A Jungian conscience: Self-awareness for public relations practice

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

This article relates Carl Jung's theories of consciousness and conscience to contemporary public relations practice, applying Jungian methods of self-awareness to public relations as a field. The chapter concludes with challenges for practitioners, individually and as a profession, to increase self-awareness, an essential prerequisite for ethical practice. It takes an interpretive approach, drawing on literature from Jungian scholarship, organisational psychology and moral philosophy. These explorations are developed at book-length in Fawkes (2014. *Public relations ethics and professionalism: The shadow of excellence.* London and New York, NY: Routledge), but here the focus is on practice and practitioners' access to conscience through consciousness. After a brief summary of the Jungian psyche and the role of consciousness in activating conscience, this paper suggests questions and reflections for the profession and its constituent practitioners. This discussion is strongly linked to developing an ethical attitude (Solomon (2001). *Journal of Analytic Psychology*, 46(3)), one based not on rules or codes but on individual and collective self-awareness.

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1. Introduction: Approaches to conscience and consciousness

Consciousness and conscience are complex concepts explored from philosophers such as Descartes to the creation of modern artificial intelligence, often centrally concerned with the "problem of self-knowledge" (MacIntyre, 2004, p.2). During this long discussion, interpretations have merged and sub-divided. As Zeman puts it (2002), "Consciousness, self-consciousness and conscience bear close family resemblances. Over the centuries their shifting meanings have mingled and worked upon one another" (Zeman, 2002, p. 14). For example, the British philosopher, Julian Baggini (2011) explores multiple avenues to the inner self, concluding we can only be understood as material physical beings; US novelist Marilyn Robinson (2010) pursues similar territory, coming to the opposite conclusion and calling for greater engagement with the "inner" self in modern culture. This article will not arbitrate on these debates but does offer a Jungian approach for taking up Robinson's challenge, as is discussed below. While the notion of corporate conscience is proposed by some business ethicists (Goodpaster, 2007) and opposed by others (Singer, 2007) Singer and Kimbles (2004), and outlined below, illustrates how depth psychology can have meaning for the inner life of groups, organisations and professions, as well as individuals. Self-knowledge is essential for institutions too.

The urgency of this debate is heightened by scandals throughout professions, which have led to an increased interest in ethical approaches as a counter-balance to abuses of power (Arthur W. Page Society, 2007, 2009; Sama & Shoaf, 2008),

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including a recent call to ethics in the financial sector from the Governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney (Monaghan, 2014a). The choice of this theme for the 2014 World Public Relations Forum is itself evidence of a desire to engage with a deeper ethical approach than that commonly offered by codes and idealised statements.

2. Public relations and the ground for ethics

Most public relations textbooks (e.g. Chia & Synnott, 2009; Johnston & Zawawi, 2009; Theaker, 2012) offer readers a choice between ethics based either on the consequences of actions as the ground for ethics (Bentham/Mills' utilitarianism) or the duty of professionals to groups such as clients, patients or society generally (Kantian), or even more often, an ad-hoc combination of both. There are problems with both, too complex to explore here, such as the appearance of impartiality in calculating relative harms and goods issuing from actions (Lucas, 2005) and the inflexibility of Kantian ethics in managing conflicts of ethical duty. Dominant approaches have their origins in western philosophy and treat ethics as normative and positivist, often with an emphasis on rationality, rules and procedures, especially in their application to professional ethics. In recent decades this position has been challenged by feminist (Benhabib, 1992; Gilligan, 1982), postcolonial (Appiah, 2005) and postmodern ethics (Bauman, 1993), among others. Moreover, the western domination of ethical thought has been expanded by the introduction of Asian ethical approaches to professional ethics (Koehn, 2001). While some of these ideas have recently made an impact on public relations ethics (Curtin & Gaither, 2007; Holtzhausen, 2012), generally these new (er) directions are not present in PR text books or chapters on ethics. The main ground of public relations ethics derives from the Excellence school's use of systems theory, which Bowen (2007) claims has a Kantian validity, a claim disputed by L'Etang (1992). Additionally, rhetorical scholars (mainly based in the USA) embrace virtue ethics (Baker & Martinson, 2002; Edgett, 2002; Harrison & Galloway, 2005; Pater & van Gils, 2003), which highlights character and reflection rather than regulation, suggesting a negotiation between competing virtues as an ethical *process* not outcome, and locating ethics in the agent not the act. However their application to practice has led to some glib assertions where virtues are presented as unproblematic in phrases like the Arthur Page Society's "Tell the Truth" or the Global Alliance's "Adhere to the highest standards of accuracy and truth in advancing the interests of clients and employers" (GlobalAlliance, 2009). The only one which hints that these might be conflicted issues and turns inward comes from the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) which suggests "Be honest not only with others but also and most importantly with yourselves as individuals" (IABC, n.d). This echoes the central theme of conscience as an aspect of consciousness, ethics as the product of self-knowledge.

