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Philip Morris's Project Sunrise: Weakening Tobacco Control by Working With It

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Abstract

Objective: To analyze the implications of Philip Morris USA's overtures toward tobacco control and other public health organizations, 1995-2006.

Data sources: Internal Philip Morris documents made available through multi-state U.S. Attorneys General lawsuits and other cases, and newspaper sources.

Methods: Documents were retrieved from several industry documents websites and analyzed using a case study approach.

Results: Philip Morris's Project Sunrise, initiated in 1995 and proposed to continue through 2006, was a long-term plan to address tobacco industry delegitimization and ensure the social acceptability of smoking and of the company itself. Project Sunrise laid out an explicit divide-and-conquer strategy against the tobacco control movement, proposing the establishment of relationships with PM-identified "moderate" tobacco control individuals and organizations and the marginalization of others. PM planned to use "carefully orchestrated efforts" to exploit existing differences of opinion within tobacco control, weakening its opponents by working with them. PM also planned to thwart tobacco industry delegitimization by repositioning itself as "responsible". We present evidence that these plans were implemented.

Conclusion: Sunrise exposes differences within the tobacco control movement that should be further discussed. The goal should not be consensus, but a better understanding of tensions within the movement. As the successes of the last 25 years embolden advocates to think beyond passage of the next clean indoor air policy or funding of the next cessation program, movement philosophical differences may become more important. If tobacco control advocates are not ready to address them, Project Sunrise suggests that Philip Morris is ready to exploit them.

Philip Morris's Project Sunrise: Weakening Tobacco Control by Working With It

The isolation and delegitimization of the tobacco industry have been common tobacco control themes over the past decade, bringing together those involved in research, health professions, grassroots and national advocacy, and policy. This approach has taken many forms, including criticizing the industry's manipulation of the scientific process,[1][2] calling for organizations, publications, and scientists to shun tobacco industry funding,[3][4] publicizing the role of the tobacco industry in contributing to the tobacco disease epidemic,[5][6] exposing tobacco industry front groups,[7][8] and persuading institutional investors to divest tobacco stocks.[9][10] The cumulative impact of these and similar efforts has been to contribute to a degree of movement solidarity around a common enemy, negatively affect public opinion about the industry, and reduce the industry's political capital.[11][12] In general, collaboration with the industry has been viewed unfavorably, and advocates who have done so in the attempt to advance pragmatic policy measures have been subject to intense criticism from their peers.[13]

Among tobacco companies, Philip Morris USA (PM) has responded uniquely to its delegitimization by developing its own initiatives aimed at restoring its credibility and achieving a more favorable place in public and policymaker opinion.[14][15][16][17] Corporate philanthropy, social responsibility programs, public messages about the risks of smoking, and partnerships with public organizations are part of these efforts. These types of outreach threaten to undermine delegitimization messages and suggest to the public, market analysts, and policymakers that PM has genuinely changed and is a worthy partner in public health.

In this paper, we discuss a long-term plan developed by PM as part of this effort. Project Sunrise, initiated in 1995 and proposed to continue through 2006, sought to ensure the social acceptability of smoking and of the company itself. To achieve these goals, PM planned explicitly to divide and conquer the tobacco control movement by forming relationships with what it considered “moderate” tobacco control individuals and organizations. Drawing on internal industry documents, we show how PM planned to exploit existing differences of opinion within tobacco control, weakening its opponents by working with them.

Methods

Seven million previously undisclosed internal tobacco industry documents have been made public as a result of litigation against the tobacco industry.[18][19] Between June and October 2005, we accessed these documents online via the Legacy Tobacco Documents Library (<http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu>). We initially identified Project Sunrise documents through work on another inquiry concerned with how the industry has responded to tobacco control initiatives. We retrieved documents through index searches (words found in document titles, authors, etc.); once the Legacy full text demonstration site became available in September 2005, we also conducted full-text searches.

