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Exploring practitioner constraints in advancing to more senior corporate communication roles

ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this phenomenological exploratory study was to explore the constraints experienced by selected corporate communication practitioners in the South African banking industry in advancing to more senior corporate communication roles.

The literature review indicated various individual, organisational and communication profession constraints experienced by practitioners. In the empirical study, additional constraints, such as organisational politics, the length of time spent in the organisation, the practitioner's lack of networking and relationship building skills, the lack of overseas experience, and the lack of the standardisation of communication practitioner deliverables, were identified.

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INTRODUCTION

A corporate communication role is an individual corporate communication practitioner's standardised pattern of behaviour of recurring activities required in a specific functional relationship, so as to yield a predictable outcome (Dozier, in Grunig, 1992:327; Dozier, Grunig & Grunig, 1995:24; Hogg & Doolan, 1999:597). It is generally accepted in corporate communication literature that there are two predominant roles, namely the manager and the technician (Broom & Smith, 1979; Broom, 1982; Dozier, 1984; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Broom & Dozier, 1985:30; Cutlip, Center & Broom, 1994:43).

In the last decade, a number of authors worldwide have provided different conceptualisations of emerging roles for corporate communication: the communication executive (Wright, 1995); reflective and expressive roles (Holmström, 1996, 1997); sales manager and intermediary (Van Ruler, 1997); agency profile (Toth, Serini, Wright & Emig, 1998); strategist and redefined manager (Steyn, 2000a; 2000b; 2000c; 2003a; Steyn, in Toth, 2006); reflective and educational roles (Vercic, Van Ruler, Bütschi & Flodin, 2001; Van Ruler, Vercic, Bütschi, & Flodin, 2004); cultural interpreter; media relations, liaison and personal influencer (Holtzhausen, Petersen & Tindall, 2002); monitor/evaluator, trouble shooter/problem solver, key policy/strategy advisor, and issues management expert (Moss, Newman & DeSanto, 2004); strategic public relations manager and manager/technician (Van Heerden, 2004); and strategic and operational public relations manager (Everett, 2006).

The conceptual framework selected for this study was Steyn's three roles for corporate communication (Steyn, 2000a; 2000b; 2000c; Steyn, in Toth, 2006):
- The strategist role was conceptualised as a role at top management or strategic level, the historic manager role redefined as a middle management role at functional level and the technician role regarded as an implementation role at operational level.
- The strategist performed the 'mirror' function of corporate communication – monitoring relevant environmental developments and anticipating their consequences for organisational strategies and policies.
- The manager and technician performed the 'window' function – the preparation and execution of a communication policy and strategy, resulting in messages that portray all facets of the organisation.

The strategist, (redefined) manager and technician roles were empirically verified, according to the normative role expectations of South African chief executives for the most senior corporate communication practitioner, and their perceptions of the role performance of the individuals occupying this position within their organisations (Steyn, 2000a; 2000b; 2003a).

The concept of 'advancing to more senior corporate communication roles' explored in this study was thus operationalised as a practitioner advancing from the 'technician to manager' or 'manager to strategist' role.

1. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The core of the problem in practice addressed by this research was twofold: firstly, corporate communication practitioners in organisations seemed to have difficulties in advancing to more senior role-playing; secondly, as a point of departure in rectifying this situation, the constraints to which practitioners were subjected in the advancement process needed to be identified.

The corporate communication function seemed to have progressed little in making a meaningful contribution to strategic decision-making in organisations -- the activities of its practitioners were mostly reactive. In spite of the opportunity presented by the changing role of business in society with its increasing emphasis on the social role of organisations, practitioners did not seem to be rising to the challenge of giving strategic direction to the organisation's communication relationships with stakeholders and other interest groups in society (Steyn, 2000a:1; 2000b; 2000c:22). Furthermore, they did not seem to be playing a leading role in identifying an organisation's issues, managing its reputation, pointing out societal expectations for trustworthiness and legitimacy, and influencing it to become more socially responsible (Steyn, 2003b; Steyn, in Toth, 2006).

This occurrence was not limited to South Africa. Van Ruler's research (1997:248) in the Netherlands found that practitioners still focused on technical procedures rather than strategic activities. In the UK, Tibble (1997) pointed out that few practitioners understood the meaning of strategy. In many instances, corporate communication practitioners were not even aware that they could fulfil a more strategic role at top management or even functional level. According to Dozier and Broom (1995:5), many of them did not aspire to (senior) management positions that required managerial/strategic role-playing, but "exhibit high levels of job satisfaction in the stability of technician role enactment over time".

Top management recognised the lack of training and/or ability in functioning as corporate leaders and therefore did not provide communication practitioners with the opportunity of moving into higher levels of management (Lindenmann & Lapetina, 1982). Rather, they assigned non-corporate communication professionals (often from marketing) to manage the function -- a state of affairs called encroachment (Lauzen, 1991). This encouraged marketing imperialism, i.e. the expansion of the marketing function into the domain of what was traditionally regarded as corporate communication (Ehling, *in* Lauzen, 1991).

Looking at the bigger picture, this situation meant that organisations could not have excellent communication (as explicated by Dozier *et al.,* 1995) since their own practitioners as well as the managers being appointed from outside did not have knowledge of the corporate communication manager role nor of the role of corporate communication in strategic management (embodied in Steyn's strategist role). Furthermore, communication that was not excellent did not contribute to organisational effectiveness and was detrimental to organisational goal achievement in the long term. It was therefore important to both the corporate communication function and the organisation to explore the constraints experienced by practitioners in advancing to more senior roles.

According to Dozier *et al.* (1995), the corporate communication roles enacted were determined by the concepts influencing the personal achievements of practitioners. There could be many constraints inhibiting practitioner advancement, for example, the lack of professional training or even the type of training received. The fact that most of the practitioners were not professionally trained led to insufficient strategic/managerial knowledge and skills for (senior) management role-playing (Moore, 1996; Neubauer, 1997). In this way, personal constraints led to organisational and communication profession constraints and vice versa.

Practitioners might even be constrained by a lack of theory on strategic role-playing. When searching for theories, models or guidelines on how corporate communication students or practitioners should be equipped to function at senior management levels within the organisation, little could be found in the literature on this field (Steyn, 2000b). A possible problem between academia and practice has widened the vicious circle even further.

According to Bütschi and Steyn (2006:106,108), theory should guide research towards crucial questions and enlighten the profession. They saw a need for theory *inter alia* on the core competencies, processes and structures to streamline the corporate communication function. Realising the negative effect that the problem stated above had on the corporate communication profession and on the organisation, this research explored the issue of constraints facing practitioners in advancing from technician to manager, and from manager to strategist role-playing.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Phenomenology, the research approach to this study, did not support the setting of hypotheses or propositions, as this might limit the exploratory nature of the study (Daymon & Holloway, 2002:25,146,147). The research objectives that were set thus provided ample guidance without limiting the identification of new phenomena by the interviewees.

Primary research objective: To explore the constraints experienced by selected corporate communication practitioners in the South African banking industry in advancing to more senior

corporate communication roles (i.e. from 'technician' to 'manager' to 'strategist'), by means of the silent card interview technique.

Secondary objectives:

Phase 1: Literature study
    (1) To explore the international corporate communication literature to identify and categorise constraints experienced by corporate communication practitioners.

