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Public relations roles empirically verified among public relations practitioners in Africa

ABSTRACT

There is a lack of knowledge and understanding of the practice of public relations (PR) in Africa, which prohibits the continent to fulfil its responsibility towards the global PR society as well as other developing countries. Based on the findings of a master's dissertation on the practice of PR in Africa, this article focuses on one of the concepts that were measured, namely PR roles.

The article discusses current literature in the field of roles research and describes the empirical verification of two PR roles in Africa. Although the three roles of the PR strategist, manager and technician were measured, only two roles emerged during the factor analysis: the role of the strategist (Factor 1), and the combined roles of the technician/manager (Factor 2).

The data was collected by means of a self-administered electronic questionnaire. Data analysis consisted of both Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Common Factor Analysis (CFA) where the underlying dimensions were extracted, indicating the items used to define the PR roles.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The current global discussions regarding the fundamentals of public relations (PR) attempt to draw conclusions about the purpose of the PR profession in the 21st century (Hutton, 1999; Van Ruler, Vercic, Flodin & Butschi, 2001). These discussions have motivated this study on the African continent.

Although it is countries with well-structured and established systems that have contributed the most to the literature and empirical evidence found in the field of PR, this does not mean that PR is not active in developing countries. However, very little has been documented about the practice of PR in developing countries, which also holds true for those in Africa. PR practitioners, especially those in African countries such as South Africa and Nigeria with a well-developed public relations infrastructure have a responsibility – not only the global PR society but also the practitioners in other less developed countries on the continent. This responsibility includes the empowerment of African PR practitioners with the necessary knowledge and skills to serve their societies, to build PR theory and to contribute to the understanding of PR in Africa.

The problem that this article attempts to address could therefore be formulated as follows: *There is a lack of knowledge and understanding of the practice of PR on the African continent.* This prohibits its participation in global discussions on the fundamentals of PR. In order to do so and contribute towards a global PR body of knowledge, it is necessary to explore the practice of PR in Africa—especially the world views and roles played by its practitioners.

The research objectives of this study consist of two research phases, the first being a theoretical literature study and the second an empirical study. The objectives applicable to this article are listed below:

1.1 Phase one: A theoretical literature study will be undertaken to:

- describe the practice of PR, in terms of the roles (activities) of PR from a theoretical perspective, focusing on global theory;
- explore the level of development of the practice of PR, from a theoretical perspective, using global theory.

1.2 Phase two: An empirical research study will be undertaken to:

- identify the roles (activities) of the practice of PR in Africa;
- operationalise and empirically verify variables defining the role of the strategist of the practice of PR in Africa.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of 'roles' refers to the everyday activities of PR practitioners. The function of PR, according to Broom (1986:2), is "*gathering, assimilating, interpreting and disseminating intelligence about the environment*". PR roles are the behavioural patterns of individuals in organisations practising PR. These roles set individuals apart and define expectations from the organisations' perspectives. The concept of role is a key to understanding PR (Dozier in Grunig, 1992:327). According to Petersen, Holtzhausen and Tindall (2002:1), it is essential to examine PR roles in international settings in order to understand how PR is practised in a particular country.

Newsom, Van Slyke Turk and Kruckeberg (1996:4) are of the opinion that the PR practitioner can be viewed as an intermediary between the organisation being represented and all the publics of that particular organisation. The responsibilities of this individual include both those of the organisation and those of the various publics. The complexity of the role of the PR practitioner prompted the PR Society of America (PRSA) to define 14 activities generally associated with PR.

2.1 North American perspectives on PR roles

Broom and Smith (in Grunig, 1992:329) conceptualised four theoretical roles, namely the expert prescriber, the communication facilitator, the problem-solving process facilitator and the technician role. These roles were measured but only two roles emerged empirically, namely the role of the manager and the role of the technician.

- The expert prescriber, communication facilitator and problem-solving process facilitator are all conceptual components of the same empirical role, namely the manager (Broom & Dozier, in Steyn & Puth, 2000:16). Research is often used in this role to assist in policy decision making as well as to plan and evaluate communication programmes (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).
- Practitioners fulfilling the technician role in organisations perform at an operational level, implementing communication programmes but they seldom undertake research or participate actively in the decision-making process.

2.2 European perspectives on PR roles/dimensions

According to Van Ruler et al. (2001:380), there are identifiable differences in the European approach to PR. The most profound difference lies in the reflective role of PR, which they consider to be the most important. The practice of Reflective PR entails providing information on changing societal standards, expectations and values, adapting organisational norms and values accordingly. The focus here is on socially responsible behaviour by the organisation in order to increase its legitimacy in the eyes of society.

