language processes. *Social Science & Medicine*, *20*(11), 1161–1168. https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536(85)90193-5

Harrigan, J. A., Lucic, K. S., Kay, D., McLaney, A., & Rosenthal, R. (1991). Effect of expresser role and type of self-touching on observers' perceptions1. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *21*(7), 585–609. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.1991.tb00538.x

Harrigan, J. A., & Rosenthal, R. (1983). Physicians' head and body positions as determinants of perceived rapport. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *13*(6), 496–509. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.1983.tb02332.x

Harrison, D. A. & Sin, H. (2006). What is diversity and how should it be measured? In A. M. Konrad, P. Prasad & J. K. Pringle (Eds.), *Handbook of workplace diversity* (pp. 191 - 216). Sage Publications Ltd.

Harrison-Walker, L. J., & Coppett, J. I. (2003). Building bridges: The company-customer relationship. *Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing*, *10*(4), 49–72. https://doi.org/10.1300/j033v10n04_03

Hargie, O. (2017). *Skilled interpersonal communication: Research, theory and practice*. Taylor & Francis Group.

Hayano, K. (2013). Question design in conversation. In J. Sidnell & T. Stivers (Eds.), *The handbook of conversation analysis* (pp. 395- 414). Wiley Blackwell.

Hayashi, M. (2013). Turn allocation and turn sharing. In J. Sidnell & T. Stivers (Eds.), *The handbook of conversation analysis* (pp. 167- 190). Wiley Blackwell.

Health Point Limited. (2023). *Workaholics Anonymous.* https://www.healthpoint.co.nz/mental-health-addictions/mental-health-addictions/workaholics-anonymous/

Heath, C. & Luff, P. (2013). Embodied action and organizational activity. In J. Sidnell & T. Stivers (Eds.), *The handbook of conversation analysis* (pp. 283- 307). Wiley Blackwell.

Heath, C. (1984). Talk and recipiency: sequential organization in speech and body movement. In J. M. Atkinson & J. Heritage (Eds.), *Structures of social action: Studies in conversation analysis* (pp. 247- 265). Cambridge University Press.

Heath, C. (1984). Talk and recipiency: sequential organization in speech and body movement. In J. M. Atkinson & J. Heritage (Eds.), *Structures of social action: Studies in conversation analysis* (pp. 247- 265). Cambridge University Press.

Heath, C. (1992). The delivery and reception of diagnosis in the general-practice consultation. In P. Drew & J. Heritage (Eds.) *Talk at work: Interaction in institutional settings* (pp. 235 - 267). Cambridge University Press.

Heath, C., Hindmarsh, J., & Luff, P. (2010). *Video in qualitative research*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

Heritage, J. & Clayman, S. (2010). *Talk in action: interactions, identities, and institutions.* Wiley-Blackwell.

Heritage, J. (1984). A change-of-state token and aspects of its sequential placement. In J. M. Atkinson & J. Heritage (Eds.), *Structures of social action: Studies in conversation analysis* (pp. 299- 345). Cambridge University Press.

Herrington, K., (2014). Multi-methods: Diary, interview and observation – understanding the practice of planning through DIO-I. In *Sage Research Methods Cases Part 1*. SAGE Publications, Ltd., https://doi.org/10.4135/978144627305013499298

Hewlett SA, & Luce C.B. (2006). Extreme jobs: the dangerous allure of the 70-hour workweek. *Harvard Business Review*, 84(12), 49-59.

Hill + Knowlton Strategies (n.d.). *Our offices*. https://www.hkstrategies.com/en/our-offices/

Hinings, B., Muzio, D., Broschak, J., & Empson, L. (2015). In L. Empson, D. Muzio, J. Broschak & B. Hinings (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of professional service firms*. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9880199682393.013.4

Hisam, A., Rahman, M. U., Mashhadi, S. F., & Raza, G. (2014). Type A and type B personality in undergraduate medical student: Need of psychosocial rehabilitation. *Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences*, *30*(6), 1304–1307. https://doi.org/10.12669/pjms.306.5541

Hodges, C. (2005). *Relaciones Humanas: The Potential for Public Relations Practitioners as Cultural Intermediaries in Mexico City* [Doctoral dissertation, Bournemouth University].

Hodges, C. (2006). “PRP culture.” *Journal of Communication Management*, 10(1), 80–93. http://doi.org/10.1108/13632540610646391

Hodges, C. E. M. (2011). Public relations in the postmodern city: an ethnographic account of PR occupational culture in Mexico City. In L. Edwards & C.E.M Hodges (Eds.), *Public relations, society & culture: theoretical and empirical explorations* (pp. 33 – 46). Routledge.

Hofstede, G.H. (1984). *Culture's consequences: international differences in work-related values.* Sage Publications.

Holmes Report. (2023). *Global top 250 PR agency ranking 2022. https://www.provokemedia.com/ranking-and-data/global-pr-agency-rankings/2022-pr-agency-rankings/top-250*

Holmes, J. (1990). Hedges and boosters in women's and men's speech. *Language & Communication*, *10*(3), 185-205. doi: 10.1016/0271-5309(90)90002-s

Holmes, J. (2000). Politeness, Power and Provocation: How Humour Functions in the Workplace. *Discourse Studies*, *2*(2), 159-185. doi: 10.1177/1461445600002002002

Holmes, J., & Marra, M. (2002). Having a laugh at work. *Journal Of Pragmatics*, *34*(12), 1683-1710. doi: 10.1016/s0378-2166(02)00032-2

Holmes, J., & Stubbe, M. (2015). *Power and politeness in the workplace*. Routledge.

Holmes, J. (2006). *Gendered talk at work: Constructing gender identity through workplace discourse.* John Wiley & Sons.

Holtzhausen, D. (2000). Postmodern Values in Public Relations. *Journal Of Public Relations Research*, 12(1), 93-114. http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s1532754xjprr1201_6

Holtzhausen, D., & Voto, R. (2002). Resistance From the Margins: The Postmodern Public Relations Practitioner as Organizational Activist. *Journal Of Public Relations Research*, 14(1), 57-84. http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s1532754xjprr1401_3

Honeybourne, V. (2020). *The neurodiverse workplace: An employer's guide to managing and working with neurodivergent employees, clients and customers*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Hou, Z., Zhu, Y., & Bromley, M. (2013). Understanding public relations in china: Multiple Logics and identities. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication,* 27(3), 308–328. http://doi.org/10.1177/1050651913479926

Howell, K. (2015). An introduction to the philosophy of methodology. *Sage Research Methods*. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473957633

Hu, Q., Yao, J., & Zhang, Z. (2020). Selecting people based on person-organisation fit: Implications for intrateam trust and team performance. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 31(1), 293-310. https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12299

Huang, Y. (2000). The personal influence model and Gao Guanxi in Taiwan Chinese public relations. *Public Relations Review,* 26(2), 219-236. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/s0363-8111(00)00042-4

Huang, Y.C. & Lyu, J.C. (2013). The influence of excellence: a citation analysis of the excellence study in PR scholarship, 1992-2011. In K. Sriramesh, A. Zerfass & J. Kim (Eds.), *Public relations and communication management: current trends and emerging topics (*pp.349-374). New York: Routledge.

Huang, Y.C. (2012). Culture and Chinese public relations research. In K. Sriramesh & D. Verčič *(*Eds.), *Culture and public relations: Links and implications* (pp. 91 – 105). Taylor & Francis.

Huffcutt, A. I., Van Iddekinge, C. H., & Roth, P. L. (2011). Understanding applicant behavior in employment interviews: A theoretical model of interviewee performance. *Human Resource Management Review*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2011.05.003

Humle, D. M. (2014). The ambiguity of work: Work practice stories of meaningful and demanding consultancy work. *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies*, *4*(1), 119. https://doi.org/10.19154/njwls.v4i1.3555

Humphery-Jenner, M. (2022, August 16). Quiet quitting: The burnout phenomenon hitting business. *University of New South Wales*. https://www.unsw.edu.au/news/2022/08/quiet-quitting--the-burnout-phenomenon-hitting-business-

Humphries, C. (2019, May 28). The cost of networking. *LinkedIn*. https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/cost-networking-claire-humphries/

Ihlen, O. & Verhoeven, P. (2009). Conclusions on the domain, context, concepts, issues and empirical avenues of public relations. In O. Ihlen, B. Ruler & M. Fredriksson (Eds.), *Public relations and social theory* (pp.323-340). New York, N.Y.: Routledge.

Ihlen, ø. (2009). On Bourdieu – public relations in field struggles. In O. Ihlen, B. Ruler & M. Fredriksson (Eds.), *Public relations and social theory* (pp. 62-82). Routledge.

Ihlen, ø.(2018). On Bourdieu: public relations, positions and resources. In ø. Ihlen & M. Fredriksson (Eds.), *Public relations and social theory: key concepts and developments* (pp. 119 - 136). Routledge.

Ihlen, ø., Verhoeven, P. & Fredrikson, M. (2018). Conclusions on the compass, context, concepts, concerns and empirical avenues of public relations. In ø. Ihlen & M. Fredriksson (Eds.), *Public relations and social theory: key concepts and developments* (pp. 414 - 431). Routledge.

Ipsen, C., & Jensen, P. L. (2012). Organizational options for preventing work-related stress in knowledge work. *International Journal of Industrial Ergonomics*, *42*(4), 325–334. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ergon.2012.02.006

Jefferson, G. (1979). A technique for inviting laughter and its subsequent acceptance declination. In G. Psathas (Ed.), *Everyday language: Studies in ethnomethodology* (pp. 79- 95). Irvington Publishers Inc.

Jefferson, G. (1984). On the organization of laughter in talk about troubles. In J. M. Atkinson & J. Heritage (Eds.), *Structures of social action: Studies in conversation analysis* (pp. 346- 369). Cambridge University Press.

