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Communication Management, Public Affairs and Public Relations: Building Trust and Equity

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Dear colleagues

We can all agree that BledCom 2003 was truly a special event. The informal gathering of scholars and practitioners in public relations from all over the world celebrated its 10th anniversary. Over the years BledCom symposium proved to be an important event for exchanging ideas in lively debates and presenting research and different theses in broad area of public relations. But most of all, BledCom presents an opportunity for meeting new people and making true friends. And that is what BledCom is all about.

BledCom 2003 addressed an important issue of building trust and equity. The theme - Communication Management, Public Affairs and Public Relations: Building Trust and Equity - was initiated by the events over the past years, which had damaged confidence and trust in the world’s financial systems and the integrity of business leaders. Events at that time have also shown that in times of economic downturn, uncertainty and cost containment, public relations and public affairs activities are cut back and practitioner numbers reduced. Therefore the second topic area of BledCom 2003 theme - building equity - raised questions about value of public relations and public affairs. The participants of BledCom 2003 discussed opportunity for public relations and public affairs, which emerge from loss of confidence and trust in financial systems, major companies and other organizations as well as in leadership. They also discussed what communication management, public relations and public affairs could really contribute in terms of development of relationship and social capital, or in terms of commercial and organizational value. More than 25 speakers presented their views on the theme.

It is impossible to put all pleasant experiences of BledCom into our introduction. It is also impossible to describe all the ideas and view, generated and presented in our meetings. So let the papers, presented on the following pages, tell you the story about BledCom 2003. We hope they will remind you of many ideas, born in interesting debates, we all engaged in.

Dear colleagues, we wish you a pleasant reading of BledCom’s 2003 proceedings. We hope you will join us in many more BledCom gatherings in years to come.

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Communication management, public affairs and public relations: building trust and equity
by Dejan Verčič

Abstract

The paper examines how does availability of information on a company in the mass media affect public’s trust toward that company, how does awareness of a company affect people’s trust toward that company and how does the trust people have in a company affect that company’s financial performance. Relationships were analyzed based on time-series data on media coverage, public opinion and performance for British Airways, Shell and the Post Office in the period between 1970 and 1996. The three companies were equally increasing their profitability as a measure of their performance during the analyzed period, but they had different trends in public opinion valuation, which was not affected by the media coverage.

For that reason, hypotheses on linear relationships between familiarity, favourability and performance are rejected.

Communication management, public affairs and public relations: building trust and equity

In organisational literature, trust is often referred to as ‘reputation’ (c.f. Bromley 1993; Dasgupta 1988; Fombrun and van Riel 1997; Lipset and Schneider 1983), although some authors make a distinction between the two terms in that trust is between two parties - trustor and trustee, while reputation includes a third party which by observing the trustee's behaviour performs a controlling function (Sanner 1997). But the addition of a third party contributes little to our understanding of trust towards companies - "trusting beliefs" and "beliefs in reputation" (Lazaric and Lorenz 1998) belong to the same concept of attitude. Bromley (1993: 3) identified three basic features of reputation as (1) beliefs about an object, (2) the extent and distribution of those beliefs and (3) the evaluation of the object and associated attributes. Evaluation differentiates reputation from a nearly identical concept of ‘public image’ which is "a fairly neutral term" (p. 6). Bromley's definition of reputation, in being composed of belief and evaluation components, fits into the concept of trust as attitude.

How do reputations (i.e., the trust people place in companies) develop? In communication management literature, there seems to be a wide agreement that reputations are based on awareness of, or familiarity with an entity (Fombrun 1996; Gainess-Ross 1997; Gregory 1997; Worcester 1997). The more people know about companies, the more familiar they are with them, the more they trust them. This is a non-obvious assertion, because, logically, familiarity is a precondition for both trust and mistrust (Luhmann 1979). While there is an agreement between authors on reputation that trust depends on familiarity, there is less agreement on how familiarity develops. Gainess-Ross (1997) and Gregory (1997) found that corporate advertising positively influences both the awareness and the overall impressions (favourability) that people have on companies. Deephouse (1997) proposed that media representations, how companies are reported in editorial space, affect reputations, and found that companies with higher media reputations have higher performance. Fombrun (1996: 187), on the other hand, found that corporate advertising affects reputations positively, while media visibility affects reputations negatively.

In this paper, we investigate the mass media reports and the awareness people have of companies as possible antecedents of their trust in companies: How does the quantity of media reports on a company affect trust in it? How does media favourability (quantity and valence, positive vs. negative, of media reports) on a company affect trust in it? How does people's awareness or familiarity with a company affect their trust in it?

There also seems to be a general agreement between authors on reputation, that reputation, used as a synonym for trust, has a direct, positive effect on organisational performance. As Bromley (1993: 157) observed, "[t]here appears to be considerable interdependence between performance and reputation, with mutual positive feedback." Companies that are trusted perform better than those which are not and higher reputation equals higher performance (Deephouse 1997; Fombrun, 1996; Gainess-Ross 1997; Gregory 1997). So, our question is, how do levels of trust influence organisational performance?

Trust and reputation as hypothetical constructs

Trust is a hypothetical construct. As such, it is not directly observable. Both laymen and scientists infer it (its presence or absence, and its magnitude) from observable responses of people to certain observable stimuli. This is presented in Figure 1.

Inclusion of behavioural predictability into a definition of trust is wrong. As Gambetta (1988) demonstrated on a case study of the Italian Mafia, behavioural predictability can be as easily a result of mistrust as of trust. Many authoritarian governments had achieved
high behavioural predictability for their subjects using different types of “deterrents”, but it would be wrong to describe such regulated societies as high in trust. Any definition of trust that includes behavioural predictability as a necessary condition, precludes itself to distinguish between trust and its negation, distrust.

Inclusion of behaviour into a definition of trust also mixes up the concept with its possible antecedent and/or consequence. Trust as a hypothetical construct is used to explain behaviour as its possible outcome; therefore, trust precedes behaviour - there is a lagged relationship between them (Sako 1998). There also seem to be different thresholds of trust for specific behaviours. Moingeon and Edmondson (1998) gave the following example: Bill asked John to borrow his computer. John denied the request. When Mary, who observed their conversation, later questioned Bill on his behaviour, he replied that he did not trust John. But if John had asked for a pencil, Bill would had lent it. The two behaviours - lending a computer and lending a pencil - seem to have two different thresholds of trust. We can add that the behaviour (lending a computer) could still be enacted if both Bill and John were to have a superior who ordered John to lend the computer to Bill. John would in that cases probably do so, but still not trust Bill. As Dupuy and Torre (1998: 144) said: “The fact that a threat can lead to cooperation shows that trust and cooperation should be clearly distinguished.”

Trust as a hypothetical construct is needed to mediate between one behaviour as a category of possible stimuli (with cognition and affect being the other two) and another behaviour as a possible response (with cognition and affect again being the other two). The assumption that trust as an inner mental state is a mediating mechanism between antecedent and consequent behaviour has been questioned on the grounds that a probability to respond to certain stimuli could be a direct measure of one’s trust (c.f., Skinner 1974: 133) - but in previous paragraphs we have shown that several variables constitute a process that unfolds over time, then there is a good reason to design longitudinal research to study the process.” (Monge, 1995: 270.)

We need a methodology and data that would enable us to extract variables and observe relationships between them through time. Since trust is attitude and attitudes in a population are most commonly studied with public opinion polls (on opinions as verbalised attitudes see Price 1992, 46-49), we decided to search for a public opinion time series data that could serve for our basic unit of analysis (as time series data on trust in a population) and for a methodology that would enable us to analyse the relationships we are interested in. This initial decision was supported by the students of trust who already acknowledged a need to study the phenomenon longitudinally (c.f. Sanner 1997, 204-205: “Some of the studies [of the trust phenomenon] come to the conclusion that longitudinal studies would be a natural extension of their study...”) and students of public opinion phenomenon as well. Noelle-Neumann (1989) stated that:

“The extension of trends in survey research increases the possibilities of establishing covariation by using mathematics to determine the connection between these trends and other data from official statistics, statistics from industry and social research” (p.150).

This is exactly the approach taken in this paper to the search for the data and for the methodology to treat them. The following steps were subsequently executed:

1. first, we identified the population we are interested in and we decided it to be the population of the UK (based on the convenience principle);

Antecedents and consequences of trust

The central concept of this paper is the concept of trust: how trust toward a company develops as a consequence of the mass media reports, as a consequence of awareness of that company in a population and how trust toward a company in a population affects that company’s performance. We are interested in changes in the levels of trust in a population as a consequence of changes in the mass media reports and changes in a population’s awareness of a company and how changes in the levels of trust effect changes in company’s performance. The notions of a ‘consequence’ and of an ‘effect’ logically and empirically relate to the notion of change. The notion of change, however; gets its meaning only through the notion of time (Granger 1969). For that reason the appropriate research method for testing our hypotheses must be capable of longitudinal analysis - analysis of data collected at different points of time. “If theory specifies that several variables constitute a process that unfolds over time, then only through the notion of time (Pettigrew 1995). Time structures possibilities for any claims about causality (Granger 1969).

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1. first, we identified the population we are interested in and we decided it to be the population of the UK (based on the convenience principle);
second, we searched for longitudinal public opinion data on trust towards companies - and we found it in the MORI ‘Corporate Image’ studies which are carried since 1970;

third, within the database we searched for companies that have different trends of the trust term through time - rising, falling and no trend - and were included in the survey at least fifteen times - to give us enough observations to analyse quantitatively;

fourth, after identifying the companies we searched for a mass media database that included those companies to extract data on media exposure - we found it in the Reuters Business Briefing database;

fifth, we found the data on the awareness of the population polled in the MORI ‘Corporate Image’ studies on the focal companies in the same public opinion database; and

sixth, we asked the companies to provide us with the official statistics on their profitability since 1970.

The data collection procedure described above already implies research design: it is based on a longitudinal public opinion poll time series conducted on representative samples of the population of the UK. Other variables we consider are also organised as time-series data.

The full description of the data, models and hypotheses, methodology and empirical results was given in VerËiË (2000).

Pattern matching of extreme cases

Although our unit of analysis is a poll, we are also interested in testing the hypotheses on the behaviour of real organisations which serve as trust-objects in the opinion measurement process. To do this, we decided to select some organisations (we concluded that three were enough for our purpose) and observe the data in relation to them. We follow Yin’s (1993: 39) suggestion to search for ‘pattern matching’ processes and Eisenhardt’s (1995: 72) suggestion to “chose cases such as extreme situations and polar types in which the process of interest is “transparently observable.” “We can postulate three such patterns for the elaboration of trust in a population through time: an increase in people’s trust through time, a decline in people’s trust, and no change in the level of people’s trust in the years that are included in the research. And as not every organisation was included in every MORI ‘Corporate Image’ survey, we have to add an additional criterion, that we have to find an organisation for every pattern type with enough observations to allow us a quantitative analysis. This rule was operationalised in a request for at least fifteen inclusions in the survey since 1970.

McDowall, McCleary, Meidinger, & Hay (1980: 19) define trend as “any systematic change in the level of a time series process.” After preliminary analysis of the available data (a list of organisations included in MORI ‘Corporate Image’ studies and the frequency of their participation through the years), we chose three organisations that fit into our postulated pattern-types almost exactly. They are British Airways, The Post Office and Shell.

Figure 3 presents sequence charts (red, green and blue line) for the trust terms for British Airways, the Post Office and Shell between 1970 and 1996. The horizontal axis represents time in years. The vertical axis represents the values of the trust indicator: percentages of respondents who said that they are very or mainly favourable towards the focal organisation. The red sequence chart belongs to the British Airways, the green to the Post Office, and the blue one to Shell.

‘Corporate Image’ survey results show no apparent trend in trust in British Airways, an increase of trust in The Post Office, and a decline of trust in Shell between 1970 and 1996. Therefore, we can select these three organisations to be the trust-objects in our analysis.
Research questions and hypotheses

The research questions addressed in this paper are:

1. How does availability of information on a company in the mass media affect people's trust toward that company?
2. How does awareness of a company affect people's trust toward that company?
3. How does the trust people have in a company affect that company's (financial) performance?

To formally address the research questions we formed five hypotheses (for their theoretical exposition see Verčič 2000):

Hypothesis 1: Trust toward a company is a function of media exposure.

Hypothesis 2: Trust toward a company is a function of media favourability.

Hypothesis 3: Trust toward a company is a function of the trustor's awareness.

Hypothesis 4: Company's performance is a function of trust (favourability).

Hypothesis 5: Company's performance is a function of trust (awareness x favourability).

Operationalisation

Media exposure

Media exposure is operationalised as stories Reuters ran on the focal companies between 1988 and 1997 and as stored in the Reuters Business Briefing database (also available for subscribers on the Internet at the address: http://www.briefing.reuters.com). Three variables are extracted from the data base for each company. The first variable captures media exposure and is measured as the sum of stories per each year on each company (trust-object) under investigation. The second and the third variables were obtained through content analysis and capture two possible measures of quantity and valence of media reports. For each company we divided stories into those reporting "business as usual" (following Garfinkel's, 1963: 193, suggestion that "[t]he concept of trust is related to the concept of perceivably normal environments") and those reporting exceptional events (industrial action, fall of profits, protests against the company, etc.) - for the Post Office on all stories (N = 239), while stories on British Airways (N = 5402) and Shell (N = 27,114) were sampled, 20 stories were taken per year on proportional cycles, 200 for each company for 10 years.

Such operationalisation of media favourability as represented in negative stories enabled us to code the variable with only two values, positive and negative. This is particularly convenient in our case in which our data were raw stories in the electronic database and we were unable to consider the media context in which they were presented (on which page, in what size, whether there was a photograph with a text, etc.) - and it is precisely this contextual information that enables coders to give media content a more fine-grained evaluation. Since we were denied of this contextual information we decided to divide all the stories between those reporting 'normal environments' and those stories reporting something that was identified as not 'normal' (from the perspective of a potential reader of a story about a company). That way we also did not have to solve the problem of dividing stories reporting 'normal environments' between those reporting them 'neutrally' and those reporting them 'positively' (for which we would also need to consider weighting). So, we believe that - in the absence of the possibility of a high-grained analysis and when the variable can be coded only in a few categories - the amount of negative stories is a better measure of media favourability than the amount of all other stories (although, literally, the measure reports 'unfavourability' and not 'favourability'; yet we decided to keep the label 'favourability' for this variable because of a convention, the same way we later label the financial measure 'profitability' even though there are losses reported under that label as well).

We operationalised the concept in two variables - one expressing the relative and one the absolute number of negative stories on a focal company. The variable of absolute number of negative stories is based directly on Garfinkel's logic that reports of negative stories might be a more powerful antecedent of consequent changes in the levels of trust than positive stories. The variable of relative number of negative stories in the total amount of stories is a counter-check in that it puts those negative stories in the perspective of all stories: the changes in the percentages of negative stories are symmetrical to the changes of positive stories (e.g. a five percent increase of negative stories is a five percent decrease in positive stories and vice versa). For that reason the observed changes in the percentages of negative stories are the same as if we would observe changes in the percentages on non-negative stories (the only difference between them is the direction, not the amount of change).

After coding and counting negative stories, we decided to form two variables for media favourability (the quantity and valence of media reports) - one expressing the relative number of stories (percentage of negative stories in the census or sample). The second variable expresses the absolute numbers of negative stories per year which are calculated from the total number of stories per year and percentages of negative stories as captured in the sample for British Airways and Shell.

The author did the original coding and a colleague was asked to code all articles on Shell. She independently coded 200 articles, which is 31.45 per cent of the total amount of coded articles. Intercoder reliability was calculated with Holsti's formula (Broom and Dozier 1990: 165-168; Wimmer and Domibnick 1983: 173) and was 0.92.

Awareness

For the purpose of testing the hypotheses presented in the previous chapter, awareness is operationalised as perceived knowledge of the focal companies as reported by respondents in the MORI 'Corporate Image' polls (i.e. familiarity). These reports came yearly on 23 instances for British Airways, 21 instances for Shell and 28 instances for The Post Office. The variable entered into the analysis consists of those who had said that they "know very well" or "know a fair amount" - separately for each of the three companies.

Trust

Trust is operationalised as reported favourability on the focal companies by respondents in the MORI 'Corporate Image' poll (N=28, yearly) who are familiar with them (those who said they "know very well" those companies or "know a fair amount" about them;
in its survey MORI doesn’t ask respondents to evaluate companies with which they are not familiar - which is logical. The variable entered into the analysis consists of those who had said that they are “very favourable” or “mainly favourable” - separately for each of the three companies.

Here we have to note that what respondents are asked about is not the trust itself, but favourability. Authors of the original questionnaire clearly define the responses to indicate ‘trust’ and that for authors of the original questionnaire the variable therefore measures ‘trust’ (see Worcester 1997).

Performance
For the purpose of the test of our model presented in the previous chapter we operationalise organisational performance as the absolute level of profits reported by each of the companies for the years included in the analysis. The data on profitability of British Airways are the absolute numbers of reported pre-tax profits in millions of British Pounds from 1975 to 1996 and were provided by their Investor Relations Office. The data on profitability of the Post Office are absolute numbers of the overall profits as reported in their reports and accounts in millions of British Pounds from 1972 to 1996 and were provided by the Chairman’s Office. The data on profitability of Shell are the absolute numbers of the net income for each year for the whole Royal Dutch/Shell Group of Companies in millions of British Pounds as reported in their brochures, Financial and Operational Information (Shell s.a.; Shell s.a.; Shell s.a.; Shell s.a.; Shell s.a.; Shell s.a.). Because we observe different profitability levels for each company separately through time and not comparatively between companies, we do not have to consider differences in their accounting and reporting procedures. (There is, however, one problem with their accounting and reporting procedures which we do not control for: changes in accounting and reporting procedures that might have been implemented within the same company at different points in time.)

The shortest stream of profitability data is that for British Airways and it is 25 years long. In the business literature, time-span above 10 years is considered as strategic, long-term domain (c.f. Jacques, 1992: 20-21). Although short-term profitability (e.g. one year) data are subject to board-level, managerial and accounting decisions, our data report long-term profitability.

Organisational performance is a multidimensional concept that can hardly be captured in any single measure and from several aspects it can be argued that financial results are not a decisive indicator of organisational performance, not even for profit-oriented companies. However, that argument is beyond the scope of this paper.

Analysis
We assumed the functional relationships between the variables in the model: “A functional relationship is thus a statement (often in the form of an equation) of how one variable, called the dependent variable, depends on the other variables, called independent variables.” (Schoedler, Sjoquist, & Stephan, 1986: 11). For testing of that kind of the relationship, “regression analysis is a general data-analytic system that most readily suits” (Nachmias, 1979: 11) our need for its evaluation. Since we are interested in establishing the relationships between the variables through the time, we have to apply the time series regression technique (Ostrom 1990) and the series (a set of observations obtained by measuring a single variable regularly over a period of time - in regular, known intervals, over a certain length of time) plays for us the role of a variable (SPSS, 1994: 11).

Regression analysis does not prove causation (Schroeder et al., 1986: 22); we accept this from theoretical premises developed in the hypotheses chapter where we also characterised the relationships to be linear.

The steps taken in our empirical analysis can be summed as follows:
1. we tested each time series (variable) for trend with curve estimation procedure for linearity through time,
2. after conducting raw data presentation, we moved to testing for relationships as specified by our hypotheses, but before conducting a linear regression analysis we checked for lags at which relationships are the strongest with the cross-correlation procedure,
3. after defining the lag we tested the hypotheses with linear regression analysis, controlling for autoregression in each case.

Values of the trust term for British Airways are realised non-linearly through time - they form no trend through time (p = .143). Values of the trust term for Shell form a trend through time (p = .000). The linear regression equation explains 77.9 percent of the total variance of the trust term. Values of the trust term for the Post Office form a trend through time (p = .000). (The linear regression equation explains 69.1 percent of the total variance of the trust term.) Trust toward British Airways in the population of the UK is on the long-term staying around its middle value, trust toward Shell is declining and trust toward The Post Office is rising. These three different trends are the benchmark against which we observed all other variables we explored.

The values of the media exposure indicator for British Airways are realised linearly through time - they form a trend through time (p = .000). Linear regression equation explains 83.9 percent of the total variance of the media exposure term. The values of the media exposure indicator for Shell are realised linearly through time - they form a trend through time (p = .000). Linear regression equation explains 90.7 percent of the total variance of the media exposure term. The values of the media exposure indicator for The Post Office are realised linearly through time - they form a trend through time (p = .051). The linear regression equation explains 39.8 percent of the total variance of the media exposure. The weaker linearity is due to a strong outlier in 1994 (privatisation debate in its peak). The mass media exposure indicators for the three trust-object companies have the same pattern through time; there is a rising trend for the numbers of stories for all three companies. It is therefore legitimate to say that the three time series have the same rising trend through time.

There is no trend in the absolute media favourability series for British Airways (p = .239). There is no trend in the relative media favourability series for British Airways (p = .947). There is a trend in the absolute media favourability series for Shell (p = .014). The linear regression equation explains 55.1 percent of the total variance of the term. There is no trend in the relative media favourability series for Shell (p = .392). There is no trend in the absolute media favourability series for the Post Office (p = .362). There is no trend in the relative media favourability series for the Post Office (p = .082).

Values of the awareness term for British Airways form a rising trend through time (p = .000) - the linear slope is going upwards from left to right and its value is positive. The linear regression equation explains 69.7 percent of the total variance of the aware-
All five of our hypotheses were rejected. (For full details see VerČiÊ 2000.)

Thirdly, after determining the lag at which we were to observe a relationship, we again estimated a linear regression as it was a formal hypothesis-testing instrument.

Fourthly, we drew pairs of sequence charts for the variables to visually check our results.

All five of our hypotheses were rejected. (For full details see VerČiÊ 2000.)

Discussion, limitations, and conclusions

This paper reported on trends in time-series data on media coverage, public perception and profitability for three companies. The five hypotheses were tested:

1. trust toward a company is a function of media exposure;
2. trust toward a company is a function of media favourability;
3. trust toward a company is a function of people’s awareness of that company;
4. organisational performance is a function of the trust people have in that company, with trust operationalised as favourability;
5. organisational performance is a function of trust people have in that company, with trust operationalised as a product of awareness and favourability.

A two-step test of the hypotheses was performed on the three organisations. First we investigated trends in their media exposure, media favourability, awareness and performance results though time and compared them with trends that we identified in their trust results for the same period - between the early seventies and the late nineties. For three of the four measures we were comparing with trust we identified trends - for media exposure, awareness and performance, but they were the same rising trends for all three variables and all three organisations. For media favourability we found only one trend in the variables we have formed for that concept. On the basis of an overview of trends in the time series data it was possible to conclude two things: first, there are three common factors for all three organisations that generate common trends in media exposure, awareness and profitability which are unrelated to trust, and second that, because of that, it is highly unlikely that the relationships from our hypotheses could be confirmed. In the second part of our hypothesis testing procedure we performed linear regression estimations for the assumed relationships between trust and the other series under investigation and our doubt from the first part of the analysis was confirmed - all hypotheses were refuted.

There are several limitations one needs to consider when interpreting such a result. The first is a conceptual and operational one. The terms used might be weakly or wrongly conceptualised and/or operationalised. The second is a methodological. Subjects, samples and methods can be questioned. Yet, the results open several interesting questions that are worth further study.

First, relations between media coverage, public perceptions and financial performance of companies need to be studied over longer periods of time. Second, extreme cases need to be examined for their heuristic value. For example, what are relations between media coverage of the US tobacco companies, their reputation(s) in the US and their profitability (and other financial indicators). Or: what are relations between media coverage of dotcom companies, their reputation(s) and financial indicators over the past three
decade (before, during and after the bubble). And third: a better understanding of compatibility between different measures need to be achieved - what is the use of measuring public opinion in the UK for a company like Shell in relation to Shell's financial performance (if, for example, Shell makes five percent or less of its profits in the UK)?

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In 2000 he received a special award by the Public Relations Society of Slovenia for his contributions to the development of public relations practice and research, and in 2001 he was awarded the Alan Campbell-Johnson Medal for outstanding service to international public relations by the UK Institute of Public Relations.

Since 1994 he annually organizes the Lake Bled International Public Relations Research Symposium. He has published six books and over two hundred articles, chapters, papers, and reports. His most recent publication is a book he co-edited with K. Srinamesh, The Global Public Relations Handbook: Theory, Research, and Practice (2003).

Dr. Verčič is president of the Euprera - The European Public Relations Education and Research Association.
Public Trust: theory and empirical results in Germany

by Günter Bentele

Aims of the proposed paper

The paper would have the following two aims:

1. to present the basic concepts of a “theory of public trust” which I developed (and published) in 1992 and worked out during the following years
2. to present some empirical data (coming out of representative surveys) about public trust in institutions (like business corporations, political parties, governments, etc.), in prominent persons (politicians, CEOs; journalists) and in social systems (economic system, political system) concerning Germany. Some of the surveys regularly are conducted by opinion research centers, I commissioned myself four representative surveys in Berlin and Saxony.

Relevance of public trust and some basic theoretical concepts

Through the social process of “mediatization” (= the media system forces other social systems to work at least partially after the “logic” of the media system) social “mechanisms” of (public) trust becomes more and more important. We regularly can observe in our societies “trust crises” in which a partly dramatical drop in the measured trust values can be seen. It always takes much time and money to regain similar trust levels as before. Public Relations is seen as the most important tool/process not only to build trust, but also to maintain and to rebuild trust.

I define “public trust” basically (similar to Luhmann) as a social “mechanism” of public communication which helps to reduce (social) complexity. Public trust is directed towards the future but at the same time based on passed experiences. In relation to four trust theories (Luhmann, Coleman, Barber, Giddens) I basically distinguish between four types of trust: basic (personal) trust, public personal trust, public institutional trust and public system trust.

I also distinguish basic elements in the trust process which are constitutive: trustor; trustee; trust mediators, but also (which often is forgotten) facts and events, which also have important influences. Positive trust values (which can be measured empirically) or processes of trust decline are influenced by certain trust factors, that means elements of communicative behaviour of persons or institutions which can be observed by the trustors. Trust factors can be seen similar as news factors (which constitute news values). Important trust factors are (high or low) expertness, problem-solving competence, communication adequacy, communicative consistency, transparency, communicative openness, social responsibility, ethics of responsibility in a more or less intensive specification. Publicly perceivable communicative discrepancies are seen as the basic cause for losses of trust.

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Günter Bentele, born 1948, is full professor at the university of Leipzig and holds the first chair for public relations in Germany. He is author, co-author, editor and co-editor of 23 books, he wrote more than 80 scientific articles in the fields of communication theory, film and media semiotics, journalism and public relations. Among his latest books is “PR-Ausbildung in Deutschland” [Public Relations education in Germany] ed. with Peter Szyszka (1995). He is president of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Publizistik- und Kommunikationswissenschaft (DGPuK) [German Association for Public Communication and Communication studies].
Culture, Trust, and Symmetrical Communication
by Chun-ju Flora Hung

For years, many scholars in the Chinese societies have challenged the possibility of Chinese symmetry, inasmuch as the context of the hierarchy in relationships and the role of power may hinder the practices of symmetrical communication. Yet, in Hung (2002), after conducting 40 interviews with multinational and Taiwanese companies in China, she concluded that symmetrical communication is feasible with a specific cultural application. From the cultural perspective, the salient characteristic of family orientation in the Chinese society showed that Chinese people tend to have more trust with the in-group members than someone from outside. Based on these premises, the purposes of this study are three-fold. First, it analyzes the context of trust building in the Chinese society. Second, it examines how trust enhanced Chinese symmetry. Lastly, it explores how public relations, as a boundary spanner, breaks the boundary of in-group and out-group and helps its organization build trust with different sectors in the environment.

Theories consulted in this study include Chinese culture characteristics, symmetrical communication, dimensions of trust, and relationship cultivation strategies. Elite interviews, long interviews, and active interviews were conducted with public relations managers from companies, government agencies, and universities in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.

The findings show that, in the Confucian society, each individual’s responsibilities to others are highly emphasized, which in turn, enhanced the symmetrical communication. Trust building in the Chinese society is a long-term task. Trust can be built through regulations and networks. In addition, sharing of task, positivity, and being unconditionally constructive are the best cultivation strategies to reach out and build a trusting relationship in the Chinese society. Implications and directions for future research are suggested.

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Chun-ju Flora Hung is now teaching in the Department of Communication Studies at the Hong Kong Baptist University in Hong Kong, SAR. She is also now a Ph.D. candidate of public relations in the Department of Communication at the University of Maryland, College Park. In 2001, she won the Walter Lindenmann Scholarship from the Institute for Public Relations, which also provided her the eight-week internship in the Research and Measurement Department in Ketchum Public Relations in New York. In three consecutive years (1998-2001), she won the Inez Kaiser Award from the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. Her research interests include relationship management, reputation, global public relations, strategic management, and intercultural communication.
A coordinated management of meaning approach (CMM) of trust building, cultivating, and evaluating in government relations

by Yi-Ru Regina Chen

China’s open market reform and rapid economic growth have generated a tremendous surge in activity and market investment by multinational companies. After officially becoming a member of the World Trade Organization, China has been positioned to emerge as an economic giant in the 21st century. More and more foreign companies are trying to conduct business in China. However, the business setting in China is different from advanced Western countries in many ways. The most silent difference lies in the authoritarian political system, which requires business units to closely work with the government. In many cases, a successful business launching is endorsed by the blessing from the government. When it comes to adapting company management strategies to this distinctive feature of doing business in China, being trusted by the Chinese government and the society as a whole is crucial to public relations professionals who engage in government relations.

This study examines how public relations professionals build and cultivate the level of trust between their organizations and the Chinese government through a coordinated management of meaning approach (CMM). Specifically, the study sheds light on (1) the coordinated interpretation of trust, (2) the co-creating rules embedded in trust building and cultivating, and (3) the influence of cultural differences on the interpretation of trust, the process of trust building, and the applied strategies of trust cultivation. Long interviews are conducted in Chinese regional/local governments and four multinationals based respectively in the United States, the Europe, Japan, and Taiwan. The findings conclude a preliminary model of the coordinated management of trust building, cultivating, and evaluating in government relations. The implications of the model in public relations in China are discussed and suggestions are presented.

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Yi-Ru Chen is a Ph.D. student of public relations in the Department of Communication at the University of Maryland. She has interned at the Formosa Association of Public Affairs, an activist group that advocates Taiwan’s independence from China, in Washington, D.C. and Elite Public Relations in Taiwan. She was awarded the Inez Kaiser Award from the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication in 1999 and 2000. She is now an instructor for an undergraduate course entitled Oral Communication: Principles and Practices. Her research interests include global public relations, risk communication, activism, and political conflict resolution.
Divide and Loose: On Professionalization of Public Relations
by Betteke van Ruler

The Public Relations in Europe Project (Van Ruler & Verčič, forthcoming) showed that public relations is a flourishing industry all over Europe. In some countries the concept is fairly new, but in other countries public relations as a specialism is practiced for more than half a century. If we compare “old and new countries” we could specify that public relations in the older countries is developed in quantity, but hardly in quality. The question is why?

Theories on professionalism reveal four clusters of theories, here called models, differentiated by “relationship with client”, “role of scientific knowledge”, “role of education” and “role of association”. In my presentation I will show that all these theories make sense, that players in the professional field take a different stand, but that basically none of these theories are taken seriously. That is precisely the barrier for the furthering of quality PR. Therefore, I have worked on a Professional Development Model of Public Relations in which all four models are combined.

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Betteke van Ruler is associate professor of communication science at the Free University of Amsterdam. Her research focuses on the relation between organization and communication and on communication management. She is a well-known consultant on questions of professionalization of public relations and communication management in the Netherlands; she is coordinator of the European Network of Public Relations Researchers, secretary of the division Public Relations of the International Communication Association and a member of the European Body of Knowledge project group. She is published in Public Relations Research, Journal of Communication Management, and in many Dutch scientific and professional journals. Recent publications are The Bled manifesto on Public Relations (Prsttop Communications, 2002) and Public relations in Europe: A kaleidoscopic picture (Journal of Communication Management 6 (2001) nr2), both with Dr. Dejan Verčič, and she co-authored On the definition of public relations: a European view (Public Relations Review 27 (2001) nr4. She is currently working on a book on Communication Management, together with Dr. Dejan Verčič.
Communication quality measurement of Councils
by Marita Vos

Summary

The School of Communication Management (SCOM) has developed a tool to measure the quality of Council communication. This new instrument, which is based on the Kaplan and Norton’s ‘balanced scorecard’, is intended to help Councils communicate more effectively with citizens. The publication describes the tool in detail to enable communication experts to utilise it within their own Council. The instrument does not only focus on the activities of communication departments, but on all Council communication. It will help communication experts increase the value of their consultancy within the Council organisation.

The quality of three communication functions is researched; namely corporate communication, policy communication and organisation-related communication, each of which is carefully measured using 12 variables. The Council’s end results can be compared with a previous year’s results or with that of other Councils. In order to obtain a clear view of the options available for further improvement, the results are itemised on several dimensions such as the transparency of governmental information and policy, the responsiveness of the organisation, interactive policy and the effectiveness and efficiency of the communication. The developed tool can be used for detailed measurements as well as for discussion about the required communication priorities.

This is a summary of a Dutch research report (1) published by the Faculty of Communication and Journalism. The author of this publication is a member of the Research Group for Governmental Communication, chaired by Mr. R. Middel. More information about this subject can be obtained from: SCOM, Faculty of Communication and Journalism, Utrecht University of Professional Education, P.O. Box 8611, 3503 RP Utrecht, The Netherlands, email: M.Vos@fcj.hvu.nl. You are very welcome to react to the content of this paper: Is it a Dutch approach or would it, to your opinion, apply in other countries as well?

1. Introduction

For many years, Councils have been working on renewing their administration with the purpose of getting closer to citizens and further improve its functionality. Attention to quality care and performance measurements certainly applies within this climate.

Attitude, with respect to the Government, has been subject to change for some time. In the Netherlands in the 60’s and 70’s, the creation of the welfare state was coupled with high expectations (2). However, many problems appeared to be difficult to control due to their size and nature, such as the environment and unemployment for example. These are complex, internationally related problems that are difficult to solve by the Government alone. However citizens were disappointed and hardly noticed what was actually achieved (3).

In order to increase policy effectiveness, Government organisations worked together with other parties on complex problems. Firstly, that occurred by means of covenants and subsequently by co-productions. One example is the National collaboration of business community sectors, which was set up in order to realise energy saving costs. Collaboration also gained much attention at regional and local levels. This intensive joint consultation also required the Councils to produce different procedures, aimed at interactive policy making. More consideration was given to a city or district viewpoint. Some of the Councils overturned the organisational structure because they believed that the concern model utilised to organise many of the Councils was too centralised and internally focused. Others were also working hard on cultural change (4), to become an open organisation that reacted better to what occurred within society. These innovations, however, did not result in a better Government image; high expectations are not easy to meet.

How exactly do citizens react towards the municipal government? In general, people are happy with the place in which they live, e.g. the greenery, the maintenance and shopping facilities, although people are somewhat concerned about safety. Furthermore, people are also happy with the direct contact with governmental organisations. However, the overall assessment of the Councils is not high (5). Confidence in politics is particularly low (6). Local administrators do not always appear to be closer than the nationals because they are often less well known.

There is a small group of people who feel allied to the Council and Management. A larger group does not feel this quite so strongly and a smaller group is indifferent (7). Many citizens prefer to pass policy management over to the elected authorities and if they have a problem then they known where to find them. In previous years, approximately half of the citizens initiated an action to bring something to the attention of the municipal authorities and the vast majority felt that they had been taken seriously (8).

The Government addresses people in different ways. Many consider the Government to be a multi-pigheaded monster (9). Various governmental organisations and divisions address citizens; the government does not speak with one voice. During time, consistency is not always great, particularly when policy changes due to a new political line (10).

Accordingly, an integral approach to communication is required as well as paying more attention to the receiver (11). With the aid of the developed communication quality measurement, we can look integrally at Council communication. Thereafter we will explain why it is important to take a wide look at communication.

2. Communication quality

Communication is one of the functional areas utilised by an organisation in order to solve or prevent problems (12). It is a telescope for looking with a certain expertise at the organisation and its social environment. Previously, finance, marketing and human resource were all particularly considered to be functional areas but nowadays it is also important to look at the functioning of the organisation from a communication viewpoint because the interdependency of society has increased.

Dependency accordingly assumes that attention is given to in-
perspectives.

Communication is therefore not just a collection of operational activities executed by communication experts. It is an approach that is important for many within the organisation. Communication experts inspire others within the organisation to apply this approach in their behaviour and encourage others to be equipped for it. The whole organisation needs to have communication skills and think from the target groups viewpoint.

It is not only the communication department that needs to communicate well but also the organisation and its employees (13). In fact everyone within their own network of internal and external relations. What is important is to have an eye for the receiver, be concrete and subsequently, pay attention to contact opportunities and information carriers (14). In addition communication experts ensure that the communication policy supports the general policy and they implement part of the communication activities. Generally, these are activities that require specialised knowledge and have a high associated risk because they make such an impact (e.g. media contacts and crisis communication).

Communication quality does not only mean considering the quality of work done by the communication experts. On the contrary, we mean the whole communication within the municipal organisation and the way the quality can be improved upon. For this purpose, the communication quality measurement can be a useful tool. Communication experts can use it as an auditor (someone who collects and examines information) in order to give more substance to their advisory function. The communication expert who has clarity regarding the communication quality criteria, can take more initiative.

Now that organisations are increasingly realising the power of communication, communication experts are receiving more requests from within the organisation. However, these internal requests are not always the most important items for the communication adviser to focus attention upon. Furthermore, problems really requiring communication advice are not always being addressed to the communication experts. Accordingly, they need to pro-actively monitor this. In addition, it helps if managers have a better insight into what communication can or cannot contribute.

As a functional area, communication promotes interaction between the organisation and the social environment. Maintaining open communication channels offers a basis for organisations to jointly function with other parties. Information exchange is also necessary for co-operation within the organisation. In addition, communication can increase the effectiveness of the performance as well as other Council measures, such as regulations and facilities.

The core competencies are (15):

- consistently confronting Government organisations with the perspective of the outside world;
- rendering significant information because information often needs to be adapted in order to be useful to the outside world.

Communication quality can be approached from different perspectives, i.e. from the organisational policy, the profession or from the target groups. We have embedded all three approaches within the communication quality measurement.

The quality criteria stem firstly from Council policy. Our understanding of ‘communication quality’ is the degree to which communication contributes towards the effectiveness of Council policy and how it strengthens the relationship between citizens and Council organisations. Accordingly, the measurement tool is based upon this. We also utilise general quality criteria that originate from the communication profession. Furthermore, we ensure that the citizens’ perspective and that of other target groups is sufficiently represented within the communication measurement. In this way we can take a detailed look at the Councils communication quality.

3. Balanced scorecard

The balanced scorecard is a measuring and improvement system focussed upon translating strategies into concrete actions (16). Kaplan and Norton provide four focus areas that interpret an organisation’s performance, i.e. financial, customers, internal business management and the learning curve or growth (17). This is a useful method because it not only looks at the organisation’s performance but also at the engines that power this performance. Therefore, possible actions are promptly obtained from the analysis. However, Kaplan and Norton really have a Company in mind rather than a Council.

We utilise the philosophy behind the balanced scorecard in order to optimise and describe the contribution that communication offers to the organisation. Becker already produced something similar for the ‘Human Resource’ area of expertise (18). Accordingly, the method can be used for the organisational policy as a whole or that of a Company division. It can also be used to describe and optimise the contribution of a certain area of expertise to the organisation. We will carry out the latter for the communication area of expertise.

Initially, we will consider the Council organisation as a whole, but the method can also be adapted for a core service within the Council.

The contribution of communication Kaplan and Norton’s focus areas need to be translated and adapted for the Council. It particularly concerns the contribution of communication towards the functioning of the Council. This leads us to the following four focus areas regarding the contribution of communication within the organisation: corporate communication (the total image), policy communication (policy items) and organisation-bound communication (internal processes). Within the Kaplan and Norton analogy (19), we could also mention a fourth focus area namely; communication research for collecting and utilising feedback. We chose not to name communication research as a separate area, but to approach it integrally. In this way, the research becomes directly linked to the utilisation.

Accordingly, we will base the communication quality measurement upon the three functions of Government communication in which communication research will constantly be included as a part. We will now explain the three functions. Their descriptions have been chosen in such a way as to tie into the Councils.
A. Corporate communication

This supports the presentation of the organisation as a whole, its objectives and results. Middel (20) describes this as:

- positioning, main line and co-ordinating policy commissioning, board agreement slogan, mission;
- communication regarding the intention and establishment of the government organisation, the ‘company behind the brand’;
- the organisation of the communication function, in which the common starting points (21) and principles are determined. These communication functions are concerned with the total image and not, in essence, policy items.

B. Policy communication

This is the type of communication that supports the various policy areas. These can be divided as follows:

- communication regarding policy items: making public and explaining policy in all policy phases;
- communication as a policy: chief or supporting instrument alongside regulating and facilitating in order to realise policy goals;
- communication for policy: the development of policy together with citizens and/or organisations via interactive policy making;
- communication in policy: integral approach of all policy products for community service by the Councils.

C. Organisation-bound communication

This supports the internal processes of a Council and focuses upon the continuity of the municipal organisation. Middel (22) mentions the following:

- internal communication;
- labour market communication;
- crisis communication.

All three communication functions can be found within the communication quality measurement.

4. Quality indicators

Indicators are provided for each communication function, which according to the balanced scorecard method should define very definite results. The communication contribution can then be optimised. The measurement is based upon the expert opinion of internal and/or external auditors, who collect material and utilise existing research within the organisation in order to form an opinion.

The communication quality measurement provides communication experts with a broad basis in order to give substance to their advisory role to the Council. The tool can be applied as a detailed measurement offering comparative information. It can also be used in outline as a starting point for a collective census of Council communication staff who wish to discuss which aspects require more attention within a given period.

The basis of the measurement tool is a collection of indicators for communication quality. The auditor needs a foundation to assess the indicators. Accordingly we will explain which aspects need to be researched for each indicator. Every aspect requires a compilation of arguments relating to the strengths and weaknesses of that point for the Council concerned.

The indicators and aspects are the result of literature research combined with interviews with communication experts of Dutch Councils. The next step will be to evaluate and further adapt them in a dialogue. We will also consult some communication experts in neighbouring countries to discuss if the approach chosen differs from what would be needed elsewhere.

You will see a letter code after every indicator (as shown below) which denotes the nature of the indicator. These codes will be explained in the next chapter. Thereafter we will also discuss the weight of the indicators (the percentage behind the code) as not every indicator carries the same weight in the total.

A. Indicators for corporate communication

1. The Council is visibly result-focused and works within clear priorities - T 100%

Aspects:
- The Council sets clear and measurable policy objectives.
- It is important for results to be clearly presented. In this way citizens are not vague about what improvements have been made and what needs to be worked on (justification).
- The policy priorities are clearly shown; there is a compact list of priorities instead of a long list with attention points that is difficult to convey to citizens.

2. The Council is accessible for citizens and organisations - A 30%

Aspects:
- The procedures and structure of the Council organisation promotes approachability (e.g. turning the organisation to target groups, city areas/districts, business communities and bringing together the counters/info points of the various services).
- The most important buildings have good access for citizens (esp. city area offices or district shops; public transport and parking facilities) and are accessible for the disabled (no hindrances with stairs or thresholds; lower counters etc).
- Board members and council members are known and approachable.

3. General information about the Council is readily available - A 40%

Aspects:
- Corporate media exists such as a Council page/newspaper; a citizen annual report, a Council guide and a short Council programme. These media are currently being evaluated.
- Within communication, consideration is being given to a compilation of the population (diversity, multi-cultural society).
- New residents automatically receive information.
- Much information has been released on the Internet.
- This information is presented in a user-friendly manner; with the majority of information being obtainable within three mouse-clicks.
- The organisation behind the Internet site is organised well so that keeping the information up-to-date can be guaranteed.

4. There is a central information point available for people - A 30%

Aspects:
- Citizens and other target groups can go to an information point for advice, which are easy to find (e.g. target group counters for the districts and business community).
- The information point can actually provide answers to questions without passing them on.
- Less than 30% of telephone enquiry callers are put in a queue.
- Citizens’ responses are used as input within the organisation.
5. The procedures regarding media contact are clear - P 100%

Aspects:
- There are clear agreements within the Council regarding spokesmen and procedures (e.g. which subjects are looked after by which board members or civil servants).
- The procedures are evaluated in consultation with the media.
- The communication experts advice and support the board members in press relations and regularly evaluate their role with those concerned.

6. The Council is notably demand focussed - R 60%

Aspects:
- The Council has mapped out what it understands to be demand focussed.
- The Council has put definite steps in place in order to increase its demand focussed service.
- The Council is looking at making internal adjustments particularly for those users involved with various services.

7. Regular image research is carried out with citizens and organisations - R 40%

Aspects:
- Collecting information regarding how citizens and other target groups see the Council is a regular activity (e.g. in the form of questionnaires, panels or district meetings).
- The content of this consultation relates to Council-wide subjects in addition to projects. The results are utilised within the policy.

8. Citizens and other target groups are involved in future developments - I 100%

Aspects:
- Citizens and organisations within the District Council will be invited to participate in the thought process regarding the Council’s future.
- The city area/district focussed procedures will take an interactive form (e.g. involvement in the policy choices for city area/district development plans).

9. The profile and house style are clear - C 30%

Aspects:
- The Council profile has a limited number of clear characteristics.
- These are aligned to reality and the preferences of the target groups (citizens, companies, tourists).
- The house style is recognisable and fits clearly within the chosen profile.
- Within the organisation’s presentation, the identity structures (such as monolithic or umbrella identity) are well chosen, clear and substantiated.
- The sender is always recognisable and a contact point is given in the communication media.

10. The communication policy aligns closely with the organisational policy - C 70%

Aspects:
- There is a Council-wide communication policy vision and this is translated into Council-wide frameworks and guidelines for communication.
- The corporate communication policy is confirmed by board members and is periodically evaluated and amended.
- Regular direct contact takes place between the communication experts and Council board members.
- The organisational embedding of communication is logical. The relationship between central and de-central communication tasks align with the total municipal organisation; the same for strategic and executive tasks and, respectively, the relationship between personal execution and outsourcing of activities.

11. The communication department’s procedures promote the effectiveness of the communication - E 50%

Aspects:
- Communication experts work in a planned way and thereby handle the agreed procedures.
- Communication plans are frequently created for important projects where attention is paid to: target group focus and dosage (preventing ‘overload’, phasing information).
- The convincing powers of the communication consultants ensure that the most important advice is adopted (e.g. training in consultancy skills).
- The communication policy is permanently led by professional development.

12. The communication department’s procedures promote the efficiency of the communication - E 50%

Aspects:
- The communication department works not only on the basis of a year plan within a yearly budget but also on project coupled plans with budgets.
- Communication experts are aware of their core tasks and priorities.
- Procedures promote an efficient and perceptive use of budgeting.
- Time-allocation is utilised.
- Procedures are in place for efficient purchasing.

B. Indicators for policy communication

1. New policies will be clearly and actively communicated - T 60%

Aspects:
- The Council will endeavour to actively make new policies known and be pro-active.
- Decisions will be supplied with an explanation as to why they were made.

2. Citizens and organisations know where they stand - unambiguous regulations - T 40%

Aspects:
- The Council will make clear regulations, containing clear content and form (this is currently being looked at for new regulations, e.g. permits).
- Communication regarding regulations promotes clarity.
- Application procedures (e.g. permits) are user-friendly (easy to complete).

3. Easy access service - A 100%

Aspects:
- Citizens and other target groups have easy access to the Council for various types of service.
- The relevant communication is easy to find and clearly stated.
- The service value will be regularly assessed by citizens, for example via a yearly Council questionnaire.
- Council services correspondence will be characterised by a clear use of language (specific writing training for civil servants).
4. Pro-active media policy - P 40%
Aspects:
• The Council will take the initiative when contacting representa-
tives of the written press and other media, by providing press
releases for example.
• The Council will actively go out and explain policies, starting
with what is of interest to citizens and (also) to announce posi-
tive news.

5. Journalists questions will get an adequate response - P 40%
Aspects:
• The Council will be as open as possible to information requests
from the media (telephone questions and interview requests).
• High availability (e.g. 24 hour).
• Following information requests, contact will be made as quickly
as possible with the requester.

6. The Council will follow the media coverage - P 20%
Aspects:
• Any incorrect coverage will be quickly amended.
• Media publications will be followed and inventoried.
• A material analysis will be applied to important subjects.
• The analysis will have associated consequences.

7. The Council will have a customer-friendly response to questions and
complaints - R 100%
Aspects:
• Letters and e-mail messages will be answered within 3 weeks.
• Handling complaints is clearly regulated, independent and
quickly executed.

8. Target groups will be involved in policy subjects - I 70%
Aspects:
• Interactive policy will be actively applied.
• Clear guidelines for interactive policy have been determined in
writing within the organisation.
• Staff know the guidelines and possibilities (e.g. internal publica-
tions, courses).

9. Attention will be given to 'difficult to reach' target groups - I 30%
Aspects:
• The Council is committed to approaching those target groups
who are difficult to reach. Specific attention will be given to
foreigners, the elderly, the young or lower-income groups.

10. The communication contribution will be assessed for all subjects
- C 60%
Aspects:
• Communication is an integral part of every policy dossier so
that the deployment of communication media needs to be
timely compared to other policy tools such as regulations and
facilities.
• In every phase of the policy cycle, the communication contribu-
tion will be determined for each policy dossier.

11. There is regular direct discussion between the communication ex-
erts and the policy managers regarding the priority choices - C
40%
Aspects:
• Regular contact times promote harmony regarding what the
communication priorities should be.
• The communication experts have access to important manage-
ment discussions.
• Agreements have been made between the managers and the
communication experts regarding where the communication
responsibilities lie and the deployment of communication for
important projects.

12. The effectiveness of communication as policy is furthered by re-
search - E 100%
Aspects:
• Procedures such as 'pre-tests' within the target groups and ret-
rospective measurement are regularly used.

C. Indicators for organisation-bound communication:

1. There is an active introduction programme for new staff - T 20%
Aspects:
• Following their appointment, new staff quickly receive an intro-
duction programme which extends beyond their own depart-
ment.
• They get to know the district Council and municipal organisa-
tion so that they can find whatever information they need.
• The participants evaluate the introduction programme.

2. Staff are well aware of Council and Organisational policies - T
60%
Aspects:
• Staff regularly receive suffice in-depth information about Coun-
cil policy and organisational policy (via internal media and work
discussion).
• They are encouraged to constantly keep each other informed
and accordingly contribute to the latter.
• Staff receive timely advanced information when important in-
fomation is to be sent to external relations (e.g.in the event of
a new municipal campaign).

3. The relationship between the Civil Service, Management and City
Council is clear - T 20%
Aspects:
• Much attention is given to good collaboration between Man-
agement and the Civil Service.
• Board members have a clear insight into the organisation.
• Agreement has been reached between the Board and the Coun-
cil regarding the form of communication and how to make contact (e.g.questions from Council members go via the
Alderman to the Civil Servants).

4. An internal information system provides staff with easy access to
much information - A 100%
Aspects:
• Much information has been made easily available to staff, e.g. in
the form of an Intranet that can also be consulted outside the
internal network.
• The method of management ensures that this information re-
mains up-to-date.
• Information about communication can also be found on the
Intranet.

5. Within the internal communication, attention is given to publicity via
the media - P 100%
Aspects:
• The contents of press releases are also directly made known
internally (e.g. by highlighting it on the Intranet and linking it to
the municipal Internet site).
• Staff are aware of the internal handling of procedures and job
divisions relating to spokespersons (e.g. when certain project
leaders will act as spokespersons).
• Staff will receive current information when important subjects
are in force (e.g. calamities) so that they know how to respond.
6. The Council regularly researches the internal image of the organisation - R 100%
Aspects:
• The Council regularly research the internal image, or rather how the staff see their own organisation.
• There is a form of employee-satisfaction research where the organisation frequently enquires about staff well-being and working conditions.
• This information (regarding what is experienced within its organisation) is utilised by the Council to improve its functionality.

7. Staff feel involved within the organisation - I 40%
Aspects:
• In general, staff feel that their input is listened to and their feedback improves the functioning of the organisation.
• Internal media, work and functioning discussions fulfil a positive role herein.
• Communication by the Staff Council is clear.
• Confidants are appointed that can be approached by the staff.

8. An open attitude and communicative skills are very important within the organisation - I 60%
Aspects:
• An open communicative attitude is encouraged within the organisation (organisational culture), including being aware of the consequences of the measures taken for the individual citizens.
• Senior executives and staff receive training in communicative skills.
• Communicative skills and attitude play an important role when assessing senior executives and functional discussions.

9. Managers receive advice about internal communication - C 70%
Aspects:
• The responsibilities of line management are determined with respect to internal communication and how the P&O and communication tasks align with each other.
• Sufficient expertise exists for internal communication.
• Managers actively appeal for advice about internal communication.
• Communication expertise is specifically deployed in order to realise important internal changes.

10. The labour market communication corresponds to the corporate communication - C 10%
Aspects:
• The content and form of advertisements and other forms of labour market communication correspond to the common starting points for corporate communication (presentation of the organisation).
• The mix of deployed media has been well considered, e.g. the coherence of advertisement and website.
• The positive aspects of working in a municipal organisation are put forward within the labour market communication, such as arrangements for parents of young children.

11. Communication aspects are given much attention in crisis planning - C 20%
Aspects:
• Communication with the various target groups is sufficiently developed in crisis planning.
• The scenarios are sufficiently known by those concerned and are practised.
• The internal communication experts actively contribute to the internal and external processes in crisis situations.
• The staff is also considered in crisis situations and there is a form of aftercare.

12. Research is being done on the functioning of important internal communication media - E 100%
Aspects:
• Parallel communication media exists within the organisation (internal media such as an internal magazine or Intranet).
• The value of the internal communication media and their effectiveness is regularly researched (e.g. by means of a questionnaire, interviews or a sounding-board group).
• A ‘pre-test’ is carried out for all important internal media.

The auditor examines the nominated aspects for each indicator and provides concrete examples of how each aspect is applied within the Council. Subsequently, the auditor provides a total impression of the indicator as a whole. This is done using a scale because this fact may be more or less applicable for certain municipal organisations. This five-point scale consists of values 1 (weak), 2 (moderate), 3 (satisfactory), 4 (good), 5 (very good). The choice needs to be carefully deliberated and, in order to be reliable, should not vary too much between different auditors.

In order to support the assessment relating to policy issues, the auditor constantly asks the following:
• Is the policy actually secured?
• Is the policy sufficiently substantiated?
• Is it structural and not only incidental?
• Is it consistent, sufficiently attuned?

When it concerns performance issues, the auditor checks are:
• Is it striking, does it stand out from the crowd?
• Is it clarified, is it clear to the target groups?
• Is it creative or innovative?
• Is the operation systematically verified?

The indicator measurements can act as a one-time analysis. However, the ‘balanced scorecard’ method is intended to provide an impulse to the cycle of continuous improvement. Accordingly, space needs to be allocated within the indicator reports to describe the improvement activities and status. When the Council works on a certain indicator, the auditor subsequently keeps note of this.

It is asking a lot of the auditor to provide a controllable and comparative assessment. This can only be expected from a senior communication expert who has learnt to take a wide view within the professional area. Subject to discussion, we recommend that two experienced (internal or external) communication experts should carry out the measurement.

A communication department could therefore choose not to use this tool for actual measurement but to utilise it for their own train of thought. Accordingly, no ranked assessment need be made and the subsequent weighting and calculating of results (in chapter 7) is not important. The objective is then to gain a joint vision regarding the communication quality. The indicators per function can be placed on a poster on which staff can indicate, by means of coloured stickers, what they consider to be the most important indicators and those that need an improvement impulse in the near future within their Council. The dimensions of communication quality can also be included in the discussion (the letter codes previously mentioned which were placed after every indicator). These will be explained in the following chapter.
5. Dimensions of communication quality

In the communication profession, certain criteria are frequently mentioned when relating to good quality communication. We refer to this as “the dimensions of communication quality”.

- **Transparency**: clarity of the message and policy; this requires a culture focussed on simplicity and justification.
- **Accessibility of information and organisation**: citizens and organisations can find what and who they are looking for, such as providing digital sources and contact people e.g. neighborhood management; this demands a good information system and a clear organisation structure as well as an open culture.
- **Publicity via the media**: the Council is active with respect to media contacts and is as open as possible in supplying information.
- **Responsiveness**: observing feedback and applying it for improvement; this requires a monitoring system and the willingness to use feedback.
- **Interactive policy**: the active involvement of target groups (also those difficult to reach) in policy projects; this requires procedures and rules and a culture focussed on collaboration.
- **Communication policy**: a well-considered embedded communication such as a policy tool in addition to other instruments; this requires strategic consideration and the determining of factual choices and procedures.
- **Effectiveness and efficiency of communication**: a result-focussed and efficient deployment of communication; this requires well-considered forms of research and cost-conscious procedures.

Statements obtained from citizens during open in-depth interviews, such as those given below, support the dimensions of communication quality:

- Transparency: “No choices have been made”
- Accessibility: “They send you from one place to another”
- Publicity via the media: “The Council comes off badly in the newspaper”
- Responsiveness: “They do listen, but do they do anything about it?”
- Interactive policy: “You really need to shout in order to get involved as an organisation”
- Communication policy: “The Council has an unclear face”
- Effectiveness and efficiency of communication: “They place a prohibition sign in the park but not in the place where people dump their rubbish”.

The final result of the auditor’s measurement can be compared with the previously demanded management endeavours or with previous years’ results or other measurements. Various lines exist in the star and comparisons make the measurement more binding. The results can also be compared with those of the image research from citizens and organisations within the district council. In order to derive a line for the star, the image measurement needs to take account of the various dimensions.

6. The weight of the indicators

The auditor provides an expert-opinion, a professional assessment. This occurs per indicator on a five-point scale using the following values: 1 (weak), 2 (moderate), 3 (satisfactory), 4 (good), 5 (very good). The value of an indicator is always a whole number.

We recommend that two senior auditors should always carry out this assessment. They can be either internal or external communication experts or, alternatively, an internal and an external auditor who collaboratively carry out the measurement. When the auditors are not directly in agreement, they should try and resolve this through argumented discussion. If this does not succeed, it may be necessary to involve a third auditor. Material needs to be collected first before the indicators can be assessed.

The indicators do not all have the same weight. Furthermore, the three groups of indicators representing the communication functions all have a different weight. We will shortly explain exactly how the calculation takes place. What is important is to be able to determine not only an overall score from the calculation, but to make it more precise by calculating a total score per communication function and subsequently per dimension. The dimensions re-appear in every communication function (see figure 2).

When interpreting the final result, the organisation’s communication functions are examined to see which ones have a proportionally low score. The same is also done for the dimensions of communication quality. It then becomes clear to the Council concerned what priorities are required in order to improve the communication quality.

If necessary, a database can be set up to illustrate whether a Council scores high or low on a certain point with respect to the overall image. In this way, the measuring system has the characteristics of a comparative research - a benchmark.

Figure 1. The cob web within the dimensions of communication quality

All of the indicators mentioned in the previous chapter relate to one of the communication quality dimensions, which are constantly shown using the relevant first letters. Each indicator has been given such a code. A total score is also produced from the indicator measurements for the communication quality dimensions. These are calculated from all the indicator scores that measure this performance. The final result can be shown in a cob web (see figure 1). The points for the scores are connected with a line on the scale. Accordingly, the result for the different dimensions can be seen simply at a glance.
Weights are allocated to both the communication functions and the separate indicators for communication quality. When relating the communication functions, B (policy subjects) has proportionally the heaviest weight, followed by A (corporate communication) and then C (organisation-related). The ratio between A, B, and C has been allocated as 3.5 : 4 : 2.5 respectively.

We have set out the dimensions within the communication functions as being all equally weighted. The one dimension is measured with more indicators than the other, so that we need to make the appropriate adjustments. The percentage determined by an indicator for a certain dimension was previously illustrated. This determines the factor by which the indicator scores should be multiplied. Accordingly, the factor illustrates the weight of the indicator. A percentage of say 30% is changed into a factor 3. A formula for the calculation method is given in the attachment.

Calculating and interpreting measurement information

Those wishing to use the measurement system for comparative information firstly need to note the value per indicator on a scale from 1 to 5 (as a whole number). This is the value that the auditors need to agree on. Subsequently, this value is multiplied by 20, so that the score then lies between 20 and 100. The critical line lies at 70 so that all the scores below this require attention.

Subsequently, the total score can be calculated per communication function. Firstly, the weighted score for the indicator is calculated by multiplying the result with the given indicator factor, which will be different for every request. The total communication function score is the sum of the weighted scores per indicator divided by the factor total, namely 70. The total score for a communication function will vary between 20 and 100. The critical value is always 70. Everything below this will require extra attention.

The overall score is the weighted average of the three communication functions. The total score of A is accordingly multiplied by the factor 3.5, the total score of B with 4 and C with 2.5 respectively. The sum of these total scores is then divided by 10. Therefore, the overall score will always lie between 20 and 100. These overall scores can be compared with those of other organisations or with the Council’s own results from previous years.

Thereafter, the total scores for every communication dimension can be calculated. For this purpose the weighted scores of all the indicators, which measured this dimension in all three communication functions, needs to be added up. The result then needs to be divided by the total of the relevant factors, namely 30. The scores for a dimension will vary between 20 and 100. The critical value is again 70, and all dimensions under this will require extra attention.

Accordingly, this tool does not only calculate an overall score for communication quality. It also highlights which communication functions and dimensions require improvement. Accordingly, the measurement stimulates action. A score list for the auditor is provided in attachment 3 to aid calculation.

7. In conclusion

The communication quality measurement can provide comparative measurement results. The overall scores can be compared but, more importantly, the council can ascertain which communication functions and dimensions are responsible for that result and, subsequently, implement improvements. In addition, the progress over time can be followed.

The choice is up to the communication departments. How will they utilise this tool? That can be done very generally during an allotted day by discussing the various indicators and jointly deciding which of them will have priority. This then relates to the quality of the discussions and the chosen direction following discussion. A list of indicators then results, which may be expanded to include dimensions. The tool can also be comprehensively utilised, producing detailed information such as described above.