Phase 2: Empirical study
    (2) To identify the roles (technician/manager/strategist) currently being played by the practitioners selected for the empirical study by means of a short questionnaire, as a benchmark for placing the constraints experienced into a logical context.
    (3) To explore whether the selected practitioners experienced the constraints identified in the literature study.
    (4) To explore whether the selected practitioners experienced other constraints not identified in the literature, which might be unique to the South African environment.

3.   *DEFINITION OF TERMS*

- A **corporate communication practitioner** is a person who works professionally in the field of public relations/corporate communication (SPRA, 2002).

- The **South African banking industry** refers to the financial institutions in the South African economy that operate with a banking licence.

- The **dominant coalition** is the group of senior managers who control an organisation (Grunig, 1992:5).

- The **micro** organisational level is the level of individual public relations programmes (Grunig, in Grunig, 1992:3, 28). According to Steyn (2003a), the corporate communication 'technician' functions at this implementation/operational level.

- The **meso** organisational level is the departmental level—dealing with the way in which corporate communication is managed, i.e. a single or integrated department, separate from marketing, direct reporting relationship to senior management, knowledge of two-way communication and the managerial role, and equal opportunities (Grunig, in Grunig, 1992:3, 28). According to Steyn (2003a), the corporate communication 'manager' operates at this functional or middle management level.

- The **macro** organisational level determines the organisation's approach to communication; whether corporate communication has power in the dominant coalition; whether there is a participative organisational culture, symmetrical internal communication and an organic structure (Grunig, in Grunig, 1992:3, 28). According to Steyn (2003a), the corporate communication strategist functions at this top management/societal/ environmental level where the organisation's strategic management takes place.

- The **enterprise** strategy focuses on the achievement of an organisation's non-financial goals such as obtaining legitimacy, trust, a good reputation, being a good corporate citizen, and building sound relationships and partnerships with stakeholders. It portrays the organisation's societal role, its stakeholder and communication approach, its values and standards for socially responsible behaviour and ethical conduct. This is the domain of the corporate communication strategist (Steyn, 2003a; Steyn, in Toth, 2006).

- The **corporate** strategy is financially oriented and deals with strategic decisions regarding the organisation's financial performance (Digman, 1990:38). Corporate communication can either play a support role in performing technical activities or a strategic role such as managing investor relations (Steyn, in Toth, 2006).

- **Phenomenology** as a research approach aims to enlarge one's view of the world by exploring and describing phenomena as they appear through the unique perspective of the individual's lived experience, rather than actions or behaviour. The assumption is that humans only know what they experience (Valle & Halling, 1989:44).

- In the **silent card** interview technique, pictures are used to facilitate the conversation and cues are taken from the interviewees' expressions, questions and occasional sidetracks (Valle & Halling, 1989:57; Leedy, 1997:162; Daymon & Halloway, 2002:178, 184).

4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The meta-theoretical framework as well as the major concepts of the study, corporate communication 'roles' and practitioner 'constraints' are presented graphically in Figure 1 and then explained.

Figure 1: Meta-theoretical and conceptual framework of the study

META-THEORY	Excellence in public relations and communication management		
DOMAIN	Corporate Communication		
MAJOR CONCEPTS	(1) **ROLES** (2) **CONSTRAINTS**		
CONCEPT (1)	(CORPORATE COMMUNICATION) **ROLE**		
CONSTRUCTS	Role of the **Strategist**	Role of the **Manager**	Role of the **Technician**
CONCEPT (2)	(PRACTITIONER) **CONSTRAINTS**		
CONSTRUCTS	**Individual** Constraints		**Organisational** Constraints

4.1 Corporate communication domain

Groenewald (1998:50) defines corporate communication pragmatically as the communication on behalf of an organisation, as managed by people (or a person) in the functional field of public relations who carry the responsibility for the communication of the organisation (as an entity). Grunig (in Grunig, 1992:4) defines public relations as "the management of communication between an organization and its publics. This definition equates public relations and {corporate} communication management".

Based on the above, the authors saw no difference between the terms 'corporate communication', 'public relations' and 'communication management'.

4.2 Excellence in public relations and communication management

The meta-theoretical approach to this study was excellence in public relations and communication management. The latter was the outcome of the seminal Excellence Study (Dozier *et al.,* 1995:10-17), conducted in the USA, UK and Canada between 1985 and 1994. Its findings indicated two

prerequisites to excellent communication in organisations: the most important was knowledge of the manager role, especially knowledge of strategic management and two-way communication. In addition, there had to be shared expectations between the dominant coalition and senior practitioners on the role of corporate communication in an organisation. If the dominant coalition expected practitioners to think strategically and they responded by doing so, then it reinforced the strategic view of communication in the dominant coalition and they came to value and support the corporate communication department.

4.3 Roles

The corporate communication 'role' was a major concept of this study. The conceptualisation of three corporate communication roles upon which this research was based (strategist, manager and technician) is described in Steyn (2000a, 2000b, 2003a); Steyn (in Toth, 2006).

- The main responsibility of the 'strategist' is to perform environmental scanning in the external (and internal) environment in order to gather and interpret strategic information on stakeholders and the publics that emerge around issues; and to analyse the consequences of organisational behaviour on stakeholders/publics and vice versa. This intelligence is fed back to the dominant coalition to aid the organisation's strategy formulation processes. This role is enacted at the top management or macro organisational level.
- In the redefined 'manager' role, the practitioner identifies the organisation's key strategic issues (ideally based on the enterprise strategy), considers their implications for strategic stakeholders and/or organisational policies and strategies, and develops a corporate communication strategy by determining what should be communicated to solve the problem or to capitalise on the opportunity presented. This middle management role is performed at the functional or meso organisational level.
- The corporate communication 'technician' role is enacted at the micro organisational level. The main activities of the technician are to produce audiovisual material for presentations, generate publicity, write media releases, provide a media clipping service, edit corporate communication materials such as speeches or the annual report, write articles for the organisation's publications, and organise special events.

4.4 Constraints

Corporate communication practitioner 'constraints' cover the second major concept of the study. Constraints are defined by Le Roux (2004:8) as the limitations experienced by corporate communication practitioners in advancing to more senior corporate communication roles.

A review of the international corporate communication literature points to some of the constraints experienced by practitioners in advancing to more senior role-playing, for example:

- Affirmative action (Visagie, 1999:148)
- The general blurred organisational view of communication (Spicer, 1997:84; Van Ruler, 1997:263; Moss, 2000:1, 6; Moss *et al.*, 2000:277, 302; Steyn & Puth, 2000:3, 7, 12)
- Industry size (Moss et al., 2000:302)
- Female gender discrimination (Moss, 2000:1; Moss *et al.*, 2000:278)
- A lack of knowledge and skills or perceived competence (Groenewald, 1998; Plowman, 1998:243; Moss, Warnaby & Newman, 2000:277; Steyn, 2000a:2, 2000b:70, 2000c:21; Steyn & Puth, 2000:10)

In this exploratory study, the identification and classification of constraints was the first secondary objective to be achieved. It already formed part of the data analysis and was thus discussed further in the section that deals with the findings.

5. RESEARCH STRATEGY AND DESIGN

This study focused on selected corporate communication practitioners (who) with regard to the constraints (what) they experienced in advancing to more senior roles (Cooper & Emory, 1995:39, 84). In Figure 2 below, the research strategy and design are summarised, as derived from the research objectives.