Jefferson, G. (1988). Preliminary notes on a possible metric which provides for a 'standard maximum' silence of approximately one second in conversation. In D. Roger & P. Bull (Eds.), *Conversation: An interdisciplinary perspective* (pp. 166-196). Multilingual Matters Ltd.

Jefferson, G. (2004a). Glossary of transcript symbols with an introduction. In G.H. Lerner (Ed.), *Conversation analysis: Studies from the first generation* (pp. 13 - 31). John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Jefferson, G. (2004b). A sketch of some orderly aspects of overlap in natural conversation. In G.H. Lerner (Ed.), *Conversation analysis: Studies from the first generation* (pp. 43 - 59). John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Jefferson, G. (2004c). "At first I thought". In G.H. Lerner (Ed.), *Conversation analysis: Studies from the first generation* (pp. 131- 167). John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Jo, S., & Kim, Y. (2004). Media or personal relations? Exploring media relations dimensions in South Korea. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *81*(2), 292–306. https://doi.org/10.1177/107769900408100205

Johansson, C. (2018). On Goffman: researching relations with Erving Goffman as pathfinder. In ø. Ihlen & M. Fredriksson (Eds.), *Public relations and social theory: key concepts and developments* (pp. 252 - 271). Routledge.

Jorgensen, D. L. (2020). *Principles, approaches and issues in participant observation*. Routledge.

Journalism and PR: Unpacking "Spin", stereotypes and media myth. (2015). *Journal of Communication Management*, *19*(4), 406-406. https://doi.org/10.1108/jcom-04-2015-0023

Kantola, A. (2016). Cleaning rotten politics, selling exclusive liaisons: Public relations consultants as storytelling professionals between markets and politics. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 5(1), 33–52. http://doi.org/10.1177/2046147x15625713

Kapadia, M. R., & Kieran, K. (2020). Being affable, available, and able is not enough. *JAMA Surgery*, *155*(4), 277. https://doi.org/10.1001/jamasurg.2019.5884

Karantinou, K. (2003). Investigating the Interactions that take Place Behind Closed Doors: An Insight into the Confidential Meetings Between Clients and Consultants. *Journal Of Customer Behaviour*, *2*(1), 11-34. doi: 10.1362/147539203764935363

Kaiser, S., & Ringlstetter, M. J. (2011). *Strategic management of professional service firms: Theory and practice*. Scholars Portal.

Keatinge, D. (2002). Versatility and flexibility: Attributes of the critical incident technique in nursing research. *Nursing and Health Sciences*, *4*(1-2), 33–39. https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1442-2018.2002.00099.x

Kendon, A. & Cook, M. (1969). The consistency of gaze patterns in social interaction. *British Journal of Psychology*, *60*(4), 481–494. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8295.1969.tb01222.x

Kendon. (2004). *Gesture: Visible action as utterance*. Cambridge University Press.

Kent, M., & Taylor, M. (2007). Beyond excellence: Extending the generic approach to international public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 33(1), 10-20. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2006.11.002

Kent, M., & Taylor, M. (2011). How intercultural communication theory informs public relations practice in global settings. In N. Bardhan & C. K. Weaver (Eds.). *Public relations in global cultural contexts* (pp. 50-76). Routledge.

Ki, E., & Ye, L. (2017). An assessment of progress in research on global public relations from 2001 to 2014. *Public Relations Review,* 43(1), 235-245. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2016.12.005

Kiambi, D., & Nadler, M. (2012). Public relations in Kenya: An exploration of models and cultural influences. *Public Relations Review,* 38(3), 505-507. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2012.01.007

Kim, H. (2003). Exploring global public relations in a Korean multinational organization in the context of Confucian culture. *Asian Journal Of Communication,* 13(2), 65-95. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01292980309364839

Kim, S., & Heo, J. (2018). An exploratory study of transformed media relations dimensions after the implementation of an anti-graft law in Korea. *Public Relations Review*, *44*(3), 363–373. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2018.05.001

Kinnear, S. L. (2020). “he iwi Tahi Tatou”: Aotearoa and the legacy of state-sponsored national narrative. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, *25*(4), 717–731. https://doi.org/10.1108/ccij-11-2019-0133

Kjellmer, G. (2009). Where do we backchannel? *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics*, *14*(1), 81-112. https://doi.org/10.1075/ijcl.14.1.05kje

Koester, A. (2012). *Workplace discourse*. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

Kolb, D. (2014). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development* (2nd ed.). Pearson Education, Inc.

Komarova, M., & McKnight, M. (2014). Using digital photography and video in participant observation of contentious events. *Sage Research Methods Cases Part 1*. https://doi.org/10.4135/978144627305013500011

Kristof, A. L. (1996). Person-organization fit: An integrative review of its conceptualizations, measurement, and implications. *Personnel Psychology*, 49(1), 1-49. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.1996.tb01790.x

Kristof-Brown, A. L., Zimmerman, R. D., & Johnson, E. C. (2005). Consequences of individuals' fit at work: A meta-analysis of person-job, person-organization, person-group, and person-supervisor fit. *Personnel Psychology*, 58(2), 281-342. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2005.00672.x

Kristof-Brown, A., & Guay, R. P. (2011). Person–environment fit. In S. Zedeck (Ed.), *APA handbook of industrial and organizational psychology, Vol. 3. Maintaining, expanding, and contracting the organization* (pp. 3–50). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/12171-001

Kubr, M. (2002). *Management consultancy: a guide to the profession.* Bookwell Publications.

Lambert, C. A., and White, C. (2012). Feminization of the film? Occupational roles of public relations characters in movies. *Public Relations Journal* 6 (4), 1-24.

Laufer, D. (2021, May 8). When PR firms become the news, it's a different kind of crisis. *Stuff Limited.* https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/opinion-analysis/300300049/when-pr-firms-become-the-news-its-a-different-kind-of-crisis

L' Etang, J. (2012b). Thinking about public relations and culture. In K. Sriramesh & D. Verčič (Eds.), *Culture and public relations: Links and implications* (pp. 218-236). Taylor & Francis.

L'Etang, J. (2011). Imagining public relations anthropology. In L. Edwards & C. E. M. Hodges (Eds.), *Public relations, society & culture: Theoretical and empirical explorations* (pp. 15-32). Routledge.

L'Etang, J. (2012a). Public relations, culture and anthropology—Towards an ethnographic research agenda. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 24(2), 165–183. http://doi.org/10.1080/1062726x.2012.626134

L'Etang, J. (2013). *Public relations - concepts, practice and critique.* Sage Publications.

L'Etang, J. (2006). Public relations and sport in promotional culture. *Public Relations Review*, *32*(4), 386–394. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2006.09.006

Lee, S-H (2013). Response design in conversation. In J. Sidnell & T. Stivers (Eds.), *The handbook of conversation analysis* (pp. 415 - 432). Wiley Blackwell.

Ledin, P., & Machin, D. (2020). *Introduction to multimodal analysis*. Bloomsbury Academic.

Leeuwen, T. V. (2018). Multimodality. In D. Tannen, H. E. Hamilton & D. Schiffrin (Eds.), *The handbook of discourse analysis* (2nd ed) (pp. 447 - 465). Wiley Blackwell.

Lerner, G. H. (2004). Collaborative turn sequences. In G.H. Lerner (Ed.), *Conversation analysis: Studies from the first generation* (pp. 225-256). John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Lester, J. N. & O'Reilly, M. (2019). *Applied conversation analysis.* Sage Publications, Inc.

Li, M., Peng, S., & Liu, L. (2022). How do team cooperative goals influence thriving at work: The mediating role of Team Time Consensus. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *19*(9), 5431. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19095431

Liddicoat, A. J. (2022). *An introduction to conversation analysis* (3rd ed.). Bloomsbury Academic.

Lincoln, Y.S., Lynham, S.A. & Guba, E.G. (2018). Observation on observation: continuities and challenges. In N. K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 97-128). Sage Publications.

Logan, N., & Cizcek, E. (2021). At the intersection of race, gender and sexuality: A queer of color critique of public relations habitus. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 33*(6), 487–503. https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726X.2022.2051174

Luttrell, R. M., & Capizzo, L. W. (2019). *The PR agency handbook*. SAGE Publications, Incorporated.

MacGibbon, N. W. (2009, July). Degrees of separation in the New Zealand workforce: Evidence from linked employer-employee data [Paper presentation]. *NZ Association of Economists Conference,* Wellington, New Zealand.

Machin, D., & Mayr, A. (2012). *How to do critical discourse analysis: A multimodal approach*. Sage.

Macnamara, J. (2015). Journalism and PR: Unpacking "Spin", stereotypes and media myth. *Journal of Communication Management*, *19*(4), 406-406. https://doi.org/10.1108/jcom-04-2015-0023

Macnamara, J., & Crawford, R. (2013). The construction of Australia day: A study of public relations as "new cultural intermediaries." *Continuum,* 27(2), 294–310. http://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2013.766311

Macpherson, W., Tootell, B., Scott, J & Kobayashi, K. (2022, September 17). Two-thirds of NZ employees want more work-life flexibility - how should employers respond? *Radio New Zealand.* https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/474959/two-thirds-of-nz-employees-want-more-work-life-flexibility-how-should-employers-respond

Madden, S., & Levenshus, A. (2021). Broadening the umbrella of Women's leadership and public relations: An ethnographic case study of a women's Political Leadership Development Program. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *33*(3), 168–184. https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726x.2021.2015354

Madill, J., Haines, G., & Riding, A. (2007). Managing customer relationships: Account manager turnover and effective account management. *Industrial Marketing Management*, *36*(2), 241-248. doi: 10.1016/j.indmarman.2005.05.015

Maister, D. (2005). Professionalism in consulting. In L. Greiner & F. Poulfelt (Eds.), *The contemporary consultant* (pp. 23 – 34). South-Western.