My argument, as expounded at length in Fawkes (2014), is that public relations ethics has, like most professional ethics, tended to elevate externalised rationality above internalised guidance, relying on codes not conscience. A Jungian approach can assist those groups and individuals who wish to be honest with themselves.

3. Jung's notion of psyche, consciousness and conscience

Jung's work forms the basis of analytical psychology, also called depth psychology, as practised throughout the world (Samuels, 1985) and has deeply influenced cultural studies, especially literature and film and the study of genre. Yet many consider his contribution to thought was undervalued by academics in the twentieth century (Proulx, 1994) and suggest his ideas are better suited to this fractured time (Hauke, 2000; Rowland, 2010).

Adler outlines four types of analysis and their relation to Jungian analytic psychology as:

> (1) confession or *catharsis*, a process that occurs in all psychotherapy; (2) elucidation or *interpretation*, the major stage in Freudian analysis; (3) *education*, adaptation to social demands and needs [Adlerian]. . .; and (4) transformation or *individuation*, in which the client discovers and develops an individual pattern of life. . ..the most specifically Jungian (Adler, 1967, cited in Mattoon, 2005:107, emphasis in original).

These methods are not solely confined to clinical practice: they are relevant to Jung's broader ideas, grounded in his own and patients' experiences and moving to more general theories. There are contradictions between different parts of Jung's voluminous writing over a very long life and he never wrote a definitive summary of his thoughts. Moreover, the different schools of Jungian thinkers and therapists also emphasise different aspects of his writing. These caveats aside, he can be said to perceive the psyche as consisting of (a) personal consciousness—everything of which the individual is aware, with the ego acting as the main organiser; (b) personal unconscious—forgotten and repressed material; and (c) the collective unconscious—all the possibilities of human culture. The psyche is envisaged as a self-regulatory (homeostatic) system, comprising entities known as archetypes, pairs of opposing qualities within the conscious and unconscious, which continually negotiate to generate a fluid meaning, or personal mythology, in the individual or group. The unconscious is perceived as potentially beneficial, a source of insight and healing.

The opposing pair of relevance to this study is that of Persona/Shadow.

Persona is a kind of mask designed to "impress and conceal", and to meet societal demands (Jung, 1953, CW7/305-9)[1]. Jung describes the two sources of the persona as 'on the one hand the expectations and demands of society and on the

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[1] *Note:* Unless otherwise stated, all Jung citations refer to the *Collected Works*, edited by H. Read, M. Fordham and G. Adler and published in London by Routledge, Kogan Page. Citations are to paragraphs not page numbers.

other the social aims and aspirations of the individual' (Jung et al., CW6/798). The persona has the task of navigating the individual's relationship with their society and needs "to both relate to objects and protect the subject" (Stein, 1998, p.119). As the ego gravitates to the public "approved" view, unconscious activity starts to compensate. For example, an individual or group may over-identify with their public image; when these functions deteriorate, fail to adapt to new situations or are not developed, help may be required. That help may be hidden in the shadow.

The shadow includes those elements of the personal unconscious which are not considered acceptable to consciousness (Jung et al., CW11/130-4)). They are not necessarily "bad", simply rejected, as a workaholic might reject relaxation, for example. But because they are outside the control of the ego they may be less socially acceptable (or conformist) than other traits (Stein, 1998). Not only is the ego unaware of this shadow personality, it can unconsciously project rejected aspects on to others, making them "carry" the unlived elements (Storr, 1999, p. xv).