Using a snowball sampling method, we began with broad search terms (“tobacco control”, “Project Sunrise”) and used retrieved documents to identify more specific search terms (names of particular tobacco control organizations, file locations, and reference (Bates) numbers). This process produced nearly 1600 documents; after excluding duplicates and unrelated documents, the final sample size was approximately 600 documents, spanning 1995-2002. We also conducted searches of the newspaper

databases Newsbank and ProQuest Newspapers for evidence of dissemination of PM-authored opinion pieces on tobacco control organizations. We analyzed the documents by assembling them into a chronologically constructed case study.[20][21]

Our study has limitations. The sheer size and poor indexing of the document databases means that we may not have retrieved every relevant document. Some may have been destroyed or concealed by the tobacco companies[22]; others may have never been obtained in the legal discovery process. Project Sunrise was initiated by PM in 1995, before the 1998 legal agreements that made these documents publicly available. However, PM planned to continue this project at least until 2006. Thus, for most of the project's proposed lifespan, PM executives were aware that documents related to it might eventually be made public. As a result, PM's later deliberations may not have been documented or may have been more circumspect, providing a limited view of PM's long-term Sunrise activities.

Background

During the early to mid-1990s, the tobacco industry faced many regulatory, financial, legal, and public relations challenges. These included the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announcement in 1994 that it was considering regulating nicotine as a drug and cigarettes as drug delivery devices, and the initiation of multiple state lawsuits to recover health care costs associated with smoking. Tobacco control had become a movement, with several strong national organizations and a widespread network of savvy, creative grassroots public health activists who increasingly emphasized smoke-free policies and criticizing the industry rather than smoking as an individual health issue.[23, p. 765]

A 1995 presentation apparently authored by PM's vice president of Corporate Affairs Ellen Merlo indicated that the declining social acceptability of smoking "may prove our biggest challenge".[24] To stave off a future in which smokers were reduced to a small, hard core of "downscale" Americans and smoking was a "solitary vice", Corporate Affairs launched a comprehensive, long-term plan, dubbed "Project Sunrise", to lead to the "dawn of a new day" for PM.[24] [25, p. 2] Project Sunrise aimed to address the multiple threats to the company's continued financial success and public credibility.

PM's Sunrise strategists created several scenarios about the future development of the American political, economic, and social landscape, 1996-2006. These scenarios forecast the position of the tobacco industry, the power of the tobacco control movement, the extent of smoking bans, and the social acceptability of smoking.[26] The Sunrise team used these scenarios to create seven overarching strategies necessary for PM to "be prepared for the future however it evolves" (see table).[27][28] PM planned to implement most of these strategies.[29] Although no previous work we could identify has examined Sunrise, other research has already examined PM's extensive research on smoker psychographics and communications,[30][31][32] Accommodation program to fight smoke-free policies,[7] [33][34] promotion of ventilation solutions,[35][36][37] and image makeover.[17] Therefore, we focus here on the company's so-called "Fair Play" strategy to limit the effectiveness of tobacco control and its efforts to reposition PM as a "responsible" company.

Table. PM’s Sunrise Strategies[28] [38][39]

<u>Strategy</u>	<u>Achieved By</u>
Fair Play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researching tobacco control advocates & organizations • Building relationships with “moderate” tobacco control organizations • Diverting and diminishing tobacco control funding • Weakening advocates’ credibility
Position PM as Reasonable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PM21 image makeover campaign
Expand the Smoking Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researching smokers • Building camaraderie among smokers • Creating products & programs to promote social acceptability & reinforce smoking rituals
Create Connections with Smokers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researching communication options (cable or satellite television, radio, internet, direct mail, etc.) • Creating smoker communities
Assure Smoking Places	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanding the Accommodation Program (a program that promoted accommodating smokers in public places) • Creating “Options” website • Creating program to reduce cigarette litter
Minimize Environmental Tobacco Smoke (ETS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting development of ventilation technologies • ETS regulations acceptable to PM • Communicating PM’s accommodation & ventilation views • Creating low side-stream smoke & low odor products
Promote Values that Support Smoking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing coalitions with other industries • Creating programs to “de-demonize” smokers, promote tolerance

In the past, PM and other tobacco companies have worked closely together on multiple initiatives to shore up the industry’s credibility. These included the infamous “Frank Statement”, [23, p. 164] development of voluntary advertising codes, funding of tobacco health risk research through industry organizations, and many other initiatives coordinated through the Tobacco Institute in the U.S. and internationally through ICOSI and other industry-wide organizations.[40] These initiatives rarely distinguished among

tobacco control organizations, opposing tobacco control generally. PM took a new approach with Project Sunrise, attempting to distinguish itself from the rest of the industry and to forge alliances with some tobacco control organizations in order to weaken the movement as a whole.

