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Investigating strategic management roles of the corporate communication function in the Department of Housing

ABSTRACT

The first phase of this qualitative study employed the extended case method. Its aim was to explore the role behaviour of the most senior corporate communication practitioner in the government Department of Housing, South Africa. It was found that the Director: Communication Services played a combination of roles: firstly, Dozier's (1984) *media relations specialist* (seen as part of the historic *technician* role) and secondly, she also performed certain generic managerial activities. The two (new) strategic management roles of the corporate communication function, the *strategist* and the redefined *manager,* were not observed (Steyn, 2000a; 2000b).

The second phase entailed the development of a corporate communication strategy for the Department by the Deputy Director, using action research. The unit of analysis was her communicative output, in the form of the strategy. Empowered by postgraduate studies, she was found to possess the necessary strategic communication management knowledge and skills to perform this important activity of a practitioner in the redefined role of *manager* successfully.

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1.   INTRODUCTION

In South African government departments,job titles such as Director: Communication (even Chief Director) abound. This would reasonably assume managerial (or even top management) roles for the incumbent, taking part in strategic decision making and being concerned with strategic planning. However, in other parts of the world, some researchers have concluded that corporate communication practitioners in managerial positions still focus on daily routines and technical procedures (Brody, 1985; Cottone, 1987; Pracht, 1991; Reagan, 1990; Van Ruler, 1997). This was substantiated in South Africa by Steyn (2000a; 2000b) in a study of 103 chief executives. Although CEOs indicated their expectations of senior practitioners playing strategic and managerial roles, their perceptions were that many of these practitioners engaged mainly in technical activities.

In the 'New South Africa', government departments are facing daunting challenges. It is up to them to manage the expectations created by electoral promises in the 1990s. In this endeavour, they could be greatly aided by practitioners with a knowledge of strategic communication management. The question therefore arises whether senior practitioners heading communication directorates in government departments are indeed playing strategic and/or managerial roles, assisting in the achievement of institutional goals and contributing towards institutional effectiveness.

2.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Practitioner roles are the key to understanding the function of corporate communication (Dozier, *in* Grunig 1992). Katz & Kahn (1978) proposed the 'role' concept as a major link between individual and organisational levels of theory. Their perspective is that an individual's behaviour may best be understood as a function of role. In an organisational setting, the concept of 'role' refers to the standardised patterns of behaviour required of individuals in specific functional relationships (Katz & Kahn, 1978:189).

2.1   The historic roles of *manager* and *technician*

It is generally accepted in corporate communication literature that there are two predominant roles: the *manager* and the *technician*. The role of the manager was originally conceptualised by Broom & Smith (1979) as three different roles: the *expert prescriber*, *communication facilitator* and *problem-solving process facilitator*. However, these roles were found to be highly intercorrelated and performed interchangeably by the same practitioner, therefore regarded as conceptual components of the same empirical role. The manager and technician are the only two roles that emerged time and time again

in numerous empirical studies of the activities performed by corporate communication practitioners since the beginning of the 1980s (Broom, 1982; Dozier, 1984).

Practitioners in the manager role make communication policy decisions and are involved in corporate communication decision making — they frequently use research to plan or evaluate their work and to counsel management. Communication technicians, on the other hand, do not participate in management decision making, but provide the communication and journalistic skills – writing, editing, audiovisual production, graphics and the production of messages – needed to implement communication programmes (Grunig & Hunt, 1984:91). Broom & Smith (1979) saw the technician role as that of technical service providers or *"journalists-in-residence"* – people having previously worked for newspapers and broadcast media, hired because of their communication skills and mass media experience.

In addition to these two major roles, Dozier (1984) found two minor roles: the *media relations specialist* — similar to the technician role, but specialising in external media relations rather than internal communication production activities — and the *communication liaison*, who linked management and publics through communication.

2.2 Different conceptualisations of an emerging third role

American academics Toth, Serini, Wright & Emig (1998) reported trends, from 1990 - 1995, on the roles of members of the national Public Relations Society of America. While the 1990 data indicated a two-role typology similar to Broom & Dozier's (1986) *manager* and *technician* categories, a third role – resembling the expert prescriber — emerged in 1995. This was named the *agency profile,* since the set of activities seemed to be managerial in nature. It covered counselling; research; programming decisions; communicating with clients, peers and subordinates; handling correspondence and phone calls; and making media contacts — no technical activities featured in this role.

Some European academics have recently pointed to the limitations of the widely accepted two-role typology of manager and technician. Van Ruler (1997:250-251) constructed *"three underlying views on the question what public relations – or communication management – is all about"*, based on an exploratory study among corporate communication professionals in the Netherlands. She extended Dozier's theory (1984) on the two historical roles by splitting the manager role into two. In addition to the technician role, she conceptualised the role of the *sales manager* (someone who is strategically concerned with synchronising the behaviour of a public with that of the organisation, in order that the organisation can continue to behave in the way it wants without interference); and the role of the *intermediary* (someone who is strategically

concerned with bringing the organisation and publics in tune with one another, reaching mutual understanding, and building bridges).

The study of Moss, Warnaby & Newmans (2000) examined the roles played by senior practitioners within organisations in the United Kingdom. They suggested a more comprehensive conceptualisation of the manager's role, necessary to delineate the range of activities that senior practitioners are increasingly performing at higher levels in the modern organisation. Role studies have not generally explored how, for example, different conceptualisations of strategy may affect the nature and extent of practitioner involvement in the strategic management of organisations.

Steyn (2000a; 2000b) concurred with these academics on the existence of a third role. By splitting the historic manager role into two, she conceptualised and empirically verified three roles for the corporate communication practitioner, according to the expectations of South African chief executives. These are the role of the *strategist* and the redefined role of the *manager* — both regarded as strategic roles of the corporate communication function (Steyn, 2000c) — as well as the historic role of the *technician*. These roles are differentiated as follows:

i.   The role of the *strategist* is regarded as a role at top management level of an organisation. A corporate communication practitioner in this role gathers strategic information on stakeholders and issues from the external environment by means of environmental scanning, and feeds this strategic intelligence into the organisation's strategy formulation processes. This represents a corporate communication's contribution to strategic decision making.

ii. The redefined role of the *manager* is seen to be a role at the departmental or functional level of an organisation. The main responsibility of a practitioner in this role is to develop a corporate communication strategy. According to the model for developing a corporate communication strategy (Steyn, 2000d:1-33), this entails identifying the organisation's key strategic issues (either from the corporate strategy or from the macro/task/internal environment); considering their implications for strategic stakeholders; determining *what* should be communicated to solve the problem or capitalise on the opportunity presented; and formulating communication goals. Furthermore, to develop a strategic communication plan based on the corporate communication strategy, and to oversee the implementation of communication plans by technicians.

iii. The well-known role of the *technician* also emerged in the CEO study. It is not considered to be a strategic role, since developing/ implementing communication plans or programmes based on the corporate communication strategy is regarded as a role at micro level. This role is implemented through activities such as producing audiovisual materials for presentations, generating publicity e.g. writing media releases, keeping a media clipping service, editing corporate

communication materials such as speeches or the annual report, writing articles for the organisation's publications and organising special events.

