A COMPETENCY-BASED APPROACH TO COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT AS APPLIED TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

T E Claassen & S Verwey

Theresa Claassen is currently the Manager Corporate Communication at Portnet. This article is based on her doctoral dissertation which she completed under the promotorship of Prof. Sonja Verwey at the Rand Afrikaans University.

ABSTRACT

Change in the external environment, without exception, impacts upon the organisation and in particular the practising of public relations. Since the beginning of the nineties, the South African business environment is characterised by the redefinement of business practices and partners and the shifting of boundaries as an expression of the globalization of the world economy. The lifting of sanctions, together with the events that took place in the political arena, introduced unprecedented changes in the legal-political, economic and social environments. Against this background, an urgent need for the development of a context sensitive generic framework of required outputs for communication managers in a changing business environment, based on an integrated approach, was identified.

This article provides an overview of the dynamics of change in the external environment and the impact it has on the public relations function. A brief discussion regarding standard setting as envisaged by the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the professionalisation of public relations, with specific reference to training needs and accreditation, is included. The article also attempts to provide insight into the empirical process that led to the development of a generic framework and the hierarchial classification of outputs according to levels of work.

INTRODUCTION

South African organisations were excluded from international markets since the eighties when a variety of political, economic, diplomatic and social sanctions were imposed (Koenderman, 1982:19-22) causing business to be operated in isolation from international competition and technological advancements. The re-introduction of South Africa into the international markets not only gave South African businesses the opportunity to expand their

interests to foreign markets, but also led to an influx of foreign businesses into the local market. Suddenly faced with more experienced and well-seasoned competitors on the home-front, South African organisations had to explore new and better ways of doing business. Communication as the foundation on which the relationship between the organisation and its publics is built, became the obvious focal point for developing programs that could face these challenges. As organisations increasingly began to realise the importance of the public relations function, more became to be expected of in-house departments, while those organisations without public relations departments, employed consultancies to advise in this regard.

The election of the first democratic government in the South African history, also introduced changes to the external market environment with specific reference to the legal-political, economic, social and technological environments. As boundary-spanner between the organisation and its environment, the communication manager is responsible for the monitoring of changes and emerging issues, the predicting of consequences and the counselling of organisational leaders (Lubbe, 1994:11). As such, it became necessary to study the impact of the changes that took place since 1994 with the aim to provide a framework for further research into the role of the communication manager. This study sets out to establish the outputs required to meet these demands and follows a competency-based approach with the purpose of promoting quality management and professional competency-based training for communication managers.

THE DYNAMICS OF CHANGE IN THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

Legal-political environment

Case studies of world societies quickly reveals that stable democracy is foreign to situations in which welfare needs and demands far exceed the capacities of governments and their tax resources to meet them (Schlemmer en Van Antwerpen, 1992:86). Democracies are also rare in situations where the mass of voters have few key interests or social identities in common with the categories of people who have the funds to invest in longer term growth. Situations like these are often an invitation to impose authoritarian controls to curb expectations and protect capital resources, or to strip capital from the middle classes and vest it with the bureaucracy.

The government has often been accused of proposing authoritarian measures - the anti-competition policy (Matthews, 12 September 1995) being one example - to transfer capital resources from the major conglomerates to the working classes. Although the government has experienced some difficulty in its attempts to uphold democratic principles in all its deliberations, it has overall expressed a sincerity in facilitating the transition to a democratic society. The introduction of the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP) aimed at furthering equal access to opportunities, economic upliftment and growth, was initially the most visible feature of the newly elected government. At both national and provincial levels, measures were introduced to ensure closer cooperation between the private sector and local governments. The division of

South Africa into nine provinces with provincial and local governments in each region, the transition of power to local governments and the creation of multipartite policy forums (such as the National Economic Forum) to serve as mechanisms for broad consultation on business issues (African National Congress, 1994:129-132), brought about the necessity for closer cooperation between business and government. It became increasingly obvious that government relations could very well be an important tool for achieving desired outcomes.

The announcement of new legislation, such as the Constitution (Act 108 of 1996), the Labour Relations Act (11 November 1996) and the still unresolved legislation against anti-competitive behaviour, also had and will continue to have important consequences for the business environment. Other events that impacted on the legal-political environment were the renewal of South African membership to international organisations such as the United Nations (UN) and the Organisation for African Unity (OAU), the reincorporation of the TBVC-states and the relaxation of trade and financial regulations.

