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A metamodern model for managing stakeholder relationships in non-profit organisations

ABSTRACT

It is posited that this article is an important theoretical addition in the field of strategic communication as it seeks to eradicate the conceptual tension between the two dominant discourses, namely modernist and postmodernist explanations of how organisations should manage stakeholder relationships. Modernists believe in a single truth, accept metanarratives and believe that grand theory represents knowledge and can explain everything, whilst postmodernists reject the absolute standards and grand theories typical of modernism in favour of awareness and tolerance of differences, ambiguity and conflict. This article links these two perspectives in a new metamodern model for stakeholder relationship management, aimed specifically at the South African non-profit sector. A conceptual theoretical framework was developed and tested by means of exploratory qualitative and interpretative research through interviews with senior management in the non-profit sector. The findings suggest that a metamodern perspective requires constant negotiation between modernism and postmodernism. We also highlight the need for formal training in stakeholder relationship management. This entails adopting a micro-perspective by regularly identifying current strategic issues, mapping the stakeholders involved and linking them to these issues, and designing focused communication strategies to manage stakeholder relationships. The main research implications are that stakeholder relationship management is a function which should not simply be delegated to the communication specialist, and that it should

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be practised from a metamodern perspective and not a modernistic or postmodern perspective. The originality and value of this research initiative lies in the development of a metamodern model for stakeholder relationship management for the non-profit sector which has been proposed and tested in practice.

INTRODUCTION

The terms non-profit organisations (NPOs) and non-profit institutions (NPIs) are often used interchangeably in the literature. Confusion surrounds the distinction between terms such as non-profit companies (NPCs), public-benefit organisations (PBOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations (CBOs) and faith-based organisations (FBOs) (Lovells, 2015). A review of the literature reveals that non-profit organisations appear to be the most common form in South Africa. The non-profit sector has been instrumental in building sustainable reconciliation strategies, and continues to have an impact on the lives of the disadvantaged and the vulnerable in this country (Holtzhausen, 2014; Statistics South Africa, 2015). Notwithstanding, NPOs need to cope with a general lack of support, intangible funding criteria, reduced funding from government, the global recession, and increased corporatisation and competition, all of which threaten the future survival of many NPOs in South Africa.

Gallagher and Weinberg (1991) argue that NPOs function in a more complex environment than for-profit organisations, which makes NPO marketing and communication more complicated than it is in other types of organisation. Knox and Gruar (2007) point out that NPO stakeholders have complex relationships with NPOs and are often directly involved in achieving NPO organisational goals, and are therefore regarded as playing a more important role than stakeholders in commercial businesses. Despite the strong theoretical focus on the relevance of effective stakeholder relationships in NPOs, there appears to be no framework or model for designing and implementing strategies to manage stakeholder relationships aimed specifically at the NPO sector. The purpose of this study was to address this gap and to develop a metamodern model for stakeholder relationship management, aimed at the South African non-profit sector.

The research problem and objectives formulated against this background are illustrated in Figure 1.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

A metamodern stakeholder relationship management model for the South African non-profit sector has not been done before

OBJECTIVE	OBJECTIVE	OBJECTIVE	OBJECTIVE	OBJECTIVE
To determine the extent of knowledge of the stakeholder relationship management concept as a governing principle amongst senior management and communication specialists (should they exist) in South African NPOs	To determine whether managers in the South African NPO sector align stakeholder relationship management strategies with organisational business strategies and current strategic organisational issues	To determine how South African NPO managers identify the salience of stakeholders, and whether it is done from a modernist, a postmodernist perspective or both	To determine if the communication strategies of the South African NPO sector are linked to their stakeholder relationship management strategies	To determine how senior managers in the South African NPO sector could best practise strategic stakeholder relationship management within an interrelated worldview of modernism and postmodernism

Figure 1: The research problem and objectives

1. THE METAMODERN WORLDVIEW OF THE STUDY

Postmodernists reject the absolute standards and grand theories typical of the modernist approach in favour of awareness and tolerance of differences, ambiguity and conflict (Overton-de Klerk & Verwey, 2013). Modernists, however, believe in a single truth, accept metanarratives, and believe that grand theory represents knowledge and can explain everything (Irvine, 2014).