3.   RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In this qualitative study, the strategic management roles of the corporate communication function are investigated in a government department in South Africa.

3.1   Phase 1: Research Objective 1

Primary Objective: To explore the *role behaviour* of the most senior corporate communication practitioner in the National Department of Housing, i.e. whether she played:
- the role of the *strategist*, the redefined *manager* or the communication *technician* (Steyn, 2000a; Steyn, 2000b; Steyn & Puth, 2000);
- any of the other newly conceptualised managerial roles identified in the literature study, such as the *sales manager* or the *intermediary* (Van Ruler, 1997); or the *agency profile* (Toth, Serini, Wright & Emig, 1998);
- the historic *manager* or *technician* role (Broom, 1982; Dozier, 1984; Broom & Dozier, 1986).

3.2   Phase 2: Research Objective 2

Primary Objective: To develop a corporate communication strategy for the Department of Housing (as the most important activity of a practitioner in the redefined role of the *manager.)*
Secondary objectives:
- To determine whether the Deputy Director: Communication Services possessed the required strategic communication management knowledge and skills to develop a corporate communication strategy for her institution, i.e. to function in the redefined role of the *manager.*
- To confirm the applicability of the model for developing a corporate communication strategy in a government department setting (the model was developed in the non-profit sector—Steyn, 2000c).

6.   RESEARCH STRATEGY, DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

A graphic presentation as a summary of the research strategy, design and methodology of Phases 1 and 2 will now be presented.

Research strategy, design and methodology of the study

	Phase 1	Phase 2
Research strategy	Ideographic (Windelband, 1980; Babbie, 2001) Contextual (Mouton, 1996) Qualitative (Marshall & Rossman, 1995)	
Research design	Naturalistic (observing/recording ongoing behaviour during the course of "normal life activity"); conducted in the field; participatory, longitudinal, and applied (Smith, 1988).	
	Exploratory (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995: 41)	Confirmatory (Miles & Huberman, 1984)
Population	Corporate communication practitioners	
Element (Smith, 1988)*	Deputy Director's *perception of the role behaviour* of the Director: Communication Services	Deputy Director's *communicative output* (Smith, 1988) in the form of a corporate communication strategy
Selection of cases	Individuals (Babbie, 2001)	

* the "thing" about which information is collected, also called unit of analysis (Babbie, 2001)
** adapted from Smith's (1988) multi-stage sampling procedure

	Phase 1	Phase 2
Four-stage selection procedure[**] • *initial/primary:* • *secondary:* • *tertiary:* • final (always the same as element – Smith, 1988)	• Government departments • Department of Housing • Second in command, i.e. the Deputy Director: Communication Services • Deputy Director's *perception of the role behaviour* of the Director: Communication Services	• Government departments • Department of Housing • Second in command, i.e. the Deputy Director: Communication Services • Deputy Director's *communicative output* (Smith, 1988) in the form of a corporate communication strategy
Observation unit	Deputy Director: Communication Services	
Research methodology	Extended case method (Burawoy *et al*, 1991)	Participatory action research (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995:56; Babbie, 2001).
Data generation	Participant observation (within a pre-existing theoretical framework)	Participant observation, review of documents, in-depth interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 1995:79-83) - within a pre-existing conceptual framework
Data analysis	Pre-existing theoretical framework (Broom, 1982; Dozier, 1984); (Steyn, 2000a; 2000b); (Van Ruler, 1997); (Toth, Serini, Wright & Emig 1998).	Pre-existing conceptual framework (Miles & Huberman, 1984) - in this instance, a model (Steyn, 2000c; Steyn & Puth, 2000).

4.1   Research strategy for both phases

According to Marshall & Rossman (1995:40), the research strategy is a road map, an overall approach for undertaking a systematic exploration of the phenomenon of interest.

4.1.1 Ideographic research strategy

This study could be called ideographic research (Windelband, 1980; Babbie, 2001), since a *contextual* strategy is followed where phenomena are studied because of their intrinsic and immediate contextual significance – i.e. attention is focused on a single event or case (Mouton, 1996:133).

4.1.2 Qualitative strategy

To answer the specific research questions posed in this study, a qualitative rather than a quantitative strategy has been selected. Qualitative research differs markedly from quantitative research in that it is *"analytic and interpretative — it attempts to examine phenomena in a holistic manner"*. Events or extraneous variables are not controlled—the purpose is to capture the normal flow of events (Du Plooy, 1995:33). Qualitative data is more likely to lead to integrating new theory since it helps researchers to go beyond initial preconceptions and frameworks (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

The qualitative approach was also particularly valuable in both phases of this study since it *"delves in depth into complexities and processes; on little-known phenomena; on unstructured processes in organisations..."* (Marshall & Rossman, 1995:43).

4.2   Research design

A research design *"constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement, and analysis of data"*. It is the plan and structure of the empirical investigation to obtain answers to research questions, and provides a framework for specifying the relationships between the study's variables (Cooper & Emory, 1995:114).

4.2.1 Phase 1: Exploratory

In achieving Research Objective 1, the design of the study was exploratory – namely to *"gain insight into a situation, phenomenon, community or person"*, because of a lack of basic information on a new area of interest (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995: 42). This interest was in managerial role playing within the South African government sector.

Firstly, the study explored whether (traces of) the existence of the two newly

conceptualised strategic management roles of the corporate communication function could be found in a government department. These two roles were empirically verified in a study that included the South African private, non-profit and educational sectors, but excluded the government sector (Steyn, 2000a; 2000b). Secondly, the study explored the existence of any of the other new managerial roles (as conceptualised by European and American academics) in the government sector. To the researchers' knowledge, the latter has not been investigated in South Africa.

4.2.2 Phase 2: Confirmatory

In achieving Research Objective 2, a confirmatory design was employed where researchers go into the field with an almost complete theory or a set of hypotheses (in this instance, the model for developing corporate communication strategy—Steyn, 2000d). According to Miles & Huberman (1984), qualitative research can be outright confirmatory when preliminary work has provided insight into a phenomenon and the researcher wants to enquire as to how this would work in natural settings. In this instance, the preliminary work was a longitudinal study, hypothesising and empirically verifying a model for developing a corporate communication strategy in the non-profit sector (Steyn, 2000c; 2000d). The research interest in this phase of the study was therefore to confirm the validity and applicability of the model in a different setting, namely the government sector – and more specifically, in the National Department of Housing.