> The Shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort.... This act is the essential condition for self-knowledge and it therefore, as a rule, meets with considerable resistance (Jung et al., CW9ii/13-14)

This is the key aspect of the Jungian psyche, at least as it can be applied to groups such as professions (see below), because the shadow realm contains material which may be necessary for maturity. Consciousness needs to be expanded to include these repressed or shadow elements, however difficult they are to face. Jungian psychology turns first inward to confront internal daemons before the individual or group can re-enter the social world as a mature moral being. In this way conscience is firmly grounded in a renewed consciousness through self-awareness. Indeed, Jung argues that conscience may be the trigger for this reflection:

> There is scarcely any psychic phenomenon that shows the polarity of the psyche in a clearer light than conscience.... Conscience brings these ever-present and necessary opposites to conscious perception (Jung et al., CW10).

4. Jungian ethics

Individuation is seen as the bedrock of a Jungian ethic, by which conscience awakens consciousness (and vice-versa) leading to ethical awareness. At the heart of a Jungian approach to ethics is a shift away from the dualities of right/wrong, good/bad which underpins so much Anglo-American ethics, towards a more complex ethical negotiation between multiple perspectives, within a unifying (but not homogenising) framework. This is esoteric, inward-looking, as in Asian ethics, rather than exoteric, rules-based ethics. What might previously have been a source of discomfort, even distress, once faced and engaged with, can become insight and moral awareness. One outcome of this process, according to Beebe (1992, p. 61) is integrity:

> An initial stage is denial that there is shadow... a turning-point stage is the acceptance of shadow; a final stage is a sense of restored wholeness once the "full disclosure" of the shadow has been integrated. I believe this to be a dialectic of integrity, proceeding through the shadow.

Here the futility of decision boxes and purely rational ethics is exposed in all its inadequacy. Instead of leaping to "fix" an ethical problem, Jung asks us to stay with it, to savour it in all its complexity. Real ethical decisions cluster around the *conflict* between received wisdom and personal ethics, a painful configuration. A Jungian ethic implies the recognition that both persona and shadow are contained in the one psyche or group (Jungian ideas are often extrapolated to collective levels); that blaming the other perpetuates the divide and stunts moral growth. It does not seek homogeneity but homeostasis and recognises that values will constellate differently in different cultures (see Fawkes, 2010b); what is important is the hard work of making such values and tensions *conscious*, allowing aspects of the whole to enter an internal dialogue through which tensions can be addressed if not reconciled. Solomon (2001) calls this the 'ethical attitude'; there can be no predetermined outcome for such ethical struggle, it is a process.

Next I need to sketch how such ideas have been deployed in organisational literature.

5. Jungian psychology in organisations

Core concepts from Jungian psychology have been adopted by scholars in the fields of organisational psychology and management (Feldman, 2004; Hede, 2007; Ketola, 2008), not forgetting the popular management diagnostic tool, the Myers–Briggs Type Indicator (Myers & McCaulley, 1985), which was developed from Jungian concepts of personality. Singer and Kimbles' (2004, p.4) elucidation of cultural complexes offers particularly useful insight into the study of organisational-level shadow dynamics:

> As personal complexes emerge out of the level of the personal unconscious . . . cultural complexes can be thought of arising out the cultural unconscious as it interacts with both the archetypal and personal realms of the psyche and the broader outer world arena . . . cultural complexes can be thought of as forming the essential components of an inner sociology.

Jungian psychology is also operationalised as a tool for addressing and healing organisational issues by Corlett and Pearson (2003), who offer guidance for, among others, "managerial leaders who are open to new ideas for improving the effectiveness of their organisations, democratizing the workplace and re-energizing their work processes" (p.xv) by deploying what they call Jungian Organisational Theory. The remainder of this discussion draws on their advice to managers and applies these insights to public relations practice.