The EBOK project team (Van Ruler et al., 2001:380) conceptualised four dimensions or roles of European PR, briefly discussed below:

- The reflective role is concerned with organisational standards and values aimed at the decision makers in the organisation. This role is responsible for the analysis of the changing standards and values in society. This is essential for an organisation striving to be socially responsible and to be seen as legitimate.
- The managerial role is mainly concerned with the organisational mission and strategy aimed at commercial and other groups. The development of strategies is aimed at gaining public trust and/or mutual understanding through relations between the organisation and its public groups.
- The operational role is aimed at implementing and evaluating the communication process formulated on behalf of the organisation by preparing a means of communication.
- The educational role is concerned with the behaviour of the members of the organisation and is aimed at internal public groups. This role assists members of the organisation in becoming communicatively competent, in order to respond to social demands.

In considering the managerial and operational EBOK roles, it is clear that they are similar to the historic roles of managers and technicians, and are therefore equated for the purposes of this study. Although the first three EBOK roles will be measured in this study, the role of the educator is not relevant to the objectives of this research.

2.3 A South African perspective: three roles for public relations

The manager and technician roles are therefore uncorrelated as they are empirically and conceptually different (Steyn, 2000:16). In terms of organisational level, the manager role will function on a functional level and the technician role on an operational level.

Regarding the widely accepted two-role typology of manager and technician as limited in describing the activities of senior public relations practitioners, Steyn (2003:1) conceptualised and empirically tested a third role for public relations, namely the strategist in the South African context. It was based inter alia on Van Riel's 'mirror' function (Steyn, 2002:44). It was however broadened to include: "monitoring of relevant environmental developments and the anticipation of their consequences for the organisation's policies and strategies, especially with regard to relationships with stakeholders and other interest groups in society" (Steyn, 2003:8).

According to Steyn (2003), many similarities can be drawn between the role of the strategist and the reflective role. Therefore, the role of the strategist was adapted to include the European perspective and empirically tested in this study.

2.4 Conclusions regarding the different perspectives

The EBOK project explained that the reflective role is theoretically different to that of either the manager or technician. Steyn (2002:46) is of the opinion that the role of the strategist is closest in nature to the reflective role identified by the EBOK project and theoretically conceptualised by Holmström (1996). According to Steyn (2000:20), the most senior PR practitioner in an organisation usually portrays the role of the strategist.

This role is performed at the macro-level of an organisation, monitoring environmental developments and anticipating the consequences for the organisation's strategic function. This study focused on the impact of the macro-environmental issues on the way in which PR is practised. It was therefore critical to include the role of the strategist as well as the European reflective role in this study and operationalise it in order to test it empirically. The similarities between the role of the strategist and the reflective role as pointed out by Steyn and Butschi (2003:20) can be summarised as follows:

- fulfilling a boundary spanning role on macro-level, and feeding top management with strategic information from the external environment;
- influencing top management's decision making, organisational strategies and behaviour based on the understanding of the social intelligence; and
- participating in the management of trust, legitimacy and organisational reputation.

South African authors Singleton and Groenewald (2003:3) refer to the reflective task of PR as a task that is within the space between the organisation and its environment using the "*window out and window in*" reflection. These authors refer to trust as fragile and therefore the organisation's behaviour needs to be aligned with its intentions. They further mention that the motive of reflective PR is functional, not ethical, rationale is cognitive, not normative; and therefore environmental data is gathered in order to feed it back into the organisation to strengthen its self-reflection.

All three roles, namely technician, manager and strategist, were included in this article in order to direct the theoretical discussion as well as the empirical aspects of this work.

3. METHODOLOGY

The population for the study was PR practitioners in Africa. The African countries where PR is actively practised, as determined by the presence or absence of a PR association, defined the target population. The sampling frame consisted of the membership list of the various African PR associations currently registered with the International Public Relations Association (IPRA). Data was gathered by means of a self-administered questionnaire using email. A total of 612 respondents in Africa were targeted in an attempt to reach a minimum of 125 respondents. Due to many logistical problems and an insufficient response rate, it was decided to include the attendees at a training session in Tanzania where 22 government PR practitioners gathered as well as the 100 delegates who attended a conference in Nairobi, East Africa, organised by the Eastern Africa Public Relations Association (EAPRA).