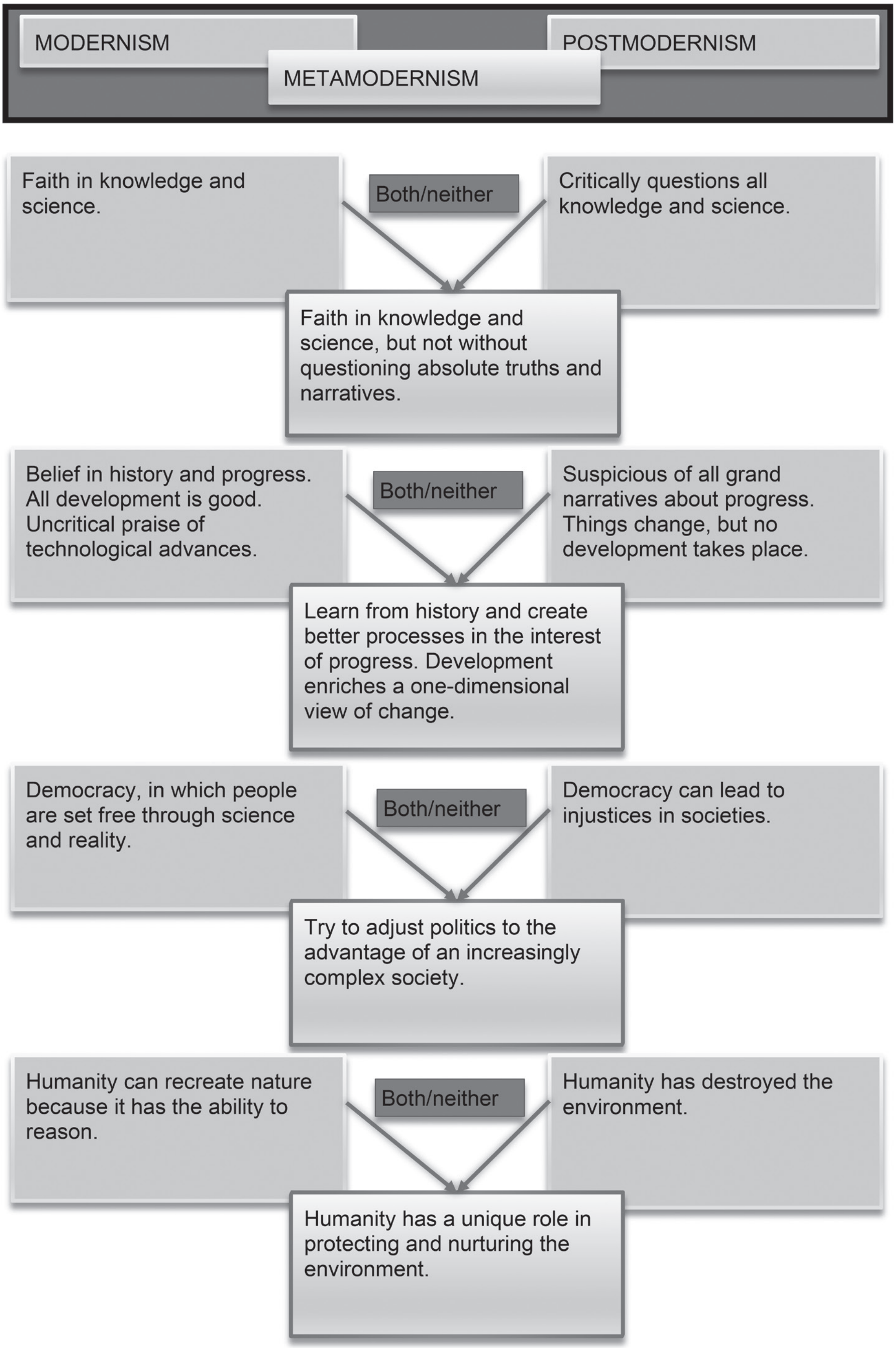
It seems, however, that the views of the modernist versus postmodern rationale are blurring. Both schools of thought agree that a grand theory will not explain everything, especially in the field of public relations (Grunig, 2006) and that a multiparadigmatic approach has become necessary (Overton-de Klerk and Verwey, 2013). In an effort to illustrate the move from modern to postmodern organisational practice and its impact on communication management, Overton-de Klerk and Verwey (2013) conclude that there is a need for a new and creative approach to communication management in which both modernism and postmodernism play a balanced role.

Holtzhausen (2008) argues that communication management practitioners should study communication practices from the perspectives created by their own milieus, which appear to be mostly modernistic. Clark (2006) believes that theoretically we may be in a period of postmodern thinking, but that modernism still holds powerful sway in many people's view of things. According to Shapiro (2013), South African brand leaders operate predominantly from a modernist paradigm in which active consumer stakeholders are neglected.

Concurring with the foregoing arguments that it is not necessary to destroy one paradigm in favour of another (Grunig, 2006), that multiple beliefs can co-exist (Brown, 2006), that communication research should be studied in the given milieu (Holtzhausen, 2008), which in South Africa is arguably mostly modernistic (Shapiro, 2013), an interrelated worldview of modernism and postmodernism, namely metamodernism, was used to approach this study.

Metamodernism does not imply a balance between modernism and postmodernism, as suggested by Overton-de Klerk and Verwey (2013), but represents a constant swinging of the pendulum or an ontological oscillation during which metamodernism negotiates between modernism and postmodernism (Vermeulen and Van den Akker, 2010). Vermeulen and Van den Akker (2010) conceptualise the epistemology and ontology of metamodernism in relation to modernism and postmodernism as a both-neither dynamic, and explain that it is simultaneously modern and postmodern as well as neither of them. Freinacht (2015) expands on this concept by changing it to both-and. According to him, a both-and worldview is needed to become a metamodernist, which indicates a willingness to combine apparent opposites in order to construct new syntheses. Essentially, his argument is the same as Vermeulen and Van den Akker's (2010), hence the both-neither concept was used in this study. Considering the complex and unpredictable environment in which South African NPOs have to function, it was acknowledged that a linear and modernist approach to stakeholder relationship management would not be sufficient and therefore the unique paradigm of metamodernism was adopted.

Figure 2 presents a metamodern perspective on stakeholder relationship management.


MODERNISM
METAMODERNISM
POSTMODERNISM
Faith in knowledge and science.
Both/neither
Critically questions all knowledge and science.
Faith in knowledge and science, but not without questioning absolute truths and narratives.
Belief in history and progress. All development is good. Uncritical praise of technological advances.
Both/neither
Suspicious of all grand narratives about progress. Things change, but no development takes place.
Learn from history and create better processes in the interest of progress. Development enriches a one-dimensional view of change.
Democracy, in which people are set free through science and reality.
Both/neither
Democracy can lead to injustices in societies.
Try to adjust politics to the advantage of an increasingly complex society.
Humanity can recreate nature because it has the ability to reason.
Both/neither
Humanity has destroyed the environment.
Humanity has a unique role in protecting and nurturing the environment.