Economic environment

South Africa's economic growth sharply deteriorated in the period since 1975, due to the South African political situation at the time (Van der Berg, 1992:157). Although social justice was widely accepted as a precondition for the return to an acceptable growth path, socio-political reform only took place after 1990. The Government of National Unity (GNU) launched the RDP as a vehicle for the creation of a strong, dynamic and balanced economy. The fundamental principles of the government's economic policy were democracy, participation and development and the main goals of the RDP in terms of the economy, stated as: the elimination of poverty, economic imbalances and discrimination; the development of human resource capacity and skills; encouraging private sector participation in economic decision making; job creation; the development of a balanced regional economy and integration into the world economy (African National Congress, 1994: 79-80). To achieve this a variety of strategies and programs were announced, such as rural and urban development programs; industry, trade and commerce initiatives; corporate policies to ensure development and black economic empowerment and the relaxation of foreign-exchange constraints which made it possible for local businesses to re-enter international and regional markets. (African National Congress, 1994:84-93 ; 113-116).

Research at the University of Stellenbosch estimated unemployment at 14,2 million (33% of the current population) in 2026 if a minimum economic growth rate of between six and seven percent per year can be achieved (Randall, 17 April 1996). Coupled with the migration of the population to urban areas, growing from the current 60% of the population to 70% in the year 2000, it is quite obvious that some adjustment, as well as the active involvement and cooperation of the private sector are required.

Social-cultural environment

Available statistics point towards a population growth of 33% in the next thirty years, implicating a population density of 53 people per square kilometre (Randall, 17 April 1997). This certainly have implications for commu-

nication management in terms of the restructuring of communication to ensure effective communication with people of different languages, cultures and values. New management strategies which offer more opportunities to communication managers to contribute to organisational effectiveness will also be needed.

South Africa's social problems are extensive and worsened by the fact that 16,5 million of the population are living below the poverty line (Coetzee, 1992:131). The government recognised the existence of these and other poverty issues when it launched the RDP to address social issues such as education, training, housing and health care (African National Congress, 1994:22-33, 42-51, 60-68). Private sector involvement in national development and social investment programs, is often emphasised and projects allocated for such purposes include: the provision of 60 000 classrooms countrywide, the training of 15 million illiterate black adults (more than a third of the total population), health care for the more than 3 million HIV-infected people, building of 780 clinics and 360 000 housing units per year over a period of six to ten years and the delivery of services such as water, sanitation and electricity to 2,5 million households before the year 2000 (Forbes Special Report, 1995:32, 73-74; African National Congress, 1994:22-33).

Technological environment

The megashift from an industrial to an information society has been described as the most subtle, yet most explosive major transformation taking place in our society to date (Naisbitt, 1982:11). Technological advancement was also identified by the government as the key component in its industry, commerce and trade initiatives, as well as an important prerequisite for both increased productivity and the development of a high quality social and economic infrastructure (African National Congress, 1994:96). As government resources are exhausted due to extensive social and economic demands, financial assistance from the private sector is required to meet the needs for development, training and research with the view of developing high technology products locally.

COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT AND THE IMPACT OF CHANGE IN THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

The public relations function has undergone significant changes since the start of the nineties and as a result of the technological revolution. The function has developed into a full-blown communication management task capable of adding value to the organisation by monitoring changes, alerting management to necessary policy adjustments and implementing planned programs of action to serve both the organisation's and the public's needs. South African organisations only began to realise the value of their communication managers shortly before the 1994 elections when it became necessary to communicate effectively with publics and to re-evaluate their policies and organisational culture. It is impossible for an organisation to survive in a context sensitive environment, such as the South African business environment, without considering the needs of the community it serves and adapting its activities accordingly. The communication manager becomes an important vehicle to determine the impact of the organisation's

activities on the community and to make recommendations regarding community projects.

Change in the external environment impacts directly on the way public relations is being practised. The communication manager has to interpret change in the immediate external environment, as well as globally and has to initiate adjustments where necessary. The recognition the communication management function enjoys in the organisation, has a significant influence on the extent to which it is being allowed to consult directly with management and to initiate changes. Apart from the monitoring of developments in the political and economic environments, the communication manager has to stay in touch with the community and its needs. Organisational management has to be kept abreast of sensitive issues such as business practices unacceptable to the local community. The extent to which the communication manager is informed about technological developments and his/her ability to utilise information technology in the establishment of new and more effective communication channels, will determine the effectiveness with which crisis situations are handled and anticipated pro-actively.