Figure 2: Research strategy and design

	Phase 1	Phase 2
Research strategy	Phenomenological (Valle & Halling, 1989:44; Leedy, 1997:161; Callahan, 2000:105; Scannell-Desch, 2000; Daymon & Halloway, 2002:148).	
Research design	Exploratory (Cooper & Emory, 1995).	
Population	Corporate communication practitioners in the South African banking industry	
Observation unit	Selected corporate communication practitioners	
Data generation	Literature study	In-depth interviews, using a question-naire and the silent card method
Data analysis	Content analysis of literature	Phenomenological analysis

5.1 Research strategy

In this research, a phenomenological research strategy was employed. German philosopher Edmund Husserl first introduced phenomenology in the mid-1890s. Since then, it has evolved into

a philosophical tradition used in almost every pragmatic and scholarly discipline worldwide (Valle & Halling, 1989:41; Callahan, 2000:105; Daymon & Halloway, 2002:147). Daymon and Halloway (2002:146) argue that there is room for the application of more phenomenological studies in the communication field.

Phenomenology aims to enlarge our view of the world by exploring and describing phenomena as they appear through the unique perspective of the individual's lived experience. The assumption of the phenomenologist is that humans only know what they had experienced. This philosophy therefore differs from other descriptive and qualitative approaches in that experience, and not actions or behaviour, was researched (Valle & Halling, 1989:44).

The limitations of the phenomenological approach were the following: firstly, it was difficult to research experiences and not natural objectives. Secondly, the interviewees' experiences consisted of their inherent perceptions and imaginations, which were several times removed from the actual experience. It was also a challenge to find information-rich respondents who were willing to collaborate. Lastly, there was a possibility that the interviewer could influence the findings of the study, if the topic under investigation was of particular interest (Valle & Halling, 1989:45; Daymon & Halloway, 2002:149).

In this study, the phenomenological research strategy reflected a snapshot in time of the interviewees' emotional, relational or situational experience (Valle & Halling, 1989:44; Leedy, 1997:161; Callahan, 2000:105; Scannell-Desch, 2000; Daymon & Halloway, 2002:148) of the constraints in advancing to more senior roles. In using this strategy, the aim was not to support or validate any pre-selected model or theory, but to embrace the constraints in a non-assumptive manner as they unfolded from the perspective of the communication practitioner experiencing it (Callahan, 2000:105; Scannell-Desch, 2000). Special attention was paid to minimising the limitations of the phenomenological approach as far as possible.

5.2 Research design

With regard to the research design, exploratory research is a particular type of descriptive research, its advantage being that the subject of investigation need not be precisely determined but is left open for adjustment. Exploratory research is used to "gain insight into a situation, phenomenon, community or person, arising out of a lack of basic information on a new area of interest" (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995:41).

This exploratory study, as a first step in gaining insight into the constraints experienced by South African practitioners in advancing to more senior roles, was designed in two phases:

Phase 1: This phase consisted of a literature review that identified the constraints noted by previous researchers.

Phase 2: This phase consisted of an empirical study that generated primary data on constraints experienced by means of the silent card interview technique, preceded by a short questionnaire that obtained demographic data and identified the roles played by the interviewees (strategist/manager/technician).

Being a pilot study, this research aimed to provide more clarity on the topic before a larger quantitative study could be conducted. Given the time and resource constraints of the principal researcher, and considering the research objectives and approach, it was decided to select a small number of interviewees from each of the large banking institutions and spend considerable time with each of them in probing their experiences in depth. According to Valle & Halling (1989:48), the length of an interview depends on the amount of self-reflection with which the participant feels comfortable and the topic of study. For the purposes of this research, interviews of one hour were set up (although some interviews ran much longer). The questionnaire, silent cards and definition list were prepared in advance.

A purposeful method, namely snowball (chain) sampling, was used in order to increase the utility of information obtained from the small sample (Valle & Halling, 1989:47,48; Daymon & Halloway, 2002:149,159). By using this method, the intention was to find information-rich interviewees (Leedy, 1997:162; Clark, Riley, Szivas, Wilkie & Wood, 2000:86; Daymon & Halloway, 2002:149,159). Eight corporate communication practitioners from three of the four main banking institutions in South Africa (ABSA, Standard Bank and First National Bank) conceded to participate in the interviews.

The interviews were open-ended and unstructured, leaving enough time to explore the topic in depth. The silent card interview technique was employed where pictures were used to facilitate the conversation and cues were taken from the interviewees' expressions, questions and occasional sidetracks. The use of this technique limited interviewer interference, bias or prejudice (Valle & Halling, 1989:57; Leedy, 1997:162; Daymon & Halloway, 2002:178, 184). In order to depict the abstract concepts used in this study, the silent card method was slightly adjusted by adding a short description to each card (silent cards can be viewed in the section on findings).

All the interviews were audio taped for transcription and analysis purposes since phenomenological research validity is concerned with the accurate transcription of data (Valle & Halling, 1989:57). The quality of the fieldwork was determined by the thoroughness of the investigation of previously identified constraints as well as possible new constraints identified by the interviewees.

5.3 Research quality

Not being quantitative research, reliability as a research goal was not relevant to this study. The limitations of the phenomenological approach as explained above were addressed by focusing on validity.

Objectivity in qualitative research could be achieved by openly discussing subjectivity (Daymon & Holloway, 2002:90). The interviewer's influence on the findings was minimised by setting up a decision trail where data and decisions were recorded, and by using the silent card interview technique (Martinsuo, 2001:545,546; Daymon & Holloway, 2002:90).

Validity in phenomenological studies is also concerned with data accuracy. Interviewer influence and the accurate transcription of data were improved by using multiple sources in the literature review to cross-reference the findings (Valle & Halling, 1989:57). The study was made meaningful by receiving input from various leaders in the field of strategic and managerial corporate communication, as suggested by Daymon and Holloway (2002:151).

The various steps undertaken to achieve research quality (Daymon & Halloway, 2002:90-93,149,150) are described in Table 1.

Table 1: Achieving research quality

Quality measure		Definition	Action by the researchers
Objectivity		The non-interference of biases	Openly discuss subjectivity
Reliability		The extent to which a research instrument will deliver the same results more than once	- Set up an audit or decision trail - Use the silent interview technique
Authenticity		The extent to which strategies used to gather data is appropriate for the true reporting of participant's ideas.	- Ensure that the data-gathering strategies are appropriate for the true reporting of participant's ideas
Trustworthy	Transferability	Explains how the study is positioned within its specific context	- Discuss the positioning of the study within its specific context and in relation to the overall theory on the subject
	Dependability	Focuses on the consistency and accuracy of findings	- Describe the decision-making process and context
	Conformability	Evaluates the findings and conclusions of the study against the aims of the study	- Describe the decision-making process and context - Match the findings and conclusions of the study to the aims of the study - Follow an ex post facto design, where the researchers are not able to control variables but only report on what has already happened (Cooper & Emory, 1995:115, 116)

5.4 Data analysis

In **Phase 1**, content analysis was used to identify and categorise the constraints indicated in corporate communication literature, for the purpose of developing silent cards for the interviews.