A non-probability sampling procedure was used, namely a snowball sample. The latter is a form of judgemental sampling that aims to reach a specialised population. This method was used due to a lack of knowledge or contact details of African PR practitioners. Respondents are usually selected through the use of a probability method and then asked to identify others in this field to participate in the study (Cooper & Schindler, 1998:247; Aaker, Kumar & Day, 2001:379; Zikmund, 2003:384).

3.1 Questionnaire development

As one of the concepts used to determine the current status of PR practice in PR, the author measured the three roles of strategist, manager and technician. The measuring instrument developed by Steyn (2000:36-37) fulfilled the requirements of a valid and reliable instrument and was therefore used as the basis for this study. However, since the researcher also wanted to include measurement items for the reflective role to reflect the societal perspective characteristic of the Europeans, she used a number of items from the questionnaire of another master's dissertation at the University of Pretoria (Green, not completed) that specifically measured the reflective role. The researcher also developed a number of items.

The measurement scale used in Steyn's study (2000) was adapted from a 7-point to a 5-point Likert scale. The reasons for this decision were the following: firstly, the researcher did not want to confuse the respondents by using different scales. Therefore, the scale was adapted so that the description of 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree' would suit the question. Secondly, the researcher wanted to draw correlations between roles and another concept that was measured in her master's dissertation (namely models). In order to do this, a similar rating scale was needed. The three PR roles were measured by 21 items representing PR activities, using a 5-point Likert scale.

3.2 Pilot testing the questionnaire

A pilot study of eight was conducted, including two PR students from Africa to ensure that the language and concepts on the questionnaire were comprehensible. Furthermore, the expert opinions of two senior colleagues (specialising in the field of strategic corporate communication) on the questionnaire were obtained. These individuals were specifically asked to comment on the content and the format of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was then emailed to various individuals asking them to access the questionnaire, completing it with "dummy" answers by following the step-by-step instructions summarised in the questionnaire and emailing it back to the researcher. This was necessary in order to identify any technical problems of completing and submitting the questionnaire electronically.

It is important to mention that the instructions on the questionnaire clearly stated that the practitioners should consider the CURRENT situation with regard to role activities and not a normative ideal.

4 REALISED SAMPLE

This study cannot be generalised to the entire African continent, since the respondents were mainly from southern and eastern Africa (i.e. the accessible population included in this study were from South Africa, Uganda, Nigeria, Kenya, Mauritius, Guinea and Tanzania). Of a sample of 612, the researcher received 151 usable questionnaires – a response rate of 25%. Table 1.1 provides an outline of the realised sample compared to the planned sample as well as the response rate for each of the channels used to distribute/collect the data in this study.

MEDIA USED	PLANNED SAMPLE	REALISED SAMPLE	RESPONSE RATE
Email respondents	490	76	16%
Training seminar in Tanzania	22	15	68%
Conference delegates	100	60	60%
Total	612	151	25%

Percentages are rounded off

Table 1.1: Planned versus realised sample

There was an even distribution between male and female PR practitioners (46% male and 54% female). The largest group of practitioners (74%) fell in the age groups from 26-45. Only 19% fell in the age groups from 46-65. In the African context, there is a differentiation between young and older practitioner. Younger individuals are referred to as professional practitioners, usually trained through further studies in the field of PR. The older generation were not necessarily trained in PR, but reached their positions through experience.

5. DATA ANALYSIS THROUGH DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

A 21-item instrument was used to measure three PR roles as an indicator of the status of PR practice in Africa. These statements focused on the current activities performed by the PR department or division in the particular respondent's organisation. Tables 1.2 to 1.4 summarise and present each of the three PR roles by showing the percentage distribution. It should be noted that only the two 'top box' and two 'low box' scores are reported in these tables.

Table 1.2 indicates the percentage distribution of six statements describing the role of the technician. All six items were taken from the original instrument developed by Steyn (2000:36). This role has been empirically tested and verified, and discussed in global literature as the lowest level of activities performed by a PR practitioner.

A CURRENT ACTIVITY of the PR department in our organisation is...		Disagree Slightly or Strongly %	Neutral %	Agree Slightly or Strongly %
Q 2	... to keep a media clipping service (clip articles that appeared in the media about the organisation)	6	8	86
Q 5	... to organise special events (e.g. open houses/exhibitions/gala evenings).	10	9	82
Q 8	... to produce audiovisual materials for presentations.	21	16	63
Q 12	... to write articles for the organisation's publications.	2	9	89
Q 16	... to edit public relations materials (e.g. speeches/the annual report).	5	9	86
Q 20	... to generate publicity (e.g. write media releases).	3	4	93

Table 1.2: Respondents' opinions regarding the Technician role

- The majority of the respondents (93%) agreed that the current activities performed by the PR department were to generate publicity for the organisation. Furthermore, almost 9 out of 10 (89%) respondents agreed that their activities included the writing of articles for the organisation's publications.
- Most of the respondents (86%) also agreed that editing material and keeping a media clipping service were part of their current activities in the PR department in their organisations. The organisation of special events was an activity that 8 out of 10 (82%) of the respondents agreed were part of their current activities. More than half of the respondents (63%) agreed that the production of audiovisual material for presentations was an activity that they fulfilled.