There is a saying that quality becomes a quantity when you want to measure it. However, communication is particularly qualitative data. It is not so much about the numbers provided by the communication quality measurement, but more the recommendations that the communication experts can derive from it. The recommendations that can strengthen the communication quality of the Council.
### Calculation of the total score per communication function

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Score (x5)</th>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Weighted score (x factor)</th>
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Total sum of the weighted scores =
This total: 70 = total score function A =

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Total sum of the weighted scores =
This total: 70 = total score function C =
Notes

(6) VNG (2002), ‘Om het vertrouwen van de burger; ambities van de gemeenten 2002-2006’, VNG.

Calculation of the total score for the dimensions

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Calculation of overall score

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<td>C</td>
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<td>Total score communication function C</td>
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</table>

Total =

Total: 10 = Overall score

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Valuing managerial competence: Examining how public relations practitioners add value to organizations
by Danny Moss and Barbara DeSanto

Abstract
The complexity of measuring the value of public relations to organisations has been a challenge that continues to exercise the minds of both PR academics and professionals. Scholars working on the so-called “excellence study” (Grunig, et al, 1992; Grunig, Grunig and Dozier 2002) have rejected attempts to estimate value of public relations purely in terms of a monetary calculation. Rather they argue the case for a “total” concept of value embracing the public relations contribution to both the organisations and society.

This ‘total’ concept of value embraces the idea of focusing on the effectiveness of ‘organisational relationships’ as perhaps the most relevant measure of public relations success and value added (Broom, Casey and Ritchey, 1997; Grunig, Grunig and Ehling1992; Grunig and Huang, 2000; Ledingham and Bruning, 1998, 2000). Here it has been recognised that measurement needs to focus on the long term value of organisation- public relationships, involving measures of such variables as trust, commitment, satisfaction, mutual benefit, etc -variables which essentially involve ‘softer’ qualitative measures of success. Despite such advances in identifying the elements of ‘value’ derived from building and maintaining long term organisation- stakeholder relationships, relatively little attention has been paid to investigating how senior practitioners attempt to actually manage the processes of relationship building and thereby help to create value for the organisation. Indeed, relatively little is known about management processes in public relations and communications departments per se. This paper reports on a comparative study of senior public relations/communications executives’ roles within a cross section of both UK and US organisations, and examines the work patterns of senior practitioners and explores the importance attached to the roles they play within their organisations. Here the paper also exposes some of the limitations of existing conceptualisations of the senior practitioner/ manager role typology, particularly in terms of understanding the pattern of work performed by senior communications executives and by extension, the value created by this work in and on behalf of organisations.

Key Words
Value
Relationships
Practitioner Roles

Introduction
One of the key challenges that has continued to face public relations and corporate communication professionals is to demonstrate the ‘value’ of the public relations/communications function to organisations, particularly in terms of the type ‘hard’ bottom-line measures favoured by financial analysts. Here researchers working on the so-called “excellence study” (Grunig, 1992; Dozier, L. Grunig and J. Grunig, 1995; L. Grunig, J. Grunig and Dozier, 2002), which represents the most extensive investigations to date into the value of the public relations/communication function to an organisation, have rejected attempts to estimate the value of public relations purely in financial terms, arguing the case for a “total” concept of value embracing the public relations contribution to both the organisations and society. Here, Grunig, Grunig and Dozier (2002) have suggested that it is more appropriate to look at the bottom-line in terms of “a combination of traditional financial return and the risks associated with the organisation’s long-term relationships” (p. 103).

Indeed, there has been a growing sense of convergence amongst scholars in recognising the core value of public relations derives from its role in helping to build, maintain and, where necessary, manage the withdrawal from long-term stakeholder relationships (Broom, Casey and Ritchey, 1997; Grunig and Huang, 2000; Ledingham and Bruning, 1998, 2000). Here the emphasis is placed on the long term value of organisation- public relationships and involves measures of such variables as trust, commitment, satisfaction, mutual benefit, etc -variables which often may involve ‘softer’ qualitative measures of success, but which nevertheless offer useful insights into the factors influencing the strength and quality of an organisation’s various stakeholder relationships.

Alongside this “relationship” approach to valuing the contribution of public relations to organisations, a separate, parallel school of scholarship has emerged, focusing on the economic value of organisational “goodwill” and/or “reputation” (e.g. Fombrun, 1996; Davies et al, 2002; Morley, 1998; van Riel and Balmer, 1997). Arguably, this focus on reputation and reputational measures [e.g. ranking lists, ‘reputational quotients’] can offer, at least an indirect indicator of the value of the public relations in that public relations is recognised as a key element in the communications mix that helps to build and maintain those organisational relationships on which the long term reputation of an organisations depends.

What these relationship and reputational perspectives fail explain clearly, however, is who should be responsible within organisations for managing relationship and reputational strategies. More specifically, it is far from clear how significant a role of public relations/communications practitioners play in developing, managing, maintaining and evaluating organisational relationships or reputational management strategies. In the latter case, reputational scholars (van Riel and Balmer, 1997; Davies et al, 2003) have recognised that “reputation management” involves decisions about more than simply an organisation’s internal and external communication strategies, but embraces all aspects of the way organisations interact and present themselves to their various stakeholder groups. In this sense, reputation management arguably cannot be considered solely the preserve of the communication/public relations function. Putting these arguments aside, there is little empirical evidence to show whether or not public relations practitioners themselves view or attempt to measure their key contribution or value to their organisations in terms of relationship or reputational outcomes. In fact, much of the ongoing debate about public relations evaluation (Cutlip et al 2000; McNamara, 1992; Watson, 1992) seems to suggest a continued preoccupation with “process-related” measures of media relations activity (extent of coverage, content analysis, etc) rather than attempts to measure actual programme “outcomes” in terms of relationship or repu-
tional effects. Moreover, it appears that in many organisations, the top communicator is not included in the power elite (Grunig, Grunig and Dozier, 2002; Moss et al, 2000), and as such, may have limited power to influence either which relationships the organisation chooses to develop, or decisions that are likely to affect relationship/ reputational outcomes.

Clearly, the location of the public relations function within the organisational structure, or perhaps more specifically, whether or not senior practitioners are treated as members of the top management team, or at least are able to contribute to management decision-making will inevitably determine the degree to which the function is able to influence organisational policies and hence, contribute to value creating outcomes. The call for public relations to be recognised as a management function within organisations has been a recurrent theme within the public relations literature (Cutlip et al, 2000; White and Dozier, 1992; Grunig, Grunig and Dozier, 2002). However, studies of the organisational role of public relations have repeatedly suggested that this type of organisational positioning for public relations is perhaps more the exception than the rule. Indeed, the evidence of a growing stream of research into practitioner role enactment within organisations (Choi and Hon, 2002; Creedon, 1991; Dozier and Broom, 1995; Moss et al., 2000; Moss and Green, 2001 Toth et al, 1998; Wrigley, 2002) suggests that the picture as far as practitioner involvement as part of the dominant coalition in organisations is concerned remains quite varied. Although there is little doubt that the importance of public relations has been increasingly recognised within both public and private sector organisations over the past two decades, it still appears to be the case that for many organisations, public relations continues to be seen predominantly as a tactical activity, responsible for simply disseminating information both internally and externally, and/or acting as publicity adjunct to marketing. While such tactical work undoubtedly does have a certain utility to organisations, it would be unrealistic to try to suggest that this type of tactical role can be claimed to be of strategic importance to organisations, or is likely to add significant long-term value to the organisation.

With these debates about the significance of the public relations role in mind, this paper reports the results of a comparative investigation of senior practitioner roles within a sample of both US and UK organisations. The study seeks to extend and deepen our knowledge about the role and work of senior public relations/ communications professionals within organisations, exploring to what extent they contribute significantly to the value creating activities of their organisations. To this end, the study sought to identify where senior practitioners are located within the organisational structure, or perhaps more specifically, whether or not senior practitioners are treated as members of the top management team, or at least are able to contribute to management decision-making, subsequently by Dozier (1992:334) has argued that “the manager-technician typology provides a parsimonious way to operationalise roles and test relations with the antecedent and consequent constructs”; other roles researchers (e.g. Culbertson, 1991; Creedon, 1991; Toth and Grunig, 1993;Toth et al, 1998) have questioned the efficiency of this dual role typology, arguing that such a reductionist view may obscure some of the subtle yet significant differences in the range of tasks performed by practitioners. Here, for example, Toth and Grunig (1993) have argued that this dual role typology may obscure the extent to which the manager and technician roles overlap, and Culbertson (1991) has argued for more research into role-making process, focusing on the “tightness” or “looseness” of roles and the diversity of “role-taking behaviour” (p. 62). Moreover, feminist scholars such as Creedon (1991) have argued that the manager-technician perspective tends to trivialise the technical work performed by female practitioners in particular which, by implication, is seen to be of lesser value.

Thusts while some challenges have emerged to the dominant practitioner roles paradigms advanced by Broom and Smith (1979) and subsequently by Dozier (1984), authors such as Dozier and Broom (1995) have maintained that the concept of roles has proved useful in enabling researchers to “make sense of organisational behaviour, its antecedence and its consequences” (p.5). Indeed, roles research has provided valuable insights into a number of important dimensions of public relations practice, particularly in terms of helping to explain the extent to which practitioners interact with senior management (the dominant coalition) and how practitioner roles affect the status and influence which public relations is accorded within organisations. Here, for example, researchers have explored such themes as the relationship and influence that practitioner role enactment has on the status and power of public relations units in organisations (Lauzen, 1992; Lauzen and Dozier, 1992; the use and involvement in evaluation research and environmental scanning (Dozier, 1984, 1990; Hon, 1998); practitioner involvement in strategic decision-making (Broom & Dozier, 1986; Dozier, 1986) and involvement in issues management (Lauzen, 1993; Lauzen and Dozier, 1994). Such considerations will clearly have an important bearing on the question of how far public relations contributes to
the value creating activity within organisations.

**The Public Relations Manager's Role**

If one accepts that in most organisations, significant value creating activity tends to involve decisions and actions will affect the long term relationship that organisations have with key stakeholders, it follows that the responsibility for such decisions is likely to lie ultimately with the senior management team. Extending this argument, it follows that if public relations is to contribute directly to such decision-making, it will need to have access to, and/or participate as part of the senior management team [dominant coalition]. Here roles research suggests that practitioner status, power and involvement in dominant coalition within organisations, are associated primarily with manager role enactment. This role, Dozier (1984) has argued, is both empirically and conceptually distinct from that performed by communication technicians within organisations, the latter being seen as concerned predominantly with the creation and dissemination of messages, but having little, if any, involvement in the planning and policy-making activities associated with the manager’s role. Indeed, managerial role enactment is normally associated with higher salary and status (Lauzen, 1992), greater involvement in research and environmental scanning, and thereby greater interaction and involvement with the top management function within organisations (Dozier, 1986; Lauzen and Dozier, 1994).

Although the use of the manager and technician ‘labels’ have been criticised as devaluing the often highly creative and skilled work performed by technically oriented practitioners (Creedon, 1991), nevertheless, Dozier and Broom (1995) have argued that technical activities are quite distinct from those of environmental scanning, programme evaluation, issues management, and strategic planning that are associated primarily with performance of the manager’s role. Moreover, Dozier (1992) has argued that the manager-technician dichotomy broadly reflects senior management perceptions of the public relations function’s roles. Indeed, Dozier and Broom suggested that the debate over the use of the technician label has less to do with feminist concerns and more to do with the tension between the creative artistic preferences of many practitioners [expressed in terms of their desire to engage in production of communications products-press releases, brochures, newsletters etc] and the demands of the managerial function of public relations.

**Criticisms of Roles Research**

Despite the prominence and importance attached to roles research in public relations, research in this field has attracted criticism, particularly on methodological and also ideological grounds. Methodological criticisms have focused on the argument that the manager-technician role dichotomy favoured in much of the more recent roles research oversimplifies the complexities of role enactment (Leichty and Springer, 1996; Toth and Grunig, 1993; Toth et al., 1998). Similarly, it is argued that insufficient emphasis has been given to the process of role receiving and role-taking within organisations, rather than treating roles as static categories into which practitioners are ‘ pigeon-holed’ (Culbertson, 1991, p. 62). A perhaps more fundamental methodological criticism role research relates to the adequacy of the role inventory measures that have been used to form an index the conceptual roles pos- tulated by Broom (Broom 1982; Broom and Smith, 1979) and subsequently by Dozier (1984). Here much of the roles research to date has drawn on the 24 item set of role inventories originally advanced by Broom, or a subset of this role inventory. While Dozier and Broom (1995) have pointed to the stability of these role measures during the twelve-year period, 1979-1991, nevertheless, as Dozier (1992) acknowledges, because roles are themselves simply abstractions of the myriad of activities that practitioners perform in their day-to-day work, conceptualising and measuring roles is inherently problematic. In this sense, it would be unrealistic to expect that roles research based around Broom’s 24 item role inventory could be expected to provide a comprehensive insight into the pattern of practitioner work activity- into what practitioners actually do.

Although still using similar survey methods to those used in earlier roles research (Broom, 1982; Broom and Smith, 1979; Dozier, 1984), in more recent studies, researchers have sought to develop alternative sets of role inventory measures drawing on differing literatures and data sources (e.g. Berkowitz and Hristodoulakis, 1996; Leichty and Springer, 1996; Morton, 1996 and Toth et al, 1998). Reflecting on the relative merits of these different role measures, Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier (2002) acknowledge that the key issue must be their relative utility in enabling a greater understanding of public relations practice, and in particular, of the work of practitioners. Moreover, they acknowledge that roles researchers have relied heavily on the hypothetical-deductive approach to study of role enactment which has encouraged them to develop an essentially nomothetic model of explanation (p.223).

As Grunig et al (2002) go on to point out, as communication practice continues to evolve, then logically the inventory of role measures used to capture practitioners’ work activity will need revising and updating to reflect changes in practitioner behaviour. By implication, maintaining the relevance and currency of role measures requires intensive observation of what communicators do.

Further criticisms of existing roles research has focused first on the lack of international comparative research into role enactment which raises questions about whether the role concepts and role measures favoured by US roles researchers can be applied effectively in other countries and cultures outside the USA (Moss, Warnaby, and Newman, 2000). Second, it is argued that insufficient emphasis has been given to the process of role receiving and role-taking within organisations, rather than treating roles as static categories into which practitioners are ‘ pigeon-holed’ (Culbertson, 1991, p. 62). Ideological criticisms of roles research have been voiced by feminist scholars (Creedon, 1991; Toth and Grunig, 1993; Hon, 1995; and Toth et al, 1998) who have argued that more account needs to be taken of fundamental differences in the worldviews of male and female researchers, which in turn, may affect the questions they consider important and how they go about studying them. Essentially, they call for more idiographic research approaches associated with intensive observation and other ethnmethodological approaches. Only in this way, feminist scholars have argued, is it possible to overcome what they see as male-biased stereotyping of role typologies. Thus Creedon (1991) has argued that the manager-technician role typology has “homogenized and dichotomized the meaning of work in the field” (p.78).

**A managerial perspective of the manager's role**

However, for the purpose of this study, we suggest a further and more significant methodological criticism of existing roles research lies in the way researchers have defined the manager’s role, and hence the type of role measures used as indicators of managerial role enactment. There appears to be little evidence that roles researchers have bothered to draw on the extensive body of management literature in identifying suitable inventories to measure elements of managerial work (e.g. Moss, Warnaby and Newman, 2000). Moreover, the relative ease with which researchers have ac-
and are subject to constant interruption, flit from topic to topic, spend relatively little time on planning and abstract formulation. Even senior management appear to conduct their work as if it were by Stewart (1976) and Horne and Lupton (1965) respectively. Examining how managers allocate their time, studies such as those by Stewart (1976) and Horne and Lupton (1965) have been conducted during the past 40 years which have sought to identify what managers actually do (e.g. Horne and Lupton, 1965; Mintzberg, 1973; Kotter, 1982; Pettigrew, 1973; Stewart, 1967, 1976, 1982; Watson, 1994).

The classical view of management, which is normally associated with the seminal work of Henri Fayol (1949) is of a rational profession in which managers perform a set of activities designed to enable them to forecast and plan, to organise, to command, to coordinate and to control. For Fayol and other classical thinkers, management is a rational activity in the sense that it is possible to provide clear grounds for its existence, tasks, and necessity, and to suggest definite principles connecting management behaviour to outcomes. However, this technocratic model of management as a rational profession has been challenged by a series of studies conducted during the past 40 years which have sought to identify what managers actually do (e.g. Horne and Lupton, 1965; Mintzberg, 1973; Kotter, 1982; Pettigrew, 1973; Stewart, 1967, 1976, 1982). Here the general picture to emerge is one that suggests that the image of managers as rational analytical planners, decision-makers, and issuers of commands does not stand up to scrutiny. Rather, as Stewart (1983) has suggested, a manager appears to be someone who:

- lives in a whirl of activity, in which attention must be switched every few minutes from one subject, problem, and person to another; of an uncertain world where relevant information includes gossip and speculation. It is a picture not of a manager who sits quietly controlling but who is dependent on many people, other than subordinates, with whom reciprocating relationships should be created; who need to learn how to trade, bargain and compromise (p. 96).

Given the strong hypothetical-deductive approach on which most of the public relations roles research has been based, it is perhaps not surprising that there is little, if any, recognition that the manager's role in public relations might comprise the sort of frenetic activity pattern described by Stewart. Indeed there is little recognition within the public relations literature that managerial work might involve a number of the other key elements of work identified by management scholars.

**Elements of managerial work**

A central problem in reaching a common understanding of 'management' is that research into managerial work over the past 30 or more years has adopted different foci and used different methodologies (Hales, 1986). Some studies have examined the substantive content of managerial work while others have examined the distribution of managerial time between work elements, managerial interactions with others at work, or the informal elements of managerial work. Moreover, Hales (1986) suggests that there has been a shift in emphasis away from a static analytical approach providing a snapshot-view of managerial work 'towards a more synthetic approach which attempts to capture the fluidity of managerial work in its different guises' (p.93).

Examing how managers allocate their time, studies such as those conducted by Stewart (1976) and Horne and Lupton (1965) reveal a common picture of managerial work as largely technical, tactical, reactive, and frenetic. Even senior management appear to spend relatively little time on planning and abstract formulation and are subject to constant interruption, flit from topic to topic, and respond to initiatives from others far more than they initiate themselves (Mintzberg, 1973a; Horne and Lupton, 1965). Looking at managerial interaction, research reveals that managers spend a great deal of their time imparting and receiving information, largely through face-to-face interactions (Horne and Lupton, 1965; Kotter, 1982) as well as interacting with other managers at the same level in organisations. While a good deal of managerial communication appears to be lateral (Dubin and Spray, 1964; Stewart, 1976), at more senior levels communication also includes variable amounts of vertical communication. Significantly, much of this managerial interaction appears, at least on the surface, to be wide-ranging in subject matter, informal in character, and only tenuously connected to business matters (Kotter, 1982). Linked to this latter point, some studies (e.g. Dalton, 1959) have suggested that managers engage in a good deal of informal activity which is often concerned with power struggles between various organisational factions to secure or defend resources as well as dealing with the informal interpretation, negotiation, and implementation of corporate policy at a local level. Similarly, Stewart (1983) has highlighted the 'political' nature of much of the informal work undertaken by managers. Here, however, Hales (1986) has pointed out that 'the distinction between 'formal' and 'informal' managerial work is difficult to sustain except in terms of managers' own perceptions of what is and is not 'really part of the job'. Moreover, these perceptions, like managerial work itself, are highly fluid' (p.100).

Managerial research has also pointed to two further aspects of managerial work. First, management scholars appear to broadly agree that managerial work is contingent upon inter alia function, level, organisation [type, structure, size] and environment (e.g. Burns, 1957; Dubin and Spray, 1964; Mintzberg, 1973; Phyesey, 1972; Stewart, 1976). Second, managerial jobs appear, in general, to be sufficiently loosely defined to be highly negotiable and susceptible to choice, both in terms of style and content (Stewart, 1976; Stewart et al, 1980). Not only do managers appear to make choices about the job content [which aspects of a job a manager chooses to emphasise], but also about the methods [how the work is done]. Often managers attempt to alter the content of their jobs in terms of making them less reactive and dependent upon the demands of others (Sayles, 1964). Thus Dalton (1964) suggested that negotiation over job content is not only part of what managers do, but is also a motif running through other activities.

What this brief review of the management literature highlights is the sharp contrast between the way in which management scholars have attempted to define and make sense of managerial work and the way in which public relations scholars have attempted to conceptualise the manager's role in public relations. Here it is perhaps instructive to attempt to draw some tentative comparisons [see Table 1] between the main element of managerial work identified in Hales' (1986) review of 30 years of managerial research, and the manager role inventory measures derived by synthesizing the work of a number of the principal roles studies (i.e. Broom and Smith, 1979; Broom and Dozier, 1986; Dozier and Broom, 1995; and Toth et al, 1998).

Direct comparisons between these two sets of “managerial descriptors” is problematical for a number of reasons, not least being that fact that these two sets of descriptors have been derived using quite different methodological approaches [as a result of empirical quantitative and qualitative research in the case of management studies, whereas in the case of public relations, the descriptors represent conceptual dimensions drawn largely from a review of secondary sources]. Further difficulties surround the fact that the two sets of descriptors are not intended to ‘measure’ or
Meet with clients/executives;  
- Planning & managing budgets;  
- Supervising the work of others;  
- Evaluating the results of programmes;  
- Counselling management;  
- Act as catalyst for management decisions  
- Managing public relations programmes;  
- Diagnose public relations problems  
- Making communications policy decisions;  
- Handling disturbances & maintaining work flows;  
- Negotiating;  
- Planning;  
- Controlling & directing subordinates.

Role items used to measure the PR manager role  
Main elements of managerial work identified by management research

Table 1: Comparison of public relations manager role measures and the main elements of management identified by managerial scholars

delineate precisely the same thing. While management researchers have sought to identify universal or generic elements of management work—what managers do; public relations scholars have sought to define the manager’s role from a much narrower functional perspective, rather than in terms of a set of generic management attributes or competencies. A third source of problems relates to the fact that management and public relations research in this area of “managerial work/roles” does not cover same scope in terms of geographical/societal/cultural settings. While management research has been conducted across a range of organizational types as well as in several different cultural settings; public relations roles research has been confined largely to US based studies with relatively narrowly defined target group. However, notwithstanding these caveats, there do appear to be some interesting similarities between the items that make up these two lists, as well as some notable differences. Here it is perhaps interesting to note that Broom’s original manager role inventory excluded any explicit reference to items such as ‘planning and managing budgets’ or ‘supervising the work of others’—which would seem obvious managerial tasks. It is equally interesting to note that management scholars such as Hales (1986) and Fondas and Stewart (1994) point out that managerial scholars have not used roles concepts as a framework for their research, with most studies offering largely descriptive profiles of work managers perform and how they allocate their time. Hales, in particular, points to the potential benefits of utilising role analysis as a basis for more in-depth understanding of managerial jobs.

Understanding how the manager’s role in the public relations context should be understood and how the profile of managerial activities performed by practitioners might be best uncovered arguable are important steps in understanding how public relations may add value to organisations. Here if we accept the proposition that perhaps the main way in which public relations adds value to organisations is through the value of the long term relationships the function helps to build and maintain (Grunig et al., 2002); then it is important to understand the type of decisions and actions that practitioners perform to develop and maintain key stakeholder relationships. Here the researchers were conscious of the need to adopt a more “grounded” inductive approach to investigating the pattern of senior practitioner work; rather than relying on the type of role inventory- based survey methods that have traditionally been used to study public relations role enactment. Moreover, the study was conducted amongst a sample of both UK and USA organisations to allow some international comparisons to be drawn.

Methodology

The research reported in this paper represents the findings from the first phase of an on-going collaborative research project which aims to uncover and explicate the nature of the managerial work performed by senior public relations practitioners [those deemed to enact a substantive managerial role] within their organisations. The research, which was conducted during a four-month period, involved a series of in-depth interviews with US and UK practitioners. The perspective adopted in this study draws heavily on the traditions of manager/management research (Stewart, 1976, 1983; Kotter, 1982; Mintzberg, 1973; Hales, 1986, etc.) examining inductively the way senior public relations managers allocate their time across activities within their departments and organisations, and develop relationships with their peers and superiors. In this way, the study set out to determine to what degree senior practitioners do engage in the types of activities that are capable of adding genuine value to organisations, and equally, what factors/influences explain possible variations in practitioners’ behaviour patterns. In this sense, this study seeks to complement some of the traditional stream of research into the value of public relations/communications to organisations while at the same time challenging some of the assumptions underpinning traditional views of “manager’s role” in public relations. This approach reflects the call by organizational scholars such as Eisenhardt (1989), Parkhe (1993), and Burrell (1996) for more emphasis to be placed in organizational research on developing new theories from empirical data, rather than relying on essentially quantitative, deductive, theory-testing research paradigms.

Data collection and analysis

Data was collected through extended in-depth interviews with 31 senior practitioners drawn from a cross-section of US and UK organisations. Here each interview, which lasted between one and one-half and two hours, focused around two broad areas of questioning. Firstly, questions were designed to elicit data about the position of the communications function within organisations, practitioners’ relationships with senior management and colleagues working in other functions, and the extent of the function’s contribution to organisational strategy-making. Secondly, interviewees were asked to take the researchers through a detailed review of their appointments’ diary/work schedule covering a typical two-week period with “typical” being self-defined by the practitioners being interviewed. Wherever possible, hard copies of the practitioners’ diary entries were also obtained for further detailed analysis. Here the researchers sought to probe into the nature and purpose of the appointments’/activities recorded and the allocation of practitioners’ time across activities. All interviews were taped and transcribed for subsequent analysis. Data analysis
was, at least in part, informed by adopting a broad conceptual template (Miles and Huberman, 1994; King, 1998) derived from a review of the management and public relations roles literature, and the data was then examined holistically, categorizing key issues that emerge from the interviewees’ narratives. The approach taken here represents an essentially “middle-order” (Dey, 1993) approach rather than representing a fully “grounded theory” approach (Glasser & Strauss, 1967).

**Sampling**

This initial phase of the study comprised interviewees with 31 senior public relations managers drawn from a roughly equal number of US and UK organisations. In case of the UK, some 14 organisations were included in this initial phase of the study. Participating organisations were chosen on a judgmental basis from the Financial Times top 250 companies list and from the Hollis Directory to provide a broad representation of industry sectors. Companies were approached initially to ascertain whether or not a formal communications function existed and to assess their willingness participate in the research project. In the case of the US, this initial phase of the research was conducted primarily within the state of Oklahoma and Texas, but included organisations which operated on a state, regional, national, and, in some cases, international level. Participating organisations were selected from regional and state business directories and from the local PRSA Chapter. An overview of the types of organisations included in the study is provided in Appendix 1.

**Limitations**

Clearly, given the exploratory and qualitative nature of this phase of the research, it is not possible to generalise about the pattern of managerial-type work and behaviour of senior public relations practitioners. Indeed, the researchers were conscious of the need to exercise caution about what conclusions could be drawn from what was recognised to be a quite ground-breaking approach to the study of senior practitioner work patterns. What the study does present, however, is a rich range of evidence that reveals some useful insights into what constitutes the managerial dimension of the work of senior practitioners across a varied range of organisational types.

The researchers were conscious of these potential dangers inherent in the analysis and problems of possible bias associated with the data collection method (Nisbett and Ross, 1980; Miles and Huberman, 1994), all of which could lead to spurious interpretation of the findings. To help guard against such errors and to check the accuracy of data collected through the in-depth interviews, where possible, the researchers obtained additional documentary evidence from each of the sample organizations (e.g. annual reports, corporate charts, and hard copy of the practitioners’ diaries). In this way, the researchers sought to check both the reliability and validity of the analysis in terms of the consistency of the categories assigned to the data (Kirk and Miller, 1986) as well as in terms of the truthfulness, plausibility, and credibility of the data collected (Hammersley, 1992).

**Findings**

The findings of this study are presented in terms of two broad but related themes; namely evidence concerning the organisational role of the public relations/communications function and the interaction between practitioners and senior management personnel and second, the evidence of the work patterns of senior practitioners in terms of the profile of activities that make up the practitioner’s “typical” week. These two themes, in turn, help to provide further insights into how the work of public relations practitioners adds value to their organisations.

**The organisational role of public relations/communications function**

Although it was not possible to ensure that all interviewees held strictly the same level of seniority within their respective organisations, all were deemed to operate at a relatively senior managerial level within their respective organisations, either heading up the communication/public relations function or operating as a senior member of the function’s management team. What was noticeable, however, was the fact that very few interviewees had the term “public relations” within their job title. Indeed, when asked about this point a number of interviews acknowledged that it was comparatively rare for more senior practitioners to use “public relations” as a job title, rather titles such as “Public Affairs”, “Corporate Communications” or “External Affairs” were used, largely because they were seen to have greater acceptance and status with other senior management functions.

**Department size**

It was also notable that there were quite wide variations in the size of communications departments, which ranged from as small as a single individual to around 30 or more individuals in the case of some of the larger in-house departments [see Appendix 1 for details]. The largest communications function in the study was that found at an international alcoholic beverage and fast food business, which had some 100 people in total working in various communications functions located around the world, nearly 30 of whom were based in the London head office of the company. Interestingly, the size of the communications department did not seem to be necessarily related directly to the size of the organisation. Rather, department size appeared more to reflect factors such as the type of organisation, the type of industry sector, and perhaps most important, the relative importance that different organisations assigned to public relations/communication. Interviewees across the sample acknowledged that there had been a trend towards the downsizing of headcount within communications departments in recent years as a result of financial pressures, regardless of the type of organisation. In the case of larger departments, the reduction in numbers was reported to have been quite marked, with staff rolls falling by as much as 30% to 50%.

**Reporting relationships**

In the vast majority of cases, both within the UK and US sample, interviewees reported either directly or indirectly to the most senior levels of management within their respective organisations. In a small number of cases, practitioners reported to a marketing director; and in one case, to the head of the finance function, which was attributed to a previous structure when the communications was identified primarily with the investor relations function. However, from the interviewees’ narratives it was clear that having a reporting line into top management did not guarantee either “a place at the top management table” nor influence within top management team. Here the study found a rather mixed picture in terms of the prevailing worldview of the public/communications function held by the top management and others within the organisation.
Top management’s worldview

Despite the growth in size and increased prominence of public relations profession during the past decade, the findings of this study suggest that there is still a quite widespread misunderstanding amongst senior management in both UK and US organisations about what public relations is and how it can add value to an organisation rather than simply being seen as a ‘cost centre’. Here, for example, the US practitioner for a national telecom company claimed that: “There still is a lot of widespread confusion among the management about the difference between public relations and marketing”. Other practitioners suggested that there was often something of an “education job “to be done to persuade management about the potential value of public relations. On the whole, however, the balance of evidence from the study suggests an underlying trend towards a greater appreciation of the role and value of public relations amongst senior management. The following narratives from two of the practitioner interviews illustrates this type of ongoing challenge:

“I took over this job or just over a year ago, and my first visits and meetings were met with, ‘well what benefit are you going to bring’. Why should we spend time working with you and one of my early challenges and indeed in some cases it remains a challenge, is to increase awareness and understanding amongst the MDs of these local bus companies who traditionally have always been local bus companies. We are having an effect generally in encouraging the MDs to realize that an effective and planned PR strategy and a sustained strategy can bring clearly identifiable benefits.”

[senior practitioner at a large UK national bus and train operator]

“...and highly controversial expansion project. Here the interviewee at a large regional airport explained how the public relations function’s status and recognition had been called upon to act and had demonstrated its potential value in helping to meet and resolve the challenge the organisation faced. Here the interviewee at a large regional airport explained how the public relations function’s status and recognition had been called upon to act and had demonstrated its potential value in helping to meet and resolve the challenge the organisation faced. Here, the interviewee at a large regional airport explained how the public relations function’s status and recognition had been called upon to act and had demonstrated its potential value in helping to meet and resolve the challenge the organisation faced.

“...and as a result of this they (public relations function) play a much more prominent role in the top management board meetings and have a much greater level of influence. I think the public relations function now has a much greater level of status and recognition within the organisation.”

[senior practitioner at US-based international energy company]

Interestingly, public relations appeared to be more highly valued in organisations that operated either in relatively high profile sectors where the organisations was under regular public scrutiny, or which had been through a particular crisis or faced a major challenge where the public relations / communications function had been called upon to act and had demonstrated its potential value in helping to meet and resolve the challenge the organisation faced. Here, the interviewee at a large regional airport explained how the public relations function’s status and recognition had been transformed through its role in helping to handle a major and highly controversial expansion project:

“I think previously this job was about publicity for marketing purposes and it used to sit within the marketing department. When the need to influence on the second runway project came about, the directorate that became corporate affairs was actually called the ‘Runway 2 Directorate’. It had a different director, but all of those bits – planning, strategy, PR, community affairs - were brought together because it was essentially a big corporate affairs project.”

Practitioner competence and charisma

In probing further for the reasons why some practitioners appeared to have greater status and influence within their organisations than others, the importance of the senior practitioner’s perceived knowledge, competence, and, in particular, personal charisma emerged as key factors. It was notable that in virtually all cases where the public relations/ communications function was said to have a strong influential position, a highly experienced, but more importantly, strongly charismatic individual headed the function. The following commentaries illustrate this point:

“Here it (corporate affairs) is extremely powerful because of the individual concerned, because she’s tough and good... There’s quite a lot vested in the individual people rather than the functions, I think I am similarly seen as a member of a dominant coalition group” (large UK regional airport senior practitioner)

“The longer I’ve been here I think the more the upper-level people believe in my abilities because they call me in and they say ‘Hey, we’re going to sit down and figure this out and we want you to be in this meeting with us.’ “He (his boss) trusts my judgment enough that I know what issues need to go through him” (large US state legal agency senior practitioner)

Membership in the ‘dominant coalition’ and input to strategic decisions making

Examining the extent to which senior practitioners operated as members of the top management team (dominant coalition) within organisations, a rather mixed picture tended to emerge. While the study suggests a trend towards increased recognition of the value of public relations /communications by top management, this did not necessary mean that public relations had “a seat at the top table” in all such organisations. Closer analysis of the interview transcripts, highlighted subtle differences between ‘participating’ in top management decision-making and simply ‘being present’ when such decisions are taken, but having little or no input to them. Here, for example, the interviewee at a US federal agency explained the largely passive role she played in attending management board meetings mainly so that by “knowing where the business is going to go in five years I can better incorporate that into the communication plan.”

In contrast, clearly there were some practitioners who not only attended top management board meetings, but played an active part in board decisions as a full-fledged member of the senior management team. Here, for example, the senior practitioner at a UK water utility company commented that:

“They (management) do take it seriously, and there is structural evidence for that largely within my reporting relationships. I’m reporting to the chairman for financial work, for the operating business work I’m reporting to the managing director of the group, and I’m a member of the executive management team of the group. So you do have that sort of top table recognition within the business which is wonderful.”

Similarly, at a US-based international energy corporation it was stated communications personnel were active members of the strategy-making team:

“So they (management) want someone from our group to be basically in every meeting and every strategy that development can find because they do see that communications is related to all of these things...”

Here, one of the interviewees, the chief executive of a large international PR agency, offered an interesting commentary on the way he perceived the differences between UK and US companies in terms of the way in which the top management view and deal with the public relations function:

“I think its getting there but I think it’s (the status of PR) still low compared to America. We still don’t think, with the exception pos-
sibly of financial PR if you’re a FTSE company, you’re not really at the top level in the same way as in the US. When I go over to the US, I talk to my colleagues there, a lot of the time they’re dealing with a chairman or a chief executive. Whereas over here, the book still tends to stop at the finance director or the corporate affairs director. I think that is changing. I think that the profile has risen as PR has become more a strategic tool of companies rather than something slightly sort of "airy fairy" activity, but I don’t think it’s taken as seriously in the board room as it is in America yet.”

Comments such as those above raise some interesting questions about the respective position of public relations in both UK and US organisations. The evidence presented from this study does not allow us to confirm or refute fully the above suggestion about the relative status of public relations in the UK and USA, since the findings include examples of UK and US organisations where public relations is both highly regarded, as well as other examples where it appears to be viewed largely as a tactical, functional activity. Nevertheless, the study does offer some interesting insights into the variations in senior practitioner role enactment across a range of UK and US organisations.

The distribution of practitioners’ time

Drawing on analysis of the interviewees’ work diaries and interview data, the researchers were able to construct an indicative picture of the breakdown of senior practitioners’ time across a ‘typical’ two week period. Here it was recognised that there may be no such thing as a “typical” working week, but interviewees were allowed to select the work period to be examined and offered the chance for comment on the representativeness of the pattern of activities occurring during the weeks examined. Although offering only a broad overview and relatively crude percentage breakdown of the allocation of senior practitioner time, this analysis does provide some interesting insights into the work patterns of senior practitioners and how they appear to allocate their time between activities. This analysis may, in turn, shed further light on how and why the role of public relations and its perceived value to organisations may vary from organisation to organisation.

Core activities

What the analysis reveals is that the bulk of both US and UK senior practitioner time (UK: 54%; US: 46%) appears to be taken up in a variety of internal and external meetings or attendance at external events. A further 18-20% of the typical working week appears to be taken up with a range administrative work concerned with aspects of running the respective communication departments and, in particular, managing the staff within them. Although the major categories of activity which occupied practitioners’ time were broadly similar in both the US and UK sample, there were some noticeable differences in terms of the relative amount of time which US and UK practitioners appeared to spend on activities such as, writing, technical or craft work, trouble shooting and attending external events. To some extent these differences might be explained simply in terms of the variation in the way some activities might have been categorized, for example, whether some elements of trouble shooting-type activities might have been categorized as either administrative work or even as element dealt with via internal/external meetings. However, one of the obvious differences between the two samples that seemed unlikely to be explained in terms of the “vagaries of categorization” was difference between the two sets of practitioners in terms of the time allocated to technical or craft work.

Technical / craft activity

Although only accounting for on average around 11% of US senior practitioners’ time, this was still almost double the time that UK practitioners indicated that they spent on technical or craft activities. Here many of UK practitioners, in particular, maintained that they tended not to get involved in the routine technical work such as drafting press releases or brochures, delegating this work, where possible, either to members of their teams or to external agencies or freelancers. Two notable exceptions were the drafting of speeches for chairmen or chief executives and the preparation of news releases relating to major corporate announcements to the city, both of which senior practitioners saw as tasks that could not easily be delegated. In contrast, there appeared to be a much greater involvement in aspects of technical or craft work among the sample of US practitioners, with a number of those interviewed acknowledging that craft work including writing for the media and for newsletters, handling events, and dealing with the media remained an important part of the job. Of course, it may be easy to dismiss such craft work as being largely short-term and tactical. However, as a number of interviewees emphasised, some element of craft work, particularly some elements of writing can be extremely important and cannot be easily delegated or "farmed out" to freelancers or agencies. The following commentaries illustrate these points:

“I am the designated ‘hitter’ for all of those things (e.g., newsletters, promotional memos). That might mean that I’ll write an original ad or marketing copy; often it means that I’ll heavily edit whatever comes my way. One thing is key - people come to rely on me pretty heavily for editing…it goes through me to make sure it’s written well…” (Senior US practitioner in chamber of commerce)

“…the things I tend to write would be… quite a lot of the chief executive’s speeches…and I write the press releases for (stock market) results and for big announcements…and I do that because I think I’m the one…closest to the strategy, and in a sense we’ve helped articulate it; therefore, we should be the people who write those things. But the rest of it, no I would expect other people to do.” (Senior UK practitioner in international drinks company)

A number of plausible explanations might be advanced to account for the observed differences in the greater proportion of time that US practitioners appeared to spend on technical or craft activity compared to the UK sample. These might include: differences in the relative size of communications departments, which may limit or enhance the scope for delegation of tasks; differences in practitioner preferences for craft rather than ‘managerial’ type work; differences in managerial experience or education; and/or differences in top managements’ expectation of practitioner role enactment. Here, it is acknowledged that further explanatory research
is needed to try to pin down the answer to why such differences in the UK and US practitioners’ work patterns exist.

Internal meetings
A notable feature of the work patterns of both the US and UK practitioners is the fact that between a quarter and up to nearly one-third of their time appeared to be taken up in internal meetings. Further probing of interviewees and analysis of diary entries revealed that this broad category of activity comprised a number of different types of meetings, ranging from daily or weekly team briefings, meetings with senior management to provide advice or to update them on particular developments, meetings with colleagues in other departments to discuss common problems or to resolve areas of possible conflict, and meetings with colleagues to simply keep abreast of “what is going on” within the organisation, or in some cases, to brain storm ideas and discuss future plans. Virtually all interviewees acknowledged the volume of meetings that seem to take place in organisations can sometimes get in the way of getting things done, although most also acknowledged that meetings did offer an opportunity for valuable face-to-face discussion with colleagues, which could help overcome potential internal conflicts. The following commentaries offer a flavour of the differing attitudes held amongst the sample towards the volume of meetings that they seemed to have to attend.

“When I first joined in the company in 1999 I thought the intensity of meetings was a function of the fact that I was new and that people wanted to get to know me and I wanted to meet them. But it wasn’t; this is the way they do business. And I had to try to extricate myself by being quite discriminating about the meetings I appeared at or delegated.” (Senior practitioner in large UK industrial chemical company)

“I’ll tell you, this is kind of interesting. I try to stay out of internal meetings and I’ll tell you why. It’s a waste of my time. They can go and they can get the details, but then we’re not ready to do anything with it…until the products are ready to go or they’re ready for us to put a budget together and we can get through that, it’s just a waste of our time.” (Senior practitioner in large US health insurance organisation)

Networking and external meetings
The importance of external ‘networking’ and of keeping in touch with relevant events, people and developments in the organisation’s environment was widely acknowledged and was reflected in the fact that both UK and US practitioners reported spending around a fifth or more of their time either attending external meetings or events. Again the following examples sum up the importance practitioners attached to this activity:

“I try to get to a number of those, firstly networking just so you’ve actually got your communications networks with the different industries and companies…I try to keep those sort of networks…gradually by the time you leave you’ve got to realize that people actually did know you…that it’s sort of on the community front.” (UK chemical company senior practitioner)

“But I think networking is critical. I have some really good friends in the PR industry that are valuable to both. One set of them are specific zoo and aquarium professionals that are important because they understand our industry, and the other set are PR friends here that understand our market better…I mean that’s very valuable and it’s also soothing, kind of calming.” (US zoo senior practitioner)

Perhaps one of the most telling comments was made by the senior regional corporate communications executive at a large UK telecommunications company which has radically restructured and downsized its communication function over the past decade. Here the regionally based team of senior practitioners have been tasked with the major responsibility of maintaining regular contact with designated key opinion formers within their regions with a view to building understanding of the company’s business and future plans and engendering a supportive attitude towards the company with respect to its various future initiatives. Here it was explained that the company had largely abandoned any emphasis on regional media relations or other mainstream tactical publicity work which research had revealed had relatively little impact stakeholder perceptions of the company. Rather most of regional communications resource was invested in a carefully targeted programme of one-to one contacts with agreed target stakeholders with a view to establishing and/or strengthening personal relationships with them that would then allow the company’s position of various issues to be put across far more effectively than using conventional communications techniques. Here it was pointed out that building relationships with key stakeholders is something that demands personal face-to-face contact: “you cannot expect people to have a relationship with a faceless company”.

Administrative work and trouble-shooting
It was noticeable that both UK and US practitioners appeared to spend a significant proportion of their time (around 20%) each week handling administrative tasks, including correspondence, e-mail, and other operational matters. Here some practitioners commented on the lack of traditional secretarial support as a result of economic downsizing and the pervasiveness of IT systems, which has led to practitioners tending to handle much more of their own correspondence. All practitioners identified the rapid growth in the use and receipt of e-mail, and this trend was viewed with a degree of ambivalence. On one hand, e-mail was seen as a valuable way of disseminating and receiving information and maintaining a network of contacts, but, on the other hand, the sheer volume of e-mail being received was seen to be a burden which kept practitioners from completing other tasks. As one UK practitioner in a large public relations agency suggested: “I think it [e-mail] should have reduced the number of meetings, but I suspect it hasn’t, but it’s certainly created more process work.”

Planning
Perhaps the most unexpected and initially perplexing finding was the relatively small amount of time that practitioners both in US and UK organisations appeared to spend on the area of planning, which typically accounted for less than 10% of their time. When probed further about this, some extremely interesting explanations emerged. One reasonably common explanation was that practitioners often found it very difficult to make the time to focus their minds on planning during what was often viewed as a very frenetic pattern of existence. Here for example, one UK practitioner commented that “planning is something I do when the phone doesn’t ring.” Moreover, because of the frenetic nature of the working week, a number of practitioners acknowledged that they found it almost impossible to do any serious strategic thinking or planning within the office itself. However, by way of contrast, a small number of practitioners did see strategic thinking and planning as something that was an essential part of their job and they went out of their way to make the time for thinking and planning:

“I think that so much of my day is spent in monitoring where we’re up to with the different projects and where I can, although I often have to do this at airports or on trains, when you do have extra
time to think I will spend time putting together strategies for particular projects…” (Senior UK transportation practitioner)

“I’d say 30 or 40 percent (of my time) is spent on strategy planning. It’s kind of hard to say because a lot of that is in working with the managers in my group on that kind of thing because they are doing a lot…on the front line and facilitation and participation…that’s most likely where you’re going to see me directly involved…” (Senior US international energy corporation practitioner)

Thus, in summary, this study paints an interesting picture of what might be a more or less typical pattern of senior public relations/ communications practitioner work in UK and US organisations. Although exhibiting some notable variations in distribution of practitioner’s time both across the two national samples as well as within each sample, some broadly common elements of the senior communicator’s job did emerge. Interestingly the pattern of senior practitioner work revealed echoes the findings of some of the major managerial studies (e.g. Hales, 1986; Kotter, 1982; Stewart, 1976) in terms of the pattern of major characteristics of managerial work uncovered. This was particularly true of the often frenetic pattern of day-to-day work. What is important now is to reflect on the inferences that can be drawn from the study, both in terms of our understanding of the “managerial” dimension of public relations work and the implications for our understanding of how public relations can value to organisations.

Discussion

Reflecting on the findings of this study, some very interesting comparative insights into the work patterns and roles played by both US and UK senior public relations practitioners emerge, which in turn may help to explain how public relations can add value to organisations. Moreover, the study offers a critique of traditional views of the way practitioner roles within organisations are defined, and in particular, how managerial role enactment is measured and understood. Here the study highlights the weakness of the widely used role inventory measures, which the authors suggest do not allow some of the more important dimensions of the managerial work in the public relations context to be uncovered. The authors suggest the need for more inductive and perhaps longitudinal research to help uncover the elements and processes of the management role within the public relations function.

Turning to the issue of “value” creation in the public relations context, the study highlights a key challenge for public relations practitioners in trying to demonstrate the function’s true value to organisations. Here the research reveals continued uncertainty about the value public relations amongst the top management within organisations, with some informants claiming that the role of public relations was increasingly well understood and valued by senior management, whereas in other cases, it was recognised that there “was still some way to go” in educating management about the function’s potential. One of the more common problems acknowledged by several informants was the tendency for senior management to consider “value” primarily in terms of short-term financial returns which it was acknowledged is difficult for public relations to demonstrate. However, one inference that might be drawn from the study is that some practitioners may be guilty of failing to explain clearly what they do, and how what they do might contribute effectively to a company’s longer term goals. Here, it is suggested that there is still a tendency for many practitioners to focus too heavily on the more tangible dimensions of the work they perform, namely on media relations and tactical or craft activity which may reinforce the impression of public relations as a largely tactical communications function. Thus, the authors suggest that improving understanding of the potential value of public relations to organisations, first requires a clearer understanding of what it is that practitioners do within organisations, particularly at the managerial level. This understanding of the work of senior practitioners in particular, is something which traditional roles research has only partially helped to reveal.

If we turn to the evidence of senior practitioner work patterns revealed in this study, as was highlighted earlier; both US and UK practitioners appeared to spend a significant proportion of their time engaged in activities that on the surface may not seem concerned specifically with value creation. Indeed the study found that both UK and US practitioners spent around 50 per cent of their time attending either internal or external meeting and events, and less than 10 per cent of their time explicitly on planning activity. The study also suggests that, at least as far as this sample of practitioners was concerned, senior practitioners in the US organisations appeared to spend twice as much time (11 per cent) on technical/craft activity as their UK counterparts (5 per cent). Of course, some caution may be needed here in interpreting these reported differences in the allocation of time completely at face value, as the analysis of peoples’ diaries is far from an exact science and is dependent on the accuracy of the informants’ diary entries. Nevertheless, despite the possible limitations of this diary analysis, the authors believe that data does provide a reasonably sound enough indication of the overall breakdown of the way practitioners allocate their time between activities.

From this analysis one might conclude that neither US nor UK practitioners appear to spend that much time on what might be viewed as the more obvious value creating activities, i.e., planning detailed strategies to enhance the reputation, brand sales or other aspects of organisational performance. However, if we accept the broader definition of value in terms of “a combination of financial return and the risks associated with organisation’s long term relationships” (Grunig et al 2002, p.105); then it follows that the emphasis on internal and external meetings and networking activities found amongst both UK and US practitioners would be consistent with this type of relationship building/maintaining goal.

Of course, the problem with much of this networking, liaison and relationship-building activity is that it is extremely difficult to evaluate in terms of any net monetary return to the organisation. It is perhaps only at times of severe pressure and/or crisis that the importance of the investment in building an organisation’s stakeholder relationships may come to the fore. Moreover, it may be misleading to assume that much of time that appears to be spent on dealing with a whole range of troubleshooting, administrative, and/or internal “politicising” and power-broking activities are not at all important. While such activities may not have any obvious monetary value, they are an inevitable part of day-to-day corporate life, and as such have to be accommodated alongside what might be seen as the more strategic, value-enhancing elements of the job. Indeed, the problem of balancing the competing demands on management time is a motif running through all studies of managerial life within organisations.

What this analysis of the distribution of senior practitioners’ time does do is to raise further questions about the adequacy of the way the “manager role” in public relations (e.g. Dozier, 1984; 1992; Dozier and Broom, 1995) has been defined, or perhaps more to the point, how the manager’s role is measured in terms of role
inventory activities. Here comparison between the traditional role inventory measures associated with manager role enactment and the inductively-derived manager activity profile identified in this paper is quite revealing. The picture of the public relations/communications manager that emerges from this study is not of someone engaged primarily in working with top management to help resolve organisational problems and/or develop organisational strategies, nor of someone engaged primarily in formulating and planning organisational communications strategies. Rather, the picture that emerges is of someone who spends a large proportion of his or her time in face-to-face communication with others both within and outside the organisation, exchanging information, networking, negotiating, trouble-shooting, and generally dealing with the unpredictable day-to-day problems that the public relations department may often be called upon to handle. This is not to suggest that senior practitioners do not engage in any strategising and planning, rather, as a number of practitioners suggested, there is often little space or time for strategic thinking and planning within the day-to-day schedule of work. Indeed, a number those interviewed talked about doing most of their creative and strategic thinking away from the office where they could be relatively free from the incessant pattern of interruptions to the working day.

Interestingly, the pattern of senior practitioner work revealed by this study can be seen to mirror; to a large extent, that found by management scholars such as Stewart (1976) and Horne and Lupton (1965) who suggested that managerial work is often technical, tactical, reactive, and frenetic in nature, with relatively little time spent on planning and abstract formulation of strategy. Further parallels can also be drawn between the findings of this study and the results of management research which suggests that managers spend a good deal of their time imparting and receiving information, largely through face-to-face interactions (e.g. Horne and Lupton, 1965; Kotter; 1982) and interacting with other managers at the same level (e.g. Dubin and Spray, 1964; Stewart, 1976).

Thus the “typical” pattern of work performed by senior practitioners that emerges from this study would seem to fit only partially with the description of the manager’s role found in much of the public relations roles literature. Such a finding is perhaps only to be expected given the limitations of the role inventory measures favoured by roles researchers, which, as was suggested earlier, have failed to embrace many of the more obvious, generic elements of managerial work identified within the management literature. Indeed, the criticism that Hales (1986) levelled at a number of managerial studies very neatly sums up what is perhaps the major limitation of the way the manager’s role has been conceptualised by public relations scholars; namely, that insufficient emphasis has been given to “distinguishing between actual observable behaviour and activities (what managers do), and what managers are charged, or seek, to achieve - their “tasks, responsibilities, and functions” (p.104).

Moreover, as a number of management scholars (e.g. Stewart, 1988, 1997; Hales, 1986) have also pointed out, managers’ jobs may vary in content and emphasis in different functional or organisational contexts. Thus it may be misleading to talk about ‘the’ manager’s job as if there were a common set of elements in all management jobs, although as Stewart (1997) has acknowledged, “some more or less common elements may exist across managerial jobs” (p.10). Equally, the way managers choose to perform similar jobs may differ; reflecting individual personalities, preferences, and styles of management. None of these considerations appear to have been taken on board by roles researchers in thinking about the design and focus of their studies. Extending these arguments, it may also be important to try to distinguish between the overall pattern of practitioner activities and those activities which add genuine value to the organisation, rather than simply maintaining the status quo.

**Implications for future research**

Although the data evidence presented in this study obviously cannot be treated as typical or necessarily representative of the work patterns of senior practitioners within all UK and US organisations, nevertheless the authors believe it does represent a valuable starting point in developing a more insightful understanding of the pattern of senior practitioners work and its recognized value to organisations. In this sense, it is suggested that further qualitative research into practitioners’ work patterns and behaviour not only in UK and US organisations, but also perhaps in different countries and or regions will help to deepen our understanding not only of the management function and process in public relations, but also of how public relations can contribute to the long term value creating process within organisations.

This study also suggests that scholars and practitioners should perhaps re-examine how the concept of “value” is understood in the public relations context, looking beyond the often narrowly defined monetary definitions of value, and considering how other dimensions of value such as long term reputational value, internal employee relationship value and external stakeholder relationship values contribute collectively to the organisation’s successful goal attainment.
## APPENDIX 1: Profiles of UK and US Organisations - Phase One of Senior Practitioner Work Profiles - UK Organisations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation Type, Sector, Business</th>
<th>Communication Department Size</th>
<th>Reporting Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A large NW based industrial chemical company</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>To main board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A major regional airport</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>To main board director of corporate communications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A large regional water utility company</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>To chief executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An international alcoholic drink and fast food provider</td>
<td>23 in UK &amp; 100 around the world</td>
<td>To chief executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The financial services division of an international bank</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>To chief executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK arm of an international speciality chemical company</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>To main board director of corporate communications in parent company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International fuel energy company</td>
<td>33 at HQ</td>
<td>To chief executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International full service advertising and marketing communications agency</td>
<td>7 (in PR division) 350+ in other comms. functions</td>
<td>To main board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large UK based PR agency, subsidiary of International parent company</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>To main board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large bus and rail transport operator</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>To main board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large telecommunications company</td>
<td>10 operating in regional communications</td>
<td>To main board director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International industrial chemical company</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International communications agency</td>
<td>300 in London of which 30 work in managerial roles</td>
<td>To main board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International speciality chemical company</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>To main board</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Phase one of senior practitioner work profiles - US organisations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation Type, Sector, Business</th>
<th>Communication Department Size</th>
<th>Reporting Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large regional broadband communications company serving 6.2 million customers in 20 US states</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>To Vice President of Government &amp; Public Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major zoological park based in the state capital</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>To Zoo Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading provider of cellular phone services to 8.6 million customers in 18 states</td>
<td>2 with contract to outside agency</td>
<td>To Director of Marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large-sized US federal government housing agency</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>To State Housing Agency Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A medium-sized turnkey service bureau that provides comprehensive outsourcing solutions for back office administration</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>To company president</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A large state government legal agency</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>To communications director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A large health insurance company with offices in all 50 states, but each state is an independent entity</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>To vice president of marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A medium-sized chemical consultancy company specialising in fluids</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>To regional division general manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A large state vocational educational and careers advice service provider</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>To state director of vocational education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A large energy company providing natural gas, natural gas liquids, petroleum, etc. operations span the US and throughout South America and Europe (Interviews were conducted in 3 separate divisions of the organisation)</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>To Vice President of Finance, To Vice President of Communications, To Vice President of Communications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A diversified energy company involved in oil and gas production, natural gas processing and transmission. Operates mainly in the mid-continent areas of the USA</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>To Senior Vice President of Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A large nationwide cooperative of community-owned health care systems</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>To Division Vice President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A small-to-medium sized for-profit restaurant and clothing business located in the central US</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>To Company President &amp; CEO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chamber of Commerce serving business in a mid-sized central US city</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>To Director of Marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A small, independent public relations consultancy</td>
<td>4 with freelancers</td>
<td>To co-colleague/owner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


- Stewart, R. (1983). Managerial behaviour: How research has changed the traditional picture. In M. Jackson (Ed), Perspectives on management (pp. 82-98). London: Oxford University Press.


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1 Here we have excluded reference to the numbers employed within the small sample.
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Danny Moss is co-Director of the Centre for Corporate and Public Affairs at the Manchester Metropolitan University and is Course Leader for the University’s Master’s Degrees in Public Relations. Previously, as Director of Public Relations programmes at the University of Stirling, he was responsible for the introduction of the first dedicated Master’s Degree in Public Relations in the UK. He is also the co-organiser of the annual International Public Relations Research Symposium, which is held Lake Bled, Slovenia.

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Assessing the Value of Corporate Public Affairs Management: A Reassessment After More than a Decade’s Passing

by Craig S. Fleisher

Introduction

The evaluation and measurement (E&M) of organizational interactions among stakeholders acting within the public policy environment (also known as the "non-market" environment or PPE) is important to firms seeking to improve their overall performance. Examples abound of firms whose performance ran "afoul" of their PPE stakeholders’ expectations. Several instances are associated with significant short and longer term economic and/or reputation damage to the offending firms (e.g., Ford and Bridgestone Tire, Arthur Andersen, Enron, etc). This nature of performance outcome is often viewed in terms of deteriorating levels of corporate social performance - CSP (Watnick & Cochran, 1985).

Managers of corporate public affairs (PA) units often have the most significant organizational responsibility for ensuring that their organizations maintain effective relationships with stakeholders in the PPE. Several empirical studies have been conducted examining the relationship between PA units and effective CSP (see, for example, Waddock & Graves, 1997; Roman, Hayibor & Agele, 1999; Preston and O’Bannon, 1997). Each study provided a unique glimpse into selected aspects of the relationship between PA unit activities and the achievement of various levels of CSP.

A decade has passed since the last comprehensive study was performed of CPAM assessment processes (Fleisher, 1993a, 1993b). That study produced a refined model that demonstrated that managerial behaviors and decisions were directly affected by PPE forces and the CPAM unit’s influence. The result of managerial behaviors and decisions, combined with the effects made on these by the CPAM subsystem, lead the organization to exhibit certain PPE behaviors. Whether these behaviors are effective or not is dependent on how the organization views its PPE relationships, which is commonly reflected by the approach it takes in evaluating CPAM. This paper seeks to answer how professionals in the field of corporate public affairs are assessing their function’s value or worth, and whether contemporary practices have changed or advanced since they were studied over a decade ago.

Background

Leaders of organizational staff groups such as finance, marketing, public affairs, or purchasing are routinely asked by senior executives responsible for their organization’s budget allocations to demonstrate their function’s impact on corporate performance. All functions that have need for using corporate funds are asked to account for their utilization of scarce funds, and some functions have commonly had more success in demonstrating accountability than others. This demonstration takes on increased importance during more difficult economic cycles or periods when budget cuts, corporate downsizing, and restructuring are persistent. 2 - Paper by C. Fleisher, presented at BledCom 2003.

The desire and need for assessing organizational performance has visibly grown in the last decade, both within and outside of the PA field (Neely, 2002). Indeed, several research centers or foundations (e.g., Centre for Business Performance at Cranfield School of Management-UK, Foundation for Performance Measurement - USA, ) and associations (e.g., Performance Measurement Association of which this paper’s author is a member; the British Academy of Management has a Performance Management Special Interest Group), were established during this time period (Neely, Gregory & Platts, 1995). Several performance assessment tools, particularly the balanced scorecard, customer surveys, activity-based costing and management (aka ABC or ABM), benchmarking, performance dashboards, pay-for-performance, and the performance prism have reached varying levels of popularity and usage (Rigby, 2003; Neely, 2002; Ittner & Larker, 1998).

Despite the increased level of interest expressed in the topic, definitions and consensus around the scope of “performance assessment” still remain elusive. Neely (1998) defines performance measurement as “the process of quantifying the efficiency and effectiveness of past actions through acquisition, collation, sorting, analysis, interpretation, and dissemination of appropriate data.” Moulin (2002) defines it as “evaluating how well organizations are managed and the value they deliver for customers and other stakeholders.” Definition remains so elusive that several authors recently noted that performance is a word in which everyone places the concepts that suits them, letting the context take care of the definition (Lebas and Euske, 2002). The concept of corporate public affairs has also tended to remain elusive to definitional agreements. Definition and scope of corporate public affairs (PA) need to be clearly understood before any attempts can be made to develop measures with which to evaluate it. In this paper, I define corporate public affairs as a management function that facilitates exchanges between an organization and its social and political stakeholders (Fleisher & Blair, 1999). Corporate PAO’s are actively involved with monitoring the external environment and managing issues that arise in the organization’s relations with political, societal and economic forces - and are the organization’s key managers of issues and stakeholders. Performance is not an easy subject and there is clearly a need to study and rethink what is meant by it and how to measure it (Meyer, 2002). Performance in this paper is broadly defined as both those comparative economic (i.e., market-based, commercial, transaction exchange-based) and non-economic (i.e., issue, non-market, public policy, stakeholder) perceptions placed upon organizations by their stakeholders. Common market measures include metrics such as return on investment (ROI), internal rate of return (IRR) market share, product/service quality, investment intensity, marketing expenditures, or economic value added (EVA), while common non-market measures would include, among other things, corporate image or reputation, community investment, corporate social performance (CSP) or responsibility (CSR), and/or political influence.

