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Editorial

In the previous editorial reference was made to the fact that change will remain the guiding force as we move into the first decade of the new millennium. This issue of *Communicare* is devoted to the impact that challenges that are brought about as a result of the digital revolution and increasing globalisation will have on the profession and practice of public relations. It is clear that public relations has reached a significant turning point in its evolution as a profession and that the future of the profession depends on how well it adapts to changes in the new media environment and to shifts in economic, social and business paradigms. In today's highly competitive business environment, with the growing influence of consumer activism on business behaviour and more public attention focussed on business actions and their consequences than ever before, public relations has the opportunity to become one of the key management disciplines of the future.

It is clear that public relations professionals will either have to adopt new social and professional roles, or suffer professional collapse as others take up the challenge to create the cyber relationships needed to compete in an emerging digital world. There is no question that the practice of public relations has altered significantly. Prominent researchers in the field point to the dichotomous nature of the discipline, which is the division of the primary role functions between that of public relations manager or advisor and that of a communication technician. Changes within the business environment has caused the weight and focus of the obligation to shift, thus creating a need to shift from the technical to the strategic practice of public relations. However, while public relations is increasingly being used as a strategic management tool, the profession has not yet made its way into the majority of boardrooms.

Regrettably, it is not only within the boardroom that the profession is not valued. Recent research findings suggest that even those professionals who are involved in the field agree that that public relations suffers from a poor professional and public image. Even more disturbing are the findings that indicate a perceived lack of professionalism amongst co-practitioners and a tendency to critically evaluate the contributions of other public relations professionals. There seems to be general agreement that public relations must achieve professional status before its social role will be broadly accepted as valuable to society and organisational clients will value the counsel of public relations professionals. No wonder that public relations professionals have in recent years exhibited a growing concern with professionalism and related issues, such as values, autonomy, commitment, responsibility, perceived societal roles, and job orientation and satisfaction. Fact is, given the challenges facing the profession, even greater attention will have to be paid to facilitating professional and ethical public relations practice. At the end of the day, respect can only be earned through

professional conduct. It can not be begged, borrowed or stolen. In future, it will only be the ability of PR professionals to develop an ethical and value driven purpose and action that will foster increased recognition of their leadership role.

Sonja Verwey
Editor

B. Steyn

Model for developing corporate communication strategy

ABSTRACT

The body of knowledge in the field of corporate communication indicates a strategic role for the corporate communication manager. However, there are but a few references to corporate communication 'strategy' in a strategic organisational context. Few practitioners seem to understand the meaning of strategy, although it is a known, uncomplicated concept to those familiar with management theory. The key problem seems to lie in the application of strategy for corporate communication (public relations) issues.

It is therefore the aim of this article to explain the meaning of *strategy* in a corporate communication context. Based on the strategic management literature, corporate communication strategy is conceptualised as a *functional* strategy, providing focus and direction to the corporate communication function. It is differentiated from *implementation* strategy as it is known in the communication plan – the latter being the approach to communication activities. Corporate communication strategy is proposed as providing the missing link between the corporate strategy and the corporate communication function.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Although the corporate communication industry acknowledges that strategy should be an integral part of its communication programmes, in practice this amounts to little more than lip service (Tibble, 1997:356):

Strategy and the communications world, and particularly the PR part of that world, just do not seem to go together. It is certainly unusual to come across a memorable, cogent, sustained, and effective communications strategy. Not a brand strategy. Not a marketing strategy. Not an advertising strategy — a communication strategy.

The fact that the concept of 'corporate communication strategy' has received little attention in academic (or practitioner) literature might be a contributory factor towards this situation. However, academic knowledge in the area of the strategic management of an organisation's communication is relatively limited (Van Riel, 1995:142). It therefore seems necessary to gain insight into strategic decision-making procedures and related management concepts, in order to conceptualise *corporate communication strategy* and suggest a model for its development.

This article will firstly clarify relevant concepts and provide a theoretical framework for corporate communication strategy. Secondly, it will explore the meaning of the concept of 'strategy' by investigating the body of knowledge on corporate strategy and strategic management. Thirdly, it will provide a conceptualisation of corporate communication strategy. Fourthly, it will suggest a model to guide practitioners and students in developing a corporate communication strategy for an organisation.

2. DEFINITION OF TERMS

2.1 Model

McQuail and Windahl (1993:2-3) consider a model as a consciously simplified description of a piece of reality in graphic form. The model developed in this article is a *functional* model, which describes systems in terms of energy, forces and their direction; the relationship between the parts; and the influence of one part on another. The aim of the model presented is thus to organise the components of the corporate communication strategy process and to explicate their development.

2.2 Corporate communication

Corporate communication can be defined as "*the integrated approach to all communication produced by an organisation, directed at relevant target groups*" (Van Riel, 1995:24), both

internal and external.

The term *corporate communication* is increasingly being used in practice to describe the management function that is still referred to as *public relations* in academic literature (Groenewald, 1998:58). A survey among Fortune 500 companies in the US indicated that, as early as 1992, *corporate communication* was used in 164 cases compared to 76 companies that persisted with *public relations* (Budd, 1995).

Corporate communication is thus preferred when referring to an overall corporate communication strategy for an organisation, further justification being that public relations suffers from negative associations with the way in which it has been practised in the past (Ehling, *in* Grunig, 1992). Public relations is also seen by some chief executives in South Africa as referring only to an organisation's external communication (Steyn, 1999). Corporate communication is regarded in this article as the broader term, encompassing both internal and external communication.

2.3 Public relations

The concept of *corporate communication strategy* is based on the following definitions of public relations (corporate communication):

- The First World Assembly of Public Relations Associations, held in Mexico City in 1978, defined public relations as "*the art and social science of analysing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organisational leaders, and implementing planned programmes of action which will serve both the organisation and the public interest*" (Jefkins & Ugboajah, 1986).
- Public relations is "*a communication function of management through which organisations adapt to, alter, or maintain their environment for the purpose of achieving organisational goals*" (Long & Hazelton, 1987:6).
- Public relations is "*the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the publics on whom its success or failure depends*" (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 1994:1).

The emphasis in these definitions is on identifying and managing issues and stakeholders/ publics in order to assist the organisation in adapting to its environment and building mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and its internal and external stakeholders, on whom it depends to meet its goals.

2.4 Strategy

Strategy could be seen as the *thinking*, i.e. the logic behind the actions (Robert, 1997:22). Drucker (*in* Kotler, 1988:61) sees it as an indication of an organisation's

positioning for the future, deciding *what* should be done rather than *how* it should be done. Strategy requires choices—deciding what particular kind of value an organisation wants to deliver and to whom (Porter, *in* Gibson, 1997).

2.5 Stakeholders and publics

These two terms are often used synonymously — however, in the context of the strategic management of an organisation's communication, there are subtle differences. Individuals or groups are *stakeholders* when they are affected by the decisions of an organisation or if their decisions affect an organisation (Freeman, 1984). Stakeholders are normally seen as being *passive*, e.g. employees or members of the community. When they become aware of potential problems in the relationship with an organisation and actively communicate about it, they can be described as *aware* or *active* publics (Grunig & Repper, *in* Grunig, 1992:125).

3. GENERAL THEORY OF EXCELLENCE IN PUBLIC RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT AS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The dominant world view of corporate communication is the asymmetrical view that corporate communication is a way of getting what an organisation wants without changing its behaviour or reaching a compromise with its stakeholders or publics. This mindset guides organisations in directions that are ineffective and not in their long-term interests. Asymmetrical world views steer corporate communication practitioners towards actions that are unethical, socially irresponsible and ineffective. Such practitioners presuppose that the organisation knows best and that stakeholders/publics benefit from 'co-operating' with it (Grunig, 1989).

Excellent organisations adopt the view that corporate communication is a symmetrical process of compromise and negotiation and not 'a war for power'. Organisations with a symmetrical world view do not isolate themselves from their environment, but are open to interpenetrating systems and freely exchange information with their stakeholders. In such organisations, people are given equal opportunity, new ideas flourish, conflict is resolved through negotiation and managers coordinate rather than dictate (Grunig, *in* Grunig, 1992:39, 43-44).

By developing a corporate communication strategy, organisations will manage their stakeholders and issues proactively – striving towards cooperation and mutually beneficial relationships. Corporate communication strategy will also serve as the link in aligning corporate communication goals with organisational goals, thereby facilitating the function's contribution to organisational effectiveness.

Bearing the above theoretical framework in mind, the concept of *strategy* (in the context of the organisation's strategic management process) will now be explicated.

4. LITERATURE ON STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

4.1 Strategy

Virtually everyone writing on strategy agrees that there is no consensus on its definition (Chaffee, 1985:89). In the following paragraphs, an attempt will be made to bring some order to the chaos that the term 'strategy' has created.

Strategy, from the Greek word 'strategia' (office of the general), is "*the science or art of military command as applied to the overall planning and conduct of large scale combat operations*". Strategy could therefore be seen as the thinking, i.e. the logic behind the actions (Robert, 1997:22). Most authors affirm that the heart of strategy-making is in the conceptual work done by leaders of the organisation.

Drucker (*in* Kotler, 1988:61) sees strategy as an indication of the organisation's positioning for the future; the *what* rather than the *how*. It means doing the right thing, rather than doing things right. A strategy can also be seen as an approach, design, scheme or system that directs the course of action in a specific situation (Grunig & Repper, *in* Grunig, 1992:123). Where there is no clear concept of strategy, decisions are based on either subjective or intuitive assessment and are made without regard for other decisions (Jain, 1997:9).

Various authors see strategy as a pattern, namely:

- a pattern in the organisation's important decisions and actions, consisting of a few key areas or things by which the firm seeks to distinguish itself (Kami, 1984);
- a pattern in a stream of actions—this pattern being the result of strategic decisions made by the firm (Mintzberg, 1987);
- a pattern of "*major objectives, purposes, or goals and essential policies and plans for achieving those goals, stated in such a way as to define what business the company is in or is to be in and the kind of company it is or is to be*" (Jain, 1997:9).

Chaffee (1985:90) clusters strategy definitions in literature into three groups:

- **Linear** strategy, which "*focuses on planning, and consists of integrated decisions, actions, or plans that will set and achieve viable organisational goals*".
 - **Adaptive** strategy, which is concerned with the "*development of a viable match between the opportunities and risks present in the external environment and the organisation's capabilities and resources for exploiting these opportunities*". The environment is seen to consist of trends, events, competitors and stakeholders, to
-

which the organisation must adapt.

- **Interpretive** strategy, which views the organisation as a “collection of co-operative agreements entered into by individuals with free will. The organisation’s existence relies on its ability to attract enough individuals to co-operate in mutually beneficial exchange”. The focus is on desired relationships, symbolic actions and communication. Interpretive strategy emphasises attitudinal and cognitive complexity among diverse stakeholders in the organisation.

The fundamental truth in strategy is that an organisation cannot be all things to all people. Strategy requires choices—deciding what particular kind of value an organisation wants to deliver and to whom (Porter, *in* Gibson, 1997). The strategy is the primary determinant of success or failure in fulfilling the mission and achieving the organisation’s goals and objectives (Digman, 1990:13).

4.2 Strategic management

Greene, Adam & Ebert (1985:536) see strategic management as “a continuous process of thinking through the current mission of the organisation, thinking through the current environmental conditions, and then combining these elements by setting forth a guide for tomorrow’s decisions and results”.

Strategic management focuses on strategic decisions—those decisions that deal with the determination of strategy and provide the definition of the business as well as the general relationship between the organisation and its environment. It also deals with the strategic planning required to put these decisions into practice with strategic control, which ensures that the chosen strategy is being implemented properly and produces the desired results. The key concept in these definitions is *strategy*, the organisation’s preselected means or approach to achieving its goals and objectives while coping with current and future external conditions (Digman, 1990).

4.2.1 Strategic thinking and strategy formulation

Mintzberg (1994) and Robert (1997) maintain that strategic thinking is not the same as strategic planning. Where strategic thinking is the process that the organisation’s management uses to set direction and articulate their vision, strategic planning often looks back at five years of numbers and extrapolates for the next five years. This does nothing to change the ‘look’ or the composition of an organisation.

Strategic thinking is a process that enables the management team to sit together and think through the qualitative aspects of its business (opinions, judgements, even feelings of stakeholders) and the environment it faces (Robert, 1997:54). It produces

a framework for the strategic and operational plans ,and attempts to determine *what* the organisation should look like, i.e. the strategy.

Strategic thinking reviews and questions the direction of the business. It produces a profile that can be used to determine which areas of the business will receive more or less emphasis and is both introspective and externally focused (Robert, 1997:56-57). It is problem solving in unstructured situations, being able to recognise changing situations. Most importantly it involves selecting the right problems to be solved (Digman, 1990:53).

4.2.2 Strategic and operational (tactical) planning

Where strategic thinking determines the strategy (*what* should be done), strategic and operational planning helps to choose *how* to get there, i.e. to put the strategy into practice (Robert, 1997:26). The chosen strategy is created for each division or business — the result is the strategic, long-range master plan.

In the implementation phase, the strategic master plan turns strategy into reality, by means of more detailed and shorter-term plans and schedules at progressively lower operating levels of the firm (Digman, 1990:54). Operational planning allocates tasks to specific existing facilities to achieve particular objectives in each planning period. Operational or action plans incorporate four elements (Pearce & Robinson, 1997:304):

- specific functional tactics*/actions/activities to be undertaken in the next week, month or quarter (*each business function, e.g. marketing/ corporate communication/human resources needs to identify and undertake key and routine, but unique activities — functional tactics — that help to build a sustainable competitive advantage);
- each tactic/action/activity has one or more specific, immediate (short-term) objectives or targets that are identified as outcomes;
- a clear time frame for completion;
- accountability, by identifying persons responsible for each action in the plan.

In applying the above to the corporate communication function, it would seem that practitioners expend most of their effort on communication plans at operational or tactical level.

4.3 Levels of strategic management

Strategy development takes place at different organisational levels (Digman, 1990). Top management and the board of directors develop the **enterprise** strategy (Ansoff, 1977) in which questions, such as why the organisation exists, what it attempts to

provide to society and what types of relationships it will seek with stakeholders in its environment are addressed. Two important aspects of creating an enterprise strategy are an analysis of the stakeholders, and their values and their expectations (Dill, 1979:49). Enterprise strategy also has to do with the achievement of *non-financial* goals, such as enhancing the organisation's image and fulfilling its social responsibilities. In part, enterprise strategy represents the social and moral/ethical component of strategic management (Freeman, 1984).

At **corporate** level, strategy is mainly concerned with defining the set of businesses that should form the organisation's overall profile (decisions concerning mergers and acquisitions, strategic alliances, etc). At this level, strategies tend to be *financially* oriented (Digman, 1990:38). A **business** strategy usually covers a single product or a group of related products (Pearce & Robinson, 1997:6; Jain, 1997:9,19) and focuses on how to compete in the product/market/industry segment. At this level, strategies are often *marketing* oriented (Digman, 1990:38).

At **functional** level, the principal responsibility is to execute the strategies of the organisation (Enterprise, corporate and business unit) by developing annual objectives and short-term strategies (Pearce & Robinson, 1997:6). Corporate communication and human resources strategies are examples of strategy at the functional level. At **operational** level, strategies are implemented by establishing short-term objectives and operating (implementation) strategies (Digman, 1990:38).

In pointing out the differences between enterprise, corporate, business, functional and operational strategies, it is clear that the term strategy, as applied in the communication plan, refers to the *operational* level. It differs from the corporate communication strategy proposed in this article, which refers to the development of a strategy at *functional* level — providing focus and direction to the corporate communication function, and producing a profile that can be used to determine which stakeholders should receive more or less emphasis.