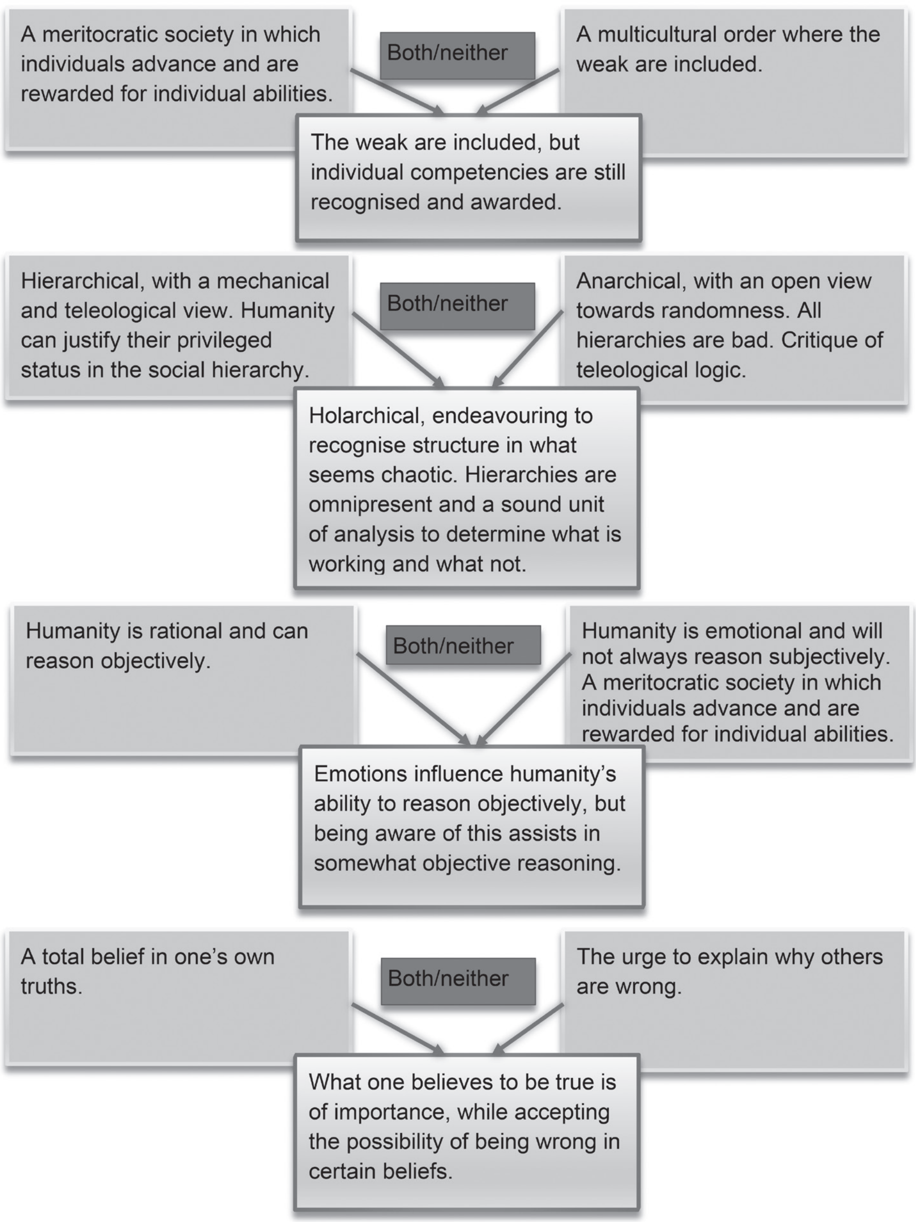


Figure 2: Contrasting metamodernism with modernism and postmodernism

Source: Researcher's own construct conceptualised from Clarke (2006); Vermeulen and Van den Akker (2010); Freinacht (2015); Freinacht (2017).

Figure 2 explains the fusion between modernism, postmodernism and metamodernism by illustrating how the synthesis between modernism and postmodernism is achieved through a metamodern perspective. It is posited that both modernist and postmodernist worldviews have value and relevance to stakeholder relationship management in applying the metamodern approach. It is argued finally that even though stakeholder theorists base their research on virtually any theory but the theory of public relations, communication management specialists should recognise the importance of building and managing relationships between stakeholders in the organisation, and that stakeholder relationship management should therefore be a broad management function.

2. COMMUNICATION THEORIES

The most prevalent theories in communication science, namely the systems theory, integrated communication, the excellence theory and the mixed-motive model of two-way communication theory, were deemed relevant since they are all concerned with interdependence, the management of relationships and stakeholder centricity. Although these theories have been criticised by postmodern scholars as too modernistic and therefore outdated (Overton-de Klerk and Verwey, 2013), this study illustrated that these so-called modernistic communication theories become relevant when approached from a metamodern worldview.

3. SOUTH AFRICAN NPOS AND GOVERNING CODES

Despite the acknowledgement from the NPO sector that strong relationships are key to achieving its organisational goals, there is a lack of knowledge and strategic thinking pertaining to the concept of stakeholder relationship management. The South African King III and King IV Reports on Corporate Governance both contain a chapter on stakeholder relationship management as a governing principle, and the King committee clearly regarded this principle relevant to the NPO sector when they included the subsequent NPO supplements, stating that NPO survival depends on strong stakeholder relationships (IoDSA, 2013). However, the same focus on stakeholder relationship management is not evident in the existing governance and ethical codes of the NPO sector.