This paper addresses the concept of performance assessment in PA, thereby increasing the need to make distinctions between the primary underlying social science facets of the process, those being evaluation, measurement and research (Lindemann, 2001). Research is a basic tool for fact and opinion gathering that focuses on the entire public affairs process and examines the nature of transactional relationships that exist among and between institutions and their key stakeholders. For the public affairs officer (PAO), a useful definition of PA research is that it is a planned and systematic effort using primary and secondary sources to discover; confirm...
and/or understand through an objective appraisal the facts or opinions pertaining to a specified problem, situation, or opportunity. Evaluation means determining the relative effectiveness, performance or value of a PA program or strategy, ordinarily done by measuring outputs and 3. Paper by C. Fleisher, presented at BledCom 2003 outcomes against a predetermined set of objectives. Measurement is the process of assigning a specific quantitative or numerical indicator to a PA activity or process. Research underlies PA performance assessment methods or techniques and provides support and assistance to measurement and evaluation efforts. Performance assessment is conceptually part of the ordinary work process that a PAO would undertake. Together, the components form a cycle, from fact-finding, research and formulation to implementation of the PA activities and programs - commonly known as Research - Objectives - Planning - Evaluation (ROPE) in public relations (PR) circles (Hendrix, 1997). After implementation of activities or programs, the results that are obtained must be monitored, and the results become an input to the formulation process on the next cycle. Thus the PA process is supposed to be continuous, although it does not always work in practice in the neat and sequential way it is typically presented in the academic textbooks. Indeed, parts of the process are often skipped entirely, like, for example, the research or assessment portions. Sometimes there is so little time in between stages that barely any time is left to actually or properly conduct one or more of these steps. As such, many successfully or unsuccessfully realized PA plans and actions can be more accurately described as emergent rather than intended. Performance assessment is nearly always important in management, and particularly so in highly complex, competitive, global and/or dynamic environments, where PA managers are expected to have a strong grasp on dozens of issues. This is a vital part of the planning and accountability process for those PAOs who are in high PA-intensity industries such as pharmaceuticals, high-technology fast-moving consumer goods, as well as resource-intensive industries such as energy or forest products. PAOs in organizations within these industries have a greater corresponding need to effectively assess performance than their counterparts in slower-moving, less-global, less complex and less competitive industries. Public affairs (PA) officers (PAOs), and those executives to whom they report, have frequently expressed dissatisfaction with the evaluation and measurement (E&M) or performance assessment of PA activities (Ferraro, 2000; Fleisher & Mahaffy, 1997; Fleisher, 1993b). Failures to adequately measure PA performance often result in a loss of accountability for PAOs and their units. This inability to demonstrate valued results can also result in declining roles and responsibilities for PA within the organization, a subsequent loss of influence, impact, and sometimes, even careers (Laird, 1996). As such, it is important to identify and describe those reasons that have kept PAOs from experiencing satisfaction with this critical work process. Aims of the 1991 Study

In response to these issues and as a means for understanding what PA professionals were doing with respect to their assessments of PA performance, I led a comprehensive and extensive research study of PAOs in the U.S. during the second half of 1991. This study was designed to probe the following questions:

- What was the role of evaluation and measurement in PA?
- How were PA units being assessed?
- Who performed PA evaluation?
- What activities were being assessed?
- What evaluation methods were being used?
- What problems were being encountered in assessing PA?
- How was the performance assessment activity related to other PA activities?

1. Most PAOs intentionally evaluated their PA units. In general, this evaluation was of an informal, qualitative nature.
2. PAO respondents generally believed that increasing emphasis should be placed on conducting more formal and rigorous evaluation of their unit's activities; however, many felt that greater emphasis on evaluation would not add value in terms of significantly improving their unit's performance.
3. There was a significant association between the formality and analytical rigor of PA evaluation and top management's support of quality management or rigorous performance management or measurement principles. Organizations which utilized quality management techniques were more likely to pursue rigorous, analytical evaluation of PA.
4. Effectiveness for the majority of PA units was measured by the degree of achievement of previously established goals - using MBO type approaches. Many firms actively mated goal achievement and stakeholder satisfaction measures.
5. Most firms regularly evaluated the performance of their individual PA professionals; however, few evaluated the performance of their overall PA unit or the organization's PPE performance. A positive overall appraisal of and by PAOs in this survey was that PA had come a long way up to that point in time in terms of its accountability within organizations. This was reflected, in one proxy measure, by the increasing number and proportion of PAOs who frequently communicated and interacted at the uppermost decision making levels of their firms.

Respondents commented that PA generally was well perceived by organizational decision makers and that continuing, albeit gradual progress was being made in addressing PA's impact on bottom line concerns.

Notwithstanding the positive perceptions, most of the PAOs still claimed that a sizeable gap existed between the remaining journey and intended destination. PA professionals generally remained dissatisfied with their ability to conduct defensible evaluations of PA, quantifying PA's effect on the bottom line, and in designing specific standards for measurement. I concluded that 5. Paper by C. Fleisher, presented at BledCom 2003 further research and discussion was needed to address these concerns. That is what served as the premise of the recent set of studies that I began to re-visit the status of performance assessment by PA practitioners in contemporary circumstances.

I summarized my findings at the time as such (Fleisher, 1997): Most performance measurement systems used in public affairs depart-
ments today are ineffective in helping managers make decisions so as to simultaneously improve both departmental and organizational performance. The relative absence of effectively performing assessment systems will continue to exacerbate the difficulties that PA decision makers face in demonstrating their organizational value and legitimacy. To the extent that these difficulties result in inadequate resource allocation to public affairs, it becomes a Catch-22 situation. The catch is that it requires resources to install and operate these systems and yet without these systems, it is difficult to make a sound case for the provision of these resources to the function. What PAOs Perceive to be Unsatisfactory with Respect to Contemporary PA Performance Assessment

I am currently in the process of revisiting the questions and replicating much of the process I used to study the phenomenon of PA performance assessment in the early 1990s. What I am presenting below is a preliminary summary of the findings to-date. A major part of this research, a comprehensive written survey, is still yet to be disseminated and is scheduled for release early in 2004.

Based on a series of focus groups held in both the US and Canada, a comprehensive review of the contemporary literature and conference proceedings, as well as the results of several proprietary benchmarking studies, I would suggest that the following major issues remain unresolved at this point over a decade after the first study. I have not presented these in any particular priority order at this point other than to note that these themes have been the ones which have been most prominent throughout the series of methods that have been analyzed thus far.

1. Using information technology (IT) to support PA performance assessment. Executives, who are often obsessed with quantification, have attempted any number of organizational IT initiatives to improve their ability to assess, manage and maximize their organizational performance (Neely, 2002). The problem with most enterprise-wide wide resource planning and reporting systems today is that what they offer is ordinarily data - reshuffled, recatalogued, reallocated, but rarely offering information or insight (Fleisher, 2002). They provide so much data that executives are often heard claiming that they are drowning in it. Among the bigger problems today is not that we are necessarily assessing the wrong things, but that we are assessing too many things and that the organization ends up falling into the all-too-common trap of simply trying to capture and assess too much data. PAOs consistently expressed that they have seldom been assisted by their organization’s adoption and use of IT to help them assess and/or manage their performance. Unsurprisingly, they are rarely involved in the organization’s decision-making processes associated with acquiring IT assets for information management purposes. Most recently adopted performance reporting systems have provided balanced scorecard, customer, financial, or market-based information, but hardly any offer the issue or stakeholder-based performance metrics and insights that PAOs need to assess the full range of their performance contributions. There are 6 - Paper by C. Fleisher, presented at BledCom 2003 some new IT solutions that ostensibly could promote the development and management of nonmarket measures, particularly in the areas of grassroots management, media tracking, image or reputation monitoring, but few of these have been widely adopted by organizations and most of them remain outside of the domain of those individuals (in accounting, fiancé or executive management) who are primarily responsible for performance management in most corporations. Several organizations have developed proprietary systems for automating the capture and circulation of PA performance data, but nearly all of these are embryonic in their development (Hoewing, 2000). There are several PA-dedicated IT vendors but none to my respondents’ knowledge has managed to provide for performance reporting modules that are integral with the organization’s larger performance-management systems.

2. Assessing the return on investment (ROI) of PA activities. The basic question behind PA ROI calculations is whether organizations can recover investment costs in PA and achieve measurable benefits from the function. The equation for calculating PA ROI is deceptively simple and as follows: ROI % = Value of Benefits generated by PA - Cost of PA / Cost of PA x 100%. Despite the need for this clarity, ROI calculations in PA are not commonly conducted. Among the most common reasons given by PAO respondents for not conducting formal ROI analysis of PA include the following:

A. The costs of tracking and measuring costs and benefits of PA may not be worth the effort, especially because PA is carried out both in an ongoing and episodic (i.e., project-based) manner.
B. While PA costs are known up front, both before and during PA interventions, benefits may not appear immediately and often accrue over extended time periods.
C. The benefits of PA interventions are often viewed to be “soft” or “intangible,” difficult to quantify and convert accurately into dollars.
D. The benefits generated by PA are usually not solely due to PA’s efforts nor can they be evenly or objectively allocated across the organization.
E. Adverse findings in an ROI calculation could be damaging to the PA function and its practitioners and result in less resources and support from top management.

Most PAOs recognize that ROI isn’t the panacea they seek despite the recognition that it is important to develop an ROI-mindset. Other factors are also critical in business decisions, including that risks must be assessed against rewards, PA undertakings must be congruent with the organization’s strategy, short-term goals need to be balanced out against long-term ones, and that scarce resources are invariably affected by internal politics. Last but not least, most PAOs continue to question how to develop ROI measures on non-events, whereby their actions prevented certain activities from occurring (e.g., lobbying that resulted in legislation that ostensibly prevented a competitor from entering the competitive marketplace) in the marketplace. They recognize that any good calculation of PA ROI must account for some reasonable levels of conditional probability and risk.

3. Effectively measuring changes in non-financial capital. Much of what PAOs do is to regularly address (i.e., attract, build, grow or maintain) the balance of human, relational or structural capital accumulated within their organizations. Human capital is the knowledge that employees take with them when they depart from the organization. It includes employees’ knowledge, skills, experiences and abilities. Relational capital is all those resources that are linked to an organization’s external relationships and its stakeholders - the primary area of capital expected to be influenced by PAOs. It comprises the part of human and structural capital involved with the organization’s relations with its stakeholders plus the perceptions they hold about the organization. Structural capital is the knowledge that stays within the organization at the end of every working day. It includes the organization’s routines and pro-
4. Demonstrating the value of intangibles. Much PA work is based on improving not only the types of capital described in the point above, but also to improve relationship capital with a variety of stakeholders, enhance goodwill, expand the corporate reputation, or to grow the amount of brand/corporate equity that customers perceive in the organization. Accounting systems were originated a millennia ago to help people account for land, labor and capital - the tangible items exchanged as part of commerce and commercial transactions. The last few decades has witnessed a major shift toward valuing the exchange of less tangible things like credibility, reputation, innovativeness, flexibility, knowledge and trust (Lev, 2001). There is little doubt that the outcome of much PA work would be to address the total value of the intangibles the organization brings to the table for its proposed and desired exchanges. Unfortunately, there has been little progress made in determining, or in reporting, the value of intangibles that underlies an organization’s thrust into stakeholder exchanges or addressing issues in the non-marketplace.

Companies that show the greatest market value today are often those that cannot show large amounts of land, labor and/or capital. Successful firms like Intel, Microsoft, or Nokia are valuable more for the intangibles they bring to the marketplace, phenomena which are not adequately captured by accounting concepts such as ‘goodwill’ which typically comes into play only (and if) the organization is to be sold on the open market. The difference between their market and book values is immense, and it is not too difficult or much of a stretch to make an argument that the PA activities conducted by these firms has been a prominent contributor to their success and correspondingly high market values. Nevertheless, unless investors, analysts, and/or executives demand the regular assessment of these intangibles, PAOs will continue to struggle in demonstrating the nature of their intangible contributions.

5. Institutionalizing performance assessment in with other routine PA activities. In numerous studies of public relations (see the review in Watson, 2001) as well as corporate public affairs (Fleisher, 1993a, 1997; Fleisher & Nickel, 1995; Fleisher & Burton, 1995), it has been demonstrated that planning, research or evaluation tend to get short-changed for budget and time resources relative to other PA activities. Assessment, measurement and evaluation are performed as though they are discretionary activities by the vast majority of PAOs - despite the fact that they also claim these activities are vital to the successful performance of their jobs. My research, as well as many others’ (Watson, 2001), have described the common barriers that prevent these practitioners from doing the level of assessment they think is ideal. The barriers range from not knowing how to do it, lacking proficiency in the analytic tools and techniques of performance assessment (Fleisher, 2002), not having the time or money to do it, an inability to 8 - Paper by C. Fleisher, presented at BledCom 2003 develop appropriate measures, a view of the cost/benefit of performance assessment not making it worth the resources expended, or an inability to communicate the nature of PA performance to executives who don’t well understand the function and its tasks in the first place (Fleisher, 1997). As such, PA performance assessment remains outside of the core activities that PAOs perform on a regular basis, most commonly done only when it is either demanded of them or their budget is threatened in the absence of these results.

6. Balancing and maximizing the time spent doing PA performance assessment activities. Most PAOs claim that they still do not properly manage their time allocation between research, planning, implementation, and assessment - the three major spokes in a hypothetical wheel describing their activities (Fleisher, 1997). Most still claim to spend the vast majority of their time fire-fighting or working on tactical activities, although the vast majority claim they wish they had more time available to them to perform more strategic, research or assessment-oriented roles (Fleisher & Nickel, 1995). This situation brings up the proverbial “Catch 22” for PAOs. Since they do not take the time to plan and perform their assessment, they won’t have the time to do them properly either: Over time, most senior executives need their PAOs to do more things with lesser resources. It is difficult for the PAO to make the business case for more resources when the PAOs lacked the time or wherewithal to develop and deliver the business case for better functional resourcing in the first place.

7. Public affairs still lacks forward-facing performance indicators. Measures are the language of progress. They provide a sense of not only of where the organization is at relative to its current PA environment, but also where it might be headed in the future. This is one of the biggest problems in PA performance assessment as there is a serious lack of leading - versus plethora of lagging - measures. This situation points to the lack of formative research in particular, but it is compounded by the lack of evaluative research that many PAOs fail to conduct. Variances in PA performance are important to be explained. For example, why did only 48% of the eligible workforce take part in the last grassroots lobbying campaign when 74% had done so during the previous effort? Much more important is whether a given situation is improving and whether it would be satisfactory in a future period, which in the previous example it clearly was not. Truly effective performance indicators should serve as an early warning device regarding key PA variables, and communicate progress and potential problems both to PAOs and the top management team. They should also communicate to implementers whether the PA department is headed toward accomplishing its mission, strategy and vision or not.

8. The need to systematically select a set of synergistic assessment approaches to utilize in an ongoing basis. Most organizations utilize an over-riding assessment approach or two across their organization, whether it is benchmarking, MBO, strategic (quality-award) approaches, internal market economy, profit-center approach, client or customer-focused approach, research-based approach, critical variables (e.g., 2x2 matrices), wins/losses, reputation indices, etc. Most PAOs use one or two methods of performance assessment methods, typically those
in current favor within their larger organization. Unfortunately, some of these approaches, when used in PA, do not generate the same level of credibility or applicability that they do in line-oriented organizational functions. The difficulty with this situation is that most of the approaches favored by the larger organization do not adequately account for PA performance outputs, outgrowths or outcomes. Another 9 - Paper by C. Fleisher, presented at BledCom 2003 frustrating facet of this situation is that many organizations jump from one performance assessment approach to another approach every few years, never actually giving any particular approach the proper amount of time needed for it to be institutionalized and to infuse itself within the fabric of the larger organization. This makes it more critical for PAOs to be cognizant of how to make the appropriate connection between their work and systems and the larger organization's assessment processes. Building a variety of useful performance assessment approaches into the fabric of the ongoing PA operation is usually the key to creating an effective function, but few PA teams have managed to do this successfully on a sustained basis.

9. Finding an appropriate balance of qualitative and quantitative measures. The tendency in most measurement and assessment circles in recent years has been heavily toward the quantification of everything (i.e., if you cannot measure it, you cannot manage it). The dominant view was that all dimensions of performance could be measured, which by default tended to mean that all phenomena could be placed in numerical terms. For those PAOs who have attempted to take up this challenge, this led to their counting most PA activities - in terms of things like the number of meetings held with key stakeholders, the number of letters sent to key public policy committee personnel, the number of issues being actively monitored, wins and losses, the number of bills being tracked, the number of persons involved in the grassroots program, etc. Counting is not equivalent to and is only the starting point of measurement, which generally requires a baseline zero point and other points for comparison to be useful. Also, all the counts that were accumulated by PAOs generally only provided snapshot measures of how busy they were. Few senior decision-makers would suggest a strong positive correlation between "busyness" and positive strategic value - indeed, too much activity on the wrong issues, too many meetings with inappropriate stakeholders, and the organization could easily perform badly in a public affairs context.

10. Breaking away from historicist models of assessment. This is the kind of assessment that is done as it is because it always has been done that way. PA practitioners relying on this inadequate approach realize that it does not improve their performance or add value to their organization. Instead, it meets the minimal standard of having a "performance-based contract" and ensuring that basic tasks are completed. The problem continuously mentioned in my research is that many PAOs do not have examples, mentors or benchmarks to provide them guidelines for establishing useful performance assessment systems; hence, they revert back to the common denominator of doing the same way that their predecessors did, recognizing that it probably will not move the function or the organization forward the way that a useful system could. The historicist model generally emphasizes PA products over processes and outcomes. As mentioned in point nine above, counting things does not provide an adequate means of assessing PA performance. Such measures ignore the real successes PA can achieve in terms of quality and relationships (Grunig & Grunig, 2001). Also, if PAOs and their organization's top management teams have expressed continuing dissatisfaction with their performance assessment, it would behoove them to try different, innovative and potentially more useful approaches and methods. Few PAOs seem to know where to begin this journey. Summary When I studied the state of performance assessment in public affairs over a decade ago, it was clear progress had been made since previous periods, and that PAOs and their top 10 - Paper by C. Fleisher; presented at BledCom 2003 management teams recognized the need for improvement in their performance assessment. There was a degree of optimism that the "corner would be turned" and that this dissatisfying situation would hopefully be resolved. I initiated a study of the current status of performance assessment recently to see if this optimism, expressed by PAOs back in the early 1990s, was warranted or not. Unfortunately, the state of performance assessment in public affairs does not actually look all that much better at the present time than it did nearly a decade ago. Despite the increased emphasis on performance assessment in organizations in general, most PAOs continue to struggle with effectively demonstrating and communicating the value or worth of their efforts to the larger organizations. They remain optimistic, generally, but many of the same phenomena that were so evident over a decade ago remain as evident today. There is a clear challenge presented by these findings for students, scholars and practitioners of public affairs. There needs to be new research, new experiments, new conceptualizations, and new ways of acting applied to this difficult area. The "old way of doing things" with respect to PA performance assessment has not, and will not suffice. Unless there is a systematic and organized means for making progress in this area, similar to what has been done in terms of the professionalization of related fields, the situation is unlikely to be all that much different a decade from now.

References


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Public Relations Generated Values For Building Trust and Equity

by David Phillips

Abstract

This paper examines the issues faced by the public relations industry as it seeks robust authority for inclusion in the development of a number of global initiatives including CSR, corporate management reporting and accounting and social justice.

It identifies that public relations practice releases value from Intellectual properties and knowledge and in the application of the public relations process proposed by the eXtensible Public Relations Language Organisation generates new IP and knowledge assets in the process.

To support this view, the paper identifies public relations practice and experimental methodologies for identifying relative values of IP and stakeholders.

Finally, the paper suggests that developments in PR along the lines proposed would aid in the development of PR as a profession.

Keywords

Public Relations, CSR, relationships, publics, stakeholder value, valuation, goodwill, non financial reporting, asset value, GAAP, balance sheet.

The Issues

This paper examines the issue of value creation through the process of Public Relations in order that the industry can create authority and influence in building corporate trust and equity.

In late June 2003, the Institute of Public Relations released a new version of its evaluation toolkit. The content, a re-run of Measuring Your Media Profile and Evaluating Press Coverage published a decade earlier offers ‘greater focus than previous editions on media evaluation’. Its publication showed the PR industry in the UK, led by the IPR, promoting the idea that press relations measurement is PR evaluation.

This is a long way from identifying (including evaluating) the elements needed re-construction, establish and promote mutual trust between organisations and their stakeholders. This paper explores some ideas on the road to identifying such elements.

The issue for the public relations industry is to raise the game from clip sortation and research (CSR) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

The broader debate, centred on the issues surrounding Corporate Social Responsibility and Social Responsibility, has become a happy hunting ground for accountants/management consultants and some PR practitioners. This area of practice has much greater weight and force than a public relations process leading to the counting clips. It is founded on major international initiatives and a desire for global social justice and equity.

The European Commission’s Green Paper in 2001 and the White Paper in 2002 invited Community Members ‘to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustaining economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion’. Later, the Goteburg European Council Sustainable Development strategy aimed for ‘long term economic growth, social cohesion and environmental protection’.

These announcements re-enforced the 1999 Davos Economic World Summit pronouncement of UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan when he said ‘Let us choose to unite the power of markets with the authority of universal ideals. Let us choose to reconcile the creative forces of entrepreneurship with the needs of the disadvantaged and the requirements of future generations’.

The concerted effort to apparently square the circle between social responsibility and commercial advancement has brought forth case studies about how such an idea can be commercially advantageous. I cite but two of hundreds of examples: The Federal Trust for Education and Research (ibid) assesses CSR impact in these terms:

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Douglas Alexander the UK Minister of State for E-commerce and Competitiveness in the foreword to his department’s “Business and Society Corporate social responsibility report” 2002 said:

“Many businesses as well as non-profit organisations accept the need for responsible behaviour as a matter of principle; but they also report that CSR can help build brand value, foster customer loyalty, motivate their staff, and contribute to a good reputation among a wide range of stakeholders.”

In common, these expressions of the aims and impact of CSR have at their heart an interest in stakeholders, reputation and value.

These are areas where the public relations industry has a vested interest when it seeks to affect stakeholders, reputation and brand attributes, attitudes and associated behaviours. The basis for researching these elements in this context to form strategies and programmes and to evaluate effect is a further issue for PR.

The PR industry is also involved in broader economics and has been, as far as John Kay is concerned since the mid-90’s:

“Business journalists treat huge firms as extensions of the personalities of individuals: General Electric is Jack Welch, Microsoft is Bill Gates. Neither of these descriptions bears the faintest resemblance to the reality of corporate bureaucracies. Our schema has no room for the irrefutable fact that large companies are social institutions with character and personality of their own, and that it is on the nature of that character and personality that their performance depends.

“The individualistic context is not the only social context within which markets can function and it is not at all apparent that it is one in which markets function well.”

The public relations industry might also like to take its cue from Kay when he says:

“Most economic activity cannot be, and is not, organised by negotiation between large numbers of potential buyers and potential sellers in impersonal markets - the perfectly competitive, markets of economics. We need to work in organisations and in teams, and to cooperate in small groups. Self-interested individuals would often fail to cooperate with each other; even when it was in their mutual best interests to do so. Corporate cultures, ethical values, and the blending of working and social lives are the mechanisms which make cooperative productive activities possible.

“Knowledge and information are key products in complex modern economies. They cannot be produced in competitive markets in which there are many buyers and sellers of each commodity. Non-materialist motivations - the thrill of discovery and the satisfactions of philanthropy - have been more important stimuli to innovation than profit seeking.

“Economists frequently describe the issues raised by asymmetric and imperfect information, coordination problems, and the inadequacies of risk markets as examples of ‘market failure’. But this phrase entirely misses the point. There are failures of a model of the market economy, not failures of the market economy itself. Much of the strength of modern economic institutions comes from the social mechanisms which have evolved to handle these issues: market economies function because, and only because, they are embedded in a social context. The intellectual paradox of the last two decades is that the legitimacy and efficiency of modern capitalism has been undermined by an account of how it works that is at once repulsive and false.”

In its “Business and Society Corporate Social Responsibility Report” 2002, the UK Department of Trade and Industry highlights opinion research showing that the role of organisations in society is significant in a number of ways:

The proportion of people who regard an organisation’s social responsibility as ‘very important’ when selecting a product has risen from 28% in 1998, to 46% in 2001. Research suggests that as many as one-fifth of consumers now boycott or select products on social grounds. The public generally understand CSR to mean responsibility towards customers, the community, employees, and the environment; but awareness of responsible practices is low, and people want to know more (MORI, 2001; www.mori.com).

CSR is also important in employment. The figures show that staff who are aware of an organisation’s CSR activities are 12% more likely to speak highly of it, and that a good reputation for responsible behaviour is a significant factor in graduate recruitment.

The 50 Best Companies List, first published in the UK in February 2001, is produced by Great Place to Work UK (http://www.greatplacetowork.gov.uk/). The second UK list was published on 24 March and now features the 100 Best Companies to work for. The process used to determine the list is unique in that employees ‘vote’ on their companies by completing the ‘Trust Index’.

These statements build bridges between public relations and economics when PR is an actor in the social economic mechanism and seeks effect in the public sphere. The industry faces significant issues in responding to the demands of social economists and the political agenda as they reflect on the socially organic nature of organisations, governments, globalisation and an (almost) post modern view of globalisation.

This social context is very relevant to the practice of public relations even when exercised at the level of agentry and written skill. This is because every practitioner needs the means to identify and define stakeholders and stakeholder relations, their social context, the nature of the social institutions and organisations in a public relations context and; use measures to work in areas affecting reputation and brand attributes, Intellectual Properties and the values they bring to society. Without these simple tools, even the act of writing is flawed from the start.

There is a need to understand and provide the means by which we can assesses the components of a society in which the willing buyer and willing seller can choose to act (in the exchange of tangible and intangible assets) with mutual trust mediated by a sustainable social compact.

The issues can be summed up in terms of:

• Much higher aspirations and leadership
• Specific public relations research capability to be affective in CSR consul and agency
• Capability to respond to meet wider social, political and economic demands put on the industry by other disciplines
Traditional Public Relations

In its latest published work on PR evaluation the Institute of Public Relations continues along its path of measurement with ‘greater focus than previous editions on media evaluation’. Its new 56 page toolkit offers ‘jargon free’ and ‘beefed up’ media evaluation. The IPR offers its members an oxymoron.

“For most in PR,” Chris Genasi is reported as saying in PR Week, “evaluation means media evaluation.”

In an era of exciting development in latent content analysis as a resource to identify the relationships; the use of vocabulary; methodologies for content analysis; analysis of the quality of media content evaluation; and the significance of media relations in the public sphere, this would seem enough. But the professional practitioner also has to come to terms with a mass of research into reception analysis; media reach and its role in a modern multi-channel, multi media environment. As the traditional print media declines in influence and the attention span of newspaper readership is squeezed by new digital media, the practitioner would seem to have enough to do without extending practice and its evaluation beyond the media.

However, the practitioner now has to go a lot further to participate in the new realms of social political and economic responsibility. Perhaps we see the signs of an industry maturing. The many domains of public relations have specialist areas of research, activity and evaluation. The manifestation of media focused evaluation reflects a part of PR practice but only a part. However, it is disingenuous for the media relations domain to declare that media evaluation is public relations evaluation.

It is time to look more closely at these PR domains and identify what is common and what is specialist.

What is a PR Brief

The beginnings of a solution harks back to the earliest days of PR practice in its simplest and most menial form.

The practitioner was nearly always faced with a ‘brief’. This tended to be a series of explicit documents typically about the organisation’s history; perhaps its aspirations (corporate brand values had not yet been invented); the description of a product/service/person and an ambition to change the behaviour of a journalist such that press coverage would ensue. The brief then (and often still today) included jargon from product managers and then a verbal ‘mind dump’ of tacit knowledge.

The brief aimed at ‘getting our three important messages in Print’. Simple sender-receiver communication.

In fact the brief is an explicit portfolio of bundles of intellectual properties and a bundle of tacit intellectual properties. It is implicit and explicit knowledge. These bundles made little sense to all but a few and required the practitioner to add tacit (often research based explicit) knowledge to identify where the values lay for a reader; editor and journalist. Then, by using agentry skills, add further process knowledge to convey the message.

In understanding that it is the reader; editor; journalist, each with their own intellectual attributes that will determine success, the practitioner has to be cognisant of the public sphere at some level.

The bright practitioner will also identify that in the process of transmit-receive a wide range of publics will add or reject relevance of the client’s bundles of IP to their own personal and social intellectual asset bundles. In most instances, this combination of IP bundles will create a new sense or new knowledge. Some of that knowledge will be a positive asset for the organisation, and some negative but a new asset will have been created.

As the aspirations of the PR industry rise, this new knowledge may be manifest in:

Greater social cohesion; sustaining economic growth; environmental protection; empowering markets with the authority of universal ideals; creative force of entrepreneurship providing opportunity for the disadvantaged; investment in future generations; the thrill of discovery; the satisfactions of philanthropy better jobs and may build brand value, foster customer loyalty, motivate staff, and contribute to a good reputation.

The simple sender-receiver model is transformed into CSR through the process of public relations. Even more important for the practice of public relations is the recognition (identification, evaluation and exploitation) of all this new intellectual property.

Public Relations and Intangible Assets.

In recent years there has been a groundswell of developments that point to public relations practice in a role that affects the non-financial assets of organisations.

Fraser Likely APR, a partner in Likely Communication Strategies Ltd Canada, looks at PR as a contributor to the asset value of a company. He asserts that traditional accounting cannot “recognize other intangible assets such as intellectual capital, customer satisfaction and loyalty, corporate reputation, positive stakeholder relations, employee satisfaction and loyalty, corporate culture, or the ubiquitous ‘goodwill’ surrounding a well-perceived organization. It’s interesting to note that these intangible assets are taken into account when one organization buys another (a firm may pay a premium for concepts like loyalty and reputation or brand recognition) but once the purchase is completed, the buying firm cannot count these “assets” on its books.

“That’s why we in public relations/communication are so concerned with the measurement of these intangible assets. That’s why our professional area is joining others to redefine what is considered the bottom line. Groups like the International Accounting Standards Committee and the Society of Management Accountants of Canada are being pressured to accept the concept of a different bottom line, one that values intangible assets - one that values our contribution.”

Elaine Dixon invites us to think of “how something as intangible as the value of communications can be measured.

“To do this,” she says, “requires new ways of thinking. It means reconsidering what creates “value” and what constitutes an “asset.” Communications professionals have been able to do this kind of thing in the past”, she adds, “but there was no place to show it on the bottom line of the balance sheet. However, organizations are more service-oriented and increasingly aware of the value of goodwill as well as how recognition of brand names is dependent on communications. That means there’s pressure on accountants to measure these intangibles in financial terms.”

The idea that intangibles such as trust are an asset is explored by Peggy Pavlich asserting a “… concept of repositioning the role and...
reputation of professional communicators in the real world where organizational welfare has never been more dependent upon the ability to optimize and sustain relationships which, in turn, depend on the asset of trust.\textsuperscript{18}

The idea that corporate brand and reputation attributes, relationships and ‘trust’, a bundle of mostly implicit personal knowledge, can be viewed as an asset is worthy of much deeper consideration.

Perhaps now it is time to explore more closely the true value of organisations and the role public relations plays in creating assets for organisations and then to explore further into the not for profit and other areas of communication and relationship.

The asset hole
It is not just a few PR practitioners and academics who identify a range of assets that do not sit comfortably in traditional accounting practice.

With incomplete valuation of intangibles, there is little hope that the value of organisations can be put before shareholders. Progress in using some form of Kaplan’s Balanced Scorecard has moved towards this goal but the work is incomplete. The IC-Index approach, so well explained by Roos, Roose, Edvinson and Dragonetti\textsuperscript{19} examined the relationships between financial capital and intellectual capital and resonates with the work of Lev and Ambler who also have extended the reach of corporate accounting into Intellectual Property, process know-how and brand value valuation.

But all stumble when fixing value and for a simple reason. The lynch-pin in the deployment of any asset in the process of wealth generation depends on human relationships. Organisations are extremely poor in evaluating human relationships. Why is this so? I argue that it is the role of public relations and the public relations process that fills this essential gap and the PR profession has, so far, been slow in its response.

I argue here that assets include a wide range of relationships as well as physical book values, Intangible Properties and brand assets. The person most responsible for relationship asset values, I suggest, is the PR practitioner (by what ever name).

So far, industry and commerce as a whole has faced a dilemma. Most forms of accounting still reflect the 18th century manufactory where the firm’s economic performance is stipulated to be generated by the three major classes of inputs: physical, financial, and knowledge assets.\textsuperscript{20} He examines knowledge assets as Intangible (intellectual) capital and states that it “…is driven by diverse factors: innovation, human capital, organizational processes, customer and supplier relations, to name some major ones.” He then fails to follow through on the concept of relationship value and says that: “For most of these drivers (e.g., customer satisfaction), there is no standardized, public information available.” He limits his work to the analysis of “several intangibles drivers which are publicly available: R&D, advertising (brand support), capital expenditures, information systems, technology acquisition.”

In identifying relationships that lever value from human capital, customers, suppliers, and other publics exposed to advertising and brand supporting publics, many of the mysteries he seeks to unravel are resolved. The reason that many invisible assets are not available for his scrutiny (not to mention the scrutiny of shareholders) is because of a failure to audit public relations - that is, relationships with publics and relationships in the public sphere.

Elsewhere we also see academics struggle with these concepts.

“For companies in the 21st century, the creation of value increasingly depends on intangible assets such as knowledge, systems, data, intellectual property, brands and market relationships. Commonly known as brand equity, there is, at present, a lack of guidelines concerning how a board should report their stewardship of this most prized asset, also known as reputation.”

So say Tim Ambler, Patrick Barwise and Chris Higson on the London Business School web site\textsuperscript{21}.

The existence of relationships and the nature of ‘good’ relationships with publics can be measured. The nature of such relationships, offering greater and wider freedom for corporate action is harder to measure but is the essence of the inherent value and is thereby a corporate (organisation) asset.

In applying a measure of reputation, we also see an asset value of public relations in evidence. Black, Carns and Richardson\textsuperscript{22} postulate that corporate reputation has value relevance, as measured by its ability to explain the firm’s market value. Corporate reputation assessed using a summary measure from the Fortune survey of ‘America’s most admired companies,’ is used as a proxy for intangible assets, such as internally generated goodwill, customer service, and intellectual capital. The authors demonstrate that this summary measure of non-financial information adds to market value. In using this approach, they point to methods of evaluation for all kinds of public relations activity ranging from media relations to investor relations. In this respect they reflect the Lev, Ambler, Barwise and Higson view.

It would appear that there is an inherent value for intangibles such as public relations which is part of the ‘goodwill’ in a balance sheet. The components of physical asset including transactional worth (cash) and the value of the organisation (share value) are different. Share value is almost without exception many times larger than asset value. Goodwill valuation is much too fluffy and is far too valuable to be dismissed so easily.

Further thought on the nature of corporate assets leads one to postulate that the components of goodwill include, intellectual properties (copyrights, trademarks, patents, market and logistics process and know-how etc), brand equity (attributes and awareness) and relationships (employees, prospects, customers, suppliers, communities, activists, governments, media, analysts and a wider constituency - the Public Sphere). It is in the latter, that there is a hole in accounting and it is one I seek to fill.

Accounting for the value of intellectual properties and brand values is a subject for another day but accounting for the value of organisation’s relationships is a matter for the public(s) relations industry.

If we can master this one element, then the industry, and especially its leaders, will have the authority to point to measures that have
Valuing relationships

A simple example of the asset value of a changed relationship (expressed the form of a changed attitude) such as a nominal Financial Analysts changing a 'buy' recommendation to a 'strong buy' recommendation has an immediate and quantifiable effect on share price and thereby the asset value of a company. This would lead one to explore the means by which even attitudes can be evaluated in financial terms. As one goes further along this path a methodology which identified the ratio between attitudes of other stakeholders allows the researcher to identify the relative values of attitude as corporate assets. For example if one assesses the attitude of employees, for example as being three times more positive than the nominal Financial Analyst, the asset worth of their attitude will be three times greater. Attitude can thereby be valued in financial terms across all stakeholder groups where an attitudinal relationship can be drawn as between, say the nominal Financial Analyst and other groups. The selection of a Financial Analyst need not be the only benchmark that can be used. One may conceive a model where attitudinal shift in a stakeholder relationship has measurable financial consequences such as between normal employee relationships and a strike; normal vendor relations and withdrawal of supply.

Relationships do not merely exist in attitudinal terms. Other measures come into play and it is not beyond the imagination of researcher using relational techniques to expressed them in monetary terms.

For example the constant or changed nature of stakeholder groups are important measures and can be evaluated in relative terms between each other. Examples abound. In our own profession we have seen PR practitioners struggle to come to terms with the behavioural changes as some people have adopted the Internet extensively and others eschew it. This change in the nature of the stakeholder groups is very important. It can be measured and it can be measured in terms of greater or lesser change as between different stakeholders. Their 'importance' has changed. Importance can be valued. There is an absolute cost that can be measured when people turn from using one product or service to another.

The music industry faced a change of behaviour among consumers as they moved from buying CDs to downloading software using Napster. Internet piracy of copyright works costs the UK music industry £4 million per year. This is a behavioural change with a measurable price tag. Changes in ‘importance’ of stakeholder can be valued.

Equally, we may like to measure the varying influence of stakeholder over an organisation. Influence can be measured relatively between different stakeholders. Do employees influence an organisation more than customers and is this influence relatively greater or less than, say, shareholders or vendors? This assessment can be made using, for example, focus groups who can identify such relationships and so to can evaluation of corporate activities. The value of such influence can also be measured in monetary terms. The relative cost of acquiring and servicing customers compared to payroll shows all to easily the relative financial commitment of an organisation between these two stakeholder groups.

By creating high-level knowledge models in a transparent graphical form, it is relatively simple to get an overview of available and missing knowledge in core business areas. Experimentally, the author, using Clarity Software, has already created such models and experimentally, they work.

In addition, using the same methodology, corporate brand and
reputational values and their associated attributes can be modelled and, using a similar technique, valued.

This approach outlines one of a number of methodologies by which the practitioner might demonstrate the significance of relationships to the asset value of an organisation. These approaches also throw a different light onto the value of public relations and add meat and bones to many balanced scorecard approaches to corporate value.

**Getting closer to public relations assets**

Charles Fombrun identified a number of reputational attributes making up an algorithm he called the Reputational Quotient. They are: Emotional Appeal, Products & Services, Financial Performance, Vision & Leadership, Workplace Environment and Social Responsibility. Fombrun also notes that ‘Companies that manage their relationships with resource-holders give clues to reputation management’. The Fombrun approach is to identify the effect of PR practice and he goes on to say: “Corporate reputation has economic value. Unfortunately, efforts to document this value run up against the problem that a company’s reputation is only one of many intangible assets to which investors ascribe value. Isolating reputation’s unique contribution to market capitalisation is therefore difficult. Nonetheless, evidence from three sources (Crisis effect, Supportive behaviours and Financial analysis) confirms reputations have bottom-line financial value.

Regrettably, this form of valuation of public relations does not translate very well as between cultures and economic regions. While measures using a balanced scorecard approach are seen to have some value they are not as universally accepted in commercial and most not for profit organisations where internal management is largely managed through traditional financial budget management and accounting methods.

There is extensive literature covering both the above approaches and I do not dwell on these techniques in this paper.

Perhaps we can gain greater insights if we look further into the nature of Intellectual Capital, the concept first espoused by John Kenneth Galbraith in the late 1960’s. His explanation that Intellectual Capital is more than just knowledge or intellect but encompasses ‘Intellectual action’ opens up a rich seam for further thoughts on the nature of public relations.

To be able to do this, we need to identify what PR ‘action’ is. What is it that is special if not unique to PR that can act on Intellectual assets and lever value from it.

**The universal truths in PR.**

The work of XPRL.ORG requires that a set of standards are created that can be understood as between computers, programmes and operating systems. To create these standards, XPRL articulates that:

To organise schemas addressing particular areas in PR, the scope of all the stages in the PR value chain needs to be classified. In normal discussion, the discipline of PR is described in ‘domains’ - investor relations, public affairs, marketing communications, etc. However, all the domains draw from the same palette of implementation techniques to structure their programmes - media relations, events, publications etc.

In this approach, the many types of public relations can be identified in exactly the same way that in ‘medicine’ there are many ‘do-
mains’ such as surgery, geriatric care, paediatrics etc. Medicine has sub domains and which is analogous to sub domains in PR such as of radio, TV and on-line media relations being subsets of the PR industry’s media relations practice.

The analogy goes further in that there are common techniques that apply to medicine from diagnostics to record keeping which are used to a greater or lesser degree by practitioners and which applies in PR. In PR written communication is very common (e.g. press releases, background briefs, house journals etc) and so is contact reporting.

This approach to scoping public relations reveals that in order for public relations to be effective, there are a number of processes common to all practice. These findings were developed at a conference in Malam in April 2003 and are articulated for the XPRL symposium on July 10th 2003 in London (www.xprl.org).

For a public relations programme to be most successful the techniques are implemented within three main components - strategy, resources and management (control) - which must all exist whether the ‘programme’ is a whole department's activity, a campaign or a project within a wider campaign.

The concept is currently going through some very careful revision and consultation but an early development of the components of strategy, resources and controls reveal the core elements of PR practice thus: (see Note 1)

What is important about this work is that it identifies the elements of PR that are critical to success. This is not to say that less well defined approaches will not work - there is evidence that they do - but that the prospects of success is much reduced when this approach is not adopted. Furthermore, this approach is not a guarantor of success but that it is the fundamental process for optimising the potential for success.

The significance of the Malam conference findings is that it shows a highly developed management process called public relations practice, that can be used universally by practitioners of public relations irrespective of their training background, title or job.

In addition the many skills in the PR domain and the domains of public relations have a unifying scope of activity that is well understood and used for successful practice.

Key strategy elements in the public relations process identify the environment for the public relations activity and messages to be shared with publics. Messages are not only explicit knowledge; they also spring from intellectual assets including, but not exclusively, tacit knowledge.

Public relations offers the process by which value can be created from the interaction of intellectual capital with a public or publics’ knowledge, interaction capability and environment. In fact, using the Malam definition of the scope of public relations, the one (and only) discipline available for optimising success in the creating value from intellectual properties is the process of public relations.

The notion that tacit and explicit knowledge has value is flawed (given that there is some debate about the nature of both, with a school of thought - the autopoeitic epistemology school - which says that tacit knowledge is private and cannot be explicit, only tacit and that tacit knowledge is actually data or knowledge that has been encoded in some way - a book for instance). Until knowledge has been shared with another person or public it only enriches the mind of the originator.
It has also been a popular myth that Intellectual Properties have a value. The confusion arises because of devices that have been invented to protect these codified expressions of tacit knowledge (e.g., copyright, patents, standards, etc.). The reality is that patents, copyright, and processes (know how), are worthless. Their worth is in their exposure and interaction with publics.

The telecoms company BT once owned the technology that allows web pages to hyperlink ("hidden page" as it was described in the original patent: Patent No US 4,873,662). Very few people knew about this patent and its values were not shared in a structured way with relevant publics.

BT never exploited it and did not manage or control the public relations process. Today the application of the patent is free and hyperlinking is a free technology implicit in every web site. It is because the knowledge, the patent, did not interact with publics in a structured way that its value to BT was never realised.

At the point where knowledge becomes explicit does not mean that it has any value. Writing the patent is important because it transfers tacit knowledge into an explicit code; or, in some cases, copyright works. Its value is only available when it interacts with a public.

In this case there were many publics not least those internal publics whose role is to optimise corporate value by exploiting corporate assets such as patents. This shows that public relations practice is a pervasive discipline throughout organisations.

To be effective, that is, to release the full value of knowledge, requires a process to achieve such interaction.

The Malam codification of the scope of public relations demonstrates, if imperfectly, what this process is and how it is optimised.

Public relations practice is the process by which value is released from (even physical but equally) Intellectual Properties.

Thus, Intellectual Properties become Intellectual Assets and can be realised into other forms of asset such as monetary worth.

A simple way of explaining the value of public relations process in releasing value is:

A factory (tangible asset) is of no value (cannot generate wealth) until the gateman (public) uses the key (tangible asset) the right way round (intellectual property) to open the door using his know-how (intellectual asset), which he got through a training programme (the process of public relations), when he gets to work (outcome evaluation positive/negative). If the gateman does not open the factory door (outcome evaluation...
positive/negative), the value of both the intellectual capital and the physical asset are not realised.

It will be seen that in the list of dependencies public relations process is the critical element in deploying intellectual capital and physical assets.

Values can be less tangible but even more valuable. The public relations process is applicable to not-for-profit and other PR domains and is also relevant to the fundamentals in society such as democracy.

The idea of liberal democracy serves a high proportion of the population of the world. The general franchise or right to vote is a very precious human right. However, a ‘vote’ is an intangible asset. It cannot, in a democracy, be touched, bought, or traded. A vote (the right to cast a vote for a candidate/referendum issue), is only realised into value through a feedback mechanism called an election. An election is a process.

Using the public relations process, the analysis of the democratic environment and the public sphere will identify issues of rights and responsibilities, motivations and, by no means least, the core attributes (analogous to corporate/brand attributes) relevant to the election process.

In exercising a vote, the elector realises value in many directions. The values released include: affirmation of the value of democracy, value of social contribution, value of self worth, value of societal responsibility, the worth of the candidate/issue and much more. These values need articulation to primary publics to give them access to these values.

However, in developing strategy and the concept of the PR environment, due recognition of the value of secondary and tertiary publics, the ‘public sphere’ needs to be considered in terms of output and response and evaluation of the wider Intellectual Assets that are realised in the process.

An elector in Swindon (England) in 2003 could exercise a vote at a public Internet kiosk in the centre of Swindon, from a PC at home or office, by sms, phone, post and in a polling station or through a proxy. The devices and channels for communication as an elector are very extensive in advanced economies.

Identifying these opportunities for the primary publics to facilitate interaction through exercising the right to vote (realise the value of the intellectual property) is a primary role of the public relations process.

Here, I part company with the initial XPRL PR scope document.

In developing the strategy, there is a need to identify the mechanism by which success can be identified (asset realisation) for the primary publics and for secondary and tertiary publics (the public sphere).

With relevant people, resources and technologies, the asset can be realised and its realisation will be evident in the values that the process generates. While one such measure may be voter turnout, there are many other Intellectual assets that accrue from the public relations process by way of:

• Affirmation of the democratic process (turnout of electorate),
• Value of social contribution (interaction with the electoral process),
• Value of self worth (evidence of personal rather than peer pressure voting outcomes - 99% vote for ‘the president’ demonstrates a low self worth),
• Value of societal responsibility, (few spoilt ballot papers)
• The worth of the candidate/issue (votes cast for alternative candidates)
• Etc.

The electoral process is not enough. The electoral process needs public relations process to generate interactivity between the vote (intellectual primary asset) with its value/attributes (secondary/tertiary Intellectual assets) expressed in a context that is relevant to the public such that they can both identify and access the value of voting (i.e. vote responsibly).

In democracies where turnout is falling (for example in the UK34), it is the failure of the public relations process that is an impediment to fulfilling the promise of democracy not the process of voting or, necessarily, the concept of liberal democracy.

In these two examples, I demonstrate how the public relations process is the mechanism for liberating the values of both physical assets and their necessary associated intellectual assets. The public relations process always takes into consideration the wider (often non financial) assets that can be realised for primary publics and the public sphere. This is as significant for brand, reputation, CSR, economic, financial, political and all other domains of public relations.

This has far reaching consequences. We can now draw the inference that it is the process of connecting knowledge with communities in a form where the attributes of that knowledge can both connect with and generate additional intellectual or knowledge assets that is the real value driver for organisations.

Equally that the nature of Intellectual Capital is that it is not information based but knowledge based and only acquires value after the public relations phase has created the interaction between knowledge and public AND thereby creates a new understanding or action expressed in the form of affective new knowledge or understanding.

Indeed, the Malam scoping document shows that, to be effective, there is a need for feedback in the communication process. This is an act of auditing stakeholders’ new knowledge which are assets for organisations.

Public relations in the facilitation of value from knowledge becomes the nursery in the evolutionary epistemology approach35 that sees knowledge in the first place as a product of the variation and selection processes characterizing evolution. This theory suggests that organisations with better knowledge of their environments would have been preferred to organisation with less adequate knowledge. In that way, the phylogenetical evolution of knowledge depends on the degree to which organisational values survives selection through its environment.

Create new intellectual assets

If the nature of creating new Intellectual assets is through interaction between a knowledge owner and publics, its nature will be to create the potential for further value-added opportunity. As long as the feedback process is affective (with the practitioner/organisation reacting to information derived from the evaluation process), the process for the development of new knowledge is implicit in the process of public relations.

This goes further than the two-way asymmetric relationships which is the staple of much PR teaching. That concept offers equal ad-
vantage to the two parties involved. This new interpretation is not win–win. The process of relationship development always means that new knowledge is created. It is win–win plus something.

In the examples above, the factory owner will identify the benefit of knowledge (a new intellectual asset) because the factory is open and can generate wealth. The cost of the gatekeeper is minute compared to the benefit of being able to liberate value from the factory. The cost has turned to asset. In the case of the democracies, electoral behaviour offers new opportunities for developing the electoral system and, as in the case of Swindon, to offer a wider range of alternative ways to vote and to value voting beyond the mechanic of the electoral system and communication.

Accounting for the value of Intellectual Properties becomes much more realistic when they are valued for their worth. Thus a library full of patents, a handful of brands and a basket full of reputational attributes that do not see the light of day are just written down cost. Exposed to publics, they transform into assets. What is more, these assets do not conform to the traditional laws of diminishing returns. Added interaction enhances value in a spiral of win–win plus something.

For as long as an organisation uses the public relations process on internal and externally derived knowledge, it will enhance the value of the organisation. Even for a quoted company in a bear market, the relative value will continue to improve when knowledge value is released using the public relations process.

Public relations, is of its nature, a new knowledge propagator. It increases the intellectual assets of the organisation. Furthermore, public relations will change the value of intellectual assets. Like all assets, there is a range of value. The value can stretch from positive to negative for some stakeholders.

Part of the role of part of the public relations industry (i.e. some PR domains) will be to create knowledge assets in the public sphere to counter adverse knowledge assets. Such is the nature of issues and crisis management.

Thus we find that in identifying the common process of public relations, including the ability to identify where new knowledge has been generated in the public sphere that is of consequence to the organisation, the practice of public relations can respond to meet wider social, political and economic demands put on the industry by other disciplines.

A maturing industry

By showing that the process of public relations generates new intellectual assets one is led to a point where identifying and evaluating such assets in the public sphere links public relations to some of the big issues of the day. PR now moves centre stage in the development of the political and democratic process, CSR, the new international account conventions and has an even stronger grip on brand and reputation development.

In identifying that it is public relations that moves to centre stage, I do not imagine that all of the Industry, or necessarily any of the existing industry (or academic PR) will be involved. It could be, but the opportunity for other forms of management and research to take on this role is high, funding is better and, in the case of Management Consultancy, acceptance of new thinking and close relations with academic development is more mature.

I show that there is a need for many forms of measurement and evaluation and that they have the potential for widespread application in auditing, accounting and reporting.

The idea that the public relations process is an asset creator means that all managers, not just a public relations manager needs to be able to apply the public relations process and that it is the realm of the public relations profession to teach, monitor and evaluate the management’s public relations capability and effectiveness. As in Financial management of organisation where every manager has responsibility for a financial budget, the extension of my argument is that the manager should also have a public relations asset budget too.

The skills of PR agency are still needed as are specialist PR domains but they serve a much more professional and wider scoped profession.

In facing the three issues I began with, the PR industry can gain a lot more because it can generate value that will build trust and equity. However, it is a tall order to invite practitioners and academia in our industry to face the issues of

• Much higher aspirations and leadership
• Specific public relations research capability to be affective in CSR consul and agency
• Capability to respond to meet wider social, political and economic demands put on the industry by other disciplines

In its role as the means by which value is released from knowledge, public relations as a management discipline has potentially a new and more demanding role in management. This is not to say that the many types of practice are superseded only that to optimise success it should be valued in this role and by valuing the role of PR for its ability to release wealth and optimise organisational value. The inference is that PR has a role to play beyond its wildest dreams.

References

4. In this paper I use the term Stakeholder very loosely and take cognisant of the range of discussion about the concept including Sternberg and Norman.
14. Phillips, D. The Public Relations Evaluationists Corporate Communications Vol 6 Number 4
15. The Internet is now established as the third source of news for many British citizens, behind television and radio. People in the UK spend three times longer surfing the Internet than they do reading newspapers. The British ISP Freeserve reported in July 2002 showed that people aged between 16 to 34 years old, spent 15 times longer on the Net in an average week than they do reading a newspaper. Reading or downloading news was a purpose for 28% of users for some of their browsing time according to the British Government’s Office of National Statistics survey in July-September 2002. (source: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/lna34.pdf). It would seem that media evaluation is important but in the wider communication context, it has its limitations and that these limitations are progressively declining in significance for communicators.


30. Fombun, C. A Summary of Rankings and Ratings by Social Monitors: Indices of Corporate Reputation Corporate Reputation Review, Volume 1, no.4


32. 33 XPRL stands for “eXtensible Public Relations Language”, Language - XPRL is a computer language that adds hidden context to the core information, in a way that allows the receiving computer system to understand the meaning of the core information and therefore re-purpose it for re-use. Tools developed in XPRL are of universal and global value, whatever the language used for the core information content.

33. Public Relations - it is a language developed by PR experts for PR work, so it is designed to meet the specific needs of formal and professional PR activity.

34. Extensible - the way the language is structured means that new scope can be added to keep tools using XPRL relevant and valuable to the industry. There is no need to abandon existing systems to accommodate future change.

35. XPRL is being developed to integrate into the family of eXtensible Markup Languages, such as XBRL (used by accountants for financial reporting) and NewsML (used in news distribution).

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Public opinion surveys and news reports have revealed mounting evidence that the global reputation of the United States is in decline. Negative, international attitudes have obscured U.S. goodwill, constructive diplomatic efforts, and successful military operations. To build trust in this untrustful world and to operate effectively within international alliances and coalitions, the United States must consider new strategies for communicating in a global context. A developing theory of global public relations suggests basing these strategies on generic principles of ethical, symmetrical communication that can be applied, understood, and accepted around the world.

This qualitative study used rhetorical analysis of U.S. government documents to compare U.S. defense principles of public information with generic, global principles of public relations theory. The study found the department's principles were based largely on one-way public information strategies of communication that could inhibit dialogue, permit unethical behavior, and damage strategic relationships with other nations. This study concluded that U.S. defense information principles fail to meet today's global public relations requirements. Therefore, this paper proposes establishing defense information principles that are more consistent with a developing theory of global public relations based on ethical, symmetrical communication.

Anti-American sentiment also drove a wedge between the United States and traditional allies (Pew, 2003). Prior to the U.S.- and British-led war in Iraq, London's The Sunday Times ("Bush and Saddam," 2003) reported that 45% of Britain's citizens regarded U.S. President Bush as the greatest threat to world peace (as big a threat as Saddam Hussein, 45%); and 47% regarded America as "'a bully that wants to dominate the world' rather than a force for good" (p. 1). Only 34% expressed admiration for the United States; 54% did not. After cessation of major combat operations and failure of military forces to locate weapons of mass destruction said to exist in Iraq, U.S. and British citizens expressed lack of trust in intelligence data and motives provided by President Bush and Prime Minister Blair before going to war (Entous, 2003; Hoge, 2003).

This trend followed a previous erosion of confidence in large, U.S. public institutions following the Vietnam War, Watergate, and other failures in U.S. government policy and leadership during the late 20th century. During this period - perhaps as a consequence of the decline in public trust and favor - U.S. government leaders became increasingly reliant on the mass media, modern communication technology, and more sophisticated public information efforts to explain their actions to foreign as well as domestic publics (Thompson, 1991; Kalb, 1998; Danzig, 1999). However, despite advances in U.S. public information programs like those used by the defense department during the war in Iraq, anti-American sentiment continued to grow around the world. This sentiment could be explained in part by U.S. preoccupation with American values at the expense of other nations' values (Zakaria, 2003). As Judis (2003) observed, "American's obsession with electoral democracy has clouded their understanding of [other] countries" (p. 128). The geographic and social isolation of the United States has also created communication barriers and weakened relationships between the U.S. and other nations (Pei, 2003). However, limitations in the strategic management of U.S. government public information programs in an increasingly complex world could also explain worsening relationships between the United States and other countries. Therefore, U.S. government agencies need to reconsider traditional communication strategies and develop ethical, multinational information programs to manage more ef-
This study used a historical-critical analysis of official documents and texts to identify strategic goals of U.S. public information strategies and directives. A comparison of U.S. public information strategies and generic principles of an emerging theory of global public relations was expected to help evaluate consistency of U.S. information principles with ethical, global public relations programs. Furthermore, data collected from this analysis were expected to illuminate how application of U.S. defense information programs might influence foreign perceptions of and international relations with the United States. U.S. defense information documents were readily available for analysis; however, observation and analysis of actual defense department public information activities and their effect on publics require additional research. Thus, this study investigated a single research question to generate baseline data that could be used for future study:

RQ1: How do public information strategies published in U.S. Department of Defense principles of information and directives compare to generic principles of a global theory of public relations?

Results of this study could lead to a better understanding of underlying causes of anti-American attitudes, suggest practical approaches for designing and applying strategic public information programs in an international setting, and contribute to the growing body of knowledge for an emerging theory of global public relations based on ethical decision making.

**Conceptualization**

This study analyzed U.S. defense information principles and examined how the ethical nature of these principles, when applied to public information or public relations programs, might affect relationships between the United States and other nations. Furthermore, the study compared U.S. defense information policies to generic principles of global public relations. Hence, this study requires an understanding of four concepts: principles of information, public relations ethics, relationship management, and global public relations.

**Historical Antecedents: Principles of U.S. Defense Information and National Security**

On November 9, 2001, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld approved a revision to a formal list of principles (Appendix A) that guide release of defense information to publics (U.S. Department of Defense, 2001). This set of principles was updated and modified on January 21, 2002 (Appendix B) for publication on a U.S. Department of Defense Web site (U.S. Department of Defense, 2002). These principles promote public understanding of U.S. Department of Defense operations and, in a larger context, U.S. national security objectives. The 2002 U.S. national security strategy states, “Our military’s highest priority is to defend the United States. To do so effectively, our military must: assure our allies and friends; dissuade future military competition; deter threats against U.S. interests, allies, and friends; and decisively defeat any adversary if deterrence fails” (White House, 2002). Furthermore, the strategy requires government agencies like the defense department to develop innovative public information programs to promote understanding of U.S. interests. According to the White House, “Just as our diplomatic institutions must adapt so that we can reach out to others, we also need a different and more comprehensive approach to public information efforts that can help people around the world learn about and understand America” (White House, 2002).

Formal principles of information have changed little over several decades; however, defense information officials have gradually adapted contemporary practices according to lessons learned during evolving military operations in Granada, Panama, the Persian Gulf, Haiti, Somalia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and now, Iraq. The updated principles of information (Appendix B) state:

It is Department of Defense policy to make available timely and accurate information so that the public, the Congress, and the news media may assess and understand facts about national security and defense strategy. (U.S. Department of Defense, 2002, p. 1)

Furthermore, the policy states, “requests for information from organizations and private citizens shall be answered quickly” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2002, p. 1). These principles require a complete and ready release of information in accordance with statutory requirements; a free and accurate flow of information to U.S. military service members and their families; and withholding of information only when disclosure could harm national security or the safety of military service members - but not to protect the government from criticism or embarrassment. The principles also instruct the defense department to coordinate its public information programs with other government agencies in order to “expedite the flow of information to the public; propaganda has no place in DoD public affairs programs” (p. 1). Finally, the principles assign primary responsibility for carrying out the defense public information function to the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs.

Despite periodic revisions, the defense department’s principles of information - designed during an era characterized by U.S. unilateral military operations - have enjoyed limited success when communicating with global publics in some multinational military operations (e.g., within international alliances and coalitions). Following NATO-led military operations in Kosovo in 1998, a senior advisor to the military commander of U.S. forces in the Kosovo region commented informally that public information was, “a much underutilized instrument of national and alliance power … ignore it at your own peril” (“A view from the top,” 2000). The senior NATO spokesperson during Kosovo operations, Dr. Jamie Shea, also cited the alliance’s need for a more global public information strategy, which can be tailored to multinational audiences:

And one lesson in the future is that we probably need a more diversified information strategy … and not just an Anglo-Saxon essentially addressing an Anglo-Saxon world in the hope that it will also be picked up favorably in other countries. In an alliance like NATO of 19 countries … you definitely do need not just a general media strategy but also individual national media strategies. (Shea, 2000)

**Public Relations Ethics**

From a philosophical perspective, ethics can be evaluated from either a teleological or deontological approach (Seib & Fitzpatrick, 1995). Teleology is a utilitarian approach that evaluates usefulness of acts in terms of how much pleasure is gained, how much human life is improved, or how much goodness is balanced with evil. Deontology is based upon a sense of duty or the premise that respect for other people’s inherent rights must govern actions. There are practical values and flaws with either approach.

Teleology is a useful approach, in that decision makers are required to make conscious decisions only after considering the...
consequences of their choices of action - a kind of risk and benefit analysis. However, this analysis process is often subjective; and, if this approach focuses merely on the goodness or pleasure to be gained, unethical behavior could be justified if the result is considered to be good or pleasurable. Deontology has strong moral support in democracies like the United States, as evidenced by the existence of deontological products such as the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights. However, from a global perspective, there is no universal definition of moral law or agreement on human rights. Social perspectives can also change rapidly, as societies in Eastern Europe have changed following the fall of the Berlin Wall in the late 20th century. As societies change, so do moral reasoning and values. Finally, perspectives are subjective - as seen from the eye of the beholder. What may be socially acceptable in one country may be unacceptable in another.

This study assumes that both individuals and government, like other public institutions, bear certain responsibilities. On an individual basis, Goodpaster and Matthews (1982) described responsibility in terms of “someone is to blame, something has to be done, or some kind of trustworthiness can be expected” (p. 133). In the context of releasing information to the public, individuals must be accountable for their actions, follow rules imposed by social norms, and use proper judgment to make trustworthy and reliable decisions. Seib and Fitzpatrick (1995) extended this view to an organizational level by observing, “social responsibility recognizes the linkages between organizations and society and imposes an obligation on organizational leaders to consider the impact of decisions on those affected by them” (p. 7).