4.4 The stakeholder approach to strategic management

The stakeholder approach provides a new way of thinking about strategic management — that is, how an organisation can and should set and implement direction — and what the affairs of the organisation actually constitute (Freeman, 1984:vi). This approach is concerned with the identification and managerial response to groups and individuals who can affect, and are affected by, the organisation's decisions.

Higgins (1979:1) defines strategic management as “*the process of managing the pursuit of the accomplishment of the organisational mission coincident with managing the relationship*

of the organisation to its environment'. The organisation's environment can be seen as the product of the strategic decisions of others: the government, competitors, customers, society and a host of other outside influences.

The concepts of *stakeholder management* as a method for systematically taking into account stakeholder interests (Freeman & Lidfka, 1997) and *stakeholder analysis* (assessing the stake and power of each group) emerged in the 1980s (Freeman & Reed, 1983).

A strategy should be in place for each stakeholder group — not only for stockholders, but also for groups such as consumer advocates, environmentalists, the media or any other group affected by the organisation's decisions. Their key issues and willingness to expend resources helping or hurting the organisation on these issues must be understood (Wheeler & Sillanpää, 1998). It would be more advantageous to implement communication processes with multiple stakeholders, to negotiate on critical issues and to seek voluntary agreements with them, rather than having a solution imposed from the outside (e.g. through the intervention of the government, activist groups or the media).

What is therefore required are concepts and processes that provide integrated, strategic direction for dealing with multiple stakeholders on multiple issues. For each major strategic issue, the organisation must consider the effects on a number of stakeholders. For each major stakeholder, managers responsible for that stakeholder relationship must identify the strategic issues that affect the stakeholder and must understand how to formulate, implement and monitor strategies for dealing with that group. Many organisations do this well with one stakeholder group (e.g. customers), but few have the processes required to integrate a number of stakeholder concerns (Freeman, 1984:27).

This can be done by integrating boundary spanners into the strategy formulation processes to anticipate stakeholder concerns and try to influence the stakeholder environment. Freeman (1984) calls for 'external affairs' managers to take the responsibility for strategically managing stakeholder groups—people who are boundary spanners; people with the so-called 'soft skills' who excel in the management of values, perceptions, expectations and feelings; people who possess excellent communication skills; people who know how to *listen*; and people such as corporate communication and public affairs managers who have a good working knowledge of stakeholder concerns.

5. THE LITERATURE ON CORPORATE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Although the public relations body of knowledge indicates a strategic role for the corporate communication manager (White & Mazur, 1995; Bartha, 1994; Grunig &

Repper, in Grunig, 1992:120), there are but a few references to corporate communication 'strategy' in a strategic organisational context. The few publications that refer to the topic deal mainly with communication campaigns and plans, as illustrated by the many planning models, operational plans and checklists that are frequently seen in corporate communication textbooks and articles.

The word strategy, according to Tibble (1997), is "*used very sloppily*", is "*bandied around like a mantra*," but contains little substance. The main thrust of his thinking is that few practitioners understand the meaning of strategy, although it is a known, uncomplicated concept to those familiar with management theory. The key problem seems to lie in the application of strategy for corporate communication/public relations issues, i.e. what strategy means in a communication context. The word strategy is often used by corporate communication practitioners to describe something 'important' (as in *strategic* messages, *strategic* direction) or to describe 'activities' (as in communication *strategy*). It is also used mistakenly when, in reality, it should describe a corporate communication/public relations aim, objective or tactic.

An effective strategy should rather provide the following (Tibble, 1997:357):

- *leadership of thought* and activity processes for the communication programme;
- the *context*, and a guiding principle, for all communication activity;
- the *link* between the 'why' and the 'how'; the logic that binds objectives and tactics together.

Eiselen (1992) seems to agree with Tibble on the real meaning of the term 'strategy', by advocating corporate communication strategy as the vital link between organisational strategies and the corporate communication function — enabling the practitioner to implement corporate communication programmes that advance the accomplishment of the corporate vision and mission. To elevate corporate communication to the same level of importance as any of the main functional areas, it is necessary to impact the organisation and its management where it really counts — the enterprise/ corporate strategy. Furthermore, strategy formulation and strategic planning are prerequisites for developing a sound corporate communication strategy, for they provide focus and direction to the communication, as well as synergy between the enterprise/corporate strategy and communication.

To make communication relevant in the strategy formulation process, Eiselen (1992) suggests the following approach: study the vision and mission, corporate goals and objectives, the major issues facing the organisation or areas of critical importance for achieving the vision/mission and corporate strategies. One now arrives at the starting point for the corporate communication strategy — it is here that the strategic link between enterprise/corporate strategy and the corporate communication function is

made.

The implications of the organisation's key strategic issues and strategies, as well as the risk of communicating the issue are determined, and the corporate communication strategy is developed. The latter should essentially reflect or mirror the enterprise/corporate strategy (Eiselen, 1992). A draft should be presented to top management for approval and suggestions. Only at this stage should communication plans/programmes be developed by means of the steps in the well-known public relations (corporate communication) process — situation analysis, developing objectives, publics, messages, media, budget and evaluation.

The above are a few references to developing a corporate communication strategy as a *functional* strategy, as the term is used in the strategic management context. Most corporate communication/ public relations authors (such as Windahl, Signitzer & Olson, 1993; Seitel, 1995:146-147; Cutlip, Center & Broom, 1994:316-327; Hainsworth & Wilson, 1992) seem to refer to communication planning at the *operational* level when using the term strategy. What they are in fact referring to is *implementation* strategy — the broad approach to communication activities

6. CONCEPTUALISING A CORPORATE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

In conceptualising a corporate communication strategy based on the concept of 'strategy', an attempt will be made to explicate the meaning of strategy in a corporate communication context (Steyn, 2000b; Steyn, 2000c).

The author regards *corporate communication strategy* as a functional strategy, providing the focus and direction for an organisation's communication with its stakeholders — determining *what* should be communicated to assist in achieving organisational goals. It is an approach that directs the course of action of the corporate communication function and provides an indication of its positioning for the future. It is the thinking, i.e. the logic behind the corporate communication function's activities, the *what* rather than the *how* — the mechanism that leads the function towards effectiveness (doing the right things), rather than towards efficiency (doing things right).

Corporate communication strategy is a pattern in the corporate communication function's important communication decisions and actions regarding relationships with strategic stakeholders, stated in such a way that the attitude of the organisation towards its stakeholders is clear. It is developed within the context of the organisation's vision, mission, corporate culture, policies and strategies (the internal environment), but focuses on an assessment of the external (macro and task) environment, and on the stakeholder environment.

Corporate communication strategy focuses on strategic communication decisions and is the outcome of a strategic thinking process by senior communication practitioners and top management with regard to the identification and management of, and communication with, strategic stakeholders. It produces a profile that can be used to determine which stakeholders will receive more or less emphasis. Corporate communication strategy can be seen as a proactive capability to adapt the organisation to changes in stakeholder expectations and opinions (through environmental scanning and boundary spanning activities). It can create a competitive advantage for an organisation through the early detection and management of issues, involving strategic stakeholders in decision making — giving the organisation the autonomy to concentrate on achieving its mission.

Corporate communication *strategy* is not the same as communication *plans*, but provides the framework for the strategic and operational communication plans necessary to carry out the strategy. It is problem solving in unstructured situations, selecting the right problems to solve. It provides a new paradigm for corporate communication — a new pattern of thinking about and studying organisational and corporate communication problems, defining them in a new way.

Corporate communication strategy does not follow the traditional 'linear' approach where the emphasis is on planning, but is moulded on the more modern approaches to strategy, e.g. adapting the organisation to trends, events and stakeholders in the environment ('adaptive' strategy). It also focuses on relationships, symbolic actions and communication, emphasising attitudinal and cognitive complexity among diverse stakeholders, which is the essence of 'interpretive' strategy. Taking this approach to strategy is easily explained when considering that the task of corporate communication is, by definition, 'building and maintaining relationships with stakeholders/publics'.

The corporate communication strategy makes corporate communication relevant in the strategic management process through its focus on communication with strategic stakeholders, aligning communication goals to organisational goals. It provides the vital link between the enterprise/ corporate/business strategies and the corporate communication function. Although the corporate communication strategy is influenced mostly by the organisation's enterprise strategy and provides strategic inputs in the enterprise strategy, it also supports the corporate and business strategies.

To conclude, it can be stated that the process of developing a corporate communication strategy provides the strategic approach required by organisations to identify issues and stakeholders proactively, and to manage communication with their strategic stakeholders.

7. THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING A CORPORATE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

The model for developing a corporate communication strategy for an organisation, as explicated step by step in the following section, is the outcome of a longitudinal action research project conducted and still being pursued, by the Department of Marketing and Communication Management at the University of Pretoria.

A model for developing a corporate communication strategy (Model 1) was hypothesised from literature and implemented in 48 non-profit organisations in 1998, by using a confirmatory design. The findings were analysed and the model was adapted. In 1999, the revised model (Model 2) was implemented in 46 other non-profit organisations, and again analysed and adapted (Steyn, 2000c). The twice revised model (Model 3) is presented at the end of this article as the preliminary findings of the action research project.

Steps that can be followed by a corporate communication manager/practitioner responsible for developing a corporate communication strategy and policy will now be suggested. As a point of departure, it is necessary to be thoroughly familiar with the organisation's (internal and external) environment.

7.1 Analyse the internal environment

→ *Corporate profile*

It is essential for a corporate communication manager to be knowledgeable about the organisation's financial status and reputation in the field, its products or services and its overall competitive environment. Knowledge about the marketing, legal and other functions is also important in order to coordinate the efforts of these functions with those of the corporate communication function. Regular contact with key management personnel and the review of documents such as the annual and quarterly reports can provide some of this information.

Furthermore, the location of the organisation, whether in a single city or having multiple branches, the delivery system for its products or services, its major suppliers, and the identity and demographics of its customers are all necessary to develop an understanding of the organisation's operations. Other information required is a good working knowledge of the organisation's staff component - its total work force, both managerial and non-managerial. Special attention should be paid to key management people - for instance, how top management views the corporate communication function and its contribution to organisational effectiveness (Hendrix, 1992:9).

The corporate communication manager should also understand the formal structure of the organisation, i.e. the way in which it is plotted in the organisational chart and how the functions are related to one another. An even more important indication of how decisions are made might be the informal power structure. Effective communication is often the key to the effective functioning of the organisational structure (Kendall, 1992).

The corporate profile serves as a background for the development of a corporate communication strategy. The actual starting point is a thorough knowledge and understanding of the vision, mission, culture, corporate policies and strategies of the organisation:

To be strategic, public relations should pass one basic test: At a minimum, everything done must be aligned with the corporate vision or mission ...and must substantially contribute to achieving the organisation's goals and objectives. Ideally, public relations should be part of the team helping to create the corporate mission and set the objectives. (Webster, 1990:18.)

→ *Vision*

A vision represents a realistic, credible and attractive future state of affairs — a condition which, in some important way, is better than that which now exists — the '*big organisational picture*'. The vision indicates where the organisation is going and what it wants to achieve (Eiselen, 1992).

→ *Mission*

The starting point in formulating an organisation's strategy is its mission or purpose, the definition of the organisation's role in society and the economy. The mission flows from the values of stakeholders (Digman, 1990:49) — it is an explanation of the organisation's identity and ambition. Whereas the vision is more associated with goals, the mission is associated with a way of behaving (Eiselen, 1992).

→ *Corporate culture*

Deal and Kennedy (1982:31) define corporate culture as "*the way we do things around here*" and Peters and Waterman (1982:106) as "*a set of shared values conveyed by symbolic means such as stories, myths, legends and anecdotes*". A good example of corporate culture would be "*the customer is always right*" (Moorhead & Griffin, 1989:493). The values that make up corporate culture are seldom written down — they are basic assumptions made by employees about what is acceptable and what is not, and they

become ingrained in their beliefs (Pearce & Robinson, 1997:356).

→ *Corporate policy*

Corporate policy is a series of guidelines or standing plans that constitute practical day-to-day guidelines for conducting business, in contrast to the longer scope of the vision, mission, goals and objectives continuum (Bittel, 1989:78). It is a written definition of general intent or company position designed to guide and regulate certain actions and decisions, especially those of major significance or of a recurring nature (Jain, 1997:177). Policies guide the thinking, decisions and actions of managers and subordinates in implementing an organisation's strategy (Pearce & Robinson, 1997:322).

Policies are different from procedures and rules in the following ways:

- *Procedures* are specific series of tasks to be followed in performing work or accomplishing an activity, e.g. how a budget is to be completed, when it is to be submitted and how it will be reviewed. Procedures are therefore detailed steps to carry out policies.
- *Rules* are specific requirements that often relate to employee conduct, e.g. 'no smoking in office building'. Rules are the most specific and detailed, and deviations are not allowed.

→ *Organisational strategies*

The organisation's strategies at the different levels (enterprise, corporate and business unit), as explained earlier, should also be studied in order to be thoroughly familiar with top management decisions.

In summary, it can be said that all of the above concepts—corporate profile, vision, mission, corporate culture, corporate policies and strategies provide the context within which corporate communication strategy is developed. To make communication relevant in the organisation's strategy formulation process, the corporate communication manager should conduct an analysis of the organisation's internal environment, as a first step in the process of developing the corporate communication strategy:

Analyse the internal environment
Corporate Profile/Vision/Mission/Corporate Culture/Values/Policies/ Enterprise/Corporate/Business Unit Strategies

7.2 Identify strategic stakeholders and publics in the organisation's environment

When organisations make decisions, they do so based on a set of shared perceptions of the organisation and its environment. Various authors conceptualise the environment in different ways. Some depict it as a set of *general components* — i.e. political, technological, economic or social components—called the remote/macro/societal environment (Pearce & Robinson, 1997:15). Others see it as a set of *cognitive maps* (Duncan, 1972; Weick, 1969). Lenz & Engledow (1986) view the environment as represented by a *patterning of strategic issues*. Van Wyk (*in Spies 1994*) calls the macro, task and micro environment the organisation's *decision making* environment.

Mitroff (*in Spies 1994*) includes the *stakeholder* environment, thus adding behaviourist methodology to the procedure. Pearce & Robinson (1997:46) also mention the *stakeholder approach* to the environment. Executives are often compelled to subordinate the demands of the organisation's internal activities and external environment to the multiple and often inconsistent requirements of its various stakeholders. The environment can be seen as the product of the strategic decisions of external and internal stakeholders (the government, media, investors, customers, community, pressure groups, employees, labour unions and a host of other outside influences).

For the purposes of the strategic management of an organisation's communication, the author conceptualises the organisational environment as both a *collection of stakeholders* (Digman, 1990) and a *patterning of strategic issues* (Lenz & Engledow, 1986).

➔ *Using research to identify strategic stakeholders and publics*

The key component around which the corporate communication function should be anchored is the organisation's stakeholders and publics. The organisation's environment is a highly complex system, consisting of different groupings of stakeholders. Each stakeholder group has its own set of values, needs, desires, wants, goals and objectives—which may be and often are significantly different from those of the organisation (Blewett, 1993:13-17).

The overall strategic management of organisations is inseparable from the strategic management of relationships (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig, 1995). The management of relationships is the function of the corporate communication department/division. Before these relationships can be managed, however, the different stakeholders of the organisation must be identified.

Research provides a way for top management to become attuned to strategic stakeholders/publics — it can be considered as the other part of two-way

communication. Focus groups and surveys are as much channels of communication as news releases, press conferences and internal publications. The corporate communication manager therefore needs expertise in strategic research. According to Lerbinger (1977), techniques such as environmental scanning, the public relations audit, the social audit and corporate image studies are useful in the identification of strategic stakeholders and their expectations/feelings/opinions regarding, and familiarity with, the organisation.