The release of the King III Report on Corporate Governance resulted in an outcry from the South African non-profit sector, claiming that it was not appropriate for the NPO sector since it was written for the corporate sector (Gastrow, 2014). Wyngaard and Hendricks (2010) also held this view, pointing out that the King III Report on Corporate Governance uses terminology such as *Companies Act, shareholders, business and remuneration of directors*, none of which are applicable to NPOs. The provision of the *Practice Notes: A guide to the application of King III for Non-profit Organisations* did not satisfy the NPO sector and their discomfort about the King III Report on Corporate Governance resulted in the launch of the *Independent Code of Governance for Non-Profit Organisations in South Africa* in 2012 (Inyathelo, 2016). Two other documents provide governance guidelines for NPOs, namely the South African NGO Coalition's (SANGOCO) *Code of Ethics for Non-profit Organisations* (1997) and the *Code of Good Practice* *for South African Non-profit Organisations* (2001) issued by the South African Department of Social Development. Neither of these codes, conceptualised and produced by the NPO sector, addresses the concept of stakeholder relationship management adequately or provides guidance as to how to build and sustain these relationships.

4. A METAMODERN STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK FOR NPOS

Theorists concur that the process of organisation-stakeholder relationship formation consists mainly of three elements, namely: organisation-stakeholder *relationship antecedents*, organisation-stakeholder *relational outcomes*, and organisation-stakeholder *relationship maintenance strategies* to ensure the survival of relationships.

4.1 Organisation-stakeholder relationship antecedents relevant to the npo sector

Antecedents are precursors to the development of a relationship, and Broom, Casey and Ritchey (1997:16) propose that they include "perceptions, motives, needs and behaviours" as possible causes for developing such relationships. Based on the literature review, expectations, mutual consequences, and NPO-stakeholder association were regarded as the most relevant antecedents to stakeholder relationships in the NPO environment.

Expectations implies that a stakeholder has certain expectations of the behaviour of the organisation (or of other stakeholders) before they enter into a relationship (Thomlinson, 2000). Arguably, these expectations are also present during the relationship, and not meeting expectations may lead to the demise or weakening of the relationship (Kim & Rader, 2010). It is thus imperative that organisations are at all times aware of stakeholder expectations as a continuum during the relationships.

Grunig and Huang (2000) regard *consequences* as antecedents to relationships and employ the excellence theory to describe them, arguing that mutual consequences present a communication problem or opportunity which could be addressed by communication specialists. They argue that management decisions have consequences for stakeholders, and that the behaviour of these stakeholders influences the level of success with which decisions can be implemented (Grunig & Huang, 2000).

Seltzer and Zhang (2011) studied *party identification* or *association* (NPO association in the context of this study) as a relational antecedent. Goren (2005) identifies party identification as ''a sense of personal, affective attachment to a political party based on feelings of closeness to the social groups associated with the parties'' – a definition that could be regarded as applicable for NPO identification, substituting "party" with "NPO".

The relevance of these antecedents to the NPO sector is contextualised in Table 1.

Table 1: Antecedents to NPO stakeholder relationships

ANTECEDENT	DESCRIPTION	RELEVANCE TO NPOS
Expectations	Stakeholders have certain expectations from an organisation prior to entering into a relationship with it. These expectations determine their willingness to start such a relationship.	NPOs must know what their stakeholders' expectations are. They must understand that these expectations exist not only prior to the relationship, but also during it. They may also change from time to time.
Mutual consequences	Organisational decisions have consequences for stakeholders and stakeholder behaviour has consequences for the organisation. These mutual consequences lead to the establishment of relationships – positively or negatively.	NPO management must understand that all organisational decisions will have an impact on the formation of relationships and should work towards a positive impact.
Stakeholder-NPO association	Stakeholders may have a certain affinity for an organisation based on a personal attachment to the cause or social group the organisation represents. This may lead to a willingness to form a relationship with such an organisation.	NPOs often capitalise on the emotional connection between the cause they represent and stakeholders' association with the cause. However, it is imperative for NPOs to understand that associating with an organisation and its cause, does not necessarily lead to positive perceptions about the relationship the stakeholder has with the organisation.

Source: Researcher's own construct conceptualised from Goren (2005), Grunig and Huang (2000), Kim and Rader (2010), Seltzer and Zhang (2011), Thomlinson (2000).

4.2 Organisation-stakeholder relational outcomes relevant to the npo sector

The relational outcomes cited by most theorists, namely *trust, satisfaction, commitment* and *control mutuality* were regarded as relevant to the South African NPO environment. Considering the mandate of NPOs to develop and uplift communities, as well as their lack of resources to do so, *involvement* and *investment* were also considered as pertinent relational outcomes. The relevance of these relational outcomes to the NPO sector is contextualised in Table 2.

Table 2: Relational outcomes of NPO stakeholder relationships

RELATIONAL OUTCOME	DESCRIPTION	RELEVANCE TO NPOS
Trust	Trust implies the level of confidence stakeholders and organisations have in each other.	NPOs must accept that a certain level of trust is necessary before a stakeholder would embark on a relationship with them.
Satisfaction	Parties are positive about each other and believe that the benefits of being involved with one another outweigh the costs of doing so.	Research indicates that stakeholders will probably only be satisfied with organisations once they trust them. NPOs should therefore accept that satisfaction does not imply a short-term gratification, but a deeply seated contentment in the long run.
Commitment	The respective parties believe that it is worth committing resources to the relationship to develop, sustain and enhance it.	Commitment is an important relational outcome for the NPO sector, since they largely rely on the commitment of donors and volunteers to achieve organisational goals.
Control mutuality	Organisations and stakeholders have some level of control over each other. Control mutuality refers to the degree to which these parties agree on the accepted level of power to influence each other.	NPOs must accept that stakeholders have some level of control over them, but that they also have a level of control over their stakeholders.
Involvement (engagement)	Not only is the organisation involved in the well-being of its stakeholders, but stakeholders are involved in the organisational decision-making process.	NPOs generally exist because they are concerned about and involved in the well-being of certain stakeholders. They should, however, extend this concern to all their stakeholders and involve (or engage) as many of them as possible in their decision-making processes.
Investment	The organisation is willing to invest time and resources into building relationships with stakeholders.	NPOs must accept that without investing adequate resources into their stakeholder relationship management practices, organisational goals will be met with difficulty.