It is clear from the above that the current activities fulfilled by PR practitioners are focused on generating publicity by writing and editing material on behalf of the organisation.

Table 1.3 summarises the results in terms of the percentage distribution of 5 statements describing a second role of PR practice, namely the role of the manager. All 5 statements were taken from the original instrument developed by Steyn (2000:37).

A CURRENTACTIVIITY of the PR department in our organisation is...		Disagree Slightly or Strongly %	Neutral %	Agree Slightly or Strongly %
Q 4	... to take responsibility for the success or the failure of public relations plans.	10	16	74
Q 7	... to develop public relations strategy that supports corporate strategy.	8	7	85
Q 10	... to manage the implementation of public relations plans	4	5	91
Q 14	... to take responsibility for the success or the failure of public relations strategy.	8	15	87
Q 18	... to monitor the performance of public relations practitioners/subdivisions.	15	29	56

Table 1.3 Respondents' opinions regarding the Manager role

- Almost 9 out of 10 (87%) respondents agreed that the PR department took responsibility for the success or failure of the PR strategy in the organisation, while 85% of the respondents agreed that the PR department developed PR strategies that support corporate strategy.
- Almost 6 out of 10 (56%) respondents agreed that a current activity of the PR department was to monitor the performance of PR practitioners/subdivisions. It is clear from the above that the current activities performed by PR departments in organisations represented in the study are primarily focused on managing the implementation of PR plans, taking responsibility for the success and failure of these strategies and developing PR strategies.

Table 1.4 summarises the results in terms of the percentage distribution of ten statements describing a third role of PR practice, namely the role of the strategist. This role has been conceptualised, empirically tested and verified by Steyn (2000:17) in South Africa. Similarities between the South African role of the strategist and the European reflective role – as conceptualised by Holmström (1996) and identified in the EBOK project (1999-2002) – were pointed out by Steyn and Butschi (2003). The following ten items measured the role of the strategist in the African context, according to the opinions of the respondents.

A CURRENT ACTIVITY of the PR department in our organisation is...		Disagree Slightly or Strongly %	Neutral %	Agree Slightly or Strongly %
Q 1	... to explain to top management the impact of their behaviour (obtained through research) on key external publics (e.g. media, investors, communities) (Steyn, 2000:37).	17	20	63
Q 3	... to act as an 'early warning system' to top management before issues in society erupt into a crisis for our organisation (adapted by Green, not completed).	6	14	80
Q 6	... to act as an advocate for key internal publics by explaining their views to top management (Steyn, 2000:37).	15	19	66
Q 9	... to initiate dialogue with pressure groups in society that are limiting the organisation's autonomy (e.g. legislators/environmentalists/consumer advocates) (adapted by Green, not completed).	26	23	51
Q 11	... to explain views/opinions that exist in society to top management (based on the writings of Holmström, 1996 and Van Ruler et al, 2001).	9	15	76
Q 13	... to bring to top management's attention any organisational behaviour that erodes public trust (based on the writings of Holmström 1996 and Van Ruler et al. 2001).	9	16	77
Q 15	... to bring to top management's attention societal expectations for socially responsible behaviour (Green, not completed).	11	22	67
Q 17	... to explain to top management the impact of the organisation's behaviour on society (Steyn, 2000:37).	12	21	67
Q 19	... to express the company's stance on social responsibility to society in order to gain public trust (based on the writings of Holmström 1996 & Van Ruler et al., 2001).	8	14	78
Q 21	... to act as an advocate for key external publics by explaining their views to top management (Steyn, 2000:37).	14	25	61