Scholars (L. Grunig, J. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002; Verčič, L. Grunig, & J. Grunig, 1996) have identified ethics as a generic principle of global public relations. Evidence of an ethical foundation for public communication extends as far as 400-300 B.C. and the Roman rhetorician, Isocrates. Marsh (2001) implied that Isocrates’ Greek predecessor, Plato, advocated an intolerant style of rhetoric that suppressed dissent and led to control over social dialogue by more powerful, well-educated people or organizations. Aristotle, a student of Plato, is also associated with an asymmetrical, persuasive rhetoric, which “is not a tool for absolute truth … [but] for persuasion in any given case” (Marsh, p. 87). Marsh concluded that Isocrates’ moral, symmetrical approach to dialogic models of rhetoric “proved to be more effective … than its asymmetrical rivals in classical Greece” (p. 95). Other modern scholars such as Toth and Heath (1992) have also written about the importance of dialogue in rhetoric:

By featuring dialogue, we opt to emphasize the dynamics of rhetorical exchange by which interested parties seek to induce agreement and action. … Each party in this exchange may agree or disagree. Through rhetorical dialogue, parties form opinions and negotiate limits and obligations that are basic to their relationships - and mutual [italics added] interests. (p. xii)

In the 20th century, development of a systems approach in organizational theory established the importance of relationships between organizations and their strategic publics (J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Within a systems framework, organizations must apply “ethical consciousness and ethical analysis” (Bivins, 1992, pp. 371-372) to their communication programs. Ethical consciousness - a concept closely associated with corporate social responsibility (e.g., Verčič & Grunig, 2000) - requires organizations and individuals to consider the consequences of their actions on others. Ethical analysis relies on ethical frameworks to evaluate choices of action. Such an approach calls for use of symmetrical communication systems designed to establish dialogue and produce mutual understanding. Also, J. Grunig (1992a) found that “choice of the symmetrical model of communication is the key choice made by effective organizations” (p. 24).

In a normative or philosophical sense, ethical decision-making requires public relations practitioners to consider the implications and consequences of their organization’s actions. Furthermore, evidence from research has demonstrated practically that organizations can be more effective when they use ethical, symmetrical communication programs that balance the needs of audiences and organizations and contribute to ethical decision-making among organizational leaders. However, ethical codes and frameworks have proven to be elusive and difficult to establish on a global scale. Although many professional organizations have codes of ethics that guide members’ conduct, “no single standard appears to be supported across the entire public relations industry” (Hunt & Tirpok, 1993, p. 1). Despite failures to identify an accepted, universal code of public relations ethics, such a code “has long-term benefits to society and to the communication and information professions” (Hunt & Tirpok, p. 2). Hence, many scholars have acknowledged the need for additional research to develop a theory of ethical decision making in public relations (L. Grunig et al., 2002, p. 554).

Public Relations as Relationship Management

Scholars have examined public relations as a relationship paradigm for nearly two decades (Ferguson, 1984; Ledingham & Brunning, 2000, p.xiii; J. Grunig, 1992a; Dozier, L. Grunig, & J. Grunig, 1995). Ledingham and Brunning (2000) have also described the relationship management perspective as a “useful and fruitful perspective for public relations study and education” (p. xiv). From this perspective, public relations is defined as “the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends” (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2000, p. 6). Toward the end of the 20th century, public relations scholars advanced the concept of relationship management by identifying types of relationships, specific relationship outcomes, and means to measure outcomes and quality of relationships (Hon & J. Grunig, 1999; J. Grunig & Huang, 2000; Ledingham and Brunning, 2000). Some scholars (e.g., J. Grunig & Hung, 2002) have also studied the effect of relationships on organizational reputation. The Institute for Public Relations Commission on Public Relations Measurement and Evaluation found that relationships between organizations and strategic publics could be measured by evaluating precise elements of relationships (Hon & Grunig, p. 2). The institute concluded that measuring the quality of relationships between an organization and its publics can help determine the value - or degree of excellence - in public relations programs.

J. Grunig and Huang (2000) identified “trust, control mutuality, relational commitment, and relational satisfaction [as] the most essential and pertinent indicators representing the quality of organization-public relationships” (p. 42). In 2002, J. Grunig and Hung elaborated on types of relationships - exchange and communal - and characteristics that define relationship quality. Exchange relationships provide mutual benefits, as when a party provides benefits to another in return for previous benefits received from that party or in expectation of future benefits. A communal relationship is characterized by willingness between parties to care for the welfare of each other; even in the absence of benefits gained or expected. According to J. Grunig and Hung (2002, pp. 29-30), relationship characteristics include:

Control mutuality - the degree to which the parties in a relation-
ship are satisfied with the amount of control they have over a relationship.

Trust - the level of confidence that both parties have in each other and their willingness to open themselves up to the other party. Our measure of trust has three underlying dimensions: integrity, the belief that an organization is fair and just; dependability, the belief that an organization will do what it says it will do; and competence, the belief that an organization has the ability to do what it says it will do.

Commitment - the extent to which both parties believe and feel that the relationship is worth spending energy on to maintain and promote.

Satisfaction - the extent to which both parties feel favorably about each other.

Moreover, J. Grunig and Huang (2000) defined these qualities as the “essence” (p. 42) of relationships between organizations and publics:

For example, control mutuality reflects the unavoidable asymmetry of power in organization-public relationships. Likewise, both trust and satisfaction reflect the cognitive and affective aspects of relationships. Finally, level of commitment reflects the degree of resource interchange, which includes emotional and psychological aspects of interpersonal relationships and behavioral aspects of interorganizational relationships. (p. 42)

When viewed as outcomes of public relations programs, the quality of these relationships can be correlated with the results of strategically managed communication processes. These process measures can be used to evaluate short-term effects that might contribute to long-term relationships, thereby guiding communication activities that are part of relationship maintenance strategies. For instance, J. Grunig and Hung (2002) associated public relations with relationship management and demonstrated how organizational behavior affects reputation and thus quality of relationships. They found that public relations functions that “provide publics a voice in strategic management” (p. 43) affect management decisions, organizational behavior, and relationships with key publics.

Global Public Relations

Public relations scholars (e.g., L. Grunig, J. Grunig, & Verčič, 1998; Verčič et al., 1996; Wakefield, 1996) have collaborated on research that contributed to a middle ground theory of global public relations. Unlike Western-based theories such as the excellence theory in public relations (Dozier et al., 1995; J. Grunig, 1992a; L. Grunig et al., 2002), a global theory would operate between a cultural relativistic and ethnocentric approach to public relations. Under cultural relativism, public relations concepts differ according to the prevailing nation, region, or culture. Under ethnocentrism, a single public relations theory could apply to all societies.

Global perspectives are often used to describe public relations activities that cross national and cultural borders. However, the term global is often confused with terms such as multinational, transnational, and international. A few scholars have attempted to differentiate between these concepts (Wakefield, 1996; Kruckenberg, 1996) identified multinational organizations as corporations whose “impact may, indeed, extend across several nations” (p. 82). Furthermore, Kruckenberg distinguished multinational organizations from transnational organizations by observing that transnationals “neither belong to, nor must they pledge any patriotic allegiance to, any home nation-state” (p. 82). Culbertson (1996) explained that international public relations “focuses on the practice of public relations in an international or cross-cultural context” (p. 2). Finally, Anderson (1989) recognized that international public relations practitioners often develop individual programs to meet the needs of multiple markets; however, global practitioners develop programs based on interrelated or similar concepts and then adapt these programs to different settings.

According to a middle ground theory of global public relations, similarities in public relations concepts are described by generic principles (L. Grunig et al., 1998, 2002). These generic principles are abstract public relations concepts that are viewed the same way in different regions of the world. However, application of these generic principles might vary according to different settings - even though the abstract concepts could mean the same thing in different countries. Research leading to the development of excellence theory (Dozier et al., 1995; J. Grunig, 1992a; L. Grunig et al., 2002) originally identified 17 characteristics of excellent public relations programs in the United States, Great Britain, and Canada. These characteristics, excerpted from J. Grunig (1992a, p. 28), are illustrated in Appendix C.

Although discovery of these characteristics helped produce the first general theory of public relations (J. Grunig, 1992b), some scholars described early development of excellence theory as a “very lopsided … theory-building activity [centered] in the USA or a few Western European countries” (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2001, p. 104). By replicating the study of excellence theory in a non-Western nation, Verčič et al. (1996) began to extend excellence theory research to a global perspective and identified nine generic principles that could be applied to public relations programs in many countries. These principles include:

- Involvement of public relations in an organization’s strategic management.
- A direct reporting relationship between the senior public relations manager and senior organizational management.
- An integrated public relations function.
- Public relations as a management function separate from other functions.
- The role of the public relations practitioner (e.g., a knowledgeable, senior communication manager who directs and technicians who carry out tasks).
- Two-way symmetrical model of public relations.
- Symmetrical system of internal communication.
- Knowledge potential for managerial role and symmetrical public relations.
- Diversity embodied in all roles.

In addition to identifying generic principles, Verčič et al. (1996) described five external, environmental variables at a national or social level that could influence application of public relations principles: political system, economic system, level of activism, culture, and media systems. Sriramesh and Verčič (2001) collapsed these variables into three categories: national infrastructure (political system, economic system, and level of activism), media system, and social culture. Furthermore, Sriramesh and Verčič elaborated on these variables and operationalized them to permit the study of their relationship with public relations practices in various countries.

Method

Previous studies of U.S. and NATO military public relations (see Van Dyke, 1989, 2001a, 2001b, 2002a, 2002b, 2003) confirmed the value of longitudinal interviews (e.g., McCracken, 1988) in producing rich data that described military public information programs. How-
ever, these studies failed to reveal how military public relations practitioners chose some types of communication programs over others (e.g., symmetrical versus asymmetrical). Given the importance of “choice” (J. Grunig, 1992b, p. 24) in selecting communication programs, I elected to use rhetorical analysis to reveal how the strategic intent of U.S. Department of Defense information policies influences choice of communication programs.

Selection of Method
This study incorporated a historical-critical analysis (Turner, 1998) of strategic goals and messages contained in the U.S. Department of Defense principles of information (U.S. Department of Defense, 2001, 2002). Critical study of organizational rhetoric can illustrate how public relations managers construct the identity of organizations such as the U.S. Department of Defense (Mumbry, 1987; Cheney, 1991, 1992; Heath, 1992). Furthermore, studying intent of these identity-building communication activities can facilitate an understanding of how messages flow from a strategic plan, why, and with what effect. From a rhetorical perspective, Medhurst, Ivie, Wander, and Scott (1997) noted, “A strategic approach … is predicated upon a realist view of the world … the world as it currently exists with its varying political systems, governmental philosophies, economic assumptions, power relationships, and dominant personalities” (p. 19).

I began the rhetorical analysis by identifying strategic communication goals, themes, and messages contained in the principles of defense information. Next, I identified how contextual or intervening variables such as U.S. cultural, historical, and political systems might have influenced development and execution of this communication strategy. According to Medhurst et al. (1997), this approach allows a critic to “fit the abstract critical concepts [of a communication strategy] to the concrete rhetorical behaviors … [and] examine contextual and rhetorical forces as they exist in ‘configured interplay’ at any given moment” (p. 23). I de-limited this study by focusing on analysis of strategic communication concepts; thus, I reserved for future analysis how the U.S. Department of Defense applied these concepts to the actual practice of public information.

Selection of Documents
I completed a rhetorical analysis of two documents for this study: the U.S. Department of Defense Principles of Information (2001, 2002) and the principles’ root document, U.S. Department of Defense Directive 5122.5 (U.S. Department of Defense, 2000). Principles of information “constitute the underlying public affairs philosophy” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2002, p. 1) for the defense department. The latter document provides authority and policy guidelines for the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs to carry out his or her public relations responsibilities. I also searched other government documents such as U.S. national security strategy (White House, 1998, 2000, 2002) and defense department press releases (e.g., Garamone, 2002) for contextual clues that might influence development and application of defense principles of information. For instance, the White House publishes annually a new national security strategy, signed by the president, which guides U.S. defense information activities. This strategy guides development of defense principles of information, which consist of a one-page document. These principles, although succinct, provide broad, strategic, ethical guidelines for the release of U.S. defense information. The defense department prepares more detailed information plans and programs for specific issues and individual military operations. Both the national security strategy and principles of information are important elements in the information efforts used to promote awareness of U.S. defense policies, at home and abroad, among domestic and foreign audiences.

Procedures
I first developed a coding scheme, developed from generic principles drawn from an emerging theory of global public relations (Verčič et al., 1996) described earlier in this paper. I then read through U.S. security strategies and defense information principles, identifying strategic elements that might represent public information goals or messages. By comparing the generic public relations principles with U.S. information strategies and messages, I assessed how U.S. defense information strategies might apply global public relations theory. Subsequently, I searched for contextual clues that might explain how U.S. government officials are influenced to adopt information strategies contained in the two documents under study. Finally, I used this data to reflect on how these strategies might influence relationships between the United States and international publics and propose refinements to current defense information principles.

Results
Results of this study revealed important aspects of the ethical nature of U.S. defense principles of information and their suitability for global public relations. Analysis revealed that these principles were consistent with 5 of the 9 generic principles of global public relations theory: military public information is an integrated function, separate from other functions, involved in strategic management of the U.S. Department of Defense, and headed by a senior public relations manager who reported directly to the department’s senior executives. The principles were inconsistent with 2 other global principles: external and internal communication programs were based largely on a one-way, public information model of public relations rather than two-way symmetrical communication systems. The analysis failed to produce enough evidence to allow a reliable comparison with 2 other global principles of public relations theory: knowledge potential and diversity in public relations roles.

These results clearly suggested that the U.S. Department of Defense, by strategic design, practices a public information - or public affairs - model of public relations described by scholars as typical of government agencies in the United States and other countries (J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984; J. Grunig & Jaatinen, 1998). Such public information programs are considered not as ethical or as effective as two-way symmetrical models of public relations based on dialogue that balance the interests of publics and organizations. Second, the defense principles of information focused primarily on U.S. domestic audiences, U.S. laws and regulations, and U.S. military interests. They seemed ill suited to manage public communication in multinational military operations that cross national borders, cultures, and lines of communication. The following excerpts from the rhetorical analysis, organized by generic principles related to global public relations theory, support these findings.

RQ1: How do public information strategies published in U.S. Department of Defense principles of information and directives compare to generic principles of a global theory of public relations?

Involvement of public relations in an organization’s strategic management.
The existence of principles of information, signed by the department’s senior executive - the secretary of defense - suggested involvement of public information in the strategic management of the defense department. Furthermore, the information principles
expressed the department’s “obligation to provide the public with information” (p. 1). Publics were described as strategic audiences: members of the U.S. Congress, news media, military service members, and families. These passages indicated that the defense department does indeed practice certain aspects of strategic public relations management and recognizes the importance of strategic relationships.

Direct reporting relationship between senior public relations manager and senior organizational management.

The principles of defense information revealed an apparent direct reporting relationship between the senior public relations official and the department’s senior executive. Just prior to his signature line on the document, the secretary of defense assigned “primary responsibility for carrying out” the principles to an immediate assistant: the “Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2001, p. 1). Department of Defense Directive 5122.5 (U.S. Department of Defense, 2000) verified this direct reporting relationship and identified the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, also identified as ASD(PA), as “the principal staff assistant and advisor to the Secretary of Defense and the Deputy Secretary of Defense for DoD news media relations, public information, internal information, community relations, public affairs and visual information training, and audiovisual matters” (p. 2). Furthermore, the directive stated, “the ASD(PA) shall … report directly to the Secretary and Deputy Secretary of Defense” (p. 4).

Integrated public relations function.

Both the principles of information and defense directive referred to integration and coordination of public relations activities with other defense department functions and government agencies. According to the principles (U.S. Defense Department, 2002), an “obligation to provide the public with information … may require detailed Public Affairs (PA) planning and coordination in the Department of Defense and other Government Agencies” (p. 1). The directive (U.S. Defense Department, 2000) required the ASD(PA) to issue coordinated guidance to various “DoD components” (p. 2), “promote coordination, cooperation, and mutual understanding among the DoD components” (p. 3) and with external agencies and publics, and “coordinate and exchange information” (p. 4) with a variety of DoD and other agencies. This type of integration has been described as a characteristic of innovative public relations programs that “see problems as wholes” (J. Grunig, 1992a, p. 227).

Public relations as a management function separate from other functions. The DoD principles of information and directive assigned strategic management responsibilities to the public relations function. However, the public relations function seemed to be more involved with managing strategic messages (e.g., a free flow of timely, accurate information) than with managing strategic relationships. Although these documents did not identify overtly public relations as a separate function, the specificity used to describe public relations functions suggested that public relations was separate from other functions in the defense department. Furthermore, the principal assistant for public affairs was assigned primary responsibility for public relations activities in the defense department and acted “as sole spokesperson and release authority for DoD information” (U.S. Defense Department, 2000, p. 2), which provided further evidence of a separate function for public relations.

Role of the public relations practitioner.

The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs was assigned a strategic management role with the defense department. First, the principles and directive identified a variety of strategic publics, whom the defense department had an “obligation” (U.S. Defense Department, 2001, 2002, p. 1) to inform. Second, in addition to public information duties, the directive (U.S. Defense Department, 2000) referred to a number of management functions assigned to the ASD(PA): develop “policies, plans, and programs” (p. 2); monitor, evaluate, and develop “systems, standards, and procedures for the administration and management of DoD-approved policies, plans, and programs” (p. 2); participate in “planning, programming, and budgeting activities” (p. 2); and “evaluate, coordinate, and provide policy guidance” (p. 3).

Two-way symmetrical model of public relations.

The opening lines of the principles of information stated, “It is Department of Defense policy to make available timely and accurate information so that the public, the Congress, and the news media may assess and understand the facts about national security and defense strategy” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2002, p. 1). This phrase exemplified a one-way, public information model of communication practiced by “public information practitioners [who] … disseminate accurate, but usually only favorable, information about their organizations” (J. Grunig, 2001, p. 12). Phrases such as “obligation to provide the public with information” (U.S. Defense Department, 2000, p. 1) and “requests for information … shall be answered quickly” (p. 1) also reflected an emphasis on one-way flow of information, even though there were several references to requests for information coming from external publics. In two sections of the directive, the ASD(PA) was assigned responsibility to “analyze … and … evaluate” (p. 3) communication received from external publics. There was also one reference in the directive to relationships with defense components and external publics. The ASD(PA) was required to “promote coordination, cooperation, and mutual understanding among the DoD Components and with the other Federal, State, and local agencies, and the civilian community” (p. 3). However, the texts of both principles and directive concentrated on the tactics of replying to requests for defense information and services rather than trying to understand and manage the defense department’s relationship with such publics. Moreover, the principles focused attention on lawmakers and news media: publics who could have significant influence over government legislation, defense regulations, and public opinion. There was no interest exhibited in the views or interests of these publics - only a desire by defense department officials to ensure that the facts about their organization were understood.

Symmetrical system of internal communication.

Like external communication, the defense department’s system of internal communication was oriented in one direction: from defense officials to internal publics. The principals and directive required the ASD(PA) to make available “a free flow of information … to the men and women of the Armed Forces and their dependents [family members]” (U.S. Defense Department, 2001, p. 1) and to “internal audiences of the Department of Defense” (U.S. Defense Department, 2000, p. 2). The directive also required the ASD(PA) to control communications “directly with Heads of DoD Components” (p. 5) and through a “channel of communications with … Commanders of Combatant Commands” (p. 5) when communicating within the defense department. This requirement suggested a hierarchical organizational structure and an authoritarian internal culture, which could limit the effectiveness of the organization and excellence of the public relations program (Dozier at al., 1995; J. Grunig, 1992a).

Knowledge potential for managerial role and symmetrical public relations. Neither principles of information nor the directive addressed issues of professional public relations education, training, or develop-

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ment that might reflect degree of knowledge potential for managing symmetrical public relations programs. However, sections of the directive that required management activities addressed earlier in this paper implied that the ASD(PA) must have knowledge and skill in strategic management.

**Diversity embodied in all roles.**

Gender and diversity issues with regard to public relations were not addressed in either the information principles or directive. This appeared to be a significant oversight, since the defense department serves as a model in the United States for equal opportunity in professional occupations—except for a few direct combat roles, which are prohibited to women.

**Discussion**

Although the U.S. Department of Defense principles of information were generally consistent with principles of global public relations, the lack of symmetry in external and internal communication and failure to address global audiences in sufficient detail cause concerns about the adequacy of defense information strategy. First, the ethical implications of apparent self-interests and rigid communication systems raise important questions about the efficacy of U.S. defense principles of information. Second, the asymmetric nature of these information principles could limit the ability of the United States to conduct effective public relations activities in global settings such as alliance, coalition, or other multinational operations. A review of literature related to relationship management and findings from this preliminary study lead to the conclusion that ethical and practical limitations of U.S. defense principles of information constrain U.S. ability to produce and maintain healthy relationships between the United States and its domestic and foreign publics. Moreover, the asymmetric nature of defense information strategy could even contribute to anti-American sentiment.

**Consistency of U.S. Principles of Information With Global Public Relations**

The qualitative results of this study are much more revealing than possible quantitative conclusions that might be drawn from this analysis. Although U.S. defense department principles of information are consistent with 5 of 9 generic principles of global public relations, the U.S. principles of information are inconsistent with global public relations in two very important areas: lack of symmetry in both external and internal communication. The strategic intent of defense principles of information seemed to favor the interests of the U.S. Department of Defense over the interests of its strategic external publics. This approach is practiced by other U.S. government agencies as well. For instance, the U.S. State Department has stated that “engaging, informing, and influencing [italics added] key international audiences” is an essential element in its mission to “advance U.S. interests” around the world (U.S. State Department, 2003). Furthermore, the asymmetric, top-down internal communication system used by the defense department suggested an authoritarian rather than participative organizational culture. Asymmetry in defense information programs could inhibit the ability of the defense department to promote healthy relationships, especially among internal audiences. As L. Grunig et al. (2002) observed:

**Ethical Implications**

There was ample evidence that principles of information serve as the foundation for a philosophical and moral code that guides the ethical practice of U.S. Department of Defense public affairs. Such a philosophy and set of norms are essential to the practice of professional public relations and separate public relations from unethical forms of communication (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2000; Ehling, 1992; J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984). First, the department’s official Web site proclaimed that the U.S. national security strategy is driven by constitutional “values of America - life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” (Garamone, 2002). Garamone’s description of how American political values influenced development of U.S. national security strategy—and, ultimately, defense information policy—supports Verčič et al.’s (1996) assertion that environmental variables such as political systems could influence application of public relations principles. The Web site also described the defense information principles as an “underlying public affairs philosophy for . . . the Department of Defense” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2002, p. 1). Second, the principles and directive specifically prohibited some forms of overt, unethical behavior. For instance, the defense department is required to provide a prompt and complete response to public requests for information. Information cannot be “classified or withheld to protect the Government from criticism or embarrassment” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2001, 2002, p. 67).
or be contrary to law” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2002, p. 1).

These principles did not, however, address the ethical nature of asymmetric communication; and data obtained from U.S. national security documents provided evidence that asymmetric communication was intended historically to be part of the U.S. government’s information strategy. Furthermore, this strategy relied principally on tactics to disseminate messages rather than strategic efforts to manage public relations. For instance, the 1998 U.S. national security strategy set goals for “advancing U.S. national interests” (White House, 1998, p. 5). These goals were designed to favor U.S. interests: “The United States has a range of tools at its disposal with which to shape the international environment in ways favorable to U.S. interests” (italics added) and global security” (p. 8). Furthermore U.S. national security strategy outlined means to achieve goals, including use of U.S. military and diplomatic force: “Diplomacy is a vital tool for countering threats to our national security. The daily business of diplomacy … is a [sic] irreplaceable shaping activity. These efforts are essential to … forcefully articulating U.S. interests [italics added]” (p. 8). A U.S. national security strategy document dated December 2000 specifically addressed asymmetric information strategies designed to “influence the policies of [foreign] governments to an unprecedented extent” (White House, 2000).

This makes public diplomacy - efforts to transmit information and messages to peoples around the world - an increasingly vital component of our national security strategy. Effective use of our nation’s information capabilities … helps advance U.S. interests abroad.” (White House, 2000)

Again, some scholars (e.g., J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1997) have viewed as unethical the unconstrained use of asymmetrical communication strategies by organizations to exercise power over weaker publics. However, some asymmetric communication strategies - even coercion - could be deemed ethical when guided by an ethical framework that includes disclosure of asymmetric intent (J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1997; Van Dyke, 2001b).

Potential Effects of U.S. Defense Information Strategies on International Relationships

In an analysis of anti-American sentiment, President of American University in Beirut John Waterbury asked, “Why do they hate us [the United States]?” (Waterbury, 2003, p. 58). He then observed that more than half of Lebanon’s residents respect American people - but “81 percent oppose its government” (p. 59). According to Waterbury and USA Today (2002), a Gallup Organization poll of 10,000 Islamic citizens in nine Muslim countries found that most Muslims disapproved of U.S. military actions following terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 against U.S. cities. Furthermore, “participants in the poll describe the United States as ‘ruthless, aggressive, conceited, arrogant, easily provoked, biased’” (Stone, 2002).

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1998), “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). Hence, this qualitative study was designed to produce a better understanding of how the U.S. Department of Defense applied generic principles of global public relations to their defense information programs. While this study produced no empirical evidence related to the effect of U.S. defense information strategy or principles on international relationships, it is possible to interpret how the meaning people assign to U.S. defense information efforts might affect their cognitive attitudes and behavior toward the United States. These attitudes and behaviors, in turn, are likely to affect relationships with the United States.

For instance, J. Grunig and Hung (2002) defined reputation as “a distribution of cognitive representations that members of a collective hold about an organization” (p. 44). Furthermore, measures of cognitive representations could reveal how publics “think about an organization” (p. 44). While J. Grunig and Hung de-emphasized reputation as a focus for public relations work, they touted the concept as having value for evaluative research in public relations and as further an indicator of relationship quality. Therefore, value of public relations could be determined by an ability to “provide publics a voice in strategic management processes and thus affect the quality and nature of management decisions” and “the impact of these management decisions on both experiential and reputational relationships with publics” (p. 43).

Historical Context

Rhetorical scholar Kathleen Turner (1998) explained, “Whereas rhetorical criticism seeks to understand the message in context, rhetorical history seeks to understand the context through messages that reflect and construct that context” (p. 2). According to this perspective, historical context affected the development of U.S. defense principles of information and application of these principles has likely affected history. For instance, the U.S. Department of Defense has been ranked among the top U.S. public institutions in terms of public confidence for more than two decades. Americans’ confidence in their military in the late 20th century was the highest of all public institutions examined (Jerkowsky & Van Dyke, 2000, pp 20-21). However, this public confidence grew during a time of unilateral operations when the defense department devoted much effort to informing U.S. domestic audiences about how their military was defending U.S. interests in Grenada, Panama, Haiti, Europe, Korea, the Middle East, and other regions.

Despite the relatively high confidence of U.S. citizens in their military, the U.S. Department of Defense must strive to earn a broader public trust abroad - especially in Middle Eastern nations where U.S. military presence often provokes anti-American sentiment and even terrorist reprisals. As Kirshner, Strauss, Fanis, and Evangelista (2003) observed, “Most states simply prefer to dwell in a world where there is some check on the ambitions of the great powers” (pp. 15-16). Future conflicts require the U.S. Department of Defense to look beyond domestic audiences and address the interests of foreign audiences (Danzig, 1999). Thus, the context of future military operations mandates a global public information strategy for the 21st century.

Furthermore, a powerful form of U.S. nationalism, based on political rather than religious, cultural, or ethnic ideals (Pei, 2003), has historically led other nations to fear or resent the United States. According to historians at Cornell University, U.S. “belief in the exceptional character of the American nation” has permeated U.S. behavior in the post-Cold War era; and “the country’s unique political and economic makeup … rendered the home front immune to class, religious, and ethnic cleavages” (Kirshner et al., 2003, pp. 15-16). The United States has even described attacks such as the September 11, 2001, terrorist strikes against U.S. soil as an assault against the nation’s freedom, liberty, and other U.S. values (Bush, 2001).
The United States has also used national political values and ideals to legitimize its use of political, economic, and armed force against other nations - just as the United States used military strikes against Serbia, Afghanistan, and Iraq to defend freedom, promote democracy, and assist oppressed citizens. However, many cultures have historically feared unethical use of lethal force and interpreted application of American power and influence as U.S. colonialism or hegemony. Furthermore, fear of U.S. hegemony could eventually erode profitability of U.S. corporations and economic products abroad, thus reducing “the advantage they once enjoyed over products from other countries” (Tomkins, 2003, p. 19). Hence, U.S. public information programs need to rely on ethical principles that can be understood and accepted by a wide variety of nations, cultures, religions, and ethnic groups.

Role of the Researcher and Influence on This Study
My previous experience as a U.S. Navy public affairs officer and my current position as a doctoral student and research assistant influenced my focus on the topic and method in this study. I served for 25 years as a public affairs specialist in the U.S. Navy and was assigned for three of those years as chief of public information for NATO’s military operations in southern Europe, including Bosnia-Herzegovina. During my graduate studies at Syracuse University and the University of Maryland, I have focused much of my research on military public information programs - including some in which I was personally involved. I believe, as Susan Crane (2000) once noted, that historical studies have moved me “into the realms of subjectivity, historical passions, and emotional relationships” (p. xi). Scientific study benefits generally from critical distance between the observer and the observed (Crane, 2000; McCracken, 1988). However, as Geertz (1973) reported, access to evidence is one of the keys to successful research. Thus, my deep access as a former participant-observer in U.S. military public information activities and my ability to understand these activities are of great benefit to this study. I trust that thorough description, interpretation, and analysis (Wolcott, 1994) of research results in this paper will lend credibility to this study and mitigate any subjectivity that might otherwise bias results.

Conclusion
There is ample and widely published evidence of an increase in anti-American sentiment among nations of the world. While nations generally support U.S. democratic values, they harbor resentment toward perceived arrogance, superior power, and aggressive interventions of the United States. The cause for this resentment is less obvious. Results of this study suggest that asymmetric U.S. government public information strategies that disseminate messages favoring U.S. interests could at least contribute to - and may even promote - anti-American sentiment. Studies of excellence in public relations theory have demonstrated that public relations “must be a strategic management function rather than a strategic messaging function before it contributes value to an organization” (J. Grunig and J. Grunig, 2002, p. 13). Evidence has shown that excellent public relations can help organizations become more profitable by reducing costs associated with public pressure, regulatory controls, legal constraints, and other external resistance (Dozier et al., 1995; J. Grunig, 1992; L. Grunig et al., 2002). Furthermore:

Public relations must be involved in the strategic decision making of the organization and ... it must attempt to balance the interests of organizations and publics (i.e., be symmetrical) to develop good relations with truly strategic publics. (p. 13)

Although the United States is capable of achieving many of its short-term goals (e.g., regime change in Iraq) without relying on other nations, it must rely on healthy relationships with a broad community of nations to achieve long-term, strategic goals (e.g., freedom from world-wide terrorism). Public trust (J. Grunig & Hung, pp. 29-30) is an essential element in the relationships between the United States and its foreign and domestic audiences. To develop and maintain mutually-productive relationships, government organizations such as the U.S. Department of Defense must rely on credible communication programs that help audiences associate the United States with elements of trust: integrity, dependability, and competence. It is apparent from this study of U.S. defense principles of information that the U.S. Department of Defense manages one of the most competent and capable military forces in the world. Furthermore, the United States has a reputation for doing what it says it will do. Just as President Bush promised, the United States launched military operations against Iraq in 2003, despite powerful opposition from many other nations and international alliances. However, not all nations feel that the United States acts with integrity or remains open to mutually-beneficial relationships. Furthermore, the asymmetric nature of U.S. government information policies only reinforces what appear to many - especially those threatened by the United States - to be unfair and unjust U.S. actions; and the underlying strategies used to construct these policies contribute to asymmetry in U.S. public information. Thus, many nations are dissatisfied with and uncommitted to relationships with the United States. This dissatisfaction could harm U.S. military, diplomatic, and economic interests around the world.

Robert O. Keohane (1999), professor of political science and co-director of the Program on Democracy, Institutions, and Political Economy at Duke University, predicted that credibility will become “the crucial source of information power” in our global society. According to James E. Grunig (2001), it is also “time to move on” from models of public relations practice - like government-style public information - and develop a new model of public relations excellence that can help promote credibility of communication. This model should be characterized by two-way symmetrical or “dialogical” (p. 29) public relations that programs that are “inherently ethical” or guided by “rules used to ensure ethical practice” (p. 29).

Within this context, U.S. defense department leaders should revise defense principles of information and incorporate in them a moral and ethical compass - symmetry of communication - to guide and ensure the credibility of defense public affairs programs. This revision should balance the interests of the defense department with the interests of its strategic audiences. To restore and maintain public trust in this untrustful world, the defense department also must develop a global communication strategy that can help improve and manage relationships with other nations. U.S. defense officials must identify strategic audiences at home and abroad and rely on ethical forms of communication to explain U.S. policies and actions.

Public relations scholars and practitioners have yet to discover a global code of public relations ethics. Some critics have concluded that we may never find a truly universal code. However, there exists a moral and ethical imperative to search for such a code (see Hunt & Tirpok, 1993). The U.S. Department of Defense, by developing and revising principles to guide their public information efforts, has contributed much to this search. Yet more work is required to refine these principles and extend them to a global stage. Let us hope that we can learn from these attempts and one...
day discover an accepted approach to global, ethical public relations that will help build trust, strengthen international relationships, and reduce the incidence of deadly conflict in an increasingly complex world.

Appendix A

U.S. Department of Defense Principles of Information (Print Version Revised November 9, 2001)

Appendix B


The Principles of Information constitute the underlying public affairs philosophy for DefenseLINK and the Department of Defense.

“It is Department of Defense policy to make available timely and accurate information so that the public, the Congress, and the news media may assess and understand the facts about national security and defense strategy. Requests for information from organizations and private citizens shall be answered quickly. In carrying out that DoD policy, the following principles of information shall apply:

Information shall be made fully and readily available, consistent with statutory requirements, unless its release is precluded by national security constraints or valid statutory mandates or exceptions. The Freedom of Information Act will be supported in both letter and spirit.

“A free flow of general and military information shall be made available, without censorship or propaganda, to the men and women of the Armed Forces and their dependents.

“Information will not be classified or otherwise withheld to protect the Government from criticism or embarrassment.

“Information shall be withheld when disclosure would adversely affect national security, threaten the safety or privacy of U.S. Government personnel or their families, violate the privacy of the citizens of the United States, or be contrary to law.

“The Department of Defense’s obligation to provide the public with information on DoD major programs may require detailed Public Affairs (PA) planning and coordination in the Department of Defense and with the other Government Agencies. Such activity is to expedite the flow of information to the public; propaganda has no place in DoD public affairs programs.”

The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs has the primary responsibility for carrying out the commitment represented by these Principles. The Principles of Information are codified as enclosure (2) to Department of Defense Directive 5122.5 of September 27, 2000.


Appendix C

Characteristics of Excellent Public Relations Programs

Program Level

1. Managed strategically

II. Department Level

2. A single or integrated public relations department
3. Separate function from marketing
4. Direct reporting relationship to senior management
5. Two-way symmetrical model
6. Senior public relations person in managerial role
7. Potential for excellent public relations, as indicated by:
   a. Knowledge of symmetrical model
   b. Knowledge of managerial role
   c. Academic training in public relations
   d. Professionalism
8. Equal opportunity for men and women in public relations

III. Organizational Level

9. Worldview for public relations in the organization reflects the two-way symmetrical model
10. Public relations director has power in or with the dominant coalition
11. Participative rather than authoritarian organizational culture
12. Symmetrical system of internal communication
13. Organic rather than mechanical organizational structure
14. Turbulent, complex environment with pressure from activist groups X. Effects of Excellent Public Relations
15. Programs meet communication objectives
16. Reduces cost of regulation, pressure, and litigation
17. Job satisfaction is high among employees


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1 This paper uses the terms public relations, public information, and public affairs to describe what J. Grunig and Hunt (1984) defined as public relations from a communication management perspective: “management of communication between an organization and its publics” (p. 4). As noted elsewhere in this paper (pp. 11-12), Cutlip, Center, and Broom (2000) defined public relations from a relationship management perspective as “the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends” (p. 6). These concepts are generally known as public relations in the United States, as public affairs in U.S. government agencies such as the defense department, and as public information in Great Britain and other European nations. These terms are used interchangeably in this paper to describe the concept of public relations.
Reputation Management and Stakeholder Engagement: an Integrated Approach to Future Corporate Governance in South Africa

By Ronél Rensburg and Estelle de Beer

1 prologue

Organisations are rapidly learning that as markets have gone global, so too, must the concept and practice of corporate governance and corporate social responsibility or corporate social investment. This inevitably means that organisations will have to learn to become good “corporate citizens”. Corporate citizenship describes the moral and ethical behaviour of organisations in their environment according to:

• The degree an organisation is accountable not only for its financial performance but also its environmental and social impact.
• The quality of an organisation’s engagement with both immediate internal stakeholders (employees) and key external stakeholders including shareholders and supply chains, but also other stakeholders representing a range of civil society groups, the media and governmental organisations both at home and abroad.
• The extent to which this behaviour translates itself into the mainstream business activity and policy of an organisation.

Developing countries, in particular South Africa has many challenges to face within this social development landscape. Some of these issues are HIV/AIDS, people in rural communities and poverty. According to Khoza (2002) the developing world is heading for a community-centered workplace that has the following characteristics:

• A community concept requires that management must be approachable, but not over-familiar.
• An atmosphere of informality must infuse the chores and procedures of business if employees across the board are to feel a sense of belonging.
• Managers should strive to understand the worldviews of those they manage and share the feelings of being human (along) with them - the Ubuntu-concept.
• In a community there is a free-flow of information. Everyone has the right to know what is going on. Each member of the group is a custodian of its secrets. One cannot cultivate a community spirit by withholding information or trying to manipulate facts.
• It is a community that is mindful of global changes but aware of a global economy means seeking a proper balance between social, economic and environmental change with an interest in improving human well-being. This way of perceiving business calls for a new approach to corporate governance and the management of corporate communication in South Africa.

The King Report II on Corporate Governance for South Africa, published in 2002, addresses corporate governance principles currently applicable in South Africa, but it also provides a framework for the development of a new, more “sustainable” corporate communication paradigm that can also help to position the communication management function on a more strategic level in organisations. “Contributing to the bottom-line” now has a new meaning since this term has been redefined to include environmental and social aspects of an organisation’s activities, apart from its economic activities. These activities will only come to fruition with effective and efficient corporate communication practices to support the new “triple bottom-line” of the organisation.

Corporate communication in a South African context will in the future include a strong emphasis on values. In a young democracy one of the most basic elements of a relationship, trust, will have to be nurtured and once again restored between people with different worldviews. In the words of Anita Roddick, founder of the Body Shop: “What is needed now is a revolution in kindness”. The communication function in public and private institutions is ideally suited to facilitate these relationships.

In adopting a participative corporate governance system of enterprise with integrity, the King Committee in 1994 successfully formalised the need for companies to recognise that they no longer act independently from the societies and the environment in which they operate (King Report ES 2002:7). According to Grunig (1992:11) managed interdependence between the organisation and its environment - society - is the major characteristic of successful organisations and as boundary spanners communication managers have a significant role to play in managing this interdependence. Gouillart and Kelly (in Verwey 1998:4) argue that the Communication Revolution not only forms the basis of this new business model, which necessitates the ability to manage the flow of information, but is actually the facilitator of a fundamental social and business influence, an unstoppable trend towards connectivity.

Carroll (1996:4) adds to this by stating that many economic, legal, ethical, and social questions and issues about business and society are currently under debate. A major force that shapes the public’s view of business is the criticism it receives in a social environment that reflects affluence, education, public awareness developed through the media (especially TV), the revolution of rising expectations, the rights movement, a growing entitlement mentality, and a philosophy of victimisation. In addition, actual questionable practices on the part of business have made it a natural target. In a global business environment there are few places where an organisation can hide its activities from sceptical consumers, shareowners or
protestors. In the age of electronic information and activism, no organisation can escape the adverse consequences of poor governance (King Report, ES 2002:10). The communication manager, with his/her expertise in relationship management, once again has a role to play here.

Hertz (2001:13) points out that organisations are not amoral, but they are morally ambivalent. The boundaries between business and government have blurred and under certain market conditions organisations are taking on the responsibilities of government. Social responsibility, sustainable development and environmental impact are terms more likely to be heard today from CEOs than from government ministers. In the words of Jim Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank, “the proper governance of companies will become as crucial to the world economy as the proper governing of countries.” (King Report, ES 2002:8). At the same time society, (for example through NGO’s such as Greenpeace) has shifted its focus to the conduct of organisations, as much as that of national governments (King Report, ES 2002:299). This may explain the interest in sound corporate governance practices over the last decade.

A major criticism of business is that it has abused its power. This usually manifests in economic, political, technological, environmental, social and individual spheres. According to the King Report (ES 2002:9) corporate governance principles were developed, inter alia, because investors, with the era of the professional manager, were worried about the excessive concentration of power in the hands of management. Power evokes responsibility that is the central reason for the corporate responsiveness that has been prevalent in recent years. These concerns have led to a changing social environment for business and a changed social contract with the community (Carroll 1996:26).

However, one must guard against witch-hunting in the world of business. Over-protection against greed could encourage the sins of sloth (a loss of flair when enterprise gives way to administration) and fear (executives become subservient to investors and ignore the drive for sustainability and enterprise) with an erosion of enterprise and an encouragement of subservience (King Report, ES 2002:8). The overriding goal of any company is to consistently generate a competitive return on investment for its shareholders. The hallmark of a successful corporate strategy is therefore the ability to balance the protection and growth of underlying value with competitiveness and profitability (King Report, ES 2002:94).

A balance is also needed between the individual interests of stakeholders and the collective good of the organisation in which their interests converge. Engaging actively with stakeholders helps inform strategic planning and risk management. Organisations that adopt this approach should adopt a process for the identification and, if necessary, prioritisation of key stakeholders having a legitimate and relevant interest in their operations (King Report, ES 2002:99).

Effective organisations are able to choose appropriate goals for their environmental and cultural context and then achieve those goals. However, strategic constituencies in the internal and external environment can constrain the organisation to meet its goals and achieve its mission. Organisations strive for autonomy from these publics and try to mobilise publics that support their goals (Grunig 1992:11). One of the departments most strategically placed in the organisation to support senior management in its endeavour to be successful in a competitive and continuously changing environment is the public relations or communication management department.

Excellent communication management departments contribute to decisions made by senior management by providing them with information about the environment of the organisation, about the organisation itself, and about the relationship between the organisation and its environment. Excellent communication management departments engage in environmental scanning, have access to senior management, and present information at an appropriate level of abstraction for different levels of management (Grunig 1992:12).

A well-managed organisation will furthermore be aware of, and respond to, social issues, placing a high priority on ethical standards. However, Hertz (2001:90) states that “ethical considerations all too often have little weight when pitted against possible loss in sales and an erosion of market share”. A good corporate citizen is increasingly seen as one that is non-discriminatory, non-exploitative, and responsible with regard to environmental and human rights issues. An organisation is likely to experience indirect economic benefits such as improved productivity and corporate reputation by taking these factors into consideration.

The key challenge for good corporate citizenship is to seek an appropriate balance between the expectations of shareowners for reasonable capital growth and the responsibility concerning the interests of other stakeholders of the organisation. The Commonwealth Business Council Working Group on Corporate Citizenship defines corporate citizenship as: “…the commitment of business to contribute to sustainable economic development, working with employees, their families, the local community, and society at large to improve their quality of life (King Report, ES 2002:8).

In the end the real measure of organisational integrity - and the basis of sound relationships with stakeholders - is tangible evidence that an organisation practises what it preaches in all areas of its activities. It must both do, as be seen to be doing, what it says it is doing. Problems arise where perception and reality do not coincide. Accordingly, it is not only useful, but also important for organisations to develop appropriate performance measurement criteria and control processes that can be tangibly applied against stakeholder performance objectives. An increasing number of South African companies are publishing reports describing how their corporate values and business principles have been applied in the interest of their stakeholders. The manner, extent and frequency of disclosure relating to social, ethical and environmental issues and performance is best left to the discretion of the board and management of each organisation according to what is appropriate to its circumstances and the requirements of its stakeholders (King Report, ES 2002:99).

3 The origins of, need for and findings of the king report

In the early 1990s increasing interest was shown in corporate governance around the world. On the continent of Africa, the emphasis on good corporate governance was even more serious due to unethical business practices and widespread corruption. South Africa took up the challenge to promote the highest standards of corporate governance in this country by publishing the first King Report on Corporate Governance for South Africa under the auspices of the Institute of Directors in 1994. The Report, compiled by the King Committee under the leadership of Mervin King, went beyond financial and regulatory aspects of corporate
governance in advocating an integrated approach to corporate governance in the interests of a wide range of stakeholders having regard for the fundamental principles of good financial, social, ethical and environmental practice. At a time of profound social and political transformation and the re-admission of South Africa into the community of nations and the world economy this Report was recognised internationally as the most comprehensive publication on this subject (King Report, ES 2002:7).

Stakeholders, and the management of contractual or non-contractual relationships with them, formed an important part of the first King Report and gave it a unique perspective - unlike that of its counterparts in other countries at the time, which focused mainly on financial reporting. The second King Report was published in March 2002, expanding amongst other issues on the importance of communication and reputation management practices in South African organisations. This Report again strongly supports an inclusive approach that recognises that stakeholders such as the community in which the company operates, its customers, its employees, its investors and its suppliers need to be considered when developing the strategy of an organisation. The modern approach is for a board to identify the organisation’s stakeholders, including its shareowners, and to agree on policies as to how the relationship with those stakeholders should be advanced and managed in the interests of the organisation (King Report, ES 2002:7).

The King Report II contains a proposed code for corporate management for private as well as government controlled organisations, public enterprises and all institutions that must comply with the regulations of the financial markets (Finansies en Tegniek 2002:46).

While South Africa currently ranks among the top five of 25 emerging markets in terms of corporate governance, it is rated poorly in terms of disclosure. The future of corporate reporting is all about transparency—the clear, complete, relevant information about corporate performance that investors and other stakeholders are demanding. Stakeholders now want a form of reporting from which they can see whether or not a company is likely to have sustained success. More particularly, investors want a forward-looking approach to reporting. A balance sheet is only a record of one moment in time of the financial affairs of an organisation. Thus, the balanced scorecard approach, which results in information at a glance so that organisations can be measured against defined goals, has been developed (King Report, ES 2002:9-15).

The King Report (ES 2002:11) states that the minimalist approach to corporate governance adopted by many local organisations needs to change. While South Africa may arguably offer investment returns comparable with some of the best in the world, it must visibly demonstrate impeccable governance standards in all sectors of commercial activity in principle, and also in practice, if it is to remain a destination of choice for emerging market global investors. Research shows that by simply developing good governance practices, managers can potentially add significant shareholder value.

A study by McKinsey & Co showed for example that international investors are prepared to pay a lot more for the shares of a well-managed organisation, even though its financial results are on the same level of a less well-managed organisation (Finansies en Tegniek 2002:46).

In the era of the global investor there are international standards or guidelines for corporate governance that countries adhere to. Examples are those developed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the International Corporate Governance Network, and the Commonwealth Association for Corporate Governance. The four primary pillars of fairness, accountability, responsibility and transparency are fundamental to all these guidelines (King Report, ES 2002:15).

The above recommendations are directly applicable to the communication management domain and resorts under the heading “Integrated sustainable development” in the King Report II. Other recommendations, which are more financial in their scope, include those for risk management, internal auditing, accounting and auditing, and compliance and enforcement of the King Report II.

4 Expectations of south african senior managers

The Excellence Study - the largest and most intensive investigation ever conducted of public relations and communication management - showed that shared expectations between the top communicator and senior management is an important aspect of communication excellence (Grunig 1994). It is therefore imperative to take into account the proposals made in the King Report II since it can be regarded as a current representation of the expectations of senior managers in the South African business environment regarding the importance of sound corporate governance practices on the one hand and communication and reputation management practices on the other.

In the current global business environment the licence to operate an organisation is much more complex than in the past. Today boards have to consider not only regulatory aspects, but also industry and market standards, industry reputation, the investigative media, and the attitudes of customers, suppliers, employees, investors and communities (local, national and international), ethical pressure groups, public opinion, public confidence, political opinion, et cetera (King Report, ES 2002:8). These practices have always been part of the domain of corporate communication management and communication managers should therefore, as experts in relationship management, be regarded as the custodians of these relationships.

According to the King Report II “the modern approach is for a board to identify the company’s stakeholders, including its shareowners, and to agree on policies as to how the relationship with those stakeholders should be advanced and managed in the interests of the company” (King Report, ES 2002:7). This point of view is supported by Steyn and Puth’s (2000:5) definition of corporate communication that “…it is managed communication with the aim of increasing organisational effectiveness by creating and maintaining relationships with stakeholders.” The overall strategic management of organisations is inseparable from the strategic management of those stakeholders relevant to the accomplishment of the organisation’s objectives. The communication function should therefore be anchored around the organisation’s stakeholders.

The inclusive approach that the King Report II (King Report, ES 2002:8) follows, requires that the purpose of the organisation be defined, and the values by which the organisation will carry out its day-to-day activities should be identified and communicated to all relevant stakeholders. These three factors must be combined in developing the strategies to achieve the organisation’s goals. It is also stated that the relationship between the organisation and its stakeholders should be mutually beneficial - a statement that has formed the essence of public relations for many years.
Cutlip, Centre and Broom (1994:2) offer a classic definition of public relations as “the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the publics on whom its success or failure depends.”

Public relations or corporate communication management is a distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and co-operation between an organisation and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasises the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilise change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and sound and ethical communication techniques as its principal tools (Hutton 1999).

Before strategic relationships can be managed, however, relevant stakeholders of the organisation and their set of values, needs, desires, wants, goals and objectives - which may be and often are significantly different from those of the organisation - must be identified through research. Relevant stakeholder research, strategy formulation and strategic planning in the organisation are prerequisites for developing a sound corporate communication strategy, because it provides focus and direction to the communication and creates synergy between the enterprise or corporate strategies and the corporate communication strategy (Steyn & Puth 2000:64).

An organisation’s vision, mission and core values form the basis for its business goals and conduct. They influence its activities and represent the cornerstone of relationships and interactions with stakeholders, establishing expectations and providing the terms of reference to assess organisational performance. To be meaningful, they should be embedded in policies, practices and decision-making processes at all levels of the company (King Report 2002:98).

The King Report II (ES 2002:23) states that every board should have a charter setting out its responsibilities, which should be disclosed in its annual report. At a minimum the charter should confirm the board’s responsibility for:

• the adoption of strategic plans;
• the monitoring of operational performance and management;
• the determination of policies and processes to ensure the integrity of the organisation’s risk management and internal controls;
• the development of its communication policy; and
• the selection, orientation and evaluation of directors.

A survey done by McKinsey & Co, published in 2000, emphasised that organisations not only need to be well-governed, but also need to be perceived in the market as being well-governed (King Report, ES 2002:13). Stakeholders have a direct bearing on ongoing corporate viability and financial performance. Stakeholder perception - and thus corporate reputation - is recognised as a significant market value driver, and relationships with stakeholders should be managed accordingly (King Report, ES 2002:98).

Corporate reputation is a function of stakeholder perception of an organisation’s integrity and efficiency, derived from many sources, such as customer service, employee relations, community relations, ethical conduct and safety, health and environmental practices. Increasingly, the investment community (although not necessarily directly or quantitatively) builds an “ethical premium” in its valuation of organisations, based on the perceived integrity of an enterprise and its management. With the current strong focus on corporate management, aspects such as risk management, ethical values and behavioural codes also now have a formal place in the world of business. Just as a monetary value can be coupled with good corporate governance, an organisation’s ethical values can determine its future, especially during a crisis (Finansies en Tegniek 2002:46). However, once blemished, this aspect of reputation is hard to recover - a fact reflected in the share price. In other words, the many non-financial facets of reputation have become important indicators of ongoing economic viability and sustainability of organisations. Business is now starting to realise that “non-financial issues” have financial consequences for a business (King Report 2002:99).

Reputation, as one of the many non-financial issues of an organisation, can be regarded as an asset, even if only in terms of perceptions. If mismanaged it can become a liability. It certainly is not optional anymore. The management of a corporate brand can be compared to safety and risk management policies and procedures in manufacturing. Organisations need to apply damage control to a brand as vigorously as for plant and equipment. A brand is as much an asset as a factory (Finance Week 2003:57).

5. Building partnerships: lessons from the corporate communication battlefield

The organisation as a good citizen of the future, will not only have as a priority to build and maintain effective relationships with all of its stakeholders, but it will have to face the challenge of building significant partnerships between these stakeholders. Andriot and McIntosh (2001) refer to the “new social partnerships” that involve institutions from different sectors of the community that come together in addressing common purposes that involve the realisation of both social and commercial needs. For example, IBM outsources its catering because it does not see this as a core competence that it has or wishes to develop.

The “Partnership Alchemy Study” (Zadek & Nelson 2000), identified a number of dynamic pathways as determinants of effective partnership building:

• Acknowledge drivers and triggers that brought the partners together
• Mutual agreement on common purpose and agenda
• Mutual agreement on the scope and complexity of levels of actions
• Identifying a leader/leadership role to act as mediator or facilitator
• Understanding resources, skills and capacities that are needed to meet the partnership objectives
• Appropriate organisational and legal structures to meet common objectives
• Transparency, representation and accountability
• Communication strategies that facilitate clarity
• Methodologies for measurement and evaluation or partnership outcomes
• Flexibility to adapt the purpose of the partnership

Zadek & Nelson (2000) presented the four “P’s” of partnership building. These four characteristics are the defining elements of partnership.
are best paid and closest to top management), such as investor re-

particularly the higher-end functions (ie those that

“integrated” communication, the public relations field is generally

function. Hutton (1999) states that, contrary to much talk about

table. If this is not done the danger lies in the disintegration of the

managers a voice and they can now make use of this window

taken before or since its publication. It has given communication

This Report opened doors for corporate communication manag-

The following multisector partnerships are examples of global

collaboration initiatives aiming at improving social and environ-

mental cohesion (Report by the Prince of Wales Business Leaders

• The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the Forest and Marine

Stewardship Council

• Conservation International

• The International Youth Foundation.

• Lions International

• Rotary International

• The Earthwatch Institute in Australia that has adopted an ap-

proach whereby they partner with the corporate sector in of-

fering experiential learning to private sector employees.

• The Community Child Care Forum in South Africa

6. Corporate Communication Can Make a Strategic

Difference

High on the agenda of corporate communication managers across

the globe is the fight for recognition in the boardroom. Sitting at

the decision-making table and contributing to the bottom-line of

the organisation have long been part of the debate on communi-

cation and public relations management and in South Africa this

was no exception. The catalyst that changed this rather fatalistic

topic of conversation into one of strategic relevance was the pub-


This Report opened doors for corporate communication manag-

ers in South Africa like no other document published or action

taken before or since its publication. It has given communication

managers a voice and they can now make use of this window of

opportunity to take their rightful place at the decision-making

table. If this is not done the danger lies in the disintegration of the

function. Hutton (1999) states that, contrary to much talk about

“integrated” communication, the public relations field is generally
disintegrating. Particularly the higher-end functions (ie those that
are best paid and closest to top management), such as investor re-

lationships and government relations, are being lost to other functional

areas within organisations.

It is no longer sufficient to regard the management of strategic re-
lationships as corporate communication’s primary function, since
other divisions in the organisation also claim to manage specific
relationships. The finance division claims to manage investor rela-
tionships, the marketing division manages customer relationships
and the Human Resources division is to a greater extent manag-
ing employee relationships. Communication managers will have to
identify a new niche in which to practise their skills in communica-
tion management - one which the authors suggests should be that
of reputation management and stakeholder engagement.

Another finding of the Excellence Study referred to earlier was that
the sphere of shared expectations between the top communica-
tor and senior management include a demand-delivery loop. This
refers to a loop of repeated behaviour with senior management
demanding and communicators delivering excellent communica-
tion programmes (Dozier et al 1995). Since the recommendations
in the King Report can generally be regarded as a benchmark for
expectations of senior management in South African organisations
a knowledgeable top communicator can position herself/himself
and her/his department on a strategic level in the organisation by
taking note of and adhering to these recommendations.

But, in order to be excellent, she/he needs to go two steps further
to also make sure that she adheres to the other two components
of excellent communication, namely “departmental power” and “the
organisational role played by the top communicato.”

Departmental power refers to:
• the ability to influence members of senior management; and
• the value that senior management attach to public relations as a

function.

The communication manager must be perceived as making a stra-
tegic contribution to organisational decision-making by demon-
strating knowledge of strategic as well as technical communication
practices (De Beer 2001:xiv).
Communication managers who are trained in the field of communication management will have the skills to manage strategic relationships with stakeholders (including activists), employees, the media, shareholders and customers. They will also be able to manage the reputation of an organisation by realising the value from the corporate image; helping the organisation position itself in a competitive environment; developing and maintaining a corporate identity, brand, profile and personality for an organisation; and attending to corporate social responsibility, internal and external communication and media relations. They will also be able to apply their knowledge of research, budgeting, environmental scanning, issues management, integrated communication, project management, ethics, technology, change management, diversity management, crisis communication, corporate governance, perception management, public opinion, et cetera. Corporate communication practitioners have the skills to be involved in strategic planning and organisational decision-making, project management (budgeting, control and evaluation), and the management of the communication division.

The core knowledge base that distinguishes excellent from less-than-excellent communication involves management role-playing, especially strategic management. The excellent communication department has the expertise to contribute to strategic planning; has the knowledge base to make policy decisions; be held accountable for programme success or failure; outline communication programme alternatives; and guide senior management through a logical problem-solving process. The top communicator should consider herself/himself to be the organisation’s communication expert, while other managers should also regard the top communicator as such (Dozier et al 1995:11).

Communication managers, trained in the skills of strategic communication management, are leaders in understanding and promoting strategic and integrated communication that will address the fundamental mission of the organisation (Smith, in Walmsley 1998:2). As boundary spanners in the organisation they will be facilitators and networkers who will be the integrators and interpreters of information that they have obtained from the environment and they will be managers of strategic relationships. However, most communication departments, excellent as well as less-than-excellent, also have creative technicians who can write and edit, handle technical aspects of production and know about photography and graphics (Dozier et al 1995:11).

However, communication departments may have the core knowledge to practise excellent communication, but senior management must also share a common understanding of the role and function of communication and communication managers in an organisation for communication to be excellent (De Beer 2001: xiv). The King Report states that the most significant obstacle to implementing meaningful social, ethical and environmental accounting and reporting lies in the way management thinks within an organisation. As long as these are perceived as “soft issues” they are unlikely to receive the focus they merit from a value-generating economic point of view. There is also a general lack of awareness of understanding of and commitment to the principle of sustainable development (King 2002:97).

In South Africa public relations and communication management are also still regarded as “soft issues”. It is hoped that the King Report will serve as a wake-up call to senior managers about the importance of this function and to the fact that it can truly add strategic value to the triple bottom-line of the organisation.

7. A Need for Corporate Communication Managers with Expanded Skills and Responsibilities

The above clearly proves that there is a need for communication managers with expanded skills and responsibilities that can add strategic value to the organisation. Potter (1998:15) states that communicators need to become business managers who specialise in corporate communication. They should then help other business managers to be more effective and successful with their communication experience. Organisational leaders generally respect business managers, and view their experience as necessary and relevant.

Increasing social demands on business have created a need for public relations professionals to advise management on formulating overall strategies for an organisation. Management is increasingly faced with the consequences of ever-changing relationships with stakeholders. The ability to objectively analyse people’s attitudes and to communicate with them effectively in order to promote better understanding between management and its various publics, has become extremely important to every successful business enterprise and non-profit institution (Wilcox, Ault & Agee 1989:66). Rensburg (2003:v) posits that the ‘new’ strategic management role of public relations will emphasise the initiation, construction and maintenance (the engagement) of inter-relationships (a deeper connectivity) by organisations with all stakeholders.

Dozier et al (1995:107) believe that changing the roles that top communicators play in the organisation provides the most direct path to excellence. Top communication departments identified in the Excellence Study combine knowledge of both manager and technician roles to provide the requisite foundation for excellence. To actually achieve excellence, however; top communicators must play advanced organisational roles of communication manager and senior adviser.

According to Steyn and Puth (1999:20) the two roles of manager and technician have been the cornerstone of roles theory in the field of corporate communication for the past 20 years. However, looking at the current need for an individual in an organisation who could manage the reputation of an organisation in its widest context, the two traditional roles are no longer sufficient to deal with organisations’ increasingly turbulent environments. Research done by Steyn clearly indicated that CEOs now expect communication practitioners to play a third role - that of the strategist.

This role of the most senior corporate communication practitioner consists of monitoring relevant environmental developments and anticipating their consequences for the organisation’s policies and strategies, especially with regard to relationships with stakeholders. The strategist role is played at the macro or top management level of an organisation. Having a practitioner in this new role should overcome the shortcomings of practitioners described by CEOs and remove most of their dissatisfaction with the lack of strategic direction displayed by the corporate communication function (Steyn & Puth 1999:20).

Excellent communication departments are made up of communicators who know how to plan strategic programmes based on information they collect about publics. The one factor that most influences the playing of advanced roles, is the contribution that communication makes to strategic planning and decision-making through research. Communication and stakeholder research provide information about relationships with key publics, a scarce and valued resource that puts top communicators at the decision-
making table. Here top communicators make senior managers aware of the knowledge, opinions, and behavioural predispositions of publics who influence the success or failure of organisations. Issues affect relationships with publics. Research also helps top communicators identify emerging issues and track established ones, counselling the full range of strategic decisions (Dozier et al. 1995:117).

According to Steyn and Puth (1999:21) the ideal would be for an organisation to have a corporate communication practitioner in the role of the strategist, and another in the role of the manager: This situation might be feasible for the multinational or big corporate - however, in a medium sized or small corporate communication department it is foreseen that the most senior practitioner will have to play both these roles. The primary responsibility of the top communicator in an organisation would be to develop a communication strategy for the organisation - one that would position it in a fiercely competitive environment by building and maintaining a solid corporate reputation in the minds of the public.

The corporate communication strategy should reflect the corporate strategy. Strategy formulation and strategic planning in the organisation are therefore a prerequisite for developing a sound corporate communication strategy. The strategic plan gives direction - it provides the strategy, goals and business policy of the organisation. Beerel (1998:162) posits that strategic planning is a formal process designed to interpret the organisation's environment for the purpose of identifying its adaptive challenges and guiding its responses so as to optimise longer-term competitive challenges.

Although planning undoubtedly produces a series of integrated decisions, this serves a secondary purpose. The very process of monitoring and evaluating the environment is the sharp end of the strategic planning process. It is the critical link between the organisation as a living network and the infinite number of networks that defines its environment (Beerel 1998:162).

Dozier et al. (1995:85) adds to this by stating that strategic management and planning are high-level organisational functions tightly linked to excellence in public relations and communication management. Strategic management can also be regarded as the “process of managing the pursuit of the accomplishment of organisational mission coincident with managing the relationship of the organisation to its environment.” That is, the purpose and direction of an organisation (its mission) is affected by relationships with key constituents (publics/stakeholders) in the organisation’s environment. These relationships affect an organisation’s autonomy to pursue its mission and accomplish its goals.