The public relations environment and the way organisations function in their environment, as well as the nature of communication with political structures that influence the environment, are on the eve of major changes. It is essential for organisations and their communication managers to be aware of the organisational changes and technological advancements that will determine the future. The South African business environment, as a contextually sensitive environment, needs the public relations function to predict and interpret change. These changes will create opportunities, which if correctly utilised, can improve the living conditions of thousands of South Africans.

The changes referred to in the preceding discussion will clearly have an influence on the outputs traditionally required from the communication manager. In the discussion that follows a competency-based approach is applied to develop a generic framework consisting of the outputs required from communication managers in the dynamic business environment.

CONCEPTUALISATION : COMPETENCE, SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE AND LEVELS OF WORK

In order to determine the required outputs, the terms competence, skills, knowledge and levels of work need to be explained in the context of this study.

Competence

Spencer and Spencer (1993:15) divide competencies into two categories:

- Threshold competencies: These are essential knowledge or skills that everyone in a job needs to be minimally effective but that do not distinguish superior from average performers.

- Differentiating competencies: Superior performers are distinguished from average performers.

According to this classification, knowledge and skills can be regarded as threshold competencies, whereas

competence is regarded as the superior level of performance, constituting differentiating competencies.

Skills

Public relations skills refer to the ability of the responsible person to do technical implementation, such as the writing of press releases, production of internal and external communication material and the organising of functions.

Knowledge

Knowledge refers to the scope of information possessed and is usually associated with experience, although it can also be obtained through active studying.

Levels of work

Elliot Jaques (1982:77-82) developed the stratified systems theory according to which qualifications in the workplace are represented at seven levels of work. A relationship was found between remuneration and the hierarchial structuring of work in the organisation, as well as between level of work, level of capability and the level of compensation. Jaques (1986:362) also found evidence of a close relationship between time span and level of work. Time span measurement is significant in that it apparently relates uniquely with the level of work or responsibility a person feels expected to fulfill : the longer the time span associated with a role, the greater the weight of responsibility.

The research of Gillian Stamp (1993:2) proceeded from that of Jaques and confirmed his classification of seven levels of work. Stamp also believed

LEVEL OF WORK	DEFINITION
1	Quality. Executing according to predetermined procedure.
2	Service. Determine the what, where, when and how for quality level.
3	Good Practice. Optimise use of all resources.
4	Strategic. Bring into being new systems, coordinate and resource systems, terminate systems.

Table 1 Levels of work (Stamp and Isaac, 1990: 2-3; Jaques, 1982:79)

that organisations can only survive in the dynamic and complex environment by adopting flatter structures with specific competencies attributed to each level, providing a framework for interaction with the environment at certain levels. Both Stamp (1990:4-18) and Jaques (1986:369) agree that the first four levels of work, as summarized in table 1, would be the most appropriate to describe the functions generally being performed in the organisation. Although levels 5, 6 and 7 are excluded from this study, it may be true that in exceptional cases, communication managers in South African organisations are appointed at higher levels, where they function as group specialists or strategic analysts. The fact that neither the existing literature, nor the empirical research that follows reflected this, may be attributed to the evolving nature of public relations.

The hierarchial classification of competencies according to levels of work imply that standards have to be set for different professions in order to determine the nature of the outputs associated with certain levels. In the discussion that follows brief reference will be made to the standard setting process as embodied by the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the implications for the public relations profession in South Africa.

THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (NQF) AND THE STANDARD SETTING PROCESS IN SOUTH AFRICA

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF)

The need for a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) originated with the inauguration of the Government of National Unity (GNU) in 1994 when education and training authorities of former homelands and self-governing territories were united into one system. A variety of qualifications existed which needed to be consolidated into a single, nationally acceptable set of standards, which would enable candidates to acquire national qualifications through a variety of mechanisms and a multiple delivery system. Legislation was passed in October 1995 that approved the founding of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), responsible for the NQF (HSRC, 1995 : 8).

The NQF is loosely based on a similar system in Britain, the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ's) system, which was implemented in 1986. The purpose of the NVQ-system was to make qualifications more accessible to the individual and more relevant to the employer's needs by rationalising and streamlining the existing qualifications system (NVQ 4, 1994:1-2).

Implications of standard setting for public relations training

The implementation of the National Qualifications Framework suggests that standard setting will take place for all kinds of education and training. Public relations training at all levels needs to be investigated to determine if current education and training, enable candidates to deliver the required outputs in terms of knowledge, skills and competencies. Standard setting in particular is important to reconcile the variety of syllabi currently in use at technikons, universities and institutes and should be the result of co-operation between the private and

public sectors, as well as tertiary institutions. Outputs should be determined through consensus, after which all existing curricula should be revised to determine whether it complies with the requirements as will be stated in terms of the NQF. This will ensure the relevancy of qualifications and will also enable employers to make quality assessments of their communication managers and in so doing, determine their own needs.