Source: Researcher's own construct conceptualised from Ledingham and Bruning (1998), Hon and Grunig (1999), Wiggill (2014).

4.3 Organisation-stakeholder relationship maintenance strategies

A range of stakeholder relationship management theories and approaches were selected as appropriate organisation-stakeholder relationship maintenance strategies for the South African NPO sector based on three principles.

Firstly, a clear understanding and a uniform organisational worldview of stakeholder relationship management are necessary in an organisation before the concept can be applied effectively. Consequently, the stewardship theory (Donaldson & Davis, 1989), descriptive, instrumental and normative theory (Donaldson & Preston, 1995), relationship management theory (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998), communicative theory of the firm (Koschmann et al., 2009) and the network theory of stakeholder influences (Rowley, 1997) were deemed appropriate points of reference. It is argued that managers intuitively take ownership of stakeholder relationships as suggested by the stewardship theory, and that from a metamodern perspective, the stakeholder relationship management theory is at the same time descriptive (describing how managers actually behave when dealing with stakeholders), instrumental (what will happen if managers behave in a certain manner) and normative (what should happen and what is the ideal). In line with the relationship management theory, it was argued that management should accept that communication is a strategic tool in establishing and sustaining stakeholder relationships. Lastly, according to the network theory of influences, NPO management should accept that they do not operate in silos, but that they and their organisations are embedded in networks, as much as stakeholders are tied to each other.

A *strategic stakeholder* was regarded as a stakeholder without whose support an organisation may cease to exist, provided that the stakeholder holds the characteristics of power, legitimacy and urgency as defined by Mitchell et al.'s (1997) theory of stakeholder identification and salience. The selection of techniques for identifying strategic stakeholders appropriate for the South African NPO sector hinges on the second principle that the identification of strategic stakeholders, including their attitudes, expectations and perceptions, constitutes a key component of a stakeholder relationship management strategy (Freeman, 1984; Grunig and Hunt, 1984; Grunig, 1992; Mitchell et al., 1997; Rowley and Moldoveanu, 2003). It was therefore suggested that NPOs should start with Freeman's (1984) hub-and-spoke stakeholder mapping, then group the stakeholders according to their links to the organisation by employing Grunig and Hunt's (1984) linkages model, whereafter Mitchell et al.'s (1997) stakeholder identification salience technique should be applied to determine stakeholders' power, legitimacy and degree of urgency pertaining to specific strategic issues.

Concurring with Koschmann (2007) that communication with strategic stakeholders and sharing meaning with them will assist NPOs in communicating success stories and strengthening their relationships with stakeholders, it was argued that formal stakeholder communication strategies are key to effective stakeholder relationship management. This third principle guided the selection of techniques that could assist the South African NPO sector in designing such communication strategies. Firstly, it was suggested that NPOs should determine why certain stakeholders are more actively involved in certain issues than others by using the variables of problem recognition, level of involvement and constraint recognition as suggested by the situational theory of publics (Grunig 1992). Once the level of power, legitimacy and level of involvement is known, Gregory's (2007) stakeholder communication strategy typology will assist NPOs in deciding which communication strategy would be applicable to which stakeholder grouping. Thereafter, a combination of Hon and Grunig's (1999) relationship management strategies with elements of the stewardship theory will encourage NPOs to build and sustain relationships with stakeholders by being accessible, positive, open and assuring, as well as through networking and the sharing of tasks.

The three principles discussed above formed the foundation of the design of the metamodern framework for stakeholder relationship management for NPOs. They are: **principle one** – establish a clear understanding and uniform organisational worldview of stakeholder relationship management; **principle two** – identify strategic stakeholders and their attitudes, expectations and perceptions; and **principle three** – design formal stakeholder communication strategies, as they are key to effective stakeholder relationship management.

Principle one resulted in stages one and two of the proposed framework, namely empower management to understand, accept and apply the concepts of stakeholder relationship management and reach internal consensus about strategic organisational issues. **Principle two** guided stage three of the framework, which was formulated as mapping stakeholders and identifying those that are strategic, and **principle three** resulted in stage four, namely designing a focused communication strategy.

Each of the four stages culminates in an action plan which includes the allocation of resources such as time, funds and human resources, and each stage is subject to continuous research and evaluation to ensure positive results. Although presented in a linear fashion, stages one to four are not static, but rather dynamic and organic in nature and need to be revisited constantly. As much as implementing these four stages could lead to growth and success for the organisation, NPO managers may, from time to time, have to start again at the beginning.

5. RESEARCH DESIGN

This empirical research study was exploratory in nature and was therefore based on a qualitative research design in order to obtain insider perspective and a holistic view of current stakeholder relationship management practices in South African NPOs (Burke and Christensen, 2002). The findings were contextualised in an interpretative approach to reach a deep and empathetic understanding of how people experience their everyday realities, and it was accepted that people are continuously making sense of their worlds by interpreting, giving meaning, justifying and rationalising everyday actions (De Vos et al., 2011).

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Unit of analysis refers to a collection of things that will be studied and represents the smallest elements under investigation (Du Plooy, 2002). The entity to which the conclusions of this research study should apply (Mouton, 1996) must represent the unit of analysis to be studied and therefore consisted of individuals in South African NPOs.