→ *What is a stakeholder?*

An organisation has a relationship with stakeholders when the behaviour of the organisation or a stakeholder has consequences on the other. Research should be undertaken to scan the environment the identification of these consequences — ongoing communication helps to build stable, long-term relationships with stakeholders.

People are stakeholders when they are affected by the decisions of an organisation or if their decisions affect the organisation. Many stakeholders, such as employees or residents of a community, are *passive*. Stakeholders who are or become more *aware* and *active* can be described as publics (Grunig & Repper, in Grunig, 1992:125).

An important step in developing a corporate communication strategy is to make a list of the people who are linked to the organisation. Such a *stakeholder map* (Freeman 1984) usually contains groups such as owners, consumer advocates, customers, competitors, the media, employees, special interest groups, environmentalists, suppliers, governments, local community residents and others.

→ *What is a strategic stakeholder?*

Strategic stakeholders (Grunig & Repper, in Grunig, 1992:123) are those that are "*critical, crucial, essential, important, or vital for an organisation in the accomplishment of its mission*". Communication programmes should be planned only with the most important - the most strategic - stakeholders. Communication at the stakeholder stage, before conflict has occurred, is important because it helps to develop the stable, long-term relationships that an organisation needs in order to build support.

One method for the identification of key stakeholders is to analyse strategic linkages that are critical for an organisation to survive. The following four can be identified (Esman, in Grunig & Hunt, 1984:140-142):

- *Enabling linkages* are with groups that provide authority to, and control the resources of, the organisation (e.g. government legislators, stockholders, the board of directors

and donors).

- *Functional linkages* are with groups that provide inputs to the organisation (e.g. employees and labour unions) and outputs (e.g. consumers and graduates).
- *Normative linkages* are with professional or industry associations – these linkages provide connections to similar organisations that might be of assistance in solving shared problems.
- *Diffused linkages* are connections to groupings of individuals who are not part of any organisation. Minority relations, community relations, media relations and environmental relations are organisational attempts to manage linkages with diffused groupings.

Organisations must manage *enabling* and *functional* linkages because these stakeholders create consequences for the organisation — organisations cannot pursue their goals without them. The organisation must manage *diffused linkages*, where organisations create consequences for others. When diffused publics organise, they in turn create consequences for the organisation. The more turbulent an organisation's environment, the more linkages the organisation must manage with its environment and the more rapidly those linkages change (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). These linkages should form the basis for the corporate communication function's communication programmes.

→ *The link between stakeholders and corporate communication strategy*

Managing communication with stakeholders as if they were discrete and unconnected groups of people does not add value to the organisation. What is required is a more integrated approach, supported by well-considered strategies, systems and behaviours that enable organisations to prioritise between stakeholder needs, to align the strategies and activities directed at stakeholders and to build bridges between them (Scholes & James, 1997).

The most important way in which corporate communication managers/practitioners can do this is by building and maintaining excellent relationships with strategic stakeholders. If what the stakeholder wants does not match the needs of the organisation, the long-term viability of the organisation may be at stake. Positive matching of the needs and objectives of stakeholders and the organisation is required for a lasting good relationship.

The corporate communication strategy entails *inter alia*:

- identifying and defining strategic stakeholder groupings;
 - identifying key strategic issues around which publics may (have) emerge(d);
 - determining whether the publics are in the *latent, aware or active stages*, and which publics have already turned activist.
-

Only when the organisation is aware of stakeholder concerns and the publics that emerge around issues can decisions be taken as to *what should be communicated* to them to solve problems or capitalise on opportunities. The second step in the process of developing a corporate communication strategy for an organisation is therefore to:

**Identify strategic stakeholders and publics
(in the external and internal environments)**

Draw up Stakeholder Map (*organisational linkages, environmental scanning*, public relations audit**)

Identify organisational consequences on Stakeholders/Publics (*social audit**)

Identify Stakeholder Perceptions/Attitudes/Concerns (*public relations audit**)

Identify Stakeholder familiarity with organisation (*corporate image studies**)

Identify Key Stakeholder Issues (both organisational and communication)

*(Lerbinger, 1977).

7.3 Identify and differentiate between key strategic issues

Strategic issues are developments, events and trends viewed by decision makers as consequential because of their potential to impact on an organisation's strategy (Ansoff, 1980; King, 1982; Dutton & Ottensmeyer, 1987). Strategic issues could range from a new competitive strategy necessitating fundamental changes in attitudes and behaviour, to downsizing or transformation.

Strategy is determined by first identifying key strategic issues of critical importance for achieving the corporate vision and mission. This is achieved by doing an environmental analysis and issues tracking, incorporating the effects of environmental changes into corporate decision making and formulating new strategies (i.e. deciding *what* to do).

Being part of the team that identifies the key strategic issues facing the organisation is part of the strategic role of the corporate communication manager (Steyn, 2000a). It is here that the strategic link between corporate strategy and the corporate communication function is made. Corporate communication managers must be experts in using communication to remove the organisation's barriers to success. Rather than trying to move communication up on top management's agenda, they should link communication with what is already at the top of that agenda (Quirke, 1996) – the organisation's key strategic issues.

Top management is interested in business problems, not in communication problems. They may not readily see the connection between communication and their problems — especially when they are measured not on the levels of excellence of their communication, but rather on attaining key organisational goals. It is the role of the corporate communication manager to identify these key strategic issues and to demonstrate (by means of the corporate communication strategy) how communication can provide solutions to key organisational problems.

The corporate communication function is often blamed by other managers for failing to reach communication goals when, in effect, other factors should be blamed. Even more problematic is the seeking of information or communication solutions when they are not adequate. It is therefore imperative that corporate communication managers take the initiative in deciding whether a problem can be solved by communication efforts alone, by communication in conjunction with other measures or by other measures only (Windahl, Signitzer & Olson, 1993).

Corporate communication managers should assert their views in order for other managers to stop defining a problem as being communication when it is, in reality, not. However, many corporate communication managers/practitioners may take the easy way out by regarding compliance as the best solution. In the latter case, the corporate communication function will be blamed for failure when so-called 'communication goals' are not reached (although they should not have been set in the first place for not being achievable). To prevent this situation, the following typology is suggested to assist corporate communication managers in differentiating between *organisational* and *communication* issues (Steyn, 2000b):

- **Organisational issues Type 1:**
Communication is not the cause of the problem, but can provide a solution (e.g. organisational change situations such as *transformation* or *downsizing* or *mergers*).
 - **Organisational issues Type 2:**
Communication is not the cause of the problem, and cannot provide a solution but can explain the issue (e.g. *budget cuts* or *Employment Equity legislation*).
 - **Corporate communication issues:**
Too little or no communication with external stakeholders is the problem (e.g. with the *media* in the case of negative publicity; or with *investors* in the case of low share price).
 - **Management communication issues:**
Too little or no (internal) communication between managers and employees is the cause of the problem — not telling employees *what* they want to hear (e.g. about the organisation's vision or staff reductions).
-

- **(Tactical) communication issues:**

Messages are not reaching the target groups (e.g. because of the use of inappropriate communication channels such as *television* to reach a rural population; or *email* to reach factory workers; or difficult/technical *language* used to reach people who are communicating in their third or fourth language).

In developing a corporate communication strategy, it is therefore important to identify and clearly describe key issues, and especially to differentiate between types of strategic issues. Although strategic *communication* issues should be addressed, the corporate communication strategy should also address key *organisational* issues – showing top management how communication can be used as a solution to critical organisational problems, or at least explaining the problem to strategic stakeholders.

Identify and describe key strategic issues
Macro/Task/Internal Environment <i>(environmental scanning/issues tracking)*</i> Identify Publics/Activists that emerge around issues <i>(issues tracking)*</i> Identify consequences for organisation (e.g. SWOT analysis) Prioritise key strategic issues
Differentiate between types of strategic issues (organisational or communication)

7.4 Identify implications of strategic issues for stakeholders

An important step in developing the corporate communication strategy is to identify the implications that key strategic issues might have (or already have) for strategic stakeholders and publics. (In order to do this, practitioners need firstly to understand the business/strategic issues that the organisation faces). In addition, the effects that organisational strategies (enterprise/corporate/business) or the behaviour of top management might have on the stakeholders should also be determined.

Identify the implications of each strategic issue
For each (strategic) stakeholder/public

7.5 Formulate the corporate communication strategy

The implications/effects of the strategic issues on the stakeholders become the subject that has to be addressed by the organisation in its communication with strategic stakeholders/publics. Corporate communication strategy therefore entails to *the clear formulation of* that which has been identified during the previous step, i.e. *what* should be communicated to strategic stakeholders (Steyn, 2000b):

- To *solve the problems* created by the implications of a strategic issue. (For example, in a situation where improving productivity has been declared a key focus area for an organisation, one of the implications of such a top management decision is that employees fear losing their jobs. The corporate communication strategy in this case is to provide communication that will either allay or confirm these fears).
- To *capitalise on the opportunities* presented by the implications of a strategic issue. (A strategic issue could, for instance, be the requirements of new environmental legislation concerning a product manufactured by the company. Whereas the implications of this issue could be *problematic* in that consumers, suppliers or stockists become nervous about the continuation of the product and proactively switch to other products, it could also be that the company has already complied with the specifics of legislation. In both these cases, it is important for this information to be conveyed to strategic stakeholders immediately. Using the fact that the product already complies with the new legislation in product advertisements could be seen as *capitalising on an opportunity* provided by a strategic issue.)

An organisation should compile documentation regarding its corporate communication strategies. This would contain a collection of the different corporate communication strategies formulated, each one specifying *what should be communicated* to strategic stakeholders either to solve problems created by a specific strategic issue or to capitalise on the opportunities presented by a strategic issue or focus area.

It is therefore clear that a corporate communication strategy is not the same as a communication plan; neither is it the same as the *implementation* strategy referred to in the communication plan. Implementation strategy is the approach to, or framework for, the communication activities. Decisions concerning an *implementation* strategy involve selecting a *series of special events* or a *package of activities* and the communication media most likely to achieve the communication goal(s). For example, using a *print campaign* to reach employees or investors; or using an *interpersonal approach* for fund-raising activities; or using a *mass media* campaign to reach the community would constitute *implementation* strategy. Each of these implementation strategies would then form the framework for the activities selected to implement them, e.g. articles in the employee newsletter (to implement the print campaign), or a luncheon with a major donor (in the case of an interpersonal approach) or news releases/TV talk shows

(to implement the mass media campaign).

Formulate the corporate communication strategy
Clearly indicating <i>what</i> must be communicated to <i>each</i> strategic stakeholder to solve the problem/capitalise on the opportunity presented by the strategic issue

7.6 Set communication goals

Based on the corporate communication strategy (which identified *what* the organisation should be communicating about), communication goals are to be developed to indicate *what* the organisation *wants to achieve* with its communication regarding the situation described (the strategic issues and their implications for the stakeholders). Does the organisation want to *give information* regarding the issue to its stakeholders, or does it want to *change the attitudes* of specific stakeholders regarding the issue or *the behaviour* of stakeholders caused by an issue, etc. (In many cases, if the behaviours or attitudes of stakeholders need to be changed, it is necessary firstly to *provide them with information* about the issue.)

In the process of developing a corporate communication strategy, the step of goal setting is the *link* between the corporate communication strategy and the communication plan. Communication plans should be developed based on the communication goals that are developed during the corporate communication *strategy* phase. This means that for each communication goal set during the strategy phase, two or more objectives should be developed for it in the communication plan.

Furthermore, if communication goals are set according to the strategy model, the corporate communication function will automatically be aligned with the corporate mission — for the communication goals are derived directly from the corporate communication strategy, which is formulated to solve the problems/capitalise on the opportunities presented by the organisation's key strategic issues and their implications for the stakeholders. This results in the corporate communication function's contributing towards organisational effectiveness (Steyn 2000d).

Set communication goals
(derived from the corporate communication strategy)
Develop communication plans around these communication goals

7.7 Formulate a corporate communication policy

A good corporate communication strategy should include a clear policy statement. The corporate communication policy is based on the corporate mission and strategies, but is also influenced by the corporate culture, values and norms of the organisation (Trainor, 1990:15). Therefore, communication policy may differ greatly from organisation to organisation.

In general terms, corporate communication policy could deal with:

- functional communication areas (internal or external communication) and specified communication programmes, e.g. lobbying or media liaison;
- functional relationships between corporate communication and other departments, e.g. marketing, research or human resources;
- the structure of the corporate communication department, hierarchical orientation and lines of command;
- corporate communication goals and objectives;
- corporate do's and don'ts.

A way of developing corporate communication policy is to make a list of (Trainor, 1990:16-17):

- what *must* be communicated to stakeholders;
- what *should* be communicated;
- what the organisation is *prepared* to communicate;
- what the organisation is *not prepared* to communicate;
- what is to be communicated in *special situations* such as emergencies or crises.

The communication policy must be enforceable, precise and clear. Messages must be consistent and all departments must use the same standards when communicating internally or externally. An example of corporate communication policy might be a commitment to honesty and openness, transparency, access to top management, credibility, compassion, trust, integrity and sensitivity to the diverse nature of stakeholders and publics.

<p>Formulate corporate communication policy <i>(who is allowed to communicate what to whom)</i></p>
<p>Organisational guidelines for communication</p>

7.8 Submit a draft corporate communication strategy and policy to top management

Top management should be kept abreast of the different steps during the development of the corporate communication strategy (and policy). They should be informed of the logic that guided the formulation of the strategy and the way in which communication will provide a solution to critical organisational problems. Research results on which the strategy is based (even if it is informal research) should be stated.

It is important to remember that top management approves the budget for corporate communication strategies. The better they understand the important contribution that the corporate communication function is making towards the achievement of organisational goals, the easier it will be to obtain funds for implementing such strategies. It will also assist in changing the negative perceptions that many top managers have of the corporate communication function's contribution to the 'bottom line'.

Draft to top management
Obtain management support and buy-in for each step of the corporate communication strategies (and policy)

7.9 Conduct an overall corporate communication media analysis

The purpose of the overall media analysis is to investigate the different corporate communication media that might be suitable for the specific organisation and its stakeholders. In the communication *strategy* phase, the aim is not to identify specific media for specific communication plans, but rather to establish broad guidelines on the different types of media that might be considered. Corporate communication media can range from interpersonal media, to group or organisational media to public or mass media (Rensburg, *in* Lubbe & Puth, 1994).

Conduct an overall corporate communication media analysis
Interpersonal, group, organisational, public and mass media

7.10 Develop a strategic communication plan

This step does not form part of the corporate communication *strategy* phase, but is rather the beginning of the *planning* phase. However, it is included to indicate clearly the position of a strategic communication plan (and resulting operational plans/campaigns/programmes) for the corporate communication function and what it entails.

The strategic communication plan is the *framework* within which communication *programmes* (being continuous communication with strategic stakeholders) communication *campaigns* (which can be single or cyclic) and communication *plans* (developed to achieve specific communication goals) are developed (Steyn, 2000b).

→ *Communication programmes*

In a study sponsored by the IABC Research Foundation (Grunig, *in* Grunig, 1992), researchers report that corporate communication managers who follow a strategic approach conceptualise and direct the most effective communication programmes. A strategic approach is not historical — excellent communication programmes are not an evolution of what has been done in the past, but are rather aimed at stakeholders/publics who are identified as strategically important to the organisation during the stakeholder analysis. Excellent practices are concerned with impact, not process, and aim to influence stakeholder attitudes, opinions or behaviours rather than simply putting processes in motion such as a news release production.