In **Phase 2**, questionnaire data was subjected to descriptive analysis. Transcribed interview data was subjected to phenomenological analysis, characterised as being open, tentative and intuitive, with the data guiding the analysis (Cooper & Emory, 1995:393). The main purpose of the phenomenological approach was to learn something about the content and those who produced the messages, the challenge being to analyse the experience as the interviewees understood it (Rubin, Rubin & Piele, 1993:189). Content analysis was used for data reduction and interpretation, bringing meaning and insight to the words of the interviewees (Du Plooy, 1996:154; Zikmund, 2000:309,318). Their attitudes, opinions, thoughts and behaviours (Rubin, Rubin & Piele, 1993) surrounding the issue of advancing to more senior corporate communication roles were described.

The steps followed in analysing the interview data were as follows:

i.   **Identify or code the units of analysis**. The unit of analysis refers to 'constraints' in whichever form (Kruger, 1988:161; Leedy, 1997:162). Latent coding was used where value judgements regarding the meaning contained within the selected unit of analysis (Du Plooy, 1996:159) or in the absence of units (Reinhard, 1998:182) were made.

ii. **Categorise the information**. Care was taken not to leave any findings uncategorised or prematurely fixing the categories of research, thereby excluding the development, discovery and invention of new meaning units (Kruger, 1988:157; Daymon & Halloway, 2002:237).

iii. **Report on the findings**. It was necessary to remain focused, as it was easy to lose the readers in the sheer volume of possible findings that are not all equally credible and important.

6. FINDINGS

Phase 1

6.1 Classification of constraints identified in corporate communication literature

The constraints identified were grouped as being external or internal to the practitioner. 'External' constraints were seen to consist of organisational constraints (e.g. the organisational view of corporate communication) and communication profession constraints (e.g. the lack of the professional acknowledgement of the corporate communication function). However, for the purposes of the silent cards developed for the interviews, they were grouped together as 'organisational' constraints. Constraints 'internal' to the practitioner (i.e. individual constraints) were seen to include, among

others, the practitioner's age, the practitioner's view of communication, and the practitioner's lack of strategic communication knowledge and skills.

6.1.1 Individual constraints
Individual constraints were seen to be constraints that pertain to the corporate communication practitioner as a person.

• **Demographic constraints**
Affirmative action was a policy applied in the South African business environment for organisations to reflect the population of the country in its workforce by appointing persons on the criteria of race or disability (Visagie, 1999:152). However, as much as 95% of all affirmative action programmes have failed due to no real commitment to their implementation and the lack of a strategic approach with regard to cultural change (Visagie, 1999:156).

• **Lacking a clear transition from one role to the next**
Van Ruler (1997) and Steyn (2000a:13-37; 2000c:41) found that communication practitioners still focus on technical procedures rather than strategic activities. According to Steyn and Puth (2000:228), it could be beneficial to an organisation if the corporate communication practitioner were able to make a clear transition from being a 'technician' to a 'manager', or from being a 'manager' to a 'strategist'.

• **Lack of strategic knowledge and skills**
Senior corporate communication practitioners in the role of 'strategist' or 'manager' should focus on environmental scanning and managing relationships in order to assist the organisation to adapt to societal values and norms, thereby obtaining political and social legitimacy. This leads to the organisation obtaining a good reputation in the eyes of its stakeholders and society in general (Van Ruler, 1997; Steyn & Puth, 2000:158). However, in practice, practitioners are promoted to more senior positions by virtue of the fact that they are the most senior practitioner, or because they perform well in their technician roles and not because they have the necessary strategic knowledge and skills to perform the 'manager' or 'strategist' roles (Steyn, 2000a:3).

• **Lack of appropriate and sufficient education**
One of the findings of the Excellence Study was that a practitioner should have knowledge of two-way asymmetrical and symmetrical communication, work within a participative culture and be able to create shared expectations between management and the corporate communication department (Dozier *et al.*, 1995:5, 10, 11). Furthermore, technology and research skills (which form part of a university education at master's or doctoral level) are needed for a practitioner to perform the managerial or strategic role maximally (Van Ruler, 1997:259; Grunig, *in* Plowman, 1998:242; Ledingham & Bruning, 2000:145; Moss *et al.*, 2000:300; Steyn, 2000a:4).

- **Lack of management knowledge and skills**

Corporate communication practitioners lack general business experience and knowledge of business issues. As managers, this limits practitioners in making business decisions (Plowman, 1998:243; Steyn & Puth, 2000).

- **The practitioner does not view corporate communication management as a strategic function**

Practitioners rationalize their role and function in the organisation by viewing the purpose of corporate communication as manipulating public opinion, which represents an unethical and asymmetrical dimension (Nessman, 1995:3; Jackall, *in* Spicer, 1997:36). Many do not see it as two-way symmetrical communication, or as a strategic function (Steyn & Puth, 2000).

- **The practitioner downplays the communication profession**

Practitioners tend to downplay their own profession by stating that other management positions are superior to their own. Furthermore, some communication practitioners are of the opinion that only technical skills and personality are needed to make a strategic contribution to the organisation (Spicer, 1997:36; Van Ruler, 1997:252, 260).

- **The practitioner is not a member of a professional organisation**

According to Dozier *et al.* (1995:66), development workshops and seminars provided by professional organisations hone practitioners' expertise and update them on new developments. This opportunity is missed if a practitioner is not a member of a professional organisation.

- **The practitioner experiences tension between the creative and managerial roles**

Moss (2000:2) regards practitioners as experiencing tension between their creative preferences and the managerial function they are expected to perform, which could affect the role played by practitioners.

- **The practitioner's career goals**

Dozier (*in* Grunig, 1992:350-351) identifies four types of practitioners, which directly influence the aims and career goals of the practitioners:

- The *upwardly mobile practitioner* holds a positive opinion about communication and practitioners in general, and wishes to climb the corporate ladder.
- The *creative artistic practitioner* distrusts management's ability to understand communication and operates as a technician.
- The *committed proactive practitioner* is committed to the organisation and takes an ethical view of the practice. He/she sees communication planning as important and wants the practice to rise above the mere application of communication techniques.
- The *literary scientific practitioner* views communication as an applied social science that needs to be more scientific and regrets practitioner's lack of knowledge.

6.1.2   Organisational constraints

Organisational constraints are seen to be those that pertain to the environment in which corporate communication practitioners function.

• **Lack of support from the communication department**

Senior corporate communication practitioners need the support of the rest of the communication department in the execution of technical skills in order to set them free to enact their managerial roles (Dozier & Grunig, *in* Grunig, 1992:114; Grunig, *in* Grunig, 1992:223-228). The communication department's culture should be based on teamwork (Dozier *et al.*, 1995:11).

• **Encroachment**

Encroachment is the assignment of top positions to non-corporate communication professionals without the relevant training and experience, i.e. empowering line managers outside the function to manage corporate communication (Ehling, White & Grunig, *in* Grunig, 1992:359, 363; Lauzen & Dozier, 1992:211; Hogg & Doolan, 1999:600).

• **Dominant coalition's view of corporate communication**

The dominant coalition's view of corporate communication in an organisation to a great extent determines the roles to be played by corporate communication practitioners. The lack of a clear definition of corporate communication and top management's view of corporate communication as a "whitewash" technical communication effort limits strategic role playing and the recognition of the value of the corporate communication profession (Nessman, 1995:3; Kruckeberg, 1996:21; Spicer, 1997:53; Wright, *in* Moss, 2000:6).