According to Mouton (1996134), “population is the sum total of all the cases that meet our definition of the unit of analysis”. The accessible population for this study was individuals in NPOs in South Africa. The target population, representing the population to be generalised to (Mouton, 1996), was managers in registered NPOs based in Gauteng, with the understanding that managers would include chief executive officers (CEOs), managing directors, heads of divisions (HODs), and/or individuals in a managerial position, including those responsible for the organisation’s communication function.

This study made use of non-probability sampling since focusing on managers of Gauteng-based registered NPOs as the target population implied that not every unit in the population had an equal chance to be selected. The sample was selected deliberately for a particular purpose and therefore indicates a purposive sample (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015), not with the intention to generalise the findings to the entire population, but to “elucidate the particular, the specific” (Creswell, 2007:128). The sampling method was therefore non-probability sampling through purposive sampling (the identified sample was arguably best suited to answer the research questions) and convenience sampling (location, as well as the availability and willingness of individuals to participate).

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews with managers in registered Gauteng-based NPOs were used as the data collection methodology. A semi-structured interview guide, containing open-ended questions, was utilised in order to allow the researcher to formulate other questions should the situation necessitate it (Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000). The realised sample consisted of 17 interview participants representing 12 organisations. Saturation of the data was reached around the tenth interview, but seven more interviews were done to increase credibility.

Trustworthiness of the data and findings was determined by complying with Lincoln and Guba’s (2000) criteria for assessing trustworthiness, namely, prolonged engagement, triangulation, member checks, structural corroboration, referential adequacy, purposive sampling, descriptive data, overlapping methods, audit trail, dependability audit, reflexivity, and a confirmability process. Morse et al.’s (2002) verification strategies for establishing the reliability and validity of the study were used. These included ensuring methodological coherence, appropriate sampling, collecting and analysing data concurrently, thinking theoretically, and developing theory.

QSR NVivo, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) programme, was used to code and categorise the data. NVivo is used to analyse all forms of data gathered through qualitative research methods by coding data into themes, sorting it into categories, and identifying connections and relationships between them (Hoover & Koerber, 2011). Data emerging from the face-to-face interviews was coded into categories, themes or recurring language, ideas or belief-patterns. The coding system was guided by the categories and subcategories of the interview guide, which in turn were guided by the thematic phases of the proposed stakeholder relationship management framework for NPOs. Although these categories, subcategories and themes guided the coding process, care was taken to be open to other emerging and non-predetermined codes (Creswell (2007:152). Whilst NVivo assists as a tool in data analysis, it does not do the intellectual work (Hoover & Koerber, 2011) and the tasks of analysing and interpreting the data remain the responsibility of the researcher. The data was recorded, transcribed, analysed and interpreted by using a combination of Marshall and Rossman's (1999) data analysis steps and Creswell's (2007) analytical spiral as described by De Vos et al. (2011).

7. FINDINGS

7.1 Findings pertaining to the proposed relational antecedents and outcomes

Expectations, mutual consequences and *stakeholder-NPO* association were regarded as relevant relational antecedents to stakeholder relationship management in the NPO sector. Participants were in agreement that these antecedents need to be present to lead to the formation of a relationship. One antecedent which was supported very strongly by virtually all the participants was *stakeholder-NPO association*. Although participants never used the terminology as such in defining what constitutes a stakeholder, they implied it through phrases like shared vision and values, a belief in what the organisation is doing, a "like-mindedness", a similar interest and a symbiosis of ideas.

Stakeholder-NPO association was added as an antecedent to all the stages of the proposed conceptual framework, not only to stages three and four as it appears in the conceptual framework. The second amendment pertains to the relational outcomes. The relational outcomes of *trust, satisfaction, commitment, control mutuality, involvement and investment* were regarded as relevant to the South African NPO environment. One participant expressed discomfort at the suggestion that managers should move away from regarding the organisation as the focal hub, to regarding stakeholders as centric to organisational success. He stated that it is of no use to him if the stakeholder is satisfied with the relationship, but not the organisation. Although this comment was made by only one participant, it was regarded as significant enough to amend the relational outcomes of each stage to clearly indicate that the relational outcomes of effective and strategic stakeholder relationship management would include *mutual trust, mutual satisfaction, mutual involvement* and *mutual investment*.

7.2 Findings for stage one of the conceptual framework

No evidence could be found in the data that NPO managers are adequately trained in the concepts of stakeholder relationship management, but ample evidence suggests that they regard relationships with their stakeholders as important, to the point where most participants believed that the NPO sector cannot function and survive without strong stakeholder relationships. Stage one of the conceptual framework was verbalised as *empower management to understand, accept and apply the concepts of stakeholder relationship management*, and was built on the principle that a clear understanding and uniform organisational worldview of stakeholder relationship management are needed in order for the function to be practised strategically. Based on the data analysis and interpretations thereof, no amendments to stage one of the conceptual framework were suggested. Knowledge of stakeholder relationship management thus functions as the starting point and first stage in an NPO stakeholder relationship management model.

7.3 Findings for stage two of the conceptual framework

Stage two of the conceptual framework was verbalised as *reach internal consensus about strategic organisational issues*, and was built on the principle that a clear understanding and uniform organisational worldview of stakeholder relationship management are needed in order for the function to be practised effectively. Based on the interpretation of the data obtained from the participants, stage two of the conceptual framework is regarded as a necessary stage, but in order to reiterate the importance of focusing on current, strategic, micro-level issues, it was reverbalised as *reach internal consensus about current strategic organisational issues*.