Strategic management is the balancing of internal processes of organisations with external factors. The strategic management of organisations is inseparable from the strategic management of relationships, traditionally the responsibility of the public relations or communication department. The most strategic functions of the top communicator, therefore, include issues management of which boundary spanning activities and environmental scanning are part. By creating alignment within the organisation, internal and external relationships are reoriented in an effort to influence the organisation’s response to internal and external forces (Dozier et al. 1995:27-28).

Writers on strategy stress the importance of communication in transmitting and sharing information about key business values and directions. They are, however, much less explicit about how communication is to be made to happen. The question here is one of responsibility for communication, and public relations staff provide one possible source of expertise in communication that can be used for internal as well as external purposes (White & Mazur 1995:27).

The public relations executive has the responsibility to implement the corporate communication strategy in harmony with the organisation’s business plan. The communication plan should integrate the employee communications with the messages to all constituents and the general public. Because these groups interact with and influence each other, it is vital to have consistent, candid messages tailored to the specific audiences with the overall goal of contributing to the success of the business (Foster 1990:9-12; White & Mazur 1995:27; Winokur & Kinkead 1993:18). Public relations practitioners are increasingly called on not only to ensure consistency of voice, but also to have a hand in defining just what the message is - a very strategic responsibility.

An important tenet of present-day strategising is that those who do not have “ownership” of the plan, are least likely to implement the plan effectively. Since modern business plans go well beyond financial forecasts, incorporating strategies that deal with the way in which an organisation ought to interact with its stakeholders, public relations must inevitably be part of the strategising process. Public relations must help to define the target to be reached by the organisation and to devise and implement the communication plans to reach those targets and audiences (De la Rey 1994:23).

The strategic plan should, therefore, feature a public relations section designed by public relations professionals (Kinkead & Winokur 1992:21).

Communication strategies, as is the case with all other strategies, must be coupled with objectives and the results must be measurable. Management commitment to communication is a prerequisite for the success of any such strategy. If management displays a negative attitude towards organisation strategies, objectives, goals and decisions, those reporting to it will probably feel the same. Management cannot expect to obtain credibility and acceptance for a communication strategy if it pays lip service to the idea of communication (Oberholster 1993:25).

However, even in the absence of a master plan for public relations, an organisation can emerge with an effective, well co-ordinated programme because of its results-oriented approach. From the beginning, once a public relations initiative is taken in a particular area, it should be strategically supported by research, planning and involvement by many players within the company who would be critical to the programme's success. Public relations should also be managed by objective, and the function should be held accountable for measurable and meaningful results (Webster 1990:19).

In practice, some organisations in South Africa have appointed corporate reputation officers (CROs) to monitor how third parties view the organisation and to report to the chief executive on their findings. Further, the CRO reports on matters such as customer satisfaction and customer perception of key service areas. Of even greater importance in the information age, particularly in IT companies, is the report on human resources aspects such as morale, skills, incentivisation, attraction of talent and succession. Other examples of so-called non-financial aspects of organisational performance include innovation, training, reciprocal relationships with defined stakeholders, management credibility as seen by third parties, technology (as compared with the technology of competitors), internal audit, management information
systems, risk management, service standards, productivity levels, benchmarking, et cetera (King Report, ES 2002:16).

According to the King Report (ES 2002:9) directors need to ensure that the necessary skills are in place for them to discharge their responsibility for internal controls. The corporate communication manager is in particular suited and trained for managing the strategic relationships with stakeholders of an organisation. Control over the management of the reputation of the organisation should also be delegated to the communication manager of the organisation who is in the first instance responsible for managing the perceptions of stakeholders, corporate identity and the image of the organisation.

**8. A NEW DIRECTION FOR THE FIELD OF CORPORATE COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT**

Changes in the current business environment necessitates an evaluation of the direction in which corporate communication management as an academic discipline is developing in South Africa, and also globally. The most important issue that communication managers will have to manage in the future is the increasing importance of non-financial information in corporate accounting and reporting.

Non-financial accounting and disclosure represent a broad topic that addresses a wide range of issues and interests. More and more organisations responding to the needs and demands of the capital markets and society-based institutions, are now reporting in greater depth on non-financial issues (King Report 2002:95).

The most important non-financial issue would be the triple bottom line, which embraces the economic, environmental and social aspects of an organisation's activities:

- **The economic aspect** involves the well-known financial aspects as well as the non-financial ones relevant to that organisation's business.
- **The environmental aspects** include the effect on the environment of the product or services produced by the organisation.
- **The social aspects** embrace values, ethics and the reciprocal relationships with stakeholders other than just the shareowners.

There is an endeavour now through the Global Reporting Initiative to lay down guidelines on how an organisation should report on the triple bottom line. (King Report, ES 2002:11)

Financial reporting is generally directed at a financially literate audience that understands financial principles. However, in the case of non-financial reporting an understanding of the issues to be reported on should not be assumed. It is important therefore to report on stakeholder issues through the most appropriate medium and in the most appropriate manner, so that the organisation's achievements are understood by the target stakeholders. As with financial reporting, verification serves to reinforce transparency and promote stakeholder confidence in an organisation's integrity, which enhances market valuation (King Report, ES 2002:100).

Just as financial reporting provides a record of where the organisation has been, many aspects of non-financial reporting provide an indication of where the enterprise can go and how it will get there. As a guide to the ongoing stewardship of the company's financial and non-financial assets, it is therefore potentially as important to shareowners and investment analysts, as to other stakeholder groups (King Report, 2002:95).

Effective corporate reporting of necessity requires an integrated approach. This is probably best achieved gradually as the board and organisation gain a better understanding of the issues identified for stakeholder communication, and more confidence in dealing with these intricate relationships (King Report 2002:100).

What organisations choose to disclose, when and how are issues best left to the discretion of each organisation, by reference to what is appropriate and relevant in its circumstances (King Report 2002:99). However, as stakeholder and particularly investor pressure grows, it is unlikely that many organisations will be able to resist the demand for improved disclosure practices. Silence on issues of concern could create negative perceptions, which only increased transparency - even to the extent of reporting that "nothing is being done" - can address (King Report 2002:97). Impetus for change will therefore come from the market and society, which will be the ultimate arbiters of corporate behaviour in this regard. Therefore, organisations should engage with both civil society and markets. Shared expectations will ensure corporate reporting on issues that are pertinent to the sustainability of an organisation and the communities with which it enjoys the symbiotic relationship on which the viability of both depends (King Report 2002:97).

In a typical South African context the notion of sustainability and the characteristic of good corporate citizenship can be found within the concept of Ubuntu - African humanism, which is generally regarded as the foundation of sound human relations in African societies. Ubuntu means "humanness" or "being human" and includes supportiveness, co-operation and solidarity. It is the basis of a social contract that stems from, but transcends, the narrow confines of the nuclear family to the extended kinship network, the community (King Report 2002:94).

The essence of Ubuntu, is that one’s personhood is dependent on one’s relationship with others. The notion of sustainability and the triple bottom-line in the corporate world is evolving to an approach that recognises the importance of inter-dependent relationships between an enterprise and the community in which it exists. Ubuntu has formed the basis of relationships in the past and could be extended to the corporate world in Africa, the rest of the developing world, and perhaps also in the global sphere. The Ubuntu philosophy and the community concept of the corporation have significant practical implications for corporate life, promoting values such as creative co-operation, empathetic communication and teamwork (King Report 2002:94).

According to Mersham, Rensburg and Skinner (1995:2) effective communication, and by implication relationship management, is a prerequisite for the success of development and growth. In South Africa the role of public relations and communication management is shaped by the dynamics of a society in transition. Given South Africa’s pressing need for social, political and economic reconstruction, corporate social investment can best optimise its impact by adopting integrated community development initiatives established through participative communication.

Development communication, with its emphasis on organisations’ involvement in a process of sustainable development in communities, has become a very popular field of study in South Africa. Development communication addresses the increasing pressure on organisations to be socially responsible. It is no longer sufficient to donate money to projects or communities as a form of charity.
Although the implementation of a sound corporate governance framework can help an organisation’s reputation and, as such, is a move in the right direction, it does not address all the drivers of reputation (Finance Week 2003:57).

The process of brand valuation, frequently carried out when a merger or acquisition takes place, is not only good business practice but also an excellent method of promoting a culture of brand care to the board, management, staff, shareholders and others. Many aspects of business success are linked to the brand - perceived value, as well as customer trust in an organisation, its products and services, and levels of satisfaction and loyalty (Finance Week 2003:57).

Di Piazza and Eccles (in Media Tenor SA 2003:8) define eight successful value drivers, which should form the basis of any internal and external communication strategy of organisations concerned with their image:

- Product and service quality
- Customer satisfaction and loyalty
- Operational efficiency
- Current accounting results
- Product and service innovations
- Employee satisfaction and turnover
- Alliances with other companies
- Community involvement and environmental performance

Taking the above trends into account, it is clear that the field of communication management in South Africa will develop in such a way that it will add value to the triple bottom line of an organisation. What has been identified as a major area of responsibility in the King Report II, has for decades been, and still is, the expertise of public relations and communication managers. What is now needed is for practitioners and academics to take up the gauntlet and to pro-actively address the gap in expectations between senior management and themselves regarding their expertise in realising the recommendations made in the King Report II on the “soft issues” in business. Only time will tell whether they will be successful in promoting their own industry in such a way that the public relations and communication management function will be taken seriously by top management.

9 A FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNICATION AND REPUTATION MANAGEMENT IN THE FUTURE SOUTH AFRICAN ORGANISATION

The field of communication management in SA will in the future develop to focus primarily on the strategic management of integrated communication with a strong emphasis on research and strategic management skills. Although managing relationships was and still is the primary focus of the corporate communication division, communication practitioners will also have to take note of the developments in the field of reputation management. However, the tools with which communication plans must be implemented can never be ignored and there will always be a need for technical communication expertise.

In the modern South African organisation strong emphasis is placed on employees, community relations, international relations, investor relations, supplier relations, customer relations, government relations, business community relations and media relations to name but a few. In some cases divisions that specifically attend to and nurture these relationships have been set up, which supports the point of view that communication has to a certain

Account must now be given of the difference the donation made to the well being of communities. It has in many cases become the task of the communication manager to manage these development projects and to ensure that the communities and organisation will benefit from it.

It is interesting to note that the May 1999 “Millennium Survey” in which questions relating to corporate social responsibility were directed to citizens in over 20 countries, 49% of the respondents indicated that corporate social responsibility was the item most influencing their impressions of individual organisations (King Report 2002:94).

A poll by PriceWaterhouseCoopers furthermore revealed that managers see product and service quality, customer satisfaction and operational efficiency next to accounting results, as the most important value drivers of an organisation, while the polled stakeholder community beg to differ: They requested information on corporate social responsibility, innovation and environmental actions. This gap between what managers consider to be the main value drivers of their organisations on the one hand, and what they communicate to the media (and through the media to the public) on the other hand, is of great concern (Media Tenor SA 2002:8).

In a Sustainability Survey done by PriceWaterhouseCoopers in 2002 among Fortune 1000 companies in the United States it furthermore was found that the behaviour of organisations influences the reputation and financial position of an organisation to a large extent and that it can endanger relationships with stakeholders if it is negative. It was also found that about 69% of the respondents were reviewing their ethics and corporate governance programmes, while 63% regarded reputation as a key factor related to sustainability (Sake-Beeld 2002:10).

An organisation’s reputation should be seen as a strategic issue that influences the bottom line in a direct, measurable way. Commercial success and respect depend on a sound reputation as much as on good corporate governance. It has been illustrated that “reputational” capital is directly attributable to the perception, on a number of fronts, of an organisation’s image. Publication of unsavoury details of failures can cause irreparable damage to corporate brands and reputations. This unplanned “visibility” affects share prices and reputations. Research shows that a downward move of one percentage point in the Fortune survey of the world’s most admired organisations amounts to a $500m fall in market capitalisation (Finance Week 2003:57).

Reputation management realises value from the corporate image. It includes aspects such as strategic positioning of the organisation; corporate identity, branding and profiling; corporate social responsibility; internal and external communication; corporate performance and stakeholder relationship management.

Organisations destroy their brands and reputations when there is an imbalance among the three main elements of image (stakeholders’ perceptions of an organisation), identity (what an organisation professes to be) and personality (what it really is). Managers often tend to say something, but do the opposite, which leads to a distorted image (Finance Week 2003:57).

Few South African organisations manage reputation as if it is an asset and a potential risk. Reputation management is a multi-disciplinary exercise that requires a holistic and integrated approach. Although the implementation of a sound corporate governance
extent become too important to be left only to the traditional corporate communication division.

Many drivers of future value in a business context are non-financial in character and a greater flow of information to the investment community and stakeholders on issues such as those outlined below is to be encouraged. This should be the primary focus of the work portfolio of the corporate communication manager. In evaluating an organisation’s worth and potential as an investment vehicle, analysts focus on the following issues (consisting of ten dimensions and 27 indicators):

**Dimension 1:**
- Compliance
  - Safety, health and environment (“SHE”-indicators)
  - International performance and management standards

**Dimension 2:**
- Corporate governance
  - The findings of the King Report 11 (2002)
  - Levels of disclosure
  - Levels of transparency

**Dimension 3:**
- Stakeholder engagement
  - Stakeholder management performance
  - Stakeholder engagement performance
  - Fulfilling stakeholder obligations

**Dimension 4:**
- Social development contributions
  - Percentage of pre-tax profit spend on social development
  - Extent of non-monetary contributions

**Dimension 5:**
- Integration
  - Integration of policy environment and management systems
  - Integration of “triple-bottom line” issues in risk management systems
  - Incentivising social and environmental responsibility performance

**Dimension 6:**
- Employee welfare
  - Impact of employee satisfaction on achievement of business objectives
  - The ratio of CEOs remuneration package to front-line employee remuneration
  - Average working hours per week per executive

**Dimension 7:**
- Reputation
  - Reputation with stakeholders
  - Impact of reputation on achievement of business success

**Dimension 8:**
- Sustainability
  - The performance of the core business
  - Sustainability of social responsibility and corporate citizenship initiatives

**Dimension 9:**
- Contextual
  - Employment equity - Black Economic Empowerment; gender issues
  - Sector or locally delimited indicators

**Dimension 10:**
- Standard setting
  - Demonstrated stakeholder loyalty
  - Accounting for unintended consequences
  - Best of class
  - Achievements as change agent

(King Report 2002:95-96)

The above indicators and expectations require strategic thinking skills from the communication manager, which will contribute to much needed synergy, integration and alignment of activities, processes and systems in organisations. In a certain sense communication practitioners need to go back to the basics and remember that communication is in essence the sharing of meaning and the creation of understanding that can only be established by two-way communication.

It further illustrates that organisations will have to realise that the future business that they engage in and the changing landscape, will be “business and unusual”. There will be an interdependency between all roleplayers and stakeholders and a concentration on integrated leadership qualities. After the King Report findings South Africa could be viewed as a “Greenfield” for international best practices. Business will furthermore move from merely “economics” to “synchronomics” - an integration of the whole existence of business as an integral part of the community and the environment.

Constantly changing organisational structures furthermore pose opportunities and threats to corporate communication divisions in South African organisations. Depending on the strategic management skills of the most senior communication practitioner, such a division will survive or be made redundant in flatter hierarchies and virtual organisations, decentralisation or centralisation of functions, outsourcing or insourcing of skills, mergers and acquisitions, and partnerships and strategic alliances. The integration and alignment of activities of business units in order to create one personality for an organisation creates a major challenge. Processes such as Customer Relationship Management and new business models such as the Balanced Scorecard and the South African Excellence Model can be used to facilitate the integration and alignment of functions and activities.

**10 IN CONCLUSION**

South African communication and public relations practitioners face unique challenges in a country that, according to world standards, is still a developing country. The South African government and organisations are constantly confronted with new challenges and opportunities to improve the well being of the country’s citizens. The guidelines for good corporate governance, as stated in the King Report, should form a framework for the development of the field of communication and public relations management in South Africa.

**References**

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The PR paradox: caught between mediazation and building trust?

by Piet Verhoeven

Abstract

In this paper will be argued that public relations (PR) managers find themselves in a paradoxical situation: caught between mediazation on the one hand and trying to build trust with stakeholders on the other hand. This so called PR paradox is taken as a heuristic to explore the role of the mass media in the declining trust hypothesis with a theory of extended mediazation (in which the mass media are becoming selfreferential). Finally questions are raised about public relations and trust in organizations from a proposed perspective of ‘public understanding of business and organizations’.

Introduction

Do public relations (PR) managers find themselves in a paradoxical situation? Are they caught between learning the organization how to survive in a mass mediated society on the one hand and trying to build or rebuild trust with stakeholders on the other hand?

This paper will present questions like these by taking this supposed ‘PR paradox’ as a heuristic for a theory of ‘mediazation’ of the mass media and what kind of research questions such a theory could generate for public relations questions in the social sciences.

First the possible role of the mass media in the breaking down of trust in some institutions and organizations in society today will be discussed. Followed by a short outline of a theory of mediazation and a few preliminary results of research in this field. Finally research questions for public relations are raised.

Questions

In summary, the following three questions will be discussed:

1. What is the role of the mass media in the declining trust hypothesis?
2. Can a theory of mediazation help describing and explaining this role of the mass media?
3. What does this mean for public relations: is it caught in a paradox?

Trust

According to research done by the European Union trust in big corporations is very low. The so called Eurobarometer 2003 shows that 57% of the public in de EU countries does not trust corporations. Only political parties rank lower on this list: 75% of EU citizens does not trust political parties (European Commission, 2003).

In political sciences and in empirical philosophy the changed role of the mass media is seen as one of the most important reasons for these low levels of trust in society. The mass media are seen as the main factor explaining what sometimes is called, the drama of the ‘crisis in western democracies’ (Marres, 2003, p. 36). Other explanations are the domination of uncertainty and risk and the loss of ideology (Harbers, 2003) and social capital (Putnam, 2000) in society. There has been extensive empirical research and literature concerning the position of politicians and political parties in de media.

Thomas Patterson (1993) describes in ‘Out of Order’ his research of presidential campaigns in the USA from 1960 until 1992 and shows that the framework of election stories in the newspapers has changed from a ‘policy schema’ in the sixties to a ‘game schema’ from 1972 on. In 1960 55% of the election stories on the front page of the New York Times were about policies and political issues, in 1992 only 12% of the stories were in this policy schema and over 80% of the stories were written in the framework of the game schema: in the context of strategy and playing the electoral game between candidates. Another example is the shrinking soundbites of politicians in the media. The average lengths of a television soundbite for a politician to tell his or her story without being interrupted by a journalist shrank from 42 seconds in 1968 to 9 seconds in 1992. Patterson says that these changes are not neutral in its effects: ‘the information culture of the journalist’ has supplanted the ‘political culture of the candidate’ (Patterson, 1993, p. 198). Since voters are not so anchored anymore in their party and therefore more open to be influenced by media stories, they are driven away from their political leaders. The way politicians are portrayed in the media could explain the decline of trust in politicians. For example because the media leave no room for compromise (in the game schema this is framed as loosing) while in ‘real life’ every voter understands that compromising is a normal part of life and therefore also of the political process.

Possible effects of this strategic news frames have also been studied by Joseph Capella and Kathleen Hall Jamieson (1997) in their study about the health reform program from the Clinton administration in the nineties in the USA. Their research shows that the strategic press frames journalists use in reporting about politics indeed form cynical frames about politics in the citizenry. They call this the ‘spiral of cynicism’ that erodes citizen interest in politics. Some interesting findings in their research are that a single strategically framed news story can activate cynical attributions, no large doses are necessary. They also found that a week of strategic news in the newspaper or on TV consistently activates cynical response from the public (Capella & Hall Jamieson, 1997, p. 230-231).

To complicate things further from the Eurobarometer (European Commission, 2003) can be learned that trust in the media by the public is growing: 65% trusts the radio, 57% the television, the newspapers are trusted by 47%. Large numbers compared to the trust in big companies and political parties.

A possible effect of trust in the media has been described by Robert Putnam in his ‘Bowling Alone Thesis’ (2000). In this study he looked for factors that have contributed to the decline of civic engagement and social capital in de USA in the second half of the twentieth century. He estimates that about 25% of this decline can be seen as an effect of electronic entertainment, above all of the use of television. In the privitised leisure time the public is not only bowling alone but is also watching TV alone and mainly to entertainment programmes which do not contribute to social capital. Putnam links the term social capital to trust by defining social capital as ‘features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions’ (Putnam, 1993). So according to Putnam electronic entertainment reduces social capital and therefore trust in society.
Mediatization

Results from political and sociological research present at least some empirical evidence that mediacontent can lead to cynicism and decreasing social capital. The question can be asked whether the change in portrayal of politicians and political parties in the media has also happened to other actors in society? For example to scientists? Scientists and medical doctors are on top of the list of trusted people by EU citizens: 63% of them trusts scientists an 55% of them trusts medical doctors (European Commission, 2002). Currently I am conducting a research to find out how the position of scientists and medical doctors has changed in Dutch medical television shows between 1960 and 2000. In this study the concept of mediatization is used. This concept is described by John B. Thompson (1995) in his book ‘The Media and Modernity’. He uses the concept to describe the influence of media and of media organizations on the cultural transformations associated with the rise of modern societies. He speaks of the ‘mediatization of culture’ as a process of cultural change mainly explained by the increasing number of mass media and their omnipresence in postmodern societies. A lot of interactions in modern societies are mediated by some kind of media. He states that ‘it has become common for media messages to be taken up by other media organizations and incorporated into new media messages’, a process he describes as ‘extended mediatization’. ‘There is a relatively high degree of self referentiality within the media, in the sense that media messages commonly refer to other media messages or to events reported in the media (Thompson, 1995, p.110-111).

The mass media do not seem to play an intermediary role between actors in society facilitating communication but they actively creating a reality of their own: a media reality. This concept of ‘extended mediatisation’ resonates with other theory about the mass media, media institutions and professional journalism. For example theories and notions like media logic and media worlds (Altheide & Snow, 1991), mediatisation (e.g. Mazzoleni & Schultz, 1999), mediahypes (Vasterman, 2000) and the domination of the journalistic field over other fields in society like literature, politics and science (Bourdieu, 1996).

Following this mediatisation concept the hypothesis might be that there has been an increasing mediatisation of medical tv in The Netherlands over the last 40 years, taking the concept of extend-mediatization a step further by defining it as ‘a journalistic order in which references and narratives of journalism and lay people are dominant over references and narratives of scientists and professionals’. The concept of mediatization is operationalized in a journalistic dimension based on the classical news factors (Schultz, 1976, Staab, 1990) and a scientific dimension based on the classical Mertonian imperatives of science (Merton, 1957). Both dimensions are used in content analysis of medical television programs. Over thirty variables are used.

The most important variables of the journalistic dimension are:
• dynamics: expecting that things will be presented more unexpected and sudden now than thirty years ago;
• personification, emotion and status: expecting that we are presented with a lot more emotional persons now than thirty years ago and that the status of the different groups has changed, for example the the role of the elite doctor will be taken over by the patient themselves and their family and friends;
• valence on two dimensions: expecting to find more controversy and succes now than in the past.

The most important variables of the science dimension are:
• communality: all scientific knowledges is owned by the community;
• universalism: as the opposite of the journalistic personification;
• disinterestness: no personal gains for scientists;
• organized skepticism: the peer review on the basis empirical and logical criteria further operationalized as reference to earlier knowledge and how doctors and journalists underpin their statements.

The research is still being conducted (it will be finished in 2004) but some preliminary results of two variables, quotation of sources and dynamics, of a sample of tv statements, from 1981-2000 can be presented.

A high professional standard in journalism has always been the quotation of sources: show where the information is coming from. Over 5000 statements were analyzed over time of the Dutch medical tv show with the title ‘Finger on the pulse’. A systematic sample was taken of the shows between 1981 and 2000. In this period there has been a significant decline of the quotation of sources over the years to practically zero. Between 1981 and 1985 the source was quoted in 8% of the statements, after 1986 this declined to 0.5% (see table 1).

The second example shows the opposite development. As shown in table 2 there has been a significant increase in the number of statements which can be called ‘dynamic’ from 11% of the statements until 1996 to 24% of the statements after 1995. The amount of statements which are labelled ‘dynamical’ has doubled in the last 6 years. So in this medical tv show the world has become a more disruptive and unexpected place after 1995.

| Table 1: Quotation of source in statements in the Dutch medical TV show ‘Finger on the pulse’ 1981-2000 |
|---|---|---|
| Period | Quotation of source | Quotation of source |
| | No (%) | Yes (%) | Total (%) |
| 1981-1985 | 92% | 8% | 100% |
| 1986-2000 | 99.5% | 0.5% | 100% |
| \(n = 5119, p < .05, \ f^2 = 206,725 \) |

| Table 2: Dynamics in statements in the Dutch medical TV show ‘Finger on the pulse’ 1981-2000 |
|---|---|---|
| Period | Dynamic | Dynamic |
| | No (%) | Yes (%) | Total (%) |
| 1981-1995 | 89% | 11% | 100% |
| 1996-2000 | 76% | 24% | 100% |
| \(n = 5119, p < .05, \ f^2 = 122,808 \) |
On the basis of these preliminary results more questions about mediation can be raised. For example has a process of extended mediation taken place step by step; by first changing television formats and loosening some professional journalistic standards (until 1985) like the quotation of sources and than gradually increase the “dynamic” presentation and labelling of events reported on television. And, to return to the problem of trust and organizations what does this do the trustlevels in society?

Trust and public relations

Social research, mainly in the political field, shows that entertainment and strategic newsframes do not seem to build trust in society. ‘Extended mediation’ or ‘increased selfreferentiality of the mass media’ might be part of the explanation why trust in corporations is so low. It seems also that trying to build trust through mass media might be an impossible case. Mass media and trust seem to be ad odds with each other.

This conceptualized role of the mass media complicates the question about public relations and trust. Aren’t PR people the ones who have taught organizations how to attract the attention of the mass media and have talked them into the importance of media presence in order to do business well in the postmodern world? Or to present the organization in a personalized, successful way fitting the culture of mediazation? Doesn’t 50% of the news come from PR sources (Hallaran, 1999)? And if the mass media are the main driving force of declining trust how does that relate to PR professionals? How can PR people handle the questions asked by top management to help solving the problem of the declining trust in the organization?

Public Understanding of Business and Organizations

In answer to the question in the beginning of this paper it can be argued that public relations is caught in the middle and finds itself in a paradoxical situation in relation to the mass media and the mediation process on the one hand and the trust building question on the other hand. This might be an extensive field for raising empirical questions and to do research on. The public sphere perspective (Van Ruler & Verčič, 2002) seems a very suitable perspective for research in this field. It’s a broad perspective which gives room to all kinds of societal questions in relation to public relations and trust. A new research area might be created around these questions called: ‘Public Understanding of Business and Organizations’ as an analogy to the research area ‘Public Understanding of Science and Technology’ in social studies of science.

In such a field questions can be asked about trust and organizations related to media content for example. How are organizations represented in the mass media in terms of newsframes and soundbites? Or from the perspective of publics: what raises trust in organizations? From the public sphere perspective questions can be asked like:

• what is the role of PR and journalism in the strategic content of the mass media and how does this relate to the trust in all kinds of organizations and institutions. Here researchers might also raise questions about responsibility of both professions in the question of trust in society. Or in other words is PR part of the declining trust problem?

• is mistrust not one of the core values of a democratic society? And how can organizations handle or produce ‘productive mistrust’.

Useful theoretical perspectives are critical theory, constructivistic theory, structuration theory and systems theory. All to find answers to a question which puzzles not only academics and was posed by the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann like this:

How is it possible that society focusses so much on the reality constructed by the mass media and accepts these constructions as containing information about the world, the society and reality, if one knows how it is produced? (Luhmann, 1996, p. 215).

References

Much has been said about public relations practitioners’ ability to be the conscience of the organization, or their ability to be change agents. At the core of these arguments lay the assumption that practitioners are free agents who can act in the best interest of the organization. Agency theory, however, challenges this assumption. It holds that agents are appointed with the sole purpose of serving the interests of the principal. Agency theory in economics focuses particularly how principals can control the self-serving behavior of agents to better serve their own interests. The overall aim of agency theory in economics is to create ways in which agents’ performance can be measured to ensure minimum risk to the principal. A closer analysis of agency theory might well explain why public relations practitioners are not likely to fulfill the role of the corporate conscience and why they are rather likely to be used by their principals to further their own interests.

Despite the wide use of the word agency in public relations (e.g., the public relations agent or the public relations agency) the idea is often used unreflectively. Closer scrutiny of the term, however, shows that it introduces highly contested meanings to the practice of public relations. A dictionary definition suggests agency implies “acting on behalf of,” “exerts power” and “produces effects.” All of these concepts have the potential to be loaded with divergent meanings.

These concepts are explored through the analysis of four focus groups conducted with internal communication agents in a large financial services organization.

The paper aims to answer the following research questions:
1. How do organizational power holders affect the ability of communication agents to perform effectively?
2. To which extent do principals affect the ability of practitioners to be ethical?

Dr. Derina Holtzhausen

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Abstract

Corporate “Social Responsibility [CSR] is neither a fad nor an optional extra. The interest in it is reflective of a deeper change in the relationship between companies and their stakeholders… Healthy business requires a healthy community, and should be contributing to its creation and maintenance. The public increasingly wants to know about companies that stand behind the brands and products presented to them. And use their power to reward “good” companies and punish the “bad” ones.” (Lewis, S. 2001)

CSR is becoming ever more important in the modern business environment, as is evidenced by the fact that most leading public companies include a specific statement on their CSR policy within their annual reports. Indeed, changing societal expectations, increasingly intrusive media reporting and ever more sophisticated and powerful pressure groups have caused all organisations to consider more carefully their wider social responsibilities not only out of altruistic reasons, but because of the need to consider the potential impact of their policies on their wider stakeholder relationships.

Inevitably, the subject of CSR has attracted increasing academic and professional attention both within general business and public relations circles. Here one of the central problems lies in the lack of a consensus definition of CSR and where responsibility for CSR lies within organisations. This paper reviews the emerging literature on CSR and seeks to tease out a broadly inclusive definition of Corporate Social Responsibility, which the authors believe is an important starting point in comprehending the importance of CSR policies in building both stakeholder trust and commitment to organisations.

Here the authors identify three predominant schools of thought in respect to CSR and the contexts they exist within. These are the Bowen School, the Friedman School and the Commission of the European Communities School. Using the rationale advanced by the latter school, a definition of CSR blending aspects of all three is advanced and discussed. The paper also draws out and defines the place and importance of communications and public relations within the definition and in-turn the practice of CSR. The paper concludes by setting the scene for future research with respect to CSR and related communications within the spectrum of field of public relations.

Introduction

“Social Responsibility is neither a fad nor an optional extra. The interest in it is reflective of a deeper change in the relationship between companies and their stakeholders… Healthy business requires a healthy community, and should be contributing to its creation and maintenance. The public increasingly wants to know about companies that stand behind the brands and products presented to them. And use their power to reward “good” companies and punish the “bad” ones.” (Lewis, S. 2001)

Lewis’s statement on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) forms part of what is an ever-increasing debate within management and communications literatures as well as within non-academic world. In the UK, Europe and Internationally, CSR has become a ‘buzzword’ from the boardroom to the living room pushed to the fore by growing media coverage dealing with such issues as corporate governance and environmental responsibility. (Jackson, B. 2001)

Here recent high profile corporate debacles such as Enron, Marconi and WorldCom have served to focus attention on the often largely obscured world of corporate behavior. Research examining media coverage in the UK, US, France and Germany by international communications specialists Echo Research found that from 2000 to 2001 media coverage dealing with CSR increased by 52% from 377 articles to 573 articles and from 2001 to 2002 increase by a further 40% seeing the number of articles published jump to 2,906. (Echo Research, 2003)

Professionally this rise in awareness of the term CSR has created a new ‘fad’ in business management. (Jackson, B. 2001) Namely that of making business strategy decisions and policy and communicating them under the heading of CSR in order to be seen to be one of Lewis’s ‘good’ companies and not be punished by the ‘public’ or an organisation’s stakeholder. (Lewis, S. 2001)

This new management fashion has seen most leading public companies include a specific statement on their CSR policy within their annual reports and undertake CSR initiatives and communications programmes. Activities which are being driven and promoted by a host of management ‘Guru’s’ and major consultancies such as global public relations agency, Burson Marstellar.

This growth of professional attention to CSR has been mirrored in a growth in the academic literature on the subject. Here for example citation index reviews of three of the UK’s leading online databases show marked increase in the number of articles dealing with CSR as demonstrated by figure 1.

While there is some concern that this explosion of literature represents an unstructured management fad, as will be noted below the mainstream academic literature on CSR has evolved in logical and deliberate patterns and given rise to clearly discernable schools within the discipline. A framework, which the authors of this paper believe that researchers in the area of communications and marketing must fully understand before trying to understand how the subject of CSR links to their own.

Overview of the Literature: Three Schools of Thought

Academic consensus generally social responsibility or CSR, in its modern context, to have originated in Howard Bowen’s 1953 text, the ‘Social Responsibilities of the Businessman’. (Warren, R. 2000: 80-81, Balabanis et al. 1998: 25, Whetten et al. 2002:375, Phillips, R. & Claus, S. 2002, Cove, R. 2002) Bowen advocated that CSR was “industry’s obligation to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of actions which are de-
The paper discusses three distinct ‘schools’ of thought that existing definitions and literatures on CSR can be perceived to fit into. The first two schools, the ‘Bowen’ and ‘Friedman’ schools, are in complete contrast and this contrasting categorisation of the schools’ polarized views of CSR is ever present in the literature. (Hemphill, T. 1997, Carroll, A. 1999, Demosthenous, M.: 2001) These schools are founded in the seminal texts of the authors for which they have been named, and it is from these texts that the discussion of the literature and definition of CSR will commence. The third and emergent school of thought, the “Commission of the European Communities” school of thought encompasses literature that moderates the polarisation of the other schools. This school’s name has been taken from the organisation, which recently, in the European context, has been its largest practical proponent. (Commission of the European Communities, 2002) (Commission of the European Communities, 2001)

Figure 1 - Increase in Academic Literature on CSR in Citation Indexes

CSR - The Bowen School

CSR is “industry’s obligation to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of actions which are desirable in terms of objectives and values of society”. (Bowen, H. 1953)

This quote effectively summarizes Howard Bowen’s seminal view, espoused in his 1953 text “Social Responsibilities of the Businessman”, in which he proposed that business, by its existence, had a responsibility to society. Academics believed that this view stemmed from the fact that at the time, and into the 1960s and 1970s, business was perceived to be enjoying unprecedented levels of power while exercising little social responsibility. (Wood, D. 1990: Eberstadt, N. 1997) Operating in what Harvey terms the ‘Fordist’ period of mass consumption, when little attention was paid by the ‘public’ to the actions of corporations. (Harvey, D. 1990) However, the origins of this school of thought, in relation to CSR, appear to have evolved much further back in time. Arthur Page, who joined the American Telecommunications Company AT&T in 1927, as a vice-president, advocated that; “All business in a democratic country begins with the public’s permission and exists by public approval.” (Griswold, G. 1967)

Although not specifically under the guise of CSR, a precursor to this was the view of the English businessman Oliver Sheldon who in 1923, according to Wren (1979), suggested that managers needed to adopt three societal standpoints: 1) That the policies, conditions, and methods of industry shall conform to communal wellbeing; 2) that ‘management shall endeavor to interpret the highest moral sanction of the community as a whole’ in applying social justice to industrial practice; and (3) that ‘management… take the initiative… in raising the general ethical standard and conception of social justice.” (Wren, D. 1979: 207)

These writings helped form the foundation of what is known as the ‘Bowen School’ of CSR thought. (Davis, K. 1967: Preston & Post, 1975) They introduced into the model and the definition of CSR concepts of businesses’ responsibility to society in a pro-active manner. In the case of Page, CSR can be interpreted to be an implied social contract in which business is accountable to society’s expectations or demands.

CSR - The Bowen School - Levels of Responsibility Sub-School

Despite the pioneering work of these authors, it was not until 1979 that Archie Carroll developed what can be considered to be the pre-eminient model and definition of CSR in the Bowen school of thought. (Wood, D. 1990: Eberstadt, n. 1997: Whetten et al. 2002: Phillips, R. & Claus, S. 2002) Carroll, building on the works of Preston & Post (1975), Sethi (1975) amongst others, proposed a conceptual model of CSR based on four categories of social responsibilities, economic, legal, ethical and discretionary. (Carroll, 1979; Sethi, P. 1975: Davis, K. 1967): Economic responsibilities being to produce products and services that society wants and to sell them at a profit. Legal responsibilities refers to an obligation to fulfill not only an implied societal contract, as Page eluded to, but also a formal contract with society, that being to obey the laws and rules applied by the state. Carroll referred to ‘Ethical’ responsibilities as businesses’ obligation to satisfy society’s expectations of business to go beyond basic legal requirements. This was an area of responsibility that Carroll perceived to be increasing in prominence as the demands of society on business increased. The fourth category proposed by Carroll was ‘discretionary’ responsibilities, being those responsibilities that go beyond society’s expectations or requests. Phillips and Claus (2000) refer to Carroll’s categories as the demands of society on business increased. The fourth category proposed by Carroll was ‘discretionary’ responsibilities, being those responsibilities that go beyond society’s expectations or requests. Phillips and Claus (2000) refer to Carroll’s categories
as a levels approach to CSR, although they combine economic and legal responsibilities into one category. (2002)

Across these levels of CSR, Carroll’s model included an examination of the ‘social issues involved’, which at the time he listed as being consumerism, environment, discrimination, product safety, occupational safety and shareholders. The model, which could also serve as a practical evaluation tool for measuring corporate social responsiveness, gauged whether an organisation’s philosophical approach to these issues, across the categories, was taken in a reactionary, defensive, accommodating or proactive manner. (Carroll, A. 1979) With specific respect to CSR, Carroll alluded in his 1979 paper and advocated in later papers that a pro-active approach should be taken in its manifestation. (Carroll, A. 1979; Pinkerton & Carroll, 1996)

Figure 2 Carroll’s Model of Corporate Social Responsiveness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of Responsibility</th>
<th>Ethical</th>
<th>Economic</th>
<th>Legal</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Environmental</td>
<td>Consumer</td>
<td>Discrimination</td>
<td>Product Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Issues</td>
<td>Occupational Health &amp; Safety</td>
<td>Shareholders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Carroll’s levels of responsibility model has been built upon and forms the pillar of further additions to the Bowen School of CSR thought. (Lantos, G. 2001) Additionally, research carried out by Pinkerton and Carroll in 1996 and Maignan in 2000 showed the model and its principle levels of responsibilities to still be relevant. (Maignan, I. 2000) This validation aside, Donna Wood in 1991 drawing from Carroll and the Bowen school of CSR presented a modernised view of corporate social performance in which she broke responsibilities into three levels, “Institutional, Organizational and Individual”. (Wood, D. 1991) These are levels at which organisations conduct environmental assessments, issue management and stakeholder management in line with the organisation's philosophical approach to corporate social responsiveness and demonstrate it with behavior in the form of social impacts, programs and policies.

This levels of corporate social responsibility sub-school of the Bowen school of corporate social responsibility, though prolific, has yet to gain the greatest share of voice in the Bowen School. Academics and professionals view it to be an overly altruistic model, because it’s proponents argued that organisations should aim for Carroll’s discretionary level in their practice of corporate social responsibility. (Lantos, G. 2001)

CSR - The Bowen School - Stakeholder Approach Sub-School

A differing philosophy of corporate social responsibility, which can be perceived to be the dominant manifestation of this school of thought, is the stakeholder approach to corporate social responsibility. (Siegel, D. 2001: Phillips, R. & Claus, S. 2002) This sub-school is premised on Bowen’s core principal of business having a responsibility to society. It takes the view that rather than levels of responsibility existing, through which organisations aim to progress similar to a form of Maslow hierarchy, business has unique responsibilities to its unique stakeholders. (Whetten et al, 2000; Phillips, R. & Claus, S. 2002: Key, S. & Popkin, S. 1998; Boehm, A. 2002)

The underpinning of this sub-school was Edward Freeman’s 1984 text “Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach.” (Freeman, E. 1984) Freeman’s model of CSR argued that firms have relationships with numerous stakeholders, all of which, “affect and are affected by the firms actions”. Freeman’s standpoint was in clear opposition to Friedman’s uni-stakeholder model, which will be discussed later. Freeman articulated that the economic system had clearly shifted to a ‘post-Fordist’ period, where the actions of corporations were beginning to be scrutinized by the ‘public’. (Harvey, D. 1990) Freeman’s stakeholders were defined as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisations objectives”. (Freeman, E. 1984: p.46) Freeman divided stakeholders into six distinct categories, owners, employees, customers, suppliers, communities and governments, that have varying responsibilities or ‘social contracts’. He, and others authors then argued that these stakeholders are then addressed by the firm at differing levels depending on organizational objectives. (Freeman, E. 1984: Phillips, R. & Claus, S. 2002: Key, S. & Popkin, S. 1998; Boehm, A. 2002)

The stakeholder approach and levels sub-schools of the Bowen School of thought, in their initial manifestations, were concerned with defining the construct of CSR. However, as academic thought progressed with respect to each standpoint, moves to measure and quantify the manifestations and effects of corporate social responsibility in the sub-schools were undertaken. These attempts, as they progressed, created a new construct or paradigm of thought identified as corporate social performance (CSP).

CSR - The Bowen School - CSP Splinter School

CSP as with CSR is rooted in the original underpinning philosophy of the Bowen School reviewed previously. However, its controversial differentiation is based on CSP being the outcomes of corporate behaviour. (Carroll, A. 1999) (Phillips, R. & Claus, S. 2002) In this respect, in the CSP literature, CSR is a principle, definition or mindset adopted by an organisation, as opposed to an outcome. CSP as a construct finds it modern origins in Sethi’s, 1975 article, “Dimensions of Corporate Social Performance: An Analytic Framework,” in which the author proposes a three-dimensional model of CSP (Sethi, P. 1975) His three dimensions include ‘social obligation’, which is the prescriptive dimension. An interpretation of this could be that this dimension is the explicit aspect of CSR’s social contract such as legal and statutory obligations. The remaining dimensions of Sethi’s model, ‘responsiveness’, which he defines as the anticipatory dimension, and ‘preventative’, form the implicit aspects of the social contract.

Furthering the work of Sethi and developing a more compre-
hensive, and functional model of CSP is Woods three-dimensional model of CSP based on the three aforementioned dimensions of CSR introduced in the discussion of the levels sub-school; institutional, organisational and individual. (Wood, D. 1991; Whetten et al. 2000; Carroll, 1991: A) The author also refers to these as: social legitimacy (institutional), public responsibility (organisational), and managerial discretion (individual).

Using these three principles of CSR in the CSP context, Wood’s model then sets out the manifestations of CSP across Carroll’s four level of CSR. CSP manifestations, which include quality of product or service of the organisation, economic contribution, approach to legal policies and regulations such as environmental, health and safety and work policies, communication to stakeholders and level of corporate citizenship/philanthropy.

**CSR PRINCIPLES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domains</th>
<th>Social Legitimacy</th>
<th>Public Responsibility</th>
<th>Managerial Discretion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>Produce goods and services, provide jobs, create wealth for shareholders.</td>
<td>Price goods and services to reflect true production costs by incorporating all externalities.</td>
<td>Produce ecologically sound products, use low-polluting technologies, cut costs with recycling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>Obey laws and regulations. Don’t lobby for or expect privileged positions in public policy.</td>
<td>Work for public policies representing enlightened self-interest.</td>
<td>Take advantage of regulatory requirements to innovate in products or technologies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical</td>
<td>Follow fundamental ethical principles. (e.g. honesty in product labeling)</td>
<td>Provide full and accurate product information, too enhance user safety beyond legal requirements.</td>
<td>Target product use of information to specific markets. (e.g. children, foreign speakers) and promote as a product advantage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discretionary</td>
<td>Act as a good citizen in all matters beyond law and ethical rules. Return a portion of revenues to the community.</td>
<td>Invest the firm’s charitable resources in social problems related to the firm’s primary and secondary involvement</td>
<td>Choose charitable investment that actually pays off in social problem solving. (i.e., apply an effectiveness criterion.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 3 Woods Model of CSP**

(Wood 1991: 710)

CSP Stakeholder and Levels sub-schools form the three predominant areas of the ‘Bowen School of Thought’ of corporate social responsibility. Despite differences they all agree that CSR is a core business principle and activity which involves multiple stakeholders and can manifest itself at multiple levels across an organisation. At each level the organisation will be asked to meet legal and statutory requirements of society as well as exceeding these requirements to meet society’s implicit demands.

**CSR - The Friedman School**

In contrast to the Bowen School, the Friedman School of thought provides an extremely polarised view of CSR. This polarisation is made evident by the following statement from one of school’s seminal texts;

“Few trends could so thoroughly undermine the very foundations of our free society as the acceptance by corporate officials of a social responsibility other than to make as much money as possible for their stockholders.” (Friedman, M. 1962)

This view, that the only responsibility of business is to make money for its owners, forms the basis for this ‘Friedman School of CSR Thought’. Although the school has few recent proponents advocating its adoption, it is pugilistically debated and referenced in the academic writing on CSR. (Lantos, G. 2001; Warren, R. 2000: 80-81, Balabanis et al. 1998: 25, Whetten et al. 2002: 375, Phillips, R. & Claus, S. 2002) Furthermore, and similarly to the Bowen school, the Friedman school can trace its origins back to long before the authoring of the seminal piece for which it has been named. One such example that Wren points to, is that of the 1883 legal case of Hutton v. West Cork Railway in Britain. (Wren, D. 1979: 109) The case dealt with the subject of corporate philanthropy and the court ruled that “that the corporation existed only as a profit-making enterprise whose purpose was the equitable distribution of its earning to its owners, the stockholders”. (Wren, D. 1979)

Within the Friedman school of thought, George Lantos inferred two main sub-schools in his 2001 article, the constrained profit-making and the pure profit-making schools. (Lantos, G. 2001)

**CSR - The Friedman School - Constrained Profit Sub-School**

The constrained profit making view of CSR is that advocated by Milton Friedman himself, in his 1962 text and 1970 article. Friedman argued that business’s responsibility is to conduct itself in accordance with the desires of its owners, which, he stated, was generally the generation of profit. (Friedman, M. 1970) Furthermore, that this generation of profit could be done by any legal, honest and ethical manner needed to achieve the objective. Friedman argued that the altruism being advocated by Bowen was the responsibility of government, the social welfare system and individuals. (Friedman, M. 1962; Friedman, M. 1970)

While the Friedman stance is the predominant and most referenced view that forms this school of thought, it is not the most recent paradigm presented in the school. As can be seen below, the pure profit sub-school is a much more extreme expression of Friedman’s views.

**CSR - The Friedman School - Pure Profit Sub-School**

Working from Friedman’s initial standpoint, Albert Carr in 1996 argued a model of CSR, which advocated that business’s responsibility was to generate a profit at any cost. (Carr: A. 1996) He argued that business operated in an isolated environment, an environment, which Lantos likened to a game of poker. (Lantos, G. 2002) Carr argued that business could operate outside even the minimal amount of moral standard implied by Friedman. This implies a situation in which business should only obey the law and where possible attempt to influence the law for its own desires.
In stark contrast to the Bowen School, these positions give rise to a construct of CSR that is only concerned with addressing the owner(s), as the principal and sole stakeholder. Furthermore, it is a construct, which manifests itself and is evaluated only by the generation of profit.

**CSR - The Commission of European Communities School**

This third and most recent school of thought, is emerging in the current literature on CSR, provides a moderating view of the two previous schools. (Commission of the European Communities 2001; Commission of the European Communities 2002; Balabanis et al. 1998; Burke, L & Logson, M. 1996; Key, S & Popkin, S. 1998; Murray, K. & Vogel, M. 1997; Bennett, R. 1997) This school argues that CSR as reflected in the ‘Bowen School’ and ‘Friedman School’ can generate increased profit or as argued as the sole purpose of business in the ‘Friedman School of Thought’. Key and Popkin simply phrased it as “doing well by doing good”. (1998)

Key and Popkin (1998) and Burke and Logson (1996) advocate that this is accomplished by reorienting CSR from achieving an altruistic level or stakeholder relationship, to a strategic function in which the levels or relationships selected are tied to individual organisational goals. In general, their goals involve increasing profit or strengthening intangible assets such as reputation or brands. (Burke, L & Logson, M. 1996; Key, S & Popkin, S. 1998) (Fombrum, C., and Garsberg, N. 2000)

Though numerous academics advocate this standpoint, and professionally its supposition is well supported, the assumed links have yet to be proven. Research published by the Commission of the European Communities (CEC) in 2002 stated, “that solid evidence that supports competitiveness and sustainable development would be the best and most effective argument to encourage uptake of CSR”. (2002) This would indicate that a functional conceptualisation of CSR would include CSR being a measurable business construct.

This third school of thought, linking the two other predominant schools of thought, states that CSR strategically used with ‘stakeholders’ at all ‘levels’ can generate, ideally, a measurable increase in ‘profit’ or achievement of organisational objectives. Therefore, more appropriately this amalgamation could be referred to as Neo-Friedman School of Thought for CSR.

**Conclusion - CSR - The Neo-Freidman School and the path forward for communications research.**

If one accepts the moderating view incorporating elements of the Bowen and Friedman Schools of thought, then it can be proposed that corporate social responsibility be defined in the ‘Neo-Friedman School’ as;

> CSR is; Corporations’ being held accountable by explicit or inferred social contract with internal and external stakeholders, obeying the laws and regulations of government and operating in an ethical manner which exceeds statutory requirements. This “ethical manner” is placed at the core of the entity’s strategy, exemplified by proactive community involvement, philanthropy, corporate governance, corporate citizenship, addressing of social issues, a commitment to the quality of its products and services, human rights, health, safety and the environment and its staff. As accountability, which its strategy, aims, principles and manifestations are measurable and audited, the results of which are communicated to the corporation’s audiences (stakeholders). While all the time this accountability should ensure a continual emphasis on generating growth, revenue and profit for the corporate entity and its shareholders/owners, facilitating this process either directly or through positive effects on the entity’s intangible assets, such as brands and reputation.

This definition is derived from Page’s view of a social contract, incorporates Carroll’s levels of CSR with Wood’s manifestations of corporate social performance across Freeman’s stakeholders, with Friedman profit generation model and the perceived potential benefits of CSR advocated by the ‘CEC School’. Furthermore, incorporated into the definition are the manifestations of corporate governance and addressing social issues drawn from a review of 2001 financial year corporate reporting of CSR activities in 31 ‘Financial Times Top 100 Index’ companies. (Appendix A)

As previously noted, the European Commission believes more sound research is required to validate the view that corporate social responsibility is a route to organisational performance and profitability. This definition the authors hope will provide a useful framework for both qualitative and empirical research, which will help develop the concept of CSR.

The significant corporate scandals currently threatening to destabilize major organisations in Europe and North America, highlight the need for a clearer accepted definition of CSR, how to implement it and how to measure it’s outcomes. Sound, research based, testing of this definition should contribute significantly to the academic foundation of CSR and professional acceptance of its principles.

Within the area of communication the proposed definition points to several questions that the authors believe research will need to address. These include, “What are the most effective manners of listening to the individual stakeholder’s expectations and gauging the individual and overall social contracts under which an organisation operates?” and “What are the most appropriate manners of communicating an organisation’s aims, manifestations and achievements in relation to CSR that not only satisfy stakeholders that their expectations are being met, but do so in a manner which delivers against desired business outcomes?”

In final summary it is important to realise that CSR, as a concept is not a new. As Page stated, organisations begin with the public’s permission and exists by public approval, and this has not changed. The term itself may be more modern that the concept, and currently be a buzzword and seem to have a launched a new management fashion. However, the current concepts of CSR are only reflective of a change amongst stakeholders and in more general the ‘publics’ expectations that has seen them become cognisant of their own power to make demands of corporations and effect the social contract by which they operate. It is in understanding this change of how the field of play in which corporations operate has evolved that the current challenge for management and communications research exist.
Appendix A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element of CSR Found in Academic or Grey Literature</th>
<th>Included Within Annual Report</th>
<th>In Chairman’s Statement</th>
<th>In CEO’s Statement</th>
<th>In Directorate’s Statement</th>
<th>Corporate Governance Section</th>
<th>In Separate CSR Section</th>
<th>Separate CSR Report</th>
<th>Method of Evaluation for CSR element Indicated</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addresses Social Issues Directly</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Code of Business Practice/Ethics</td>
<td>All****</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commitment to Value/Quality of Product or Services</td>
<td>All****</td>
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<td>Community Involvement</td>
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<td>All in varying forms.</td>
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<td>Stated Definition of CSR as whole</td>
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<td>Responsibility to Share-holders</td>
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**** In varying forms, locations and to varying degrees.
Annual Reports

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References

Phil Harris

Is chairman of the UK based Academy of Marketing, a member of the Senate and International Board of Trustees of the Chartered Institute of Marketing and Global Marketing board of the American Marketing Association. He is Co-Director of the Centre for Corporate and Public Affairs at Manchester Metropolitan University Business School. He is a Fellow of The Chartered Institute of Marketing, Institute of Public Relations and Royal Society of Arts. He is a past Vice Chairman of one of the UK political parties and has stood as a candidate for both the EU and UK Parliaments. He has been a political advisor in the last five UK General Elections. He is co-editor of the Journal of Public Affairs and a member of a number of various editorial and advisory boards. He has over 100 publications in the area of communications, lobbying, political marketing, relationship marketing and international trade. He is the co-author of texts on international business, political marketing, and global management. Phil has acted as a public affairs and marketing advisor to a number of major organisations including, Age Concern, Management Consultants Association and Granada Media Group amongst others. Before entering academe he was a marketing manager in the international chemical and plastics industries. He is a visiting professor in Holland, New Zealand and the United States and regular media presenter especially on political marketing and lobbying and coined the phrase “Machiavellian Marketing” to describe modern campaigning and pressure group activity as an integral part of modern marketing management.

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Ryan Bowd

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Abstract

This paper seeks to explain the paradox of the role of public relations against the observed decline of trust in major institutions and business corporations. In the 1970s, it was believed that public relations would restore then fading confidence in business organizations, but the most recent evidence suggests that decline in trust and confidence has been steady since then. Surveys published at the World Economic Forum’s meeting in Davos in January 2003 showed that in many countries the least trusted institutions are democratically elected legislatures and governing bodies, followed closely by domestic and international business corporations.

During the same period, expenditures on public relations activities by governments and business have increased year on year, without having the effect that might be expected on levels of trust and confidence.

This paper examines the decline in trust, increasing expenditures on public relations activities, and offers a number of explanations for the role of public relations in the decline in trust. These draw on interviews with clients and senior practitioners in the UK, and the current debate in the UK about best practice in public relations.

Decline in trust and equity: The paradox of the role of public relations

By Jon White and Kevin Murray

Jon White

Jon White is a consultant specialising in management and organisation development, public affairs and public relations management. He has worked in public and private sector organisations in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Europe, the United States, South Africa, Australia and Canada, where he lived from 1972 to 1986. An honorary professor in public affairs at the University of Birmingham School of Business, he is also a visiting faculty member at the Cass School of Business, City University, London, an associate faculty member at Henley Management College, and a visiting professor at USI Lugano, Switzerland. He is a member of the board of the Global Public Affairs Institute in New York.

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His research has dealt with the impact of new communication technology on social development, management decision-making, the contribution of communication to organisational effectiveness, professional development in communication management, evaluation, research priorities in public relations and public affairs practice in the UK and Europe, fee-setting practices in UK public relations consultancies, and innovation in professional service firms.
A conceptualisation and empirical verification of the ‘strategist’, (redefined) ‘manager’ and ‘technician’ roles of public relations

by Benita Steyn

Abstract

The aim of this quantitative study was to determine the chief executive's role expectations for the most senior practitioner responsible for the public relations (PR) function in the South African organisation, in terms of the roles of strategist (a strategic role at the top management or societal level); (redefined) manager; and technician. A conceptualisation of the role of strategist preceded the empirical study, differentiating it from the historical roles of manager and technician.

The method of data analysis was a Common Factor analysis (rotated to an Oblique Promax solution) which indicated a three factor solution—as a control measure, a two factor solution was also extracted. Both solutions were subjected to a Confirmatory Factor analysis to determine fit. The three factor solution provided a (marginally) better fit than the two factor solution, and was accepted as a ‘reasonable’ fit.

The most important finding was that, in addition to the (redefined) manager and technician roles, a third role namely the strategist has been conceptualised and empirically verified according to the expectations of 103 South African chief executives.

1. INTRODUCTION

This research is based on the principles of ‘communication excellence’, defined by Dozier, L Grunig & J Grunig (1995:x) as the ‘ideal state in which knowledgeable communicators assist in the overall strategic management of organisations, seeking symmetrical relations through management of communication with key publics on whom organisational survival and growth depend.’ For the purpose of this research, ‘key publics’ is seen to include passive stakeholder groups as well as latent, aware and active publics (J Grunig & Repper, in J Grunig, 1992:125-150) that emerge around societal, stakeholder or internal organisational issues.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem that prompted this research is a multi-faceted one: Firstly, the role of business organisations in society is changing. Secondly, the public relations (PR) function seems to have progressed little in making a meaningful contribution to strategic decision-making in organisations, assisting them to adapt to changing external conditions. Thirdly, members of top management in organisations do not seem to be satisfied with the role performance of senior PR practitioners.

2.1 the changing role of business in society

In the 21st century, there is a growing realisation that business as practised in the past will not be sustainable in the future. Operating in a hostile environment, organisations will have to adapt to the fact that the stability they once knew is gone forever (D-Aprix, in Verwey, 1998:1). A new business paradigm is being institutionalised at present to ensure social order in an increasingly differentiated society. This paradigm is characterised by “corporate self-control and a more expansive corporate social responsibility” – government regulation and market forces are no longer sufficient to ensure social order (Holmström, in Vercic, White & Moss, 2000:41, 45).

Legitimacy is becoming increasingly important in an era where corporate and government mismanagement of issues are rife and business suffers from perceptions of their leaders as being “complacent, greedy and unconcerned about the long-term welfare of their companies and the employees that have not been shown the door through downsizing” (Regester & Larkin, 2002:7). Corporate and institutional behaviour is under much greater scrutiny than ever before. People are less trusting of those in authority and corporate loyalty is no longer a given. In such an environment, the allegations of special interest groups are likely to be believed (Regester & Larkin, 2002:8, 10).

A fundamental shift in the relationship of business to individuals and to society as a whole is thus taking place (Verwey, 1998:2-3). The author is of the opinion that business organisations traditionally have been focused on the achievement of financial goals, having been led by a top management team whose expertise lies mostly in financial management and corporate/competitive strategy – being attentive mainly to shareholders and other financial stakeholders. However, in an era characterised by a ‘triple bottom line’, social, political, environmental and ethical issues have gained strategic importance. In such an environment, a good corporate reputation has become dependent on being regarded as trustworthy. In fact, legitimacy is fast becoming a precondition for corporate social acceptance (Holmström, in Vercic, White & Moss, 2000:41, 45). Nevertheless, many business leaders still fail to understand that, in the new business paradigm, the ‘license to operate’ is now obtained from society.

2.2 Public relations is not making a meaningful contribution to strategic decision making

In the author’s view, the changing role of business in society has major implications for the role to be performed by the PR function in the modern organisation. In the new interconnected world, the importance of stakeholder communication is widely acknowledged. However, PR practitioners do not seem to be rising to the challenge of giving strategic direction to the organisation’s communication relationships with strategic stakeholders and other interest groups in society. Furthermore, they also do not seem to be playing a leading role in managing the organisation’s reputation. The latter is an excellent opportunity to add value to the bottom line, since many companies regard their reputation as the most important asset; and damage to their reputation as the biggest business risk they face (Regester & Larkin, 2002:1-2).

According to Broom & Dozier (in Ledingham & Bruning, 2000), the contribution of public relations to the achievement of corpo-
rate goals is still a mystery to many. Although practitioners provide counsel and advice to senior management regarding communication-related problems, they rarely participate directly at the corporate and business levels (Moss, Warnaby & Newman, 2000:29). In most instances, the PR function is seen as being peripheral to policy formulation, not a legitimate part thereof. This might be because the way it is practised, reduces it to nothing more than communications, meaning the exchange or transmission of information (Budd, 1991). Its practitioners are not there when decisions need to be taken about what must be done to adapt the organisation to its environment (Neubauer, 1997). If PR practitioners do not step into management or strategic management roles, a power vacuum is created. This often leads to encroachment where non-PR professionals (often from marketing) are assigned to manage the function (Lauzen, 1991).

“The career failure of top practitioners to assume the management role within organisations is also a failure to truly emerge as a profession from the communication skills cluster that operationally defines what practitioners do—and what the practice is” (Dozier; in J Grunig, 1992:352).

There could be many reasons for this situation. Practitioners might not aspire to senior management positions because many are artistic, creative types that “build their careers around this creative specialization and exhibit high levels of job satisfaction in the stability of technician role enactment over time” (Dozier & Broom, 1995:5). They might have insufficient knowledge and skills to play a strategic and/or managerial role (Moore, 1996; Neubauer, 1997; Groenewald, 1998). Few theoretical guidelines seem to exist on how public relations should contribute to the organisation’s strategy formulation process (Moss & Warnaby, in Kitchen, 1997:59) or what a strategic role for the PR practitioner actually constitutes (Steyn, 2000). Furthermore, roles research to date has failed to examine how the PR manager’s role may vary at different levels within organisations. There is a need to “reconfigure the existing manager-technician typology” in order to differentiate between practitioners who play a senior executive role in public relations and those who focus on managing operational practices (Moss & Green, 2000:1:23).

Uncertainty regarding the perspective that public relations brings to the strategic decision making process might point to a theoretical problem that runs deeper than merely a lack of theory on the strategic contribution of public relations. What might be in question is the very essence of public relations itself -- what its purpose is to organisations, how it should be used and what it should contribute to society. This study aims to provide some guidelines in this regard and will approach the matter from the perspective of chief executives (CEOs) as the role senders.

