

28 July 2010



Public relations - progress and wellbeing

Beyond GDP

Tim Marshall has initiated a blog conversation “*Time for radical thinking and real PR leadership*”, because he believes that public relation professionals from around the world can play a role in establishing progress and wellbeing measurement tools that go beyond GDP.

This follows the Anew NZ Newsletter of last month which offered a “new thinking” document on “Beyond GDP, A Paradigm Shift in the Making”. Tim is a trustee of Anew NZ.

Tim’s message is “double barrelled” because he is not only speaking to the subject of “Beyond GDP” but is also clarifying a contemporary role of the PR industry.

He recognizes that a common perception of public relations is that it is a corporate and government tool for manipulating public opinion. He takes issue with this perception because the industry has many excellent professionals who see PR as an instrument of education and influence – to foster a collaborative approach in public engagement.

As a leader in the PR field Tim, a PR practitioner with 25 years experience and a former president of the Public Relations Institute of New Zealand (PRINZ) believes that it could and should take a leading role in re-defining progress and wellbeing. Tim has put a challenge/opportunity to his fellow PR professionals in the July 2010 blog post on the internationally supported website PR Conversations.

“What does PR have to do with measuring progress and well-being?” you may well ask. Tim’s answer to this question is that introducing new concepts for measuring progress and well-being will require buy-in from a wide range of stake-

holders. PR practice, by definition, involves organisations communicating with stakeholders and building and maintaining relationships with them. So PR practitioners can and should play a vital role in stakeholder consultation and buy-in for the introduction of new measures for progress and well-being.



Tim’s position is: The global PR profession shouldn’t just play an operational role, it should take a leading role in driving change in the way the world’s governments and private sector organisations measure progress and well-being. His blog post is entitled: “*Time for radical thinking and real PR leadership*” and it starts:

Here’s an idea for the public relations and communications management profession to hang its hat on – and to show leadership.

Let us be the driving force to set up a Genuine Progress Index (GPI) for the world. A GPI is a set of indicators that show whether the world is making progress socially, environmentally and, let’s say also, scientifically and technologically.

Instead of being the god we bow to, let’s make economics the servant of pursuing progress goals in these areas.

For too long our measure of success has been economic growth – usually as measured by the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of nations. But growth in GDP requires even higher production and consumption and, at a time when the world is rapidly running out of resources, this simply does not compute.

You can read the full text and responses here: <http://www.prconversations.com/index.php/2010/07/tim-marshall-time-for-radical-thinking-and-real-pr-leadership/>

Leader in Public Relations

Besides his local involvement with PRINZ, Tim was the New Zealand representative when the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management was initiated in Boston in 1998. The “Global Alliance”, as it is known in PR circles, is a federation of PR societies and institutes from around the world including PRINZ, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (UK) and the Public Relations Society of America. From small beginnings the Global Alliance now has as members PR associations from more than 70 countries, see www.globalalliancepr.org



Tim speaking at PRINZ Conference

Tim was the New Zealand representative in the Global Alliance’s formative years and he arranged for PRINZ to host the GA’s annual general meeting in Auckland in February 2003. Attendees at that meeting included Toni Muzi Falconi (Italy), Colin Farrington (UK), Jean Valin (Canada) and Sej Motau (South Africa) who have all since served as Global Alliance chairs. The current chair, John Paluszek (USA), also has New Zealand connections and visited last year. Tim was invited to write his blog post by New Zealand-based Global Alliance board member Cathy Arrow and former GA chair Toni Muzi Falconi immediately weighed in with support for the concept.

The Stockholm Accords

A catalyst for Tim’s blog post and his call to action to his fellow PR practitioners was an initiative by the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management to establish a universally agreed framework for PR practice – The Stockholm Accords. This was developed in the lead up to the Global Alliance’s World PR Forum hosted by the Swedish Public Relations Association in Stockholm on 14-15 June 2010, and launched at that event.

