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Feb 23, 2023 by [Carla Cabrera Cuadrado](#)

Could Purpose and Cultural Awareness Form a New Paradigm for Public Diplomacy? ^[1]

Note from the CPD Blog Manager: This piece is based on a [research article](#): "Purpose and Cultural Awareness in PD: Toward a Golden Circle of Public Diplomacy??" written by [Carla Cabrera Cuadrado](#) and published in the *Journal of Public Diplomacy*.

Countries and states have been using public diplomacy for years with the purpose of improving their image abroad, either to increase tourism, attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), promote their goods and services or to be seen as a key player in the decisions of the international community. During the last decades, public diplomacy (PD) research has multiplied and triggered the appearance of several PD models where countries have the goal of managing the international environment through the influence of foreign publics and, consequently, their respective governments. But what is the secret formula for a successful

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Nowadays, we live in a globalized world economically, politically, socially and culturally. We live in a technological world with a democratized access to information, and not just access, but content production has expanded to every single person who owns a phone and has internet. During a single minute, 500 hours of video are published on YouTube, 200 million emails are sent, and 695,000 Instagram stories are posted. Now more than ever, the biggest challenge for governments is to get attention in this ocean of information, which is also compromised with misinformation and disinformation. Therefore, credibility becomes an additional challenge.

In order to appeal to the masses with a PD strategy, I have created a PD model for analysis and strategy building called “The Golden Circle of Public Diplomacy.” This model is divided into six concentric layers: WHY, HOW, WHAT, WHERE, WHO and WHEN. The first three layers are based on existing theories by Simon Sinek and Simon Anholt, and the last three bring an innovative contribution to the field of public diplomacy.

Simon Sinek is the anthropologist behind “The Golden Circle,” a leadership model for businesses that he describes in his viral TED talk and his book *Start with WHY*. Sinek states that the most successful companies are the ones who have a moral purpose as their mission and reflect it in their marketing strategy, as well as in their whole structure. For example, Apple doesn’t just sell technology and devices; they sell social status, dream accomplishment and personal development. Moreover, their employees believe in this purpose and show this by using Apple devices in their personal lives. The moral purpose, or WHY, of Apple highlights the company against all other technology businesses that only sell physical products. This successful model has also been proven in companies such as Nike, Chanel and Coca-Cola among others. To apply this theory to public diplomacy, I have merged it with the “Good Country Equation” created by the political advisor Simon Anholt. His theory declares that countries gain popularity when they are solidary and generous with the international community, in other words, when they are “good countries.” As an example, Sweden is a world leader in fighting an international enemy such as climate change, which improves Sweden’s image abroad by defending the interests of the international community and not just their own national interests.

The merger of these two theories conforms to the first three layers of the Golden Circle of Public Diplomacy. The WHY represents the moral purpose or sense of mission of a country, which should be reflected in their PD strategies, but also in their whole structure and society. The HOW is the country’s soft power, its charisma and how the country conducts public diplomacy (e.g., with transparency, democracy, etc.). The WHAT is all programs and communications that belong to the public diplomacy strategy and that, ideally, reflect the WHY and HOW in all their actions. For the next three layers (WHERE, WHO and WHEN), I have introduced new concepts to public diplomacy research.

Although globalization has also been classified as an Americanization or Westernization of certain regions, the truth is that a long list of different cultures coexist in the world we live in today. Similar to the PD literature, intercultural research has experienced exponential growth in recent decades, with top contributions to the field such as Hofstede's IBM study, Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner's cultural model, GLOBE's intercultural leadership study and Erin Meyer's culture map. Within these models, more than 20 cultural dimensions can be identified, or maybe fewer depending on how many dimensions from different models overlap. Nevertheless, only one of these dimensions has been integrated into a PD model (individualism vs. collectivism), the communication theory by R.S. Zaharna. Apart from this, there is no PD model with enough cultural context to conduct public diplomacy in a culturally sensitive way. Therefore, it is necessary to create a cultural feasibility assessment between sender and receiver countries to define the cultural similarities between societies and identify possible challenges in diverging cultural dimensions.

This cultural feasibility assessment introduced in my article consists of utilizing the existing intercultural literature to compare countries within existing cultural dimensions and to add a customized analysis of the countries' shared history and unique cultural traits of each society. Apart from a deep understanding of the geographical cultures (WHERE), it is also important to add intersectional cultural dimensions that help understand the relationship between subcultures in both countries involved. These intersectional dimensions such as religion, generation, language or regional typology, provide the bigger picture of WHO is conducting PD and WHO is the audience. Last but not least, all PD activity needs a time logic and the layer WHEN emphasizes the need to decide on how PD needs to be communicated, for how long and how often, bearing in mind the cultural context.

In summary, the Golden Circle of Public Diplomacy is a new paradigm in public diplomacy literature that introduces a moral purpose and cultural awareness as two intersectional concepts necessary for a successful public diplomacy strategy.

Image: Courtesy of Carla Cabrera Cuadrado via SIETAR Europa.