The corporate communication function should therefore have *continuous programmes* for strategic stakeholders (Grunig & Repper, *in* Grunig, 1992). This does not mean that the same activities are repeated year after year, but rather that campaigns/activities are developed annually for the organisation's strategic stakeholders and current publics (Dozier & Grunig, *in* Grunig, 1992). *Ad hoc* communication plans could be made during the year for new stakeholders or emerging publics (previously unknown or non-existing). If these publics persist in the long term, they should be incorporated in the ongoing programmes. Examples of continuous programmes for strategic stakeholders are the following:

Continuous communication programmes

Issues management	Employee relations	Change management
Media relations	Government relations/ lobbying	Customer relations
Industrial relations	Community relations	International relations
Social investment	Sponsorships	Corporate identity
Publications	Corporate advertising	Crisis communication

It is important to note that there is a difference between communication *programmes*, as described above, and communication *campaigns*.

→ Communication campaigns

According to Kendall (1992:3), the term 'campaign' in its general usage means a "*connected series of operations designed to bring about a particular result*". Although the distinction between programmes and campaigns may not be universally recognised, there are advantages in differentiating the *continuous* 'programme' from the *time-limited* 'campaign'. A campaign planned for a month, six months or a year is much more subject to measurement of effect and tends to involve greater precision in planning and execution than a continuing programme that has no clear beginning and end. Plans for activities that have no deadlines tend to be pushed back in the scheduling of priorities (Kendall, 1992).

● Corporate communication (public relations) campaigns

The above description of a campaign fits the corporate communication/public relations campaign, which is a "*concerted effort of an organisation to build socially responsible relationships by achieving research-based goals through the application of communication and the measurement of outcomes*" (Kendall, 1992:3).

The corporate communication campaign is an organised and integrated effort to manage certain well-focused corporate communication activities, together with their supporting communication, to achieve a more controlled result. Best results are achieved when regular activities that form part of corporate communication programmes (i.e. announcing decisions to the press, publishing the employee

newsletter or responding to media enquiries) are coordinated with the concentrated efforts of the campaign. For example, when the campaign theme and activities are incorporated into a newsletter, bulletin board and other means of communication, the additional notice will multiply the effect. Coordinating regular programmes and campaign activities also enables the corporate communication department to measure the effectiveness of specific activities as well as the total effect. A campaign will also attract renewed interest in familiar programmes (Kendall, 1992).

A campaign needs not be a one-time effort — a cycle of campaigns, each building on, and profiting from, previous ones has much to recommend it over the indeterminate continuing programme. The basic elements that make up a corporate communication campaign can simply be repeated with revisions, additions, and different directions for a more effective long-range programme. The cyclical continuing series of campaigns also has the advantage that the evaluation of one campaign can be incorporated in the research phase of the next (Kendall, 1992).

- Public communication (information) campaigns

The public communication/information campaign tends to focus on an *immediate objective* — to stop smoking, control wildfires or reduce crime — and relies primarily on *mass communication*. The corporate communication campaign described above also seeks such objectives but rather as a means of building relationships with the organisation’s stakeholders. While it may also use mass communication, it relies on the complete spectrum of corporate communication media (Kendall, 1992).

<p>Develop a strategic communication plan (a master plan for <i>how</i> to implement corporate communication strategies)</p>
<p>Communication programmes (continuous communication with strategic stakeholders) Communication campaigns (single or cyclical) Communication plans (implementation strategy and action plans)</p>

8. A MODEL FOR DEVELOPING A CORPORATE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Based on the steps identified in the previous section, a model for developing corporate communication strategies for an organisation is now suggested. (It should be emphasised that research forms an important component of the different steps in the model.)

ANALYSE THE INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT



IDENTIFY STRATEGIC STAKEHOLDERS AND PUBLICS

(in the external and internal environments)



IDENTIFY, DESCRIBE AND DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN KEY STRATEGIC ISSUES



IDENTIFY IMPLICATIONS OF EACH STRATEGIC ISSUE

(for each strategic stakeholder)



FORMULATE THE CORPORATE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

(decide *what* must be communicated to strategic stakeholders/publics)



SET COMMUNICATION GOALS

(derived from the corporate communication strategy)



FORMULATE THE COMMUNICATION POLICY

(*who* is allowed to communicate *what* to *whom*)



DRAFT TO TOP MANAGEMENT



CONDUCT AN OVERALL CORPORATE COMMUNICATION MEDIA ANALYSIS

(which *types* of media are best suited to the organisation's strategic stakeholders)



DEVELOP A STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION PLAN

(master plan for *how* to implement the strategy)

9. CONCLUSION

Developing a corporate communication strategy is a process of identifying and analysing the implications of the organisation's key strategic issues and the effects of its current/future strategies on the stakeholders. Furthermore, it includes identifying stakeholders and their major concerns, and considering the implications thereof for the organisation — determining *what* should be communicated to strategic stakeholders to solve organisational problems or capitalise on opportunities.

From the model outlined above, a corporate communication strategy can be developed for any type of organisation, large or small. It is as much a *thinking* process as a doing process. A very important element in the process is the use of research — to identify strategic issues as well as stakeholders and publics, to gauge their attitudes towards the organisation, and to identify the consequences of the organisation's strategies and policies on relationships with its strategic stakeholders.

Although the steps in the process of developing a corporate communication strategy were indicated in a linear fashion in the model (i.e. one leading to the next), this development does not necessarily always occur in this sequence in practice. It is the responsibility of senior corporate communication practitioners to judge the situation and the specific circumstances in which the organisation finds itself, and to decide what is to be done at that specific time. Furthermore, the development of a corporate communication strategy takes place continuously, and is not a once-a-year exercise. The steps in the model serve only to make practitioners and students aware of aspects that should be considered in the process. Developing a functional strategy will help to establish a new paradigm for corporate communication. This paradigm will be focused on strategic communication decisions concerning corporate communication *strategy* (deciding *what* to communicate), rather than tactical decisions concerning a communication *plans* (deciding *how* to communicate). This will produce a new pattern of thinking about and studying organisational and corporate communication problems. However, it will necessitate both a strategic role for corporate communication at top management level as well as managing corporate communication plans/programmes/campaigns strategically by aligning corporate communication goals with organisational goals.

In order to determine a corporate communication strategy, corporate communication managers/practitioners will need to understand the business issues that the organisation faces — suggesting communication solutions to critical organisational problems. Thinking and talking alone in terms of communication processes, goals, products and the corporate communication function will no longer make a substantial contribution to organisational effectiveness.

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Transcending diversity: The communication manager as ethical/moral ombudsperson in the postmodern organisational setting

ABSTRACT

Although the philosophy of ethical and socially responsible communication management¹ practices has a long history and has been described in great detail, the notion of the communication manager as an ethical/moral ombudsperson is relatively new.

With increasing numbers of communication managers now forming part of the dominant coalition/strategic decision-making team in many organisations, the real influence that these individuals have over the values that organisations accept should be critically assessed.

The new role of the communication manager is conceptualised as constituting two spheres of responsibility. Internally the communication manager should be facilitating the establishment and acceptance of ethically/morally acceptable organisational values. These values will then figure in external organisational behaviour, while the communication manager will act as the eyes and ears of the society in which he/she operates.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is an attempt to stimulate the philosophical reasoning about as well as the origins and manifestations of organisational values in a postmodern organisational setting, and more specifically to question the role of the communication manager in this dynamic process. This paper will also address topics such as the reasons for an ethical/philosophical approach to the role of communication management in organisations, a discussion of approaches and theories applicable to this topic as well as some critical questions.

The motivation for this study stems from the theoretical view that communication management may play different roles within society, depending on the world view from which it is practised (Grunig, 1992). The article supports the normative world view of symmetrical communication management. The theme of this article lends itself to discussions from both a positive and a normative perspective, which may lead to rhetoric among scholars and practitioners. In an attempt to facilitate such a debate, several key questions have been asked, and although it would be possible to provide exhaustive discussions of these questions, this is not the objective of the article.

L. Grunig (IN Toth & Heath, 1992:66) contends that communication management¹ professionals should support the level of maturity this field has reached by becoming introspective and looking closely at the presuppositions, goals and methods that govern the profession. Hall (1963:7-8) also supports this notion by pleading for reflection about all things and by all individuals: *"A man is what he thinks. His mental attitude is the key to this code of action, and civilization is fundamentally a code of action."*

The practical value of such introspection is also emphasized by Hall (1963:7): *"When our systems fail us we learn to depend upon ourselves for security and well being. Ever increasing is the demand now for organisation and classification of spiritual teachings, so that the average person can base on them his own foundation for a personal code of more intelligent living."*

¹The term **communication management** will be used throughout as a synonym for **public relations**. J. Grunig, in Grunig (1992:4), contends that the terms public relations and communication management are broader than (1) specialized public relations programs and (2) communication techniques, thus equating the term public relations with communication management: *"Public relations and communication management describe the overall planning, execution, and evaluation of an organisation's communication with both internal and external publics – groups that affect the ability of the organisation to meet its goals."*

The moral purpose of public relations is that of building and maintaining healthy relationships toward harmony in society (Seib & Fitzpatrick, 1995:1). The communication management function has been referred to as the 'social conscience' of organisations. Simply stated, this thus means that what is accepted and seems normal to many (in this case communication management practitioners and scholars) should be analysed in order to answer questions about what lies beneath the surface.

A starting point may be to understand the different philosophical approaches and the implications of these on communication management.

2. COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT AND DIFFERENT BRANCHES OF PHILOSOPHY AND ETHICS

The ultimate goal of a philosophy, based on specific principles, for either one's personal life or profession, such as communication management, should be to *"equip the mind to cope with any issue with at least a fair measure of true intelligence"* (Hall, 1963:9). In this case, the insight gained from critically evaluating accepted theories and ideas that govern communication management should help shape intelligent reasoning on both a philosophical and practical level.

Using Hall's (1963) view about the importance of philosophical thought, one should also consider those elements that collectively constitute the concept of "philosophy". According to the same author, the modern concept embraces six fields of mental activity:

"Metaphysics includes theology, cosmology and the nature of being. **Logic** refers to the doctrine of being reasonable. **Ethics** includes morality and character and the discovery of the nature of good. **Psychology** encompasses the whole field of mental phenomena. **Epistemology** is mainly concerned with the problem as to whether knowledge in itself can exist in an absolute form. **Aesthetics** includes the science of the reactions caused by beauty, harmony, elegance and nobility. **Theurgy** refers to the science of becoming godlike and considers the actual process by which a man becomes a philosopher – the discipline of philosophy."

There are basically three broad approaches to ethics: The Teleological approach (also referred to as Utilitarianism or Realism) that, simply put, concludes that ethical behaviour is that which would be for the greater good of the greatest number of people (Briggs & Bernal, 1992; Seib & Fitzpatrick, 1995, Spicer, 1997). The question of whether some action would have good or bad consequences or the amount of 'pleasure' produced by the action would determine its ethical value.

But this approach has two main flaws. The first addresses whether a good end result

could justify any means of obtaining it. Would even unethical behaviour be justified if the result is good? Secondly, the problem arises when one considers minority groups. Not all groups have the power in terms of size or importance, but this does not mean that the majority vote is 'right' and the smaller group is 'wrong'. The importance of the voice of a minority group is especially relevant for the public relations practitioner concerned with all the publics of an organisation. The consequences of actions are also important in the teleological approach, which implies that decision makers conscientiously think about the consequences of all their decisions to be ethical (Seib & Fitzpatrick, 1995:31, Spicer, 1997:285).

The second approach is referred to as the Deontological (Idealism or Kantianism), which proposes that moral judgment should be grounded in the awareness of every person's moral obligations and duty toward society (Briggs & Bernal, 1992; Seib & Fitzpatrick, 1995, Spicer, 1997). Every person should be treated with respect and people's rights have to be considered. This is why all bodies and organisations normally have ethical codes, and all acts are measured against these rights to see whether they are morally right or wrong. If any act were considered to be acceptable for any 'reasonable person', it would be ethically correct. This implies that there would be some universal acceptance of what is wrong and right – some universal law.

This second approach also has its problems: if a society would consider something acceptable, does this imply that the society is basically good or that it can be assumed that all societies are good? One can ask the question whether society has not already been desensitised to what is basically wrong or right. Can one assume that because everyone is doing it, it must be the right thing to do? A further weakness of this approach is that it can encourage individualism to such an extent that it leads to anarchy (Spicer, 1997:286).

There is also a third branch of ethics that focuses on distributional effects of actions, called the theory of justice (Spicer, 1997:283). The justice approach follows three principles, the first of which postulates that similar individuals should be treated similarly; secondly, that rules should be communicated to all and understood by everyone so that it will be conducted and controlled fairly to avoid partiality; thirdly, that individuals cannot be held responsible for anything over which they have no control.

The implications of this approach for public relations are that a set of rules should be in place to protect the rights of the organisation as well as those of the stakeholders in order to maintain the stability of relationships between these parties (Spicer, 1997:285). An external authority would be involved in settling disputes concerning rights, which could be a court of law or an internal ombudsperson function. A further process would be the fair allocation of resources between the organisation and

stakeholders on the basis of perceived fairness and kindness of organisational decision-making or by participation that would include all stakeholders. This approach protects the interests of underrepresented groups because they can revert to their minimal rights.

The weakness of this approach is that it can result in the reduction of some individuals' rights in order to accommodate justice, and it can reduce entrepreneurship and innovation (Spicer, 1997:286).

Because of the fact that the utilitarian approach is most commonly followed in managerial decision-making (Spicer, 1997:287), the most important concern for public relations managers, in terms of their role as a possible organisation ombudsperson, would be the monitoring of organisational-stakeholder interactions as well as the facilitation of participation in decision-making. The role of research and environmental scanning in this regard is again emphasized (Ströh & Leonard, 1999).

The focus on the utilitarian approach for guidelines in decision-making is often based on the importance of economics, which has the effect that decisions are based on the outcomes and not on the decision-making process where stakeholders should be included (Spicer, 1997:289). By focusing on the consequences of a decision, decision-makers often argue in favour of the organisational context to the detriment of some stakeholder groups. Organisations and stakeholders also view the consequences of actions differently and they might use different approaches or combinations of approaches in their ascertainment of ethical decisions. Since conflicts arise because of these differences, the need for an impartial and ethical ombudsperson increases.

From a postmodern perspective, ethics are seen as being just as complex as the systems within which they are suppose to function (Cilliers, 1998:136). Postmodern theorists view society as a complex network of interweaving classes of opinions and an attempt to reach consensus would freeze a system into a conforming state of stagnation. As this is rather improbable, it is more desirable to develop a sensitivity for the process of conflict management, change and ethical decision-making.

Knowledge of all these approaches and ethical perspectives will empower communication managers and give them the edge to become a credible part of the decision-making process and advise management on ethical issues. Although guidelines are provided for communication managers in the form of ethical codes and guiding principles it is still the responsibility of the practitioner to consider the consequences of all decisions, and the cornerstone of the PR profession is the individual practitioner (Seib & Fitzpatrick, 1995: 113).

All the questions relating to these approaches hold specific implications for communication management within the organisation. Before one can address these implications, it is important to ask whether it is the place or function of the public relations practitioner to be responsible for making these decisions, or at least facilitating ethical decision-making. The complexities of the ethical role of the communication manager will be addressed through the discussion of the following questions.

3. WHAT ARE THE ROLES OF COMMUNICATION MANAGERS IN A POSTMODERN ORGANISATIONAL SETTING?

When trying to describe the role of the organisational/corporate communication manager, one has to consider briefly what the underlying perspective is that governs one's thinking about the nature of organisations.

Different metaphors are used to describe organisations, each emphasizing a different dimension. If one accepts the metaphor of the organisation as an individual, the assumption of accountability for actions is highlighted. This debate centres around questions of corporate accountability and whether an organisation has a conscience. One view argues that the corporation is an impersonal institution that has one obligation, which is to make profits and not to act morally responsible (Weiss, 1998:95). Sources such as government regulations and control should be responsible for ensuring corporate moral behaviour. Added to this, the view exists that corporations do not have moral intentions but that the people in the corporation do.