7.4 Findings for stage three of the conceptual framework

Stage three of the conceptual framework suggests that NPOs use Freeman's (1984) hub-and-spoke model to initially map all their stakeholders (potential, latent and internal), but that the process should then be refined by grouping these stakeholders according to their links to the organisation through applying Grunig and Hunt's (1984) linkages model, followed by Mitchell et al.'s (1997) theory of stakeholder identification and salience. Six participants stated that they had formally identified their stakeholders, although none of them referred to potential, latent or internal stakeholders as part of their stakeholder map. Two participants referred to the process as stakeholder mapping and in the case of one of them, there seems to be some resemblance to Grunig and Hunt's (1984) linkages model in the sense that the stakeholders are grouped according to their link to the organisation, such as a donor, a partner or a collaborator. However, in spite of virtually all the participants agreeing that stakeholders' levels of influence and power determine how important they are to the organisation, none documented these levels of influence and power strategically, and no conscious effort was made to link these levels of influence and power to current strategic issues. Only three participants spontaneously referred to employees as stakeholders. The proposal in stage three that Freeman's (1984) hub-and-spoke model and Grunig and Hunt's (1984) linkages model should be followed by Mitchell et al.'s (1997) theory of stakeholder identification and salience, was thus regarded as relevant. It is posited that by doing so, NPOs will be in a position to identify which stakeholders are salient and therefore strategic by considering their levels of legitimacy, power and interests as they pertain to each identified strategic issue. Stage three was verbalised as *map stakeholders and identify strategic stakeholders*, and was built on the principle that effective strategic stakeholder relationship management requires the identification of strategic stakeholders, as determined by their attitudes, expectations and perceptions.

7.5 Findings for stage four of the conceptual framework

Despite the belief amongst participants in the strong link between communication and stakeholder relationships, no evidence could be found of a strategic communication strategy directly linked to and in support of a stakeholder relationship management strategy. Based on the findings, stage four was verbalised as *design a focused communication strategy aligned with the stakeholder relationship management strategy*, and is supported by the principle that formal stakeholder communication strategies are key to effective stakeholder relationship management.

8. A METAMODERN STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIP MODEL FOR NON-PROFIT ORGANISATIONS

The findings emanating from the face-to-face semi-structured interviews enabled amendments to the conceptual framework and advanced it into a final model. The model consists of four stages which are all supported by an underlying principle. Relevant relational antecedents are indicated at each stage, as well as the input needed from the organisation in order to comply with this stage, and the anticipated outputs should the organisation succeed in executing the input tasks. Each stage also specifies which relational outcomes could be expected after successful implementation of this stage, as well as which theories form the foundation of the reasoning behind the design of the stage.

The research results revealed that senior NPO managers have no formal training in the concepts of stakeholder relationship management. Stage one of the model addresses this shortcoming by suggesting continuous stakeholder relationship management training. Secondly, the research results indicated that NPOs mostly have strategic business plans and that their stakeholder relationship management activities are linked to these business plans. However, these business plans are generally designed from macro-perspectives and stakeholders are not linked to current strategic issues. Stage two of the model suggests that NPOs should adopt a micro-perspective by regularly identifying current strategic issues and by reaching internal consensus on what these issues are. Stage three of the model proposes that the successful implementation of stage two would make it possible to identify strategic stakeholders proactively, and to link them to current strategic issues. The research results indicated that a limited number of NPOs map their stakeholders broadly, but that none of them identify strategic stakeholders by continuously linking them to current strategic issues, confirming the relevance of stage three. Finally, it was found that NPO communication strategies, should they exist, are not linked to stakeholder relationship management strategies or designed in support of such strategies. Stage four of the model addresses this by suggesting the design of a focused communication strategy aligned with, and in support of, the stakeholder relationship management strategy. Although these four stages are presented in a modernistic and linear fashion, it is accepted that NPOs operate in postmodern and unpredictable environments and that these stages are in reality not linear and sequential, but rather imbedded in one another. This implies that an NPO could work simultaneously on any of the stages, return to any of the stages at any point in time, or even start over when needed. It also accepts that the *both/neither* view discussed earlier and illustrated in Figure 2 is applicable to the NPO environment.

Figure 3 presents the model in a dash-board and collapsed view of the four stages, showing their interrelatedness and the continuous nature of this cyclical process.