Mannik, L., & McGarry, K. (2017). *Practicing ethnography: A student guide to method and methodology*. University of Toronto Press.

Manolchev, C., & Foley, S. R. (2021). Participant observation: A practical field guide for students and lecturers. *Sage Research Methods Cases Part 1*. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529759266

MarketLine (2022, March). *New Zealand in-depth PESTLE insights. New Zealand Country Profile* [Report]. Marketline.

Markham, A. N. (2018). Ethnography in the digital internet era: from fields to flows, descriptions to interventions. In N. K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 650 - 668). Sage Publications, Inc.

Mart, L., & Jackson, N. (2005). Public relations agencies in the UK travel industry: Does size matter? *PRism 3*. http://praxis.massey.ac.nz.

Maruping, L. M., Venkatesh, V., Thatcher, S. M., & Patel, P. C. (2015). Folding under pressure or rising to the occasion? perceived time pressure and the moderating role of Team Temporal Leadership. *Academy of Management Journal*, *58*(5), 1313–1333. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2012.0468

Matera, V., & Biscaldi, A. (2021). *Ethnography a theoretically oriented practice*. Springer International Publishing.

Matsumoto, D., Hwang, H. C., & Frank, M. G. (2016). The body: Postures, gait, proxemics, and haptics. *APA Handbook of Nonverbal Communication.*, 387–400. https://doi.org/10.1037/14669-015

Mavridopoulou, I., & O'Mahoney, J. *(2020). Elitism in strategy consulting: How institutional prestige influences recruitment. Management Consulting Journal, 3(1), 12-22.* https://doi.org/10.2478/mcj-2020-0003

McGivern, G., Dopson, S., Ferlie, E., Fischer, M., Fitzgerald, L., Ledger, J., & Bennett, C. (2018). The silent politics of temporal work: A case study of a management consultancy project to redesign Public Health Care. *Organization Studies,* 39(8), 1007–1030. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840617708004

McKie, D., & Munshi, D. (2004). Pumpkins, kiwi fruits, and global hybrids: A comparative review of 21st century public relations scholarship in Australia/New Zealand and the United States. *Review of Communication*, 4(3-4), 278–287. http://doi.org/10.1080/1535859042000250404

McKie, D., & Munshi, D. (2005). Tracking trends: Peripheral visions and public relations. *Public Relations Review,* 31(4), 453-457. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2005.08.001

McNeill, D. (1992). *Hand and mind: What gestures reveal about thought.* The University of Chicago press.

McNeill, D. (2005). *Gesture and thought.* The University of Chicago press.

McNevin, M. S. (2020). Developing a surgical practice – it's a lot of hard work. *Seminars in Colon and Rectal Surgery*, *31*(1), 100719. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scrs.2019.100719

Mehrabian, A. (1968). Relationship of attitude to seated posture, orientation, and distance. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *10*(1), 26-30. https://doi:10.1037/h0026384

Mehrabian, A. (1969). Significance of posture and position in the communication of attitude and status relationships. *Psychological Bulletin*, *71*(5), 359-372. https://doi:10.1037/h0027349

Mehrabian, A. (2007). *Nonverbal communication.* Taylor & Francis Group.

Mein Smith, P. (2011). *A concise history of New Zealand*. Cambridge University Press.

Merelo, G. (2019). *Workplace Diversity Case Model.* Diversity Works NZ. http://bit.ly/3Gfjpbn

Merriam, & Tisdell. (2015). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley & Sons.

Mertens, D. (2018). *Mixed methods design in evaluation.* SAGE Publications, Inc, https://doi.org/10.4135/9781506330631

Middleton, A. J. M. M. (2020). *Kia hiwa rā! the influence of tikanga and the language revitalisation agenda on the practices and perspectives of Māori journalists working in reo-māori news* [Doctoral thesis, Auckland University of Technology]. Tuwhera. http://hdl.handle.net/10292/13286

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña Johnny. (2020). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A methods sourcebook*. SAGE.

Miller, G.R. (2009). Persuasion and public relations: two "Ps" in a pod. In C.H. Botan & V. Hazelton (Eds.), *Public relations theory* (pp. 45 – 66). Routledge.

Miller, K. S. (1999). *The voice of business: Hill & Knowlton and postwar public relations*. The University of North Carolina Press.

Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment [MBIE] (2019). *Better protections for contractors: Discussion document for public feedback.* https://www.mbie.govt.nz/assets/better-protections-for-contractors-discussion-document-for-public-feedback.pdf

Ministry of Social Development (2016). *The social report 2016. Te pūrongo oranga tangata.* https://www.socialreport.msd.govt.nz/documents/2016/msd-the-social-report-2016.pdf

Moloney, K., & McGrath, C. (2020). *Rethinking public relations: persuasion, democracy and society*. Routledge.

Mohammed, S., & Nadkarni, S. (2011). Temporal diversity and team performance: The moderating role of Team Temporal Leadership. *Academy of Management Journal*, *54*(3), 489–508. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2011.61967991

Motion, J., & Leitch, S. (1996). A discursive perspective from New Zealand: Another world view. *Public Relations Review*, 22(3), 297–309. http://doi.org/10.1016/s0363-8111(96)90051-x

Mühlhaus, J., & Bouwmeester, O. (2016). The paradoxical effect of self-categorization on work stress in a high-status occupation: Insights from management consulting. *Human Relations*, *69*(9), 1823–1852. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726715626255

Müller-Bellé, S. (2020). *In pursuit of meaningfulness in work: The individual consultant's attitude to the profession of management consulting*. Cuvillier Verlag.

Murphy, P. (1994). Comparing the Decision Structures of Public Relations Agencies and Clients. *Journal Of Public Relations Research*, *6*(4), 209-228. http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s1532754xjprr0604_01

Naim, I., Tanveer, M. I., Gildea, D., & Hoque, M. E. (2018). Automated analysis and prediction of job interview performance. *IEEE Transactions on Affective Computing*, *9*(2), 191-204. https://doi.org/10.1109/taffc.2016.2614299

Nairn, A., & Bhargava, D. (2021). Demon in a dress? An exploration of how television programming conceptualises female public relations practitioners as monsters. *M/C Journal*, *24*(5). https://doi.org/10.5204/mcj.2846

Nakhid, C. & Devere, H. (2005). Negotiating multiculturalism and the Treaty of Waitangi. In G. Ghosh & J. Leckie (Eds.), Asians and the new multiculturalism in Aotearoa New Zealand (pp. 61 – 89).

New Zealand Parliament. (2022, March). *Briefing into pay transparency.* [Report of the Education and Workforce Committee]. https://bit.ly/3m2bBmg

Nielson, M. (2021, August 5). Government communications spending increases 50 per cent in four years. *NZ Herald.* https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/government-communications-spending-increases-50-per-cent-in-four-years/2C3ZMNP6A7TBIVORCAHOBMTU5M/

Nikolova, N. (2019). *The client-consultant relationship in professional business service firms* (KWV ed.). Springer Gabler. (original work published 2007).

Nikolova, N., & Devinney, T. (2012). The nature of client-consultant interaction: a critical review. In T. Clark & M. Kipping (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of management consulting*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199235049.013.0019

Nikolova, N., Möllering, G., & Reihlen, M. (2015). Trusting as a ‘Leap of Faith’: Trust-building practices in client–consultant relationships. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, *31*(2), 232-245. https://doi:10.1016/j.scaman.2014.09.007

Nikolova, N., Reihlen, M., & Schlapfner, J. (2009). Client–consultant interaction: Capturing social practices of professional service production. *Scandinavian Journal Of Management*, *25*(3), 289-298. https://doi:10.1016/j.scaman.2009.05.004

Norrick, N. (2014). Interjections. In K. Aijmer & C. Ruhlemann (Eds.), *Corpus pragmatics: A handbook* (pp. 249 – 275). Cambridge University Press.

Norris, S. (2004). *Analyzing multimodal interaction: A methodological framework*. New

Norris, S. (2011). *Identity in (inter)action: Introducing multimodal (inter)action analysis*. Routledge.

Norris, S. (2019). *Systematically working with multimodal data: Research methods in multimodal discourse analysis*. Wiley Blackwell.

Norquay, K. (2022, September 18). Are you job-obsessed? New Zealand joins global look at work addiction. *Stuff Limited.* https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/300686223/are-you-jobobsessed-new-zealand-joins-global-look-at-work-addiction

Noury, L., Gand, S., & Sardas, J.C. (2017). Tackling the work-life balance challenge in professional service firms: The impact of projects, organizing, and service characteristics. *Journal of Professions and Organization*. https://doi.org/10.1093/jpo/jow010

Nothhaft, H. & Zerfas, A. (2023). Public relations in a postdisciplinary world: on the impossibility of establishing a constitutive PR theory within the tribal struggles of applied communication disciplines. In C.H. Botan & E. J. Sommerfeldt (Eds.), *Public relations theory III: in the age of publics* (pp. 247 - 265). Routledge.

Omnicom Group. (2022). *About.* https://www.omnicomgroup.com/about/

Orange, C. (2023). *'Te Tiriti o Waitangi – the Treaty of Waitangi'.* Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand. http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/te-tiriti-o-waitangi-the-treaty-of-waitangi

Ortolja-Baird, L., & Culture, S. (2017). *New Zealand - culture smart!: The essential guide to customs & culture*. Kuperard.

Oxford University Press (2023a). Affable. In *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*. https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/affable?q=affable

Oxford University Press (2023b). Able. In *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*. https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/able_1?q=able

Oxford University Press (2023c). Availability. In *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*. https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/availability

Pal, M., & Dutta, M. (2008). Public Relations in a Global Context: The relevance of critical modernism as a theoretical lens. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 20, 159-179. 10.1080/10627260801894280

Parsons, P. J. (2016). *Ethics in public relations: A guide to best practice* (3rd ed.). Kogan Page Limited.