Fair Play

The goal of the “Fair Play” strategy was to limit the effectiveness of the tobacco control movement, labeled by PM as the “anti-tobacco industry”, the “ATI”, or the “antis”.[28] As John Galletta, a member of PM’s Worldwide Regulatory Affairs department, explained in an email, tobacco control advocates’ activities were “the primary cause of the current regulatory environment as well as a principal reason for the increase in public concern over smoking and in negative sentiment against the tobacco industry”. He regarded this as an extremely important effort, emphasizing that “anything we can do to research and counteract their activities is at the same level as our work on ETS or nicotine”.[41]

A Corporate Affairs document explained that tobacco control organizations drew their strength from “their funding, their credibility in public opinion, and ... their unity. Our primary strategies focus on impacting each of [these] sources of strength”.[42] Joshua Slavitt, policy issues director in PM’s Issues Management department, outlined in a 1996 memo several reasons why tobacco control advocates were potentially vulnerable, including the fact that

[t]he rapid growth in resources, membership and successes has created a sense of invincibility within the ATI that may blind organizations to carefully orchestrated efforts by the tobacco industry and its allies to accelerate turf wars and exacerbate philosophical schisms (smoking and ETS, vs. youth and marketing).[43]

To exploit these vulnerabilities, Slavitt recommended that PM pursue four strategies: 1) intensify research on the tobacco control community; 2) build relationships with “moderate” tobacco control organizations; 3) diminish tobacco control funding; and 4) weaken the credibility of tobacco control organizations and their leadership.[44]

Intensify research

Slavitt regarded gathering information on the composition and objectives of the tobacco control community as essential to the success of Fair Play.[43] Issues Management was already overseeing creation of a database on all tobacco control organizations, intended ultimately to contain biographical information on current and emerging leaders, and a flow chart of organizational relationships.[43] It would also house information on tobacco control organizations’ funding sources, political contributions, advertising, meetings, budgets, policy priorities and plans, and internet, media, and internal communications.[45] Information was to be supplied by PM consultants APCO, Bivings and Woodell, Triad Communications, Richardson Ziebart Consulting, and Fiscal Planning Services.[43] This “competitive intelligence” would improve PM’s ability to respond “proactive[ly] and offensive[ly]” to tobacco control advocates and to rank tobacco control groups from “moderate” to “extreme” in order to facilitate the next stage of the Fair Play strategy.[46, p. 4]

Build relationships

Slavitt recommended that PM’s research on tobacco control organizations be used to form relationships with tobacco control organizations to “enhance our credibility” by working with them on “realistic solutions”. These relationships “with so called

‘moderate’ anti-tobacco groups”, Slavitt argued, would also “disrupt the ATI’s cohesion” by positioning other tobacco control groups as “prohibitionists”.^[45]

Slavitt considered youth access legislation the most promising area of collaboration and suggested that PM offer to fund or establish partnerships with state or local tobacco control organizations working on this issue.^[44] Regardless of the outcome, PM would benefit: if the offer were accepted, PM could advertise this instance of “mutual cooperation”, and if the offer were rejected, “we have an opportunity to question the true agenda of tobacco control advocates”.^[44] Increasing the pressure on tobacco control advocates by questioning their motives would allow PM to “cause additional divisions within the ATP”.^[46]

No documents we located defined what PM considered to be a “moderate” tobacco control organization. However, based on Slavitt’s remarks about “prohibitionists” and the possibility of PM supporting youth access legislation, it seems reasonable to assume that PM would label as moderate tobacco control organizations with a limited, non-industry focused agenda, such as reducing youth smoking through educational efforts. Organizations working to limit youth access to cigarettes might be appealing “moderate” partners for the tobacco industry, given that research has shown that youth access programs do not reduce youth smoking and in fact benefit the tobacco industry.^{[47][48]} Tobacco control organizations working to delegitimize smoking and the industry might be more “extreme” in PM’s view. PM’s negative reaction to industry-focused youth campaigns lends support to this interpretation.^[49] An exchange among Karen Daragan, PM’s director of youth smoking prevention, consultant Jim Lindheim, and Ellen Merlo indicated that the company wanted to publicly claim support for

American Lung Association programs, but only if they were not “anti industry efforts disguised [sic] as youth smoking initiatives”.^{[50][51][52]}.