Table 1.4: Respondents' opinions regarding the Strategist role

- The majority of the respondents (80%) agreed that the activities fulfilled by the PR department were to act as an 'early warning system' to top management before issues in society erupted into a crisis for their organisation.
- Almost 8 out of 10 respondents (78%) agreed that a current activity that the PR practitioner performed was to express the company's stance on social responsibility to society in order to gain public trust. Furthermore, 67% of the respondents agreed that the PR practitioner's current activity was to bring societal expectation for socially responsible behaviour to the attention of top management. A total of 76% of the respondents agreed that PR was explaining society's views or opinions to top management.
- A little more than 6 out of 10 of the respondents (61%) agreed that PR was currently responsible for acting as an advocate on behalf of the external publics in order to explain their views to top management.
- Most of the respondents (77%) also agreed that when organisational behaviour is eroding public trust, PR practitioners need to bring it to the attention of top management. While 67% of the respondents agreed that PR was explaining the impact of organisational behaviour on society to top management, only 63% of the respondents agreed that PR was explaining the impact of the organisation's behaviour on key external publics to top management.

From the above discussion it is clear that, in the African context, there is a concern for societal issues that necessitates continuous dialogue between the organisation and society. It is clear that PR is currently fulfilling a mediating role on behalf of both the organisation and society. Organisations have a responsibility to the societies in which they operate and in order to determine what their responsibilities are, they need to know how their decisions and behaviour affect these individuals and groups. Dialogue and continuous communication are therefore critical for an organisation to gain public trust.

6. FACTOR ANALYSIS

According to global literature, there are currently three PR roles. This study aimed to determine the number of roles that are currently present on the African continent. This study used factor analysis as an interdependent multivariate technique in the data analysis. According to Cooper and Schindler (1998:577), factor analysis is a general term for several specific computational techniques, all having the objective of reducing many variables to a more manageable number that belong together and have overlapping measurement characteristics. When data is factor analysed, it analyses the interrelationships between a number of variables by defining a set of common underlying dimensions, known as factors (Hair, et al., 1998:90). Therefore, the general purpose of factor analysis is to summarise and reduce a large number of variables in a smaller number of factors, discovering a basic structure of a domain and adding substantive interpretation to the underlying dimensions (Zikmund, 2003:586 & 587).

Aaker *et al.* (2001:554) discuss two primary functions of factor analysis, namely to identify underlying constructs in data, and to reduce the number of variables. Firstly, when underlying constructs are identified, data is summarised and therefore when interpreted

and understood, the data is described in a smaller number of items than the original variables. Secondly, when each underlying dimension's scores are calculated and substituted by original values, data reduction takes place. Factor analysis can achieve the purpose from either an exploratory or a confirmatory perspective. This study used exploratory factor analysis, in order to search for a structure among a set of variables where no prior constraints were set on the estimation of components or the number of components to be extracted (Hair, *et al.*, 1998:90-91).

In conducting factor analysis, the input data matrix is calculated from the correlations between the variables. The resulting factor pattern demonstrates the underlying relationships of the variables and is referred to as an R-type factor analysis (Hair, *et al.*, 1998:97).

The data was entered into an SAS statistical package using a procedure called PROC FACTOR to factor analyse the data. Referring to the critical assumptions underlying factor analysis, the results were evaluated according to the following decision rules:

- Only factor loadings greater than 0.3 will be considered.
- A factor should consist of at least three variables.
- Items that loaded similarly on more than one factor were considered for possible deletion (Hair, *et al.*, 1998:97-100).

At this point, all the critical assumptions of factor analysis were sufficiently applied and therefore the next step consisted of a factoring technique, used as a method of extracting factors. The method that was used in PROC FACTOR procedure in SAS was the Maximum Likelihood factor, also referred to as a common factor analysis as it identifies the dimensions or constructs representing the original variables.

6.1 Extracting the number of factors

The process of determining the number of factors to be extracted is summarised by using a combination of approaches. The most frequently used approaches are the latent root criterion, the percentage of variance and the scree test criterion (Hair, *et al.*, 1998:103-104). In this study, a combination of two of these approaches was used, namely the latent root criterion and the scree test criterion. The latent root criterion focuses on the amount of variance that is associated with the factor. The sum of the square of the factor loadings of each variable on a factor represents the eigenvalue. Factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 were retained (Aaker, *et al.*, 2001:559) and therefore in this study, three eigenvalues were greater than 1.0, indicating a possibility of three factors. Table 1.5 summarises the eigenvalues for the three factors (PR roles).

FACTOR	EIGENVALUE
1	15.3279
2	3.3346
3	1.5355

Table 1.5: Eigenvalues for factors identified in the exploratory factor analysis

The scree test is a plot summarising the eigenvalues against the number of factors to be extracted. The shape of the plot is used to determine the number of factors. There is a distinct break between the steep slope of factors and the scree of the rest of the factors (Aaker, et al., 2001:559). Figure 1.1 illustrates an example of the scree plot of the initial correlation matrix for the three factors representing three PR roles.