4.3   Research methodology

Marshall & Rossman (1995:40) consider the methodology to be the specific tools for conducting the research.

4.3.1 Phase 1: extended case method

Case studies are a type of qualitative research in which the researcher explores *"a single entity or phenomenon ('the case') bounded by time and activity, and collects detailed information by using a variety of data collection procedures during a sustained period of time"* (Creswell, *in* Leedy 1997:157). Phase 1 of this study is classified firstly, as a *single* case (sample of one) and secondly, as an *appraisal* case (in contrast to an issue or analytical case), on the grounds of the following criteria (SACRA, 1996):

● It is concerned with future outcomes and long-term planning.
● It is strategy oriented and deals with uncertainties.
● It uses raw data and evaluates critical analysis.
● It processes and conceptualises information

In this case, attention is focused on one instance of a social phenomenon – the *role*

behaviour of the Director: Communication Services in the setting of the Government Department of Housing. The Deputy Director observed her direct supervisor's role behaviour over a period of 19 months. A very specific type of case method was employed: the *extended* case (Burawoy *et al*, 1991). This methodology requires researchers to have a thorough knowledge of existing theories, and sets out to uncover contradictions or identify the gaps in them. Its purpose is therefore to discover flaws in, and then modify, existing theories (in this case, roles theory). This differs, for instance, from the grounded theory method where researchers seek to enter the field with no preconceptions about what they will find.

4.3.2 Phase 2: Action research

Action research is a particular form of participatory research, the latter being the encouragement of the active participation of people whom the research is intended to assist. Participatory research is not necessarily action research, but action research is always participatory. Action research demands that the researcher(s) and the participant community to be equal partners in the planning and implementation of a project, and each brings valuable resources to it. Furthermore, that the initiative for the project should come from members of the community who find themselves in some sort of difficulty, looking for solutions (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995:56). There is no general formula for action research—*action* and *research* take place alternatively in an ongoing learning process for everyone involved. It is research WITH, rather than research ON (McNiff, 1988:3-4).

In order to achieve Research Objective 2, the action research phase of the study used a model (Steyn, 2000c; Steyn, 2000d; Steyn & Puth, 2000) as a pre-existing conceptual framework to develop a corporate communication strategy for the Department of Housing. The strategy was formulated by the Deputy Director: Communication Services (Green, 2000), playing the redefined role of the *manager* (Steyn, 2000a; 2000b).

Action research as a methodology for developing the strategy was most suitable. The project was suggested by the Deputy Director, as no corporate communication strategy existed in the Department of Housing. Having studied the model for developing a corporate communication strategy (Steyn, 2000d), she participated in the research endeavour as a full partner: firstly, by applying her newly acquired knowledge on corporate communication strategy, and secondly, by offering her practical experience and knowledge of communication procedures and processes in the Department. During the data generation and analysis stages, she constantly consulted with her co-researcher, the academic who developed the model. This situation provided an ideal and therefore a more valid outcome for the study.

The fact that the Deputy Director (the principal participant) was knowledgeable about strategic communication management and research methodology, she was also deemed to increase the validity of the study. The participant community in action research projects usually contributes its expertise and knowledge of the setting under investigation, but rarely possesses research knowledge and skills, nor theoretical knowledge of the subject, as in this instance.

The participants in the action research process were the following:

- Researcher 1: the lecturer of the honours course in Strategic Communication Management (SKO 780) at the University of Pretoria.
- Researcher 2: an honours student in the subject of Strategic Communication Management (SKO 780).
- Participant community: the principal participant was the Deputy Director: Communication Services in the Department of Housing. (She was also the honours student, referred to above as Researcher 2.)
- Other staff of the Department of Housing (who were interviewed by Researcher 2) also formed part of the participant community.

5. AN ANALYSIS OF PHASE 1

5.1 Background

The National Department of Housing is headed by a political appointee in the person of the Minister. The Director-General, who is the equivalent of the Chief Executive, is the administrative head and accounting officer of the Department, assisted by one deputy director-general. Further down the departmental hierarchy are chief directors, directors, as well as deputy and assistant directors.

In many government departments, the top management structure constitutes officials from director level upwards, as is the case in the Department of Housing. This means that the Director: Communication Services is included in top management business meetings and strategic top management meetings, enjoying easy access to senior managers. Due to its relatively small size (a 158-strong staff establishment), deputy directors are also included in strategic meetings, but not in business meetings. Such a situation would be the envy of many a senior practitioner in the private sector, since access to top management is generally accepted (in theory and practice) to be a prerequisite for communication excellence (Grunig, *in* Grunig 1992).

5.2 Discussion of findings: Phase 1

The Director: Communication Services also acts as the Minister's Public Relations Officer, in addition to heading the Directorate. Her role in both positions could be described

as that of a *media relations specialist*. This role is characterised by considering an organisation's external environment of prime importance, especially the media – consequently, communication with internal stakeholders remains largely unattended to (Dozier, 1984). The most senior practitioner in the Department of Housing is mainly occupied with providing communication and journalistic skills, such as writing speeches (for the Minister) and press releases, obtaining free publicity for the institution. This is also called the role of *publicist* or *'journalist-in*-residence' (Broom & Smith, 1979), often played in organisations that practise the press agentry/publicity model of corporate communication. Other practitioners in the Directorate also behave and are managed as 'journalists-in-residence' — it could in fact be said that the Directorate functions as a 'mini press agency'. In addition to these activities, the Director also spends some time on events management and on the process of producing publications such as the annual report.

In classifying the role of the Director: Communication Services, it could be said that she mainly occupies herself with corporate communication activities, that are generally executed by a practitioner in the role of a *technician* (Broom, 1982; Dozier, 1984). However, she does fulfil certain generic managerial duties such as managing the staff complement and drawing up the budget.

Some aspects of the new role of *agency profile* (Toth, Serini, Wright & Emig, 1998) also apply to the Director. These are mainly the generic managerial activities, such as handling correspondence and phone calls; communicating with clients, peers and subordinates; and making media contacts. She also counsels top management, mainly on publicity-related aspects. Since the characteristics of this role are described as being mainly managerial (including research activities and programming decisions) and containing no technical activities, the authors do not consider it to be a good application in this case.

Van Ruler's two managerial roles (1997) do not apply either. The Director: Communication Services does not appear to be strategically concerned with synchronising the behaviour of a public with that of the organisation (the *sales manager*), nor concerned with bringing the organisation and a public in tune with one another, reaching mutual understanding (the *intermediary*).