Perakyla, A. (2006). Observation, video and ethnography: case studies in aids counselling and greetings. In P. Drew, G. Raymond, & D. Weinberg (Eds.), *Talk and interaction in social research methods* (pp 81-96). SAGE.

Peters, T. J., & Waterman, R. H. (1982). *In search of excellence: Lessons from America's best run companies*. Harper & Row Publishers.

Petelin, R. (2005). Editing from the edge: De-territorializing public relations scholarship. *Public Relations Review,* 31(4), 458-462. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2005.08.002

Picardi, C. A. (2020). *Recruitment and selection: Strategies for workforce planning and assessment*. SAGE Publications, Incorporated.

Pieczka, M. & L'Etang, J. (2006). Public relations and the question of professionalism. In J. L'Etang & M. Pieczka (Eds.), *Public relations - critical debates and contemporary practice* (pp. 265 - 278). Routledge.

Pieczka, M. (2002). Public relations expertise deconstructed. *Media, Culture & Society,* 24(3), 301–323. http://doi.org/10.1177/016344370202400302

Pieczka, M. (2006a). Paradigms, systems theory, and PR. In J. L'Etang & M. Pieczka (Eds.), *Public relations - critical debates and contemporary practice* (pp. 333-357). Routledge.

Pieczka, M. (2006b). Public relations expertise in practice. In J. L'Etang & M. Pieczka (Eds.), *Public relations - critical debates and contemporary practice* (pp. 279-301). Routledge.

Pieczka, M. (2006c). "Chemistry" and the public relations industry: an exploration of the concept of jurisdiction and issues arising. In J. L'Etang & M. Pieczka (Eds.), *Public relations - critical debates and contemporary practice* (pp. 303-331). Routledge.

Pieczka, M. (2008). The Disappearing Act: Public Relations Consultancy in Theory and Research. Conference Papers -- *International Communication Association*, 1-29.

Pieczka, M. (2011). Public relations as dialogic expertise? *Journal of Communication Management*, *15*(2), 108–124. https://doi.org/10.1108/13632541111126346

Pink, S. (2007). *Doing visual ethnography: images, media, and representation in research*. Sage Publications.

Pink, S. (2021a). *Doing visual ethnography*. SAGE Publications.

Pink, S. (2021b). The ethnographic hunch. In A. Ballestero & B.R. Winthereik (Eds.), *Experimenting with ethnography: A companion to analysis* (pp. 30 - 40). Duke University Press.

Place, K. R. (2012). Power-control or empowerment? How women public relations practitioners make meaning of power. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *24*(5), 435–450. https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726x.2012.723278

Place, K. R., & Vardeman-Winter, J. (2013). Hegemonic discourse and self-discipline: Exploring Foucault's concept of bio-power among public relations professionals. *Public Relations Inquiry*, *2*(3), 305–325. https://doi.org/10.1177/2046147x13494965

Pomerantz, A. (1984a). Agreeing and disagreeing with assessments: Some features of preferred/dispreferred turn shapes. In J. M. Atkinson & J. Heritage (Eds.), *Structures of social action: Studies in conversation analysis* (pp. 57- 101). Cambridge University Press.

Pomerantz, A. (1984b). Pursuing a response. In J. M. Atkinson & J. Heritage (Eds.), *Structures of social action: Studies in conversation analysis* (pp. 152- 163). Cambridge University Press.

Pompper, D. (2007). The gender-ethnicity construct in public relations organizations: Using feminist standpoint theory to discover latinas' realities. *Howard Journal of Communications*, *18*(4), 291–311. https://doi.org/10.1080/10646170701653669

Pompper, D. (2012). On social capital and diversity in a feminized industry: Further developing a theory of internal public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *24*(1), 86–103. https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726x.2012.626137

Pritchard, R. D., & Smith, S. (2015). *The public relations firm (first edition.).* Business Expert Press.

Public Relations Institute of New Zealand [PRINZ]. (n.d.-a). *About.* https://prinz.org.nz/about-prinz/

Public Relations Institute of New Zealand [PRINZ]. (n.d.-b). *Code of Ethics.* https://prinz.org.nz/about-prinz/code-of-ethics/

Public Relations Institute of New Zealand [PRINZ]. (n.d.-c). *Iwi Engagement Wellington.* https://prinz.org.nz/event/iwi-engagement-wellington/

Public Relations Institute of New Zealand [PRINZ]. (n.d.-d). *Events.* https://prinz.org.nz/events/

Public Relations Institute of New Zealand [PRINZ]. (n.d.-e). *Join now.* https://prinz.org.nz/memberships/membership-fees/

Public Relations Institute of New Zealand [PRINZ]. (n.d.-f). *Accreditation in Public Relations (APR).* https://prinz.org.nz/education-and-events/accreditation-in-public-relations-apr/

Pudjiarti, E. S., & Hutomo, P. T. (2020). Innovative work behaviour: An integrative investigation of person-job fit, person-organization fit, and person-group fit. *Business: Theory and Practice*, 21(1), 39-47. https://doi.org/10.3846/btp.2020.9487

Raven, B., & French, J. (1958). Legitimate power, coercive power, and observability in social influence. *Sociometry*, *21*(2), 83. https://doi:10.2307/2785895

Reid, A. Yadav, U., Dixon, H & Hurren, K. (2022, February). *Migrant pay gap*. [Report]. Diversity Works NZ. https://bit.ly/3M9Pd4W

Ren, M. (2019, April 26). Let's Play with Style! Dress for Success in PR. *Boston University*. https://www.bu.edu/prlab/2019/04/26/lets-play-with-style-dress-for-success-in-pr/

Research First (2021). *PRINZ industry report 2021.* [Report]. Public Relations Institute of New Zealand [PRINZ]. https://prinz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/PRINZ-Mental-Health-Survey-2020-2021_FINAL.pdf

Riggs, L., Sin, I. & Hyslop, D. (2019, November). *Measuring the "gig" economy: Challenges and options.* Motu Economic and Public Policy Research.

Rivera, L. A. (2012). Hiring as cultural matching: the case of elite professional service firms. *American Sociological Review*, *77*(6), 999–1022. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122412463213

Rivera, L. A. (2015). *Pedigree: How Elite Students Get Elite Jobs*. Princeton University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv7h0sdf

Robert Walters. (n.d.). *Successful networking in NZ*. https://www.robertwalters.co.nz/career-advice/successful-networking-in-new-zealand.html

Roulin, N. (2022). *The psychology of job interviews*. Taylor & Francis Group.

Rashmi, T. (2010). *Recruitment management*. Himalaya Publishing House.

Rhee, Y. (2002). Global Public Relations: A Cross-Cultural Study of the Excellence Theory in South Korea. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 14(3), 159-184. http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s1532754xjprr1403_1

Rossano, F. (2013). Gaze in conversation. In J. Sidnell & T. Stivers (Eds.), *The handbook of conversation analysis* (pp. 308- 329). Wiley Blackwell.

Röttger, U., & Preusse, J. (2013). External consulting in strategic communication: functions and roles within systems theory. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, *7*(2), 99-117. doi:10.1080/1553118X.2013.765437

Russell, S., & Brannan, M. J. (2016). "Getting the right people on the bus": Recruitment, selection and integration for the branded organization. *European Management Journal,* 34(2), 114-124. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2016.01.001

Ruusuvuori, J. (2013). Emotion, affect and conversation. In J. Sidnell & T. Stivers (Eds.), *The handbook of conversation analysis* (pp. 330 - 349). Wiley Blackwell.

Stivers, T. & Sidnell, J. (2013). Introduction. In J. Sidnell & T. Stivers (Eds.), *The handbook of conversation analysis* (pp. 1 - 8). Wiley Blackwell.

Sacks, H., Schegloff, E., & Jefferson, G. (1974). A simplest systematics for the organization of turn-taking for conversation. *Language*, *50*(4), 696. https://doi:10.2307/412243

Salaman, G. (1974). *Community and occupation: An exploration of work/leisure relationships*. Cambridge University Press.

Salmond, A. (2017). *Tears of rangi: Experiments across worlds*. Auckland University Press.

Schegloff, E. (2007). *Sequence organization in interaction*. Cambridge University Press.

Schiffrin, D. (1987). *Discourse markers: Studies in interactional sociolinguistics.* Cambridge University Press. https://doi:10.1017/CBO9780511611841

Schoenberger-Orgad, M. (2011). NATO's strategic communication as international public relations: The PR practitioner and the challenge of culture in the case of Kosovo. *Public Relations Review*, 37(4), 376-383. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2011.06.003

Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. Basic Books.

Scott, E. (2022, August 23). *What it means to have type A personality traits*. Verywellmind. Retrieved February 10, 2023, from https://www.verywellmind.com/type-a-personality-traits-3145240

Scott, J. (2001). *Power*. Polity Press.

Seek. (n.d.). *10 ways to boost your job search.* https://www.seek.co.nz/career-advice/article/10-ways-to-boost-your-job-search

Servaes, J. (2016). Guanxi in intercultural communication and public relations. *Public Relations Review,* 42(3), 459-464. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2014.10.001

Shen, H. (2019). Work-life balance. In C.M. Kim (Ed.), *Public relations: Competencies and practice* (pp. 167 – 179). Taylor & Francis Group.

Shrum, W., & Scott, G. S. (2017). *Video ethnography in practice: Planning, shooting, and editing for Social Analysis*. Sage Publications, Inc.

Sias, P. M. (2008). *Organizing relationships: Traditional and emerging perspectives on workplace relationships*. SAGE Publications, Incorporated.

Sibley, C.G., Overall, N.C., Osborne, D. & Satherley, N. (2021, January). *Social, psychosocial and employment impacts of COVID-19 in New Zealand: Insights from the New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study 2020/2021*. University of Auckland.

Silverman, D. (2013). *Doing qualitative research*. Sage.