The second view maintains that corporations are individuals, thereby confirming the validity of the metaphor of the organisation as an individual responsible for their intentions and actions (Weiss, 1998:97). This stems from the humanistic approach to management, which is the dominant paradigm in the postmodern era. The implication of this view is that organisations can and will be evaluated according to the standards for individual actions. Inherent in the view of the organisation as an individual is the notion of socially responsible citizenship. Legal and moral liability is the least of what is expected of such a 'citizen' (Weiss, 1998:97).

De George (IN L'Etang, 1996:100) suggests that "individuals and organisations may both be held culpable" even though he accepts that "the corporation in itself is not a moral agent, because people within it are and actions done by them on behalf of the organisation should be morally evaluated".

L'Etang (1996:101) points out that the legal conception of a corporation is "an anthropomorphic fiction" – a corporation is an abstraction, which possesses neither human mind nor human body and is therefore not capable of expressing intention.

According to law, a person will be found guilty if their guilty mind/intention is proven. In the case of an organisation, the person/agent who is really the directing mind and will of the organisation will be held accountable.

Corporations form the basis of our economic society and all stakeholders have an interest in the way a business is run. Therefore, stakeholders have the right to question and evaluate the way in which it is run (Shaw, 1999:15). Shaw (1999:16) aptly criticizes the first view: this view "...treats the standards and rules of everyday business activity as if they had nothing to do with the standards and rules of ordinary morality, and ... as something that we give lip service to on Sundays but that otherwise has no influence on our lives."

Corporate citizenship is often referred to as the external organisational behaviour through which the latter should be seen as being a good citizen, alongside all other citizens. And, according to Bishop and Andrews (1999:16), this term should mean more than just "sponsorship of a local charity or football team; it also involves being a good employer, providing a valued product, paying the bills on time and having a sense of responsibility toward people and the planet".

Corporate social responsibility, development, broad consultation with stakeholders and sensitivity towards the natural environment all represent the ideals of ethical responsibility and values. The critical reader may argue that these are simply representative of the current zeitgeist. They may argue that a certain type of ruthlessness and aim always to gain the highest possible profit margins will always prevail as business values. But it can also be argued that without the consent of, and healthy relationships with stakeholders the organisation will not be able to function and prosper: "It is not an issue of philanthropy or appeals to the good nature of business that we should be concerned with here, but the fact that it makes sound business sense to foster good relations with the community" (Harrison, 1995: 124). This is where corporate social responsibility becomes relevant as a "concern and active two-way involvement with social, economic and political forces which influence the environment within which it exists" (Overton-De Klerk, 1994).

According to Bishop and Andrews (1999:18), corporate citizenship should also be incorporated into the mainstream corporate culture of an organisation. The most important reason for this would be to achieve personal commitment and active participation in the corporate citizenship programme by all employees.

The underlying theme in both instances is the need to connect people – be it the different levels of management within organisations or the organisation with its different strategic constituencies. Corporate communication management is the vehicle through

which this objective can be achieved.

Gouillart and Kelly (1995:1&3) believe that the organisation is inherently whole, and they use the analogy of the human body to describe how different parts should work together to achieve the organisation's objectives. Organisations are essentially made up of people who converge in order to achieve some kind of business objectives. According to Spicer (1997) and Grunig's (1992) conceptualisation of the power-control model within organisations, the communication manager operates from a powerful position. The most significant element of this perspective is the influence that the communication manager may have over the world view of the dominant coalition, thus directly influencing communication management practices. From this perspective, the following questions can be addressed.

4. WHAT REAL INFLUENCE OR POWER DO COMMUNICATION MANAGERS HAVE IN ORGANISATIONS IN TERMS OF ETHICS?

"Issues have a moral component when an organization's actions when freely performed may harm or benefit others" (Jones IN Spicer, 1997:275). This is how Jones defines moral issues in an organisation, which implies that moral decisions have consequences for others and must involve choice. Stakeholders are defined as any group that may influence or be influenced by the organisation (in other words, decisions have consequences for them) in the achievement of its goals (Grunig, 1992:125; Spicer, 1997:15). If the definition of communication management postulates that the communication manager is responsible for the management and maintenance of relationships with stakeholders (Grunig, 1992:4), it is logical to deduce that the communication manager should be involved in the moral issues and ethical decision-making processes in the organisation.

The abovementioned is a basic argument for the involvement of the communication manager in ethical decision-making. But there are other roles that validate and serve as a motivation for the communication manager's participation in strategic argumentation regarding ethical issues.

4.1 The boundary-spanning role of the communication manager

According to White and Dozier (1992:93), management needs information from the environment to make decisions accordingly, and this type of information is often provided by boundary spanners - "individuals within the organisation who frequently interact with the organisation's environment and who gather, select, and relay information from the environment to decision makers in the dominant coalition". Communication managers are responsible for managing communication between an

organisation's subsystems and various relevant publics, thereby assisting different subsystems in remaining in contact with their publics (Kitchen, 1997:12).

This boundary-spanning function also helps to keep the organisation aware of issues in the environment so that it can make decisions accordingly. The more complex the decisions concerning issues in the environment, the more prevalent the boundary-spanning function becomes because decision-makers are less sure of what information to use to manage the organisation's responses to the environment in an ethical way (White & Dozier, 1992:93). The research knowledge and skills to conduct this environmental scanning role professionally provide the communication manager with the power to assist in decision-making and advising on ethical issues (Ströh & Leonard, 1999:29).

4.2 New role opportunities for the communication manager

The normative conceptualisation of the role of communication manager (Grunig IN Grunig 1992; Spicer 1997) includes the responsibility for moral leadership within, and on behalf of, the organisation. As the term indicates, this role would allow the communication manager to operate as the ethical and moral consciousness of the organisation and help to guide the establishment of organisational values, which will determine the nature of all external behaviour.

Following the model of Goodpaster (1982:4), this role would be twofold. The communication manager should be aware of his/her responsibilities in managing the organisation's specialized internal and external relationships. In terms of the external relationships, the communication manager should view the organisation as a "moral agent in the wider society", e.g. assuming responsibility for product safety, environmental protection, truth in advertising and communication management campaigns, and acting responsibly towards investors and suppliers.

In terms of internal relationships, the communication manager should view the organisation as a moral agent in itself - an entity that "ought to be managed with a view to the freedom and well-being of its members" (Goodpaster, 1982:5). Examples of this would include the management of interpersonal relationships, authority and incentives and "more subtle organisational pressures that affect either the general moral climate or culture of the organisation or the character of individuals as they rise through the ranks".

Although he does not provide a detailed discussion of the process whereby the communication manager can achieve these objectives, Goodpaster (1982:5) says that action in both the internal and external spheres involves issues of policy formulation

and policy implementation. In itself, this process of establishing organisational values in a fair and ethical manner is of utmost importance if the communication manager wants to be worthy of the title "ethical/moral ombudsperson".

It would also be appropriate to describe the new role of the communication manager as that of being the "thinking heart of the organisation" (Goodpaster, 1982:5). Although Goodpaster's (1982:5) model has been developed to describe the responsibilities of the general manager accurately, the requirements of ethical awareness and "a healthy balance between analytical skill and intuition" undoubtedly also apply to the communication manager.

4.3 The professional characteristics of the communication manager in the role of ethical adviser

While the philosophical reasoning about actions is crucial to the communication managers' new role, the process of involving all constituencies/strategic partners should also be considered carefully – this is the crux of the new role (Spicer, 1997:285). When considering the personal values of communication managers in their professions, it would be ideal if they would have insight, knowledge and a thorough understanding of organisational values, culture and business ethics, societal culture and norms. This individual will often have to make sense of apparent confusion and should therefore have a well-established reputation as an ethical and fair professional – without these qualities no communication manager will have trust and/or credibility from any constituency in or outside the organisation.

Hall (1963:13) contends that an individual, in this case communication managers, can act wisely only if he/she has a firm grip on the reasoning for his/her actions: "Only from philosophy can we derive an enlightened courage with which to face the day. Those who have light within themselves will pass triumphantly through the difficult years which lie ahead."

The single biggest stumbling block in trying to act as an ethical/moral ombudsperson could be the resistance from any organisational constituency, e.g. an individual or two in the dominant coalition. In this case, there are both idealistic and realistic answers.

Ideally, the communication manager should have been a part of the dominant coalition for long enough to have proven his/her knowledge of and ability to manage the organisational culture and to influence the organisation's philosophical approach to communication management practice, thereby improving the quality of all relationships. In this instance, it is also the responsibility of the communication manager to use the

symbolic value of top managers ethically, i.e. have them adopt the organisational values. Following the power-control model (Spicer, 1997), this would influence what happens in the rest of the organisation because all systems are related, and what happens in society has an influence on the organisation (culture, values, effectiveness) and vice versa. Micheal Rion (IN Tuleja,?:167) also supports this thinking: *"Firm and visible top management commitment, and especially a history of such commitment, is essential to keeping ethical dimensions of management on the agenda of operating managers"*.

A more realistic view accommodates the fact that not all communication managers have the power to influence either the process whereby organisational values are created or the values themselves. Communication managers could still use their own symbolic power to ensure that all communication management efforts are executed and managed in both an ethical manner and from an ethical and a philosophical perspective (Spicer, 1997:232). Symbolic power refers to the recognition that the communication manager earns through his/her role as an expert adviser to management.

Having looked at the type of support that the communication manager would require in this new role, the focus should shift to some of the sources of sound organisational values as well as the influence of these values on the nature of communication management practices.

To fully appreciate both the boundary spanning role as well as the role of the 'thinking heart', one has to consider two dimensions. The first has to do with the processes whereby the internal and external spheres are managed and the second dimension addresses the interaction between the individual and the values and goals of the organisation.

5. HOW TO FIND COMMON GROUND BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANISATIONAL VALUES AND GOALS

In the process of establishing organisational values that all employees would embrace, all elements of the more traditional roles of communication facilitator and problem-solving facilitator, as conceptualised by Dozier (IN Grunig, 1992:333), should be understood. All of these responsibilities are inherent in the process of reconciling different values and beliefs, and eventually guiding the organisation's external behaviour and communication management practices.

The expert prescriber, communication facilitator and problem-solving facilitator dimensions should be viewed as interchangeable. According to Dozier (IN Grunig, 1992:333) communication managers make policy decisions and are held accountable for public relations programme outcomes. "They view themselves and are viewed by

others in the organisation as communication and public relations experts. [Finally] they facilitate communication between management and publics and guide management through what practitioners describe as a 'rational problem-solving process' (Dozier IN Grunig, 1992:333).

The process of reaching consensus about what organisational values will and ought to be embraced by all employees (from the postal assistant to the CEO) also has to be carefully considered. Postmodern organisational theory prescribes that employees should be empowered to share their ideas and to take ownership of these values. In this instance, the communication manager should understand that he/she must already be neutral about the specific outcomes of the process, but should purely facilitate dialogue between different stakeholders (Ströh, 1998:39).

5.1 The communication manager's role in reconciling the diverse personal values of employees with those of an organisation

Complex systems consist of a large number of elements that interact dynamically and are interrelated in such a way that their behaviour will influence each other and the goal attainment of the system (Cilliers, 1998:121). Adorno, one of the foremost contemporary thinkers of post-modernism, argues that "there are differences among human beings that remain irreducible to a totalizing system" (Cilliers, 1998:138). The inherent individualism of the members in the organisation implies important differences, which constitutes the humanity of the system.

The diversity in frames of reference brings about conflicts of interest and methods of functioning effectively. "During times of high ambiguity, scarce resources, and moderate to high conflict and diversity" (Spicer, 1997:73), the political and symbolical frames in the organisation assists in the understanding of the communication manager's function. Spicer further suggests that the concern over the ethical issues involved in conflict management should be the responsibility of the organisational ombudsperson. Because public relations should know the intricacies of organisation-stakeholder relationships, the communication manager should be involved in this conflict management process. Only a true understanding of relationships, channels that carry information in both directions and symmetrical conflict management can contribute to wise and ethical management decision-making. "Accurately understanding the perspective of outside groups is the art of public relations and the mark of a truly talented practitioner" (Spicer, 1997:297).

The question of whether all employees at an organisation can be united in their interpretation of what "good" or "evil" organisational action would constitute is part of the dilemma that communication managers face today.

According to Veenstra (1994:83), people are constantly reminded of the dualism of life – the battle between good and evil. This constant battle occurs on a spiritual level, thus forcing people always to consider whether they are striving for either the so-called good or evil. Very often, the person's cultural philosophy or religion determines his/her view of 'good' and 'evil'. Veenstra (1994:72) explains the role of these values in the following manner: "In so far as a person tries to give up the rules and standards which he sincerely accepts, they become part of his 'philosophy of life' guiding his choices and giving direction to his conduct."

It is furthermore also the responsibility of the communication manager to ensure that the enterprise does not only have the values of the individual at heart but should also consider the consent of wider society. This implies that the communication manager has to act as a watchdog on behalf of society and ensure that the organisation always acts ethically and responsibly when achieving its business objectives. The insider-outsider impartial role of the communication manager furthermore emphasizes the responsibility to represent both the views of the organisation and its stakeholders (Spicer, 1997: 293-294).

5.2 Searching for universal values to guide the ethical/moral ombudsperson

Before discussing some super concepts in communication management that have traditionally been accepted as ensuring the aforementioned, the values that may come from various religious and cultural views should be considered. The question to be answered is whether followers of diverse cultural and religious backgrounds could be unified under organisational values, and if so, whether these values could realistically be translated into ethical/moral and socially responsible communication management practices.

In this instance the essence (principles) of two prominent cultural philosophies, Ubuntu and Confucianism, and two prominent religious philosophies, namely the Christian belief system and Buddhism, were compared to search for common values, which would transcend time, religion and culture. This comparison pointed to the central themes of love, peace, reciprocity in relationships, humanism and general moral behaviour (Parrinder, 1983).

The need for such ethical norms is emphasized by Michael Josephson (IN Seib & Fitzpatrick, 1995:21) who identified ten universal and timeless values summarized by Seib & Fitzpatrick (1995:22) as: integrity, honesty and fairness. They define integrity as: "sound moral principle" and actually include honesty and fairness under this umbrella term. Mel Sharpe (IN Seib & Fitzpatrick, 1995:22) reiterated that honesty and fairness are two ethical absolutes and defined them as "the behaviour required to create and

maintain harmony in human relationships". As the communication manager is responsible for the establishment and maintenance of relationships, the involvement in ethical decision-making against the background of these definitions is self-explanatory.

Love and peace can be associated with the deep sense of respect that organisations ought to have for themselves and with whomever or whatever they have relationships. Since relationships are the ultimate commodity in today's business environment, they should be treated as such. The values and attitudes that are intrinsically part of interpersonal relationships should enter the equation in the business world. The question is no longer whether one is willing to take another party into consideration in any process – it is assumed that this will happen: "Relationship skills are no longer a luxury. They are a necessity – both in business and for our global survival" (Youngblood, 1997:270).

But if one wants to relate these values to the ethical/moral ombudsperson role of communication managers, these have to be compared to the values that are commonly held as the ideal within the literature and practice of this profession.

Roth, Hunt, Stavropoulos and Babik (1996) and Kruckeberg (1993) have all described some of the ethical dilemmas in this profession, and they have contemplated whether it would be realistic to establish an international code of ethics that will transcend international and cultural borders. They have listed respect for public interest, honesty, fairness, truth, integrity and accuracy as the basis for almost all codes of professional ethics for professional bodies.

Since these values also seem to reflect those common features of the four world views and religions, they should form the basis for ethical and socially acceptable organisational values, and form an inherent part of the communication manager's mental makeup and professional attitude.