The standard setting process in South Africa has to date not made much progress in providing a clearly defined framework within which standards for the different professions may be set. National Standard Setting Bodies (NSB's) were approved in June 1997 by SAQA and various NSB's, responsible for the appointment op Standard Generating Bodies (SGB's), have since been created (Louis, 29 October 1997). Nominations for representatives from different organisations to serve on these NSB's were requested earlier, leading to people being appointed as such. The Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA), for example, has one representative on the NSB for Commerce and Management Studies, according to Annemarie Honiball, Director PRISA Education Centre (29 October 1997). This particular NSB was identified by PRISA as the most appropriate for determining standards for communication management in South Africa, due to its emphasis on business and management. Progress into the next stage of this process, namely the actual standard setting process by the SGB's (still to be appointed), has however been hampered by issues regarding trade union representation on the NSB's.

The above confirms the notion that the road ahead is long and treacherous. It has already taken two years since the founding of SAQA to achieve the mere approval of NSB's. One realizes that these initial stages are important to lend credibility to the process but the question needs to be asked whether the South African educational system can afford such a drawn-out process. A number of other issues also needs to be addressed. Firstly, PRISA currently serves as the only body responsible for accreditation and accredits members according to existing standards. In terms of the NQF (and similar systems such as the NVQ) the state should appoint or approve the institute or body responsible for accreditation, based on nationally acceptable standards. The current system clearly does not satisfy these conditions although PRISA believes that its accreditation can not be judged against these criteria, because registration as an accredited public relations practitioner is not required by law (Honiball, 29 October 1997). PRISA also points out that the previous government has rejected suggestions of legislating public relations. This however, may change in future, giving rise to the question whether accreditation that was awarded prior to standards being determined, will still be valid once the process has been completed.

Secondly, it is not clear how responsibility for quality management will be awarded, although the possibility has been mentioned that applications by the various professional organisations will be considered. This would not be acceptable in terms of the principles of quality management, determining that an institute that offers its own courses and diplomas, can not be responsible for quality management (and therefore the regulation of other institutes) as in the case of PRISA. However, the Institute has separated its training function, the PRISA Education Centre, from its professional body responsible for ac-

creditation during 1997. PRISA therefore sees no reason why, in principle, the latter should not be appointed by SAQA to assume responsibility for quality management. Resistance to such an appointment, from other tertiary institutions responsible for public relations training, can still be expected due to the dual nature of the Institute.

Thirdly, standard setting is still in the starting blocks and the process of determining standards for the various professions could take years. Very little research is being done in this regard and in terms of the public relations profession specifically, no published framework of standards exists locally or internationally. It is against this background that the need for research to develop a generic framework for communication management in a contextually sensitive environment, was identified.

An overview of existing literature was undertaken to provide a foundation for the development of such a framework (inter alia: Bovet, 1995:13-14,38; Howard, 1995:6-11; Webster, 1996:3; Hauss, 1995:20-21; Hodge and Anthony, 1991:114-115; Wilkinson, 1990:12-13; Sadie, 1994:250-251; Steinberg, 1995:44-56; Newsom, Scott and VanSlyke Turk, 1989:10,506; Wilcox, Ault and Agee, 1992:101; Wakefield and Cottone, 1987:24-32; Toth, 1994:32; Rhodes and Baker, 1994:292-294; Fitzpatrick and Whillock, 1993:316). In the following discussion an overview of the empirical process that led to the determining of the required outputs in terms of knowledge, skills and competencies, will be provided.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Method

Qualitative research rather than quantative research was chosen as the preferred method in the absence of competency profiles or generic frameworks for the purpose of numeric summary. Qualitative research also enabled the researcher to collect data regarding perceptions of the respondents through intensive and extended contact with respondents. Personal interviews contributed to mutual understanding between the researcher and the respondents.

Sampling

The focus of the study was the business environment and therefore the corporate sector was chosen from thirteen possible sectors in which public relations is practised. Experience and seniority within the organisation were among the requirements to control the sample size as well as to ensure that respondents would be well equipped to give the necessary feedback. Data was collected by way of personal interviews based on a questionnaire. The sample size was restricted to thirty, because of the level of seniority and experience that was required, but was nevertheless viewed as sufficient to represent the most important corporate organisations in the Johannesburg/Pretoria region. The main activity of each of the chosen organisations was classified according to seven categories. A profile of the respondents is given in table 2.