Underlying the Stockholm Accords are a number of concepts about public relations practice including:

- “The stakeholder governance model” which says that organisations must carefully consider all stakeholders as they make decisions;
- “Value networks” which states that much of the value of organisations today stems from networks of relationships that do not distinguish between internal and external stakeholders;
- “The communicative organisation” which recognizes that informal communication makes up more than 90% of an organisation’s communication – and professional communicators must learn to work in this environment

The Stockholm Accords also named sustainability as a key concern for PR practitioners.

There is a widely held view that PR is a “one-way process” as organisations aim to persuade stakeholders such as staff, customers and regulators, to their point of view. However the Stockholm Accords set out that PR should be a collaborative process in the increasingly complex world we live in.

Could public relations professionals from around the world play a role in establishing progress and well-being measurement tools beyond GDP?

Tim believes senior public relations professionals are in a unique position to work with their colleagues, and with their clients and stakeholders to establish and promote new ways of measuring progress and well-being. This was always so, but the Stockholm Accords confirm his conviction.

(See next page for PR Conversations Blog Post)

Public relations—progress and wellbeing BLOG

Time for Radical Thinking and Real PR Leadership

Here's an idea for the public relations and communications management (PR/CM) profession to hang its hat on – and to show leadership.

Let's be the driving force to set up a Genuine Progress Index (GPI) for the world. A GPI is a set of indicators that show whether the world is making progress socially, environmentally and let's say also scientifically and technologically. (Instead of being the god we bow to, let's make economics the servant of pursuing progress goals in these areas .)

For too long our measure of success has been economic growth – usually as measured by the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of nations. But growth in GDP requires ever higher production and consumption. And at a time when the world is rapidly running out of resources this simply does not compute.

The GPI concept is not crazy. Simon Kuznets, the Nobel Prize-winning economist and principal architect of the GDP, warned 40 years ago: "The welfare of a nation can scarcely be inferred from a measurement of national income". Robert Kennedy said: "GDP measures neither our wit nor our courage; neither our wisdom nor our learning; neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country; it measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile."

Last year French president Nicholas Sarkozy, recognizing the shortcomings of GDP for measuring France's progress as a nation, commissioned Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz to create the Commission for the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress to suggest alternatives.

A number of prototype GPI models exist including the Full Cost Accounting model of GPI of Dr Ron Colman of Nova Scotia, Canada. The OECD has a work stream on Measuring and Fostering the Progress of Societies. Statistics New Zealand in 2008 report "Measuring New Zealand's Progress using a Sustainable Approach" included a set of indicators. New Scientist magazine, which for years has warned that economic growth is incompatible with the Earth's limited resources, last year ran a four issue special which included a double page spread of global social and environmental indicators.

Why should a GPI be the concern of public relations and communication management? In fact it is properly the domain of leaders – organisational and national leaders – but they need a mandate from stakeholders or help to promulgate the concept. We need radically new thinking about how we not only live within the Earth's resources but continue to advance. Having a GPI that we talk about and care about is central to this – "you treasure

what you measure".

Achieving a shift from an "economic growth mentality" to a "genuine progress mentality" will possibly be the biggest and most critical stakeholder engagement exercise of all time – and obviously that's where we PR/CM professionals come in. This is something we could endorse centrally yet each of us can promote it within our organisations and our wider spheres of influence. To me this is an idea whose time has come – and if it doesn't happen we, our children and other life on Earth are all in serious trouble.

The catalyst for this thought has been the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management's current work on the Stockholm Accord, which aims to describe 21st century PR practice for both practitioners and the people who use our services. For some time I have also been quietly working away with a group called Anew New Zealand, whose interest is forming a widely agreed national vision, creating plans for that vision to be realised and measuring progress towards it using a GPI of some form. To me it seemed as if that two of my spheres of interest had converged.

Let me finish by reiterating my opening line: This is an idea, an opportunity, for the public relations and communications management (PR/CM) profession to hang its hat on – and to show leadership.

Note: See the full blog with responses on: <http://www.prconversations.com/index.php/2010/07/tim-marshall-time-for-radical-thinking-and-real-pr-leadership/>

Tim Marshall is a New Zealand PR consultant with 25 years' experience who believes PR can and should be an agent for positive change in the world we live in.