5.3 Challenges to universal values

The traditional approach to decision-making and the interpretation of the temporal nature of a system privileged the present, and meaning was derived from the past (Cilliers, 1998:139). The postmodern view is that responsibility should also be taken for the unpredictable and unknowable future, and that the effects of decisions should be anticipated even though decisions have to be made now. Therefore, ethical decisions should be made by taking the consequences into consideration, and to fall back on a rigid universal set of principles would deny the complexities of the fast-changing environment in which organisations function. Although universal and legal principles and values have to be taken as the basis for decision-making they should be remotivated

each time they are used. "To behave ethically means not to follow rules blindly – to merely calculate – but to follow them responsibly, which may imply that the rules must be broken" (Cilliers, 1998:139). Complexity and postmodern approaches recognise the development of complex relationships where a rigid set of rules would not be possible. Cilliers (1998:139) proposes the following considerations to judge every situation responsibly:

- Respect for diversity as an inherent value in itself.
- Even though it is impossible to have access to all information possible, one should strive to seek the whole truth.
- Even though it is impossible to predict the future, consequences of decisions should be anticipated.
- Because of continuous changes in the environment, it may be possible that decisions turn out to be imperfect. It is crucial for these decisions to be researched, revised and ultimately reversible, if necessary.

The moral responsibility of communication managers should not be limited to the current or immediate future, and the abovementioned values would provide guidelines and an understanding or morality to assist ethical decision-making that would surpass time. Without this knowledge, it would be virtually impossible to navigate your organisation through the current unpredictable environment of social values and market forces.

6. CONCLUSION

It is the responsibility of every professional communication manager to be intellectually sophisticated in ethical decision-making, and these must be grounded in theories developed and strengthened over time, but should also meet the demands of every particular situation (Seib & Fitzpatrick, 1995:114). To be truly seen as professional and credible, it is to the advantage of communication managers to be ethically educated in order to provide strategic advice on ethical issues.

The boundary-spanning function of communication managers enables them to be in touch with all the stakeholders of the organisation, but also to be advisers to management on issues in the environment. For this position to be exploited to its utmost, a firm research background that would make the communication manager more credible should be developed. Research has shown that communication managers who are more knowledgeable and well trained in formal research could contribute to the reaching of strategic goals of the organisation (Ströh & Leonard, 1999). Proficient skills in research also sensitise communication managers to ethical issues and create an awareness of minority voices to be consulted in the decision-making process.

The most important role that communication managers should fulfil in terms of ethical issues in the organisation, especially if they are not well trained and feel inadequate to give advice on ethics, is to facilitate dialogue and discourse on ethical issues. It is especially important to bring minority groups to the discussion tables so that they can participate and assist in ethical decision-making. If all the parties concerned share the responsibility of decision-making it would empower them and contribute to two-way symmetrical communication, thereby ensuring more ethical processes and outcomes.

In future, communication managers cannot only be the non-symbolic and symbolic decision-makers or administrative heads of departments, expert negotiators and strategic thinkers, but should also be true custodians of corporate consciousness – moral leaders on behalf of both organisations and society as a whole. But this places the responsibility on such individuals to prove that they deserve this position.

If communication managers can fulfil the role and play the political game of being conflict managers between the organisation and its different stakeholders, they should be able to facilitate ethical decision-making. Communication managers should further be educated in ethics, fulfil their role as impartial boundary spanners between the organisation and stakeholders, undertake research to include minority opinions and facilitate participation for ethical decision-making. If communication managers have the ability to adhere to these demands, they could fulfil the role as ethical ombudsperson in the organisation.

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S. Verwey

Public relations: A new professionalism for a new millennium?

ABSTRACT

The advent of the Communication Age sets the challenge for public relations to lead corporations and other organisations on several levels, including the integration of relationships with various stakeholders, management functions, corporate and organisational structures as well as the integration with society. The successful integration at these levels will depend on the range of leadership that corporate communication professionals demonstrate from a macro level of interaction with society to a more micro level of individual stakeholders. As a result, public relations professionals must understand the major issues and trends confronting business and society, and be able to effectively communicate their longterm implications to management. Key issues that will remain of concern include many challenges that are a function of technology and changing times. The future of public relations practice depends on how well the profession adapts to changes in the new media environment and to shifts in economic, social and business paradigms.

This article explores the reasons why public relations practice has grown increasingly complex and discusses the challenges, threats and opportunities facing the profession in the new millennium.

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1. INTO THE NEW MILLENNIUM

The swift movement of technology, the mobility of organisations and people in the global world, and the competition for markets and customers have all combined to ensure that the stable and developed world known to modern economics, is gone forever (D'Aprix, 1994:14). According to Merry (1999:b), organisations must survive in a world of accelerated change, in an intertwined global village, powered by breakthroughs in technology. Sustainability has become an essential feature of adaptive corporations because of the complexity, instability and uncertainty of times. According to Caywood (1997:xi) on entering the 21st century, public relations will lead corporations and other organisations on several levels, including the integration of relationships with various stakeholders, the integration of management functions, the integration of corporate and organisational structures and finally integration with society.

The value of the contribution of public relations professionals to this integration process emerges from the self-defined role of the professional to build relations or integrate relationships between the organisation and its publics. The successful integration at these levels will depend on the range of leadership that corporate communication professionals demonstrate from a macro level of interaction with society to a more micro level of individual stakeholders. As more and more corporations around the world begin to rely on public relations professionals to guide them through the complex issues they face in an increasingly global marketplace, those professionals must have expertise in strategic and analytical skills as well as tactical tools. Graham (1997:274) maintains that public relations has reached a significant turning point in its evolution as a profession. According to Cardwell (1997:3), in order to track the career path of any profession, it is necessary to adopt the mantle of futurists such as Faith Popcorn or John Naisbett, and self-confidently gaze into the future of the profession. Without being able to interpret and predict trends, based on a comprehension of the past and the larger world in which we operate, any discussion related to public relations as a profession will prove futile and ultimately of little use.

In today's highly competitive business environment, with the growing influence of consumer activism on business behaviour and more public attention focused on business actions and their consequences, public relations has the opportunity to become one of the key management disciplines of the future. Public relations professionals will increasingly be called upon to interpret external developments and formulate plans to address a broad range of issues. As a result, public relations professionals must understand the major issues and trends confronting business and society, and be able to communicate their longterm implications to management effectively. The key issues that will remain of concern include many challenges that are a function of technology and changing times. The future of public relations practice depends on how well the

profession adapts to changes in the new media environment and to shifts in economic, social and business paradigms. Many of the issues that are currently being debated as a result of these changes are not new. Many of the debates have been raging since the inception of public relations as a field of scientific study. What is new is the importance of addressing these issues in a meaningful way as a result of global paradigm shifts and the concomitant impact this has on the practice of public relations in new global contexts. The purpose of this article is simply to stimulate debate about these issues by reporting current viewpoints of public relations scholars on these issues. It is envisaged that this may stimulate debate and possible research on the impact of these issues on the profession and practice of public relations in South Africa.

2. TRENDS AFFECTING THE PRACTICE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

2.1 Global economic shifts

Globalisation and technological change are spawning new sources of competition; deregulation is changing the rules of competition in many industries; markets are becoming more complex and unpredictable; and information flows in a tightly wired world enable firms to sense and react to competitors at a faster rate (Day and Reibstein, 1997:2). Globalisation describes the increasing convergence and interdependence of national economies and of the scope and availability of markets, distribution systems, capital, labour and technology. Grulke (1995:1) contends that through the application of communication networks and digital technologies, constraints of time and space have changed, geographical and industrial borders have shifted and the importance of geographic location has decreased. The increasing need for business transformation in order to position the new business context represents a fundamental shift in the relationship of corporations to individuals and to society as a whole. With new technology comes new business possibilities, such as the ability to set up a business with a much smaller physical presence, that provides better service to customers, with more information that is customised to the unique needs of the customer (Rossini, 1999:66). According to Rossini (1999:66), concepts such as personalisation, one-to-one marketing, suggestion engines, affordable communication, and a deep richness of information with a very large reach are some of the benefits of new Internet technology. The key is that e-commerce is not about technology. It is about the application of technologies that facilitate communication, support business processes and leverage the marketing and branding capabilities of the Internet. Increased media sophistication extends to all global markets, but in particular to Europe and to a lesser degree to the developing countries of Asia and Latin America (Clark, 1997). Media fragmentation is evident in the growing number of worldwide publications. The new high impact media will have a profound influence on public opinion. As a result, the competition to reach key constituencies will become fierce, necessitating media relations to become a more

knowledge-based profession. New, imaginative forms of information distribution will emerge and it will become increasingly difficult to control the speed of two-way, interactive communication. Media developments continue to progress towards narrowcasting – ultimately resulting in programming customised for the individual.

Companies large and small are starting up virtual businesses, reaching new markets and carving out new opportunities in existing markets by finding new ways to add value (Gordon, 1999:64). Strenski (1998:25) maintains that as a result, consumer marketing or “value marketing” will be increasingly important. Corporate reputations will play a dominant role in the response customers will give to a variety of competitive offerings.

In future, corporations will face increased challenges in maintaining a positive corporate image, and the benefits of having such an image will also increase (Graham, 1997:285). Communicating quickly and efficiently with an increasingly diverse audience will be both more important and more difficult to manage than ever before. This holds important implications for the public relations practitioner as the targets of public relations programming are becoming increasingly multicultural. The challenge for public relations practitioners in increasingly multicultural contexts is not just overcoming language barriers, but also understanding the cultural nuances that can impact on the effective execution of public relations strategies. In an increasingly sophisticated business arena, there is more interaction among strategic stakeholders than ever before. Corporate management is increasingly realising that important audiences must be treated as partners in the communication process, rather than mere targets. This positive change in objectives has significant consequences for the public relations professional who must understand, analyse, and approach key audiences with arguments that are meaningful and clearly understood. According to Goring (1997:75), this means honing information and personalizing it for increasingly diverse audiences. Technology will continue to drive this segmentation with vendors introducing new ways to reach tightly defined targets. According to Gardenswartz and Rowe (1995:5), diverse communication teams are more adept at identifying emerging markets because they are more attuned to these groups’ needs and preferences. Attaining the best reputation for the organisation will be an asset prized by management and CEOs will increasingly assume responsibility for communicating clear visions and strong values, which will set aggressive benchmarks on which to build their corporate reputation goals. This necessitates local and global interests to be united within a global business and communication strategy. For the corporation’s international companies, local business and communication plans should be developed based on local markets, issues and products. McIntosh (1990:12) contends that given the complexity of a diverse world, organisational structures would have to be rethought to institutionalise the protection of diversity and distinct forms of human community. As a result of globalisation, organisations have to improve their ability to satisfy, and even delight, an increasingly

diverse set of customers around the world. If business organisations are to succeed in the global marketplace, they will have to understand and value diversity because mergers, acquisitions and alliances are blurring the once distinct borders of the firm.

2.2 Shifting social paradigms

While paradigm shifts are most often driven by technology, ultimately the most important manifestations are social – increasing the level of social complexity and leading to profound changes in society to which the company (as the dominant institution of the industrial age) must adapt. Successful corporations in the new millennium need to develop a new role built around the invention of a new social contract, which sees corporations redefining the boundaries of their responsibility and accepting accountability for the way in which they use resources and contribute to the environment. As a result of the transition to a new global perspective, managers are challenged to decentralise authority and responsibility radically in order to empower people to care for themselves more directly, simultaneously creating a self-organising system for managing a complex world (Halal, 1993:61). This increasing need for business transformation in order to position the new business context represents a fundamental shift in the relationship of corporations to individuals and to society as a whole. This holds important implications for organisational–public relationships, which are defined by Ledingham, Bruning & Wilson (1999:160) as the state that exists between an organisation and its key publics in which the actions of either entity impact on the economic, social, political and/or cultural well-being of the other entity.

Value-added intermediaries or info-mediaries, such as public relations professionals, may see their roles expanded in a world of exploding information, new paths to people and the need for timely access. With the advent of the Communication Age and its globe spanning communications, and with world strife creating a more volatile public opinion environment, public relations practice has grown increasingly complex. The global expansion as a result of the development of new communication technologies offers great new opportunities for public relations professionals to (re)present the interests of business organisations in increasingly multicultural contexts. However, it also offers major challenges. Consumerism is spreading worldwide, fuelling business growth and a demand for business communications. Disintermediation as a result of the development of information and communication technology greatly democratises access to the means of communication and to information and knowledge. It takes the power conferred by the control of information away from a tiny elite and makes it available to many. Interactive communication allows people to sidestep institutions completely. Individuals who once felt powerless to change the course of events are discovering new ways to make their voices heard. Humanitarian groups are increasingly using interactive communication to collect information about human rights violations,

identify and warn about trouble spots, mobilise public opinion against violations and coordinate disaster and relief projects. This means that public relations professionals will have to understand issue dynamics (how disputes arise and are responded to by organisations and others in society), and develop appropriate issue response strategies. More importantly, these professionals will increasingly have to counteract issue activation by shaping the information inactive publics receive through aware publics, in order to address the level of concern created among aware publics. This is made more difficult by the low cost of entry to interactive communication, which is a powerful levelling factor, both socially and economically, because it allows individuals, small business or organisations to cooperate with, compete against or impede the efforts of much larger players.

Consequently, Hallahan (2001:47) contends that a more strategic approach to issue response is required than the current education-based activities such as alliance building, media advocacy and lobbying. It will entail a shift towards market and performance monitoring, ingratiation (creating favourable acceptance through relationship management) and reputation enhancement. As globalisation has placed more power in the hands of multinationals, it has also brought with it increased responsibilities. Simply refraining from bad corporate behaviour is no longer sufficient. Companies like Shell now have to practise sustainable development where human and environmental rights go hand in hand with economic development (Renton, 1998:7). Shell (1998:3) identifies four interlinked trends that will drive the need to engage and consult external stakeholders:

- The weakening of many national governments and traditional sources of authority and legitimacy
- The relative weakness or non-existence of institutions of global governance
- Increasing power and influence of business, particularly in the form of multi-national corporations
- Continuously accelerating the speed and reach of global communication.

It is within this broader political context that some leading organisations now find themselves having to pioneer new forms of stakeholder engagement and consultation in an effort to test and legitimise their proposed actions in globalising markets.

1.1 Shifts in business paradigms

Within this new global context, businesses are forced to rethink almost every aspect of their behaviour in order to create a sustainable role (Mc Cown, 1993:69). More and more firms are realising that they must transform their old organisations in ways that allow them to add more value in an information age economy. The New Organisational Paradigm recognizes multiple constituencies, customers, the community, the

environment and perhaps most importantly the employees. According to McCown (1993:68), the organisations that prosper and survive will be those organisations that find new ways to flatten hierarchies and empower the workforce. Interactive communication enables organisations to shed the middle layers of management whose function is to mediate between organisational levels or constituents. The process of disintermediation has helped level hierarchies because it makes direct communication access possible. Instead of flowing via the organisational hierarchy, it now flows through "collegial networks" where colleagues interact with each other directly. These collegial networks cut out the middleman, very often the formal management layer, in their communication (White, 2000:59). In many organisations this has led to a much more open culture that obviates the need for intercessors. Interactive communication blurs lines of authority that are normally imposed through controls such as hierarchies. It provides greater access to information and a much broader instantaneous ability to communicate. Because interactive communication facilitates dispersed collaboration, it harnesses different forms of organisational flexibility, unconstrained by the traditional barriers of space and time. These trends are a result of information and communication technologies, which facilitate the ability to telecommute, and the use of contract services in lieu of full-time employees. This trend has also impacted on the practice of public relations with an increasing flow of client professionals into public relations agency jobs (Drobis & Tysse, 1997:247). In this sense, employee communication is emerging as a distinct challenge. With the emergence of roaming office workers, communicating with them has become a challenge that can only be overcome through technological connectivity. On-line electronic services provide forums that open new sources of external information for employees and make global communication possible between employees, suppliers, contractors and customers. Clark (1997:223) contends that public relations practitioners will have to develop a full understanding of all forms of the media and the roles they play between organisations and individuals. Of growing importance as a result of the emergence of new communication technology is the role of advocacy communication. As the media emerge, credibility and source will become of increasing importance. As a result, the competition to reach key constituencies will become fierce, necessitating media relations to become a more knowledge-based profession. The emergence of new communication technologies requires an integration of existing public relations technology with the emerging technologies, thus enabling the practitioner to make the best possible use of communication options (Thoms, 1996:24). The future of public relations practice hinges on how well it adapts to the new media environment, and how it translates this understanding into useful counsel for its clients. The new forms of media being created today will not only allow public relations practitioners to deliver information and ideas to finely segmented publics, but also promote dialogue between professionals. Networks of media should foster networking between practitioners, especially during times of transformation. Clark (1997) contends that public relations professionals will either have to connect with

new media and digital networks, or suffer professional collapse as others take on these roles and create the cyber relationships needed to compete in an emerging digital world. Ryan (1999:29) proposes that practitioners must also integrate all the knowledge about new communication technologies with those traditional skills and values that made them successful in another era, and redefine their roles to meet the challenges posed by the development of new communication technologies and new economic, cultural and business contexts.

