

When feelings trump facts

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JMSB research examines how public opinion is formed in the asbestos industry

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When it comes to public opinion, facts cannot trump feelings finds a study commissioned by the Luc Beauregard Centre of Excellence in Communications Research at the John Molson School of Business.

The paper, which looks at the PR lessons that can be learned by examining the Quebec asbestos industry was written by JMSB Lecturer John Aylen. “Individuals tune out facts that do not support their feelings,” says Aylen. He further states that “it is very difficult to build consensus and coalition if the potential parties do not mobilize over a common goal, are not driven by a sense of urgency and are not empowered by a sense of moral superiority.”

The study is one of two that were commissioned by the Centre to better understand coalition-building and the public engagement process around important societal causes and issues.

The second study was written by Joanne Labrecque, an associate professor at HEC Montréal and Philippe Lefèvre, founder and senior partner at Réseau GARP. Its focus is on efficient coalition-building in the Quebec shale gas industry.

The case studies were recently presented at the 2015 national conference of the Canadian Public Relations Society in Montreal and are now available for download in both English and French.

The Luc Beauregard Centre for Excellence in Communications Research was established in 2012 to pay homage to Luc Beauregard, the founder of NATIONAL Public Relations. Its stated mission is to “advance the strategic role of public relations at the highest levels of organizational management and leadership by supporting and promoting applied and innovative research and establishing best practices that can assist and inspire today’s and tomorrow’s senior professionals in all types of organizations.”

“These two research papers are a great example of what the Centre is all about,” says Jordan Le Bel, the Centre’s director. “They were commissioned after the Centre was approached by an expert in the energy field who had grown tired of dead-end debates in our society that basically paralyze or stop discussion on major issues. This is particularly the case when it comes to energy-related matters.”

The Beauregard Centre’s advisory board authorized a special call for proposals and NATIONAL Public Relations’ Calgary office provided additional financial support so that two case studies could be funded.

“These case studies are well aligned with the kind of issue that Mr. Beauregard would have liked to see us tackle,” says Le Bel. “Broad and important issues, at the core of what PR and communications professionals face day in and day out.”