• **Stereotyping and gender discrimination**

Gender discrimination is experienced in terms of the role played, salary earned and pattern of work performed by male and female practitioners (Dozier & Broom, 1995:3, 7, 20; Moss *et al.*, 2000:279, 291; Toth, Serini, Wright & Emig, *in* Moss, 2000:1). This discrimination leads to unequal advancement opportunities (Hon, Grunig & Dozier, *in* Grunig, 1992:419, 421; Dozier *et al.*, 1995:158, 159; Toth *et al.*, 1998:2).

Grunig and Grunig (*in* Grunig, 1992:302) show that there is a clear link between femininity and the two-way symmetrical model of communication excellence in the US, indicating that women are naturally inclined to the managerial role. Women need to develop strategies for overcoming the discrimination and socialisation that prevent them from carrying out managerial and strategic role-playing.

In contrast, Moss *et al.* (2000:294, 303) find no gender discrimination in terms of positions held, access to top management, balance of activities and influence on the dominant coalition.

• **Lack of opportunity to show strategic communication contribution**

The corporate communication practitioner needs to earn the right and get the opportunity from the dominant coalition to make a strategic contribution to the organisation (Dozier *et al.*, 1995:85, 86; Moss *et al.*, 2000:87; Steyn, 2000c:28). By offering strategic input to the dominant coalition, the latter would value and seek the practitioner's input. This would in turn reinforce the strategic view of communication in an organisation (Dozier *et al.*, 1995:17, 87).

• **Organisation and communication department size**

The size of the communication department does not appear to be related to the organisation's size, but rather to the range of responsibilities of the department (Moss *et al.*, 2000:288, 299, 300). In a small corporate communication department, the practitioner must necessarily fulfil the technician role since there is little room for delegation (Dozier *et al.*, 1995:114).

• **Organisational culture**

The organisational culture has an influence on the role that the corporate communication practitioner is allowed to perform. In a culture of two-way symmetrical communication, there is more room for the practitioner to act strategically (Steyn, 2000a:17, 20). However, South African managers do not recognise the importance of two-way symmetrical communication and thereby limit the role of the practitioner (De Beer, 2001:327).

• **Organisational structure**

When final decisions on communication strategy and policy are left to a person not knowledgeable or trained in the field of corporate communication, the role of the practitioner is limited. The corporate communication function reporting to marketing is an example of a structure that would not lead to excellent strategic communication (Nessmann, 1995:3; Hogg & Doolan, 1999:600).

• **Lack of mentors**

Guidance is needed by communication practitioners in order to gain the experience by which an individual's ability to provide strategic input is judged (De Beer, 2001:340). Due to the limited number of communication practitioners playing strategic roles in the banking industry, mentors are often not available to new/young practitioners.

• **Lack of participation in management decision making**

Practitioners are not included in management decision making since they keep on performing technical activities, lack business knowledge, and focus on communication skills that limit their power-control management and use of hierarchical authority (Dozier, *in* Grunig, 1992:x; White & Dozier, *in* Grunig, 1992:91; Moss *et al.*, 2000:291).

- **Limiting organisational environmental influences**

The degree of environmental uncertainty is positively related to the role that practitioners enact. This means that a stable or stagnant environment would limit practitioners in performing more senior or strategic roles (Lauzen & Dozier, 1992:207; Moss, 2000:3).

6.1.3   Summary

The 21 constraints identified in corporate communication literature and classified as individual and organisational constraints were re-categorised into 13 silent cards, developed for the purposes of the interviews. Table 2 illustrates this re-categorisation, achieving the Secondary Objective (1): To explore the international corporate communication literature to identify and categorise constraints experienced by corporate communication practitioners.

Table 2: Categorised constraints

Individual Constraints	Organisational Constraints
Demographic constraints (explored in the questionnaire) **Education** (silent card 1) • Lack of appropriate and sufficient education • Lack of strategic knowledge and skills • Lack of management knowledge and skills	**Lack of opportunity to show a strategic communication contribution** (silent card 2) • Limiting organisational environmental influences • Complexity & turbulence of the external environment
Communication practitioner world-view of communication (silent card 10) • The practitioner does not view communication management as a strategic function • The practitioner downplays the communication profession • The practitioner is not a member of a professional organisation	**Lack of participation in management decision making** (silent card 3) • Company decision making **Lack of mentors** (silent card 4) **Communication department size** (silent card 5) • Size of the organisation
The practitioner's career goals (silent card 12) • The practitioner experiences tension between the creative and more senior roles (manager and strategist) • The practitioner lacks making a clear transition from one role to the next	**Organisational view of communication** (silent card 6) • Limited communication world-view of dominant coalition • Dominant coalition does not view communication as strategic **Gender discrimination & stereotyping** (silent card 7) • Affirmative action **Encroachment** (silent card 8) • Assigning non-communication managers to manage communication practitioners **Organisational structure & culture** (silent card 9) • Vague view of the communication function • Communication as part of the marketing function **Membership of the dominant coalition** (silent card 11) **Lack of support from the communication department** (silent card 13)

Phase 2

6.2 Findings and conclusions of demographic questions in the questionnaire

The questionnaire was used as a starting point for the interviews to standardise demographic data and obtain the data necessary to pinpoint the corporate communication roles currently played by the interviewees, i.e. 'strategist', 'manager' or 'technician'.

The responses from the questionnaire highlighted the following:

- Two of the eight interviewees' titles did not contain the word 'communication'. Across companies there did not seem to be agreement on, or a standard for, a title for the person filling the communication position.
- Seven of the eight interviewees were female. This could point to the feminisation of the corporate communication practice in the South African banking industry.
- Previous experience gained by practitioners younger than 40 years was in communication-related fields such as marketing, marketing and communication, journalism and public relations, while practitioners older than 40 years had experience in non-communication functions such as human resources, administration and travel. This finding was probably related to the fact that communication management was only recently acknowledged as a separate function.
- Of the eight interviewees, only four had studied communication-specific courses. It was concluded that the interviewees' type of education might be indicative of their lack of knowledge of strategic communication.
- Two questions were included in the questionnaire to determine the perceived role of the practitioner versus the actual role performed by the practitioner:
    The interviewees were asked to indicate the percentage of their workday allocated to certain tasks, according to their own perception. These tasks were indicative of the role that the practitioners performed. Three interviewees indicated that they performed the 'strategist' role, four the 'manager' role and only one the 'technician' role. There was no clear relationship between the role the practitioner performed and the time the practitioner spent in the organisation or in that position, the interviewee's qualifications, professional organisation, job title or age.
    The interviewees were asked to indicate the most important five activities they had performed over the last three months. These activities were then classified as 'strategic', 'managerial' or 'technical' in order to determine the role performed by the practitioner in the last three months. The actual role performed was then compared with the perceived role performed as indicated by the practitioner. This finding reflected the phenomenon of self-reporting by the practitioners, i.e. the practitioners reported on what they wanted to do or thought they should be doing, rather than reporting a true reflection of what they were indeed doing. Three practitioners overestimated their role, which could lead to

frustration as practitioners viewed themselves to be on a higher level than the actual work they performed. Another three practitioners underestimated their role, which could lead to frustration with their managers in their expectation of the practitioner's work deliverables. In only two cases, the activities that the interviewees performed in the last three months corresponded with what the interviewees perceived their daily activities to be. This is the ideal scenario.