The first stage of Jungian integration and the most feasible for a profession is to become conscious of the shadow aspects of the group or field and the first place to look for shadow aspects is at the point of most irritation, suggest Corlett and Pearson (2003). They argue that healthy organisations need to recognise both conscious and unconscious aspects of the "organisational psyche" to flourish. One issue they identify is the "public face seen as being same thing as organisation" (p.39), citing a company that insisted it recruited the "best and the brightest", despite contradictory evidence, because, they speculate, it "confused the image it was trying to project with an inner reality about which it was oblivious, or chose to ignore" (p.39). This is a classic example of over-identifying with persona aspects. Engaging with shadow material offers a counter-balance but may mean accepting that as well as bad apples there are bad barrels (Zimbardo, 2007), that the hidden abuses of power may be systemic rather than attributable to deviant individuals. This approach challenges the normative, predictive aspects of professional status management, hence the requirement for a well-founded ego.

It is then possible to ask questions of the group or organisation, such as: what actions in the individual/organisation/profession have created a culture where such behaviour is seen as acceptable? Are we susceptible to particular temptations which have been denied rather than engaged with critically? Thus, groups dealing with financial transactions might heighten their awareness of fiscal irresponsibility and the desire to transgress; groups dealing with the vulnerable might reflect on the danger of abusing their powers and so on.

Given that working with the shadow is a painful process, it is worth remembering the incentives. The loss of legitimacy and trust in professions in recent decades referred to earlier can be seen as analogous to the mid-life crisis that sends individuals to seek help. Clearly insisting on probity is not a sufficient response to the situation; it calls for consciousness.

6. Jungian approaches to public relations

I have explored elsewhere the role of the archetypes of Persona and Shadow in public relations (2010, 2012, 2014). In Fawkes (2010a), I considered public relations from a Jungian perspective, proposing that the idealisation of the excellence approach constitutes the field's "persona", or public face, while the critics emphasise the hidden or "shadow" aspects of persuasion and sometimes propaganda. There is also a tendency in public relations, like many other professions, to emphasise the positive and marginalise less attractive aspects of the work. Does a desire for things to be better, an emphasis on the positive, lead us to privilege the ideal over the real? Do we believe our own publicity and blame those who don't for their "cynicism"? Is the reliance on idealised codes an avoidance of the conflicts that face practitioners every day (Kang, 2010)? While such observations have relevance for the development of ethical theory, this polarity has also generated divisions in ethical identity among practitioners, casting them as either "ethical guardians" (Bowen, 2008) or anti-ethical partisans (Baker, 2008) while most are both "saints *and* sinners" (Fawkes, 2012). This separation of aspects is indicative of shadow dynamics. It also illustrates the relevance of this approach to practice and offers a new source of guidance to that offered by codes, which are considered of limited efficacy, not least because they disregard the centrality of persuasion for practice (Bivins, 1993; L'Etang, 2011). It is hoped that the following Jungian toolkit will offer an alternative avenue for self-awareness.

7. The Jungian toolkit

In order to operationalise a Jungian approach to consciousness in the profession, a range of tools has been generated from Jungian literature and applied to public relations as a field. These questions can be addressed to the profession as a whole, as here, but could also be adapted for use in agency, communications departments and other workgroups. They can be deployed in workplaces or considered by individual practitioners.

7.1. Persona aspects

7.1.1. What language, symbols and images does the profession/group use to promote itself?
Does the professional body present itself as part of the establishment, as an outsider, a grass roots or an elite organisation? The contrast between the headquarters of the UK's Chartered Institute for Public Relations (CIPR) and the Public Relations Institution of Australia (PRIA), for example, is striking; the former used to occupy a grand mansion in London's St James's Square, the home of the gentlemen's club; the latter has a small office suite in a 1930s block, in a somewhat run down part of Sydney, opposite a couple of sex shops. Buildings, promotional websites, logos and other signs, text and symbols reveal the image the organisation wishes to present to the world. Applied to the workplace, does the agency/department present itself as youthful and technically advanced or old-fashioned and reliable?