Successful partnerships with tobacco control organizations to promote passage of youth access legislation, PM managers believed, would likely bring attacks from other tobacco control advocates. An anonymous PM memo outlined a media strategy to limit the effectiveness of these attacks, beginning with “gotcha research”: quotes from tobacco control advocates reflecting their position on these laws.^[53] If opposing advocates called the proposed legislation weak, the memo suggested “refer to quotes from the research that call for elements that are already included in the legislation”, and “explain why the antis proposals/views are extreme” and why the partnership “is acting reasonably and responsibly”.^[53] Focusing on tobacco control advocates’ “extremism” was not new – the Tobacco Institute had recommended in 1991 that tobacco companies “bait anti-tobacco forces to criticize industry [youth smoking prevention] efforts” in order to “focus media attention on antis’ extremism”,^[54] and, during an earlier boycott campaign, positioning leaders as “extremists” was part of the industry’s response.^[55] What was new was the attempt to divide and conquer tobacco control by painting some tobacco control advocates as extreme and others as reasonable.

Slavitt suggested seeking other opportunities to build relationships with tobacco control scientists and advocates.^[44] For example, PM scientists and tobacco control scientists interacted at scientific and professional association meetings; thus, PM scientists could “lend support on non-tobacco issues that may be of interest to anti-tobacco [scientists]”. PM might also support these scientists’ non-tobacco research. In addition, PM’s corporate philanthropy program could build goodwill among anti-tobacco

elected officials and community activists, who might then be willing to “deliver our messages”.[44] Slavitt recommended that PM’s philanthropy focus on education, nutrition programs, or “finding solutions to the real issues affecting children today”, which would “de-link tobacco as a so-called ‘gateway’ to other risky behaviors”.[45]

Ellis Woodward, director of Issues Management, explained to members of PM’s board of directors that, over time, the public would come to distinguish between tobacco control advocates: “After all, their motives range from altruism to outright greed. We will work to divide them along these lines. Some will sit down with us to work on reasonable solutions to the youth smoking problem...Others won’t”.[56] Successfully repositioning tobacco control organizations in this manner would benefit PM in several ways. The credibility of “extreme” groups would be weakened and they would be “force[d] to use some of their resources for self-defense”.[56] This effort would also “create schisms” within the entire tobacco control movement, “forc[ing] [the antis] to fight among themselves”, particularly over the issue of “youth smoking versus prohibition”.[42] [57] This internal conflict would, in turn, “keep [them] from focusing on legislative agenda (sic)”.[57]

PM’s divide and conquer strategy was consistent with strategies developed by occasional PM consultant Mongoven, Biscoe, and Duchin (MBD). In 1991, as described in earlier research,[58] Ron Duchin detailed MBD’s divide and conquer tactics for activist movements: isolate the movement’s radicals, while co-opting the realists, “the pragmatic incrementalists willing to work within the system”.[58] MBD also recommended transforming movement idealists, those with altruistic motives, into realists by pointing out that their advocacy negatively affected some groups.[58]

Diminish funding

Another aspect of the Fair Play strategy was to diminish and divert funding for tobacco control, particularly funding that was supporting (unspecified) activities that “are causing the most harm to the company”.[44] Slavitt recommended several tactics for diminishing funding, including encouraging “friendly” legislators to hold hearings on the efficacy of tobacco control programs and arming them with evidence of “waste” and “abuse”; identifying possible legal action the company could take; creating a coalition to challenge tobacco control programs in the courts or through government oversight agencies; recruiting other industries interested in limiting consumer advocacy organizations’ activities; and creating a coalition to advocate for tougher restrictions on lobbying using public funds.[44] A Sunrise team member explained in an internal presentation that PM intended to encourage federal investigations of tobacco control organizations “on the wrong side of law, as we’ve done with CTFK [Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids]”.[59] (In 1996, Representative Harold Rogers (Republican, Kentucky) urged the Internal Revenue Service to investigate CTFK’s tax exempt status; that same year, the Department of Health and Human Services’ Inspector General audited the American Stop Smoking Intervention Study (ASSIST) at the request of the Appropriations Subcommittee, chaired by tobacco industry allies Representatives Henry Bonilla (Republican, Texas) and Ernest Istook (Republican, Oklahoma)).[60] PM also planned to “identify opportunities to tighten federal and state funding and lobbying requirements that would directly impact the ATI”.[59]

Money also could be diverted. PM and the tobacco industry had been working to divert state tobacco control funding to non-tobacco programs since at least 1990.[61, p.