The questionnaire findings achieved Secondary Objective (2): *To identify the roles (technician/manager/strategist) currently being played by the practitioners selected for the empirical study by means of a short questionnaire, as a benchmark for placing the constraints experienced into a logical context.*

6.3 Findings and conclusions: silent card interviews

For the purposes of this research, interviews of one hour were set up although some interviews ran much longer. This is permissible in phenomenological research since the duration of the interview could be determined by the amount of self-reflection with which the participant felt comfortable. The interviewer started each interview by explaining the aim of the study and outlining the procedure to be followed. The anonymity of the interviewees was stressed. Eight interviews were conducted, only five of which were usable due to the fact that, in two of them, the background noise interfered considerably while in the third, the recording device did not record effectively.

6.3.1   Themes per silent card
The findings of the five interviews that were transcribed and analysed are presented below, according to the theme of each silent card.

•   **Silent card 1: education, skills and experience**
Education did not seem to be a prerequisite for advancing to more senior communication roles. However, based on the findings, it seemed that education armed practitioners with valuable knowledge and assisted them in advancing to more senior roles. Tertiary education specifically seemed to become important later in practitioners' careers, once they were on a managerial level.

•   **Silent card 2: opportunity to make a strategic contribution**
It was the experience of the interviewees that there was room for a practitioner to make a strategic contribution in organisations that were open to such input. However, this privilege had to be earned by showing an understanding of business issues.
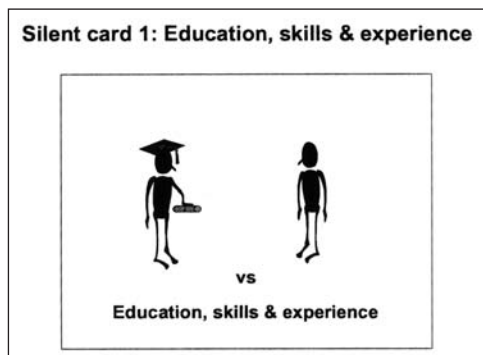
- **Silent card 3: company decision making**

While practitioners had decision-making power on their own level, they influenced decisions on a higher level through their managers. The practitioners argued that they had a valid contribution to make due to the stakeholder information they obtained, but felt that they were not given the opportunity. The reason for this, according to one interviewee, was that the South African banking industry in general could be regarded as being autocratic.

- **Silent card 4: mentorship**

Mentorship seemed to be very important for career advancement. The communication function was perceived as being slightly isolated and practitioners therefore needed support. None of the five interviewees had a (strategic) communication mentor although some had a business mentor. Four interviewees tried to fill this gap with other means such as Listservs and through education.
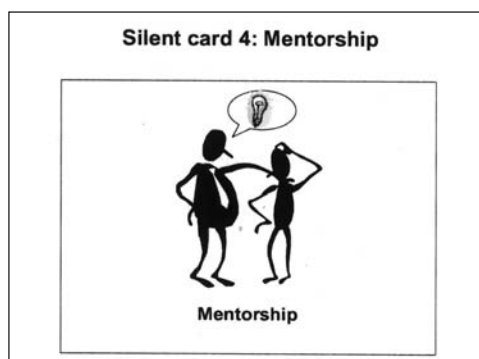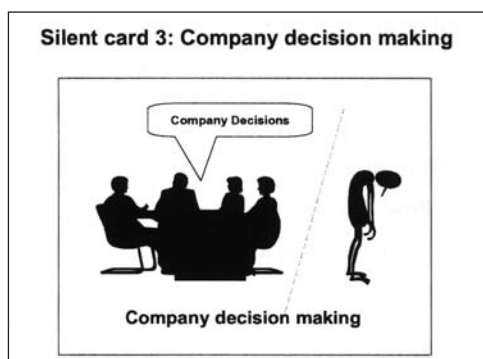
- **Silent card 5: size of the communication department**

Neither big nor small corporate communication departments were seen to be ideal. Large departments had problems such as communication breakdown and territorial issues, while small departments had capacity issues. Large departments however offered the opportunity to specialise while small departments necessitated multi-skilling. The problems associated with small departments seemed more difficult to overcome than those of large departments.

- **Silent card 6: organisational view of communication**

Two interviewees indicated that younger top managers (or those who had recently become senior managers) were more open to communication management than their older counterparts. Although there was no specific organisation-wide view of communication, top management's view of communication had a large influence on the practitioner's ability to perform managerial and strategic functions, as this dictated resource allocation.
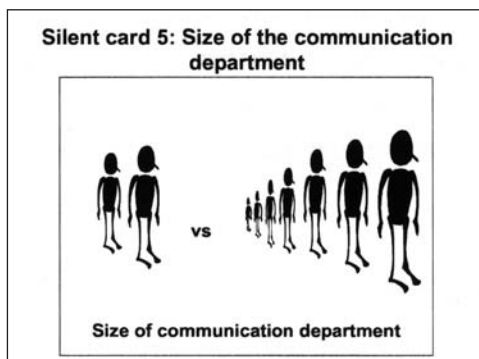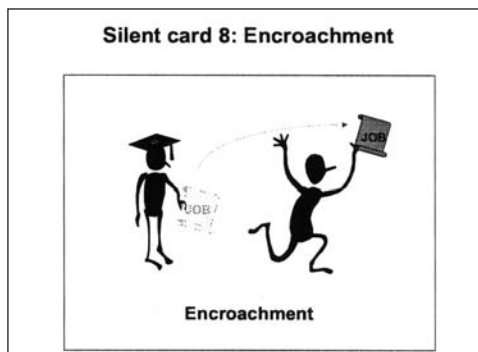

- **Silent card 7: gender discrimination and stereotyping**

Gender discrimination and stereotyping seemed to play a role in a practitioner's advancement, although the interviewees commented that there was less discrimination and stereotyping than before. It was interesting to note that interviewees two and four experienced the same situation, but one labelled it as stereotyping while the other saw it as gender discrimination. This could point to practitioners' world views determining their experience.

According to the interviewees, practitioners could limit discrimination and stereotyping by having a sense of their own self-worth, joining women's forums for support, gaining business knowledge and proving their contribution to the organisation.

- **Silent card 8: encroachment**

Three of the five interviewees experienced encroachment. The ones who had not argued that a person appointed in this way would not be able to perform in the position and would eventually be removed. The interviewees experienced manifestations of encroachment on both the individual and departmental levels as well as in people taking undue credit. Furthermore, encroachment and organisational politics were closely linked. In all of the above cases the practitioners experienced any form of encroachment as negative.

Silent card 7: Gender discrimination & stereotyping

Gender discrimination & stereotyping

Silent card 8: Encroachment

Encroachment

- **Silent card 9: organisational structure and culture**

Current organisational structures were not seen to be ideal for communication to prosper. The interviewees preferred to have an open line to the CEO or even, through their managers, a dotted line. It was clear that top management's support of communication was considered crucial.

- **Silent card 10: practitioner's view of communication**

Practitioners benefited when their superiors had a strategic view of communication. Two interviewees expressed the need for standardised communication practices, as inconsistencies in the expectation of communication deliverables created difficulties.