Steyn's role of the *strategist* (2000a; 2000b) is also not considered applicable in this case either. A practitioner in this role identifies stakeholders and publics through environmental scanning in the external and internal environments. In the Department of Housing, there seems to be no (communication-defined) systematic mechanism of obtaining and channelling information from management to strategic stakeholders, except via the media (through press statements or when the media covers Ministerial

events), or through management's direct discussions with the relevant stakeholders in their regularly scheduled business meetings – or from stakeholders to management.

Strategic intelligence is not gathered systematically, and when obtained ad hoc, it is not adequately disseminated among top management. An example to justify this statement is the following: In July 1999, a help desk was placed under the jurisdiction of the Directorate: Communication Services as a response by the Minister to queries addressed to her personally whenever she appeared on radio talk shows. This decision was lauded, since the allocated radio time was never adequate to address all the issues, and some of them were too complex to address on air. More and more people are making use of this feedback channel, and the official in charge of the help desk interfaces on a daily basis mainly with people who have grievances about the national housing programme.

The majority of people who visit the help desk at the department live in the vicinity of the Greater Pretoria Metropolitan Council area, whereas those from other provinces phone in or write letters. These people constitute the Department's most strategic stakeholder group — the poor at whom the national housing programme is being targeted. The Communication Officer who mans the help desk immediately responds to the queries within her power and capability, by phoning relevant municipal counterparts to try and solve the problems aired. Complaints include reports on raw deals people are getting from municipal offices with regard to their applications for homes, or on completed homes which are not delivered in a satisfactory condition. The more complex problems are reported to the Communication Director, sometimes with recommendations. The frequency of the help desk's written reports is generally once a month, but if more burning issues emerge, they are reported as they surface.

The normative theory on the strategic management roles of the corporate communication function (Steyn, 2000a; 2000b; 2000c) suggests this as an ideal opportunity for a practitioner in the role of the *strategist* (or *manager*) to practise two-way symmetrical communication. In this instance, it would entail bringing the concerns of strategic stakeholders (and their implications for the organisation's policies and strategies) to the attention of top management, explaining how the stakeholders think, feel and might behave. Suggestions on how communication could provide solutions to organisational problems should be presented and advocated, thereby increasing the power of the communication division with top management. The status quo is that the Director: Communication Services (also being the Minister's Public Relations Officer) channels this information directly to the Minister, who in turn addresses some of the issues in her public speeches, mostly during interviews with the media or at housing project launches. However, such speeches can naturally cover only a fraction of what gets collected at the help desk, and can hardly deal in specific terms with issues

emerging per case and per township.

What is really necessary is for top management to become privy to this information so that they can directly address the stakeholders' concerns, as far as possible. Intervening with top management on behalf of strategic stakeholders is a major activity of a communication practitioner in the role of *strategist*. However, this necessitates the incumbent to possess strategic communication management knowledge and skills – a situation which, according to the perceptions of chief executives, is the exception rather than the rule in South African organisations (Steyn, 2000a; 2000b).

The role of the researcher is another activity (characteristic of both *strategist* and *manager* roles) that is neglected in the Communication Directorate, as is the case in many other communication divisions countrywide. This is especially important in order to be able to identify stakeholders, issues and the publics that arise around issues (Grunig & Repper, *in* Grunig 1992), as well as to plan and evaluate communication programmes for their effectiveness. In the circumstances, it is therefore not surprising that passive stakeholders of the Department are starting to form into publics because no action or communication is forthcoming about their joint and individual grievances. Developing a corporate communication strategy to inform these stakeholders/publics about the problems experienced by management in attending to their grievances (among others) is a major activity of a practitioner in the redefined role of the *manager* (Steyn, 2000a; 2000b) – an activity that also has not taken place at the Department of Housing in the past.

5.3   Conclusions and recommendations: Phase 1

Phase 1 of this study explored the role played by that most senior corporate communication practitioner in the National Department of Housing. It was found to be a combination of corporate communication activities representing the historical *technician* role (more specifically the role of the *media relations specialist*) and generic managerial activities such as managing staff, doing the correspondence and budget and representing the directorate at management meetings). However, activities not performed were specifically those corporate communication activities representing the role of the *strategist* (identifying stakeholders and their concerns, identifying issues and their implications for organisational strategies and policies, and feeding this strategic intelligence into the Department's strategic decision-making processes). Not performed either were activities such as developing a corporate communication strategy for the Directorate, which is regarded as the most important activity of the redefined role of the *manager*.

The background provided on some of the Department's problems indicates that playing

the roles of the *strategist* and *manager* could possibly have contributed towards achieving institutional goals, therefore remaining as a positive theory. No new activities came to light in analysing the Director's role behaviour to indicate the necessity of adjusting the existing role theory or developing a new theory on role behaviour.

Although this study reports on one case only, namely the perceptions of the Deputy Director: Communication Services in the Department of Housing on the role behaviour of the Director, her perceptions are not dissimilar to the perceptions of chief executives in the private, non-profit and educational sectors on the role behaviour of the most senior corporate communication practitioners heading their communication divisions (Steyn, 2000a; 2000b). South African CEOs who participated in the latter study did not perceive their senior practitioners to be performing well in the role of the strategist although their expectations for this role were high. Furthermore, CEO expectations for the role of the *technician* were low, but their perceptions of the performance in this role were high. (The most important reason for CEO dissatisfaction with their communication managers was the fact that they did not play a strategic role in the organisation). The fact that there seems to be no apparent difference between the role behaviour of the senior practitioner in the Department of Housing versus other sectors merits a recommendation by the authors that further qualitative and quantitative research be conducted to investigate corporate communication role playing in the other government departments.

The findings of this exploratory study also seem to concur with the literature on corporate communication (which often describes conditions in the private sector). This case seems to be another instance of Budd's (1991) perception that senior practitioners fail to assume broad decision -making roles within their organisations, and that their thinking is tactical, rather than strategic. Furthermore, intelligence obtained is not integrated into the strategies of the larger organisation (Fleisher & Mahaffy, 1997). Corporate communication is seen to be peripheral to policy formulation, not a legitimate part of the process—"*a major industry, with corporate titles abounding, but no closer to decision making than it was in the 1970s*" (Budd 1991:9).

A possible reason for the fact that senior practitioners do not make a strategic contribution in their organisations might be that they do not have the required skills to do so (Moore, 1996; Neubauer, 1997). These views are supported by Groenewald's (1998) study in the South African environment, which found that corporate communication *managers* perceive strategic communication skills, management skills and management communication skills as very important — however, they did not consider themselves sufficiently equipped for their present positions by the training they had received in these skills. Such a situation could reflect negatively on the position of senior practitioners, indeed on the entire communication profession.