Sissons, H. (2015). Lifting the veil on the PRP-client relationship. *Public Relations Inquiry,* 4(3), 263–286. http://doi.org/10.1177/2046147x15614686

Sissons, H. (2014). *Whose news? Investigating power relations between journalists and public relations practitioners* [Doctoral dissertation, Auckland University of Technology]. https://hdl.handle.net/10292/8890

Smith, P., & Riley, A. (2008). *Cultural theory.* Prentice-Hall.

Somerville, I., Hargie, O, Taylor, M. & Toledano, M. (2017). Introduction: public relations in deeply divided societies. In I. Somerville, O. Hargie, M. Taylor & M. Toledano (Eds.), *International public relations: perspectives from deeply divided societies (*pp. 1-9). Routledge.

Spoonley, P. (2005). 'I made a space for you': renegotiating national identity and citizenship in contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand. In G. Ghosh & J. Leckie (Eds.), *Asians and the new multiculturalism in Aotearoa New Zealand* (pp. 39 – 60).

Sriramesh & White, J. (1992). Societal culture and public relations. In J. E. Grunig (Ed.), *Excellence in public relations and communication management (*pp 597-614). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc

Sriramesh, K & Fisher, J. (2021). Personal influence in public relations. In C. Valentini (Ed.), *Public relations* (pp. 335-359). Walter de Gruyter GmbH.

Sriramesh, K. (1996). Power distance and public relations: an ethnographic study of Southern Indian organizations. In H. Cultertson & N. Chen (Eds.), *International public relations: a comparative analysis* (pp. 171 – 190). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Sriramesh, K. (2012). Culture and public relations. In K. Sriramesh & D. Verčič (Eds.), *Culture and public relations: Links and implications* (pp. 9 – 24). Taylor & Francis.

Sriramesh, K. (2020). Culture: the "silent" language is also the "neglected" language . In K. Sriramesh & D. Verčič (Eds.), *The global public relations handbook: theory, research, and practice* (pp. 28 – 38).

Sriramesh, K., Kim, Y., & Takasaki, M. (1999). Public relations in three Asian cultures: An analysis. *Journal of Public Relations Research,* 11(4), 271-292. http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s1532754xjprr1104_01

Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa. (2020, September 3). *Ethnic group summaries reveal New Zealand's multicultural make-up.* https://www.stats.govt.nz/news/ethnic-group-summaries-reveal-new-zealands-multicultural-make-up/

Sterne, G. D. (2008). Business perceptions of public relations in New Zealand. *Journal of Communication Management*, (1), 30. https://doi:10.1108/13632540810854226

Stivers, T. & Sidnell, J. (2013). Introduction. In J. Sidnell & T. Stivers (Eds.), *The handbook of conversation analysis* (pp. 1 - 8). Wiley Blackwell.

Stuff. (2022, July). *NowNext Pou Tiaki Survey.* https://bit.ly/40LoW14

Sudhaman, A. (2022, May 16). *2022 agency rankings: global PR industry bounces back with 11% growth.* https://www.provokemedia.com/long-reads/article/2022-agency-rankings-global-pr-industry-bounces-back-with-11-growth

Sung, M. (2003). The meaning of roles and relationships for public relations professionals: From public relations firm’s perspectives. Conference Papers -- International Communication Association, 1–30. https://doi-org.ezproxy.aut.ac.nz/ica_proceeding_12251.PDF

Sydow, J., Lindkvist, L., & DeFillippi, R. (2004). Project-based organizations, embeddedness and repositories of knowledge: Editorial. *Organization Studies*, 25(9), 1475–1489. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840604048162

Tashakkori, A. & Teddlie, C. (2008). Quality of inferences in mixed methods research: calling for an integrative framework. In M. Bergman (Ed.), *Advances in mixed methods research.* Sage Publications.

Tātaki Auckland Unlimited. (2023). *Business.* https://www.aucklandnz.com/business

Taylor, M. (2000). Media relations in Bosnia: A role for public relations in building civil society. *Public Relations Review,* 26(1), 1-14. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/s0363-8111(99)00026-0

Taylor, M. (2004). Exploring public relations in Croatia through relational communication and media richness theories. *Public Relations Review*, 30(2), 145-160. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2003.09.003

Taylor, M. (2023). Reflections on the evolving theories of public relations. In C.H. Botan & E. J. Sommerfeldt (Eds.), *Public relations theory III: in the age of publics* (pp. 523 - 537). Routledge.

Terasaki, A.K. (2004). Pre-announcement sequences in conversation. In G.H. Lerner (Ed.), *Conversation analysis: Studies from the first generation* (pp. 171- 224). John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Terry, V. (2005). Postcard from the Steppes: a snapshot of public relations and culture in Kazakhstan*. Public Relations Review,* 31(1), 31-36. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2004.11.003

Tertiary Education Commission. (2023). *Communications professional.* https://www.careers.govt.nz/jobs-database/arts-and-media/advertising-marketing/communications-professional/

Theunissen, P. & Sissons, H. (2018). *Relationship building in public relations.* Routledge.

Theunissen, P., & Wolf, K. (2023). At the intersection of two countries: A comparative critical analysis of covid-19 communication in Australia and New Zealand. *International Communication Gazette*, *85*(2), 99–119. https://doi.org/10.1177/17480485221113713

Tindall, N. T. J. (2013). Invisible in a visible profession: the social construction of workplace identity and roles among lesbian and bisexual public relations professionals. In N. T. J. Tindall, & R. D. Waters (Eds.), *Coming out of the closet: exploring LGBT issues in strategic communication with theory and research* (pp. 24–40). Peter Lang.

Toledano, M. (2016). Advocating for reconciliation: Public relations, activism, advocacy and dialogue. *Public Relations Inquiry*, *5*(3), 277–294. https://doi.org/10.1177/2046147x16666595

Tombleson, B., & Wolf, K. (2017). Rethinking the circuit of culture: How participatory culture has transformed cross-cultural communication. *Public Relations Review*, 43(1), 14-25. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2016.10.017

Tompkins, G. (2017). Social capital and its application to Maori social policy. *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work*, *27*(4), 16-24. https://doi.org/10.11157/anzswj-vol27iss4id433

Tourism New Zealand. (2022a). *New Zealand geography & geneology.* https://bit.ly/3UOc6NJ

Tourism New Zealand. (2022b). *New Zealand people.* https://www.newzealand.com/nz/feature/new-zealand-people/

Trenwith, L. (2010). The emergence of public relations in New Zealand from 1945 to 1954 - The beginnings of professionalisation. *New Zealand Journal of Applied Business Research (NZJABR)*, *8*(1), 51-62.

Tsetsura, K. (2011). Is public relations a real job? How female practitioners construct the profession. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *23*(1), 1-23. doi:10.1080/1062726X.2010.504763

Vafeas, M. (2010). Boundary spanner turnover in professional services: Exploring the outcomes of client retention strategies. *Journal of Marketing Management*, *26*(9-10), 901-920. doi: 10.1080/02672571003633651

Vafeas, M. (2015). Account manager turnover and the influence of context: an exploratory study. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, *30*(1), 72-82. https://doi:10.1108/jbim-04-2012-0064

Valentini, C. (2010). Personalised networks of influence in public relations. *Journal of Communication Management,* 14(2), 153-166. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/13632541011034600

Valentini, C. (2021). Mapping public relations theory: concluding reflections and future directions. In C. Valentini (Ed.), *Public relations* (pp. 615-627). Walter de Gruyter GmbH.

Van Dijk, T. A. (2018). Critical discourse analysis. In D. Tannen, H. E. Hamilton & D. Schiffrin (Eds.), *The handbook of discourse analysis* (2nd ed) (pp. 466 - 504). Wiley Blackwell.

Vardeman-Winter, J., & Place, K. (2017). Still a lily-white field of women: The state of workforce diversity in public relations practice and research. *Public Relations Review, 43*(2), 326-336. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2017.01.004

Verčič, D. (2012). Public rleations firms and their three occupational cultures. In K. Sriramesh & D. Verčič (Eds.), *Culture and public relations: Links and implications* (pp. 243 – 257). Taylor & Francis.

Verčič, D., Grunig, L.A. & Grunig, J.E. (1996). Global and specific public relations: evidence from Slovenia. In H. M. Culbertson & N. Chen (Eds.), *International public relations* (pp31-66). Earlbaum.

von Nordenflycht, A. (2010). What Is a Professional Service Firm? Toward a Theory and Taxonomy of Knowledge-Intensive Firms. *Academy of Management Review*, *35*(1), 155-174. https://doi:10.5465/amr.35.1.zok155

von Platen, S. (2015). The communication consultant: an important translator for communication management. *Journal of Communication Management*, 19(2), 150-166. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/jcom-06-2013-0049

von Platen, S. (2016). Struggling with new media and old expertise: Reconstructing the professional role of communication consultancy. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, *10*(5), 353-367. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1553118x.2016.1204612

Wakefield, R. (2011). Critiquing the generic/specific public relations theory. In N. Bardhan & C. K. Weaver (Eds.). *Public relations in global cultural contexts* (pp. 167-194). Routledge.

Wakefield, R. (2013). Personal influence and pre-industrial United States: An early relationship model that needs resurgence in U.S. public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 39(2), 131-138. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2013.02.008

Walton, D. (2012). *Doing cultural theory.* SAGE Publications Ltd.

Waters, R. D. (2013). Harassment in the workplace: Violence, ambivalence, and derision experienced by LGBT strategic communicators. In N. T. J. Tindall, & R. D. Waters (Eds.), *Coming out of the closet: Exploring LGBT issues in strategic communication with theory and research* (pp. 7–23). Peter Lang.