7.1.2. What are the main stories we tell ourselves?
So many of the stories about public relations' leaders emerge from US histories and are highly sanitised (Ewen, 1996), preferring a tale of idealised founders and scoundrel "bad apples". Equally, critical scholars may disregard narratives that

describe the contribution that public relations has made to reducing conflict between warring parties (Rice & Somerville, 2013). There are other means for identifying dominant narratives in and of the profession, through examining key texts or conducting interviews with leading practitioners (L'Etang, 2004). The growing history movement in public relations (Watson, 2014) suggests a desire to understand our own story. Each organisation will also have its own history, embodied in its website, its images of founders, its newness or oldness.

7.1.3. Who are we? And who is missing?

What are the gender balances, are ethnic minorities subtly dissuaded at early stages of career planning, is diversity given lip service but resisted in practice? Is there a "common sense"' view that public relations staff are young, white and female, for example (Edwards, 2010)? What does the data generated by the European Communication Monitor (ECM) project (Zerfass, Vercic, Tench, Verhoeven, & Moreno, 2013) tell us about the nature of the field at this time?

7.1.4. How do we see our role?

The past half century has seen a sustained effort to emphasise strategic communication and boardroom counsel over the older versions of promotion and publicity commonly associated with the field. As a consequence those practicing PR in the areas of sports, celebrity, music, for example, may not feel welcome in the club. Hutton (2010) concerns about the failure to clearly define role and jurisdiction are likely to be reflected in workplaces as well as across the field.

7.2. Shadow aspects

7.2.1. What is off limits in the group or workplace? What are the taboos?

I suggest persuasion is the great taboo in public relations, as least as presented through the Excellence perspective. Here asymmetrical communication must always be sub-ideal, even though practitioners routinely describe themselves as advocates, or communicators-for-hire (Fawkes, 2012). Of course rhetorical scholars embrace it (Heath, 2009; MacIntyre, 2004; Porter, 2010), but there is still a deep unease with the topic.

In individual workplaces, there may be other questions: what can one *not* raise at a meeting? Are there issues around finance, accountability, billing practices?

7.2.2. Who or what is the object of most loathing?

Which groups attract the most intense reactions, jealousies and resentments? Where are they located in proximity to the profession? Is there are shared history, a split in perspectives? Have they gained more status in the struggle for jurisdictional control? In my experience, many practitioners and academics tend to bridle when confused with publicity or marketing functions, although many practitioners do work in these roles in organisations. In organisations, there may be close rivals or others who are treated with contempt despite sharing similar functions and goals. Looking into this tension can reveal what is being projected outward onto other groups.

7.2.3. What happens when things go wrong in public relations?

There are scandals of the PR agencies working for tyrants, backhanders, false representation and so on, routinely reported in websites like Spinwatch.org. Contrast their detailed accounts of PR manipulation of the media and democratic processes with the very low number of disciplinary procedures. Given that public relations have striven to place itself in the boardroom, what responsibility does the profession have for the current state of the world? In agencies/departments, do failures, whether of actions, thinking or relationship, lead to post-mortems or is it on to the next brief? Is there space to discuss what doesn't work?

7.2.4. How is the profession perceived, generally?

How does public relations fare in annual trust surveys, is it the regular butt of cartoons, jokes or online forums? In the UK, for example, the rise of the term "spin doctor" extended beyond political communication into the general field of PR, leading to much resistance from some practitioners. One researcher found practitioners said they worked in advertising rather than come clean (Thurlow, 2009). What is the key contrast between the promoted image and that received, across the profession or in a smaller workgroup?

7.2.5. Who teaches the next generation?

And what are they taught? Control of syllabus, the role of industry in PR Education – these are large, complex issues – but they help shape the practice, so they matter. This is where the story – in all its shadowy distortions – is passed on to the next generation. What do we want that story to be?

7.2.6. Where does the individual practitioner find values and guidance?

There are professional codes, employer codes, union codes and religious principles and commandments that any individual practitioner might turn to depending on his or her circumstances and inclinations. Are these externalised or internalised? Is loyalty primarily to the client/employer or the wider society? Are codes of ethics applied in everyday practice or only when

a crisis occurs? Which have meaning for the practitioner? Can they be invoked in the workplace or profession? If not, why not?