Dimension	Description		%
Sector	Financial		17.4
	Industrial / Manufacturing		39.1
	Mining		8.75
	Consulting		17.4
	Transport		8.75
	Media / Communication		4.3
	Food		4.3
Gender	Male		65.0
	Female		35.0
Qualifications	Certificate		13.0
	B.A.		17.4
	B.Com		13.0
	Technikon Diploma		9.0
	B.A. and Certificate		13.0
	B.A. and PRISA		21.7
	Masters in Communication		4.3
	Doctorate in Communication		4.3
	No formal		4.3
Professional Accreditation	APR		43.9
	APR and IPRA		4.3
Levels & average years of service	Management	20yrs	60.8
	Senior Management	22yrs	8.75
	Director / Executive	20yrs	17.4
	PRO	8yrs	4.3
	Consulting	4yrs	8.75

Table 2 : Description of sample

Measurement

A questionnaire was compiled based on the knowledge, skills and competencies identified through the overview of existing literature. A combination of open ended and closed questions were used to obtain both factual information, as well as information regarding the perceptions of the respondents. Closed questions required the respondents to indicate the importance of the various items on a scale of 1-10. Open ended questions allowed for further discussion and additional information. Each category was concluded with a control question to enable respondents to include additional outputs where deemed necessary.

Results

The results of the measurement are displayed in table 3.

The ten most important outputs as identified by the respondents are displayed in table 4.

The collection and dissemination of information was perceived as the most important output, followed closely by knowledge regarding the internal environment, interpersonal communication skills, problem solving abilities and issues management, knowledge regarding the external environment and media relationships and contacts. These outputs were viewed as the very foundation of communication management, being largely interdependent and some, such as interpersonal communication skills and problem solving, being a prerequisite for success in others. The first six outputs differed very little in their ratings, indicating a close relationship, while the last four were also closely related. Managerial competencies, personal characteristics

Knowledge	%	Skills	%	Competencies	%
				1. Problem solving abilities	90.2%
				2. Managerial competencies	86.8%
				3. Social marketing	84.8%
1. Internal environment	91.7%	1. Collection and dissemination of information	92.3%	4. Integrated communication	84.8%
2. External environment	89.7%	2. Interpersonal communication	90.7%	5. Social investment communication	83.3%
3. Knowledge regarding other communications disciplines	81.6%	3. Media relations	89.5%	6. Research and planning	83.2%
4. Computer literacy	77.2%	4. Personal characteristics	86.5%	7. Monitoring of environmental issues	82.3%
5. Government institutions	74.5%	5. Ability to function in a group	85.7%		
6. General knowledge regarding various subjects and related fields	73.5%	6. Intercultural communication	81.7%	8. Cultural change communication	82.2%
7. International public relations	72.0%	7. Organising and presentation skills	77.8%	9. Globalization of communication	81.7%
		8. Written and design skills	65.0%	10. Counselling	81.5%
				11. Cross-cultural communication	80.3%
				12. Development communication	79.3%

Table 3 : Results

Outputs	%
1. Collection and dissemination of information	92.3%
2. Knowledge regarding the internal environment	91.7%
3. Interpersonal communications	90.7%
4. Problem solving and issues management	90.2%
5. Knowledge regarding the external environment	89.7%
6. Media relations	89.5%
7. Managerial competencies	86.8%
8. Personal characteristics	86.5%
9. Ability to function in a group	85.7%
10. Social marketing Integrated communication	84.8%

Table 4 : Most Important Outputs

and the ability to function effectively in a group, each only differed with half a percentage, indicating the important influence of the latter on the communication manager's managerial effectiveness. Social marketing and integrated communication received the same value, indicating the necessity for integration with other sub-disciplines in the planning and executing of social marketing initiatives.

The fact that the category, skills, was represented in five of the top ten outputs, indicates that communication managers in the South African business environment, function at a relatively low level requiring only threshold competencies. Although only three of the top ten outputs were categorised as competencies, it emerged that if the list was expanded to include the top fif-

teen outputs, competencies would also be represented in the next five entries. This indicates a growing realisation of the value communication managers can add to organisational functioning.

INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS

Knowledge

The items classified as "knowledge", received a relatively low rating in comparison with the other categories, although it was viewed as necessary. The following conclusions were made based on the results :

- Knowledge is the foundation for the other outputs and is perceived as a basic entry level requirement.