187][62] Slavitt’s proposal was to mobilize other social activists (i.e., those fighting AIDS, breast cancer, diabetes, Alzheimer’s, etc.) to compete for tobacco control funds and to direct funds to “benign” tobacco-related programs, which, Slavitt pointed out, would require PM to determine acceptable (minimum age law enforcement or youth education)[43] [59] versus unacceptable (health-related research, anti-tobacco advertising, and ASSIST) programs.[43] A Fair Play document explained that

as their funding is squeezed and investigations are launched on potential violations of ... lobbying laws, some ATI advocates may think pragmatically about accepting our offer to work together to address the youth issue.[46]

Weaken credibility

Finally, Fair Play aimed to weaken the credibility of tobacco control advocates “by challenging their so-called ‘white hat’ image with elected officials and the media”, and exposing their true agenda, “prohibition and financial gain”.[44] [59] This was primarily a media strategy that would involve publicizing links between tobacco control and trial lawyers and questioning both the financial motives of voluntary health organizations and the priorities of foundations with tobacco control programs.[45] Slavitt also recommended demonstrating tobacco control advocates’ “extremism” by invoking a slippery slope argument – restrictions on tobacco would be followed by restrictions on alcohol and red meat.[45]

Another tactic was to create a “Truth Squad” to promulgate PM’s point of view in the media and among elected officials “and to highlight instances in which the antis can be revealed as extreme”.[38] [42] Raising public awareness of tobacco “prohibitionism” provided PM with an opportunity to “expand the debate over tolerance for lifestyle

choices and freedoms”, a message that PM had determined was particularly effective with “Gen X-ers”, the post-baby boom generation.[46]

Repositioning PM and Tobacco Control Advocates

A related Sunrise strategy was to “enhance the position of Philip Morris as the reasonable/responsible industry leader and work to give the company a legitimate ‘seat at the table’”. [28] It encompassed three objectives: improved attitudes toward PM; increased company credibility; and establishment of “a foundation of acceptability” for company actions.[25, p. 57] This Sunrise strategy became linked to the company’s 1996 corporate repositioning effort,[25, p. 58] eventually known as “Philip Morris in the 21st Century”, or “PM21”[63] which also focused on an improved company image.[11, pp. 48-49]

PM21 involved repositioning PM as a reasonable and responsible company and repositioning “our opponents”, tobacco control advocates.[11, p. 41] As senior vice president of Corporate Affairs Steve Parrish explained in a presentation to an internal audience, the company intended to “expose” tobacco control advocates as “prohibitionists”, [n]ot just by saying it – which lacks credibility – but, more importantly, but letting them reveal it in their reactions to our ‘reasonable solutions’”(underlining and quotation marks in original).[11, pp. 40-41] He explained that not everyone who was “anti-smoking” was an “extremist”; in an allusion to Fair Play, he stated that PM would try to find common ground with “whomever we can, thereby further isolating those whose true agenda is to drive us out of business”. [11, pp. 41-42] As discussed above, portraying tobacco control advocates as extremists and prohibitionists was not a new

strategy. PM's refinement was to attempt to ally with some tobacco control organizations in order to isolate others.