However, most corporate communication managers are communication technicians through training (Burger, 1993), not having the knowledge and skills to play a (strategic) management role. They often fill a management position by virtue of the fact that they are the most senior practitioner or because they perform well in their technician roles. Such communication managers might be efficient at what they are doing, but cannot necessarily be considered effective – therefore, they are not making a contribution towards communication 'excellence'. They are functioning at the micro level of the organisation (the level of implementation) and not at the macro level (Neubauer, 1997), where input to the strategy formulation process is made. The career failure of senior practitioners to assume the communication management role within organisations (Dozier, *in* Grunig 1992:352) or the strategic role (Steyn 2000a; 2000b) is a failure to emerge truly as a profession from the communication skills practised by most.

The problem outlined above (both in the case study and in literature) is a practical problem. However, according to the researchers, this problem might be caused by the *training* that corporate communication practitioners receive. If senior practitioners are to participate in strategy formulation and strategic planning in order to make organisations more effective (Grunig & Repper, *in* Grunig 1992:117), they should receive training in strategic management, strategic communication and management communication to empower them to be able to make a real contribution.

6.   AN ANALYSIS OF PHASE 2

6.1   Background

The findings of Phase 1 influenced the setting of Research Objective 2. Firstly, the fact that the role of the corporate communication *strategist* was not being played in the Directorate: Communication Services should be considered against the findings of the Excellence Study (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig, 1995). This was namely that knowledge of strategic management/communication is required in the corporate communication division in order to have excellent communication in an organisation. However, it is not necessary that most senior communication practitioner should possess such knowledge —only that someone in the communication division does.

Secondly, a corporate communication strategy as suggested by Steyn (2000c); Steyn & Puth (2000) was not being developed for the Department. Normatively, this is a major activity of a practitioner in the redefined role of the *manager* – a role that should ideally be played by the Deputy Director as she was second in command of the Directorate: Communication Services. Since she was in the process of completing postgraduate studies in strategic communication management, it was deemed important

to determine whether she could indeed function in this role — i.e. whether she possessed adequate strategic communication knowledge and skills as well as the required knowledge of the Department to develop a corporate communication strategy for the institution. Whether the model to be followed in the process was indeed applicable to a government department setting, also need to be determined, since it was developed in the non-profit sector.

6.2   Findings: phase 2

To achieve Research Objective 2, the methodology of action research was employed. Based on a model (Steyn, 2000c; Steyn & Puth, 2000), a corporate communication strategy for the Department of Housing was developed by the Deputy Director: Communication Services (Green, 2000), in consultation with the academic who developed the model. The point of departure for the corporate communication strategy was to study the vision, mission, corporate philosophy, values and policies of the Department of Housing.

6.2.1 Vision, mission, corporate philosophy and values
The current vision of the Department of Housing is *"a nation housed in sustainable human settlements"*. The mission is *"to establish and facilitate a sustainable process that provides equitable access to adequate housing (fully serviced with running water, ablution facility and electricity) for everyone"* (South Africa, 1999: 1).

The corporate values, philosophy and service principles of the Department are mainly encompassed in the *Batho Pele - "People First" White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery* (South Africa, 1997:1-25). This protocol requires that national and provincial departments make service delivery a national priority – all public servants are to treat every member of the public like a king. This is the principle that the *"customer is always right"* — that citizens be served courteously, with respect and dignity, equitably and without discrimination; be consulted about the level and quality of the public services they receive; and be given full, accurate information about the public services they are entitled to receive. The *Batho Pele* principles champion the efficient delivery of services and rapid response to letters and telephonic enquiries, and a reduction in wastage. Where bottlenecks do occur in service delivery, citizens are to be given reasons and a full explanation of the state of affairs, as well as information on what to expect further.

Other aspects are captured in the Department's operating and draft policies on Affirmative Action, transformation, a Code of Conduct, HIV/AIDS, language, disciplinary and dress codes, overtime, personnel evaluation, smoking, bursaries, etc. However, many of these

policies are in draft form and cannot be communicated actively before they are officially declared a policy. Up to now, the *Batho Pele* protocol has existed mainly on paper. It has yet to be championed actively and lived by each of the Department's staff members, if it is to be translated successfully into a service culture. These gaps constitute internal communication opportunities about which the communication directorate needs to advise top management.

6.2.2 Identification of strategic stakeholders and publics

The strategic stakeholders of the Department of Housing have been identified by using Esman's typology (*in* Grunig & Hunt, 1984:140-142).

Enabling linkages
These linkages are with groups that provide authority and provide/control resources:
- *Department of Finance (National Treasury)*, which allocates a percentage of the national budget to Housing.
- *Department of State Expenditure*, which regulates state expenditure, and to which the Department of Housing accounts for financial resources allocated to it.
- *The Cabinet* (Ministers' body), which approves policy recommendations before they are tabled in Parliament.
- *Parliamentary Committee on Housing*, which lobbies support for Housing policy and legislation in Parliament.
- *The National Assembly*, the legislative body that passes legal propositions originating in the Department of Housing into law.
- *The National Council of Provinces (NCOP),* a second legislative body comprising of representatives of the provinces (including traditional leaders), through which proposed legislation passes after going through Parliament and before it can proceed to Cabinet.
- *The Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA),* which formulates public service policy and regulations to which the Department of Housing must adhere.
- *Donor bodies*, such as Danish Cooperation for Environment and Development (DANCED), the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS), and the German and USA governments.

Functional linkages
These linkages are with groups that provide input to the Department and use its outputs:
- *Departmental employees* and their *trade unions*.

- *Provincial and local government structures*, who cooperate with the Department.
- *Housing institutions or statutory bodies* established to augment the national housing delivery programme such as SERVCON; Thubelisha Homes; the National Home Builders Registration Council; the National Housing Finance Corporation; Gateway Home Loans; and the Social Housing Foundation.
- *The entire low income population of South Africa* – earning 0 to R3 500 per month — which constitutes the main target of the Department's housing development programme.

Normative linkages

These linkages are with professional/industrial associations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), providing solutions to shared problems:

- *Federation of Homeless People of South Africa*, an NGO that mobilises people into saving and using their own savings to meet their housing needs.
- *Institute for Housing in South Africa*, an independent body of professionals in housing, i.e. architects, town planners, surveyors, housing contractors and financiers organised to discuss national housing needs.
- *Sustainable Homes Initiative*, a coalition of NGOs promoting environmentally sound housing initiatives.
- *Urban Sector Network*, another coalition of NGOs offering alternative housing solutions in urban South Africa.
- *Rural Housing Finance*, another independent initiative serving rural South Africa's housing needs.
- *Other provincially-based housing organisations* which, over and above these initiatives, are doing their fair share to house the nation.

