

Abstract for Disability Stream- ANZCA 2018 Conference. Multiple Realities.

Closing the gap: Challenging organisational norms of inclusion for people with disability and people from a Non-English Speaking Background.

Abstract

This research investigates organisations' ability to be inclusive in their public communication practices. The focus is an organisation known as an exemplar of inclusive practice to identify gaps between Managers' and clients' experiences of being included. This study examines two minority publics¹, those who identify with disability and those who come from a non-English speaking background. These publics, while distinct, share a lack of recognition and representation in organisational communication processes (Thill and Dreher, 2018, Vardemann-Winter, 2011, 2014, Atkin and Rice, 2013). These publics challenge communicators in the design of communication processes, and managers in the development of policy to facilitate their voice and listening capacities. Documenting these processes exposes power relations that place onus on the less powerful to persuade the organisation to include them (Goggin 2009; Weerakkody 2015, Thill, 2015,p.3).

This review is achieved through a case study of a government organisation that has a reputation for valuing multiple perspectives and developing inclusive communication strategies for their publics. Data were gathered from the organisation's documentation and interviews with managers of policies and processes on their perspectives for including these publics. Feedback from the organisation's clients reported on their experience of engaging

¹ In public communication literature, 'public' commonly refers to a group of people who share an interest and know about each other, increasing their power to act (Dewey, 1927, Hallahan, 2007, Smith, 2013).

with the organisation. A thematic analysis of the data isolated themes on inclusion. Themes included: a culture of inclusion; policy development informed by broad consultation that includes the lived experience of the people of focus; and processes established by professionals with expertise to design and promote inclusion beyond their usual publics. An example of an initiative that aimed to include but missed the mark was given by a Manager who described a request by the vision impaired community to access the Sydney New Year's Eve fireworks television coverage. The manager said they provided a commentary on the whole event but the community said "they wanted audio description of the way the fireworks look and explode..." She said they hadn't thought about that type of description and how to achieve it, stating "... it's a learning curve" (Manager, 4 2017). A client identifying with disability and an active member of the organisation's advisory panel agreed that taking on board feedback from people with "lived experience with disability" was key (Client 1, 2017). The organisation drew on the experiences of their clients with 'lived experience' to guide the establishment of communication processes that were accessible. While the process seems common sense, it provides a level of insight that was missed by someone outside that norm of practice that requires attention (Davis, 2006, Vardemann-winter, 2014).

Listening is explored as a process and position for public communicators to obtain and apply feedback to challenge power relations embedded in processes that exclude people who sit outside the organisation's norm of engagement and privilege the more powerful (Vardemann-Winter, 2014, Macnamara, 2016).