Silent card 9: Organisational structure & culture

CEO

Director · Director · Director

Manager · Manager · Manager · Manager

Organisational structure & culture

Silent card 10: Practitioner's view of communication

View of corporate communication — Technician · Manager · Strategist
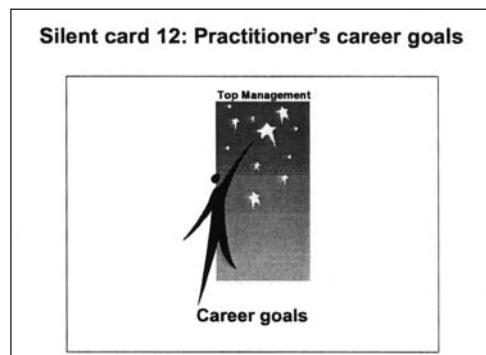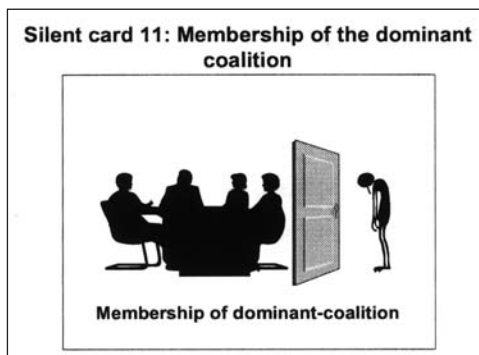
Practitioner's view of communication
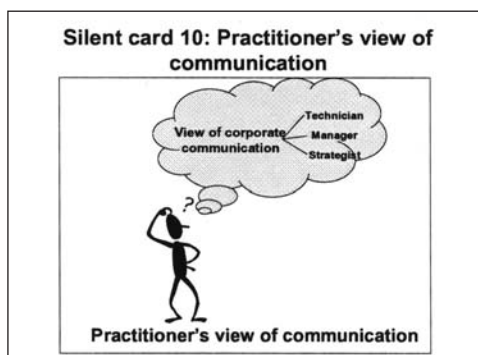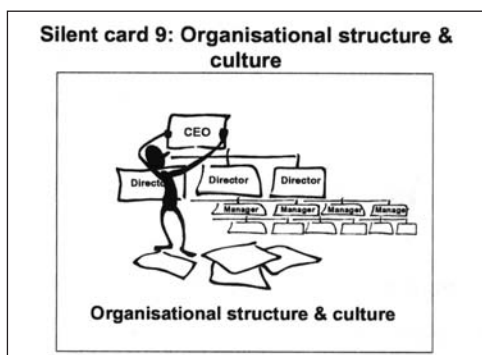
- **Silent card 11: membership of the dominant coalition**

Three interviewees stated that access to the dominant coalition helped practitioners to gain more insight into business, to gain business knowledge, to get a chance to prove themselves, and to gain credibility.

- **Silent card 12: practitioner's career goals**

Three interviewees mentioned that being driven helped practitioners to advance to more senior role-playing. All the interviewees indicated that their career goals had changed over time. Three interviewees wanted to progress only to senior management and not to director level.

Silent card 11: Membership of the dominant coalition

Membership of dominant-coalition

Silent card 12: Practitioner's career goals

Top Management

Career goals

- **Silent card 13: communication department support**

Teamwork could assist practitioners in performing their duties. However, two interviewees indicated that they were not experiencing teamwork. It was suggested that communication department support was closely linked to organisational structure.

Silent card 13: Communication department support

Communication department support
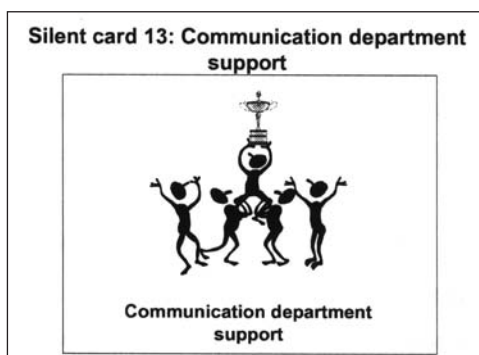
6.3.2   Themes per interviewee

While the findings of the five interviews were presented above according to the theme of the silent card, the following section describes the silent card findings per interviewee.

- **Interviewee one**

This interviewee realised that politics play an important role in an organisation and in a practitioner's advancement, and that it was important to have the opportunity to make a strategic contribution. Her mentor guided her in pursuing these opportunities, thereby minimising the effect of discrimination and the glass ceiling. The practitioner felt fortunate to work in an enlightened organisation/department where the Managing Director had a strategic view of corporate communication and the colleagues supported each other. Her experience was that tertiary education had helped her to advance as she could provide the same output as people with many years' experience.

- **Interviewee two**

Although the CEO supported communication and allowed the interviewee access to Executive Committee meetings, she was constrained in advancing to more strategic role-playing by the structure and the (small) size of the organisation/department, stereotyping and the lack of support from the marketing department. She was subjected to time constraints, having to perform all three communication roles (technician, manager and strategist). The interviewee tried to overcome these constraints by proving herself through strategic input, gaining support from her mentor, and obtaining information from Listservs.

- **Interviewee three**

Overall, this interviewee seemed to have advanced to more senior role-playing by spending over 33 years in the same organisation. She honed her skills over the years and did not rely on formal tertiary education. The interviewee used opportunities to get ahead and found it crucial to offer one's opinion on strategic issues and speak one's mind. The interviewee argued that practitioners needed to understand their own value and not be dependent on others to acknowledge their worth. This view had helped her to ignore encroachment and stereotyping, and to progress without a mentor. She stated that the experience gained by having worked overseas was very valuable to her.

- **Interviewee four**

This interviewee developed her passion for strategy through tertiary education. It led her to strive for challenging positions where she could contribute strategically. Unfortunately she experienced a great deal of politics, territorial issues and gender discrimination in the banking industry, and labelled the latter as autocratic. She did not form part of the decision-making coalition and was consulted only after decisions had already been made.

• **Interviewee five**

This young and ambitious interviewee stated that her tertiary education had helped her in her management position. Her career took off when she joined her current employer. The fact that she had a mentor and the organisation's view of corporate communication was strategic enabled her to perform strategically, compete for resources and create opportunities for advancement.

Interviewee five experienced the size of the communication department as less important than the support she received from the department. She experienced encroachment and politics, but overcame them through relationship building and networking. In order to focus her attention, she divided her tasks between core and context. The fact that there was no standard for communication practice and the definition of corporate communication in the business world was not clear had made her job even more difficult.

In conclusion, the findings of the silent card interviews discussed above achieved Secondary Objective (3): *To explore whether the selected practitioners experienced the constraints identified in the literature stud*y.

6.4 New constraints not identified in the literature investigation

The following constraints were identified by means of an open question asked towards the end of the interview: "Are you experiencing any other constraints that we have not yet talked about?"

• **Organisational politics**

Four interviewees agreed that practitioners should have knowledge of organisational politics, but should not participate since this could result in the corporate communication department being viewed negatively. Two mentioned that their mentors assisted them in handling politics.

• **Length of time spent in the organisation**

One interviewee seemed to have advanced to more senior roles by having spent over 33 years in the same organisation. Without having obtained further qualifications, the length of time she spent in the same organisation seemed to have assisted her in advancing to more senior roles.

• **Lack of networking and relationship building**

One interviewee mentioned that relationship building and networking could assist the practitioner in overcoming encroachment and politics.

• **Lack of knowledge of overseas practice**

Four interviewees agreed that working overseas in the field of public relations could assist practitioners in advancing their careers since this knowledge expanded their world view. It was

however important to realise that the circumstances in South African organisations differed in some respects from those abroad and that the needs of South African practitioners might be different from those of their overseas counterparts.