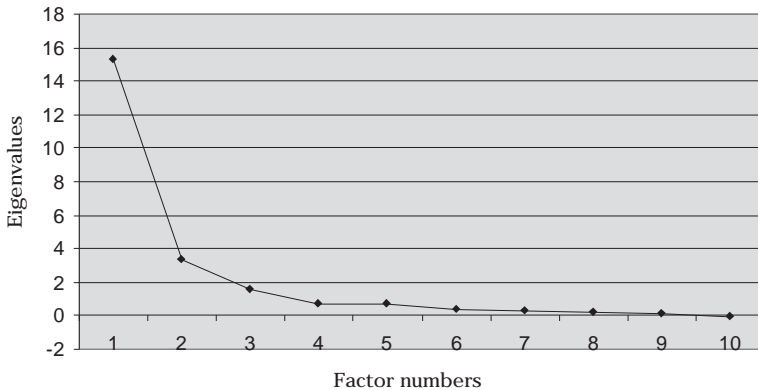


Figure 1.1: Eigenvalues plot for the scree test criterion for the roles (activities) of the practice of PR

In Figure 1.1 it is evident that a definite number of two factors can be considered for the extraction of factors. From factor 3 onwards, a gradual downward slope occurs in the slope of the scree test. Compared to the latent root criterion, there is possible disagreement between these two approaches in terms of two or three factors to be extracted.

As already mentioned, the maximum likelihood analysis was conducted, specifying a Varimax orthogonal rotation of the original factor matrix. Orthogonal rotations preserve the right angles that exist among the factor axes. Varimax orthogonal rotation attempts to simplify the factor loadings, forcing them to be near 0 or 1. This procedure enhances the interpretability of factors (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2002:809). Factor loadings are referred to as measurements that are of importance for a variable in measuring a factor that is used for interpreting and labelling a factor (Hair, et al., 2003:588). Therefore, the deletion of items depends on the factor loading of the factor.

In the first round, a rotated five-factor matrix was examined and the results were not satisfactory according to the minimum criteria. The matrix illustrated that no variables loaded significantly on factor 5 and two factor loadings were found in factor 4. Both these results were not satisfactory and therefore it was decided not to continue running a five- or four-factor analysis.

In the second round of analysis, a three-factor extraction took place. The three-factor rotation matrix was examined. Two variables loaded on more than one factor. The first one loaded on all three factors identified and the second one loaded on two of the three factors. These two variables were deleted and the three-factor analysis was run. The implication of this was that factor 2 had only three other factor loadings describing factor 2. The third round of analysis was run on a three-factor analysis. This rotation matrix was examined and again one of the variables loaded on more than one factor. This, however, left factor 3 with only two other factor loadings, which is not sufficient for defining a factor. This variable was deleted and a two-factor analysis was run.

In the fourth round of the factor analysis, two factors were extracted and the process of examining the two-factor matrix was followed. The two-factor solution had a total of 18 variables of the 21 original variables, all with a factor loading greater than 0.3. The two variables that loaded on all three factors as well as another that loaded on two of the three factors were discarded. No new labels were given to the factors as it was decided to keep the original labels as discussed in the literature review, in order to interpret and represent the African findings in terms of the three roles. It was, however, clear that some of these variables defining the roles loaded together in the African context and these will be explained.

- FACTOR 1 – Strategist - This factor consisted of ten variables that defined the role of the strategist. This factor was labelled “strategist”.
- FACTOR 2 – Technician/ Manager - This factor consisted of eight variables, two of them defining the traditional manager role and the other six variables the role of the technician. This factor was labelled “Technician/manager role”. A reason why these two variables loaded with the other variables in this factor might be that these two variables differentiated between activities representing in terms of the development and implementation of plans and strategy (Technician and Manager roles)

In order to ensure that there is internal consistency between the factors identified in this two-factor solution, it is necessary to provide a summary of the final rotated factor loading for the roles of the practice of PR.