2.3 Top management does not seem to be satisfied with the role performance of senior PR practitioners

Johnson (1989:244-245) is of the opinion that an essential but neglected perspective in the study of PR roles has been whether top management/the CEO (as the role sender) perceives the same role for the PR practitioner as the practitioner (the role receiver) does. Roles research to date provides only a one-sided perspective of role enactment, namely that of the practitioner. They do not examine the role-making process as a product of the interaction between role senders and role receivers (Katz & Kahn, 1978). More than two decades ago, Broom & Dozier (1985) suggested that the next step in the stream of PR roles research should be to examine the expectations that organisational managers have of their PR practitioners. Up to the present, this does not seem to have materialised.

This is a major oversight by researchers, since the body of knowledge on public relations clearly points to the fact that many CEOs/top management members are not satisfied with the performance of PR managers/senior practitioners. The perceptions of CEOs are that the PR function is focused on achieving communication goals and objectives without necessarily linking them to the achievement of business goals—they are not seen as making a contribution to the bottom line (Ackley, 1997; Bourke, 1990; Bovet, 1993; Budd, 1991, 1997; Burger, 1983; Campbell, 1993; Esler, 1996; Graham, 1991; Fleisher & Mahaffy, 1997; Marken, 1996; McGoon, 1997; Moore, 1996; Stahlheber, 1989; Tortorello & Dowgiallo, 1990; Towers, 1993; Webster, 1990; Woodrum, 1995).

An international study of CEOs and PR executives indicated that these two groups approached communication and its role in the organisation from two different perspectives. When PR executives spoke about communication, they were usually referring to the products, programmes and activities that the communication team had created. When the CEOs talked about communication, they usually described it in terms of results, or solutions to critical problems (Esler, 1996; McGoon, 1997). Top management feels that the PR function should be less obsessed with its own activities and media -- their thinking is tactical. Practitioners generally perceive their work as fire fighting, as ‘doing’ or implementing rather than thinking strategically and making a contribution to strategic decision making (Fleisher & Mahaffy, 1997; Budd, 1991).

In summarising the shortcomings of PR practitioners as portrayed by the literature mentioned above, it can be said that they:

- fail to assume a broad decision making role.
- adopt a role as implementers of policy, rather than shapers and moulders of policy.
- lack a comprehensive understanding of social, political and business problems and are therefore unable to see the big picture.
- do not understand important issues in their industry/fail to address strategic issues.
- lack management, business and planning skills.
- either do not do research, or measure outputs rather than outcomes, or do not integrate the intelligence obtained into the strategies of the larger organisation.
- do not integrate the function into its larger organisational domain.
- are reactive, and await decisions by their CEO rather than being proactive.

From the discussion above, a lack of understanding and agreement between the CEO and his/her PR manager about the role of communication is evident—the latter seems to be ill-defined in most organisations (Campbell, 1993; Grates, 1997; Marken, 1996; McGoon, 1997; Woodrum, 1995).

In the opinion of the author, the problem described above as it is seen to exist in practice is, to a large extent, the outcome of the training that PR practitioners receive. In essence, this is a theoretical problem—caused by the lack of theory on (i) what constitutes a strategic role at the top management level, and (ii) how to develop PR strategy on the functional level. Of interest to this research is therefore the specific role that public relations should be playing at the strategic/societal level to assist organisations in adapting to a fast changing external environment and a new business paradigm.
3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Phase 1: To conceptualise a strategic role for the PR practitioner at the top management or macro/societal level of an organisation, i.e. the role of the PR strategist.
- To redefine the historic manager role as a role at the functional or meso level.
- To redefine the historic technician role as a role at the micro or implementation level.

Phase 2: To quantitatively determine CEO role expectations for the most senior practitioner responsible for the PR function in the South African organisation -- with regard to the role of the strategist, the manager and the technician - in an effort to provide more clarity to practitioners (as role receivers) on the expectations of the chief executive (as the role sender).

4. DEFINITION OF TERMS

4.1 Public relations

This paper is based on the premise that there is no theoretical difference between ‘corporate communication’ and ‘public relations’. However, since ‘role’ is the major concept in this research, the term public relations will be employed to be consistent with the academic literature on roles research in the US and Europe (i.e. the PR manager role and the PR technician role).

The following definitions are seen to be the essence of public relations as employed in this study:
- The First World Assembly of PR Associations, held in Mexico City in 1978, defined public relations as “the art and social science of analysing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organisational leaders, and implementing planned programmes of action which will serve both the organisation and the public interest” (Jenkins & Ugboajah, 1986).
- Public relations is “a communication function of management through which organisations adapt to, alter, or maintain their environment for the purpose of achieving organisational goals” (Long & Hazleton, 1987:6).
- Public relations is concerned with “assisting organisations to both formulate and achieve socially acceptable goals, thus achieving a balance between commercial imperatives and socially responsible behaviour” (Kitchen, 1997:8).
- Public relations is “the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the publics on whom its success or failure depends” (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 1994).

4.2 Role

Members of an organisation occupy different positions or ranks, each of which has a different role (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Role has been defined as “the patterns of behaviour or the every-day activities of a PR practitioner” by Katz & Kahn (1978), and as “the position in a given social structure, on the actor in relation with others, or on the activities of organisational members” (Biddle, in Toth & Trujillo, 1987:6).

4.3 Function

According to Grunig & Hunt (1984:46), functions are the output or performance variables of a system (e.g. an organisation) or a subsystem (e.g. a department/division in an organisation).
- Mirror function: The monitoring of relevant environmental developments and the anticipation of their consequences for organisational strategies/policies (adapted from Van Riel, 1995:2).
- Window function: The preparation and execution of a communication policy and strategy, resulting in messages that portray all facets of the organisation (adapted from Van Riel, 1995:2).

4.4 Public relations strategy

Public relations strategy provides the focus and direction for an organisation’s communication with its stakeholders, determining what should be communicated to assist in achieving organisational goals. These core messages are derived by identifying the organisation’s key strategic issues (including social, political and ethical issues) and determining their impact on the stakeholders/other interest groups in society. Thereafter, determining what should be communicated internally and/or externally to solve the problem or capitalise on the opportunity presented by the issue.

4.5 Communication plans

Communication plans put PR strategy into practice - breaking down a set of intentions into steps, formalising them so that they can be implemented almost automatically (Digman, 1990).

5. GRAPHIC PRESENTATION OF META-THEORETICAL APPROACHES AND CONCEPTUALISATION

Whereas a meta-theoretical approach offers a way of looking (Babbie, 2001:51), conceptualisation defines key concepts and places them within a theoretical framework (Mouton, 1996:115). This is best described graphically (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

6. META-THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO THE STUDY

All scientific inquiry rests on one or other (meta-theoretical) approach, the inquirer approaching the research from a certain perspective. However, each approach offers a limited view of the phenomenon, highlighting only certain aspects (Jansen & Steinberg, 1991:2-3). Since the assumptions of an approach are embodied in individual theories, and different theories apply to the PR problems addressed by this paper, the meta-theoretical framework for the study is constructed from a synthesis of the following seven approaches:

6.1 dialogic approach to communication

The assumptions of a dialogical approach, according to Steinberg (1989:41), is that communication is a two-way reciprocal encounter between the participants and not a one-way transmission of messages (monologic). It could be viewed as a dialogue or conversation between the participants in the communication event (Steinberg, 1989:1). Dialogue as conversation carries the connotation of serious talking rather than idle chat—attempts are made at bridging gaps in understanding (Gadamer, 1985). Participants resolve conflicts without acrimony and gain insight about themselves and each other (Steinberg, 1989:16-17).

In this study, the participants in the communication event are the organisation and its stakeholders/ other interest groups in society. A practitioner in the role of the strategist performs a ‘mirror’ function by reflecting societal norms and the organisation’s image amongst its stakeholders/other interested members of society back to the organisation’s management. In this process, the strategist assists the organisation in gaining insight about itself and in
understanding how it appears in the eyes of the other participants in the communication encounter in order that it can adapt to societal norms and stakeholder expectations. In providing a ‘window’ on the organisation, PR practitioners in the role of the manager and technician express the organisation’s identity and values to its stakeholders and other interested members of society.

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**Fig. 1: Meta-Theoretical and Conceptual Framework for the Study**

**A SYNTHESIS OF META-THEORETICAL APPROACHES**

| Dialogic approach to communication |
| Open systems approach to organisational effectiveness |
| Ecological approach to PR |
| Corporate social responsibility/responsiveness approaches to strategic management |
| Corporate community approach as a new theory of the firm |
| New institutional approach to strategic management |
| Excellence approach to PR and communication management |

| DOMAIN | Public relations | Strategic management | Marketing |
| PARADIGM | Public relations role | Strategy formulation | Customer satisfaction |

| THEORIES | (Manager and technician) roles theory |
| Context (environment): |
| · Boundary spanning |
| · Environmental scanning |
| · Stakeholder theory |
| · Issues management |
| Content of strategies (Organisational level) |
| Process of strategic management |
| Gap theory model |
| · Gap between customer expectations of product/service and customer perceptions of the performance of the product/service |

| MAJOR CONCEPT | Integration of (1) SATISFACTION and (2) ROLE = ROLE SATISFACTION |

| CONCEPT (1): Marketing | (CEO) SATISFACTION |
| (Satisfaction = gap between expectations and perceptions of performance) |

| CONSTRUCTS | Marketing |
| (CEO) Expectations | (CEO) Perceptions of performance* |

| CONCEPT (2): Public Relations | (PR) ROLE |

| CONSTRUCTS: Public Relations | Mirror function | Window function | Window function |

| CONSTRUCTS: Strategic Management | Inputs into organisational strategy formulation processes |
| External representation (information disposal) in the stakeholder and societal environment |
| External representation (information disposal) in the stakeholder and societal environment |

| CONSTRUCTS: Strategic Management | Developing enterprise/institutional strategy |
| Developing PR/corporate communication strategy |
| Developing implementation strategy and functional tactics |

| CONSTRUCTS: Strategic Management | Strategic role at top management/macro/societal level |
| Strategic role at functional/meso/organisational level |
| Tactical role at micro/implementation level |

| FACTORS AS CONSTRUCTS | Role of PR strategist |
| Role of PR manager |
| Role of PR technician |

Source: Steyn B (not completed) *(CEO) Perceptions of performance will not be reported in this paper*
6.2 Open systems approach to organisational effectiveness

Systems concepts such as input, output, throughput, and feedback describe the behaviour of a system. Organisations as open systems receive input from the environment, e.g. as information, that identify problems that have put the organisation out of equilibrium with interpenetrating systems in its environment. The information inputs are processed through an activity known as throughput—the information is organised and solutions to problems that generated the inputs are formulated. Outputs are then released into the environment in an attempt to restore equilibrium with interpenetrating systems. After those outputs affect the environment, the organisation seeks feedback to determine if it has solved the identified problem. This process continues until the organisation is back in equilibrium with its interpenetrating systems (Grunig & Hunt, 1984:94-95).

In order to make the organisation more effective, PR practitioners should therefore engage in two types of communication behaviour on behalf of the organisation: acquire (seek or listen to) information from the environment (the strategist) so that the organisation can adapt to stakeholder views and societal norms; and disseminate (provide) information to the environment (the manager and technician) on organisational views, policies and strategies.

6.3 Ecological approach to Public relations

The ecological approach to public relations (Everett, 1993:180-182) is a dominant perspective in text books (J Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Newsom, VanSlyke Turk, & Kruckeberg, 1996; Baskin & Aronoff, 1992; Seitel, 1992; Wilcox, Ault, & Agee, 1992). It is based on a model of organisational adaptation where the premise is that "to survive is to adapt: and to adapt is to change" (Scott, 1987:91). Some degree of fitness must be achieved between an organisation and its environment. Fitness can be measured by assessing any number of factors including public opinion, return-on-investment, regulatory climate or stakeholder satisfaction (Everett, 1993). In this perspective, the dominant coalition/other managers scan the relevant environment for opportunities and threats, formulate strategic responses and adjust organisational behaviour/structure appropriately (Hannan & Freeman, 1977). Weick (1984:293) views the organisation as an interpretive system where key decision makers "sense and interpret the environment and respond to it".

Public relations is posited as a boundary spanning function that mediates the organisational/environmental relationship. The ideal outcome of public relations interventions is therefore an adapted organisation (Everett, 1993). The role of the strategist in this perspective is to scan the environment, gather relevant information, interpret this information and feed it into the organisation's strategic decision making processes. Based on an analysis of key strategic issues and stakeholder expectations, values and feelings, the manager develops core messages (corporate communication strategy), which the technician communicates to strategic stakeholders and relevant interest groups in the societal environment.

6.4 Corporate social responsibility/Responsiveness approaches to strategic management

The assumptions of a corporate social responsibility approach to strategic management is that corporate behaviour should conform to prevailing social norms, values and expectations (Sethi, in Carroll, 1996). Decision makers have an obligation to take actions which protect and improve the welfare of society as a whole along with their own interests (Davis & Blomstrom, in Carroll, 1996:34). In addition to 'basic responsibilities' (referring to technical and routine obligations) and 'organisational responsibilities' (intended to secure the well-being and needs of strategic stakeholders), organisations also have 'societal responsibilities' (i.e. becoming involved in the wider community by assisting in the creation of a healthy overall environment -- emphasising the welfare and prosperity of society). Business organisations operate in a society that offers them opportunities to make a profit -- in turn they have the obligation to serve societal needs (Chung, in Grunig, 1992:240). "In the long run those who do not use power in a manner that society considers responsible, will tend to lose it" (Davis, in Stoner, 1978:77).

Whereas the main tenet of the above approach is philosophical i.e. whether organisations indeed have social responsibilities, the related approach of corporate social responsiveness concentrates more on the pragmatic matter of responding effectively to environmental pressures -- how these social responsibilities should manifest itself (Frederick, in Carroll, 1996). In management and PR theory this is known by the term 'issues management' (Vercic & J Grunig. 1995). The role of the PR strategist in such an approach is to identify strategic, social, ethical and political issues and bring it to top management's attention, so that it can be taken into consideration in the development of enterprise/corporate strategy. The role of the manager is to identify the consequences of strategic issues or organisational policies/strategies on the stakeholders/societal interest groups and decide what must be communicated to solve the problems/capitalise on the opportunities presented by the issues. The technician implements the strategy by developing PR plans and communication activities.

6.5 Corporate community approach as a new theory of the firm

The corporate community or partnership/inclusive approach has been prevalent since the 1990's. In the Information Age the organisation is viewed as a socio-economic system where stakeholders are recognised as partners who create value through collaborative problem solving. This is not done to be socially responsible, but because it provides a competitive advantage (Halal, 2000:10). This approach provides a new way of thinking about the role of business in society, about strategic management and what the affairs of the organisation actually constitutes.

A practitioner in the role of the strategist keeps top management informed of stakeholder feelings, expectations and values, as well as of societal norms on which stakeholder views are based. In this way, mutually beneficial relationships can be built between the organisation and its stakeholders, and joint problem solving can take place around issues of mutual concern.

6.6 New institutional approach to strategic management

New institutionalism claims that whereas some organisations survive through technical efficiency, others survive through legitimacy—by acting in socially expected ways. Rumelt, Schendal & Teece (1994:35) regard the distinguishing contribution of an institutional approach to be the "identification of causal mechanisms leading to organizational change and stability on the basis of preconscious understandings that organizational actors share, independent of their interests".

New institutionalism regards society at large as the source of concepts, professional roles, rules, standards, expectations, policies, strategies, and standard organisational arrangements. When organisations institutionalise (adopt) these, they gain legitimacy. This is non-rational behaviour; done because it is the ‘thing to do’ (Rumelt, Schendal & Teece, 1994:36). It is the role of the strategist to bring societal values and norms to top management's attention so that they can adapt organisational strategies and policies. It is the role of the manager and technician to communicate the
identity of the ‘adapted’ organisation to strategic stakeholders and interest groups in society—thereby obtaining legitimacy and a licence to operate.

6.7 excellence approach to public relations (PR) and communication management

According to the general theory of excellence, public relations contributes to organisational effectiveness when it focuses on segments within the environment that most threaten the organisation, rather than on the total environment (J Grunig, L Grunig & Ething, in J Grunig, 1992). Significant groups of people in an organisation’s environment are called publics by PR/communication professionals and stakeholders by managers/executives. For practical purposes, these concepts can be, and often are, used interchangeably. However, in the theoretical context of strategic PR management, these terms are seen to represent different stages (J Grunig & Repper, in J Grunig, 1992:124):

- The stakeholder stage: Individuals or groups are stakeholders of an organisation when the behaviour of the organisation has consequences on them or vice versa (Freeman, 1984). Stakeholders are normally passive and see no need to act or become involved with the organisation unless there are shifts in the environment or changes in organisational policies which impact them. During this stage, strategic stakeholders are identified through environmental scanning and monitoring.
- The publics stage refers to the identification of groups/individuals who see the consequences of organisational decisions as problematic. Publics can be differentiated as latent (passive, but with the potential to be active); aware (when a latent public recognises the potential problem); and active (when they organise to do something about the problem).
- In the issues stage, an active public makes an issue out of a problem that is not satisfactorily addressed by an organisation. When active publics bring in the media, arrange protest marches, etc., they can be called activists. Such interest or pressure groups merit special attention by PR managers because they present threats to the organisation.

PR practitioners play their most valuable role by identifying and stabilising relationships with strategic stakeholders and identifying/managing the publics and activists that emerge around issues -- thereby reducing conflict and uncertainty in strategic decision making. Meeting this challenge entails being pro-active by: (i) constantly monitoring relevant stakeholders and publics to find out how the organisation is perceived and (ii) knowing with whom, when, and what to communicate and how to reach stakeholders and publics via different channels of communication (L Grunig, in J Grunig, 1992).

To contribute most to effectiveness and to the organisation’s bottom line, public relations should be practised on three organisational levels (J Grunig, in J Grunig, 1992:3):

(i) On the micro level, where the planning, execution and evaluation of PR programmes takes place. This is the level where the organisation interfaces with its stakeholders, daily issues are identified, stakeholders are identified and decisions are taken on how to communicate with stakeholders. The contribution of public relations here is to manage communication programmes strategically (J Grunig, 1990:14).
(ii) The meso level pertains to how the PR department is organised and managed (J Grunig, 1990). Seven meso level characteristics of excellent PR departments, as identified by the Excellence Study are the following: an integrated PR department, a separate function from marketing, direct reporting relationships to senior management, the practice of the two-way symmetrical PR model, and a senior PR person playing the manager role (J Grunig, in J Grunig, 1992).

On the macro level, communication excellence is determined by certain organisational and environmental conditions (J Grunig, 1990). The power-control theory (Robbins, 1990) explains that people with power—the dominant coalition—determines the way organisations behave and they do not always make rational decisions. Public relations must therefore be represented in the dominant coalition to be part of the decision making team that identifies strategic stakeholders and publics, as well as the most appropriate PR model for the organisational environment (J Grunig, in J Grunig, 1992).

Whereas J Grunig (1990:28) maintained that the achievement of objectives at the micro level helps the organisation to achieve its goals at the macro level, Holtzhausen (1995:164, 227) reversed this process. The author agrees with the latter in that the macro level is actually the determining factor in the way public relations is practised at the meso and micro levels.

According to the findings of the Excellence Study, there are two prerequisites for communication excellence (Dozier et al, 1995:11-17):

- The knowledge base of the PR department involves knowledge of the manager role, especially strategic management. Excellent communication involves knowledge of two-way communication, which includes environmental scanning to identify emerging trends, issues and stakeholders that affect the organisation, as well as conducting formative and evaluative research. It is founded on the two-way symmetrical communication model, where negotiation and compromise is used to solve conflict between organisations and stakeholders, and develop ‘win-win’ solutions. When using this model, PR practitioners act as advocates for stakeholders and publics’ interests in strategic decision making.
- Shared expectations must exist between the PR manager and top management about communication’s role in the organisation (what it constitutes and how it can benefit the organisation). The strategist should therefore ensure that top management understands the role of the excellent PR practitioner and demands it. If the latter has the knowledge to deliver, a strategic view of public relations is reinforced amongst top management.
- The overall strategic management of organisations is “inseparable from the strategic management of relationships’” (Dozier et al, 1995:27). The general theory on effectiveness and excellence in public relations and communication management strongly supports a strategic role at the top management level for the most senior practitioner responsible for the PR function. It also supports the role of a manager (at the meso level) and a technician (at the micro level) of the organisation.

7. theoretical framework and conceptualisation

In contrast to a meta-theoretical approach which offers a way of looking, a theory aims at explaining what we see (Babbie, 2001:51). Concepts acquire (new) meaning within a conceptual framework such as a theory or a model (Mouton, 1996:115).

The role of the strategist has been constructed based on theories from two scientific domains: Public relations and strategic management. Furthermore, (role) expectations are to be measured based on the customer satisfaction paradigm in the marketing domain.
The author regards public relations to be a multidisciplinary domain and its strategic contribution best explained by a number of meta-theoretical approaches and the theories generated by them.

The major concept measured in the doctoral research upon which this paper is based, is in effect an integration of two separate concepts namely satisfaction from the marketing domain and (PR) role from the PR domain: (CEO) satisfaction + (PR) role = (CEO) role satisfaction

- The first concept in this equation namely satisfaction is borrowed from the gap theory model in marketing where customer satisfaction is measured by analysing the gap between the customer’s expectations of a product/service and the customer’s perceptions of performance of the product/service (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985). CEO (role) satisfaction with regards to the most senior PR practitioner is therefore measured by analysing the gap between CEO (role) expectations and CEO perceptions of (role) performance of the most senior practitioner responsible for the PR/corporate communication function in an organisation. For reasons of brevity, this conference paper will only report the measurement of the normative (role) expectations of South African CEOs with regard to their most senior practitioners and will not touch upon their positive perceptions of (role) performance.
- The second concept to be measured in this equation is (PR) role. ‘Role’ has been one of the most enduring concepts applied to organisational contexts. Definitions of role have concentrated on “the position in a given social structure, on the actor in relation with others, or on the activities of organisational members” (Biddle, in Toth & Trujillo, 1987:46). Originally from the sociology paradigm, ‘role’ has been the central concept measured by the PR roles paradigm prevalent in the field since the early 1980s.

A major weakness of PR roles research over the last two decades has been the fact that it draws mostly on self-reports from the perspective of PR practitioners. The implicit assumption in these studies is that roles reside within the individual (Johnson, 1989:244). In contrast, this research follows Katz & Kahn’s roles approach (1978) proposing that roles are a function of a social system made up of role senders and role receivers. The role performed, at least in part, depends on others’ expectations—a description of role behaviours should therefore include the role sender’s perspective (Sypher & Sypher, 1984). “The range of acceptable role expectations is key to the evolution of the PR function in organisations. The key issue is: Who will manage the PR function, how will it be managed and what are the role expectations of the role set?” (Dozier, in J Grunig, 1992:329).

In an attempt to answer some of the above questions posed by Dozier, the author has integrated the concepts of role and satisfaction in order to measure CEO role satisfaction, as explained above—differentiating between CEO role expectations (reported in this paper) and CEO perceptions of role performance (reported in the author’s doctoral thesis).

The conceptualisation of three roles for the PR practitioner (strategist, manager and technician) as measured in this study, will now be described according to the domains from which it stemmed originally (public relations and strategic management).

7.1 From the Public Relations domain

According to Katz & Kahn (1978), ‘role’ refers to the standardised patterns of behaviour required of individuals in specific functional relationships (i.e. their every-day activities).

7.1.1 Historic PR roles

Broom & Smith (1979) introduced the concept of roles to PR, conceptualising four theoretical roles: the expert prescriber; the communication facilitator; the problem-solving process facilitator and the communication technician.

Broom (1982) and Dozier (1984) found the first three roles to be interchangeable, conceptual components of the same empirical role, the PR manager role. Practitioners in the manager role make communication policy decisions and are involved in all PR decision making. They frequently use research to plan or evaluate their work, and counsel management (J Grunig & Hunt, 1984). They are held accountable for PR programme outcomes—they view themselves and are viewed by others in the organisation as PR/communication experts. They facilitate communication between management and publics, and conceptualise and direct PR programmes (J Grunig, in J Grunig, 1992:19). The technician does not take part in strategic decision-making or conduct research, but rather provides the communication and journalistic skills needed to implement PR programmes. The manager and technician roles are uncorrelated, indicating that they are empirically as well as conceptually distinct.

Practitioner roles are key to understanding the function of PR (Dozier, in J Grunig, 1992). Most organisations have practitioners playing the role of PR technician (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). However, for public relations to contribute to organisational effectiveness, there must also be a practitioner playing the role of the PR manager, taking part in the organisation’s strategy formulation process (Dozier, in J Grunig, 1992:327). Although there is increasing reference in the literature that a strategic role should be played (Brom, 2001; Moss, Warnaby & Newman, 2000; Vercic & J Grunig, in Moss, Vercic & Warnaby, 2000; Steyn, 2000; Steyn & Puth, 2000; Fleisher, 1998; Van Ruler, 1997; Dozier; L Grunig & J Grunig, 1995; White & Mazur, 1995; Siegel, 1995; Bartha, 1994; Winokur & Kinkead, 1993; J Grunig & Repper, in J Grunig, 1992), no empirical studies could be found that explicitly spell out the activities to be performed by a practitioner in such a role.

7.1.2 Conceptualisations of an emerging third role in the US and Europe

In the PR literature there are indications of an emerging third role. In the USA, Dozier & Broom (1995) identified a senior adviser role (in addition to the manager and technician), while Toth, Serini, Wright & Emig (1998) reported the agency profile role of which all activities are managerial in nature. Wright’s (1995) communication executive functions within the ‘inner circle’ of organisational decision making and spends most of his/her time performing managerial and executive tasks – rarely functioning as a communication technician.

Some European academics have recently pointed to the limitations of the widely accepted manager and technician typology. Since these studies have been conducted over a period of two decades, Moss & Green (2001:120-123) suggest that the pattern of responsibilities associated with the manager’s role may have changed in recent years. For instance, they see a need to differentiate between two types of PR managers: senior executives and operational managers.

A study by Moss, Warnaby & Newman (2000) examined the roles played by senior practitioners within organisations in the United Kingdom. They suggest a more comprehensive conceptualisation of the manager’s role, necessary to delineate the range of activities that senior practitioners are increasingly performing at higher
levels in the modern organisation. For example, roles studies have not generally explored how different conceptualisations of strategy may affect the nature and extent of practitioner involvement in the strategic management of organisations.

Based on an exploratory study amongst PR professionals in the Netherlands, Van Ruler (1997:250-251) constructed “three underlying views on the question what PR - or communication management - is all about”. In addition to the technician role, she conceptualised two roles: the sales manager (being strategically concerned with synchronising the behaviour of a public with that of the organisation in order that the organisation can continue to behave in the way it wants without interference); and the intermediary (being strategically concerned with bringing the organisation and publics in tune with one another; reaching mutual understanding and building bridges). These roles were, however, not verified empirically. With regards to the above-mentioned new emerging roles, the author considers Wright’s (1995) ‘communication executive’ and Van Ruler’s (1997) ‘intermediary’ role to be strategic roles similar to her own conceptualisation of the strategist.

In the Delphi study that was conducted as part of the European Body of Knowledge (EBOK) research project, four roles or dimensions were identified (Van Ruler, 2000; Vercic, Van Ruler, Büttschi & Flodin, 2001):

- The reflective role or dimension has to do with analysing changing standards, values and norms in society and pointing these out to organisational decision makers so that they can adjust the standards and values of the organisation regarding social responsibility and legitimacy. This can be seen as a developing function of PR, directed towards organisational members (the top management team).
- The managerial role or dimension concerns the organisational mission and strategies and has to do with managing relationships and maintaining communication processes with stakeholders and other public groups in order to gain their trust and/or mutual understanding. It is directed towards stakeholders and other groups in the public sphere.
- The operational role or dimension is concerned with preparing a means of communication for the organisation. It entails executing and evaluating action plans developed by others and is directed towards stakeholders. It is not supported as a view on public relations but is mentioned as a common role.
- The educational role or dimension is directed towards organisational members (employees especially). It is concerned with helping them to become communicatively competent in order to respond to societal demands.

Although the Europeans use both the terms ‘dimensions’ and ‘roles’, the author regards these four dimensions as ‘roles’ since the first three are very similar to her own conceptualisation of three roles for public relations. Notable here is the similarity of the new roles namely EBOK’s reflective role and her own strategist role, also remarked upon by the EBOK researchers (personal communication with Vercic, 2001; Van Ruler, 2001; and Büttschi, 2002).

7.1.3 Conceptualisation of strategic management roles of the PR function in South Africa

In her masters research script, the author conceptualised the strategist and redefined the manager as strategic management roles of the public relations function, based on the following theory from the public relations domain (Steyn, 2000):

- Public relations should be practised on three organisational levels in order to contribute the most to effectiveness (Grunig et al., 1992; Grunig, 1992; Holtzhausen, 1995): on the macro level (the role of the strategist); on the meso level (the role of the manager); and on the micro level (the role of the technician).

- Van Riel (1995:2) regards the role of public relations in the achievement of the organisation’s mission as professionally carrying out the ‘mirror’ and ‘window’ functions. He describes the ‘mirror’ function as the monitoring of relevant environmental developments and the anticipation of their consequences for the organisation’s communication policy. Being a pillar on which the role of the strategist rests, the author broadened the construct mirror function to the ‘monitoring of relevant environmental developments and the anticipation of their consequences for the organisation’s policies and strategies, especially with regard to relationships with stakeholders’.

Van Riel (1995:2) describes the ‘window’ function as the preparation and execution of a communication policy, resulting in messages that portray all facets of the organisation in a lucid and appealing way. As a foundation for the roles of the manager and technician, the author also broadened the construct window function by adding strategy to the policy definition, and left out ‘in a lucid and appealing way’ (because the latter smacks of asymmetry). The construct window function is therefore regarded by the author as ‘the preparation and execution of a communication policy and strategy, resulting in messages that portray all facets of the organisation’.

The conclusion is drawn that the PR body of knowledge indicates an emerging third role (a strategic role) to be played by a senior PR practitioner at the macro/societal level of an organisation. In the view of the author, this is the so-called mirror function of public relations and represents the contribution that public relations makes to strategic decision making. The window function is fulfilled by practitioners in two roles: the manager and the technician.

7.2 from the strategic management domain

Several theories from the strategic management domain have also been employed in the conceptualisation of PR roles at the macro or top management level, the meso or functional level, and the micro or implementation level of organisations.

7.2.1 Boundary spanning theory

According to Digman (1990:14), the strategic management process is an attempt to achieve a productive fit between the organisation’s external or macro environment and its internal situation (structure, systems and procedures, climate and resources). Top management is greatly assisted in this process by organisational boundary spanners. Most authors concur that boundary spanning roles are involved with either (information) inputs to the organisation and (information) outputs from the organisation. This corresponds with Adams’ (1976) boundary spanning roles of acquisition and disposal, and Aldrich & Herker’s (1977) information processing and external representation roles.

Katz & Kahn (1966) see three boundary spanning roles: procuring resources and disposing of outputs; relating the organisation to its larger community or social system; and adapting the organisation to the future by gathering information about trends and planning to meet these developments. Leifer & Delbecq (1978) regard boundary spanning activities as protecting the organisation from environmental stress and acting as regulators of information (and material flow) between organisation and environment.

To summarise the different views on boundary spanning expressed above, it can be said that informational boundary spanning is a two-part process—firstly, obtaining information from outside sources
to adapt the organisation to its larger community/social system/ the future by gathering information about trends, processing this information, acting as regulators of information by disseminating it internally, and planning to address external developments to protect the organisation from environmental stress. Secondly, disposing information to the outside world, representing the organisation in the external environment.

Based on the above, the informational boundary spanning process is equated to the mirror and window functions of public relations, thus providing another theoretical pillar on which the roles of strategist, manager and technician rests.

### 7.2.2 Environmental scanning theory

'Scanning' was first conceptualised by Aguilera (1967) as the way in which managers studied the environment. Perhaps more than any other factor, the environment affects organisational strategy and managerial decision making (Duncan, 1972; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; King & Cushman, 1994:16). Whether environmental changes have positive or negative consequences depends almost entirely on the speed, accuracy and interpretation of the information, the communication regarding changes and the rapid internal reorientation of the organisation (King & Cushman, 1994:16). It is therefore important to incorporate the effects of environmental changes into corporate decision making (Jain, 1997:10).

Environmental scanning can be regarded as the “first step in the ongoing chain of perceptions and actions leading to an organisation’s adaptation to its environment.” (Hambrick, 1981:299; Bourgeois, 1980; Phillips & Calantone, 1994; Robbins & De Cenzo, 1998). It is a process in which an organisation learns about events and trends in the external environment, establishes relationships between them, and considers the main implications for problem definition and decision making.

There are two distinct approaches to environmental scanning: the ‘outside-in’ or macro approach and the ‘inside-out’ or micro approach (Engledow & Lenz, 1985). Successful organisations plan from the outside in — not from the inside out — because the environment shapes the future of the organisation. The role of the strategist is based on the ‘outside-in’ approach to environmental scanning, assisting the organisation’s management in learning about trends, establishing relationships between them and considering the consequences for the organisation’s stakeholders and strategies. These activities can be likened to the mirror function of public relations or the information acquisition role of the boundary spanner. The roles of the manager and technician are based on the ‘inside-out’ approach, informing stakeholders and interest groups in the societal environment about the organisation’s values, policies and programmes. These activities can be likened to the window function of public relations or the information disposal role of the boundary spanner.

### 7.2.3 Stakeholder and issues management theory

Stakeholder theory focuses primarily on the actors in the organisation’s environment. The premise is that an organisation must of its own volition undertake to satisfy its key stakeholders. If it does not, a solution will be imposed upon it from the outside, by means of regulations and laws. This can be achieved by integrating boundary spanners into the strategy formulation processes, who interact with stakeholders and anticipate their concerns. Many organisations have public relations and public affairs managers who have a good working knowledge of stakeholder concerns, or marketing and production managers who have expertise in the needs of customers and suppliers (Freeman, 1984:74, 78-79).

In the inclusive stakeholder approach, managers have to undergo a major conceptual shift in how they see the organisation and its multilateral relationships with stakeholder groups. Stakeholders are no longer perceived as only those groups that management thinks have some stake in the firm but also those that themselves think they have such a stake (Freeman, 1984:24-25). In the opinion of the author, this necessitates the identification not only of stakeholders, but also of publics and activists that emerge around societal or organisational issues. The challenge of stakeholder management today is to identify primary stakeholders and assist them in achieving their objectives, but also to adapt to the needs of other stakeholders, publics and interest groups in society in order to achieve the classical ‘win-win’ situation.

Freeman (1984) calls for external affairs’ managers to take the responsibility for strategically managing the organisation’s stakeholders — managers who should be boundary spanners, possessing the so-called ‘soft skills’; people who excel in the management of values, perceptions, expectations and feelings; people who possess excellent communication skills; people who know how to listen (Freeman, 1984:26).

In addition to the identification and management of stakeholders, societal issues and trends are also to be monitored and analysed. The values and beliefs of key stakeholders are derived from broader societal influences, creating opportunities or threats to organisations’ revenue growth and profit prospects. Awareness of, and compliance with, societal attitudes can assist an organisation in avoiding restrictive legislation and being regarded as a ‘bad corporate citizen’ (Harrison & St John, 1998). A pro-active approach to issues management entails that an organisation anticipates strategic, social, public, ethical and other issues, and devise ways to prevent the problem from developing further (Sturdvant & Vernon-Wortzel, 1990:53-54).

The author suggests that a PR practitioner in the role of the strategist is ideally positioned to be an ‘external affairs’ manager. That is, to scan the external (and internal) environment to identify and manage issues that impact the organisation and also to manage the needs of stakeholders — not only those with an equity stake who have formal voting power (the shareholders), but also those with an economic stake in the organisation (customers, suppliers and employees) as well as an influencer stake (special interest groups in society and the government) who have political power (Freeman & Reed, 1983).

A strategy should be in place for each stakeholder group — not only for stockholders, but also for groups such as consumer advocates, environmentalists, the media or any other affected by the organisation. Their values and expectations, key issues and willingness to expend resources helping or hurting the organisation on these issues must be understood.

The organisation therefore needs concepts and processes that provide integrated, strategic approaches for dealing with multiple stakeholders/publics on multiple issues. For each major strategic issue, the organisation must think through the effects on a number of stakeholders. For each major stakeholder group, managers responsible for that stakeholder relationship must identify the strategic issues that affect the stakeholder and must understand how to formulate, implement and monitor strategies for dealing with that group. Many organisations do it well with one stakeholder group.
(e.g., customers), but few have the processes needed to integrate a number of stakeholder concerns (Freeman, 1984:27).

It is suggested that a practitioner in the role of the manager develop public relations strategy (at the functional level) which will provide an integrated, strategic approach for dealing with multiple stakeholders on multiple issues. Furthermore, that a practitioner in the role of technician develop implementation strategy and PR activities to implement (functional) public relations strategy.

7.2.4 Strategy formulation theory

In developing strategy, Lynch (1997:21) distinguishes between the process, content and context within which strategy formulation takes place. (For a more detailed discussion, see Steyn 2002:129-133).

7.2.4.1 The context of strategy formulation

Content refers to the environment within which the organisation operates and develops its strategies. When managers make decisions, they do so based on a set of shared perceptions of the organisation and its environment. The latter can be conceptualised in different ways. Some authors depict it as a set of general components—e.g., technical, economic or social components—called the remote or macro or societal environment (Pearce & Robinson, 1997:15). Others see it as a set of cognitive maps (Duncan, 1972; Weick, 1969). Lenz & Engledow (1986) view the environment as being represented by a patterning of strategic issues. Van Wyk (in Spies, 1994) calls the macro, task and micro environment the decision-making environment. Mitroff (in Spies, 1994) includes the stakeholder environment, thus adding a behaviourist methodology to the procedure. Pearce & Robinson (1997:46) also mention the stakeholder approach to the environment.

For the purposes of this study, the environment is conceptualised as both a collection of stakeholders (Digman, 1990) and a patterning of strategic issues (Lenz & Engledow, 1986). The environment is the product of the decisions of strategic stakeholders and the publics/activists that arise around strategic issues. Furthermore, that a practitioner in the role of the consultant develops implementation strategy and PR activities to implement (functional) public relations strategy.

7.2.4.2 The content of strategies

Content refers to the substantive issues tackled in strategy formulation—specifically: what can you do and what is allowable? The different levels of strategy formulation typically refer to the content of strategies.

• Enterprise strategy: Each organisation has a societal-role or enterprise strategy, whether stated or not (Ansoff, 1977), it addresses questions such as why the organisation exists: what it attempts to provide to society: which sectors of the economy it forms part of: and how it functions in society (profit or non-profit). It also addresses the organisation’s relationships with the stakeholders in its environment, including the identification and analyses of stakeholder values and expectations (Dill, 1979:49). The enterprise strategy acts as a framework to guide the formulation of corporate policies and strategies in other areas (Digman, 1990:37). It is the opinion of the author that strategies at this level should be oriented towards legitimising the organisation’s role in society and building trust in its relationships with stakeholders/other interest groups in order to safeguard its reputation.

• Corporate strategy: is mainly concerned with defining the set of businesses that should form the company’s overall profile (most applicable to multi-business firms), and to unify and point them towards an overall goal (Jain, 1997:9). At this level, strategies tend to be financially oriented (Digman, 1990:38).

• Business unit strategy is the responsibility of the general manager of a business unit who must translate the statements of direction and intent generated at the corporate level into concrete objectives and strategies for individual business divisions (Jain, 1997:19). Strategy at this level usually covers a single product or a group of related products (Pearce & Robinson, 1997:6; Jain, 1997:9, 19) and is mostly marketing oriented. It focuses on how to compete in the product or market or industry segment (Digman, 1990:38).

• Functional strategy involves decisions on how to execute the organisation’s strategic plans (Pearce & Robinson, 1997:6). The major emphasis is on maximising resource productivity by capitalising on any possible synergies and distinctive competencies that the organisation may possess (Pearce & Robinson, 1997).

• At the operations strategy level, strategies are implemented. Key operating managers establish short-term objectives and implementation strategies that contribute to business and corporate-level goals. Operations strategies are needed to manage operating units and line areas in a cost-effective manner (Digman, 1990:38).

The PR function’s contribution is seen to take place mainly on three strategy levels:

• A PR practitioner in the role of strategist functions at the top management or macro or societal level of an organisation, making strategic inputs into the enterprise strategy.

• A PR practitioner in the role of manager functions at the meso or organisational or functional level of an organisation, developing functional (public relations) strategy.

• A PR practitioner in the role of technician functions at the macro or operational or implementation level of the organisation, developing implementation strategy.

7.2.4.3 The process of strategic management

Process is the method by which strategies are derived, referring to specific steps or phases through which strategies are formulated and implemented. The strategic management process indicates how the actions link together/interact as the strategy unfolds against a (changing) environment. It must be noted that the different phases are interactive and do not necessarily always occur in a strict order (Steyn, 2002:133). The author regards the role of public relations in this process as follows:

• Environmental analysis: The strategist scans the stakeholder and societal environment to obtain strategic information that is fed into the enterprise strategy.

• Strategic thinking and strategic planning: The contribution of the strategist is to interpret and synthesise information with regards to stakeholders and issues, informing top management of the consequences for organisational strategies and policies. Furthermore, to inform top management of the consequences of their behaviour on stakeholders and society. The manager (with inputs from the strategist) develops PR strategy and a strategic (PR) plan.

• Goal formulation, implementation and control: Implementation strategy and communication plans are developed and implemented by PR practitioners around goals that have been identified in the PR strategy phase by the manager. Control is exercised by both the PR manager (through evaluation of communication plans, campaigns and programmes) as well as by the PR strategist, whose responsibility it is to feed evaluation information back into the process at top management level.
7.3 The roles of strategist, manager and technician—a summary

The role of the PR strategist:
- is regarded as a strategic role at the top management/societal/environmental level. (In the strategic management literature, this is referred to as the macro level).
- is based on the outside-in approach to strategic management, conducting environmental scanning to gather information on stakeholders, publics and issues from the environment.
- is the information acquisition role of the boundary scanner, being part of the strategic team that adapts the organisation to the future.
- is the information processing role of the boundary scanner, which entails strategic thinking by interpreting information gathered with regards to its consequences for organisational strategies/policies and stakeholders.
- constitutes public relations’ inputs into the organisation’s strategy formulation processes -- resulting in a strategic contribution towards enterprise strategy, but also supporting corporate and business-unit strategy.
- is equated to the mirror function, consisting of scanning and monitoring relevant environmental developments/issues and anticipating their consequences for the organisation’s policies and strategies, especially with regard to the stakeholder and societal environment.

The (redefined) role of the PR manager is:
- a strategic role at the organisational or meso level. (In the strategic management literature, this is referred to as the functional level).
- (part of) the information disposal/external representational role of the boundary scanner, in portraying the organisation’s identity and values to the external environment.
- (one) part of the window function of public relations, developing public relations policy and strategy that results in messages portraying all facets of the organisation.
- to make strategic inputs by considering the consequences of issues/organisational strategies/behaviour on the stakeholders, deciding what must be communicated to solve the problems/capitalise on the opportunities presented. This strategic information provides the content of the functional (public relations) strategy. The corporate and business-unit strategies are also supported.
- based on the inside-out approach to strategic management, contributing to strategic thinking/planning by identifying core messages to be communicated to the stakeholders and societal environment.

The role of the PR technician:
- is an implementation role at the micro or programme level of the organisation. (In the strategic management literature, this is referred to as the operational level).
- is (one) part of the window function of public relations, developing implementation strategy and communication plans that result in portraying all facets of the organisation to the stakeholders and societal environment.
- is (part of) the information disposal/external representational role of the boundary scanner, in developing and implementing unique PR activities that portrays the organisation’s identity and values to the stakeholder and societal environment.
- based on the inside-out approach to strategic management, contributing to public relations planning by deciding how messages should be communicated to reach the strategic stakeholders/publics/interest groups.
- is to support the enterprise, corporate and business-unit strategies by aligning communication activities to the organisational mission and goals.

The roles of the strategist and (redefined) manager are regarded as strategic roles of the public relations function, while the technician is an implementation role.

In the next section, the conceptualisation of these three roles as described above will be measured empirically to determine whether the roles can be verified according to the expectations of South African chief executives.

8. THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

The aim of the doctoral research on which this paper is based was to determine CEO role satisfaction, measured as the gap between (normative) CEO expectations and CEO perceptions of the performance of the most senior practitioner responsible for the PR function in the South African organisation -- in terms of the role of the newly conceptualised PR strategist, the (redefined) PR manager and the (historic) PR technician. In this paper, only CEO (normative) expectations will be reported.

8.1 The SAMPLE

The population consisted of the CEOs of public and private companies, as well as tertiary educational institutions, (PR consultancies were excluded, as they were not considered relevant to the study.) For lack of a sampling frame, the membership lists of professional PR/communication associations such as PRISA (Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa), the IABC (International Association of Business Communicators), UNITECH (Association for Marketing and Public Relations Departments of Southern African universities and technicons) and SACOMM (Southern African Communication Association) were used to identify the accessible population. This implied a three-stage sampling process:

1. Selection of the chief executives of the above-mentioned organisations or institutions (Smith, 1988:76).
2. Selection of the (redefined) strategists and (newly conceptualised) PR practitioners belonging to professional associations; selecting secondary sampling units (organisations to which PR practitioners belonged); selecting the window function -- the chief executives of the above-mentioned organisations or institutions (Smith, 1988:76).

Since the above procedure produced a list of only 400 CEOs, a census rather than a sample was taken. Using the rule of thumb of four to five times as many observations as there are variables to be analysed, 100-125 realised questionnaires were required for statistical analysis. The self-administered questionnaire was distributed amongst CEOs by electronic mail—103 usable questionnaires resulted from the survey (a response rate of 26%).

8.2 Measurement

A measuring instrument was designed to collect the data. To measure the historic role of PR technician, the author constructed an index by developing new items, as well as adapting items developed by Groenewald (1998) and Broom (1982). In measuring the (redefined) PR manager and (newly conceptualised) strategist roles, the author constructed indices—most items were new, others were based on or adaptations of Groenewald (1998). A seven-point Likert scale was used to measure CEO expectations on 25 statements; 9 statements formed the index for measuring the role of PR strategist, 10 statements the role of PR manager and 6 statements the role of PR technician. According to Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black (1998), five or more variables should be included...
to represent each proposed factor if a study is being designed to assess a proposed structure.

8.3 data Analysis

Factor analysis was used as a deductive approach in hypothesis that the above three PR roles existed. According to Hair et al. (1998:97), factor analysis is most efficient when conceptually defined dimensions can be represented by the derived factors. If the ultimate goal is to obtain several theoretically meaningful factors or constructs, an oblique solution is appropriate—realistically, very few factors are uncorrelated. Principal axis factoring, also known as common factor analysis (Malhotra, 1996:65) was selected. Factors resulting from common factor analysis are based only on the common variance—with its more restrictive assumptions and use of only the latent dimensions (shared variance), common factor analysis is often viewed as more theoretically based (Hair et al., 1998). The programme SAS Proc Factor was used to rotate the factors to an Oblique Promax solution. The Scree and Re-order options were used in all the cases.

The results were evaluated according to the following decision rules:

- Factor loadings above 0.5 were identified, since they are generally considered practically significant (0.3 is considered to meet the minimum level). This guideline is applicable when the sample size is 100 or larger (Hair et al., 1998).
- Variables loading >0.35 on one or more of the other factors, were eliminated.

8.4 findings

8.4.1 Common Factor Analysis

In the first round, a Common Factor Analysis was conducted on all 25 variables. Three factors were extracted in terms of the mineigen criterion, as three Eigenvalues larger than one were obtained. The respective Eigenvalues were 7.49, 4.55 and 1.47.

The five variables that loaded lower than 0.5 on all the factors were deleted in the subsequent analysis. Since a variable with several high loadings is a candidate for deletion (Hair et al., 1998:113), three more variables that loaded >0.35 on one or more factors were also deleted. Although one variable (V46) loaded 0.38 on one other factor it was not eliminated, since the factor loading on its primary factor was relatively high (0.64). In the first round, eight variables with unsatisfactory loadings were thus deleted.

In round two of the analysis, a Common factor analysis (Promax rotation) was conducted on the 17 remaining variables. From this solution, three factors were again extracted in terms of the mineigen criterion as three Eigenvalues larger than one were obtained. The three Eigenvalues were 4.93, 4.19 and 1.41 respectively. The factor structure obtained from the three factor solution (17 variables) is indicated in Table 1.

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<tr>
<th>VARIABLE</th>
<th>FACTOR 1: Technician</th>
<th>FACTOR 2: Strategist</th>
<th>FACTOR 3: Manager</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V48</td>
<td>0.867</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V44</td>
<td>0.863</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V40</td>
<td>0.840</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V12</td>
<td>0.788</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V24</td>
<td>0.777</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V30</td>
<td>0.682</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V6</td>
<td>0.523</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V22</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.829</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V36</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.776</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V16</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.772</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V34</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.748</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V18</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.684</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V10</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.856</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V8</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.802</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V4</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.716</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V46</td>
<td>0.332</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.628</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(N=3 and R=Promax)

All remaining variables loaded >0.62 on their primary factor, except V6 that loaded 0.52. This was still an acceptable loading according to the decision rule of 0.5. The higher the score, the better the evidence that items in the instrument are measuring the same trait (Leedy, 1997:35). No items loaded > 0.35 on another factor (the decision rule). The only item that loaded relatively high in this regard, was V46 (loading 0.33 on Factor 1). The item was not deleted, since the loading on its primary factor was 0.64. The rotated factor solution in Table 1 was accepted as the final three factor solution, containing respectively 7, 5 and 5 items.

8.4.2 Reliability Coefficient (Cronbach’s Alpha)

To determine the internal consistency of the three factors, Cronbach’s Alpha coefficients were calculated on the indices representing each factor. There was only one item that threatened the internal stability, namely V6 under Factor 1: Technician. Since V6 was also the item with the lowest factor loading (0.52) on the final three factor solution, it was decided to eliminate this item. The Cronbach Alpha for Factor 1: Technician thereby increased to 0.894. All factor loadings for the final three factor solution was now > 0.62. According to Hair et al. (1998), factor loadings of 0.55 and above are significant in a sample of 100 respondents.

The internal stability on the variables representing the roles of technician, strategist and manager were regarded as sufficient, since 0.70 is generally regarded as the minimum Alpha coefficient which a factor should reach—see Table 2 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRONBACH ALPHA FOR THREE FACTORS (after V6 was deleted)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FACTOR 1: Technician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FACTOR 2: Strategist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FACTOR 3: Manager</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The three factors explained respectively 29%, 25% and 8% of the total variance, i.e. in aggregate 62% of the total variance. The common variance for the three factors was 47%, 40% and 13% respectively.
8.4.3 Interfactor Correlations

Interfactor correlations on the three factor solution are shown in Table 3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FACTOR 1</th>
<th>FACTOR 2</th>
<th>FACTOR 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TECHNICIAN</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>0.036</td>
<td>0.035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STRATEGIST</td>
<td>0.036</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>0.485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MANAGER</td>
<td>0.035</td>
<td>0.485</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is a negligible correlation between Factor 1 and Factor 2 (0.036), as well as between Factor 1 and Factor 3 (0.035)—it can therefore be said that the role of technician is not correlated to the role of manager or strategist. However, there is a substantial correlation between Factor 2 (strategist role) and Factor 3 (manager role), namely 0.485.

8.4.4 Two factors extracted as control measure

Because of the substantial correlation of 0.485 between Factor 2 (strategist role) and Factor 3 (manager role) as well as the fact that the Eigenvalues of Factor 3 was marginally > 1 (namely 1.41), it was decided to also extract two factors on the 17 remaining items representing the technician role combined perfectly into one (Factor 1) in the two factor solution. However, the three factor model does not represent a (marginally) better fit than the two-factor solution. The indices yielded are shown in Table 6.

8.4.5 Confirmatory factor analysis

In order to determine the preferred solution, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (using SAS Proc Callis) was carried out on the “clean” two- and three-factor structures obtained. The indices yielded are shown in Table 6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indices</th>
<th>Two factors</th>
<th>Three factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fit criterion</td>
<td>2.9583</td>
<td>2.6676</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)</td>
<td>0.7516</td>
<td>0.7640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GFI Adjusted for Degrees of Freedom (AGFI)</td>
<td>0.6806</td>
<td>0.6966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Root Mean Square Residual (RMR)</td>
<td>0.1199</td>
<td>0.1710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parsimonious GFI (PGFI)</td>
<td>0.6576</td>
<td>0.6685</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-square</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0(n &gt; Chi² = 0.0001) df = 119</td>
<td>298.7853</td>
<td>269.4294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-square</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df = 136</td>
<td>977.1058</td>
<td>977.1058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMSEA Estimate (90% CI)</td>
<td>0.1223</td>
<td>0.1119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to 0.1397</td>
<td>(0.105)</td>
<td>(0.0942)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probability of Close Fit</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECVI Estimate (90% CI)</td>
<td>3.7775</td>
<td>3.4869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2.2832 – 3.0291)</td>
<td>(2.3356 – 4.0390)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bentler’s Comparative Fit Index</td>
<td>0.7863</td>
<td>0.8212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal Theory Reweighted LS</td>
<td>283.7424</td>
<td>265.1819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-square</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akaike’s Information Criterion</td>
<td>60.7853</td>
<td>31.4294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bozdogan’s (1987) CAIC</td>
<td>-370.5864</td>
<td>-399.4242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schwartz’s Bayesian Criterion</td>
<td>-251.5864</td>
<td>-280.9424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McDonald’s (1989) Centrality</td>
<td>0.1412</td>
<td>0.4784</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bentler &amp; Bonett’s (1980) non-normed Index</td>
<td>0.7557</td>
<td>0.7956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bentler &amp; Bonett’s (1980) NFI</td>
<td>0.6942</td>
<td>0.7243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James, Mulaik &amp; Brett (1982)</td>
<td>0.6074</td>
<td>0.6337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parsimonious NFI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-Test of Wilson &amp; Hilferty (1931)</td>
<td>8.3545</td>
<td>7.2887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bollen (1986) Normed Index Rhoi</td>
<td>0.6505</td>
<td>0.6849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bollen (1988) non-normed Index Delta2</td>
<td>0.7905</td>
<td>0.8247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoelter’s (1983) Critical N</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two and Three factor solutions (N = 103)

The indices from the three-factor solution of the Confirmatory Factor Analysis represent a (marginally) better fit than the two-factor solution. However, the three factor model does not represent a ‘good’ fit on the data—it was accepted as a ‘reasonable’ fit. The residuals (DRMR and RMSEA) seemed somewhat high, both estimated well above the level of 0.05 which is accepted as the maximum for a ‘good’ fit. The three factors were: Factor 1 -- Role of the PR technician; Factor 2 -- Role of the PR strategist; and Factor 3 -- Role of the PR manager.
Indices that measured the three roles are shown in Table 7. Only the items in the final three factor solution are presented, in order of the highest to the lowest factor loadings for each factor.

Table 7: Measurement Indices

**Factor 1: The role of PR technician**
- V48 0.867 Write articles for the organisation’s publications.
- V44 0.863 Keep a media clipping service (clip articles that appeared in the media about the organisation).
- V40 0.84 Generate publicity e.g. write media releases.
- V12 0.788 Produce audio-visual materials for presentations.
- V24 0.777 Organise special events e.g. open houses or exhibitions or gala evenings.
- V30 0.682 Edit PR materials e.g. speeches or the annual report.

**Factor 2: The role of PR strategist**
- V22 0.829 Explain to top management the impact of their behaviour (obtained through research) on key external stakeholders (media, investors, communities).
- V36 0.776 Act as ‘early warning system’ to top management before issues erupt into crises.
- V16 0.772 Act as advocate for key external stakeholders by explaining their views to top management.
- V34 0.748 Reduce uncertainty in strategic decision making by interpreting the external environment to top management.
- V18 0.684 Initiate dialogue with pressure groups limiting the organisation’s autonomy, e.g. environmentalists or consumer advocates or legislators.

**Factor 3: The role of PR manager**
- V10 0.856 Take responsibility for the success or failure of corporate communication* plans.
- V8 0.802 Take responsibility for the success or failure of corporate communication* strategy.
- V4 0.716 Develop corporate communication* strategy which supports corporate strategy.
- V46 0.640 Manage the implementation of corporate communication* plans.
- V20 0.628 Monitor the performance of corporate communication* practitioners or sub-divisions.

*In the South African context, the term corporate communication is preferred

9. DISCUSSION

9.1 methodological considerations
The factor analysis fulfilled the following requirements:
- Hair et al (1998:98) recommend that a researcher not factor analyse a sample of fewer than 50 observations—preferably the sample size should be 100 or larger. The sample size in this study was 103.
- Initially, only items loading higher than 0.5 were considered. In the final factor solution, the remaining items loaded sufficiently high on all three factors (> 0.62), satisfying the criterion of >0.55 for a sample of 100 respondents (Hair et al., 1998).
- Behavioural indicators of role activities were sufficiently reliable for all three roles. The Cronbach Alpha or reliability coefficient was the following: Factor 1 -- Technician: 0.89; Factor 2 -- Strategist: 0.83 and Factor 3 -- Manager: 0.81.
- Hair et al. (1998:103) considers the Eigenvalue for establishing a cut-off most reliable when the number of variables is between 20 and 50— in this study there were 25 variables initially.
- Eigenvalues were above 1 for all three factors. Since the Eigenvalue measures the variance accounted for by a factor; the Eigenvalue-greater-than-one criterion assures that the common factors extracted define a certain level of variance among the variables. The cutoff rejects factors that do not account for at least the variance of one variable (Rummel, 1970:356).
- The total variance explained by the three factors were 62%, considered an acceptable percentage for the social sciences (Hair et al., 1998). The three factors respectively explained 29%, 25% and 8% of the total variance, i.e. in aggregate 62% of the total variance. The third (and last factor) accounted for 8% of the variance. (The fourth factor, which was not considered, accounted for 5.8% of the variance).
- The common variance explained by the three factors were 47%, 40% and 13% respectively.
- Several factor solutions with differing numbers of factors were examined before the structure was considered well defined. (Initially, a Principal Components analysis produced an unrotated structure—a Varimax rotation was also done, in order to investigate different factor structures).

9.2 limitations of the three factor solution
The limitations of the final three factor solution are seen to be the following:
- Although the Eigenvalues of Factor 1 was 4.93 and Factor 2 was 4.19, the third factor (role of the PR manager) produced an Eigenvalue marginally > 1, namely 1.42.
- The interfactor correlation of 0.49 between Factor 2 (role of PR strategist) and Factor 3 (role of PR manager) could be seen by some as too high, considering the strategist and manager to be conceptual components of the same empirical role. However, it can theoretically be explained by the fact that they are both management roles. Whereas in practice these roles might be played by the same person in a smaller organisation, this study provides empirical evidence that the strategist and manager might indeed be two different roles. In a bigger organisation, this might translate to two different people playing the role of PR strategist and PR manager.
- Although the three factor solution produced a (marginally) better fit than the two factor solution when subjected to a Confirmatory Factor Analysis, it cannot be considered a ‘good’ fit. The three factor solution was accepted by the author as a ‘satisfactory’ fit.

9.3 verification of the manager and technician roles
Another finding of the study was the empirical verification of the traditional PR roles (manager and technician) that emerged from the two factor solution, as reported by South African chief executives. The latter consisted of Factor 1: Role of PR strategist and PR...
manager combined, and Factor 2: PR technician. The conceptualisation of the role of PR strategist was based on a split of the traditional PR manager role into items that represented PR activities at the macro level (the strategist role) and those activities that took place on the meso or functional level (the manager role). Since the roles of PR strategist and PR manager combined perfectly into one factor in the two factor solution, the traditional view of only two empirical roles (PR manager and PR technician) can be said also to be supported in the South African environment. However, the three factor solution is still preferred as it showed a better fit, both empirically and conceptually.

10. CONCLUSION

This study conceptualised the role of the PR strategist as a strategic role at the top management or macro/societal level of the organisation, and the role of the PR manager as a role at the functional or meso level. The role of the PR technician, as conceptualised by Dozier (1984) and Broom & Smith (1979), is seen as a role at the micro or implementation level of the organisation. The most important findings of the study are firstly, the empirical support for the conceptualised role of a PR strategist, secondly, that chief executives expect their senior PR practitioners to play such a role; and thirdly, that an important new activity for the PR manager on the functional level was conceptualised and empirically verified—namely to develop a public relations strategy for the organisation that supports the corporate strategy.

It must be cautioned that no claim can be made to empirical verification of a new conceptual role based on one study only. More empirical research on the ‘split’ of the historical manager role into the role of PR strategist and PR manager need to be conducted, both in South Africa and abroad. The possibility that the third factor occurred by chance due to the design of the study or chance covariance in the data matrix, or other peculiarities of the sample, needs to be ruled out.

In spite of the caution expressed above, the findings merit further research for several reasons. An extensive investigation of the public relations as well as the strategic management literature preceded the empirical study. The role of strategist was conceptualised from both the public relations and strategic management literature. An attempt was also made to establish fit by investigating the strategic management literature to establish whether a need for such a role indeed exists at the top management level—theoretically, this was found to be the case.

Where most research on PR roles draw on self-reports from the perspective of PR practitioners, this study provided the perspective of the chief executive as the ‘role sender’—both theoretically and empirically. In light of the findings of the Excellence Study, this study made an important contribution with regards to the shared expectations that must exist between top management and senior PR practitioners as a prerequisite for achieving excellent communication in an organisation.

In conceptualising the role of the PR strategist, the study broadened the theoretical viewpoint of the field of public relations. The Excellence Study pointed out that in order to be excellent, an organisation must have a practitioner playing the role of PR manager (J Grunig, in J Grunig, 1992). This study posited that to be excellent, an organisation should also have a practitioner playing the role of PR strategist. In providing a description of the strategic role of the PR practitioner at the top management level, indicating the behavioural characteristics of the role, this study addressed a vacuum in the PR literature.

11. REFERENCES


• Steyn, B. (not completed). Determining CEO satisfaction with the role played by the most senior corporate communication practitioner—A gap analysis. Thesis to be submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Doctor Commerce (Communication Management), University of Pretoria.