8. Discussion

Many of these suggested avenues for reflection need to engage the members of the profession, not just the ruling body. Their input is vital to allow the complexity of perspectives to emerge, leading to a new professional ethic—not a code of conduct or set of rules but something closer to a moral audit. The discomfort identified by Kang (2010) and the denial found by Thurlow (2009) suggest practitioners are already experiencing the conflict which, Jung suggests, lies at the heart of conscience. Codes seem unable to address these conflicts, tending to shut down rather than open up areas of confusion and ambiguity. A more honest engagement with the problems in practice might allow them to come clean.

If, as Baker (2008) suggests, there are virtues and vices in public relations practice, a Jungian context allows us to look at what might be attractive in the vices, unattractive in the virtues. Are we (sometimes) drawn to situations that seem to sanction manipulation, deceit, secrecy? Are transparency, humility and respect too *difficult* to bring to everyday work where cultures and organisations ask for the opposite?

In particular, given that rejected material often contains the seeds of what is missing from the whole person, what they need to grow up, it may be that failure to acknowledge the persuasion at the heart of most public relations has infantilised our ethical approaches. What if persuasion is an asset rather than a liability? Practitioners see it as their main offering (O'Malley, 2011); perhaps a wider discussion could re-envision the persuader as a skilled deployer of text and symbol to serve a particular end. After all, a Jungian approach encourages engagement with rather than rejection of these elements of the whole: what do they have to tell PR about itself? Perhaps we will be better able to examine power imbalances in communication if we accept the reality of persuasion than if we insist on an illusory ideal of equality (Moloney, 2006). As Jung (CW14/706) points out, shadow material contains what we need to be whole, if only we can claim it: "This process of coming to terms with the Other in us is well worthwhile, because in this way we get to know aspects of our nature which we would not allow anybody else to show us and which we would never have admitted."

Taking a Jungian approach to public relations, then, would allow the profession to:

(a) Recognise that its dealings with its members and the wider world are not wholly driven by rational reflection, but by forces within its collective field, mostly outside the current consciousness of members or leaders of that profession; thus, despite claims to serve society and enhance democracy, it must be acknowledged that not all public relations activity lives up to that ideal;

(b) Acknowledge the imperfections of the profession, its fallibilities and pretensions (without falling into despair); in particular, the public relations practitioner is often closer to the organisation that employs or contracts him or her and may consciously or unconsciously privilege that interest over the wider demands of society;

(c) Construct a new sense of identity based on a deeper understanding of human failing and aspiration, moving away from the idealised symmetrical communicator based in excellence, or the principled advocate from virtue approaches and recognise that both are contained within the field, often within individuals; and

(d) Recognise the centrality of persuasion to public relations practice and start a profession-wide discussion of what this means for individual practitioners, the organisations that employ them, and society as a whole.

After working on these issues as a practitioner and scholar over several decades and the past seven years writing and reflecting in both thesis and book, I come to the conclusion that, for all the theory and philosophy surrounding professional ethics in general and public relations in particular, the most salient advice I have to offer practitioners is to encourage them to ask – and keep asking – some very simple questions:

• Am I comfortable with this decision? If not, why not? Is it because my pride/self-image/security is threatened or do I fear harm will come from it?
• Am I prepared to raise this discomfort? If not, why not? Am I in a position of power or powerlessness? Am I abusing that position/abdicating responsibility?
• Who do I blame for ethical failures? What does this say about me?
• Is there a "safe" forum for expressing doubts? If not why not?

And if that is too hard, then somewhere in the hurly burly of every day practice, to draw breath, check their own inner responses and have the courage to pause and ask: are we *sure* about this?

9. Conclusion

This study has outlined the principles of a Jungian ethic based in self-awareness generated by engaging with previously hidden aspects of the self, whether in individuals or groups. It has illustrated how Jungian psychology can be applied to organisations, groups and public relations as a profession. It has focused on what challenges this approach presents to

practice, particularly to the profession as a whole, before briefly considering the implications of such an approach for individual practitioners. The central argument is that consciousness activates conscience and conscience activates consciousness; self-knowledge is the pre-condition for an ethical attitude. Jungian psychology is by no means the only avenue available but its application to organisations by others allows for a simple transfer to professions, in this case that of public relations.

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