Evidence of Implementation

Intensify Research

PM appears to have implemented some of these plans. There is considerable evidence of the research aspect of Fair Play. From 1997-1999, PM consultants conducted extensive research on tobacco control organizations, including their mission, leadership, funding sources, tax status, membership, and priorities, and federal and state tobacco control activities.[64][65][66][67][68][69][70][71][72][73][74][75][76] PM consultants also monitored tobacco control advertisements, press conferences, websites, list-serves, and publications.[77][78][79][80][81][82][83][84][85][86][87][88][89][90][91][92][93][94][95][96][97][98] Issues Management fed this information into the "Common Ground" database, searchable by tobacco control issues, groups, people, and television and print advertisements.[99]

Build Relationships

PM used the youth smoking prevention issue to try to build relationships with tobacco control and public health organizations. PM's state government affairs regional directors attempted to "enter into a dialogue" with local offices of the American Heart Association, American Lung Association, and American Cancer Society in 1999; in at least one instance (Ohio), they were rebuffed,[100] although Corporate Affairs reported that "others...have been quite willing to talk about state ysp [youth smoking prevention] programs".[101, p. 17] In 1999, PM representatives also tried to discuss the company's

youth smoking prevention program with a prominent tobacco control funder, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, but were denied a meeting.[102] [103]

In 1998, PM approached the national offices of the youth service organization 4-H with an offer to help fund and design a youth anti-smoking program.[104] The national office accepted the offer, but pressure from tobacco control organizations led many state and local clubs to reject it.[104] A 1999 Corporate Affairs presentation concluded from this incident that PM should “focus our outreach on the grass-roots level rather than the national level...with the hope of leveraging the [local] relationships on the national level in the future. This bubble-up approach, rather than top down, makes it harder for our critics to detect and sabotage”.[101, p. 16]

PM also attempted to avoid detection of its outreach efforts by working through the Institute for Youth Development.[101, p. 17] In 1998, the Institute had solicited funding from tobacco companies, pointing out that although tobacco companies had youth smoking prevention programs, “this approach is suspect by industry critics and the general public because it is seen as neither independent nor unbiased. IYD [Institute for Youth Development] in part provides an effective answer to that dilemma”.[105, p. 18] PM provided funding,[106][107][108] and, in 1999, Corporate Affairs indicated that PM intended to work through the Institute to “implement an outreach plan with different health and medical groups in key states”.[101, p. 17] In Virginia, the Institute had already co-sponsored a youth development conference with the governor and the health department.[101, p. 17] That same year, Shepherd Smith, the president of the Institute, wrote an op-ed piece in *Youth Today*, a newspaper for youth service professionals.[109]

Entitled, “Philip Morris, Yes! Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, No!”, it defended the national 4-H council’s decision to accept PM funding.

PM also made overtures to tobacco control leaders working in the area of harm and risk reduction.[110][111][112] But these overtures sometimes aroused concern and possibly mistrust among tobacco control advocates. For example, in reference to planning a PM-initiated meeting to discuss harm reduction, one tobacco control advocate noted in a 2001 email to PM’s Rick Solana that he might bring another colleague, because “[s]ome of the people I work with are ghastly afraid of me being irredeemably corrupted by walking into the den of PM without a chaperone”.[113]

More recently, PM apparently successfully aligned itself with a tobacco control organization on the issue of U.S. FDA regulation of tobacco. In 2003, despite its previous differences with CTFK, PM reportedly negotiated with CTFK representatives to achieve mutually acceptable terms for FDA legislation.[114] The bill both supported failed to become law, but was the first of its kind to advance to a Senate House conference committee.[115] PM was alone among tobacco companies in supporting the bill. To the dismay of CTFK and the other voluntary health organizations supporting the bill, PM publicly framed its support as evidence of a “partnership” and an effort to work for “reasonable” tobacco control measures, just as Project Sunrise proposed.[116]

Diminish Funding

We found limited evidence of PM’s efforts to diminish funding for tobacco control. In 1997, North Carolina representative Walter Jones urged the Internal Revenue Service to investigate the American Heart and Lung Associations’ political activity; his office provided PM with versions of the letters he sent requesting an

investigation.[117][118] The National Smokers' Alliance, a smokers' rights organization created for PM by the public relations firm Burson Marsteller,[119, p. 1] sued Roswell Park Cancer Institute in 1999 for allegedly violating a federal lobbying law.[120] In 1998, Richardson Ziebart Consulting prepared a report for PM on "waste, fraud, and abuse" in California Proposition 99 expenditures.[121] This initiative had increased the state's tobacco tax and allocated some funding to public health and environmental programs; however, it is not known how PM used this information.