Benita Steyn

After having been a PR practitioner for 16 years (and a diplomat for 13 years), Benita joined the Dept of Marketing and Communication Management at the University of Pretoria, South Africa in 1996. She has twice been awarded “Educator of the Year” by the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (1999 and 2001), and received a Bronze Quill Award from the SA Chapter of the IABC in 1999. In addition to numerous conference papers as well as academic and industry publications, Benita published a book “Corporate Communication Strategy” at the end of 2000, based on her masters degree. She is currently completing her doctorate on chief executives’ normative expectations for a PR manager.
Reflective public relations: A commentary on conceptual and empirical similarities and differences between South African roles research and European reflective research

by Benita Steyn APR and Gerhard Bütschi

ABSTRACT

The main problem addressed in this study is how to understand ‘reflective’ public relations. The authors propose that the conceptualisation, measurement and empirical verification of three public relations roles in South Africa (strategist, manager and technician) provide a basis for further theoretical and methodological exploration of ‘undefined’ (European) concepts identified in the EBOK study (such as the ‘reflective’ dimension/role of public relations). Furthermore, that the empirical findings of the strategist, manager and technician roles might be regarded as an (indirect) measurement of the European ‘reflective paradigm’ and its central concept ‘mutual reflection’ -- albeit unintended and theoretically imperfect.

1. INTRODUCTION TO A SOUTH AFRICAN RESEARCH PROGRAMME IN STRATEGIC PUBLIC RELATIONS MANAGEMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA (UP)

The research programme in strategic public relations management referred to was carried out at the University of Pretoria (UP) between 1997 and 2003. It was originally intended to be a replication of the IABC Excellence Study (Dozier, L. Grunig & J. Grunig, 1995), the idea planted by Prof Lanssa Grunig on the occasion of her visit to South Africa (SA) in 1996. In order to build on the seminal Excellence Study and obtain empirical findings for South Africa, a two-phase research programme was initiated at UP’s Department of Marketing and Communication Management in 1997. However, at this time it was decided not to replicate the Excellence Study as it had indeed been done by academics and/or public relations practitioners in many countries around the globe. Rather, the aim was to use its findings as a theoretical base for the conceptualisation of research aimed at investigating and finding solutions to public relations problems in the local context. Empirical research on the knowledge base of public relations practitioners and their shared expectations with top management was practically non-existent in South Africa.

Phase 1 of the UP research programme was completed by Groenewald (1998) with her research on the knowledge base of the public relations manager, determining the skills that respondents deemed important in their managerial positions. The most important findings were that public relations managers in South African organisations perceived management skills, strategic communication skills and management communication skills to be significantly more important than technical communication skills. However, the effectiveness of their training in management skills, strategic communication skills and management communication skills was significantly lower than in technical communication skills. Based on her findings, Groenewald (1998) suggested further research on a strategic role for the public relations manager; investigating the nature and activities of such a role.

Phase 2 of the UP research programme, which focused on the shared expectations between top management and the public relations manager, consists of two separate studies. In the first, De Beer (2001) investigated PR managers’ perceptions of senior management’s expectations with regard to excellent communication in South African organisations. Some of her findings were the following:

- It is the perception of top communicators that senior management expects them to make a strategic contribution to organisational decision-making by playing the public relations manager role.
- Top communicators do not perceive reporting lines to the chief executive officer (CEO) or any other manager to be very good indicators of their strategic contribution to decision-making.
- Top communicators can make a bigger strategic contribution in large public relations departments, where technical tasks can be delegated.

The second study in Phase 2 is a doctoral thesis (Steyn, not completed) of which some of the findings are reported in another paper presented at this 10th Bled Symposium (Steyn, 2003). This thesis touches upon both the prerequisites for ‘excellent’ communication in an organisation, as reported by the Excellence Study. Firstly, it explores the knowledge base of the practitioner insofar as it conceptualises the role of the public relations strategist and redefine the historical role of the manager. Secondly, by means of a quantitative study, it addresses shared expectations by determining chief executive (CEO) normative role expectations, as well as CEO perceptions of the role performance of their organisation’s most senior public relations practitioner.

To obtain more detail on the conceptualisation (1997-98) and the empirical research findings (1999) with regards to the South African roles research, it is recommended that another paper in this conference proceedings be read, titled “A conceptualisation and empirical verification of the ‘strategist’, (redefined) ‘manager’ and ‘technician’ roles of public relations” (Steyn, 2003).

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Two problems are addressed in this paper: Firstly, the lack of publication of international perspectives inter alia on the (changing) purpose of public relations; and secondly, how to understand reflective public relations.

In the Bled Manifesto, Van Ruler & Vercic (2002:5) suggest that the discussion on the fundamentals of public relations should be globalised and a dialogue between continents be started in order to learn from one another. Terms used and the theoretical approaches to these different terms should be discussed to develop a global language. This presents a challenge in view of the fact that relatively little international research has been published from a
3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To enter the current debate between the US and Europe on 'reflective' public relations (as suggested by Vercic, Van Ruler, Bütschi & Rodin, 2001:381), by providing one view from the African continent.
2. To share research findings confined to national publications.
3. To analyse the meta-theoretical and conceptual framework for the three public relations roles (strategist, manager and technician), conceptualised and empirically verified in South Africa by Steyn (2000a; 2000b; 2000c; 2000d; 2002; 2003); Steyn & Puth (2000) -- conceptualised from literature in the public relations and strategic management domains. It will also point out the theoretical and empirical similarities and differences to research conducted on 'reflective' public relations in various European countries during the same time period - the latter based on literature from the public relations and sociology domains.
4. To analyse the meta-theoretical and theoretical approaches of the European research, with a view to discovering similarities and differences with the South African roles research.
5. To investigate the European social systems theory (Luhmann, 1995), the systemic public relations paradigm (Holmström, 1996; 1997) and the societal approach as suitable approaches for the South African study.
6. To compare and point out the similarities and differences between the 'mirror' and 'window' function of public relations as the concepts upon which the three South African roles are based (Steyn, 2000a; 2000d; Steyn & Puth, 2000:20-21) with 'mutual reflection' as the central concept of the reflective paradigm (Holmström, 1996; 1997; 2000).
7. To analyse the similarities and differences between the roles/dimensions identified by the EBOK project (Van Ruler, 2000:161; Van Ruler & Vercic, 2002:14; Van Ruler; Vercic; Rodin & Bütschi, 2001:174; Vercic et al, 2001:380); the four characteristics of communication management as a specialty (identified by Van Ruler & Vercic, 2003); and the three roles identified in South Africa by Steyn (2000b; 2000c; 2000d).

4. RESEARCH METHOD

The research is conducted by means of a literature study, with reference to publications of the following authors (see List of References):

• The EBOK research team: Prof Betteke van Ruler, Dr Dejan Vercic, Dr Gerhard Bütschi and Dr Bertil Flodin.
• Susanne Holmström from Roskilde University, Denmark.
• The late Niklas Luhmann, German sociologist.
• Benita Steyn from the University of Pretoria, South Africa.
• The commentary of Prof James Grunig and Prof Larissa Grunig from the University of Maryland, USA to the Bled Manifesto (in the BledCom 2002 conference proceedings).

5. DEFINITIONS

5.1 PUBLIC RELATIONS

The South African study is based on the following definitions of public relations:

• The First World Assembly of PR Associations, held in Mexico City in 1978, defined public relations as “the art and social science of analysing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organisational leaders, and implementing planned programmes of action which will serve both the organisation and the public interest” (Newsmag, Vanslyke Turk & Kruckeborg, 1996:4).
• Public relations is “a communication function of management through which organisations adapt to, alter, or maintain their environment for the purpose of achieving organisational goals” (Long & Hazelton, 1987:6).
• Public relations is “the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the publics on whom its success or failure depends” (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 1994).
• Public relations is concerned with “assisting organisations to both formulate and achieve socially acceptable goals, thus achieving a balance between commercial imperatives and socially responsible behaviour” (Kitchin, 1997:8).
• Public relations should be practised “to serve the public interest, to develop mutual understanding between organisations and their publics, and to contribute to informed debate about issues in society” (J Grunig, in J Grunig, 1992:9).

The European view on public relations is defined by the following:

• Holmström (1996:115) sees public relations as “relations to the public communication system”. In this view, social responsibility is the core of public relations practice - i.e. to solve or avoid conflict between organisational behaviour and the public perception of how socially responsible organisations should operate.
This is achieved through the process of mutual reflection - performing the reflective and expressive tasks of public relations.

- In a societal approach to public relations, Van Ruler & Vercic (2003) defines public relations as a strategic process of viewing an organisation from an ‘outside’ or public perspective. Vercic et al. (2001:373) regards it as a special concern for broader societal issues and approaches to any problem with a concern for implications of organisational behaviour towards and in the public sphere.

5.2 ROLE
Members of an organisation occupy different positions or ranks, each of which has a different role (J Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Role has been defined as “the patterns of behaviour or the every-day activities of a PR practitioner” by Katz & Kahn (1978) and as “the position in a given social structure, on the actor in relation with others, or on the activities of organisational members” (Biddle, in Toth & Trujillo, 1987:46).

5.3 STAKEHOLDERS AND PUBLICS
These two terms are often used synonymously -- however, in the context of the strategic management of an organisation’s communication, there are subtle differences. Individuals or groups are stakeholders when they are affected by the decisions of an organisation or if their decisions affect an organisation (Freeman, 1984). Stakeholders are normally seen as being passive, e.g. employees or members of the community/society. When they become aware of potential problems in the relationship with an organisation regarding specific issues, they can be described as active publics. If they actively start communicating about the problem, they are seen as active publics (J Grunig & Reppin, in J Grunig 1992:125).

5.4 INTEREST/ACTIVIST GROUPS
An interest or activist group is “a group of two or more individuals who organise in order to influence another stakeholder/public(s) through action that may include education, compromise, persuasion, pressure tactics, or force” (L Grunig, in J Grunig, 1992:504).

5.5 STRATEGIC ISSUES
Strategic issues are defined as “developments, events and trends viewed by decision makers as consequential because of the potential to impact an organisation’s strategy” (Ansoff, 1980; King, 1982; Dutton & Ottensmeyer, 1987). Strategic issues could range from a new competitive strategy necessitating fundamental changes in attitudes and behaviour, to downsizing, transformation, the acquisition of new businesses or shifting opinions/attitudes in the societal environment.

5.6 STRATEGY
Strategy could be seen as the thinking; the logic behind the actions (Robert, 1997:22). Drucker (1954) sees it as an indication of an organisation’s positioning for the future, deciding what should be done rather than how it should be done. Strategy requires choices—deciding what part of a strategy is to go on and how to deliver to whom (Porter, in Gibson, 1997).

5.7 COMMUNICATION PLANS
Communication plans put public relations strategy into practice - breaking down a set of intentions into steps, formalising them so that they can be implemented almost automatically (Digman, 1990).

5.8 SOCIETY
The totality of all social communication that can be expected (Luhmann, 1995).

5.9 PUBLIC SPHERE
The public sphere represents the perception of an overall, common perspective in civil society - a network of associations that institutionalise problem-solving discourses on questions of general interest inside the framework of organised public spheres (Jensen, 2000:67).

5.10 REFLECTION
Reflection is the ability of a social system to see itself in relation to other social systems and to act on the basis of this recognition to survive in the long term - developing restrictions and co-ordinating mechanisms in its decision-making processes with regard to other social systems (Luhmann, 1995:144).

5.11 SYMBOLIC COMMUNICATION MEDIUM
This term refers to preformed social standards or norms that exist within each social system e.g. money in the economic system, power in the political system, law in the legal system. A symbolic communication medium eases communication within its own system but is blind to the medium of another social system (Luhmann, 1995).

5.12 PUBLIC COMMUNICATION SYSTEM
This new functional system is an auxiliary structure for communication in the societal system. Although there is a perception of a collective rationality within this system, it consists of a collection of forums where different world-views are competing. It is not defined by organisations, but by negotiating institutions such as non-profit organisations or the mass media (Holmström, 1996).

5.13 SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY
In social systems theory, social responsibility is regarded as the symbolic medium of the public communication system. In the new social order, social responsibility has replaced the law as the regulating mechanism and plays a major role in adapting social systems to each other (Holmström, 1996).

6. SOUTH AFRICAN ROLES RESEARCH
In this section, the meta-theoretical and conceptual framework for the three public relations roles (strategist, manager and technician), conceptualised and empirically verified in South Africa, is analysed with a view to discovering similarities and differences with the European research.

In the South African context, the focus of the comparison is the roles research conducted by Steyn (2000a; 2000b; 2000c; 2000d; 2002); Steyn (2003); Steyn (not completed); Steyn & Puth (2000). The problem addressed by this research programme is the changing role of business in society; the changing purpose of public relations; the perception that public relations is not seen to make or capitalise on the opportunity presented by the issue (Steyn & Puth, 2000:63).
a meaningful contribution to strategic decision making, and the perception that top management is not satisfied with the role performance of their senior public relations practitioners.

The research objectives for the South African study was inter alia to explore the purpose of public relations; to conceptualise a strategic role for public relations at the top management level; and to quantitatively measure CEO normative role expectations, as well as their perceptions of role performance of the most senior public relations practitioner in the organisation.

6.1 META-THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

In redefining the purpose of public relations by conceptualising the role of the public relations strategist at the top management level, the researcher synthesised the following seven meta-theoretical approaches to form the framework of the study (Steyn, 2003):

- The dialogic approach to communication, where communication is not seen as a one-way transmission of messages, but rather a two-way reciprocal encounter between the participants. Both parties have the opportunity to express themselves and to interpret each other’s messages (Steinberg, 1989:1, 16-17, 41; Gadamer, 1985).
- The open systems approach to organisational effectiveness, maximised through the process of strategic management. In this approach the organisation strives to balance its mission - what it is, what it wants to be, and what it wants to do - with what the environment will allow or encourage it to do (J Grunig & Hunt, 1984:94-95).
- The ecological approach to public relations, where public relations is postured as a boundary spanning function that mediates the organisational/environmental relationship. The ideal outcome of public relations interventions in this approach is an adapted organisation (Everett, 1993:180-182; Scott, 1987:91).
- The corporate social responsibility/responsiveness approach to strategic management assume that corporate behaviour should conform to prevailing social norms, values and expectations (Sethi, in Carroll, 1996). “In the long run those who do not use power in a manner that society considers responsible, will tend to lose it” (Davis, in Stoner, 1978).
- The corporate community approach (as a new theory of the firm), where management’s role is to facilitate joint problem solving among corporate stakeholders -- because stakeholder collaboration is the key to creating economic wealth (Halal, 2000).
- The new institutional approach to organisation, where society at large is viewed as the source of concepts, professional roles, rules, standards, expectations, policies and strategies in order to gain societal legitimization (Rumelt, Schendal & Teece, 1994:35-36).
- The excellence approach to public relations and communication management (J Grunig, 1992; Dozier et al, 1995:11-17), where public relations is seen to contribute most to organisational effectiveness when (i) being practised on the macro, meso and micro organisational level; and (ii) when focusing on strategic constituencies which most threaten the organisation’s survival (i.e. strategic stakeholders, publics and activist groups).

6.2 PARADIGMS, THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND CONCEPTUALISATION

The study is grounded in three disciplines: public relations (PR), strategic management and marketing. In each discipline, a specific paradigm is relevant to the study. 'Paradigm' is regarded by the researcher as a scientific world-view (J Grunig, in Botan & Hazelton, 1989:24; Du Plooy, 2001:19; Babbie, 2001:4, 42, 51; Littlejohn, 1992:28).

Figure 1 presented on the next page summarises the paradigms, theoretical framework and conceptualisation of the South African study.

6.2.1 Public relations

Over the last quarter of a century, the roles paradigm has been very relevant in the field of public relations, if not the dominant paradigm during the eighties. The central concept of this paradigm is public relations role. Public relations roles theory has been built on two empirical concepts: the manager role and the technician role (Broom, 1982; Dozier, 1984).

Practitioners in the manager role make communication policy decisions and are involved in all public relations decision making. They frequently use research to plan or evaluate their work, and counsel management (J Grunig & Hunt, 1984). They are held accountable for public relations programme outcomes—they view themselves and are viewed by others in the organisation as public relations/communication experts. Public relations managers facilitate communication between management and publics, and conceptualise and direct public relations programmes (J Grunig, in J Grunig, 1992:19). Public relations technicians do not take part in strategic decision making or conduct research, but provide the communication and journalistic skills needed to implement PR programmes.

(see Fig.1)

Public relations role is one of the major concepts measured in the South African study. Since the public relations literature indicate an emerging third role (Dozier & Broom, 1995; Wright, 1995; Van Ruler, 1997; Toth, Serinis, Wright & Emig, 1998), the researcher conceptualised three roles for the public relations practitioner (the strategist, manager and technician), based on:

- Van Riel (1995:2), who views the contribution of public relations to the achievement of organisational goals as successfully performing the mirror and window function. Van Riel describes the 'mirror' function as the monitoring of relevant environmental developments and the anticipation of their consequences for the organisation’s communication policy. For the purpose of the South African roles study, the researcher broadened the construct mirror function to the ‘monitoring of relevant environmental developments and the anticipation of their consequences for the organisation’s policies and strategies, especially with regard to relationships with stakeholders and other interest groups in society’. The researcher views these activities as the role of the public relations strategist (Steyn, 2000a; Steyn & Puth, 2000; Steyn, not completed).
- The window function is described by Van Riel (1995:2) as the preparation and execution of a communication policy, resulting in messages that portray all facets of the organisation in a lucid and appealing way. For the purpose of this study, the researcher broadened the construct window function to add strategy to policy and leaves out ‘in a lucid and appealing way’ (for the latter smacks of asymmetry). The construct window function is therefore seen as ‘the preparation and execution of a communication policy and strategy, resulting in messages that portray all facets of the organisation in a transparent way’ (Steyn, 2000; Steyn & Puth, 2000; Steyn, not completed).

The researcher views the activities executed in performing the window function as being twofold: those activities performed by practitioners in the role of the public relations manager (developing a public relations strategy, policy and strategic communi-
### A SYNTHESIS OF META-THEORETICAL APPROACHES

- Dialogic approach to communication
- Open systems approach to organisational effectiveness
- Ecological approach to public relations
- Corporate social responsibility/responsiveness approach to strategic management
- Corporate community approach as a new theory of the firm
- New institutional approach to organisation
- Excellence approach to public relations and communication management

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### MAJOR CONCEPT

Integration of (1) SATISFACTION and (2) ROLE = ROLE SATISFACTION

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Source: Steyn, B. (not completed)
cational plan for the organisation) and those activities performed by the public relations technician (implementing the public relations strategy by means of communication plans, programmes and campaigns).

- J Grunig (in J Grunig, 1992:3); Holtzhausen (1995), who see public relations as being practised on three organisational levels in order to contribute the most to effectiveness: on the macro level, also referred to in strategic management as the top management or societal level (the role of the strategist); on the meso level, also referred to as the functional or divisional level (the role of the manager); and on the micro level, also referred to as the implementation or operational level (the role of the technician).

6.2.2 Strategic management

Strategy has been an important concept in the field of strategic management, ever since the economic historian Chandler (in Narayanan & Nath 1993) first articulated the notion in scholarly circles in the sixties. According to Lynch (1997:21), the central concepts of the strategy paradigm are the process, content and context of strategy formulation.

Context refers to the environment within which strategy formulation takes place. Pearce & Robinson (1997:15) differentiates between the societal, task and industry segments of the environment, but also mentions the stakeholder environment. Lenz & Engledow (1986) regard the environment as a patterning of strategic issues. For the purpose of the South African research, the environment was conceptualised as a collection of stakeholders and a patterning of strategic issues (in the societal environment). Information on the organisation’s stakeholders and issues are gathered by means of environmental scanning.

Strategic management theory indicates two boundary spanning roles: the first is based on the systems theory concept of (information) inputs to the organisation and the second with (information) outputs from the organisation. These two roles corresponds with Adams’ (1976) boundary spanning roles of acquisition and disposal, and Aldrich & Herker’s (1977) information processing and external representation roles. The role of the strategist is founded on the boundary spanning roles of information acquisition and processing (information inputs to the organisation) - the so-called outside in approach to strategic management. The manager and technician are founded on the information disposal or external representation role (information output from the organisation) - the so-called inside-out approach to strategic management.

Content of strategies refer to the different levels of strategy formulation. Ansoff (1977) sees the enterprise level strategy as addressing questions with regard to the organisation’s role in society, while Dill (1979:49) sees it as being concerned with the organisation’s relationships with stakeholders. In the view of the researcher, strategies at this broadest level should be oriented towards legitimising the organisation’s position in society and building trust in relationships with stakeholders/other interest group in society in order to safeguard its reputation. While corporate strategy is financially oriented, business-unit strategy is marketing oriented, focusing on the organisation’s competitive position (Digman, 1990). Functional strategy has to do with maximising resource productivity (Pearce & Robinson, 1997). At the operational level, strategies are implemented (Digman, 1990:38).

In the opinion of the researcher, the contribution of public relations to organisational effectiveness lies in making inputs into, and taking part in formulating, enterprise strategy (the role of the strategist) as well as formulating public relations strategy (the role of the manager). In addition, the public relations function supports the implementation of corporate and business-unit strategy, but does not assist in the formulation thereof. A practitioner in the role of the technician implements the public relations strategy and also supports the implementation of the corporate and business strategies.

The process of strategic management refers to the specific phases through which strategies are formulated and implemented. The steps include environmental analysis and strategic thinking (the role of the public relations strategist), strategic planning and goal formulation (the role of the manager), and implementation (the role of the technician). Control is normally practised by the manager (Steyn, 2003).

6.2.3 Marketing

The marketing paradigm relevant to the study is customer satisfaction. The gap theory model states that customer satisfaction is measured by the gap between the customer’s expectations of a product/service and the customer’s perceptions of the performance of the product/service (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985). The major concept of the South African study namely (CEO role) satisfaction was borrowed from marketing and measured as the gap between CEO role expectations and CEO perceptions of the role performance of the most senior public relations practitioner.

6.3 RESEARCH METHOD AND FINDINGS

In the South African study, CEO normative role expectations and CEO perceptions of the role performance of the most senior public relations practitioner in the organisation were measured in terms of the roles of public relations strategist, manager and technician. A questionnaire operationalising the three roles was distributed by means of electronic mail to the 400 chief executives of organisations whose public relations practitioners belonged to the four professional public relations/communication associations in South Africa (a census). A response rate of 26% resulted in 103 usable questionnaires. The data was subjected to a Cronbach Alpha to test the reliability of the questionnaire. Hypothesis testing as well as a Common factor analysis was also conducted. The latter indicated three factors, corresponding with the conceptualised roles of strategist, manager and technician.

The statement on the questionnaire with the highest average expectation (6.5 on a scale of 1 - 7) was to “Develop corporate communication strategy which supports corporate strategy”. When asked to evaluate their most senior public relations practitioner on a scale of 0 - 10, the average obtained was 5.8. Content analysis on an open question to CEOs with regards to the most important reason for their dissatisfaction with the most senior practitioner indicated that the latter was reactive and did not play a strategic role.

6.4 CONCLUSION

The meta-theoretical, theoretical and conceptual framework of the South African roles study discussed above, as well as its findings, will serve as the data for the comparison with the European reflective research.

7. EUROPEAN RESEARCH ON REFLECTION

7.1 META-THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND THE THEORIES GENERATED

In this section, the meta-theoretical and theoretical approaches
of the European research is analysed, with a view to discovering similarities and differences with the South African research.

Holmström (1996:2) is of the opinion that public relations theory should be anchored within the social sciences generally, and in the field of sociology particularly. (This is often the case in European countries such as Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands). The rationale is that public relations as a professional practice had its origins in pluralistic, democratic societies during the previous century and should be examined in connection with developments in the structures and processes of society. The actual focus of public relations in such an approach would be on the conflicts between the different interests of society.

7.1.1 Niklas Luhmann's social systems theory as meta-theoretical approach

Holmström (1997:26,30) regards Luhmann as the most significant representative of systems theory's sociological development today. Luhmann (1995:xiv) has developed a theoretical framework for a description of modern society as a complex system of communications that has differentiated itself horizontally into a network of interconnected social subsystems. These subsystems observe and evaluate everything from their own logic and create an image of the world from their own perspective.

Luhmann's contribution to systems theory in social science is his view that systems can simultaneously be open and closed. That is, they are normatively closed with regard to their own worldview and rationale, but are open with regards to information on how they can operate most efficiently in relation to this rationale (Holmström, 1996:63). Because a system is closed, it cannot communicate with its environment, but it can observe its environment and collect information for inner-system communication. A system can only see that which is meaningful to itself and defines the information that is important and necessary for its survival. Systems thus have meaning boundaries, differentiating between that which makes sense inside and outside the system (Holmström, 1996:59).

When a system observes its environment, it is not an exact reflection but an internal construction of the environment external to the system (Holmström, 1996:65).

From a functionalist, systems-oriented position, Luhmann's (1995) main concern is how systems maintain their boundaries. He does not make any normative or moral decisions on what is good or bad, but merely analyses how society functions. In contrast with his fellow countryman Habermas, he does not believe that social integration is an ideal goal for society, but rather sees it as a risk to society because integration threatens system boundaries. Luhmann criticises Habermas's consensus-oriented discourse ethics as a "hopelessly inadequate response to the complex issues that arise in highly differentiated postindustrial societies" (Luhmann, 1995:xiv).

In modern societies, most social systems cluster in functional systems (Luhmann, 1995) - i.e. social communication networks oriented towards different functions in society e.g. politics, law, science, economics and the news media. Each functional system has its own world-view and its perceptions of its own legitimacy, role and responsibility in society. Each also has its own symbolic communication medium (preformed social standard or norm) e.g. money in the economic system, power in the political system, law in the legal system, information in the mass media system, belief in the religious system, truth in the scientific system and love in the family system. Although these symbolic media ease communication within the system, they are blind to other media and thus obstruct interaction between systems because reason is rooted in the logic of each social system. A common framework of understanding is therefore not possible and the systems continuously have to adapt to each other through negotiation (Holmström 1997:34).

In an increasingly complex society, there is a trend toward self-regulation to resist regulation by external systems such as the government. A prerequisite for self-regulatory behaviour is to take other systems in the environment into account. This is only possible through reflection within the system, referring to the ability of a system to understand itself as the environment for other systems. Reflection is an alternative form of regulation, effective only where social systems continuously adapt to each other through negotiation and mutual control (Holmström, 1997:32).

A new functional system called the 'public communication system' is emerging. Holmström (1996:85) regards this system as an auxiliary structure for communication in the societal system. The public communication system is not defined by institutions (such as ethical commissions or the editorial departments of the mass media) nor by being publicly accessible. For instance, advertising is in the public domain but not part of the public communication system. What is included in this system is negotiating institutions such as councils, commissions, etc. (non-profit organisations), as well as the mass media. Although there is a perception of a collective rationality within this system, in reality it consists of a collection of forums where different world-views are competing.

Holmström (1996:86) sees social responsibility as the symbolic medium of the public communication system. Social systems perceive society and thus the concept of social responsibility from their own perspectives. Social responsibility could therefore never be an all-embracing norm within society but is formed according to whatever symbolic medium (money, truth, law, etc.) it is coupled to. In the new social order, social responsibility has replaced the law as the regulating mechanism and plays a major role in adapting systems to each other (Luhmann, in Holmström 1997:26,30-32). In such instances, legal sanctions are supplemented by sanctions from other social systems.

Social responsibility is based on a central concept of social systems theory called reflection - a specific social communication pattern which opens up the possibility of seeing conflicts between different interests in society as productive dynamics in a broader perspective. This view takes into consideration more values than only the economic e.g. social, environmental and ethical values (although based on an economic rationale). Such considerations produce the realisation that other systems perceive the world from different perspectives -- that the views of one’s own system are only one amongst many. This broader perspective finds expression in modern organisations in concepts such as multi-stakeholder dialogue, ethical programmes, broader value orientations, the triple bottom line and symmetrical communication (Holmström, 2002:9). It includes 'extra-economic' themes formerly seen to be outside the boundaries of business organisations, but now firmly on the corporate agenda.

Reflection thus requires that the difference between system and environment is introduced into the system, trying to understand how (other) systems produce other perceptions of reality and respecting those differences (Holmström, 2002:4). Systems negotiate and try to find a platform for mutual consideration by forming partnerships and trying to find compromises. Through reflection a self-understanding is produced in relation to other systems in the environment -- the system sees itself in the larger societal context. It recognises that by creating problems for others it could create
problems for itself in the long term and therefore should show consideration to others (Holmström, 1996:68). Reflection involves the exercise of self-restriction by a system in order to survive in the long-term. In practice this manifests itself in environmental/social audits, certifications, etc.

Reflection is an evolved capability which can foresee potential conflicts between social systems, evaluate/assess their consequences and propose corrective behaviour within the system (Holmström, 1996:68) — i.e. the practice of voluntary self-control, which implies a larger mutual toleration of differences and diversity. Reflection however introduces risk into the system since it may raise doubt about the system’s own rationality, its reason for being and its social boundaries (Holmström, 2002:5).

The ultimate objective of reflection is to generate the social trust which, to an increasing extent, is required for interaction between all social systems (Holmström, 1997:34). Trust does not have its own functional system but is present in all symbolic media (Holmström, 1996:89). In a highly complex society, social regulation is increasingly delegated from the government to social systems and achieved through reciprocal adjustments, employing reflection as a principle of social action. When there is a high level of complexity in interactions, it is difficult to predict the behaviour of other systems. In such situations, uncertainty (as well as risk) increases. Traditionally the law has been the ‘safety strategy’ in situations of uncertainty. However, trust/mistrust is increasingly acting as an equivalent.

In a self-regulated social order built on the concepts of social responsibility and trust, social systems require mutual (reciprocal) reflection from each other — consisting of a reflective task (furthering reflection within the focal social system) and an expressive task (furthering reflection on the focal system within social systems in the environment). The intention of mutual reflection is not to reach a common perspective or mutual understanding/norms/values (the central tenet of Habermas’ view). Rather, it is to prevent mistrust by obtaining ‘consent on dissent’ - to at least allow social systems to exist side by side if they cannot reach reconciliation (Holmström, 1997:35,37).

In the social systems view, an organisational system enters the public sphere representing its own interests. It is not considered unethical to practise corporate social responsibility with the organisational system’s own long-term interest in mind — rather, it is considered functional behaviour. A business system therefore practises social responsibility (e.g. pays attention to pollution and environmental issues) to secure a profit and not because it is for the common good (Holmström, 1997).

7.1.2 The social systemic reflective paradigm: a sociological theory for public relations

Based on Luhmann’s social systems perspective as set out above, Holmström (1996, 1997:24) developed a sociological theory for public relations that she calls the functional, reflective or cognitive paradigm of public relations.

7.1.2.1 Social responsibility as the core of public relations practice

Organisational systems are being challenged to take on a broader social responsibility than the traditional considerations of law and economics. Holmström (1997:25, 76) is of the opinion that social responsibility should be the core of public relations practice — solving or avoiding conflict between organisational behaviour and the public perception of how socially responsible organisations should operate. Public relations is to act as a co-ordinating mechanism, interpreting and mediating between the different symbolic media of social systems (e.g. money, power and trust). In acting as a ‘transformer’ between systems, public relations increases mutual reflection within the organisational system and ensures that the organisation imposes self-control — thereby obtaining public trust.

Holmström thus defines public relations as relations to the public communication system. In deciding whether a relation is ‘public’ depends on whether it refers to the regulating mechanism of social responsibility. Public relations plays an important role in interactions with all social systems in the environment, i.e. employees, consumers, customers, politicians, the mass media. All these social systems interact with the system of public communication which can be conceived as a kind of market for public trust (Holmström, 1996:94).

Within a social systemic interpretation of public relations, reflection is probably the most significant concept since it allows a system to adjust to its blind spots (Holmström, 1996:64). This is however only possible when public relations practices mutual reflection i.e. assists organisations with both the reflective as well as the expressive task (Holmström, 1996:97-101).

7.1.2.2 Mutual reflection as public relations’ most important task

Reflective task of public relations

According to Holmström (1996:97), the reflective task of public relations is to act as a sensor; spanning the boundary between the focal system (the organisation) and its environment. Public relations reflects on where the organisation has set its boundaries and assists the organisation in considering the different meaning boundaries of other systems. Public trust cannot be achieved by simply changing outward communication to signal a socially responsible frame of reference. An organisation has to behave accordingly and practice self-regulation/restriction if it wants to be seen as socially responsible and thereby gain the public trust. In so doing, it can avoid restrictive legislation or sanctions from other social systems. The motive in this view is functional, not ethical - it is in the organisation’s own best interests to do so.

The specific task of public relations in inward communication (the reflective task) is the following (Holmström, 1996:98):

- to select information from the public communication system on what is considered socially responsible behaviour in the public sphere and transmit it to the organisation;
- to encourage organisational members to balance their behaviour in relation to the expectations of public opinion - thereby deserving public trust and earning social acceptance.

The reflective task is inherent in the Danish Association of Public Relations’ definition of public relations (in Holmström 1996:98): “To adjust a company’s policies and functions to public demands on the basis of an assessment of the company’s reputation.”

Expressive task of public relations

The self-image of the focal system (the organisation) that it is behaving socially responsible and is trustworthy must be translated into an outward image. Public relations thus has an expressive task in interaction with the public communication system i.e. to provide images of reality for the processes of public communication. These images are transmitted by different means, from telephone conversations and media statements to speeches and brochures (Holmström, 1996:99).
The specific task of public relations in outward communication (the expressive task) is the following (Holmström, 1996:99):

- to create and provide regular, widely distributed information (based on reflection) on behalf of the organisation, for use in the processes of public communication.
- to ensure that the public communication system operates with a socially responsible image of the organisation.
- to help to strengthen public trust in the organisation (and thus interaction with relevant systems in the environment) and thereby achieve social acceptance for the organisation.
- to attempt to achieve greater understanding, empathy and support in those public spheres that the organisation is in contact with or wishes to be in contact with.

In the social systemic paradigm, the purpose for being understood in the public sphere is cognitive agreement and not normative understanding.

According to Holmström (1996), public relations today is practised mainly in its expressive form, where it reflects only on the basis of the organisation’s own logic—i.e. it attempts to influence the environment from the organisation’s own frame of reference. Holmström refers to this as 1st order observation. It is only in practising 2nd order observation, i.e. mutual reflection, that public relations assists in restricting the organisation’s operations out of consideration for the survival and development opportunities of other systems in the environment (Holmström, 1996).

7.1.3 Societal or public approach to public relations as a meta-theoretical approach

Kuckelhaus (in Van Ruler & Vercic, 2003:14) describes three approaches to communication management: product oriented, marketing oriented and societally oriented. She regards the societal or macro approach — where the orientation is not the (business) organisation itself, but its place in society — as the only possible approach to public relations theory building in the 21st century. This is indeed the approach used in Germany and, according to Van Ruler & Vercic (2003:12), also in the Netherlands and Scandinavian countries.

In the societal approach, public relations brings a distinct mode of explanation or way of thinking about organisations to the strategic decision making table—'a special concern for broader societal issues and approaches to any problem with a concern for implications of organisational behaviour towards and in the public sphere' (Vercic et al, 2001:373). This concern is implicit in definitions of public relations as 'relationship management', as 'communication management', as 'reputation management', etc.

Nessman (in Moss, Vercic & Warnaby, 2000:212-225) explains public relations as working 'in public, with the public and for the public' i.e. in the public sphere. This adds the analytical dimension that European public relations is concerned with issues and values that are considered publicly relevant. In this approach, public relations serves a democratic function much as journalism does, as they both contribute to a free flow of information and its meanings, as well as to the development of the public sphere (Van Ruler & Vercic, 2003:15).

The issue of societal legitimacy and legitimation is one of the central concepts of public relations in Europe. Legitimacy as used here is not a moral or ethical principle but must rather be seen as what is good and justifiable for members of society. Van Ruler & Vercic (2003) regard an organisation as being legitimate as long as there is no public discourse concerning its legitimation. Holmström (2000) sees legitimacy as a precondition for corporate social acceptance.

Public relations in this approach is therefore a strategic process of viewing an organisation from an 'outside' perspective. Its primary concerns are an organisation’s inclusiveness, thus preserving its licence to operate (Van Ruler & Vercic, 2003).

7.1.4 Reflective communication management: a theory generated from the societal approach

Van Ruler & Vercic (2003:12) developed a communication theory on organisation where people are viewed as reflective humans being engaged in a continuous social process of constructing society; and organisations are viewed as institutions that construct their societal legitimacy in an ongoing reflective communication process. The reflective communication management theory is based on a synthesis of the societal approach to public relations; the constructivist approach to communication and organisation; the institutional approach to organisation; and a reflection-in-action approach to management (Van Ruler; personal communication, 4 Dec. 2002).

These authors distinguish between the (i) economic role of organisations as the meso (group) and the micro (interpersonal) level of communication among organisational members; between the organisation and its publics in order to become legitimate and (ii) the societal role as the macro level of societal legitimation. The macro role is the basis for the meso and micro roles in the 21st century Western economic order (Van Ruler & Vercic, 2003:21).

In an effort to clarify the concept of communication management, Van Ruler & Vercic (2003:7) combined views of communication with views of organisation and management, and thereby discovered four different theoretical approaches to communication management:

- The information model focuses on the dissemination of information to target groups to enlighten them about the organisation’s plans and decisions. Since the most widely used channels to inform the public are the mass media, this approach can be seen as ‘broadcasting management’.
- The persuasive model focuses on the persuasion of target groups to accept the organisation’s view on relevant issues. J Grunig & Hunt (1984) call this the asymmetrical public relations model where only the public has to alter their view, but not the organisation.
- The relationship model focuses on communication processes between parties (and not on the communication processes towards publics). The aim of a relationship is the creation of consensus on important issues to avoid conflict and assure cooperation.
- The discursive model focuses on the facilitation of dialogic interaction between organisation and publics, with the aim of developing learning processes. It is based more on a ‘battle of interests’ than on a ‘harmony of interest’, creating as many meanings as possible.

Stemming from a societal or public approach, Van Ruler & Vercic (2003:23) regards communication management as being concerned with public legitimation and getting a public license to operate — its focus is therefore on the public sphere. Communication management — as a function of management — can therefore be seen as ‘… maximizing, optimizing, or satisfying the process of meaning creation, using informational, persuasive, relational, and discursive interventions to solve managerial problems by co-producing societal
Communication management as a specialty contributes a unique perspective to organisational decision making with regards to broader societal issues. The roles that the communication specialist can play exhibit the following four characteristics—derived from the EBOK project’s Delphi study (Van Ruler & Vercic, 2003:23-24):

- **Counselling**: to analyze changing values, norms and issues in society and discuss these with organisational members so that they can adjust their values, norms, standards and organisational strategies.
- **Coaching**: to educate organisational members in communication so that they can respond adequately to societal demands.
- **Conceptualising**: to develop communication plans and build relationships with publics to gain public trust.
- **Executing**: to implement communication plans.

Communication management as a specialty ‘helps organizations by counseling the deliberations on legitimacy, by coaching its members in the development of their communicative competencies, by conceptualizing communication plans, and by executing communication means, using informational, persuasive, relational, and discursive interventions’ (Van Ruler & Vercic, 2003:24).

### 7.2 EUROPEAN BODY OF KNOWLEDGE PROJECT (EBOK)

Teaching and research in Europe is largely US-oriented. To address the lack of knowledge that exists on European public relations, the European Body of Knowledge Project (EBOK) was initiated in 1998 (Van Ruler, 2001:166).

Because of the fact that the research method in the EBOK project was a Delphi study, no prior theorising and conceptualisation took place (Van Ruler; personal communication, 4 Dec. 2002).

#### 7.2.1 The Delphi study

To answer the question of whether there was anything distinct in European public relations, the research team initiated a Delphi study. Respondents from 25 European countries clarified the research issues descriptively and normatively. In most countries the respondents were academics, and in some a prominent practitioner also participated (Van Ruler et al, 2001:167).

Two easily identifiable differences between European and US public relations that were pointed out by the Delphi study were the following: i) There is a lack of conceptual dualism between ‘communication’ and ‘relationships’ and ii) There is a problem with the translation of the term public relations in Europe—pointing to a deeper cultural difference, not merely a language issue. A third difference was hidden in the finding of four dimensions/roles of European public relations, discussed under the next heading (Vercic et al, 2001:380).

#### 7.2.2 The roles/dimensions found by the EBOK project

The findings of the landmark EBOK project indicated four public relations dimensions or roles (Vercic et al, 2001:167; Van Ruler, 2000):

- **Reflective**: To analyse changing societal standards, values and viewpoints, and discuss these with organisational members in order to adjust organisational values and norms regarding social responsibility and legitimacy. This role is aimed at developing the mission and organisational strategies, and is directed at the organisation’s dominant coalition.
- **Managerial**: To develop strategies/plans to maintain relationships and manage communication processes with publics in order to gain public trust and/or mutual understanding. This role is concerned with the execution of the organisational mission and strategies, and is aimed at commercial or other (internal and external) public groups.
- **Operational**: To prepare a means of communication for the organisation (and its members) in order to help the organisation formulate its communication. This role is concerned with communication plans developed by others and has to do with implementation. It is not supported as a view on public relations, but mentioned as a common role.
- **Educational**: To help the members of the organisation become communicatively competent in order to respond to societal demands. This function has to do with the mentality and behaviour of organisational members and is aimed at internal groups.

The main problem with these roles/dimensions is the lack of theoretical and methodological foundations. At this stage, especially the reflective and educational dimensions are undefined concepts. The managerial and operational dimensions have extensively been discussed in public relations text books, while the educational dimension can be found in organisational communication, management and leadership textbooks. However, “the reflective dimension is yet to be developed and has only been discussed briefly in papers within communication and public relations science” (Van Ruler et al, 2001:173). The conference papers referred to are those of Holmstrom (1996) and Jensen (2000) Van Ruler (2000:162) suggests that, during the next few years, the European research agenda should be focused on finding out what these dimensions/roles mean within the public relations concept, how they can be refined and under what conditions they are applicable.

#### 7.3 CONCLUSION

The meta-theoretical and theoretical framework of the European reflective research outlined above, as well as the findings of the EBOK study, will serve as the data for the comparison with the South African roles research. Since the EBOK research was conducted by means of the Delphi method, no prior conceptualisation took place.

### 8. COMMENTARY ON THE SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE SOUTH AFRICAN ROLES RESEARCH AND THE EUROPEAN REFLECTIVE RESEARCH

#### 8.1 INVESTIGATING THE SOCIAL SYSTEMS THEORY, THE SOCIETAL APPROACH AND THE SYSTEMIC PUBLIC RELATIONS PARADIGM AS APPROACHES SUITABLE TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN STUDY

The correspondence/relevance of the European approaches (indicated in italics) to the meta-theoretical approaches previously selected for the South African study (indicated in”quotation marks”) is analysed below.

The dialogic approach

- The “participants in the communication event” are no longer seen as only “the organisation” (the focal system) and “its stakeholders/other interest groups in society” (relevant systems in the environment), as stated in 6.1.
- Based on the European social systems theory, another relevant system is added as “a participant in the communication event”, namely the emerging public communication system which is an
auxiliary structure for communication in the societal system.

- The “societal environment” is now better understood as the public sphere, which includes “relevant stakeholder and interest group” systems but adds another analytical dimension namely that public relations is concerned with issues and values that are considered publicly relevant.

- Furthermore, the concept of “society” is now better understood as the totality of all social communications that can be expected.

- “Participants in the communication event” gain insight about themselves (through mutual reflection) and “resolve conflicts without acrimony” (consent on dissent).

The open systems approach to organisational effectiveness

- The “organisation strives to balance its mission with what the environment will allow or encourage it to do, maximised through the process of strategic management”.

- This “balance” is best achieved through the process of mutual reflection (a central concept in social systems theory), consisting of the reflective and expressive tasks. In the systemic public relations paradigm, both these tasks are performed by the public relations subsystem on behalf of the focal system.

- In performing the reflective task, the focal system tries to understand itself in relation to other systems and to see itself as the environment for other systems. It defines what information is important and necessary for its survival. It collects this information from systems in its environment for use in its inner-system communication and observes itself to understand where it must adjust to values and norms in the public sphere.

- In performing the expressive task, the focal system communicates to relevant systems in its environment on “what it is, what it wants to be, and what it wants to do”.

The ecological approach to public relations

- Public relations in the ecological approach is postulated as a “boundary spanning function that mediates the organisational/environmental relationship”. In bringing to the strategic decision making table a special concern for broader societal issues and for the implications of organisational behaviour towards and in the public sphere, public relations introduces differences between the focal system (the organisation) and its environment into the system, so that the focal system can try and understand, respect and adjust to those differences. (“Understanding” in social systems theory is functional, not normative). Public relations therefore practises mutual reflection on behalf of the organisation — acting as a co-ordinating mechanism, interpreting and mediating between the different symbolic media of social systems.

- The ideal outcome of public relations interventions in the ecological approach is an “adapted organisation”. In acting as a transformer, public relations increases mutual reflection within the focal system and ensures that it imposes self-regulation and self-control. Reflection is thus an alternative form of regulation, only effective where social systems continuously adapt to each other through negotiation and mutual control. This legitimises the focal system — and makes it deserve, and obtain, public trust.

The corporate social responsibility/responsiveness approach to strategic management

- The assumptions of this approach are that “corporate behaviour should conform to prevailing social norms, values and expectations”. Luhmann’s main concern is how systems maintain their boundaries. He posits that in order to maintain system boundaries/ independence, a system has to nurture its interdependence with other social systems by adjusting to them according to the idea of a collective social responsibility.

- “In the long run those who do not use power in a manner that society considers responsible, will tend to lose it”. Social responsibility has replaced the law as the central regulating mechanism. Legal sanctions are thus supplemented by sanctions from other social systems, blocking interaction with organisational systems who do not live up to the idea of a collective social responsibility (consumer boycotts, decreasing staff morale, etc.)

The corporate community approach (as a new theory of the firm)

- “Management’s strategic role is to facilitate joint problem solving among corporate stakeholders — because stakeholder collaboration is the key to creating economic wealth.” This approach refers expressly to organisational “stakeholders”—the idea of “public” or “interest/activist groups” as groups with a problem/issue concerning the organisation, does not feature.

- Holmström (1996:115) defines public relations as relations to the public communication system (and not whether it is addressed to stakeholder groups such as politicians, investors, the mass media, the local community, the employees, etc.) In Holmström’s opinion, a view of the environment as consisting only of stakeholders is a limiting one. In the new business paradigm, the corporate environment of market and state is supplemented based on the concept of public sphere which influences norms and opinions relevant to the company. Public sphere represents an overall common perspective serving as the mirror for reflective public relations practice. This overall perspective is not captured when considering only the stakeholder (and mass media) concepts as constituting the environment. Consequently, there is a theoretical difference between the social systems/social systemic public relations approaches and the corporate community approach in this respect. However, Holmström (2002:12) admits that in practice an organisation’s environment is constructed as stakeholders and negotiation partners and symmetric interrelations, in which case there is a similarity to the corporate community approach.

- There is also a theoretical similarity between the corporate community and the European approaches insofar as the reference to “collaboration is the key to creating economic wealth” is concerned. In the social systems view, an organisational system enters the public sphere representing its own interests. It is not considered unethical to practise corporate social responsibility with the organisational system’s own long-term interest in mind — rather, it is considered functional behaviour. A business system therefore practises social responsibility (e.g. pays attention to pollution and environmental issues) to secure a profit and not because it is for the common good. Both approaches therefore refer to a strategic motive for creating wealth/making a profit.

The new institutional approach to organisation

- In this approach, “society at large is viewed as the source of concepts, professional roles, rules, standards, expectations, policies and strategies in order to gain societal legitimation.” It therefore is very similar to the social systems/social systemic public relations/societal approaches since the issue of societal legitimation and legitimation is one of the central concepts of public relations in Europe. Legitimacy is a precondition for corporate social acceptance.

- The new institutional approach is in fact a sociological approach.

The excellence approach to public relations and communication management

- Public relations is seen to “contribute the most to organisational effectiveness when (i) it is being practised on the macro, meso and micro organisational level; and (ii) when focusing on strategic constituencies which most threaten the organisation’s
survival (i.e. strategic stakeholders, publics and activist groups).”

- In another European approach discussed earlier in this paper (the reflective communication management approach), Van Ruler & Vercic (2003:21) distinguish between the (i) economic role of organisations as the meso (group) and the micro (interpersonal) level of communication among organisational members/between the organisation and its publics in order to become legitimate and (ii) the societal role as the macro level of societal legitimation. They regard the macro role as the basis for the meso and micro roles in the 21st century Western economic order (just as respondents in the Delphi study named the reflective role as the most important role/dimension of public relations in Europe).

- In developing her social systemic paradigm for public relations, Holmström (1996:115) states that public relations is managed to ensure the organisation's independence and the choice of dialogue partners and dialogue are strategically managed because “An autonomous system is... a system that on the basis of autopoietic (self-creating) self-control maintains specific environment relations that are indicated by the system's guiding difference and mode of operation.”

- In social systems theory the ambition is not to reach mutual understanding (since this is considered impossible) but rather to at least prevent particular interests drifting apart and prevent mistrust by obtaining consent on dissent - to nurse the kind of understanding that if not reconciles the different observers then allows them to exist side by side. Constant conflict becomes the dynamics and motivation behind the continuous process of adjusting conflicting interests between different social systems.

- The final argument for the similarity between “excellent” public relations and the social systemic public relations paradigm comes from Holmström herself (1996:113) in stating that the excellence theory developed in the US by J Grunig (1992) would fit much better within a social systemic paradigm (based on Luhman) than within a Habermasian paradigm (as has occasionally been referred to by J Grunig).

Based on the above analysis, the authors reach the conclusion that there are no noteworthy differences between the approaches used for the South African study and the European approaches, with the exception of the corporate community approach which refers to stakeholders in the organisational environment. The latter does not make mention of publics or interest/activist groups which can theoretically be connected to the concept of public sphere (the European conceptualisation of the external environment).

The European social systems theory (Luhmann, 1995), social systemic public relations paradigm (Holmström, 1996) and the societal approach (Vercic et al, 2001:373) are seen to enrich and clarify the approaches previously selected for the South African study. Their assumptions broaden the view on the phenomenon of public relations with regard to its purpose for the organisation/society, the environment in which it operates and the organisational/societal role-players involved. The European approaches are thus added to the meta-theoretical framework of the South African roles research (see Figure 2). It must be noted that they have been added “after the fact”, i.e. after the conceptualisation and measurement of the study.

(see Fig. 2)

8.2 COMPARING THE SOUTH AFRICAN ‘MIRROR’ AND ‘WINDOW’ FUNCTION WITH THE EUROPEAN CONCEPT OF ‘MUTUAL REFLECTION’

8.2.1 The ‘mirror’ function versus the ‘reflective’ task

In the South African study, the researcher (Steyn, 2000; Steyn, not completed) defined the mirror function (from the public relations domain) as the monitoring of relevant environmental developments and the anticipation of their consequences for the organisation’s policies and strategies, especially with regard to relationships with stakeholders and other interest groups in society.

The mirror function can further be explicated through the strategic management concepts within the conceptual framework (Figure 1) that describes the role of the public relations strategist. The latter is conducted at the macro/societal level of the organisation; is the boundary spanning role of information acquisition; gathers information on stakeholders and issues by means of environmental scanning in the stakeholder and societal environment (the so-called outside-in approach to strategic management); processes this information (through a strategic thinking process) by considering its consequences for the organisation’s strategies and stakeholders; feeds this intelligence into the organisation’s strategy formulation processes; and ensures that it is used by taking an active part in formulating enterprise (institutional) strategy.

The content of the enterprise strategy provides further clarification on the public relations strategist’s role and its key focus areas in performing the mirror function. Questions addressed by the enterprise level strategy are for instance the organisation’s role in society; stakeholder opinions, expectations and feelings towards the organisation; the legitimation of the organisation’s position in society; the image/reputation of the organisation; the building of trust in relationships with stakeholders/other interest group in society in order to safeguard the organisation’s reputation. The authors consider the above-mentioned elements of the enterprise strategy to be conceptual elements of the mirror function of public relations.

Mutual reflection is one of the central concepts of Luhmann’s (1995) social systems theory, consisting of the reflective and expressive tasks. The reflective task is to further reflection within the focal social system (the organisation) by selecting information from systems in the environment with the aim of producing self-understanding in relation to the environment. This enables the organisation to see itself from the outside, to see its independence as being dependent on the larger societal environment. This motivates sacrifices in the short term in order to survive in the long term.

From Holmström’s (1996) social systemic public relations paradigm, the reflective task of public relations (i.e. the task of public relations in inward communication) is to act as a sensor; spanning the boundary between the organisation and its environment. It selects and decodes information from the public communication system and transmits it to the organisation in order to strengthen its self-reflection and balance its behaviour in relation to opinions expressed in the public communication system. In this way, the organisation becomes deserving of public trust and earns social acceptance.
**Fig. 2: Addition of European meta-theoretical approaches to public relations (and the theories and concepts generated) to the meta-theoretical and conceptual framework of the SA study**

### A SYNTHESIS OF META-THEORETICAL APPROACHES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dialogic approach to communication</th>
<th>Open systems approach to organisational effectiveness</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social systems approach to public relations</td>
<td>Societal approach to public relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecological approach to public relations</td>
<td>Corporate social responsibility/responsiveness approaches to strategic management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate community approach as a new theory of the firm</td>
<td>New institutional approach to organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellence approach to public relations and communication</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### DOMAIN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public relations</th>
<th>Strategic management</th>
<th>Sociology</th>
<th>Marketing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### PARADIGM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public relations role</th>
<th>Strategy formulation</th>
<th>Reflective</th>
<th>Customer satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### THEORIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Manager and technician) roles theory</th>
<th>Context (environment): Boundary spanning</th>
<th>Environmental scanning</th>
<th>Stakeholder theory</th>
<th>Issues management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content of strategies (Organisational level)</td>
<td>Gap theory model (Gap between customer expectations and customer perceptions of performance)</td>
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### MAJOR CONCEPT

Integration of (1) SATISFACTION and (2) ROLE = ROLE SATISFACTION

### CONCEPT (1): Marketing

(CEO) SATISFACTION

(Satisfaction = gap between expectations and perceptions of performance)

### CONSTRUCTS

(CEO) Expectations (CEO) Perceptions of performance

### CONCEPT (2): PR

(PR) ROLE

### CONSTRUCTS: PR

Mirror function | Window function | Window function

### CONSTRUCTS: PR

Macro organisational level | Meso organisational level | Micro organisational level

### FACTORS AS CONSTRUCTS: PR

Role of public relations strategist | Role of public relations manager | Role of public relations technician

### CONSTRUCTS: Sociology

Reflective task (in stakeholder environment and public sphere) | Expressive task (in stakeholder environment and public sphere) | Expressive task (in stakeholder environment and public sphere)

### CONSTRUCTS: Strategic Management

Info gathering/processing (information acquisition) in the stakeholder and societal environment | External representation (information disposal) in the stakeholder and societal environment | External representation (information disposal) in the stakeholder and societal environment

### CONSTRUCTS: Strategic Management

Inputs into organisational strategy formulation processes | Inputs into PR function’s strategy formulation | Inputs into PR/communication planning

### CONSTRUCTS: Strategic Management

Developing enterprise/institutional strategy | Developing PR/corporate communication strategy | Developing implementation strategy and functional tactics

### CONSTRUCTS: Strategic Management

Strategic role at top management/macro/societal level | Strategic role at functional/meso/organisational level | Tactical role at micro/implementation level

Source: Adapted from Steyn B (not completed)
In comparing the South African mirror function of public relations to the European reflective task of public relations, there are amazing similarities (taking into consideration that the researchers worked in different domains and on different continents, and were not aware of each other). Both see public relations as:

- operating at the macro or societal level, spanning the boundary between organisation and external environment in a listening capacity (the outside-in approach);
- bringing in information from the external/societal environment that the top management structure in an organisational system should consider;
- pointing out to top management the consequences of the information for the organisation;
- influencing top management to adapt organisational strategies and behaviour according to the social intelligence obtained;
- being involved in issues of organisational trust, legitimation and reputation.

With regards to differences between the two concepts, the following. Both regard the external environment as consisting of ‘stakeholders’ (which includes the mass media) and ‘publics/interest groups,’ who have a problem with the organisation’s behaviour. However, the concept of the ‘public sphere’ features pertinently in European conceptualisations of the environment whereas it is only implied in the South African concept of ‘society’, as well as in the distinction drawn between ‘stakeholders’ and ‘publics’ and ‘interest groups.’ In the opinion of the authors, the South African conceptualisation of the environment can be strengthened by adding the conceptual elements of ‘public sphere,’ thus including all aspects covered by the concept ‘public communication system’.

8.2.2 The ‘window’ function versus the ‘expressive’ task

In the South African study, the researcher (Steyn, 2000; Steyn, not completed) defined the window function of public relations (from the public relations domain) as ‘the preparation and execution of a communication policy and strategy, resulting in messages that portray all facets of the organisation in a transparent way.’ The researcher views the activities in performing the window function as being twofold:

- Those activities performed by practitioners in the role of the public relations manager (developing public relations strategy, policy and a strategic communication plan for the organisation); and
- those activities performed by practitioners in the role of the public relations technician (implementing the public relations strategy by means of communication plans, programmes and campaigns).

The window function is based on the inside-out approach to strategic management. It can further be explicated through the strategic management concepts within the conceptual framework (Figure 1) that describes the role of the public relations manager and technician:

- The manager role is performed at the functional or meso level of the organisation. It includes strategic thinking in identifying and prioritising key strategic issues from the environment as well as from the organisational strategies; strategic planning in deciding what should be communicated to solve problems or capitalise on opportunities presented by key strategic issues facing the organisation (i.e. deciding what information should be disseminated in the stakeholder and societal environment, thereby performing the boundary spanning role of information disposal) -thus taking responsibility for formulating public relations strategy and the strategic communication plan.
- The technician role is performed at the operational or micro level of the organisation and includes communication planning in developing implementation strategy and unique tactics to execute the public relations strategy developed at the functional level.

From Luhmann’s (1995) social systems theory, the expressive task of public relations is to further reflection on the focal system (the organisation) within social systems in the environment. In Holmström’s (1996) social systemic public relations paradigm, the expressive task (i.e. the task of public relations in outward communication) is seen to widely distribute information (based on reflection) in the public communication system; to ensure that the latter has a socially responsible image of the organisation; to strengthen public trust in, and achieve social acceptance for; the organisation; and to achieve greater understanding and support in those public spheres that the organisation wishes to be in contact with.

In comparing the South African window function of public relations to the European expressive task of public relations, many similarities are observed. Both see public relations as:

- spanning the boundary between organisation and environment in an expressive or speaking capacity, i.e. the inside-out approach.
- the information disposal role of the boundary spanner;
- (doing strategic planning in) reflecting and deciding on what should be expressed/communicated to systems in the external environment.
- widely distributing information in the external environment.
- ensuring that the external environment has a positive image of the organisation.
- achieving greater understanding and support amongst those groups in the external environment that the organisation wishes to have relations with.

Differences between the window and expressive task of public relations are the following:

- The expressive task does not differentiate between the activities of the manager and technician roles nor the different organisational levels these tasks are performed at.
- The expressive task specifically refers to bringing about a ‘socially responsible’ image of the organisation, while the window function refers to the image as being transparent (i.e. honest/true).
- The expressive task specifically refers to strengthening public trust and achieving social acceptance. (It could however be argued that an honest image as created by the window function will lead to being trusted, as conceptualised by the expressive task).

In view of the current emphasis on corporate governance and socially responsible behaviour by organisations, the authors are of the opinion that a conceptualisation of the window function can be strengthened by specifically projecting a ‘socially responsible’ identity for the organisation in order to achieve public trust and thereby earn a good reputation.

Based on the findings of the analysis concluded above, mutual reflection (the reflective and expressive task) is added to the conceptual framework of the South African study, considered to
be theoretically similar to the mirror and window function of public relations. For a graphic representation of the revised conceptualisation, see Figure 2.


The comparison addressed in this section, has been summarised graphically on the next page (Figure 3).

8.3.1 Strategist, reflective and counselling roles

Counselling as described by Van Ruler & Vercic (2003) is regarded by the authors as one of the characteristics of the European reflective role and therefore considered part of the same role.

The European reflective role is similar to the South African strategist role with regards to the following aspects:

• Both are roles performed at the macro or societal level of an organisational system.
• Both are outside-in approaches to strategic management, i.e. the reflective or mirror function of public relations.
• Both gather and analyse information from the environment and point out the consequences for the organisation.
• Both aim at influencing organisational members (especially top management) to adapt their behaviour/decisions/strategies according to the social intelligence obtained.
• Both use the intelligence obtained as inputs into the enterprise strategy (according to strategic management theory; the mission is part of the enterprise strategy i.e. the societal role strategy).

Differences between the roles are that the European reflective role specifically gathers information on values/norms from the public communication system with regards to social responsibility and legitimacy, while the strategist gathers information on strategic, social, ethical, political or other issues that may impact the organisation, as well as on the opinions/expectations/feelings of stakeholders (including the mass media), publics and interest groups in society. Considering that the public communication system consists of ‘opinions/conflicting world-views’ in the public sphere, the ‘opinions of publics or interest/activist groups in society’ (who have a problem with the organisation) might be considered similar to the social systems concept of ‘public sphere’.

The conclusion is drawn by the authors that the European reflective role is to form part of another study in the South African research programme.

8.3.2 Manager, managerial and conceptualising roles

Conceptualising as described by Van Ruler & Vercic (2003) is regarded by the authors as one of the characteristics of the European managerial role and therefore considered as part of the same role.

The European managerial role is similar to the South African manager role with regards to the following aspects:

• Both are considered (by the authors) to operate at the functional level although this is not expressly stated in the case of the European role. However, according to theory, the European ‘managerial’ role is concerned with execution of the mission/strategies (and could therefore not be a role at the strategic level). Also, the term ‘managerial’ indicates middle management/functional and not operational level.
• Both are part of the ‘expressive’ or ‘outward’ or ‘window’ function of public relations.
• Both are disposing information on behalf of the organisation to groups in the external environment with the aim of building relationships.
• Both are developing strategies/plans to manage communication with external groups.

Differences between the roles are that the aim of the European managerial role is to build relationships to gain ‘public trust’, although the latter is not specified by the conceptualisation of the South African manager role. However; the South African ‘window function’ of which the manager role forms part is defined as communicating in a ‘transparent’ way, which could be deduced as being ‘honest’ communication that will lead to public trust in the organisation.

The conclusion is drawn by the authors that the South African manager and the European managerial role is very similar. This is not surprising when considering that both are based on management theory and on the historical public relations manager role, conceptualised and verified in the US more than two decades ago. Furthermore, both the roles are considered the ‘window function’ of public relations, an opinion shared by Van Ruler (personal communication, 5 December 2002).

8.3.3 Technician, operational and executing roles

Executing as described by Van Ruler & Vercic (2003) is regarded by the authors as one of the characteristics of the European operational role and therefore considered as part of the same role.