Diffused linkages

These linkages are with groups in society who cannot clearly be identified by membership in formal organisations:

- *The media*, who inform diffused groups.
- Publics who arise when they experience problems with the consequences of the Department's decisions, e.g. *the community*.
- *Housing consumer groups* (in both the low income and other categories) who can be considered activists — people organised or otherwise, who are seeking legal and other recourse against any questionable housing practice.

6.2.3 Strategic issues within the macro, task and internal environments

Strategic issues are "*developments, events and trends that are considered consequential by an organisation's management because of the potential to impact the organisation's strategy*" (Ansoff, 1980; King, 1982; Dutton & Ottensmeyer, 1987). Not all issues are

therefore strategic, and management must decide which of the issues (of which they become aware) merit their attention.

The four most strategic issues facing the Department of Housing, identified by Green (2000), are the following:
- Inadequate funding to provide housing to South Africa's homeless.
- Rural under-development contributes to rural-to-urban migration in search of economic opportunities, resulting in ever-increasing urban housing needs.
- Employee attitude and behaviour illustrates the lack of a service culture.
- Some RDP houses built to date are substandard — unscrupulous developers are pocketing huge profits.

In this article, only one of the four strategic issues identified will be discussed in detail to illustrate the process of developing a corporate communication strategy (Steyn, 2000c; Steyn & Puth, 2000). The other three will be presented in table format in less detail.

Each strategic issue will be described and classified according to a typology developed by Steyn (2000c). Furthermore, its implications for the Department's stakeholders will be considered, and decisions taken on *what* should be communicated to the strategic stakeholders to assist in solving the problems experienced or to capitalise on opportunities presented. This is the essence of a corporate communication strategy: forming the basis for the formulation of communication goals. In following this process, a corporate communication strategy forms the link between communication plans and the corporate mission, and communication goals are aligned to the corporate strategy.

6.2.3.1   Strategic issue 1: Inadequate funding to provide housing to South Africa's homeless

- Classification of the strategic issue

This issue is classified as an Organisational Issue Type 2, where communication is not the cause of the problem and cannot provide a solution, but can provide an explanation by informing stakeholders of alternative housing solutions available.

- Description of the strategic issue

Although South Africa's current political dispensation recognises housing as a basic human right, and makes provision for housing in Section 26 of the Constitution (South Africa, 1996:12), in the White Paper on Housing (South Africa, 1994:22), and in Section 2 (1)(a) of the Housing Act, No. 107 of 1997 (South Africa, 1997), the available Housing budget cannot hope to match the national demand. According to the 1994 White Paper (South Africa, 1994) it was one of government's goals that year

to increase Housing's share of the state budget to five per cent, thereby increase housing delivery to a peak level of 350 000 units per annum, over a period of five years. In the 1997/98 financial year, housing delivery notched 322 638. However, due to a decrease in the budget, this momentum could not be sustained. During the period up to 2000, housing delivery averaged 235 000 per annum (South Africa, 1999:18).

Furthermore, it should be taken into account that South Africa's population keeps growing, making it even more difficult to address the housing backlog. Other threats to the state housing programme are high unemployment, the lack of social stability, a highly destabilised housing environment, lack of access to basic municipal services in many instances, limited or no access for the poor to housing land, a culture of "dis-saving", and declining investment in housing.

According to an economist in the Department of Housing, annual budget allocations to the South African Housing Fund are decided not only on the basis of national housing needs, but are influenced by other factors such as South Africa's macro-economic and fiscal policy, and the government's national development priorities. This view was also expressed by President Thabo Mbeki in his Year 2000 State-of-the-Nation address on February 4 (South Africa, 2000b): *"While cognisant of a confirmed need to address pensions, social welfare, housing, education and medical care, government needs to strike a proper balance between such expenditure and more directly economic expenditure by the public sector to ensure that we address the challenge for growth and redistribution together"*.

It is clear from the economic and social realities spelt out above that it is unrealistic to expect the government to provide housing for all. However, previously disenfranchised by apartheid and still ravaged by unemployment and the lack of access to housing credit, the country's poor continue to look up to the government to provide them with housing. It is here that a strategic opportunity is presented to the Department of Housing, namely to research and document all alternative housing solutions in existence and to inform the poor, as their strategic stakeholders, about them – if, and when, the Department decides to follow that route. Some possibilities in this regard will now be suggested.

The Federation of Homeless People has housed up to 8 000 households nation-wide in houses ranging in size from 40 to 72 square metres, at a cost of between R7000 and R12000. The poor are encouraged to augment their home savings by recycling building material and contributing sweat equity in the construction of their own homes. This approach has occasionally been applauded by the Minister of Housing as a resounding success, and the Department has publicly acknowledged the Federation's contribution.

However, more could be done in this regard. For instance, the government could publicly acknowledge all alternative solutions equitably, so that the poor, no matter where therefore located, could be informed about all NGO initiatives operating in their areas.

Another corporate strategy that could be followed is to explore the housing methods of thermally-efficient and sustainable houses, employed by organisations such as the SEED Programme, the Sustainable Homes Initiative and the Urban Sector Network. In the quest for energy-efficient homes, these initiatives use natural, far cheaper and widely available building materials. If endorsed the national policy level and replicated more widely, these building methods could see the State's limited funds stretching to millions more houses, offering a lot more than just shelter. Structures requiring little or no artificial heating in winter and cooling naturally in summer would see poor people realising huge savings in fuel costs, not to mention redemption from using cheap energy sources such as paraffin and coal. The Department of Housing could study the research findings on ecologically sustainable houses, conducted in recent years by the SEED Programme, and conduct supplementary studies to establish the sustainability of these alternative housing approaches.

A third corporate strategy that could be followed to offset the government's financial limitations is to establish a link between homelessness and poverty — to identify the causes of unemployment through research and to explore possible interventions in mitigation of the situation. One possible focus area could be to establish to what extent poverty is inter-linked with people relying too much on the formal sector to provide jobs, as opposed to devising their own livelihood. Partnering with relevant government and other organisations in a national communication drive would be the suggested route to follow.

Another aspect of this strategy could be to capitalise on an opportunity created by the Jobs Summit Initiative, through which government, labour and business constituencies have established a fund to stimulate the creation of jobs throughout South Africa in the next three years. The challenge – after people acquire skills from these jobs — is to communicate the importance of self-reliance programmes, of *stokvels* and other alternative savings schemes with a view to continue generating income on their own well beyond the Jobs Summit, and provide for their own needs, including housing.