At the federal level, a 1997 memo summarizing PM lawyer Beverly McKittrick's dealings with Congress indicated that "PM consultants do not think we can chop funding for anti-tobacco programs, given the obvious sensitivity of the issue".[122] The "sensitivity" may have been related to efforts then underway to craft through secret negotiations a "global settlement" resolving multiple state attorneys general lawsuits.[13] The company, which was seeking immunity from future litigation, may have been wary of asking for too much from Congress, which would have to approve such a deal. However, McKittrick indicated that PM would continue to work with Representatives Istook and Bonilla on the purported use of ASSIST funds for lobbying purposes.

Weaken Credibility

To weaken the overall credibility of tobacco control, PM created a communications team in 1998 to direct media attention to the "extremist" organizations.[123] Team documents were primarily plans; it is unclear how many were actually implemented. The team's first task was to "gather ammunition" on tobacco control organizations; next, they planned to arrange market research to determine the most effective means of communicating the extremism message.[123] This research

would identify tobacco control activities or policies that the public considered extreme, measure the impact of the industry's prohibition message, uncover "stereotypes we may be able to capitalize on", and determine whether public opinion even mattered.[123][124] The team intended to rely on third party allies such as public policy, taxpayer, smokers' rights, and "pro-choice/tolerance" groups to send the "extremism" message using PM-supplied materials and training.[123]

Fair Play plans had also called for diminishing public support for tobacco control organizations by publicizing their links to trial lawyers. Since the early 1990s, PM had provided funding to the "grassroots" organization Citizens Against Lawsuit Abuse (CALA) to weaken trial lawyers and promote "tort reform," which would also make it more difficult to sue the industry.[125][126][127] However, we found no direct evidence in the documents or in newspaper databases of CALA or PM linking trial lawyers to "extremist" tobacco control advocates.

The document archives do contain what appear to be PM-authored op-eds and articles on tobacco control advocates' purported extremism, poor research, misinformation, and million dollar budgets.[128][129][130][131] A search of local and national newspapers from 1997-2005 revealed that apparently none were yet published, although the *San Antonio Express-News* published a National Smokers' Alliance op-ed containing ideas similar to those in the PM archives regarding the quality of tobacco control policy research.[132]

The Success of PM's Repositioning Effort

Because so many factors may influence public opinion, it is impossible to appraise definitively the success of Project Sunrise in this area. However, it is worth

noting changes in public opinion toward PM since implementation of Project Sunrise. In 1993, PM's opinion research showed that Americans had a highly negative view of the company, giving it an average favorability rating of 32.7 (on a scale of 0 (least favorable) to 100 (most favorable)).^[133] In 1999, Americans continued to view PM negatively, with only 23% having a favorable impression of the company.^[134] However, by the next year, this percentage had jumped to 39%.^[134] This increase was fueled by 18-34 year olds, whose favorable estimation of PM grew by 26 percentage points during the period (from 19 to 45%).^[134] By December 2000, more young adults viewed PM favorably (45%) than unfavorably (34%).^[134]

In January, 2004, the most recent year for which PM polling data are available, 58% of Americans agreed that the tobacco industry was acting more responsibly than in the past.^[135] In addition, many Americans distinguished PM from other tobacco companies; 41% agreed that PM was more responsible than other companies.^[135] Among 25-34 year olds, 65% agreed that the tobacco industry was behaving more responsibly, and 43% agreed that PM was more responsible than other tobacco companies.^[135]

Exporting Project Sunrise

PM conducted Project Sunrise scenario forecasting sessions in several other countries, including Mexico, France, Germany, and, more broadly, the European Union.^{[136][137][138][139]} Hong Kong, Japan, Italy, and Greece were also considered as possible sites.^{[140][141][142]} Available documents provide few details regarding Project Sunrise's progression in each country, or whether the proposed social acceptability strategies included something akin to Fair Play. However, PM's French

Project Sunrise strategies included plans to “develop and implement actions to limit the impact of the Anti’s on government policies”.^[137]

Discussion

This review of PM documents shows that PM initiated in 1995 a plan to undermine tobacco control by creating and/or exploiting divisions among its tobacco control opponents. We do not know whether the plan is currently in operation, although the project was intended to continue until 2006. Documents specifically mentioning Fair Play or Project Sunrise end in 2000. Other initiatives, such as PM’s corporate social responsibility efforts, launched in 2000, may have expanded upon or superseded some or all of Project Sunrise’s strategies.^[15] Nevertheless, it is timely to consider the implications of PM’s Project Sunrise for tobacco control.