The European operational role is similar to the South African technician role with regards to the following:

• Both are disposing information to groups in the external environment, therefore part of the ‘expressive’ or ‘outward’ or ‘window’ function of public relations.
• Both are concerned with communication plans.
• Both are implementation roles.

There seems to be no differences between the roles. This is not surprising since both are based on the historic technician role, conceptualised and empirically verified in the US. Furthermore, both the roles are considered to be part of the ‘window function’ of public relations, an opinion shared by Van Ruler (personal communication, 5 December 2002).

8.3.4 Educational and coaching roles

Coaching as described by Van Ruler & Vercic (2003) is regarded by the authors as one of the characteristics of the European educational role and therefore considered as part of the same role.

The European educational role was not measured in this study but is to form part of another study in the South African research programme.

8.3.5 Conclusion of the roles comparison

Based on the findings of the analysis conducted above, the three South African roles (strategist, manager and technician) are considered theoretically similar and practically identical to three of the EBOK roles (reflective, managerial and operational). The four characteristics of communication management as a specialty (counselling,
Fig. 3: A comparison of the South African and EBOK roles, and the characteristics of communication management as a specialty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STEYN’S THREE ROLES (SA)</th>
<th>EBOK’S FOUR ROLES</th>
<th>VAN RULER &amp; VERCIC’S FOUR CHARACTERISTICS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategist role:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Reflective role:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Counselling role:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strategic role at macro or societal level</td>
<td>analysing changing societal standards/values/point of views and discussing them with organisational members to adjust organisational values/norms regarding social responsibility and legitimacy</td>
<td>analysing changing values/norms/issues in society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conducting environmental scanning to gather information on stakeholders, publics and issues</td>
<td>inward communication</td>
<td>discussing them with organisational members so that they can adjust their values/norms and organisational strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>information acquisition/processing role of the boundary scanner</td>
<td>aimed at developing mission/organisation strategy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>outside-in approach to strategic management</td>
<td>directed at the dominant coalition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strategic contribution towards enterprise strategy</td>
<td>equated to mirror function</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>equated to mirror function</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Manager role:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Managerial:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Conceptualising:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>role at the functional or meso level</td>
<td>developing strategies/plans to maintain relationships and manage communication processes with publics to gain public trust and/or mutual understanding</td>
<td>developing communication plans and build relationships with publics to gain public trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>information disposal/external representation role of the boundary scanner</td>
<td>outward communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>developing public relations strategy and strategic communication plan</td>
<td>concerned with execution of org mission and strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inside-out approach to strategic management</td>
<td>aimed at commercial or other (internal/external) public groups.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>part of the window function</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Technician role:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Operational:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Executing:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>implementation role at the micro or programme level</td>
<td>preparing means of comm. for organisation to help it formulate its communication</td>
<td>implementing communication plans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>information disposal/external representation role of the boundary scanner</td>
<td>outward communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>developing communication plans and implementation strategy/tactics</td>
<td>concerned with the communication plans developed by others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inside-out approach to strategic management</td>
<td>has to do with implementation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>part of the window function</td>
<td>not a view on public relations, but common role.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>This role was not measured by the South African study</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educational:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Coaching:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assisting organisation members to become communicatively competent to respond to societal demands</td>
<td>educating organisational members in communication so that they can respond adequately to societal demands</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>concerns mentality/behaviour of organisation members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aimed at internal groups.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conceptualising, executing and coaching) are each considered part of one of the EBOK roles (see Figure 3 for graphic summary).

9. CONCLUSION

The main problem addressed in this paper was the conceptualisation and measurement of ‘reflective’ public relations. On the previous pages, an analysis was conducted which found that the conceptualisation of the mirror and window function (measured in the South African study as the roles of the public relations strategist, manager and technician) were theoretically similar to mutual reflection (consisting of the reflective and expressive task) - the central concept of Holmström’s (1996; 1997) reflective paradigm for public relations.

In the EBOK study four roles emerged and were named the reflective, managerial, operational and educational roles or dimensions of European public relations. No prior conceptualisation took place because the study was conducted by means of the Delphi method -- the roles were recognised based on existing European and US theory. This resulted in a situation where there is a “lack of theoretical and methodological foundations...for these potential dimensions of public relations, especially the educational and the reflective ones, and its contextual factors” (Van Ruler et al, 2001:166).

In their comments on the Bled Manifesto, which outlined the four European roles, L Grunig & J Grunig (in Vercic, Van Ruler, Jensen, Moss & White, 2002:25-26) expressed their interest in the reflective role of public relations, but also cast their doubts: “The question remains, however, whether van Ruler and Vercic have ‘proved’ (as the word ‘manifesto’ implies) that their Eurocentric view of public relations would stand up to empirical scrutiny.” (They thought that the bias in the group of Delphi respondents was academic rather than practitioner knowledge since, in most instances, a single academic represented the countries participating in the study).

In another analysis conducted in this paper (see 8.3), three of the four EBOK roles (reflective, managerial and operational) were found to be theoretically similar and practically identical to the South African roles of strategist, manager and technician.
The latter three roles were empirically verified (firstly by means of a multi-round common factor analysis and thereafter by a confirmatory factor analysis), according to the expectations and perceptions of performance of 103 South African chief executives, of the most senior public relations practitioner in the organisation.

The authors of this paper therefore propose that:

i) the conceptualisation and measurement of the three South African roles provide a basis for further theoretical and methodological exploration of the ‘undefined (European) concepts’;

ii) the empirical findings of the ‘strategist, manager and technician’ roles of public relations might be regarded as an (indirect) measurement of the European ‘reflective paradigm’ -- albeit unintended and theoretically imperfect.

The significance of such a claim could be the following:

• Contrary to the Grunig’s expectations, it might indeed be possible to measure the European reflective role of public relations empirically.

• Should that be the case, the reflective role might indeed be considered distinct from US public relations. However, it could not be considered Eurocentric, since it was measured in South Africa.

• Conversely, the reflective role might not be distinct from US public relations and if it were to be measured in the US, it might also be empirically verified.

• If the measurement of the strategist, manager and technician roles in South Africa were to be considered a measurement of the European reflective paradigm, it could be said that South African chief executives expect the reflective (rather than the expressive task) from a senior public relations practitioner. This could indicate that South African chief executives might have recognised the assumptions of the reflective paradigm in the measurement instrument, which would be logical since they are operating at the macro or societal organisational level.

• The findings of the South African study indicated that, in most instances, senior public relations practitioners were not functioning at the macro or societal organisational level, i.e. not performing the role of the strategist. Based on Groenewald’s (1998) findings, a possible reason could be that they do not have the knowledge of strategic communication management to do so. The question then arises whether such practitioners would have recognised the strategist/reflective role of public relations should they have been the respondents in the South African study instead of the chief executives.

• An indication of an answer to this question is provided by the findings of another (pilot) study in the South African research programme on strategic public relations -- conducted amongst the Top 300 companies on the Johannesburg Securities Exchange in 2002. In this pilot study, the roles of strategist, manager and technician were measured amongst both public relations and investor relations managers in the Top 300 companies. Because of a low response rate (only 60 realised questionnaires, evenly split between public relations and investor relations managers), it was not possible to conduct a factor analysis to identify the three roles. However, a Cronbach Alpha conducted on the questionnaire items indicated the occurrence of all three roles.

Based on the findings of the pilot study, the authors reach the conclusion that:

i) in addition to the empirical evidence that the roles of strategist, manager and technician exist in South Africa according to CEO expectations, they might also exist according to the perceptions of public relations and investor relations practitioners themselves in some companies quoted on the Johannesburg Securities Exchange.

ii) there is theoretical evidence to believe that the strategist, manager and technician roles (as represented by the reflective, managerial and operational roles) exist in Europe; and

iii) there is no reason to believe that these very similar South African-European roles do not exist in the US too since the South African study was based on the US Excellence Study as well as on strategic management theory, mostly from the US.

A second problem addressed in this paper was the lack of publication of international perspectives inter alia on the (changing) purpose of public relations. Based on the analyses conducted in this paper; there can be little doubt that there is value in exposing research findings hidden away in national publications in far-away countries. It is therefore recommended that an effort be made by academics/researchers in such countries to publish internationally and by editors in the US and Europe to encourage such articles.

10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In smaller European countries like Switzerland or third world countries such as South Africa (where the authors reside), there are few researchers studying theoretical problems such as the purpose of public relations or the specific contribution that public relations brings to the strategic decision making table. In such instances, individual researchers should enter the “trading zone” (Taylor-Huber & Morrelle, in L. Grunig & J. Grunig, 2002:32) where they “translate, tell, and persuade ‘foreigners’ to hear their stories and try their wares…..seek advice from and collaboration with those ‘others’ especially when their own references, methods, and colleagues are unable or unwilling to fill in the gaps.” International forums such as the Bled Symposium are therefore invaluable and their organisers are commended for encouraging and providing the opportunity to researchers from other continents to present their views, however flawed.

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Benita Steyn

After having been a PR practitioner for 16 years (and a diplomat for 13 years), Benita joined the Dept of Marketing and Communication Management at the University of Pretoria, South Africa in 1996. She has twice been awarded “Educator of the Year” by the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (1999 and 2001), and received a Bronze Quill Award from the SA Chapter of the IABC in 1999. In addition to numerous conference papers as well as academic and industry publications, Benita published a book “Corporate Communication Strategy” at the end of 2000, based on her masters degree. She is currently completing her doctorate on chief executives’ normative expectations for a PR manager.

B. Steyn/G. Bütschi: “A model for developing corporate communication/public relations strategy”

Short description of co-author Gerhard Bütschi

Gerhard Bütschi, Chief Executive Officer of Switzerland based Digital Management AG, studied business and private law at the University of Bern (Switzerland) where he earned his doctoral degree. Operating internationally, Digital Management AG offers consultant services in marketing and communication management, with specific emphasis on designing and implementing technology-based communication systems. In 1996, he was appointed an adjunct member of the Graduate Faculty in the Department of Journalism at the University of Memphis (U.S.A.). Since 2003, he also lectures Strategic Communication Management at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. Gerhard Bütschi is active in the European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EUPRERA), serving as its President in 2001 and 2002.
1. Introduction

Telkom SA Limited (Telkom) is South Africa’s leading communications service provider with a 100% fixed-line and 59% cellular market share, servicing more than 13 million telecommunication customers, countrywide. In March 2002 the company’s Initial Public Offering (IPO) took place, through a listing of shares on the Johannesburg Securities and New York Stock Exchanges. This listing became the South African Government’s flagship privatisation and is aligned with an intense programme to liberalise telecommunications regulations in South Africa, with the resulting consequence of an increasingly competitive market-place.

During this complex and dynamic phase of its history, Telkom needed to cater for new shareholder requirements in terms of world-class performance, while continuing to respond to the needs of its diverse stakeholders.

2. Opportunity Statement

With the mounting excitement of its March Initial Public Offering and changes to the telecommunications regulatory landscape, media interest in Telkom over the period June 2002 to April 2003 was at an all-time high and all incidents related to the company came under heavy scrutiny by the South African media and public. Over this period, an average of 580 articles were devoted to Telkom each month by the printed media alone - much higher than any other South African company at that time.

One of Telkom’s objectives was to capitalise on the opportunity afforded by media coverage to position itself to stakeholders in terms of its vision, values and strategic goals. The role of the mass media in corporate reputation management is widely acknowledged. Consistent communication, reinforcing what the company stands for, reflects a stable corporate persona which inspires confidence and decreases investor uncertainty - providing it is consistent with what the company does.

Given the pre-listing environment, and in contrast to the aim of the Public Relations publicity model (Grung & Hunt, 1984), Telkom SA’s main challenge was not to seek or stimulate media interest. Rather, it was to use mass media coverage both as a positioning tool and to achieve self-understanding, enabling the company to ‘see itself from the outside’ (Holmström 2002:4).

Recognising the IPO as an opportunity to see itself through the eyes of others as reflected in media reporting, Telkom embarked on a journey to find an innovative solution to capture, analyse and interpret the needs, expectations and agendas of its stakeholders. Understanding stakeholder perceptions in relation to the company’s own desired positioning allows the early identification of issues and an opportunity to manage these issues proactively.

Telkom SA took a conscious decision to elevate its monitoring and analysis of media coverage to a level where data from the daily monitoring of all national printed and online publications becomes useful information, and, with proper contextualization, actionable intelligence that the company can use to take ‘wise’ (the right) decisions.

3. Research Objectives

The following primary and secondary media research objectives were defined for the study:

• To evolve from the reactive monitoring of the media to proactive issues management
• To analyse media reporting on the (tele)communications industry during the nine months prior to the company’s Initial Public Offering on the Johannesburg Securities and New York Stock Exchanges
• To use trend and time series analysis to identify patterns in reporting, by publication and/or by journalist, as well as plotting the relationship between different themes
• To find an innovative solution to capture, analyse and interpret the needs, expectations and agendas of stakeholders
• To advance qualitative analysis from an assessment of tone (positive, neutral or negative) to a customised interpretation of the debate
• To position the Company to its stakeholders in terms of its vision, values and strategic goals
• To analyse media coverage in relation to Telkom’s vision, values and strategic goals
• To evaluate the impact of coverage, not in terms of characteristics of the medium carrier (its readership, distribution etc.), but in terms of stakeholders
• To develop a weighting index to assess the impact of coverage in terms of key company stakeholders

This paper aims to address these research objectives through the basic 5 Ws and the H formula taught to journalism students all over the world as the way to put a story in a logical perspective, providing a guide to the reader that will improve understanding.

The structure followed in the paper is summarised in the table below:

Using media coverage as a mirror to reflect perspectives in the public sphere: A case study of Telkom South Africa
by Amanda Singleton and Retha Groenewald
4. Theoretical Perspectives

4.1 The Reflective Paradigm and Public Trust

4.1.1 The Reflective Paradigm and Public Trust

The ‘why’ of studying the mass media is best answered by Holmström’s interpretation of Niklas Luhmann’s theory of social systems (Holmström, 1996). The value of this meta-theoretical framework lies, in part, in its accommodation of the realities confronting business today. Instead of directing all relationships towards consensus building between a company and its various stakeholders, it recognizes that the objectives of different role players such as management, government, employees, shareholders, trade unions and religious groupings are conflicting and diverse, with consensus rarely an option and business decisions serving all stakeholders’ interests, seldom possible. According to Luhmann’s theory of social systems the main aim should be to create and maintain interaction between social systems, and the overarching means is the establishment of trust. The central task of Public Relations or Corporate Communication is to secure trust in relationships as a mechanism to relieve the uncertainty caused by the increasing complexity of society (Holmström, 1996, 1997, 2002). Public trust results from a structured process of reflection.

Public trust is increasingly becoming a precondition for interaction (Holmström, 1996:90). Through reflection organisations the- matisate their identity, role and responsibility in society in order to portray the organisation as being worthy of public trust. This is why, in South Africa, corporate social responsibility themes such as Black Economic Empowerment and Employment Equity conduct, do not only create public trust but impacts directly on its investment case.

A precondition for maintaining public trust is reciprocal reflection: a social system on the one hand finds its own identity and acts independently. On the other hand, in recognition of the interdependence between social systems it learns to understand itself as the environment for other social systems. The social system develops restrictions and coordination mechanisms in its decision-making processes in relation to other systems (Luhmann, 1995). According to the Golin/Harris Trust Survey conducted in February 2002 there has been a continuing erosion of trust in business. Nearly 70% of the respondents in a USA survey said “I don’t know whom to trust any more”. Factors contributing to the lack of trust include perceptions that business is difficult and confusing to deal with; acts primarily in self-interest or will simply disappoint stakeholders by making promises they fail to keep. Commitment to and connection with all stakeholders seem to be critical actions in building public trust (www.golinharris.com).

Within this theoretical framework, the mandate of public relations is two-fold. Firstly, to portray the company as socially responsible, in order to gain the public trust necessary for interaction with other systems. Secondly, to assist in making the company deserving of trust by meeting the obligations the trust carries (Holmström, 1996:90). According to DiPlazza & Eccles (2002:64) the main obligation for a company is to do what it says it is doing - to walk the talk.

4.1.1.1 The reflective task of Public Relations

Public Relations functions within the space between the company and its environment thereby assisting the company with reciprocal reflection (window out, window in). Public trust cannot be gained by changing signals to match its accountability to the triple bottom-line. Trust is fragile and the company’s decisions and actions need to be aligned with its intentions. Trust becomes mistrust unless the Company, as a social system, is capable of reflecting on its position in the larger context. The motive is functional, not ethical; the rationale is cognitive, not normative. In a context-regulated society, social systems must practice self-restriction if they want to cultivate trusting relationships.

In summary, the reflective task of the Corporate Communication function is to gather and analyse data from the environment to feed back into the company in order to strengthen its self-reflection (window in). This self-reflection allows the company to balance its behaviour with stakeholder expectations and hence maintain relationships based on trust with other social systems in

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Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Theoretical perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why?</td>
<td>To obtain and maintain public trust between social systems</td>
<td>Holmström’s (1996) adaptation of Niklas Luhmann’s theory of social systems in the reflective and expressive task of Public Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where?</td>
<td>The Public Sphere</td>
<td>The Public Sphere as refined by Jensen (2000:68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What?</td>
<td>Mass media reporting as a mirror image of the meaning of different social systems and the debate between social systems</td>
<td>Through reflection (introspection) Telkom dispelled its meaning in 31 themes to be tracked in media reporting - based on Holmström (2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who?</td>
<td>Telkom SA</td>
<td>Jensen’s (2000:64) three different concepts of the company in society used to introduce Telkom SA to the reader; that is, the Company as economically successful, legal &amp; responsible</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Share price & investor relations**

- Steve Nkasaana
- Service Delivery
- Pricing
- Government drives the IPO process
- Commercial Equity / Black Economic Empowerment
- Governance
- Other Telkom Leaders
- Regulations and Legislation
- Positioning of the Company
the environment (Holmström, 1996).
In terms of the Reflective task of Public Relations, a clear answer emerges as to the ‘what’ of this study. For the Public Relations function to carry out its mandate, it needs intelligence regarding other social systems to feed into company’s decision-making, keeping the company honest to its positioning as being trustworthy.

4.1.1.2 The expressive task of Public Relations
The self-image of a company has to be translated into an image of trustworthiness in order to gain greater understanding, empathy and support for the company in the public sphere. Due to the need to consolidate reality in the mass media society, stabilizing the reputation of the company requires, according to Merten (in Holmström, 1996:95), a continuous flow of information through all possible forms of media in order to build the company’s credibility and create trust.

4.1.2 The Reflective Paradigm and the New Role of Business
Much has been said about the changed expectations of stakeholders. These expectations carry many names such as reputation, legitimacy, governance, equity, ethics, brand trust and the so-called power shift in public-private sector relations (Zairi & Peters 2002:175). Irrespective of the jargon or buzz words involved, there is a ‘new role for business’ in society.

At the core of this ‘new role for business’ is the realisation that a company’s accountability towards multiple stakeholders in society is on par with its responsibility towards customers and shareholders (Vinten 1998:89). Companies increasingly acknowledge that their accountability to other stakeholders has moved far beyond peripheral “do-goodism” and has entered the sphere of sustainable development (Wilson 2000:12).

In contrast to business ethics, which was perceived as a moral debate of profit versus ethics, the drive towards sustainability is a rational debate combining economic interest (the concern for profit) with concern for the planet and people through sustainable development. In 2000, the Dow Jones Sustainability Index showed that those companies which, in their strategies, integrate economic aspects with environmental, ethical and social concerns — give a larger yield on their shares than conventionally driven companies (Holmström 2002).

According to Clem Sunter, chairman of the Anglo American Chairman’s Fund, companies that relate to their environments purely on the basis of economics are known to cultivate relationships from pure self-interest and mostly with shareholders, financial analysts and customers. Often, these interactions have been a power play — ‘wining and dining’ the influential few, — while ignoring the rest or coercing them into conformance (Sunter & Visser; 2002:106). However, to survive in the sustainability era, companies have to move beyond their aggressive, competitive tendencies. They need to be genuinely concerned about the perspectives and wellbeing of all their stakeholders.

Nalebuff & Brandenburger (1996), refer to this transition as Co-operation, while Wheeler & Sillanpaa (1997) talk about The Stakeholder Corporation and Hawken, Lovins and Lovins (1997) about Natural Capitalism. Irrespective of authors’ semantic preference, reality usually has the last word. In recent years even the most powerful multinational companies have experienced the ego pain and financial loss caused by maltreated stakeholders.

The casualty list of high-profile companies — BP, Dreamworks, Green Cross, Intel, McDonald’s, Monsanto, Nike, Shell, Texaco and Wall-Mart, is reviewed by Sunter & Visser (2002) in their book Beyond Reasonable Greed: Why Sustainable Business is a much better idea. Reality is further highlighted by the fact that 40 CEOs of the USA’s largest 200 companies lost their jobs in 2001 (Watson et al, 2002:55). Reasons for dismissal included poor communication, misunderstanding the importance of corporate culture and ignoring the needs of diverse stakeholder groups.

Encouragingly, however, the list of ‘branded’ stakeholder-oriented enterprises is also growing, including the likes of AT&T, The Body Shop, Canon, Electrolux, Hewlett Packard, Levi Strauss, Reebok, Unilever, Volkswagen and Volvo (Sunter & Visser, 2002: 107) to name but a few.

Holmström (2002) suggests that we are witnessing the evolution of a new pattern of expectations for business practice. As it evolves the new business paradigm will stabilize and new standards for socially acceptable economic practice and corporate social accountability will be set.

Against this evolving set of expectations, Telkom has to responsibly manage the company’s impact on society as well as its reputation with stakeholders. With increased complexity in relationships between the company and other role players in the public sphere, tracking the mass media debate on Telkom related issues in the public sphere can contribute to a more thorough understanding of specific stakeholder expectations.

4.1.3 The Reflective Paradigm, Meaning and Interdependence
The first part of the ‘what’ of the study is also addressed within the Reflective Paradigm. It studies meaning as it pertains to different social systems. According to Luhmann (1995) all social systems are anchored in meaning. A social system is based on communication and emerges whenever two or more persons’ actions are coordinated meaningfully, i.e. through communication.

Likewise, relationships between social systems are about meanings. Society has no top, no bottom, neither one reality, nor one truth. Society is increasingly differentiated by incompatible logics in its social systems. But logics are blind — and therefore indifferent to other logics (Luhmann 1998).

Social systems view their environment from the perspective of their own logic. From that environment they select information that is meaningful to their own logic and, moreover, interpret information on the basis of their own logic.

The point of departure for the empirical execution of the media research study was to identify Telkom SA’s logic and meanings. This was done by means of analysis of the Corporate Communication Strategy, resulting in 31 Telkom themes, clustered into 6 high-level categories. These themes have been used as the filter through which mass media coverage on the company and its industry has been tracked and monitored.

Holmström (2002) refers to the concept of a ‘network society’ indicating that different systems, though fragmented, have a high interdependence. Because of this interdependence, turbulence in one system will affect another: Even small changes in one system can, through resonance, release huge energy in another: Within Luhmann’s theoretical perspective we are analytically able to reconstruct society into a ‘map’ of communication.

In the case of Telkom SA we could observe how the Company’s decision to reduce staff led to employees’ fear for retrenchment; that spilled over to the Labour Unions where it developed into a macro-economic political issue, which found resonance with the media as a anti-privatisation sentiment; which influenced the political system in that it posed the risk of losing votes. This in turn, linked to a perception of instability by the international investment community; which influenced expectations of the privatisation programme threatened by an undervalued share price.

By mapping debates in the media over time, patterns of meaning emerge, and the expectations of stakeholders become clear and, therefore, actionable.

The basic aim of a sound system is to reduce complexity and
establish an expectation and an identity (Holmström, 2002). Bananis et al. (1998:26) conceptualize a company’s responsibility as managing the “fit” between society’s expectations of ‘business’ and the company’s actions.

4.2 The Public Sphere from an Intersubjective Public Relations Paradigm

4.2.1 A re-introduction of the Public Sphere

Jensen (2001:133) suggests the re-introduction of the public sphere as a concept in Public Relations theory and calls attention to the emerging function of the public sphere of organizational legitimacy and identity. She makes the case that in differentiating between publics, (in a way similar to marketing segmentation), the ‘public sphere’ as an analytical dimension is lost. Consequently, an essential aspect of Public Relations practice is its concern with publicly relevant issues which means issues relating to the public sphere. Even though most communication professionals are familiar with the idea of ‘publics’, ‘audiences’ or ‘stakeholders’ as groups of people that relate to the company in some way or another; each justifying a unique relationship and customized two-way communication, the concept of the public sphere is not yet well established amongst practitioners in South Africa. Part of the reason may be that the concept of the public sphere stems from Jurgen Habermas’ social theories rather than from the study fields of communication, business or the mass media (which are perceived to be the main contributors to the development of the communication function). According to Habermas the robust public sphere that characterized 17th and 18th century Europe has been transformed through modern advocacy disciplines, including Public Relations. Public relations, as opposed to private relations, are, by definition, relations located in the public sphere (Holmström, 1996:22). When an issue no longer has a merely private character but is also of public concern, it moves from the private into the public sphere, and it becomes an object of public discussion.

In the Habermasian intersubjective Public Relations paradigm, it is precisely these public issues which populate the field of Public Relations practice in organisations (Holmström, 1996:25). The public sphere adds a valuable dimension to understanding the environment holistically and answers the question on “where” the mass media research study was conducted.

Working with Habermas’s private/public distinction, Jensen (2001:136) redefines the public sphere as a complex network of persons, institutionalised associations and organisations. One aspect that contributes to the complexity of this network is that members of society simultaneously enact complementary roles. Looking at the Telkom case study, this means the organisation has to understand and accept the fact that when it engages an individual in one particular context, it has to consider the impact of that engagement on all the other roles of that individual. For example, when Telkom is talking to a CEO of a major corporation which spends very large sums of money with the Company on a monthly basis, it has to be conscious of the fact that this person is also an ordinary residential customer, quite possibly a senior member of a business chamber and an industry association, while he or she may also be on the Board of an influential social society or pressure group.

In these complementary roles, members of society experience both the requirements and the failures of the various systems. Such experiences, at first interpreted privately and related to their own life history, become intermeshed with other life histories. These experiences link the private spheres to the public sphere in two ways. First, the diversity of experiences becomes the source of problems expressed in the public sphere. Secondly, these experiences form the sounding board for debates in the public sphere, which means that they become relevant and comprehensible and become the basis for discussions with family, friends, neighbours and colleagues.

However, when communication transcends the private level of reflection and becomes a matter of public concern, the private experience is amplified and is of general interest. In this context, there is no shortage of cases where an individual had a personal experience with Telkom, which goes beyond the interaction between the Company and the individual by being raised and debated in small groups of friends and family. If the issue is not resolved quick enough, it will be escalated to the individual’s professional environment and before long it may end up squarely in the public domain when it’s printed in the letters column of a newspaper or reported on by a journalist as a newsworthy event. In all of these cases there is an implicit ‘subtext’ to the title of the story or letter; saying: “This should be known to everybody”. Regardless of whether one agrees with the content or not, the appeal to the public sphere is obvious.

4.2.2 The Mass Media and the Public Sphere

The second part of the ‘what’ of the study is addressed by mass media debates in the public sphere. The public sphere debates represent a way of disagreeing openly about matters of common concern such as the South African Government’s privatisation and public listing of shares in the country’s fixed line service provider monopoly, Telkom SA.

Applied to the study, typical role players in the public sphere network who actively took part in the debate on Telkom’s Initial Public Offering (IPO) included Government (Departments of Finance, Public Enterprises and Communications), Trade Unions (representing Telkom employees), other parastatals (largely government owned entities), bidders for the second network licence, economists and analysts, opinion influencers such as Organised Business, and many more.

According to Jensen (2001), agreements are seldom exposed explicitly in public debate, and therefore will obtain little coverage, unless it is threatened. Normally, agreements are taken for granted. The debates are very rarely conclusive, but they constitute a complex source of social power, trust and legitimacy for stakeholders in the private sphere and in government. True to this conceptual description of the public sphere, the complex network of role players discussing the Telkom IPO were not obliged or able to come to an agreement or a decision regarding the IPO; yet the debate itself influenced decisions made by individuals, institutionalised associations (such as Trade Unions) and government. An example was the disconnected offer made to historically disadvantaged individuals (those without the vote prior to 1994) known as the Khulisa Offer; the ethics of which was challenged from various angles in the media.

The public sphere adds an important analytical dimension to Public Relations and provides a diagnostic tool to study conflicting positions on the public listing of Telkom SA.

In following the debate in the public sphere, it was valuable to monitor the intensity of the debate (reflected in column centimetres) as well as the role players who actively participated in the debate (by tracking the publications and journalists).

As the research study specifically deals with the mass media coverage of Telkom SA, it is important to understand the relationship between the public sphere and the mass media. The public sphere is not the media, yet it is dependent on the freedom of the press and the prevention of media monopolization (Jensen, 2001:135). And, although the mass media cannot be equated to the public sphere, it is an important agent in present-
ing conflicting perspectives and as such it mirrors and sometimes amplifies the public sphere debates. Even though the role of the media, in a Habermasian paradigm, is merely to disseminate information and to encourage public reasoning, we know that in reality public reasoning is influenced by the media and by particular interests with access to the public via the media (Holmström, 1996:28).

The media has a tendency to first personalize and then simplify stories into dichotomies - safe or dangerous, right or wrong (Watson et al., 2002:56). Sandman (1986) argues that there are valid reasons for this. When confronted with an environmental risk the public is generally faced with a yes-or-no decision. Journalists seek to offer information to the public in a form that is consistent with one or the other decision. Also, modern media formats do not allow for complex, extended or balanced presentations. However, this characteristic of media coverage poses a huge problem to companies when complex matters are under discussion.

Leading up to the Telkom IPO, the government announced a special share offering called the Khulisa share offer, which was only open to persons who were economically and politically disadvantaged before 1994. This issue was debated intensely in the media, and saw various publications taking a stance on the matter: Publications such as Die Beeld, Rapport and Volksblad saw the offer as discriminating on the basis of race and therefore unconstitutional. Southetan, the largest national daily took the opposite stance. Both sides simplified the very complex issue for their readers - leading to strongly opposing views. Many other publications did not cover the issue, refusing to touch such a volatile and complex debate.

5. Issues Management

Issues management is labelled by Holmström (2002) as one of the buffering strategies of asymmetrical communication used by business from a defensive position in order to protect its own boundaries. However, if one views an issue as a gap between stakeholder expectations and the actions of the company, and consequently, issues management as the process to close the gap (Steyn & Puth, 2000), it boils down to managing the reflective and expressive tasks discussed by Holmström earlier. The first issue management model, created in 1977, was based on a systems approach (Issues Management Council, 2003). At the core of this model is the interaction between social systems that “serves as the birth place of all issues” (www.issuesmanagement.org).

Authors (Ferners et al., 2000: 254) differentiate between different phases in the life cycle of an issue. In the early 1970s Luhman (in Ferners et al., 2000: 255) described the life cycles as “subject careers” and even though the individual phases and their facets do not have a descriptive theoretical status, they can be regarded as an attempt to enhance understanding on public discussion of issues and their practical consequences. The phases reflect the different degrees which an issue penetrates the Public Sphere and in each of the phases intermediary groups and the media are involved in different ways and to different degrees. The media plays a very special role in an issue’s life cycle. The way an issue penetrates society can be defined as a function of media involvement. The analysis of media responses provides clues to identify the individual phases in the life cycle. People involved in the practical side of public relations work and the day-to-day business of gathering information on and dealing with issues, may find it helpful to apply the different life cycles to their issues at least in the way of a rough map which provides a general sense of direction.

Researchers whosubscribe to the constructionist perspective on social problems argue that issues do not exist until they are labelled as such and are then developed through claims-making activities (Best 1989, 1995; Salmon 1990; Sarbin & Kitsuse 1994). To align to the Habermasian private/public distinction, disputes will typically be private, while issues involve “different meanings” that exist amongst social systems in the public sphere. According to Hallahan (2001:28) issues often are debated by the population at large; covered by the news media; and addressed by government. Whereas problems are outgrowths of individual experience, issues emerge only when people share problems with others through communication as people analyse, define, delimit and label problems in a “contest over social reality”. To expand awareness and public concern about an issue, ‘sponsors’ must identify the issue in a compelling way, manipulate symbols effectively, and seek media publicity (Elder & Cobb, 1983).

Issues Management can be defined as an organisation’s efforts to monitor; analyse and communicate with strategic stakeholders about different meanings in society (Hallahan, 2001:27). Issues management is thus an outside-in cultural mindset and re-links an organization and its stakeholder ecosystem. The linkages enhance responsiveness to change and acknowledge the myriad expectations of various stakeholders. Issues management involves connectivity with, rather than control of, other social systems by the commissioning system.

Issues Negotiation is offered by Watson et al. (2002) as the alternative to the traditional “decide, dictate, defend” approach. Whereas the traditional approach consists of a common strategy where an organization “decides” on its plans, before “dictating” them to stakeholders with a pre-prepared “defence” of its position, Issues Negotiation is aimed at building trusting relationships through ongoing dialogue. The “decide, dictate, defend” approach has an “iceberg” effect - it scratches the surface of the issue, without addressing the underlying issues. There is a fundamental business imperative for effectively communicating in a truly relevant, timely and regular way with all stakeholders. Also, issues are not static. Rather, they evolve from a period of inception and growth to maturity and there communication strategies will change with their development status.

6 Case Study Application

6.1 Introduction to Telkom SA

6.1.1 Transforming role in society

In addressing the ‘who’ of the study, Telkom SA’s role in its societal context from 1997 to date will be analysed according to Jensen’s three different concepts of the company in society (Jensen, 2001:133). This analysis provides a mechanism to understand the transformation of Telkom SA’s role and responsibility in society and will illustrate how debates and developments in the public sphere have redefined the role of the company at different periods of time. It is, however, important to note that the order of the three concepts of the company in society is different from that described by Jensen.

6.1.1.1 Phase 1: Dual bottom line

Since 1997, the telecommunication landscape in SA has been dominated by the search for new (foreign) investment in Telkom SA and the transformation of the sector through structural liberalisation. And, in 1997 - Telkom’s Strategic Equity Partner, Thintana, a consortium of the US telecommunications Company, SBC and Telekom Malaysia, acquired 30% of the company’s shares. This first step in the privatisation of the country’s telecommunications sector came with the dual focus on economic success on the one hand and adherence to specific licence obligations from government on the other. Licence targets were the result of government’s realisation that market returns were inadequate as
the driver for rolling-out services to low tele-density communities in line with the values and goals of the Government. Therefore it was considered necessary and legitimate that the South African government addresses apartheid legacies through legal regulations imposed on the company to supply services to under-served communities.

Whereas, for the first time, profit became a very real business driver for the previously 100% state-owned enterprise, it had to comply with government initiated licence targets in return for exclusivity rights as the monopoly provider of telecommunication services in the country.

Being part of the new South African business environment - with government as the majority shareholder - further implied a very strong drive towards political transformation in the form of Employment Equity (black and gender appointments) and Black Economic Empowerment (through supplier contracts). During this phase Telkom management’s focus was to be economically successful while achieving social targets.

6.1.1.2 Phase 2: Single bottom line

In 2000 the Government announced their decision to have an Initial Public Offering of Telkom shares. This meant a change in the status of the company from parastatal to listed company with the Government reducing its shareholding from 67% to 39%. The bursting of the dotcom bubble (in late 2000), together with delays in third generation mobile technology, in which huge sums had been invested, left many international investors with a mountain of debt and a drastically reduced appetite for investment in emerging markets, such as South Africa.

Nonetheless, both from the fiscal perspective (the SA budget for 2001/02 assumed R12bn in privatisation proceeds), and a policy credibility standpoint, the South African government could not postpone the listing of Telkom SA for too long. Finance Minister Trevor Manuel pushed hard for an IPO on the Johannesburg and New York security exchanges before the end of the 2001/02 financial year.

The company’s exclusivity period of five years was drawing to an end and even though it was still regulated by the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa, ICASA, the telecommunication landscape was to be restructured through a process of structured liberalisation with the reality of direct competition from a second network operator in the near future.

In preparation for these challenges, Telkom single-mindedly focused on unambiguous economic goals. Its business plan sets clear business objectives to be achieved on the journey to become a competitive, world-class communications business. It used legal processes to protect its market position and engaged in aggressive marketing to lock in key customers.

Management focus turned to market growth opportunities. The corporate culture of Telkom focused on efficiency, profitability and business acumen and how to instil a competitive mindset amongst its then 42 000 employees.

6.1.1.3 Phase 3: Multiple bottom line

In March 2003 the company was listed on the Johannesburg Securities and New York Stock Exchanges. This ushered in a new era, new shareholders (both South African and international institutions and individuals), and new demands.

Other forces shaping the South African business arena is the threat of HIV/Aids, the awareness of limited human resources, huge social problems such as poverty and the demands of internationally accepted good corporate governance - to name but a few.

Telkom today has to be economically successful; provide shareholder value to its new owners; abide by sectoral regulations; and meet the demands of the public and institutionalised stakeholders that sometimes transcend the bounds of legality. The company’s focus has moved from a dual (economic and social) bottom line, to a single bottom line, to a triple bottom-line. This means that Telkom has to blend a multiplicity of values into its strategic goals. It must deal with the complexity of public debate and institutionalised stakeholders. The move from an unambiguous goal, financial performance towards sustainable development and the triple bottom-line reflects the ambiguity of values and goals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business Goals</th>
<th>1997 -</th>
<th>2000 -</th>
<th>2003 and beyond</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dual: Economic success and achievement of social targets</td>
<td>Unambiguous: Ensuring that the company is a attractive investment opportunity (profitable) and worthy competitor</td>
<td>Ambiguous: Economic success and shareholder value; adherence to regulations; co-responsibility for the social agenda of the country; public goodwill “people, planet and profit”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus of Management</td>
<td>Bounded rationality; strategic planning and adapting to regulatory targets; lobbying</td>
<td>Rational strategic planning related to the market - market share, growth in revenue</td>
<td>Value-based management The multiple bottom line - dialogue, ethics, values, sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholders driving corporate behaviour</td>
<td>Government and customers (incl. emerging customers)</td>
<td>Business customers (due to high profit margins) and the Financial Community</td>
<td>Customers Shareholders Financial Community Employees Government and the Regulator Media The Public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Jensen, 2001: 139

Whereas the initial understanding of Telkom’s role in society focused on service delivery, people development and market demand on the one hand and Government regulations on the other, another function has emerged, emphasizing concepts such as “the public sphere” and “oil stakeholders”.

6.2 Research Design and Methodology

Evaluation has been a key buzzword in the corporate communication and public relations arena since the 1990s (Bissland, 1990; Kim et al., 1999). However, in the debate around the impact of public relations on organisational effectiveness (Kim, 2000; Hon, 1997) the emphasis moved away from studying publicity as outcome, to a focus on research concepts such as environmental scanning as well as measuring the impact on attitude, behaviour, relationships, and the bottom line (Ehling, 1992; Lindenman, 1993, 1997; Lindborg, 1994; Hon, 1997; Hon & Grunig, 1999, Kim, 2001). While the role of these research methods is acknowledge by practition-
ers, they have not found a way to integrate the value of research methods into the day-to-day practice of corporate communication (Randford & Goldstein, 2002: 252). According to Kim et al. (1999) this trend has widened the gap between practitioners and academicians with measurement tools for media exposure being developed from the industry (Haus, 1993; Holloway, 1992, Thel- lusson, 2003), not academicians.

This study aims to take the measurement of media exposure beyond pure content analysis, reconciling a practical study of the media with the latest theoretical thinking in European public relations. In this context formalised research methodology serves two purposes. The first is to keep us, as researchers, honest and able to control our biases and reduce errors. The second is to enable us to convince a sceptical audience that what we have found is valid and accurate (Sumser, 2001).

In order to achieve the set research objectives, this study made use of a triangulated design to provide for a reiterative qualitative and quantitative approach. Qualitative methodology was applied to explore and respond to the dynamic contexts of the Public Sphere and included the Expert Panel Discussion, as well as coding decisions made during the research process. The quantitative methodology allowed for longitudinal analysis of quantified data. In this study content analysis was conducted on 5 094 articles, containing coverage of Telkom and the (tele)communication sector, that were published in South Africa from June 2002 to March 2003.

6.2.1 Data Collection and Data Capturing

Time series analyses for the measuring of impact of media exposure are impossible without accumulated data (Kim et al., 1999). The data compiling process must start with the development of reliable measurement tools. Articles were downloaded from the Monitoring South Africa website, a full text online database. Monitoring South Africa specializes in the daily monitoring of over 600 publications country wide. Monitoring entailed a key word search on the text of all printed and electronic (web-based) publications in South Africa for any mention of Telkom or any of its competitors. If a mention occurred, the relevant article, story, feature or piece was collected, made electronically available in PDF format and captured on the online database with password protection for use of Telkom only.

The use of the Monitoring South Africa database resulted in quick and efficient access to all articles and saved a significant amount of time and effort that usually goes with the tedious data gathering process. The physical unit, such as the size and space properties of a media article, is referred to in the study as the unit of analysis and is accounted for in the coding process. For purposes of data analysis, every unit of analysis was entered into SPSS as a single line data entry with a unique identity, coded into the associated fields of: publication name; date of publication; source; headline; tagline; byline; page numbers; Telkom spokesperson; other people quoted; column centimetres; etc.

With keyword-based monitoring and analysis, the research has to spend a fair amount of time to eliminate irrelevant articles (Kim & Kim, 2001:158). These include movie reviews, entertainment sections and countless other unrelated or questionably relevant items. Filtering the data allowed for a better picture of the quantity, type and impact of the relevant coverage. Completely irrelevant coverage was discarded at all times. Relevant coverage was categorized as one of the following:

- Telkom mention: A mere reference to Telkom
- Telkom statement: Any reference to, or statement about Telkom, spanning more than 3 lines, or approximately 20 words
- Telkom exclusive article: Where the main theme or topic dealt with, or referred to, Telkom
- Competitor mention: Where a competitor company such as Vodacom, MTN/V Cell, Cell C, Eastel, Transtel or Sentech is mentioned in an article

This provided a sound database for longitudinal quantitative analysis. Over the period June 2002 to March 2003, 5 094 relevant articles on Telkom SA were analysed contributing to 55 480 column centimetres of coverage. Column centimetres were measured as the real size of a media piece, including any visuals.

Further qualitative analysis included an assessment of the report type as:

- Editorial/Unsigned Editorial - defined as a newspaper or periodical article that is given a special or significant place, and that intentionally expresses the views of those in control of the publication on a matter of current interest. Unsigned editorials represent the view of the publication or section of the publication, whereas other editorials are the views of an individual editor or a small group of individuals (editorial team).
- Advertorial - which includes ‘paid for’ special reports, inserts and subsidized sections.
- Journalist - an article, story, feature or news item generated by, or attributed to, a specific journalist, that does not fall under any of the other categories.
- Wire Service/News Report - an article, story or news item attributed to a syndicated news agency that sends out news copy to subscribing clients by wire.
- Letter - Letters from members of the public / readers of the publication, published in the media.
- Unknown - Any item which does not fall under any of the above, including but not limited to, summary columns, staff writers and correspondents, and articles with no quoted source.

Another value judgment made for each of the entries into the database, is whether a published piece was solicited or unsolicited media coverage. Solicited coverage results from an initiative taken by Telkom, be it a media release, media conference, briefing to selected journalists or a one-on-one interview with an influencer in media circles. Unsolicited coverage results from the media’s own agenda.

Items were coded by five trained coders. A supervisor to the coding team analysed 20% (1020 articles). Reliability was measured by computing interceding reliability coefficients. Overall intercoder reliability was 82.5%. Variables that have an intercoder reliability of more than 70% are generally acceptable (Litwin, 1995).

6.2.2 Content Analysis

Traditionally content analysis focused on positive-negative-neutral evaluations of relevant articles. For this study a customized Telkom methodology has been developed. In line with the Reflective Paradigm’s position that social systems view their environment from the perspective of their own logic, Telkom identified, - with its vision, values and strategic objectives as point of departure, - an unique framework consisting of 31 Telkom themes. The content belonging to each of these themes was clearly defined as well as ‘what will constitute Telkom’s ideal position’, or the Telkom slant. This resulted in content analysis by Telkom themes and a judgment made on whether the content relates to the ideal Telkom position or if it opposes this position. Not every unit of analysis was forced into a Telkom theme. Incidental mentions of Telkom were only coded if the link between Telkom and the main theme of the article was direct. Content that opposed the desired Telkom position was labelled as ‘Negative’. To interpret ‘Negative’ reporting it was further analysed as:

- Negative Statement: Where a directly negative statement is
made about Telkom. E.g, Telkom overcharges its customers
• Negative by Implication: Where the opposite of the ideal is implied
  but not stated directly. E.g, Telkom has posted wonderful results for the last quarter, could this perhaps be because of
  their “aggressive” pricing strategy?
• Negative by Omission: Where Telkom is omitted from a list
  or set of companies when it should obviously be included. E.g.
  Companies which sponsor the proudly South African campaign
  are, Eskom etc, leaving out Telkom
• Negative by Association: Where Telkom is associated with a
  negative event or action. E.g, An ex-Telkom employee killed his
  spouse yesterday

6.2.3 Impact Assessment
The obvious difficulty in assessing publicity exposure’s value or
impact is the number of uncontrollable variables such as location,
visual treatment (both size of headlines and graphics), editorial
touch and subjective treatment on a conscious or subconscious
level by individual journalists.
From raw press coverage, a number of assessments are typically
made to determine impact and penetration. Weights are tradi-
tionally added to a measure of the article’s volume to reflect the
page-sitting (placement), the inclusion (or not) of photography,
brand prominence within the article and the influence of the me-
dium with the stakeholders concerned (Thellusson, 2003: 16). As
long as these are applied consistently they can be an excellent
way to gauge the impact of coverage on different stakeholders rel-
ient to the company (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000:294). Instead
of assessing individual cases as they occur, this study developed
a comparative weighting index per publication to be automati-
cally applied to all coverage during data analysis. The comparative
weighting index was developed through a structured Expert Panel
discussion calculating the relative importance (weight) of different
publications for priority stakeholder groups as well as the effect of
varied placement of articles.
The experts involved in this panel discussion were individuals with
knowledge of macro strategic issues, different forms of mass me-
dia, and the telecommunications sector. The panel of 12 experts
included three Corporate Communication professionals, two fi-
ancial analysts, four media experts and three opinion leaders in
the telecommunications sector. It is important to note that this
index is intrinsically relevant to Telkom only and that it deliberately
attempted no financial assessment of ‘worth’.
The aim of the study was to understand public discourse in terms
of the participants, their meanings and logics, and therefore equat-
ing the value of coverage achieved to equivalent advertising was
irrelevant. Usually when press coverage is used in an attempt to
substantiate the value added by Media Relations, this equation is
used in correlation with a multiplier to reflect the very real advan-
tages of editorial over advertising in terms of believability, credibil-
ity, trust and resultant action (Thellusson, 2003: 16).
However, to Telkom publicity is a fact of life and as such the Com-
pany’s objective was to understand the likely impact on Telkom
priority stakeholders in terms of the use of the publication.

6.2.4 Data Analysis
The data was analyzed using SPSS V 11.5.0 (SPSS, 2002). The data
was screened for any data entry errors using a variety of statistical
procedures. Once the data was cleaned, a number of transforma-
tions were required to calculate new variables that factored in
the weights decided on during the Expert Panel Discussion.
Firstly, new variables were computed that reflected the number
of articles per publication and per journalist. To avoid over repre-
sentation of syndicated articles the total number of articles were
reduced by the number of separate publications that carried the
article. Secondly, a new variable was calculated that reflected the
placement weight. Once these computations were made, two dif-
ferent weights were calculated that would eventually be used as the
weighing factor.
• The first weight was computed as follows: Weight1 = number
  of articles *column centimetres* panel’s publication weight.
• The second weight was computed as follows: Weight2 =
  number of articles *column centimetres* panel’s publication
  weight* articles placement weight. The data was analyzed sepa-
rately for each weight.

Standard cross tabulations and descriptive statistics were used to
investigate the impact of themes per journalist and per publica-
tion. The data allowed us to determine patterns in the way that
publications/journalists report on themes; to investigate the treat-
ment of different spokespeople by different media and to assess
the potential impact of different publications and journalists on
key stakeholders.
For trend analysis data sets were combined and issues were ana-
lyzed per month. The idea was to look for underlying equations
over time, by plotting development of discourse in relation to the
pressure on that issue. By mapping social discourse as covered
by the media over time, patterns of meaning emerges, and the
development of needs and expectations of stakeholder groups
become clear and actionable. Perceptual maps were generated
using themes and publications as dimensions. Additional percep-
tual maps were generated that used the article placement as a
dimension as well.

6.3 Findings
The next section of the paper highlights some empirical findings.
Even though a report was submitted on a monthly basis - compar-
ing the media for the specific month with the baseline for preced-
ing months - this section of the report will concentrate on the
findings in March as the month of the listing.

6.3.1 Sources of Reporting
For the period, June 2002 to March 2003, more than half (57%)
of the 4401 Telkom related units of analysis were accredited to
journalists, followed by 9% coverage lifted from syndicated news
services, 5% consisting of letters from readers and 3% editorial
content dealing with Telkom. Unknown items represented any ar-
ticle or media item which was not accredited to a single named
source, including but not limited to, financial quotes, summary col-
umns and items not accredited to journalists in name, but as staff
writer or business correspondent.

During March, the month of the Telkom listing, coverage on Telkom
meaningfully increased and became significantly more financially
focused in contrast to the general and more political nature of the
media debate during the pre-listing period. Whereas on average
per month, 42 items from news services were lifted into print reporting. March saw an increase to 102 items from wire services. As the media’s need for reliable financial information increased, their use of financially focused wire services increased accordingly. During the pre-listing period, an average of 24 articles from the South African Press Association (Sapa) (the syndicated news wire service most frequently used) were lifted per month. During March however, Reuters - a more financially focused news service - increased from an average of 11 items per month, to 44. In contrast, only 30 Sapa items were used in newspaper reporting during March. The category ‘other wire services’, which includes financial services such as I-net Bridge, also increased from a monthly average of 5 to 22 units of analysis during March.

Illustration 4 shows the increase in column centimetre coverage per publication in March. Column centimetre exposure varied distinctively according to media interest in Telkom, while number of article exposure did not show these variations.

6.3.2 Coverage

Over the period, June 2002 to April 2003, Telkom had been exposed in 300 different printed and online publications. Each publication’s coverage was analysed by (1) the number of articles and (2) column centimetres devoted to Telkom.

The Business Day and the Business Report were the two daily newspapers who covered Telkom most frequently with 435 and 280 articles respectively over the period. Both publications have a business focus. Of the more general mainstream daily press, Telkom was covered most frequently by Die Beeld (257 items), followed by Sowetan (247 items) and Die Burger Eastern Cape (192 items). The Sunday Times (124 items) covered Telkom more than any other weekly publication. The Financial Mail provided Telkom with significantly more coverage than any other magazine. In comparing publicity exposure in community newspapers over time, the number of articles community newspapers dedicated to Telkom was similar indicating that community newspapers reacted in the same way to Telkom news, occurrences and events. Publications’ month-to-month coverage of Telkom in terms of number of articles was relatively stable over the ten month period. Business Day can serve as example with had on average 41 articles per month on Telkom, with 67 as the highest number of articles in March, and 38 the lowest number of articles in October. Column centimetre coverage, however, showed a distinctive difference from month to month and corresponded directly with the level of interest the media showed in Telkom at different stages during the time period analysed. With a few exceptions, column centimetre coverage increased significantly during March as publications covered the listing. Whereas the average column centimetres per month over the pre-listing period was 5-548, it increased to 12 777 during March 2003 even though the number of articles remained stable - the articles did not become more, but longer. Publications with a business focus showed greater increases in Telkom coverage than publications with a general news focus. However, certain non-financially focused publications such as Volksblad, Sowetan and Die Burger covered the listing from both a financial and political point of view. This dual nature of reporting led to substantial column centimetre coverage.

6.3.3 Impact on Telkom Stakeholders

Using the weighing index developed by the Expert Panel Discussion, exposure (number of articles and column centimetres) was aligned with the relevance of a specific publication for Telkom priority stakeholders. Placement (front page place story, news pages, editorial page or back pages) was also taken into account as a prominent factor.

Over the period of analysis, Business Day and Business Report, the two business-focused daily newspapers, consistently had the highest impact. During various phases of the pre-listing debate individual publications took an interest in certain aspects of the discussion and consequently had an increased impact on stakeholders for some time. During March, Sowetan, Beeld and Die Burger had a significant impact due to their coverage of the listing from both a political and financial perspective, which increased the volume of their coverage and consequently their impact.

In total 689 journalists reported on Telkom during the period June 2002 to March 2003. Their impact on Telkom stakeholders varied significantly due to variations in their output. That can be ascribed
to journalists’ going on holiday, being assigned to different beats and changing publications. Certain journalists however had a consistently high impact. These include Robyn Chalmers and Lesley Stones from Business Day and Ryk van Niekerk who writes for various Afrikaans publications. During March, due to the emphasis on accurate financial information, content lifted from wire services accounted for 15% of overall coverage. This means that during the month of the listing, wire services in many cases had a significantly higher impact on Telkom stakeholders than individual journalists.

6.3.4 Trends per publication
The proportionate contribution per source towards the total coverage per publication was calculated in order to understand which sources contribute the majority of publications’ coverage on Telkom. The ratio of ‘Telkom slanted’ to ‘negative exposure’ of major contributing sources has then been analysed in order to better understand where reporting does not overlap with the Telkom logic or meaning and, in other words, contradicts the company’s desired identity. Over the 10-month period, 82% of the exposure that Telkom received through the pen of Lesley Stones was positive, against 18% negative reporting. The corresponding figures for Robyn Chalmers and Ryk van Niekerk were both 88% positive and 12% negative, with Marina Bidoli of the Financial Mail at 57% positive and 43% negative. Illustration 7 represents a profile of Business Day during March 2003, with its major contributors (Journalists and Wire services) and the portion of these contributors’ coverage that was negative.

Tracking individual publications’ theme coverage over time allows for insight into the publications’ editorial philosophy. Certain publications showed a stable pattern of theme coverage with little variation from month to month. Business Day (Illustration 8). Die Beeld and Financial Mail are excellent examples of newspapers where a predictable pattern of theme coverage emerged over the period of analysis. Publications which showed significant variation of theme coverage tended not to be actively involved in the debate and only covered (tele)communications issues sporadically. These include regional publications such as The Mercury and The Daily News.

6.3.5 Negative Exposure Index
Apart from understanding who the sources were that contributed to negative coverage of Telkom for each individual publication, it was important to gain insight into the negative coverage that Telkom received in relation to specific themes. In order to understand which themes contributed to negative exposure, a Negative Exposure Index was constructed. This index maps the position of a specific theme in relation to the overall coverage on the theme and the frequency of negative coverage it attracted. Block Economic Empowerment and Employment Equity, a strong political theme that directly relate to Telkom’s investment case, attracted intensely negative coverage in the period December 2002 to January 2003 while the Khulisa share offer was reported by the media. In March 2003 the coverage on the theme was less negative and the frequency of coverage over the period remained constant. Coverage on Employee Development and Support increased in frequency and negativity during the month of the listing with Trade Unions being concerned about the future of their members in a new shareholders era. As can be expected, reporting on Telkom’s Financial Performance increased in frequency in the three months directly prior to the listing and exposure was not negative. The Positioning of Telkom as a company attracted high frequencies of reporting during June to November. At the three months pre-listing, the de-
bate centred on Government as the party who drives the Initial Public Offering and the Positioning of Telkom as company received less than expected, negative coverage. However, as soon as the listing happened, criticism against Telkom increased and shareholders expressed their concern with the fact that the regulation of the industry to allow for direct competition to Telkom is taking too long.

6.3.6 Discourse Analysis
In following the debate in the public sphere, it was valuable to monitor the intensity of the debate (reflected in column centimetres) as well as the role players who actively participated in the debate by tracking not only the publications and journalists, but also stakeholders.

The discourse analysis in Illustration 10 provides a simplified view of stakeholder involvement in the pre-listing debate. Stakeholder groups entered the debate with specific sentiments or agendas regarding Telkom’s planned listing and based on opportunities created by events/happenings, they increased or decreased their participation. Though perhaps oversimplified, the analysis illustrates when stakeholder group was involved over time and the intensity of their involvement (intensity is denoted by darker shades). Certain stakeholders are led by events and do not play a substantial role in shaping the events. Stakeholders such as Government and ICASA however, play an active role in shaping the debate.

6.3.7 Theme Coverage and Associations
The frequency with which themes are associated with each other provides an interesting insight into the nature of media discussion. Attractiveness of the emerging telecommunication markets was for example always linked to Telkom’s financial performance which makes sense from an investment perspective. During the pre-listing debate, Telkom ready for the IPO was associated with the Regulatory Framework and Pricing of telecommunication services, but during the month of the listing the association shifted to Telkom’s financial performance. Discussion on Government as the driver of the IPO was pre-listing linked to Telkom’s positioning as a company, and its Black Economic Empowerment and Employment Equity actions. In the listing month this theme became directly associated with Telkom’s financial performance.

All of these associations illustrate the shift from a political, more general debate in the pre-listing time period to a distinctive discussion on financial performance during the listing month. From this analysis it further becomes clear that spokespersons for Telkom increased their association with listing related themes during March due to their comments on the successful listing. In association with the financial performance of the company, the listing debate in March touched on Vodacom as a 50% owned subsidiary and the Strategic Equity Partners as other shareholders.

The privatisation debate reached a major historical milestone with the listing of Telkom shares on the Johannesburg and NewYork Stock exchanges during March. Over the pre-listing period the frequency of theme occurrences was tracked and an average frequency per theme for a month has been calculated as a baseline. Illustration 12 compares theme frequencies during March to this baseline.
Government drives the IPO process was consistently the most prominent theme in the 9 months of media analysis, and increased during March due to the culmination of the listing debate. The themes Financial performance, Vodacom and Strategic Equity Partner occurred more frequently during March, driven by the listing and financial focus associated with it. References to Block Economic Empowerment and Employee Development and Support increased during March due to the fears of employees and their trade unions.

7. Management Implications

7.1 Issues Management

From the findings it became clear that the issues/themes that received most coverage in all the media over the period June 2002 to March 2003 related directly and indirectly to Telkom’s offering of shares to the public. Post-listing, one can expect the media to be covering the company from new/different angles. Because of the stable editorial coverage patterns that we’ve seen developing over the past ten months, publications are likely to now focus on their second and third most favourite themes. Generally speaking, these would be issues around (1) the positioning of Telkom as company (competitiveness, delivery); (2) pricing; and (3) regulations. From the discourse analysis it’s clear that the privatisation debate has concluded with the exception of the discussion on Employee Development and Support as theme. Trade Unions are still concerned about the future of their members and are likely to keep this debate alive in the Public Sphere. The theme will be linked directly to the positioning of Telkom as a company and can potentially impact very negatively on Public Trust. Another emerging issue to keep in mind is the fact that Telkom still functions as a monopoly - Government’s intention to grant a Second Line Operator license has not yet materialized. This sustained monopoly status of the newly privatized company, is causing frustration to many stakeholders and can lead to amplified coverage of any negative event relating to Telkom.

Given the vision and strategic objectives of Telkom, it would serve the Company well to not only ensure proper positioning of Telkom messages on the above mentioned three themes, but also to ensure that the following themes are carried by the media into the Public Sphere:

- Model citizen
- Sound corporate governance
- Black Economic Empowerment
- Corporate Social Investment
- Compliance with legislation

7.2 Relationship Management

Every year companies are spending huge amounts of money on advertising. Not only because they want to ‘push products (or services)’ but also to consistently communicate what the company stand for in terms of its vision and values. However, research by Hoeken & Renkema (in van Lunenburg, 2002: 126) as well as Cameron (1994) indicates that publicity outperforms advertising in contributing to people’s memory, recall, recognition, and purchase intention, mainly due to is higher credibility in terms of third party endorsement. This emphasised the importance of investment in media relations.

From the findings of the study it became clear that editorial philosophy dominates news selection and the treatment of themes. This corresponds with the organizational orientated theories of news selection (Breed, 1955; Gans, 1979). The differences in media coverage are not caused by journalists in the first place but by the products they make (Bird, 1993; van Lunenburg, 2002). The culture of the publication or media organisation dominates the process of news selection (Breed, 1955; Tuckman, 1978). Therefore an Editor Programme engaging the leadership (editors) of publications that consistently had the highest impact on Telkom stakeholders is an apparent management implication of the study.

The role of journalists in shaping public debate increases in importance due to the general information overload (van Lunenburg, 2002:126). News reporting is always subjective, because journalists give their own interpretation in the way that they offer a story. In a complex industry with huge quantities of data and information available, journalists’ ability to report on these matters in an educated way, is of paramount importance. The findings of the study identified journalists with a high impact on Telkom stakeholders. It’s therefore proposed that Telkom invests time and money in the general education of these journalists on the (tele)communications sector. The programme can be individualized to cater for the needs of journalists newly appointed on the telecommunications beat, in any of the high impact publications.

Apart from the general education described above, Marina Bidoli who was the most negative, high impact journalist over the 10 month period, has to be influenced especially on her stance in relation to legislative and regulatory issues concerning Telkom and the Regulator, ICASA. Off-the-record briefings on Telkom’s position on cases brought against it in the High Court or ICASA (the Regulator) as well as cases brought by Telkom to both these for a is planned for the future.
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She holds a BA Communication from RAU and has 18 years experience as a communication professional.

In her current position she is responsible for Telkom’s strategic brand management, including managing the Company’s vision strategy, culture programme and corporate reputation.

Amanda was responsible for the communication strategy which saw Telkom transforming from “Public Enemy Number One” (in 1992) to South Africa’s Most Admired Company (Markinor Study, 1998).

Retha Groenewald

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Retha started her career in Potchefstroom as a PR & Marketing Officer to the Dome Trail Eco Tourism organisation while lecturing part-time at the Department of Communication. From 1996 to 1998, she lectured at the Department of Marketing and Communication Management at the University of Pretoria. During 1998, the opportunity to work with Dr Gustav Puth on a venture known as Marketing and Communication Solutions provided Retha with practical and relevant experience. From this point, she joined Telkom SA. As a Senior Manager in Corporate Communication (October 1999) she focused on Issues Management, Transformation Communication, Management Communication and Employee Relations. In December 2001, Retha chose to leave Telkom and to work as an independent consultant in association with a network of experts in the PR, Events Management, Marketing and Communication environment. She later joined Ask Afrika in August 2002, as a Senior Business Analyst.