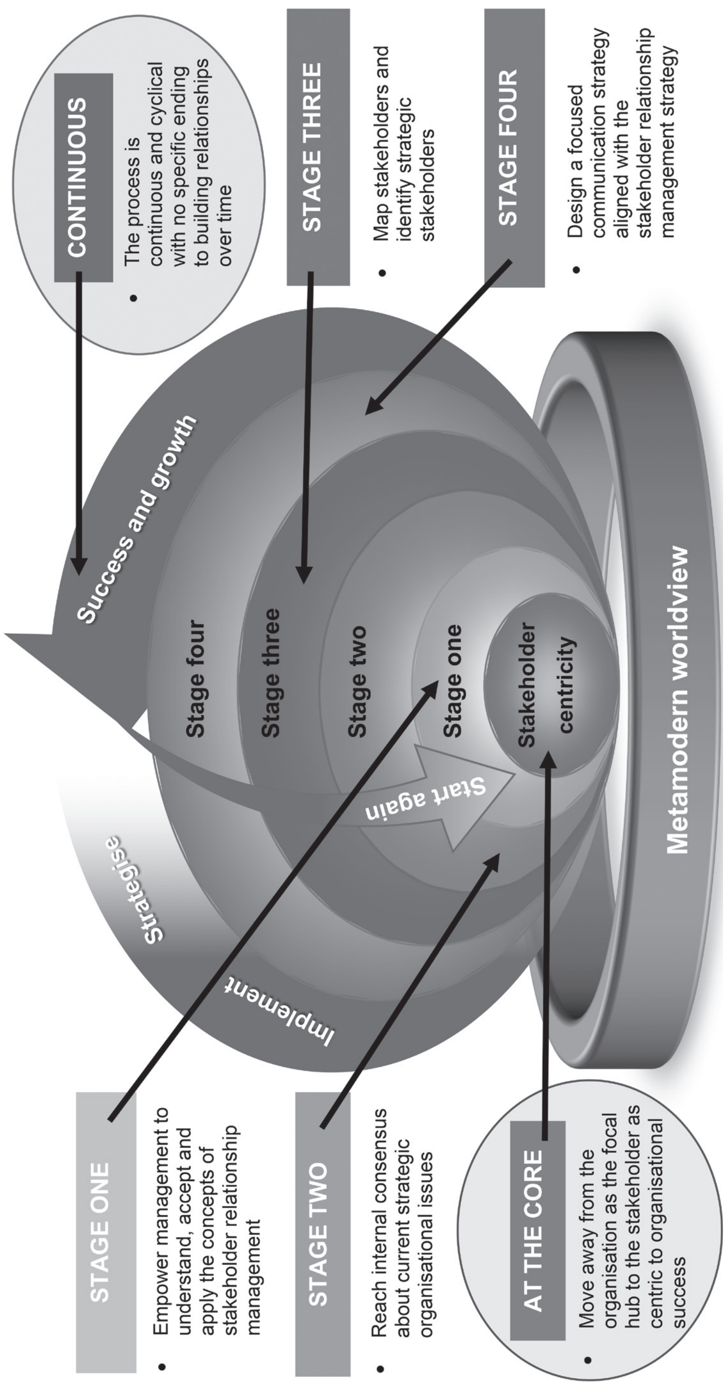


Figure 3: Collapsed view of the cyclical nature of stages one, two, three and four

Source: Researchers' own construct.

The framework in Figure 3 is guided by three principles, namely: establish a clear understanding and uniform organisational worldview of stakeholder relationship management; identify strategic stakeholders and their attitudes, expectations and perceptions; and design and implement formal stakeholder communication strategies.

This process consists of four stages.

Stage one focuses on empowering management to understand, accept and apply the concepts of stakeholder relationship management. During this stage, management would not be able to practice strategic stakeholder relationship management without the necessary training.

Stage two encourages NPOs to reconsider the strategic issues they face and to prioritise them based on the urgency to address these issues. It is argued that broad, metanarrative stakeholder relationship management strategies are insufficient and too vague, and that relationships should be built at micro-level.

Stage three requires the mapping of all stakeholders, after which they should be defined as strategic or not by considering their attributes such as legitimacy, power and urgency pertaining to the issues identified in stage two. By doing this, NPOs will understand which stakeholders are strategic at any point in time, and how to allocate their limited resources to their stakeholder relationship management efforts.

Stage four is guided by the view that communication is the only tool available to build relationships and suggests that NPOs should have formal and focused communication strategies in support of their stakeholder relationship management strategies. It is argued that different stakeholders would need different communication approaches at different times and that communication strategies should be revisited frequently, as should stakeholder relationship management strategies.

In each stage of the conceptual framework the role of antecedents and relational outcomes were described, and it was illustrated that certain relational outcomes such as investment and commitment could also be regarded as antecedents in certain stages. It was proposed that relational outcomes should be stated as formal goals at the beginning of the design of a stakeholder relationship management strategy. NPOs should continuously evaluate their stakeholder relationship management strategies and develop criteria that would measure the quality of the stakeholder relationships. The proposed relational outcomes of *trust, satisfaction, commitment, control mutuality, involvement* and *investment* could act as such criteria. The conceptual framework relies heavily on the cooperation of management and, in line with the stewardship theory, expects management to regard building and sustaining strong relationships with strategic stakeholders as one of their main responsibilities.

The entire conceptual framework is embedded in the metamodern worldview of this study. It is argued that NPO management should take responsibility for the stakeholder relationship management function in the organisation, even if a full-time communication specialist is employed.

The role of the communication specialist is therefore not to practise stakeholder relationship management on behalf of the organisation, but to enable the entire organisation to do it well. In line with a metamodern worldview, this implies a decentralised approach in which modernistic and central control is balanced with a postmodern attitude of flexibility and the acceptance that the environment if often chaotic and turbulent.

The conceptual metamodern framework is thus designed in such a manner that the principles guiding it are regarded as modernistic metanarratives, but the four stages within the framework are in typical postmodern fashion, flexible, imbedded in, interrelated and dependent on each other. As situations change, stakeholder perceptions and attitudes will change and the proposed framework concludes with the reality that the project of stakeholder relationship management is never complete. It must be revisited frequently and may, from time-to-time, need to be restarted from the beginning.

9. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The main limitations are that the findings cannot be generalised to the entire NPO sector in South Africa and that the seemingly linear approach of the model could be regarded as unrealistic should the NPO sector fail to understand that, although presented in a sequential manner, the model is in reality organic and circular.

Despite its limitations, this study identified two main directions for future research. The first is the applicability of metamodernism as a new and creative paradigm in communication science and stakeholder relationship management research. Second is the need to conduct research on stakeholder relationship management as a governing principle.

10. CONCLUSION

This study provided insight into the exciting possibilities of a metamodern worldview for the disciplines of communication science and in stakeholder relationship management within the South African NPO sector. It is posited that certain modernistic truths within these two disciplines are valid, but could be implemented in a postmodern NPO environment. It recognised the lack of professional communication practitioners in the South African NPO sector, and expanded the responsibility for communication and stakeholder relationship management beyond that of the communication specialist, to senior management in NPOs.

It is believed that the flexible and organic metamodern nature of the proposed model for stakeholder relationship management makes it practical in a creative manner, which may assist the disciplines of communication and stakeholder relationship management in a small way to grow out of their “old selves and become something new”, as suggested by Prather (1997:21).

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