Watkins, K. E., Ellinger, A. D., Suh, B., Brenes-Dawsey, J. C., & Oliver, L. C. (2022). Further evolving the critical incident technique (CIT) by applying different contemporary approaches for analyzing qualitative data in CIT studies. *European Journal of Training and Development*, *46*(7/8), 709–726. https://doi.org/10.1108/ejtd-07-2021-0107

Waymer, D. (2012). Culture, social class, and race in public relations: an introduction. In D. Waymer (Ed.). *Culture, social class and race in public relations: perspectives and applications* (pp. 1 -12). Lexington Books.

Weaver, C.K. (2011). Public relations, globalisation, and culture: framing methodological debates and future directions. In N. Bardhan & C. K. Weaver (Eds*.), Public relations in global cultural contexts* (pp. 1-28). Routledge.

Weaver, C. K. (2001). Dressing for battle in the New Global Economy. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *15*(2), 279–288. https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318901152007

Weaver, C.K. (2021). Public relations, power and control. In C. Valentini (Ed.), *Public relations* (pp. 123-137). Walter de Gruyter GmbH.

Weaver, C. K. (2014). Mothers, bodies, and breasts: Organizing strategies and tactics in women's activism. In C. Daymon & K. Demetrious (Eds.), *Gender and public* *relations: Critical perspectives on voice, image, and identity* (pp. 108 – 131). Routledge.

Wellington City Council. (n.d.). *Early European history from 1865 – 1890*. https://wellington.govt.nz/wellington-city/about-wellington-city/history/history-of-wellington/1865-1890

White, J. (2002). Fee setting in public relations consultancies: A study of consultancy and client views of current practice in the UK. *Journal of Communication Management,* 6(4), 355-367. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/13632540210807189

Williams, M. (2000). Interpretivism and generalisation. *Sociology, 34*(2), 209–224.

Williams, S. (2018). Personality in practice. In E. Bridgen & D. Verčič (Eds.), *Experiencing public relations: international voices* (pp. 51 – 65). Routledge.

Wilson, J. (2020). *'History',* Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand. http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/history

Wolf, K. (2016), Diversity in Australian public relations: an exploration of practitioner perspectives. *Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal*, 17(2), 62-77.

Wood, P. (2002). The rise of consultancy and the prospect for regions. In T. Clark & R. Fincham (Eds.), *New perspectives on the management advice industry* (pp. 50 – 73). Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Wooffitt, R. & Widdicombe, S. (2006). Interaction in interviews. In P. Drew, G. Raymond & D. Weinberg (Eds.), *Talk and interaction in social research methods* (pp. 28 – 49). Sage Publications.

Wohltjen, S., & Wheatley, T. (2021). *Eye Contact Marks the Rise and Fall of Shared Attention in Conversation*. https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/npk75

WPP. (2023, March 23). *Annual report 2022.* https://www.wpp.com/en/investors/annual-report-2022

Wright, D. K. (2013). Structure and development of the public relations agency industry in the United States: Operational structure, clients, fees, and talent. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, *7*(2), 136-148. doi:10.1080/1553118X.2013.766193

Wright, D.K. (2020). The development and challenges of global public relations agencies. In K. Sriramesh & D. Verčič (Eds.), *The global public relations handbook: theory, research, and practice* (pp. 73 – 83).

Wu, M., & Baah-Boakye, K. (2009). Public relations in Ghana: Work-related cultural values and public relations models. *Public Relations Review,* 35(1), 83-85. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2008.09.015

Xifra, J., & McKie, D. (2011). Desolidifying culture: Bauman, liquid theory, and race concerns in public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 23(4), 397-411. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1062726x.2011.605975

Yeomans, L. (2010). Soft sell? Gendered experience of emotional labour in UK public relations firms. *PRism 7*(4): http://www.prismjournal.org

Yeomans, L. (2016). Researching emotional labour among public relations consultants in the UK: A social phenomenological approach. *Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations*, *15*(3), 31. https://doi.org/10.21018/rjcpr.2013.3.193

Yeomans, L. (2019). *Public relations as emotional labour*. Routledge.

Yogeeswaran, K., Afzali, M. U., Andrews, N. P., Chivers, E. A., Wang, M.-J., Devos, T., & Sibley, C. G. (2019). Exploring New Zealand national identity and its importance for attitudes toward Muslims and support for diversity. *New Zealand Journal of Psychology*, *48*(1), 29–35.

York, J. (2022, May 2). Does 'dressing for success' still matter? *BBC.* https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20220429-does-dressing-for-success-still-matter

Yunus, E. N., & Ernawati, E. (2018). Productivity paradox? The impact of office redesign on employee productivity. *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*, *67*(9), 1918–1939. https://doi.org/10.1108/ijppm-12-2017-0350

Vien, C. L. (2018). Powerful internship programs for smaller firms. *Journal of Accountancy*, (6), 38.

Yoon, Y. & Black, H. (2007). Learning about Public Relations from Television: How is the profession portrayed? *Communication Science,* 28 (2), 85-106. Routledge.

Zadeh, A., Zellers, R., Pincus, E., & Morency, L.-P. (2016). Multimodal sentiment intensity analysis in videos: Facial gestures and verbal messages. *IEEE Intelligent Systems*, *31*(6), 82–88. https://doi.org/10.1109/mis.2016.94

Zimmerman, D. H. (1992). The interactional organization of calls for emergency assistance. In P. Drew & J. Heritage (Eds.), *Talk at work: Interaction in institutional settings* (pp. 418 - 469). Cambridge University Press.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Transcription symbols

The study used Jefferson's (2004a) transcription symbols. Further explanation available in Jefferson (2004a, pp. 24 – 31) and Lester and O'Reilly (2019, pp. 131 – 140).

(0.0)	Time elapsed between talk measured by tenths of seconds.
(.)	A period in parentheses indicates a micropause (plus or minus a tenth of a second)
=	Latching, i.e., no gap between talk.
[ ]	Overlapping talk, i.e., people talking at the same time.
Word	An underline denotes speaker's emphasis.
WORD	Use of upper case indicates that the words were spoken louder than the surrounding talk.
°word°	The degree signs indicate that the words were spoken softer than surrounding talk.
↑	An upward arrow shows a rise in intonation.
↓	A downward arrow shows a fall in intonation.
?	The question mark indicates a strong rise in intonation.
,	The comma denotates an upward trend in intonation such as when reading a list of items.
.	The period denotes a fall in intonation at the end of someone's talk.
:	The colon represents stretched sound. The more the colons, the more stretched the sound.
>word<	The right/left carats indicate that the bracketed talk is speeded up, compared to surrounding talk.
<word>	The left/right carats indicate that the bracketed talk is slower, compared to surrounding talk.
((comment))	Any description in double parentheses shows researcher's commentary.
( )	Any text within single parentheses shows researcher's best guess about what was said.
.hhh	This is used to indicate speaker's in-breath

Appendix B: Participant information sheet for video ethnography

Date Information Sheet Produced: 16 March 2017
A look into the occupational culture of New Zealand's public relations consultancies

An Invitation
I am inviting you to take part in this research project which is being undertaken to meet the requirements of a Doctor of Philosophy degree at Auckland University of Technology. The project supervisor is Dr. Petra Theunissen. Your participation is entirely voluntary and subject to you signing the consent form. You may refuse participation or withdraw at any time without adverse consequences.

What is the purpose of this research?
Little is known about the occupational culture of practitioners working in public relations consultancies. They are often universally typified to have a certain 'agency profile', even though their lifeworlds across different socio-cultural contexts have not been explored. This often results in stereotypical views of consultancy life.
This research will therefore advance the body of knowledge in socio-cultural public relations by providing one of the first ethnographic accounts of the New Zealand consultancy micro-context. It aims to explore the occupational culture in public relations consultancies and the impact this has on their decision-making. Findings and discussions will provide a valuable ground for future research, as well as a reflection on occupational practices.
The research questions being explored are -
RQ1. What is the occupational culture (practitioner lifeworld and occupational practices) in New Zealand's public relations consultancies?
RQ2. What role does occupational culture play in the decision-making process of the consultancies?

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?
You have been invited as you are a mid-senior level public relations practitioner working as a consultant in New Zealand. Your contact details were publicly available online and you have subsequently been contacted.

How do I agree to participate in this research?
Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and subject to you signing the consent form. Non-participation or withdrawal will not bear any consequences. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue being used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

What will happen in this research?
I would like to observe you, as you go about your daily public relations work, (creating public relations content, interacting in work related meetings with colleagues, clients and journalists, interacting with colleagues at social/culture building activities at work, networking with peers in industry events) for a period of ten working days. This will be done using a video camera along with the taking of field notes, photographs where appropriate, and the collection of any documents that may provide insights into your occupational practices. I would also like to informally interview you during this period to verify the data being collected and to ensure fair representation of reality.
What are the discomforts and risks?
No significant discomforts or risks are expected.
The observation only relates to your professional practice and participation is entirely voluntary. Non-participation, withdrawal or request to stop video filming will bear no consequences.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?
I will act professionally and ethically (following AUTEC guidelines as well as the PRINZ Code of Ethics) at all times to ensure discomfort or risk, if any, is mitigated. You are welcome to refuse participation or withdraw from research until the point where data collection is complete. Any request to stop video filming or photography will be honoured.

What are the benefits?
The results will help you reflect on your practice. Some of the insights may also be useful in entering the annual PRINZ Consultancy of the Year award, which requires entrants to outline how their culture impacts on their practice.

It will be a platform for understanding what it is like to work in a New Zealand public relations consultancy. Such an insight into the motives, values and habits of consultants will help those interested or linked to the practice. These include prospective students, marketing and advertising professionals, journalists, clients and human resource suppliers.
From an academic standpoint, this research will further the body of knowledge in socio-cultural public relations by providing one of the first ethnographic accounts of the New Zealand consultancy micro-context. Successful completion of this research project will help me gain the Doctor of Philosophy degree and use the findings for academic publications and conferences. It will also deepen my understanding of the public relations consultancy culture, which I can apply in my lecturing role at AUT University.