- Computer literacy, knowledge regarding international public relations and local, regional and national government structures, were identified as areas in need of further development.

- International public relations and government liaison increasingly demand specialisation.

- The technological revolution emphasized the importance of the communication management function in the monitoring of trends and communicating with the environment.

- Training should focus on computer literacy and subjects such as financial management, international economy and political studies in order to prepare students in advance for much needed specialisation.

Knowledge regarding the internal environment is essential to integrated communication.

Knowledge determines the success of communication activities internally, locally and internationally. It is therefore essential that these requirements are specified within the National Qualifications Framework in order to ensure that candidates for accreditation are measured against these standards.

Skills

The items classified as skills, received the highest overall rating. This can be attributed to the fact that these outputs are perceived as intrinsic requirements for communication management at all levels. The following conclusions were made based on the results :

- The ability to collect and disseminate information by way of written or verbal messages, was perceived as the single most important output in all the categories.

- Written skills are still important, but are increasingly outsourced due to specialisation.

- Interpersonal communication skills and the ability to function effectively in a group, are essential to networking.

- The importance of media relations depends on the nature of the organisation's activities.

- Written and design skills, as well as organising and presentation skills, are recommended for briefings when dealing with consultants, but are not viewed as essential.

- Training should pay more attention to intercultural communication skills in order to ensure better cooperation between various population groups.

The ability to function in a group, interpersonal communication skills and all the personal characteristics listed, are inborn skills. The value of specification of these skills as necessary outputs for communication management, is in the enabling of training institutions and employers to select suitable candidates through aptitude tests.

Competencies

Competencies are perceived as the highest level of required outputs, because it mainly concerns the strategic or management level of public relations. The outputs classified as "competencies" were therefore highly rated. The following conclusions were made based on the results :

- Managerial and problem solving abilities were perceived as of utmost importance during times of change, the latter serving as support system to management.

- The extent to which communication managers are employed in a counselling role, depends on the status of the public relations function in the organisation.

- Social marketing as a function of communication management has not yet been exploited fully in South African organisations.

- Direct communication with decision makers and lobbying will become increasingly important.

- Although research is important, it is increasingly outsourced due to time constraints.

- Planning is an integral part of communication management and therefore a required output.

- The communication manager as boundary-spanner between the organisation and the environment, can make a valuable contribution in identifying community needs and evaluating the success of social investment programs.

- The ability to monitor trends and issues relating to the natural environment, was regarded as a necessary output.

Although all the outputs classified as competencies received high ratings, a number of these competencies emerged as fairly new to communication management in the South African business environment. The following were therefore identified as development areas : Cross-cultural communication competencies which are essential in decision making and planning; the ability to coordinate communication programs at global level; integrated communication; and the ability to coordinate development programs and act as change agent. The value of vocational training was also emphasized in order to equip communication managers with the necessary knowledge to deliver the required outputs, while it will also contribute to the professionalisation of public relations in South Africa.

Based on the results of the empirical research, a contextually sensitive generic framework was developed, based on table 4, but with the following additions as recommended by the respondents (see table 5).

The framework was subsequently interpreted according to levels of work (see table 6).

INTERPRETATION OF THE CONTEXTUALLY SENSITIVE GENERIC FRAMEWORK ACCORDING TO LEVELS OF WORK

The grouping of the results according to levels of work makes an important

Knowledge	Skills	Competencies
Relevant media	Negotiating skills Consultation skills Facilitation skills Liaison at high level and net-working Language skills Effective time management	No competencies added

Table 5 : Additional recommended outputs

contribution to research regarding communication management in South Africa. The framework is the only known expression of the state of communication management in South Africa and the only depiction of the outputs communication managers regard as necessary to meet the challenges of the future.

The framework is particularly useful in that it specifies outputs required at different levels. It provides a clear distinction between outputs required at entry level and outputs required at the strategic or management level. In so doing, it provides insight into the contribution of the communication manager at the various levels of the organisation and serves as an indication of the full potential of communication management at the highest level.

The grouping according to levels of work offers especially valuable perspectives on the issues facing the communication management function in South African organisations. The fact that the highest overall rating was awarded to level 2 outputs, indicates a total lack of understanding of the role of the communication management function in the broader organisational context. The interpretation of the generic framework according to levels of

work and the ratings awarded by the respondents, indicate that the most important outputs are delivered at level 2, while the majority of outputs are delivered at levels 3 and 4. It is therefore implied that communication management is mainly a level 3 and 4 organisational function, but is being practised at level 2 in the majority of South African organisations. The conclusion has to be reached that a contradiction exists that needs to be explained in order to resolve the issues regarding the public relations function in South African business organisations.