• **Lack of dividing communication work into core and context**

One interviewee suggested that dividing tasks into core and context could assist practitioners in allocating their time to more important tasks. 'Core' tasks referred to those where practitioners could provide strategic input and 'context' to those where practitioners could merely try to influence decisions.

• **Lack of standardisation of corporate communication practitioner deliverables**

This constraint was linked to the vague organisational view of communication and the lack of professional recognition of the function. Two interviewees argued that there was no standard for communication practice deliverables, leading to inconsistencies within the business. It was also difficult to manage expectations since the expectations of the communication department were so varied.

The findings described above achieved Secondary Objective (4): *To explore whether the selected practitioners experienced other constraints not identified in the literature, which might be unique to the South African environment.*

7. LIMITATIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusions that follow must be seen in the light of the small sample size of this phenomenological exploratory study. Although eight interviews were recorded, three of the taped interviews were not usable due to background noise and the quality of the recording. This eliminated the only male communication practitioner's interview from the findings. Furthermore, only one African and no Coloureds or Asians were involved in the study. Data analysis was thus done on eight questionnaires and five in-depth interviews, the latter conducted by means of silent cards.

In addition to demographic data, the findings of the eight questionnaires indicated a phenomenon often described in the international corporate communication literature – the limitation of 'self-reporting' on corporate communication roles. In describing their own roles, the practitioners reported on what they wanted to do or thought they should be doing, rather than what they actually did. Johnson (1989:244-245) suggests that this could be overcome by asking members of the dominant coalition to report on the roles they expect practitioners to perform or the roles they actually perform.

In this study, three interviewees perceived themselves to be playing the 'strategist' role, four the 'manager' role and only one the 'technician' role. However, when the perceived roles were compared

with the actual roles performed, three practitioners overestimated their role, a situation that could lead to frustration as practitioners viewed themselves to be playing a more senior role than they actually did. Another three practitioners underestimated their role, i.e. viewed themselves to be playing a less senior role than they actually did. This could also lead to frustration, in this case with their managers, because of the latter's expectation of the practitioner's work deliverables. In only two cases, the activities that the interviewees performed over the last three months corresponded with what they perceived their daily activities to be.

The use of the silent card interviewing technique was found to be effective in this study in exploring whether the selected corporate communication practitioners experienced the constraints identified in the literature. An important finding was that, while education was not seen to be a prerequisite for advancement, it was practitioners' experience that it provided valuable knowledge and assisted them in advancing to more senior roles. Tertiary education specifically seemed to become important later in practitioners' careers, once they were on a managerial level and want to advance further to strategic role-playing. This was in accordance with the Excellence Study findings (Dozier *et al.,* 1995) that practitioners needed knowledge of the manager role, and especially of strategic management. It is therefore recommended that practitioners who wanted to advance to more senior roles obtain tertiary qualifications. It was especially during postgraduate studies that students (practitioners) learned about recent research findings such as the prerequisites for excellent communication reported by the Excellence Study (Dozier *et al.,* 1995) or CEO expectations of the activities to be performed by practitioners in the corporate communication strategist or manager roles (Steyn, 2000a; 2000c; 2003a). Such knowledge could assist in preparing them to function at the organisation's strategic level. Empowered with strategic communication and business knowledge and skills, practitioners could overcome their current constraint in participating in an organisation's strategic decision-making processes.

According to the Excellence Study findings (Dozier *et al.,* 1995), knowledge of the manager role/strategic management and shared expectations between the dominant coalition and the communication department created/reinforced a strategic view of communication in the dominant coalition (which would lead to the latter valuing and supporting the corporate communication department, actually demanding strategic role-playing from them). This finding was also supported in this study, with interviewees indicating that the dominant coalition's support for communication was crucial in advancing to more senior roles and they benefited when their superiors had a strategic view of communication. It also had a large influence on the opportunity to perform managerial and strategic functions, as this dictated resource allocation.

It was furthermore the interviewees' experience that access to the dominant coalition helped them gain more insight into business, gain business knowledge, get a chance to prove themselves, and gain credibility. However, current organisational structure and culture often prohibited this, which

made it difficult to create a strategic view for communication in the dominant coalition or to contribute strategically.

Another finding was that although older employees were believed to have greater insight and experience, younger practitioners were being appointed to high-level positions. Being in the knowledge era, this could point to new specialised knowledge becoming more important than many years of experience (of a previous era) -- a finding that reinforces the need for, and importance of, tertiary education at postgraduate level. It could also provide a possible explanation of why none of the interviewees had a communication mentor but had to be satisfied with a business manager as mentor (which was a constraint in itself in making a strategic communication contribution). There simply might be no senior corporate communication practitioners that have advanced to the strategic level in ABSA, Standard Bank or First National Bank that could mentor young and upcoming practitioners in strategic communication management.

One of the demographic findings of this study indicated that interviewees older than 40 years had experience in non-communication functions such as human resources, administration and travel. If this also applied to other older practitioners, and if new specialised knowledge of corporate communication were indeed required to advance to senior role-playing, this would be an important constraint to older employees (in turn also constraining younger employees, who had no senior communication mentors). This situation could be related to another finding of the study, namely that three of the five interviewees experienced encroachment (where people from outside corporate communication were appointed to manage the function). In the knowledge economy, this practice was not desirable since it could inhibit strategic role-playing directly (the outside manager did not have the knowledge of the communication manager and strategist roles needed to advance or to establish a strategic view for communication among the dominant coalition) and indirectly (the outside manager was not able to mentor young ambitious practitioners so that they could advance themselves).

This research also uncovered new constraints not identified in the literature investigation. Responses to an open question asked towards the end of the interviews indicated that organisational politics, the length of time spent in the organisation, the practitioner's lack of networking and relationship building skills, not having worked abroad and thus not having been exposed to overseas communication practices, and the lack of standardisation of communication practitioner deliverables were constraints facing practitioners in advancing to more senior role-playing. It is suggested that more research be conducted on the identification of constraints not described in the literature. Such a study could be totally exploratory without prompting interviewees with silent cards (or any other method). The rationale for this was firstly to find additional new constraints and secondly to ascertain whether interviewees identified the known constraints of their own accord, without being prompted.

It is concluded that phenomenology, a research strategy widely used in the field of psychology and other communication sub-disciplines, was valuable also for corporate communication research. Despite the many constraints facing practitioners in advancing to more senior role-playing, the findings of this study indicated ways in which some of these constraints could be overcome, *inter alia* through tertiary education, acquiring knowledge on strategic communication management, becoming a member of the dominant coalition and enhancing the practitioner's relationship management skills. In the words of one of the interviewees: "Practitioners should remember that 'there is life after' their current job".

Despite the limitations of a small sample, valuable findings emerged in this study. An effort was thus made to publish the findings to stimulate further research on the constraints facing practitioners, and ways to overcome them. Since the research was limited to the South African banking industry and the results are therefore industry and organisation specific, it is recommended that a quantitative study be undertaken to provide generalisable results on the constraints identified in the literature as well as those that emerged in the South African environment. Such a study could for example be conducted among all corporate communication practitioners nationally or among all banking institutions in South Africa, using a representative sample of men, women and practitioners from all races to exclude cultural factors. Further research could also focus on the commonalities of constraints experienced by corporate communication practitioners in the banking industry versus other industries, compared with other countries or even with individuals in other professions.

- The questionnaire and its descriptive statistics can be obtained from the corresponding author, Tanya le Roux, at komtlr@puknet.puk.ac.za.

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