How will my privacy be protected?
Your participation is not anonymous. However, your identity will be protected in the thesis as well as any other research publication that uses any material containing you. A pseudonym will be used to refer to you and your organisation. Your face and any other identifiable framing will be blurred in any material used. You will have the right to review any material containing you, if I wish to publish it. However, changes only concerning accuracy and confidentiality may be guaranteed.

What are the costs of participating in this research?
There are no costs involved. However, I would like to observe you, as you go about your daily public relations work, for a period of ten working days.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?
You have 10 working days to consider this invitation.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?
Yes, if you choose to, you will receive a summary of findings.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?
Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, *Dr. Petra Theunissen,* petra.theunissen@aut.ac.nz, *09 921 9999 ext. 7854*. Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC, Kate O'Connor, *ethics@aut.ac.nz* , 921 9999 ext. 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?
Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:
Researcher Contact Details: *Deepti Bhargava:* dbhargav@aut.ac.nz; *021 139 0261*
Project Supervisor Contact Details: *Dr. Petra Theunissen,* petra.theunissen@aut.ac.nz, *09 921 9999 ext. 7854*.

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *23 March 2017*, AUTEC Reference number *17/64*.

Appendix C: Participant information sheet for incidental participants

Date Information Sheet Produced: 16 March 2017
A look into the occupational culture of New Zealand's public relations consultancies

An Invitation
I am inviting you to be an incidental participant in this research project, which is being undertaken to meet the requirements of a Doctor of Philosophy degree at Auckland University of Technology (AUT). The project supervisor is Dr. Petra Theunissen.
Your participation is voluntary and subject to you signing the consent form. You may refuse participation or withdraw at any time without adverse consequences.

What is the purpose of this research?
Little is known about the occupational culture of practitioners working in public relations consultancies. They are often typified to have a certain 'agency profile', even though their lifeworlds across different socio-cultural contexts have not been explored. This often results in stereotypical views of consultancy life.
This research will therefore advance the body of knowledge in socio-cultural public relations by providing one of the first ethnographic accounts of the New Zealand consultancy micro-context. It aims to explore the occupational culture in public relations consultancies and the impact this has on their decision-making. Findings and discussions will provide a valuable ground for future research as well as a reflection on occupational practices.
The research questions explored are -
RQ1. What is the occupational culture (practitioner lifeworld and occupational practices) in New Zealand's public relations consultancies?
RQ2. What role does occupational culture play in the decision-making process of the consultancies?

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?
You are not a primary participant in this study.
I am currently observing a primary participant in their routine public relations work (creating public relations content; interacting in work related meetings with colleagues, clients and journalists; interacting with colleagues at social/culture building activities at work; networking with peers in industry events) for a period of ten working days. Part of their work today involves an interaction with you, hence you have been identified and invited as an incidental participant in this study.

How do I agree to participate in this research?
Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and subject to you signing the consent form. Non-participation or withdrawal will not bear any consequences. You may decline to be videoed. If you choose to withdraw from the study after the videoing, you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you to be removed or allowing it to continue being used for research purposes. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

What will happen in this research?
I am currently observing a primary participant in their routine public relations work (creating public relations content; interacting in work related meetings with colleagues, clients and journalists; interacting with colleagues at social/culture building activities at work; networking with peers in industry events) for a period of ten working days. This is being done using a video camera along with keeping field notes, taking photographs where appropriate, and the collection of any documents that may provide insights into the primary participant's occupational practices.
Part of their work today involves an interaction with you, hence I will be observing this interaction.

What are the discomforts and risks?

No significant discomforts or risks are expected. The observation only relates to your professional practice and participation is voluntary. Non-participation, withdrawal or a request to stop videoing will be respected and will bear no consequences.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?
I will act professionally and ethically (following AUTEC guidelines as well as the PRINZ Code of Ethics) at all times to ensure discomfort or risk, if any, is mitigated. You are welcome to refuse participation or withdraw from research until the point where data collection is complete. Any request to stop video filming or taking photographs will be honoured.

What are the benefits?
It will be a platform for understanding what it is like to work in a New Zealand public relations consultancy. Such insight into the motives, values and habits of consultants will help those interested or linked to the practice. These include prospective students, marketing and advertising professionals, journalists, clients and human resource suppliers.
From an academic standpoint, this research will further the body of knowledge in socio-cultural public relations by providing one of the first ethnographic accounts of the New Zealand consultancy micro-context. Successful completion of this research project will help me gain the Doctor of Philosophy degree and use the findings for academic publications and conferences. It will also deepen my understanding of the public relations consultancy culture, which I can apply in my lecturing role at AUT.

How will my privacy be protected?
Your participation is not anonymous. However, your identity will be protected in the thesis as well as any other research publications that uses any material containing you. A pseudonym will be used to refer to you and your organisation. Your face and any other identifiable framing will be obscured in any material used. You will have the right to review any material containing you if I wish to publish it. However, changes only concerning accuracy and confidentiality may be guaranteed.

What are the costs of participating in this research?
There are no costs involved.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?
You will be provided with an Information sheet and Consent form. Your participation is subject to you signing the consent form before filming occurs. I will also give you my business card and you may contact me if you have any further questions or concerns. If you choose to withdraw after being videoed, you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue being used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?
Yes, if you choose to, you will receive a summary of findings.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?
Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, *Dr. Petra Theunissen,* petra.theunissen@aut.ac.nz, *09 921 9999 ext. 7854.* Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC, Kate O'Connor, *ethics@aut.ac.nz* , 921 9999 ext. 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?
Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows: ***Researcher Contact Details:*** *Deepti Bhargava:* dbhargav@aut.ac.nz; *021 139 0261*
Project Supervisor Contact Details: *Dr. Petra Theunissen,* petra.theunissen@aut.ac.nz, *09 921 9999 ext. 7854.* **Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *23 March 2017*, AUTEC Reference number *17/64*.**

Appendix D: Participant information sheet for interviews

Date Information Sheet Produced: 16 March 2017
A look into the occupational culture of New Zealand's public relations consultancies

An Invitation
I am inviting you to take part in this research project which is being undertaken to meet the requirements of a Doctor of Philosophy degree at Auckland University of Technology. The project supervisor is Dr. Petra Theunissen. Your participation is entirely voluntary and subject to you signing the consent form. You may refuse participation or withdraw at any time without adverse consequences.

What is the purpose of this research?
Little is known about the occupational culture of practitioners working in public relations consultancies. They are often typified to have a certain 'agency profile', even though their lifeworlds across different socio-cultural contexts have not been explored. This often results in stereotypical views of consultancy life.
This research will therefore advance the body of knowledge in socio-cultural public relations by providing one of the first ethnographic accounts of the consultancy micro-context. It aims to explore the occupational culture in public relations consultancies and the impact this has on their decision-making. Findings and discussions will provide a valuable foundation for future research, as well as a reflection on occupational practices.
The research questions being explored are -
RQ1. What is the PRP culture (practitioner lifeworld and occupational practices) in New Zealand public relations consultancies?
RQ2. What role does PRP culture play in decision making by the consultancies?

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?
You have been invited as you are a mid-senior level public relations practitioner working in a New Zealand consultancy. Your contact details were publicly available online and you have subsequently been contacted.

How do I agree to participate in this research?
Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and subject to you signing the consent form. Non-participation or withdrawal will not bear any consequences. You can withdraw from the study at any time up until data collection is complete. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue being used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

What will happen in this research?
As part of this research, I have been video observing two public relations practitioners as they do their routine work in their respective consultancies. This is giving me an insight into the working life and culture of public relations consultants in New Zealand. I would now like to interview you to hear your views on the same. This will help me gain additional perspectives that can support the video observation.

The interview will be done using a digital audio recorder and will last not more than 45 to 60 minutes. The interview will later be transcribed and analysed for inclusion in the research. Any relevant statements you make will be used without identifying you or your organisation. Pseudonyms will be used to refer to both.

What are the discomforts and risks?
No significant discomforts or risks are expected.
The interview only relates to your professional practice and participation is entirely voluntary. Non-participation or withdrawal will bear no consequences.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

I will act professionally and ethically (following AUTEC guidelines as well as the PRINZ Code of Ethics) to ensure discomfort or risk, if any, is mitigated. You have the right to refuse to answer any or all questions. You are welcome to withdraw from research until the point where data collection is complete.

What are the benefits?

The results will help you reflect on your practice. Some of the insights may also be useful in entering the annual PRINZ Consultancy of the Year award, which requires entrants to outline how their culture impacts on their practice.

It will be a platform for understanding what it is like to work in a public relations consultancy in New Zealand. Such an insight into the motives, values and habits of consultants will help those interested or linked to the practice. These include prospective students, marketing and advertising professionals, journalists, clients and human resource suppliers.

From an academic standpoint, this research will further the body of knowledge in socio-cultural public relations by providing one of the first ethnographic accounts of the New Zealand consultancy micro-context. Successful completion of this research project will help me gain the Doctor of Philosophy degree and use the findings for academic publications and conferences. It will also deepen my understanding of the public relations consultancy culture, which I can apply in my lecturing role at AUT University.

How will my privacy be protected?

Your participation is not anonymous, given this is a face-to-face interview. All data pertaining to you will be kept confidential by the researcher who (along with her supervisor) will be the only one with access to it. Please note that given the small size and well-networked nature of the profession, complete anonymity and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. It is possible that participants may be identified by people with special knowledge. However, your identity will be protected in the thesis as well as any other research publication that uses any material containing you. A pseudonym will be used to refer to you and your organisation. If you withdraw from this research, all relevant information including audio files and transcripts will be destroyed unless you give explicit consent for continued use of such material.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

There are no costs involved.