VARIABLES	FACTOR 1 STRATEGIST	FACTOR 2 TECHNICIAN/MANAGER
V43 (Q17)	0.824	0.114
V41 (Q15)	0.817	0.194
V39 (Q13)	0.782	0.244
V35 (Q9)	0.712	-0.031
V37 (Q11)	0.700	0.213
V29 (Q3)	0.675	0.170
V27 (Q1)	0.645	0.133
V47 (Q21)	0.635	0.143
V45 (Q19)	0.596	0.212
V32 (Q6)	0.562	0.171
V28 (Q2)	-0.011	0.626
V30 (Q4)	0.298	0.604
V40 (Q14)	0.382	0.574
V46 (Q20)	-0.071	0.573
V42 (Q16)	0.290	0.550
V38 (Q12)	0.137	0.500
V31 (Q5)	0.105	0.469
V34 (Q8)	0.206	0.314

Table 1.6: Rotated two-factor loading matrix

6.2 Reliability of the roles of the practice of PR in Africa

The eighteen variables constituting the final two-factor solution were submitted to a reliability analysis. Cronbach's coefficient alpha for the two factors is summarised in Table 1.7 below.

FACTOR	VARIABLE	CORRELATION WITH TOTAL	CRONBACH'S ALPHA AFTER DELETION	RELIABILITY
Strategist	V27 (Q1)	0.625	0.905	0.91
	V29 (Q3)	0.666	0.903	
	V32 (Q6)	0.560	0.909	
	V35 (Q9)	0.668	0.901	
	V37 (Q11)	0.696	0.897	
	V39 (Q13)	0.770	0.896	
	V41 (Q15)	0.781	0.896	
	V43 (Q17)	0.787	0.896	
	V45 (Q19)	0.593	0.907	
	V47 (Q21)	0.630	0.905	
Technician / manager	V28 (Q2)	0.517	0.745	0.78
	V30 (Q4)	0.542	0.741	
	V31 (Q5)	0.444	0.757	
	V34 (Q8)	0.327	0.776	
	V38 (Q12)	0.473	0.752	
	V40 (Q14)	0.521	0.744	
	V42 (Q16)	0.549	0.739	
	V46 (Q20)	0.447	0.757	

Table 1.7: Standardised Cronbach coefficient alpha for two-factor solution

The two-factor solution is considered reliable since the coefficient alphas for both factors are above the recommended 0.7. The factor loadings of each of the two factors will now be discussed individually.

VARIABLES	QUESTIONS	FACTOR LOADINGS
V43	To explain to top management the impact of the organisation's behaviour on society	0.824
V41	To bring to top management's attention societal expectations for socially responsible behaviour	0.816
V39	To bring to top management's attention any organisational behaviour that erodes public trust	0.782
V35	To initiate dialogue with pressure groups in society that are limiting the organisation's autonomy (e.g. legislators/environmentalists/consumer advocates)	0.712
V37	To explain views/opinions that exist in society to top management	0.699
V29	To act as an 'early warning system' to top management before issues in society erupt into a crisis for our organisation	0.675
V27	To explain to top management the impact of their behaviour (obtained through research) on key external publics (e.g. media, investors, communities)	0.644
V47	To act as an advocate for key external publics by explaining their views to top management	0.635
V45	To express the company's stance on social responsibility to society in order to gain public trust	0.595
V32	To act as an advocate for key internal publics by explaining their views to top management	0.561

Table 1.8: Factor 1 - Role of the Strategist

The first factor, labelled 'strategist', is summarised by ten variables relating to the activities the PR practitioner is fulfilling in a high profile position and indicating the importance of gathering information on societal perspectives in the practice of PR in order that the organization can adjust its policies and procedures. Table 7.22 summarises all the variables and their factor loadings.

VARIABLES	QUESTIONS	FACTOR LOADINGS
V28	To keep a media clipping service (clip articles that appeared in the media about the organisation)	0.626
V30	To take responsibility for the success or the failure of public relations plans	0.603
V40	To take responsibility for the success or the failure of public relations strategy	0.573
V46	To generate publicity (e.g. write media releases)	0.572
V42	To edit public relations materials (e.g. speeches/ the annual report)	0.550
V38	To write articles for the organisation's publications	0.500
V31	To organise special events (e.g. open houses/ exhibitions/ gala evenings)	0.468
V34	To produce audiovisual materials for presentations	0.314

Table 1.9: Factor 2 - Role of the PR Technician/Manager

Eight variables defined the second factor, labelled 'Technician/Manager role'. All these variables relate to activities that refer to the management and implementation of plans and strategies, therefore explaining why these two variables loaded on this factor.

7. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS RELATING TO THE PR ROLES IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

In the review of the global PR literature, various role perspectives were identified. For the purpose of this study, the three-role typology conceptualised and empirically verified by Steyn (2000) were operationalised and measured. In operationalising the role of the strategist, items representing Holmstrom's reflective role were included. Some of these items were obtained from Green's (incomplete) questionnaire and the researcher developed the other items. These items proved to be reliable with a Cronbach Alpha of 0.91.