PM’s repositioning, and the corporate social responsibility initiatives being pursued by some other companies,^{[143][144]} may be exposing unarticulated value conflicts within the tobacco control movement. With recent successes, including passage of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and entire states and nations approving meaningful, non-preemptive smoke-free legislation, advocates have begun to consider what an ultimate goal for tobacco might be.

For some within tobacco control, the long-term existence of the tobacco industry as a profitmaking business is accepted as an unfortunate given, and tobacco control should seek to reduce use and create less harmful tobacco products. Others see reduction in use as a means to the end of making the industry “vector” smaller, less powerful, and less profitable. They may focus on measures such as smoke-free policies, cessation programs, and prevention. For still others, the ultimate aim of tobacco control efforts

should be to eliminate the industry as we know it or to restructure the tobacco market, establishing a not-for-profit tobacco supply monopoly, mandated to encourage gradual declines in tobacco consumption.[145]

These underlying differences in long-term goals suggest very different positions about the desirability and purpose of working with tobacco companies. For example, advocates of the harm reduction approach may view the industry as an essential source of scientific knowledge about tobacco products. Some of those advocating demand reduction measures may feel that given the industry's political power, a pragmatic engagement is necessary at times to achieve policy goals. Others see industry delegitimization as the key element of the success of tobacco control programs. Along with those advocating the phasing out of the for-profit tobacco industry, they may see their goals as fundamentally antithetical to industry interests; thus, working with the industry may be regarded as a betrayal of their principles.

The fact that PM considers collaborations with “moderate” tobacco control organizations useful to its objective of increasing the social acceptability of smoking and disempowering tobacco control should raise a red flag for all advocates. Those considering any cooperation with PM must do so assuming that the company intends to exploit the partnership in order to damage other segments of tobacco control, and tobacco control overall. Furthermore, it seems likely that PM could exploit tobacco control partnerships with other tobacco companies in the same way.

PM sought to strip some tobacco control advocates – those who rejected its offer of partnership – of public credibility by characterizing them as extremists. However, PM also recognized that its actions would likely create dissent within tobacco control.

Disagreements such as these are perhaps inevitable; whether they are destructive, and play into PM's plan, or handled in such a way as to maintain the overall unity of tobacco control depends on tobacco control advocates.

Transparency and dialogue are key to maintaining a unified, healthy, and vigorous movement that includes many individuals and organizations working at multiple levels. It is unrealistic and possibly counterproductive to expect tobacco control advocates to come to unanimous agreement about the ultimate goal of the movement (and hence the advisability of working with the industry). Tobacco control may be more powerful in the short-term if it does not continuously debate future goals, but focuses on immediate objectives. However, leaving these differences unarticulated makes it easier for PM or other companies to exploit them, as one group's reasons for working with or rejecting the industry out of hand may be misunderstood by other advocates.

Perhaps the tobacco control movement needs to deliberately make space for these discussions in a context in which it is appropriate to look toward the future. The goal should be not to reach consensus, but to reach a better understanding of these ongoing tensions within the movement as a whole. As the successes of the last 25 years embolden advocates to think beyond passage of the next clean indoor air policy or funding of the next cessation program, these philosophical differences may become more important. If tobacco control advocates are not ready to address them, Project Sunrise suggests that Philip Morris is ready to exploit them.

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What this paper adds

A large literature has documented the tobacco industry's attempts to thwart effective tobacco control measures. However, fewer studies have examined the industry's strategies for dealing directly with the tobacco control movement.

This study details Philip Morris's Project Sunrise, a long-term plan initiated in 1995 to carry the company through 2006. Its Fair Play strategy involved exploiting divisions among tobacco control advocates and "carefully orchestrated" attempts to build relationships with "moderate" tobacco control organizations on issues it favored, while marginalizing others it considered "extreme". Through this plan, PM planned to enhance its reputation as a "reasonable and responsible" company. Internal tobacco control debates about working with the tobacco industry to achieve public health goals should include discussion of how such collaborations might advance the goals of Project Sunrise.

Competing Interests

The corresponding author owns one share of Altria stock for advocacy purposes. The other authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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