However, your time is involved as I would like to interview you, for up to 45 to 60 minutes.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

You have 10 working days to consider this invitation.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

Yes, if you choose to, you will receive a summary of findings.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, *Dr. Petra Theunissen,* petra.theunissen@aut.ac.nz*, 09 921 9999 ext. 7854.*

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC, Kate O'Connor, *ethics@aut.ac.nz* , 921 9999 ext. 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Deepti Bhargava

dbhargav@aut.ac.nz

021 139 0261

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Dr. Petra Theunissen, petra.theunissen@aut.ac.nz*, 09 921 9999 ext. 7854.*

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *23 March 2017*, AUTEC Reference number *17/64*.

Appendix E: Consent form for video ethnography

Project title: A look into the occupational culture of New Zealand's public relations consultancies.
Project Supervisor: Dr. Petra Theunissen
Researcher: Deepti Bhargava

○ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 16 March 2017.

○ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

○ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.

○ I understand that if I withdraw from the study, I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or continue being used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.

○ I understand that video, photographs and notes containing me will be taken and transcribed. I understand that my name, name of my organisation or any other identifying feature will not be used. Images and video material containing me will be used, where my face and any other identifiable framing will be blurred for confidentiality. I understand that pseudonyms will be used to refer to me and my organisation.

○ I understand that any field notes, photographs and video material containing me will be made available to me for checking and that I may, at that time, amend anything that is not accurate. I understand that only changes relating to accuracy or confidentiality are guaranteed.

○ I understand that once I have checked the field notes, photographs and video material containing me to my satisfaction, it will be my final consent to publish this material in the form outlined to me in the information sheet and in discussion with the researcher (namely a PhD, journal article, conference paper and any other academic publication or presentation).

○ I understand that copyright of this work belongs to the researcher. I will upon request be given copies of the video material and photographs in which I appear, which I may use as I wish.

○ I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one): Yes ○ No ○

○ I agree to take part in this research.

Participant's signature: ....
Participant's name: ....
Participant's contact details (if appropriate):
…………………………………………………………………………………………..
…………………………………………………………………………………………..
…………………………………………………………………………………………..
…………………………………………………………………………………………..
Date: ……………………………………………………………………………………

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 23 March 2017 AUTEC Reference number 17/64
Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Appendix F: Consent form for interviews

Project title: A look into the occupational culture of New Zealand's public relations consultancies
Project Supervisor: Dr. Petra Theunissen
Researcher: Deepti Bhargava

○ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 16 March 2017.

○ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

○ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.

○ I understand that if I withdraw from the study, I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or continue being used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.

○ I understand that audio and notes containing me will be taken and transcribed. I understand that my name, name of my organisation or any other identifying feature will not be used. I understand that pseudonyms will be used to refer to me and my organisation. I understand that given the small size and well-networked nature of the profession, complete anonymity and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. It is possible that my participation may be identified by people with special knowledge.

○ I understand that any material containing me will be made available to me for checking and that I may, at that time, amend anything that is not accurate. I understand that only changes relating to accuracy or confidentiality are guaranteed.

○ I understand that once I have checked the material containing me to my satisfaction, it will be my final consent to publish this material in the form outlined to me in the information sheet and in discussion with the researcher (namely a PhD, journal article, conference paper and any other academic publication or presentation).

○ I understand that copyright of this work belongs to the researcher.

○ I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one): Yes ○ No ○

○ I agree to take part in this research.

Participant's signature: ....
Participant's name: ....
Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):
………..
………
………
………
Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 23 March 2017 AUTEC Reference number 17/64
Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Appendix G: Consent for incidental participants (video ethnography)

Project title: A look into the occupational culture of New Zealand's public relations consultancies.
Project Supervisor: Dr. Petra Theunissen
Researcher: Deepti Bhargava

○ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 16 March 2017.

○ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered. I have been given the researcher's business card to follow-up if there are any other concerns.

○ I understand that I am not a primary participant in this study. I understand that my incidental participation is a result of my work-related interaction with a primary participant, whose routine public relations work is being observed in this study. This incidental participation is voluntary (my choice) and I may decline to be videoed without being disadvantaged in any way.

○ I understand that if I withdraw after being videoed, I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or continue being used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.

○ I understand that video, photographs and notes containing my interaction with the primary participant will be taken and transcribed. I understand that my name, name of my organisation or any other identifying feature will not be used. Images and video material containing me will be used, where my face and any other identifiable framing will be obscured for confidentiality. I understand that pseudonyms will be used to refer to me and my organisation.

○ I understand that any field notes, photographs and video material containing me will be made available to me for checking and that I may, at that time, amend anything that is not accurate. I understand that only changes relating to accuracy or confidentiality are guaranteed.

○ I understand that once I have checked the field notes, photographs and video material containing me to my satisfaction, it will be my final consent to publish this material in the form outlined to me in the information sheet and in discussion with the researcher (namely a PhD, journal article, conference paper and any other academic publication or presentation).

○ I understand that copyright of this work belongs to the researcher. I will upon request be given copies of the video material and photographs in which I appear, which I may use as I wish.

○ I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one): Yes ○ No ○

○ I agree to be an incidental participant in this research.

Participant's signature: ....
Participant's name: ....
Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):
……………………………………………………………………………………….
……………………………………………………………………………………….
……………………………………………………………………………………….
……………………………………………………………………………………….
Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 23 March 2017 AUTEC Reference number 17/64
Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Appendix H: Observation protocol

Project title: A look into the occupational culture of New Zealand's public relations consultancies
Student's name: Deepti Bhargava
Student ID: 0701942

Participant observation of the daily working lives of two public relations consultants working in two different New Zealand consultancies.

Participants: Public relations consultants

Background: This research relies on voluntary participation. It is designed as a video observation, relying primarily on qualitative data collection and analysis. The researcher will use ethnographic multimodal discourse analysis (Sissons, 2015) to examine the data.
Location: In public relations practitioner's consultancies and at work in the field.

Observation: The interactions of the participants will be videoed when they are:

- Creating public relations content
- Interacting in work related meetings with colleagues, clients and journalists
- Interacting with colleagues at social/culture building activities at work
- Networking with peers in industry events

Incidental participants:
Public relations work involves talking with clients, journalists and peers, and in this research context they will be incidental participants. All incidental participants will be made aware of the research and their permission sought before videoing can occur. All incidental participants will be given the researcher's business card, so they have a way to make contact if necessary. If an incidental participant declines to be videoed, their wish will be respected.

General:
Neither the settings nor the participants will be manipulated for the camera. Each participant will have the right to ask for the camera to be turned off at any time. Each participant will have the right to review any material containing him/her if the researcher wishes to publish it.

Date: 16 March 2017

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 23 March 2017 AUTEC Reference number 17/64
Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Appendix I: Ethics approval

AUTEC Secretariat

Auckland University of Technology
D-88, WU406 Level 4 WU Building City Campus
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316
E: ethics@aut.ac.nz
www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics

23 March 2017

Petra Theunissen
Faculty of Culture and Society

Dear Petra

Re Ethics Application: **17/64 Culture's impact on decision making - A look into New Zealand's public relations consultancies**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 23 March 2020.

As part of the ethics approval process, you are required to submit the following to AUTEC:

- A brief annual progress report using form EA2, which is available online through http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics. When necessary this form may also be used to request an extension of the approval at least one month prior to its expiry on 23 March 2020;
- A brief report on the status of the project using form EA3, which is available online through http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics. This report is to be submitted either when the approval expires on 23 March 2020 or on completion of the project.

It is a condition of approval that AUTEC is notified of any adverse events or if the research does not commence. AUTEC approval needs to be sought for any alteration to the research, including any alteration of or addition to any documents that are provided to participants. You are responsible for ensuring that research undertaken under this approval occurs within the parameters outlined in the approved application.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval from an institution or organisation for your research, then you will need to obtain this.

To enable us to provide you with efficient service, please use the application number and study title in all correspondence with us. If you have any enquiries about this application, or anything else, please do contact us at ethics@aut.ac.nz.

All the very best with your research,

K O'Connor

Kate O'Connor
Executive Secretary
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: deeptibhargav@gmail.com

Appendix J: Indicative Interview Questions

1. Can you please give a brief background of your knowledge and experience as a public relations consultant?

2. How would you define the work you do as a public relations consultant?

3. What would a day in your consultancy life look like?

4. What values and motivations do you have as a practitioner? Can you elaborate, please?

5. How would you explain the culture of your public relations consultancy?

6. Are there any norms that are specific to the culture of your consultancy?

7. What forms of skills, knowledge, ability, behaviour (KSABs) and/or experience are valued most in your consultancy? Can you please elaborate?

8. How are decisions made in your consultancy? In what way, if any, do you think your consultancy's culture impacts on this decision-making?

9. What form of work-related relationship building and/or socialisation, if any, do you practice in your routine life as a public relations consultant?

10. Are there any rules and/or guidelines that you follow in your day-to-day practice?

11. How would you explain the socio-culture structure of the society within which your consultancy operates? In what way, if any, do you think this impacts on your practice?

12. Are there any issues specific to the life and culture of consultancies in Auckland?

13. Do you have any other comments about the practitioner culture in Auckland's consultancies that you would like to share?

Appendix K: Data Collection Schedule

Participants	Month	Method
Madison	Sep 2017	Semi-structured interview
Demi	Sep 2017	Semi-structured interview
Nathan	Sep 2017	Semi-structured interview
Frank	Sep 2017	Semi-structured interview
Hugh	Oct 2017	Semi-structured interview
Julia	Dec 2017	Semi-structured interview
Liam	Dec 2017	Semi-structured interview
Karen	Dec 2017	Semi-structured interview
Aroha	Dec 2017	Semi-structured interview
Hailey	Dec 2017	Semi-structured interview
Karen	21 - 24 Feb 2018	Video ethnography
Charlotte	April 2018	Semi-structured interview
John	10 days across 23 April – 14 May 2018	Video ethnography
Ethan	May 2018	Semi-structured interview
Oliver	Aug 2018	Semi-structured interview
Gracie	Nov 2018	Semi-structured interview
Chris	Dec 2018	Semi-structured interview