Government policy does indicates an openness towards alternative housing methods by stating, in the Draft Housing Strategy for the New Millennium that *"where applicable, sustainable cost-effective architecture and home building techniques must be promoted, through the use of durable products and proven local building methods.....agrement (sic)*

certification of indigenous building technologies (such as rammed earth technology) must continue, as these methods can make a considerable contribution" (South Africa, 2000a:37).

Once the Department has approved these alternative approaches to the provision of housing, it should actively promote them in partnership with the relevant NGOs. The state housing subsidy should be extended to this approach, so that the poor can make informed choices about the houses in which they want to be sheltered. The White Paper on Housing (South Africa, 1994:23) recognises an individual's right to *"freedom of choice in the process of satisfying his or her own housing needs. The State should promote both the right of the individual to choose and encourage collective efforts (where appropriate) by people to iprove their housing circumstances"*.

■ Implications of the strategic issue for the stakeholders
The Government: Failure to receive housing could cause those who have not yet benefited from completed and on-going housing programmes to lose faith in the Department of Housing, and by implication, in the government.
The homeless might become despondent or frustrated, feeling neglected, dejected and deceived by what they view as unfulfilled electoral promises. They might turn from being passive stakeholders into publics, or even activists, who actively communicate about their problems. Even worse, it could lead to increased crime and violence should they lose all hope to obtain housing.
Housing consumer groups might use the power of the media to state their case. Such a situation would tarnish the reputation of the Department.
The media, often looking for sensation, could have a field day in putting down government initiatives.
Departmental employees could easily be disheartened in such situations, leading to a decrease in productivity.
Housing institutions or statutory bodies established to augment the national housing delivery programme could also suffer these negative consequences.

■ Corporate communication strategy
Following the President's lead in his Year 2000 State-of-the-Nation Address (South Africa, 2000b), government departments should become realistic about what they can and cannot achieve, and openly communicate about it. Once the Department of Housing adopts a clear policy in this regard, the corporate communication directorate should support it with a focused communication strategy.

In the true tradition of openness and transparency, it is suggested that the Department follow a strategy of providing explanations to strategic stakeholders of the financial limitations of the Housing Programme. Public awareness of the government's limitations must be created, and the Department must set out to create hope among the poor by

communicating the alternative housing solutions spelled out above. The role played by like-minded organisations should be publicly acknowledged. People should be encouraged to use them as credible avenues outside the government. Such a communication strategy will go a long way in allaying the fears of the homeless, who have no economic means to obtain their own houses. This must be combined with instilling and cultivating entrepreneurship and self-reliance in and among the poor.

- Communication goals
- To inform all stakeholders of the financial constraints faced by the Department of Housing, in view of other national priorities.
- To create awareness of alternative housing approaches outside the state-driven programme.
- To inform stakeholders of partnerships with NGOs in their regions.
- To inform stakeholders of the opportunity created by the Jobs Summit Initiative, through which the government, labour and business constituencies have established a fund to stimulate the creation of jobs throughout South Africa.
- To communicate the importance of taking responsibility for own housing needs and ways in which to do so.
- To promote applicable, sustainable, cost-effective architecture and home-building techniques.
- To communicate the importance of self-reliance programmes, *stokvels* and other alternative savings schemes to provide for own housing needs.
- To allay the fears of, and create hope for, the poorest of the poor, who have no other means of obtaining housing.
- To create more two-way communication channels to obtain feedback on problems experienced by strategic stakeholders.
- To communicate the successes/targets achieved.

6.2.3.2 <u>Strategic Issue 2: Rural under-development contributes to rural-to-urban migration in search of economic opportunities, resulting in ever-increasing urban housing needs.</u>

Table 2: Strategic issue 2

Description of Issue 2	Rural people without a meaningful livelihood migrate to cities in search of jobs. As new arrivals raise the urban housing backlog, the Department of Housing has to bear, in part, the consequences of this migration. They are therefore involved in government initiatives such as the Integrated and Sustainable Rural Development Programme, as well as a cross-sectoral programme intervention to make optimal use of creativity, resource-pooling and the avoidance of duplication of efforts. They also follow a holistic development strategy, where housing development planning, for instance, takes into consideration health, transport, schools and social infrastructure. A partnership with other departments, the private sector, donors and NGOs with an interest in development could further explore attractive alternatives in the form of sustainable rural development programmes, in consultation with affected rural communities.
Type of issue	Organisational Issue Type 2: Communication is not the cause of the problem, nor can it provide a solution. However, the consequences of the issue could be explained to strategic stakeholders.
Most strategic stakeholders for this issue	• Rural poor, rural jobless. • Relevant government departments. • Donors, NGOs, the private sector. • Employees and labour unions. • The media.
Implications of the issue for the stakeholders	The rural poor migrate in expectation of a better life. However, what they find is often worse than what they have left behind. Resources of all relevant departments and other organisations involved in social and economic upliftment are severely strained.

Corporate communication strategy	To create a national awareness that rural-to-urban migration is not always a solution to poverty, and that rural dwelling in many cases provides more quality living conditions than urban living.
Communication goals	• To make the rural poor aware of the fact that unemployment is higher in the urban areas, and that they might face even greater hardships in the cities. • To inform them that the quality of life in rural areas is often higher, with clean air, vast open spaces and free-flowing streams. • To provide statistics on higher crime in the cities. • To provide information on how rural living could be enriched. • To create awareness of development initiatives in the region. • To change attitudes/behaviour towards urban migration as a solution to problems.

6.2.3.3   Strategic Issue 3: Employee attitude and behaviour illustrates the lack of a
          service culture.

Table 3: Strategic issue 3

Description of Issue 3	There seems to be little observation of the *Batho Pele* protocol and the Department's Code of Conduct. Employees are not a closely knitted group, working together to achieve institutional goals. All seem to be doing their own thing.
Type of issue	If this is a widespread issue, it could be classified as an organisational issue, Type 1, where communication is not the cause of the problem, but could assist in providing a solution. It might also in part be a management communication issue, where too little or no communication between managers and employees is the problem, not telling employees what they should hear – in this case, the importance of a service culture, and what the role of each employee is.
Most strategic stakeholders for this issue	All employees at national, provincial and local levels, but specifically: • officials serving in the municipalities under which housing projects are in the pipeline or are already being implemented; • officials at Head Office in Pretoria, specifically front-line employees, personnel directorate, corporate services, secretaries (as gatekeepers) and corporate communication directorate. • the homeless who are the potential/actual beneficiaries of housing projects and who suffer the consequences of poor service; • internal departmental media.