One possible explanation can be found in the utilisation of communication managers in organisations. The majority of communication managers realise the extent of the contribution they can make, but are not offered the opportunity to make these contributions at strategic level. This is attributed to the fact that organisational management still perceive public relations as a technical function, while its strategic role is viewed with scepticism. Another explanation relates to the level of training of communication managers. It seems that communication managers are not always equipped to deliver the required outputs. This could be the result of a lack of understanding of the full implications of the changes that took

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
• Drafting of press releases 85.0% • Application of visual and technical aids 70.8% • Graphic design 57.0% • Copy writing 53.2%	• Collection and dissemination of information 92.3% • Interpersonal communication 90.7% • Ability to function in a group 85.7% • Research and planning 83.2% • Oral presentations 81.5% • Planning and coordinating of special events 81.0% • Computer literacy 77.2%	• Knowledge regarding internal environment 91.7% • Media relations 89.5% • Social marketing 84.8% • Integrated communication 84.8% • Social investment communication 83.3% • Cultural change communication 82.2% • Intercultural communication 81.7% • Knowledge regarding other communication disciplines 81.6% • Cross-cultural communication 80.3% • General knowledge regarding various subjects and related fields 73.5%	• Problemsolving competencies 90.2% • Knowledge regarding the external environment 89.7% • Managerial competencies 86.8% • Monitoring of environmental issues 82.3% • Globalisation of communication 81.7% • Counselling 81.5% • Development communication 79.3% • Knowledge regarding government institutions 74.5% • Knowledge regarding international PR 72.0%

Table 6 : Interpreted framework according to levels of work

place in the business environment. This in turn results in the lack of ability to deliver the required outputs, because the necessary knowledge, skills and competencies have never been acquired or developed.

If the existing contradictions can be explained on the basis of these argu- ments, the question arises if the solution can be found in the state of training and the criteria for accreditation. Furthermore, should the implications of changes in the business environment be addressed in curricula and should provision be made for re-training of communication managers to ensure that they will be able to fulfill the re-

quirements to be determined by the NQF for the various levels at· which qualifications can be obtained? Should criteria for accreditation take these factors into account? The answer can probably be found in a comparison with other professions, that require candidates to be licensed after the successful completion of in-depth training and state regulated examinations under the jurisdiction of a state appointed body, also responsible for disciplinary measures. Communication managers should be expected to comply with the same criteria and should not be allowed to practise and to be accredited if the requirements have not been fulfilled. Communication management can make an important contribution to the functioning of the organisation in its environment, but if left to incompetent individuals, it can be extremely harmful to the organisation and even to the economy and the community as a whole.

FINAL REMARKS

To conclude, it should be noted that difficulty currently exists to delineate what counts as a qualification. In South Africa, raising standards and qualifications is often regarded as synonymous with the adoption of western or first-world measures. "Qualifications" and "standards" are not always ready-made, objective entities, but social and cultural constructs and as a result can become blocking mechanisms. It is therefore essential that standards are designed by all to be relevant to the working environment and nationally accepted.

In the case of public relations it is even more important that a standard should be set to provide a foundation for the incorporation of all existing qualifications into a single system, character-ised by hierarchial levels of work. It is important that the standard setting process gets under way, both for the training of public relations professionals and for communication managers to add value to the organisation by being awarded the opportunity to play a truely strategic role.

REFERENCES

AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS (ANC) 1994. *The Reconstruction and Development Programme: A Policy Framework.* Johannesburg : Umanyano Publications.

BOVET, S.F. 1995. Forecast 2001 : A Golden Age for Public Relations Looms. *Public Relations Journal,* Winter 1989 - 90.

COETZEE, S. 1992. Towards an Anti-Poverty Strategy for South Africa. In *Redistribution and Affirmative Action.* Edited by Hugo, P. Halfway House : Southern Book Publishers (Pty)Ltd.

FITZPATRICK, K.R. & WHILLOCK, R.K. 1993. *Assessing the Impact of Globalization on U.S. Public Relations.* Public Relations Review, 19(4) : 315 - 325.

FORBES : A Special Report.1995. *Building a Nation : South Africa's Reconstruction and Development Programme.* A Forbes Special Edition on South Africa's Reconstruction and Development Programme. A joint project between Forbes magazine and the South African RDP Ministry, Department of Foreign Affairs and private sector. New York : RR Donnelly & Sons Company.