Within the new organisation, a more enlightened view of the psychological contract is emerging, which assumes individual self-responsibility as a given, while recognising that the corporation has an important social role to play. This new social contract is based on the principle that to create more value in the marketplace – through quality, responsiveness and innovation – more value must be created in the workplace. This means that where the focus in the past has been on communicating key messages to selected target audiences, public relations professionals will now have to shift the focus towards establishing and managing strategic relationships both inside and outside the organisation. Public relations practitioners have begun to realise the importance of not only measuring communication efforts, but also measuring how effective they have been in building and maintaining sound relationships with key internal and external constituencies. Theorists have concluded that a key to understanding the levels of satisfaction held by customers or clients towards a given organisation is found in the attitudes and opinions that are held by its employees (Lindenmann, 1998:18). Organisations that have problems of morale will never be capable of delivering the level of customer service required to succeed in competitive markets. The increased emphasis on managing relationships not only improves economic opportunities but also helps to avoid or minimize conflicts or crises with strategic stakeholders. Holtzhausen (2000:110) contends that in a world defined by continuous change, public relations practitioners need to play an important role in activating and defining change in organisations and societies. The ability of the public relations professional to deal with the changes in society will enable those who work in institutions to contribute to their organisation's survival and effectiveness.

Morgan (1986:335) states "...there is a close relationship between the way we think and the way we act, and the many organisational problems that are embedded in our thinking. This has very important consequences. First, it encourages us to take ownership of the part we play in shaping the problems we have to solve...Second, an appreciation of the close relationship between thought and actions can create new ways of organising." Public relations professionals will increasingly have to lead their corporations' relationships at both macro and micro levels. From micro relationships, built with many stakeholder groups, the corporate and organisational public relations professional will guide the corporate values that permit organisations to operate in society at macro level. Public

Relations can be the formal mechanism that incorporates questions of ethics and responsibility into organisational decision-making. Public relations also introduce the values and problems of stakeholders into strategic decisions whereby a moral element is introduced into those decisions. Activist pressures have afforded public relations professionals an uncommon opportunity to develop ways to align the goals of society and the goals of business more closely and responsibly. Spicer (1997) uses the term collaborative advocacy to describe the dual role of public relations professionals in current contexts where they act as both advocate and collaborator. Balancing self-interest with the interests of others is a give-and-take process that can waver between advocacy and collaboration. Grunig & Huang (1999) identify four key indicators of relationships: trust, control mutuality, satisfaction and commitment. Trust and control mutuality seem to be particularly important in a collaborative relationship. Communal relationships are particularly relevant as an outcome of symmetrical public relations. Although marketing supports the shift towards individualism through the customisation and competitiveness of organisations, the purpose of public relations should be to balance those tendencies by introducing collaboration and collectivism. Communicators can facilitate collaboration by seeking out diverse employee groups to serve as informal advisers, sounding-boards or colleagues in the creation and delivery of marketing support materials (Laurie, 1997:241). Collaboration with diverse employee groups in accurately and swiftly targeting diverse market segments can bring a real competitive advantage to the firm (Laurie, 1997:235).

Given the impact of shifting social paradigms and the corresponding shift in human value systems, real success, for both big business and the public, lies in the large enterprise conducting itself in the public interest in such a way that the public will give it sufficient freedom to serve effectively (Page, 1999:14). Boyd (2000:343) contends that institutions that are accepted as legitimate are allowed by their publics to operate and exercise authority and influence. Institutions are considered legitimate if their publics perceive them to be responsible and useful. Boyd (2000:344) notes that legitimacy inheres in an institution that acts in accordance with public values. In the past, public relations practitioners have typically dealt with issues of legitimacy mostly on a macro level and very often in situations of crisis where organisations sought to dissociate themselves from wrongdoing and seek a return of institutional legitimacy. Within the new business context, much more emphasis will have to be placed on building a supportive coalition of stakeholders at micro level where corporate dialogue with publics is still possible when those publics can affect corporate policy and before any crises occur. According to Boyd (2000:349), factional legitimacy is not aimed at gaining approval of the corporation's place in the social structure, but to gain approval from critical publics for a specific corporate policy or activity. According to Crable (1990), actional legitimacy is quintessential in a wide variety of non-crises public relations situations from introducing a new retirement policy to changing the

company name. In future, actional legitimating will compel public relations practitioners to focus on gaining support for specific, individual policies before or during the implementation of these policies.

2. PREDICAMENTS OF PRACTICE IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

As more and more corporations call upon public relations professionals to interpret external developments and to formulate plans to address a broad range of issues, public relations professionals must increasingly develop strategic skills and good judgement in order to provide the strategic counsel senior management requires. This entails PR executives to be positioned to engender conditions for success if they possess the following characteristics (Graham, 1997:275):

- Public relations professionals will have access to the highest levels of management - thereby enhancing their effectiveness in managing the organisation's reputation.
- Senior executives will recognise public relations as a key management discipline - one that is distinguished by the need to cut across all management functions to address a range of issues affecting the corporation's reputation.
- The public relations function, in a broad sense, will be credible and command the respect of other management functions within the corporation.

Toth, Serini, Wright and Emig (1998:161) hold the view that roles in public relations are in progress, enacted in economic circumstances that require practitioners to retool and reinvent themselves to respond and even keep ahead of the demands of and change in their organisation. Pieckza (2000:212) points to the fact that early writers and researchers of professions took the important stabilizing role those professions play in the social structure for granted. In public relations, the term professionalism is usually linked to the expression of a need to improve occupational standing. According to Pieckzka (2000:211), this deals with the way in which practitioners can demonstrate their value to clients. This is often presented as a question of effectiveness. Grunig & White (1992) contend that three worldviews have limited the excellence and accompanying effectiveness of public relations.

1.1 The view that public relations is asymmetrical

According to Grunig (1989), it is difficult if not impossible to practise public relations in a way that is ethically and socially responsible using an asymmetrical model. Grunig (1989) argues that practitioners with an asymmetrical worldview presuppose that the organisation knows best and that publics benefit from cooperating with it. Woodward (2000:270) contends that public relations professionals who are guided by the norms of dialogue must assume a management responsibility to direct contact beyond the limited interactional relations that define patterns of buying, selling, support and

competition. Dialogic engagement with publics and constituencies acknowledges their capacity for creative action and their role in shaping the field of material, informational, socio-cultural and technological resources (Woodward, 2000:70). Makau & Arnett (1997:x) contend that the dialogic perspective enables practitioners to exert leadership in modelling communication in an age of diversity and therefore it should be regarded as appropriate for an age of global communication and economics. Understanding how dialogue is established and maintained is key to responsible public relations professionalism in this era of global communication and business when the challenge to engage the constituents' interests and elicit their support involves contacts with internationally diverse publics. Culbertson (1996:256) contends that public relations professionals must respond to an intensified demand to provide guidance in relationship building and maintenance as part of their distinctive contribution to organisational management. Public relations as a field of practice and study should respond by movement from one-way to two-way communication and from emphasizing knowledge and persuasion to relationship building. According to Culbertson (1996:ix), truly effective public relations practitioners ought to provide the guidance that fosters dialogue between an organisation and its publics.

1.2 The view that public relations has a neutral or advocacy role in society

Grunig & White (1992) reject the notion that public relations can adopt a neutral role because worldviews and values affect both, and lead to criticism of the organisational behaviours that are observed, while also influencing the recommendations that are made for more effective behaviour. The advocacy approach is based on a worldview that sees society as a system in which knowledge and information provide power and influence, and can be used to bring about change. Grunig & Grunig (1996) believe that a critical problem of public relations ethics is how to deal with the problem of divided loyalties that practitioners experience when they try to balance their personal values with those of organisations, publics and other professionals. Scholars of both management and public relations (Nicotera & Cushman, 1992; Wright, 1985) have pointed out that individual and organisational ethics may differ, and that the ethics of a profession as a whole may differ from the ethics of individual practitioners or organisations. Holtzhausen & Verwey (1998) identify at least three levels at which worldviews and values come into play:

- Macro (societal ethics as reflected by prevailing societal norms)
- Meso (organisational ethics as reflected by the organisational norms through organisational culture)
- Micro (individual ethics as reflected by individual behaviour in the practice of public relations).

According to Grunig & White (1992), most public relations practitioners adopt either

a pragmatic, conservative, radical or idealistic social role in public relations practice. An asymmetrical worldview underlies pragmatic, conservative and radical social roles. In contrast to the other three, the idealistic social role takes a symmetrical approach to public relations. Sullivan (in Grunig, 2000:30) identifies three types of values in public relations that are strongly related to social roles:

- Technical values that do not relate to ethical problems because they are by definition impersonal and amoral. Public relations technicians incorporate these values.
- Partisan values that underlie the willingness to champion a cause or belief and to defend its essential rightness. These values underlie an asymmetrical approach to public relations.
- Mutual values which refer to human rights, which belong to people and cannot be taken away. Mutual values support the idealistic role as well as the two-way symmetrical model.

According to Hutton (1999), those involved with public relations will agree that the public relations field suffers from a poor public image and that the practitioners of public relations have come to be associated with a litany of derogatory terms. The general public seems to believe that public relations practitioners as a whole have no ethical values. Public relations practitioners have for decades sought a professional status that matches those of other professions, and attempts to maintain that status have been a major concern in the industry. According to Grunig (2000:23), public relations must achieve professional status before its role will be broadly accepted as valuable to society and organisational clients will readily acknowledge its value. Hon (1998:115) stresses, however, that part of the problem in demonstrating the value of public relations is that many of the contributions public relations makes go beyond the outcomes of measurable activities. In the current business context, public relations practices have to be reprogrammed with current issues in the public relations field such as management's insistence on accountability, the focus on return on investment, and proving the bottom-line impact. Pieckza (2000:214) notes that professionalism is not only a matter of knowing what the right solutions are, but convincing others of the legitimacy of these solutions and the professionals' right to deal with the problem in the first place. Professions are based on core values and a body of knowledge that provide expertise on how to implement those values. Grunig (2000:25) contends that public respect and the relative autonomy it provides are key characteristics of a profession that public relations must develop, and that will eventually allow public relations practitioners to rise above serving only the self-interests of client organisations. Grunig & Hunt (1984) identify five traits that determine the extent of professionalisation:

- set of professional values;
- strong professional organisations that socialise practitioners into these values;
- professional norms to enforce values;

- technical skills; and
- an intellectual tradition and an established body of knowledge.

Kruckeberg (1988) acknowledges that if (1) ethics is the art or science of humankind's efforts to live in harmonious relationships with other individuals, groups or institutions and is also the study of humankind's moral responsibility to discern the rightness or wrongness of its actions, and if (2) ethics is part of morality, the latter which is characterized as that which is right and proper, and if (3) codes of ethics are rules of good conduct for dealing with one another in the best ultimate interests of all concerned, it would seem both instructive and beneficial to examine the feasibility of developing and applying a unified and comprehensive code of ethics for professional communicators representing transnational companies.

1.1 The view that public relations is a technical function

The worldview of public relations as a technique is closely associated with the press agency and public information models of public relations. Grunig (1989b:18) contends that public relations practitioners occupy two major roles, the technician and the manager. The technician is found in all organisations with public relations departments. In this instance, the practitioner largely implements decisions made by others, with primary responsibility dedicated to relevant materials production. In contrast, the manager functions as an expert prescriber, communication and problem-solving facilitator, depending on the situational demands of both clients and organisations. Austin, Pinkleton & Dixon (2000:237) note that the manager is ultimately responsible for programme accountability, whereas the remaining responsibilities related to implementation are likely to fall to technicians. The manager's responsibilities include issues response, goal and objective development, budget preparation and research decisions. Farmer & Waugh (1999:236) contend that: "knowledge to enact the manager role is the single most powerful correspondence of excellence in public relations and communication management." This unmistakably supports the need for the current paradigm shift of the public relations profession from a technical standing to a more managerial and strategic role within an organisation.

Multiple internal and external forces have forced practitioners to develop programmes that can demonstrate greater effectiveness. Hogg & Doolan (1999:1) suggest that in order to understand the role played by practitioners, it is necessary to consider both the organisational context within which the practitioner operates and the extent to which the practitioner's role is influenced by the expectations of those within the organisation who are responsible for determining public relations policy. Acharya (1983) also demonstrates an association between practitioner roles and organisational environments, finding that technicians are dominant in organisations with a non-

threatening or stable environment, while managers tend to be linked to organisations with threatening or unstable environments. Graham (1997:285) suggests that in future, CEOs are more likely to play an active role in setting communication goals for their firms and insisting on measurable programmes to achieve those goals. Grunig (1997:291) contends that the strategic management of public relations must be integral to the management of the overall organisation. Grunig (1997:293) reports that at least two types of managerial roles can be discerned: the supervisors and the more executive types who serve at the highest level of the organisation. The executive senior managers are members of the dominant coalition and, as such, they have immediate and frequent access to the power elite. Grunig (1997:293) also reports that CEOs prefer their top public relations person to adopt a managerial rather than a technician role. Participation in strategic management also elevates public relations from a reactive style of management to a more proactive approach. A study by Moss, Warnaby & Newman (2000:277) of practitioner role enactment in UK companies revealed considerable differences in the level of practitioner involvement in strategic decision-making.

Factors such as the industry and organisational context, management expectations of public relations, and the perceived professional competence of practitioners emerged as important determinants of the level of practitioner involvement in strategic decision-making. Caywood (1997:xiii) believes that the boundary spanning role of the public relations in which managers operate at the permeable boundary of the organisation permits the PR professional to interact with a diverse range of stakeholders, but it also creates the expectation that PR is fully aware of the changing expectations of society and the importance of matching corporate and societal goals. Clark (1997:24) contends that in increasingly global contexts, the role of the practitioner could become so pervasive that it is no longer a specialty staff function. In this context, practitioners must redefine themselves to be highly relevant within emerging global trends. Shifting geographic boundaries and the evolution of virtual communities of interest will no doubt impose new demands for client council based on improved access to relevant information from around the world. The increasing need for high purpose and high function public relations will require new broad-based competence in a number of fields. The future practice of public relations will be shaped by several factors, many of which have been discussed in this article. What is evident is that public relations will increasingly require knowledge working at many levels and necessitate lifelong learning as public relations draws from a broader cross-section of professions over time.

2. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In conclusion, it is clear that the postmodern public relations practitioner will indeed serve as the conscience and change agent of the organisation. The importance of practising ethical leadership is pointed out by Fitzpatrick (1996:250) who contends

that public relations practitioners who have long been referred to as the 'social conscience' of the organisation they represent should be playing key roles in the ethical leadership of institutions because they seem uniquely qualified and situated to gather data and supply leadership and expertise that can help corporations to develop effective and useful ethical standards. Public relations has a role to play in challenging the dominant worldviews and practices of the organisation when these are perceived to be unjust. According to Pratt (1994:72), open two-way symmetrical public relations strives to be the 'standard bearer(s) of ethical initiatives', striving to view their responsibility to society in general as more important than its responsibility to the employer or client. Holtzhausen (2000) believes that the future role of the public relations professional should be to demystify the organisation and its practices continuously, and to transform it into a more democratic institution, for both its internal and external publics. Grunig (2000:28) sees values at the centre of ethical decision-making in public relations because public relations ethics involves the application of one's personal and professional values in juxtaposition with the values of our client organisations and the publics with which the organisation have relations. Toth & Pavlik (2000:1) point to the fact that practising ethical public relations may become one of the greatest challenges for the public relations professionals of the 21st century. The ability to practise ethical public relations might well determine the success of practitioners in managing strategic relationships, and interpreting the complex dynamics and interrelationships of society within a global context. While the predicaments of practice that have been highlighted in this article have characterized the field since its inception, these issues will clearly have to be resolved if public relations is to attain professional recognition and adopt its rightful role as one of the fastest growing career fields of the 21st century.

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The Last Word

M. Roodt

The new age and conventional communication

Despite 14 joint years of working for two large Parastatal corporations and the largest Financial Services institution on the African continent, and of late three years as an independent communication consultant, I still have no clear-cut answer to the question of what the future holds for conventional communication. Note that I am steering clear of the word communications.

Communications would in my view be referring to those information-technology-trained experts driving luxury cars at an age when they had barely qualified for a legal driver's licence, or to the richest person in the world who has, by starting a dot.com business, surpassed in stock wealth the software wunderkid of the eighties. They are indeed also part and parcel of communication. The only thing is that they seem to be successful on a large scale where people electing to qualify and practise in the field of conventional communication appear to have much less to be happy about.

This statement would probably further demoralise current students of communication, academia, starter-up practitioners, those who are in fact making it and let us not forget communication advisers. The question is are we making it professionally or are we practising an unnecessary art and science? Let us, explore this issue by looking objectively at some pertinent communication industry (not IT) mind teasers, turning them into statements and then arguing the realities surrounding them.

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- The communication industry is underdeveloped in terms of diversity. Public Relations represents communication and communication is PR!
- The communication industry is underdeveloped in terms of a body of knowledge.
- It has no professional recognition.
- It has no impact socially, economically and politically, whether local or global.
- It does not have or deserve top management recognition in commerce.
- It has no blueprint or best practice flagships with which to boast.
- Are we living in the shadow of electronic data communications?

Let us look at these teasers one by one!

The communication industry is fairly diverse. People are active in not only one type of communication but various, including Public Relations, Journalism, Intercultural Communication, Business Communication, Mass Media Communication, Organisational Communication, Graphic and Pictorial Communication, Corporate Communication, Oral and Speech Communication, Marketing Communication and so forth. It would therefore be unfair to describe communication as single dimensional and at the beck and call of one single field. A common misconception among the misinformed is that all communication falls under the umbrella of Public Relations (PR). Institutions representing PR seem to think so too! The reality of the matter is that PR is a sub-discipline of the larger communication field and should be positioned as such; nothing more, nothing less!

On the issue of communication being probably underdeveloped, it is difficult to dispute the fact that most areas of communication are still in their infancy. Communication has its roots in other disciplines of human sciences and while one should never forget this fact, it will have to research and create its own tailor-made body of knowledge and practices. Universities and other tertiary institutions seem to go a long way in developing syllabuses tailor made to industry needs. If communication is then underdeveloped in terms of a body of knowledge, this situation will change with investing time and effort. Rome was not built in one day, but it is today one of the well-known cities of the world. Communication can also reach such stage.

This brings one to the question of professional recognition! The existence of international and national institutions representing the interest of people active in communication does not imply professional recognition. Why? Firstly, the mission and activities of these institutions seem to be an extension of formal communication education (more than anything else). Secondly, their ability to serve as lobbyists for professional recognition of communication should be questioned.

Professional recognition is not in the eye of the beholder. It has been said that while

you act professionally, you will enjoy recognition professionally and other privileges; monetary or non-monetary. Not so! Human Resources Management is a case in point. HR management has developed into a fully-recognised professional science with a need for its diverse sub-disciplines entrenched and enforced by legislation. A host of Labour-related Acts compels corporate institutions to make use of relevant HR services or face the consequences.

Could one then expect communication to enjoy the same legal backing as HR, for instance? Probably not in the foreseeable future! It took HR many decades to develop to what it is today. Henri Fayol, forebear of modern management thinking, probably gave HR the necessary start when he declared "personnel management" as part of the six main things that should be managed in any modern organisation. Communication needs a Fayol.

Communication and particularly journalism in all its mass media manifestations have in past changed and are as we speak changing the world socially, economically and politically. Journalist and mass media vehicles bring social injustices to you, in your lounge, on a daily basis. It forces the powers that be to take action. Newspapers also, turn economic perceptions around on a daily basis and shape investment decisions. Politically, governments try their utmost to legislate the mass media. This speaks volumes.

There is no doubt that communication has an impact socially, economically and politically.

Does communication have or deserve top management recognition in commerce and where it is elsewhere employed? Recognition has made progress in the past decade, but communication as a top management function is still left wanting. Except for a handful of organisations, communication managers are normally subjected to the line authority of either the marketing or HR director. This clearly shows that communication is not recognised as a management function on a par with other functions in the organisation.

Does it deserve to be up there with other management functions? The answer is unequivocally "yes"! Communication is not elevated to its rightful place is because of two basic reasons. The first is the quality of people practising communication in commerce in particular but also in other sectors in general. They should leave their comfort zones behind and realise that the time has come for them to aspire to new heights and fight for what they believe in. One way of doing this is to improve the strategic value adding of communication; thus having less tea parties that are easy to organise and no threat to job security and doing more strategic thinking.

The second reason refers to typical South African corporate cultures and leadership. How often do you hear captains of industry saying: "the time is not right to go public" or internally "we do not want to make statements to the employees yet". Corporate leaders are in my own subjective view generally uncomfortable with open and honest communication. This excludes those leaders who have the courage and conviction to use communication internally and externally as often as they can. They realise that either you plan and control your stakeholder communication or some newspaper will. We salute them, even if they are few and far between.

Having made all the comments about communication so far, one needs to look at sub-disciplines of communication that should be commended for progress made and the pure energy and pride they invest in building their profession.

An avid reader of newspapers and magazines and also a keen watcher of television programmes myself, I am very proud of South African journalism, our advertising industry and pictorial communication.

With the necessary capital injection, our local film and documentary industry could match the best in the world. Adfocus 2000, annually published by Financial Mail, boasts international awards for creativity and excellence in our advertising cum marketing communication industry. A host of local newspapers and magazines displayed on the shelves of any CNA speaks for South African journalism. To the question of whether communication has sub-disciplines to be proud of, the answer is "yes". Communication has in pictorial communication, journalism and marketing communication a blueprint and best practises to serve as examples and an inspiration for other sub-disciplines.

Lower on the bragging list, but learning as time progresses, are Corporate Communication, Organisational Communication, Intercultural Communication and Business Communication. These areas of communication have a crucial role to play in the building of commerce and a sound South African economy.

The question is whether typical South African corporate culture and leadership would grant them the opportunity to do so?

A short recap: we started this article by saying that electronic data communication is making huge successful inroads in communications and will conclude it by asking the question: Are we living in the shadow of electronic data communication? Not necessarily at this stage, but it is on the horizon unless conventional communication experts do something about it. The answer lies in partnerships between conventional communication and electronic communication.

Web sites, e-mail, telephones, facsimiles, video conferencing, etc. are already the order of the day. Electronic data-based Management Information Systems can provide management with data quicker than any human being. Certain software packages can provide strategic information for planning and control more effectively than the average conventional communication expert. In short, is there in the information age still a role for us?

There is an important role to play in that the information technology is already causing information overload. Data should be turned into human communication and eventually business knowledge. The bad news is that we as conventional communication experts have a great deal of work ahead of us before we will be able to meet this challenge effectively. The good news is that at least we have this option available to us.

A partnership between electronic communication and conventional communication holds unlimited potential for new models of Corporate Communication, Organisational Communication and Business Communication. The question is: will conventional communication experts rise to the occasion or drop back into their comfort zones.

Finally, what are the chief challenges facing us in the conventional communication industry? Listed they are:

- Communication experts and students should stop feeling sorry for themselves and lobby for the right of their profession.
- Make it your business to invest energy and pride in developing conventional communication models and practices that add theoretical but strategic value to the world around us.
- Realise that most areas of conventional communication are still in their infancy phase with many years left on the learning curve.
- Conventional communication has its weaknesses but a bright future ahead.
- Realise that we are part and parcel of the information age. Electronic communications (note the "s") is not our enemy but our partner.

In conclusion, I would like to demonstrate the latter point by inviting comments on observations in this article. You may contact me on cellphone: 082 465 2707, fax (011) 827-8560 or e-mail: mcrcc@iafrica.com.

Research forum

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

DE JAGER, IM. 2000. The technical and the strategic role of communication managers and the organisational constraints that influence these roles.

MA (Communication Management)

Supervisor: Ursula Ströh

The role of the communicator can be divided into two main roles namely the technical and the strategic role. These two roles are interdependent of each other and work in close relationship with each other

Different organisational variables/constraints as identified in the study can influence these roles and prevent the communication manager from fulfilling either one of these roles or both. The literature study identified the following organisational variables and, if not applied correctly, constraints that might have an influence on the role of the communicator. The five organisational constraints that were identified in the literature study are:

- Placement of communicators within the organisational hierarchy;
- Reporting relationship to management;
- Size and budget of organisations and communication departments;
- The influence of organisational culture, and
- The influence of organisational expectations.

The aim of this study was to determine the influence of organisational constraints on the technical and strategic roles of the communication manager in the organisation. In-depth interviews were held with seven respondents (communication managers) of different industries to determine the influence of these organisational variables/constraints on the role of the communication/public relations manager.

All the above-mentioned organisational constraints identified in this study may have an influence, to a greater or lesser extent, on the technical and strategic role of the public relations manager. It is easier to overcome and determine their influence when these constraints are identified and evaluated. The number of constraints does not determine whether a public relations manager fulfils a strategic or technical role, but the extent of the influences determines the role-playing effect.

One constraint can also lead to another constraint which may have an influence on the roles to be played. The study identified certain trends which can be used as guidelines by communication managers in the industry. It must be borne in mind that these are only guidelines and not the norm, and that that they can assist the communicator in identifying his or her organisational variables. The variables will, in turn, enable them to understand their situation in the organisation and how to overcome certain constraints to fulfill the different roles identified in the study effectively.

ARNOLDI-VAN DER WALT, S.E 2000. The evaluation of Ubuntu as an Afrocentric management (and) communication approach.

Ph.D. (Communication Management)

Promotor: Dr Gustav Puth

Co-promotor: Prof Ronél Rensburg

This study endeavours to formulate a basis for theory development by comparing Western, Japanese and African management theories and philosophies, enabling the researcher to juxtapose these with the core value system, Ubuntu. These theories and philosophies are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive, but rather interrelated. Categories therefore support or compete with one another. In general, the comparative analysis was roughly grouped into dimensions based on macro-, socio-structural processes and those based on interpersonal processes. Although this dichotomy is a simplification of a range of views, it provided a parsimonious way to begin discussing issues of management communication. The broad aim of the study was to take the first steps in constructing a model that will, with further research, eventually result in a measurement instrument. The initial and perhaps most important contribution of the framework was to create an awareness among management of the differences (and similarities), that may exist in organisations found in a multicultural society.

This study, which starts from the premise that communication is a basis for human organising and thus a management function, has maintained throughout that the organisation has elements interacting to form constantly changing meanings constructed through communication.

The core elements of Ubuntu are respect, dignity, acceptance and care, need elements that proved to be universal, and therefore not exclusive to Ubuntu. Rather it is indicative of the need toward a softer approach to management, incorporating greater understanding of communalism and individualism in the South African organisation. It is recommended that care has to be taken not to use exclusive (Africanisation and Afrocentricity) concepts, but rather inclusive (South Africanisation), concepts. Both traditionally Western and African mechanisms of communication have to be integrated,

and shows that empowerment is a global phenomenon, but the way it is dealt with between cultures differ. Secondary research questions show that the continent's business environment is not homogeneous; that the problems experienced in South African organisations differ from the rest of Africa; values that are characteristically African are transcending African boundaries; and that these values are relevant to economic development, business management and to management communication in particular.

VAN DER AHEE, L. 2000. The correlation between employee satisfaction, vertical and horizontal communication.

MCom (Communication Management)

Supervisor: Prof Ronél Rensburg

The aim of the research is to provide a description of how participants experienced horizontal and vertical communication at ATC (Pty) Ltd. (a copper and fibre optic cable manufacturer), and to determine if there is a significant positive correlation between both horizontal and vertical communication, and employee satisfaction.

The research problem presented in this script is that most organisations either have not yet acknowledged the benefits of good communication, while others still do not know the key ingredients of effective communication. These organisations often inundate employees with ineffective communication, that influence employee satisfaction negatively, and subsequently, productivity. The paper also briefly discusses the relationship of communication and employee satisfaction with the organisational climate and leadership, due to these aspects' interactive relationships.

A non-experimental survey design, quantitative approach and descriptive strategy is followed. A pilot study was conducted with five selected employees at ATC (Pty) Ltd., while face validity measures were used, and the internal consistency reliability coefficient of variables determined. A hundred and four employees participated in the study. The whole population was targeted, and participants participated out of free will. This resulted in a relatively low response rate, and although ten percent of the workforce participated, the results can not be generalised to the population.

Both horizontal and vertical communication items, and the employee satisfaction items were rated high average, while, as expected, significant positive correlations were found between both vertical and horizontal communication and employee satisfaction. Although speculating, as no concrete evidence was produced from this research, it is very likely that a third variable such as organisational climate or leadership may impact on the correlational relationship between employee satisfaction and communication. A positive organisational climate may impact on productivity levels, and influence the

communication climate and employee satisfaction. Results from this research suggest that ATC (Pty) Ltd. is currently focusing on effective communication and acknowledges that effective communication can produce satisfied and productive employees.

SCHOEMAN, A. 2000. Identifying and understanding the key elements of strategic communication management in an attempt to demystify this concept for practical application.

MCom (Communication Management)

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The overarching challenge for public relations agencies that emerges in the pursuit of providing a more strategic service is to define strategic communication management. A *clear understanding* of strategic communication management is imperative and a simple definition will not suffice, therefore a process of unpacking the key elements of strategic communication management should be eminent when embarking on pursuing a clear understanding.

These elements can be used as a guideline by all public relations consultants and even in-house public relations managers, on how to be and become more strategic in providing their services to a client. But more importantly, it will make a major contribution in clarifying the concept of strategic communication management that up to now has been very nebulous and confusing in many people's minds.

By unpacking the elements of strategic communication management in a meaningful and scientific way, a better understanding of what it really means can be shared. The five factors of strategic communication management identified through research namely (a) research, (b) planning, (c) implementation, (d) strategic thinking and (e) account management (referring specifically to the agency environment) provide a "checklist" for the strategic communication manager.

Furthermore, these elements and the items that constitutes these elements, can be used to manage and measure clients' expectations with regard to providing a strategic communication management service. One of the elements that will need specific attention in the future is research. The case for more formal research has been argued extensively in both the literature review and research findings of this study.