Implications of the issue for the stakeholders	The biggest implications are for potential beneficiaries themselves, who are suffering poor service, maybe even corruption. Lack of a service culture may impact negatively on the Department's reputation among all the strategic stakeholders, and by implication on the Government. The employees themselves might suffer the consequences by constantly experiencing negativity from the potential beneficiaries or alliance partners. This might lead to a decrease in productivity and job satisfaction. Lack of inculcation of corporate values in employees may result in disharmony. It may lead to the formation of fragmented sub-cultures with each doing his/her own thing, a staff complement feeling unappreciated, and therefore dissatisfied, leading to high employee turnover.
Corporate communication strategy	To communicate to employees why a service culture is important and the consequences of a lack of service ethos.
Communication goals	• To inform employees on the *Batho Pele "People First"* White Paper. • To explain the importance of the principles within the larger context of the Department's vision and mission. • To educate employees on the *Batho Pele* principles, and its implementation in their specific job context. • To explain to employees that compliance with the *Batho Pele* principles will earn them rewards. • To inspire employees to serve the public and the department with pride. • To cultivate in employees a commitment to eradicate corruption and unscrupulous practices. • To restore public confidence in the Department of Housing, by showing commitment to excellent public service. • To communicate the Department's Government's commitment to consul-tation with stakeholders. • To set in place feedback mechanisms on service standards.

6.2.3.4   Strategic Issue 4: Some RDP houses built to date are substandard — unscrupulous developers are pocketing huge profits.

Table 4: Strategic issue 4

Description of Issue 4	The Department of Housing has to date delivered over 1 million houses, providing shelter to over 4 million people. Intelligence gathered from both media reports and public complaints has revealed that a significant number of homes delivered are substandard. These houses were built by unscrupulous developers who pocketed the profits, but did not deliver the goods in a satisfactory condition. Although the Housing Consumers Protection Measures Act No 95 of 1998 provides for government to bring the shoddy construction culprits to task, this provision might not apply to work done before the law came into being on December 1, 1999.
Type of issue	Organisational Issue Type 2, where communication is not the cause of the problem, cannot provide a solution, but can explain the situation. In this case, where some of the complaints are received at the Help Desk (part of the Communication Directorate), it is the responsibility of Communication to bring this issue and its implications to the attention of top management.
Most strategic stakeholders for this issue	• Recipients of substandard houses. • Future recipients of houses. • Alliance partners. • Developers. • The media (including internal departmental media).

Implications of the issue for the strategic stakeholders	Government appears to be protecting its political image at the expense of the people it is claiming to serve. This damages the credibility and image of Government, and by implication, the Department of Housing. Not only are occupants of substandard houses in physical danger, but they receive little shelter from the elements. Government might have to shoulder the financial responsibility to repair the substandard houses built prior to December 1999.
Corporate communication strategy	To inform the nation of the problem, assure everyone that the matter is being attended to, and provide information on the measures being taken. Provide information on the Housing Consumers Protection Measures Act.
Communication goals	• To inform housing recipients of how the Government acted on their behalf once the problem came to their attention. • To acknowledge past mistakes with the intent to demonstrate transparency and therefore credibility/ integrity. • To inform all stakeholders of the systems that have been put in place to prevent the past mistakes from recurring, e.g. the capacity-building process for local and provincial officials in partnership with WITS and other universities. • To ask recipients of substandard homes to cooperate in bringing the culprits to task. • To inform recipients of substandard houses of the options available to them, and the avenues they should follow to set the process in motion.

6.3   Discussion of findings and recommendations: Phase 2

As the principal participant in the action research process (also playing the role of Researcher 2), the Deputy Director: Communication Services developed a corporate communication strategy for the Department of Housing. This strategy, as her communicative output, was the unit of analysis in Phase 2 of this study. The document was assessed and evaluated by Researcher 1 – being the Deputy Director's lecturer in the Honours course in Strategic Communication Management at the University of Pretoria, and the academic who developed the model on which the strategy was based.

The Deputy Director showed considerable insight into the Department of Housing's key strategic issues, pointing towards her knowledge of, and experience in, the strategic management processes and structures of the Department. She demonstrated an ability to make a contribution towards strategy formulation at macro level by suggesting, in Strategic Issue 1 for example, possible corporate strategies that could be followed to offset the issue of inadequate funding to meet national housing demands. Being able to derive a corporate communication strategy successfully for each strategic issue, she demonstrated knowledge and skills in strategic communication management, and therefore the ability to perform an important activity of a practitioner in the redefined role of the *manager*.

Contributory factors to this situation might have been the fact that firstly, the Deputy Director had access to senior managers and strategic information by attending strategic top management meetings in the Department. This points to the importance of providing senior practitioners with such access to empower them to make a strategic contribution. Secondly, the Deputy Director was in the process of completing her Honours degree in Communication Management, which might account to some degree for the strategic communication knowledge and skills. This points to the importance of training for senior communication practitioners to empower them to make a contribution towards communication excellence, and therefore to their organisation's effectiveness.

Another insight that emerged from the study was support for the Excellence Study's finding (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig, 1995) that it is not necessarily the most senior practitioner who must have knowledge of strategic management/communication, but that another practitioner with the required knowledge and skills might also make a strategic contribution (if allowed by top management to do so).

A last finding points to the applicability of the model for developing corporate communication strategy in a government department setting. In the evaluation of the corporate communication strategy document, no problems could be detected in applying the constructs to the Department of Housing.

7.   CONCLUSION

Although a private sector organisation and a government department differ in that the former is for profit and the latter is a non-profit entity, no indications were found in this study that the roles to be played by corporate communication practitioners in either sector differ conceptually. Management principles and processes, as far as the development of a corporate communication strategy is concerned, seem to be similar.

The conclusion is reached that government institutions could benefit from having senior practitioners functioning in the strategic management roles of the corporate communication function, i.e. the roles of the *strategist* and the *manager.* It is accepted that in smaller organisations these two roles will of necessity be played by the same practitioner. However, bigger organisations that function in turbulent environments, such as government departments, possibly merit more than one practitioner in these roles.

Professional associations and tertiary institutions in South Africa have only been offering training in communication *management* since the early nineties. Training in *strategic* communication management is an even more recent occurrence. It is therefore the responsibility of both the employer and practitioners in senior management positions to see that they are suitably qualified to function effectively in these roles – be it through undergraduate or postgraduate study, diploma or short courses.

Knowledge of, and skills in, strategic management/communication and research are of paramount importance to corporate communication practitioners to participate in an organisation's strategy formulation (Steyn & Puth, 2000). Senior practitioners should demonstrate knowledge of their organisation's mission, strategies and goals, and their communication solutions must answer real needs and reflect the greater picture. Regardless of the nature of their organisations, private or government, senior practitioners should function as fully fledged strategic advisers to top management. It is in the identification of stakeholder concerns and issues, and the management of communication with those strategic stakeholders, that the corporate communication function could make its biggest contribution to organisational effectiveness.

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