HAUSS, D. 1995. Career Pointers for Practitioners of the Future. *Public Relations Journal*, October 1995.

HODGE, B.J. & ANTHONY, W.P. 1991. *Organization Theory : A Strategic Approach*. Fourth edition. Boston : Allyn and Bacon, Inc.

HONIBALL, A. 1997. *Personal interview with Annemarie Honiball*, Director : PRISA Education Centre, 29 October 1997. Johannesburg.

HOWARD, C.M. 1995. *Building Cathedrals - Reflections on Three Decades in Corporate PR and a Peek at the Future*. Public Relations Quarterly, Summer 1995.

HUMAN SCIENCE RESEARCH COUNCIL (HSRC) 1995. *Ways of Seeing the National Qualifications Framework*. Pretoria : Human Science Research Council (HSRC), October 1995.

JAQUES, E. 1982. *Free Enterprise, Fair Employment*. New York : Crane, Russak & Company, Inc.

JAQUES, E. 1986. *The Development of Intellectual Capability : A Discussion of Stratified Systems Theory*. The Journal of Applied Behavioural Science, Vol. 22, No. 4 : 361 - 383.

KOENDERMAN, T. 1982. *Sanctions : The Threat to South Africa*. Johannesburg : Jonathan Ball Publishers.

LOUIS, S. 1997. *Personal interview with Samantha Louis*, Manager : Education, Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa, 29 October 1997. Johannesburg.

LUBBE, B.A. 1994. The Nature of Public Relations. In *Public Relations In South Africa : A Management Reader*. Edited by Lubbe, B.A. and Puth, G. Durban : Butterworths.

MATHEWS, C. 1995. RDP wants too much for too many. *The Star*, 12 September 1995.

NAISBITT, J. 1982. *Megatrends : Ten New Directions Transforming our Lives*. London : Futura.

NEWSOM, D., SCOTT, A. & VANSLYKE TURK, J. 1989. *This PR : The Realities of Public Relations*. Fourth edition. California : Wadsworth Publishing Company.

NVQ 4 1994. *Vocational Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*. London: National Council for Vocational Qualifications.

RANDALL, E. 1996. Higher Growth Rate to reduce Joblessness, Research claims. *The Star Workplace*, 17 April 1996 : 4.

RHODES, K. en BAKER, V. 1994. Public Relations in Southern Africa : Inventory and Future Perspectives. In *Public Relations in South Africa : A Management Reader*. Edited by Lubbe, B.A. en Puth, G. Durban : Butterworths.

SADIE, Y. 1994. Public Affairs and Issues Management. In *Public Relations In South Africa: A Management Reader*. Edited by Lubbe, B.A. and Puth, G. Durban : Butterworths.

SCHLEMMER, L. & VAN ANTWERPEN, J. 1992. South Africa's Underestimated Crisis : Black Advancement and Empowerment. In *Redistribution and Affirmative Action*. Edited by Hugo, P. Halfway House : Southern Book Publishers.

SPENCER, L.M. & SPENCER, S.M. 1993. *Competence at Work : Mod-*

els for Superior Performance. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. : New York.

STAMP, G. and ISAAC, D.J. 1990. *A Matrix of Working Relationships.* Middlesex : Brunel Institute of Organisation and Social Studies.

STAMP, G. 1993. *Hierarchies and Working Relationships : The Hidden Depths.* Middlesex: Brunel Institute of Organisation and Social Studies, June 1993.

STEINBERG, S. 1995. Communication Skills in South African Organisations : A Needs Analysis. *Communicatio,* 21 (2):44-56.

TOTH, E. 1994. Develop Research and Management Skills. *Public Relations Journal,* October/November 1994.

VÁN DER BERG, S. 1992. Redressing Economic Inequality in South Africa. In *Redistribution and Affirmative Action.* Edited by Hugo, P. Halfway House : Southern Book Publishers (Pty)Ltd.

WAKEFIELD, A. & COTTONE, L.P. 1987. Knowledge and Skills Required by Public Relations Employers. *Public Relations Review,* Autumn 1987, Vol. 13.

WEBSTER, C. 1996. Timing, Medium and Message : The Route to Success. *The Star Workplace,* 15 May 1996 : 3.

WILCOX, D., AULT, P.H. & AGEE, W.K. 1992. Public Relations : Strategies and Tactics. Third edition. New York : Harper - Collins Publishers.

WILKINSON, A. 1990. Globalization : Are we up to the Challenges ? *Public Relations Journal,* January 1990 : 12 -13.