

Nov 04, 2016 by [Naomi Leight-Give'on](#)

Comparisons and Connections ^[1]

At the hub of public diplomacy in the western United States, here at CPD we were very busy last week. We started off with a workshop on Mexican Public Diplomacy and ended with a conference on International Broadcasting in the Social Media Era. Now you may be wondering what is the common thread, aside from public diplomacy, that links these two bookends of a week together. The theme that I took away from this week was, as you might have guessed from the title of this post, comparisons and connections as a vital component of the practice of public diplomacy.

Scholars in a variety of fields spend numerous hours scouring through cases in order to draw comparisons, connections and conclusions. However in the practice of public diplomacy (PD), this is not so much the case. Most diplomats do not have time to go and sit with diplomats from other countries to find out what they've learned. They have time to manage their posts, and if they are lucky, to learn from their predecessors' successes and failures. However, Dr. Pamela K. Starr was determined to change that for Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials from Mexico. She was able to offer a two-day workshop on public diplomacy that brought together public diplomacy practitioners from Canada, Chile, India, Israel, Korea, and of course, Mexico for two days of discussion.

Among the main takeaways from this workshop were the challenges and complexity that public diplomacy faces in this instant communication era—every different audience can receive every different message. The ability to achieve foreign policy goals using PD tools is no longer dependent on what a government wants and how it conducts its public diplomacy towards a foreign public, but also how it communicates and listens to its domestic audience and diaspora populations. Each of the countries around the table noted that they struggle with effectively engaging different sectors of foreign publics with a coherent message. They all face the challenge of being unable to create a comprehensive and unified national narrative that is supported by the majority of their domestic population. They are all trying to use public diplomacy to listen, engage, and support their national interests, but run up against the same difficulties. These countries have now had the opportunity to see that they are not alone in their struggles for successful public diplomacy campaigns. After two days of comparing and connecting, these diplomats now have new networks to turn to for advice, and examples to learn from when moving forward to the next PD strategy.

This ability to reach both foreign and domestic audiences, listen to them and communicate your goals to them is clearly a big challenge. This fits right in with an overarching theme of our international broadcasting conference—comparing the experiences of a number of broadcasting actors and their challenges in the social media era. The IB conference showcased the different entities which now conduct or participate in international broadcasting. Conference participants were able to compare and contrast the traditional broadcasters such as Radio Free Asia and the BBC World Service, with the new broadcasters like CCTV and Al Jazeera, as well as private corporations such as CNN and Google. Each of these broadcasting entities has different interests, goals, strategies and audiences, yet they

each face the same challenges of effectively connecting with their stakeholders or publics.

It became clear to me by listening to a plethora of public diplomacy actors that the greatest challenge public diplomacy faces around the world boils down to a very tangible and human one, how to connect with one another. This is so basic—we all struggle with it individually and collectively. But do we sit down and compare the challenges we face? Not much and definitely not enough. Broadcasting in the 21st century demonstrates that we have more and more tools at our disposal to listen and share, but it is also more complex than ever. How do we meet this connectivity challenge? What could help everyone become better connectors? Well, for PD practitioners, I would recommend a little more comparing and sharing. Countries and their diplomats, broadcasting entities and even corporations should function less as silos and more as participants in global networks. In order to move beyond our own interests to the mutuality for which public diplomacy strives, we must learn to engage with each other and our stakeholders more effectively. These conferences underscored the necessity of doing so.