In the African context, the research results indicate two PR roles, namely the strategist and the technician/manager. Of the 21-item instrument used in the questionnaire, 18 remained as part of the purified measuring instrument. With regard to the role of the strategist, none of the ten variables had been deleted in the scale purification phase, illustrating that these items defined and explained the role of the strategist very effectively.

PR roles refer to a collection of activities that PR practitioners perform. The findings of this study indicate that the current activities of PR practitioners in the survey show a high concern for societal issues, which motivates continuous dialogue between the organisation and society. This illustrates that the PR practitioners have a responsibility towards the organisation and to society, because the success of an organisation depends on adapting to the norms, values and expectations of society for socially responsible behaviour by the organisation. In this process, society learns to trust the organisation. Since the role of the strategist was the strongest factor in this study, it can be said that a societal perspective characterises the practice of PR in the African context.

According to the respondents, African PR practitioners' current activities focus mainly on the activities of the strategist. These activities are focused on societal issues and act as an 'early warning system' to top management. These individuals are also responsible for continuous dialogue between the organisation and society. The focus of this role is on a strategic level, that of decision making, giving direction, educating top management on the possible outcomes and feeding strategic information into the decision-making circle.

The research findings further illustrated that in the African context, differences are found between the role of the strategist and that of the technician, but no clear difference exists between the roles of the manager and the technician. In fact, it seems as though the role of the manager as conceptualised in theory does not exist in the African context.

8. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Survey research was conducted in an attempt to describe the practice of PR in Africa, as manifested by one of its most enduring concepts, namely PR roles. The research design and the choice of research methods and techniques were guided by the fact that the research was quantitative in nature. This was one of the major limitations of this study, as there was little knowledge and information available on African PR practitioners, especially electronically. Data was collected through the medium of email, which did not prove to be a very effective medium in the African context. The instances of face-to-face data collection in the study proved to be much more effective, illustrating the importance of interpersonal relationships in the African context. This was evident from the impact of, firstly, meeting some African PR practitioners face to face and, secondly, the referrals that followed. The medium of email also illustrated that the technological infrastructure is still not as stable in some of the African countries as was expected.

The questionnaire did not make provision for consultants as respondents to provide their perspective of what PR's current purpose and activities entail, since it was based on an existing questionnaire that focused on PR as part of an organisation's activities. Although the questionnaire was adapted to address this particular study and its objectives, the author included a few more questions in order to obtain a better understanding of the nature of PR in Africa. This, however, made the questionnaire a little long and could have contributed to the low response rate.

The sampling method used in this study, namely snowball sampling, was another limitation because it was firstly very time consuming. Secondly, the researcher did not have much control over the type of respondents who participated. And lastly, it is preferable to use random sampling when conducting advanced statistical procedures, but due to many issues this was not possible. It would also have been more effective if PR practitioners from the various sectors of society could have been included in this study in order to see if there were any differences in the PR roles played in the different sectors.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study focused on the practice of PR as manifested by the PR roles played in certain African countries. It did not address the educational and research component of the African body of knowledge and therefore when making an attempt to investigate a body of knowledge, research on all three of these aspects should be included.

It is essential to determine what the PR curriculum is that is taught at formal and informal institutions in Africa, as this will have an impact on the roles played by PR practitioners. It would therefore be valuable to explore the scientific perspective on which this training is based.

The importance of culture, specifically referring to the African world view, will have an impact on the way in which PR is practised. It is therefore essential to refer to anthropology and sociology literature to understand better the development and context of Africa.

10. CONCLUSION

The empirical phase of this study indicated that two PR roles are evident in the African context. Of these, the role of the strategist is a relatively new role and therefore it is interesting to note that it exists in certain African countries, in the opinions of the respondents. The activities that represent the role of the strategist are performed at the macro or societal level of an organisation. It is therefore enlightening that African PR practitioners are of the opinion that it indeed does take place and is an indication that PR practice in certain African countries might occur at a more strategic level than is generally believed. However, these findings should be interpreted with caution since they are based on only one study. Due to the fact that snowball sampling was employed, it must be regarded as an exploratory study, but nevertheless provides valuable information on the practice of PR in some African countries and the roles played by practitioners. The findings of the study are a starting point for academic researchers to build an African body of knowledge based on an African world view for public relations. It is also a point of departure for joining the global discussions on how PR is practised in various countries and on different continents.

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