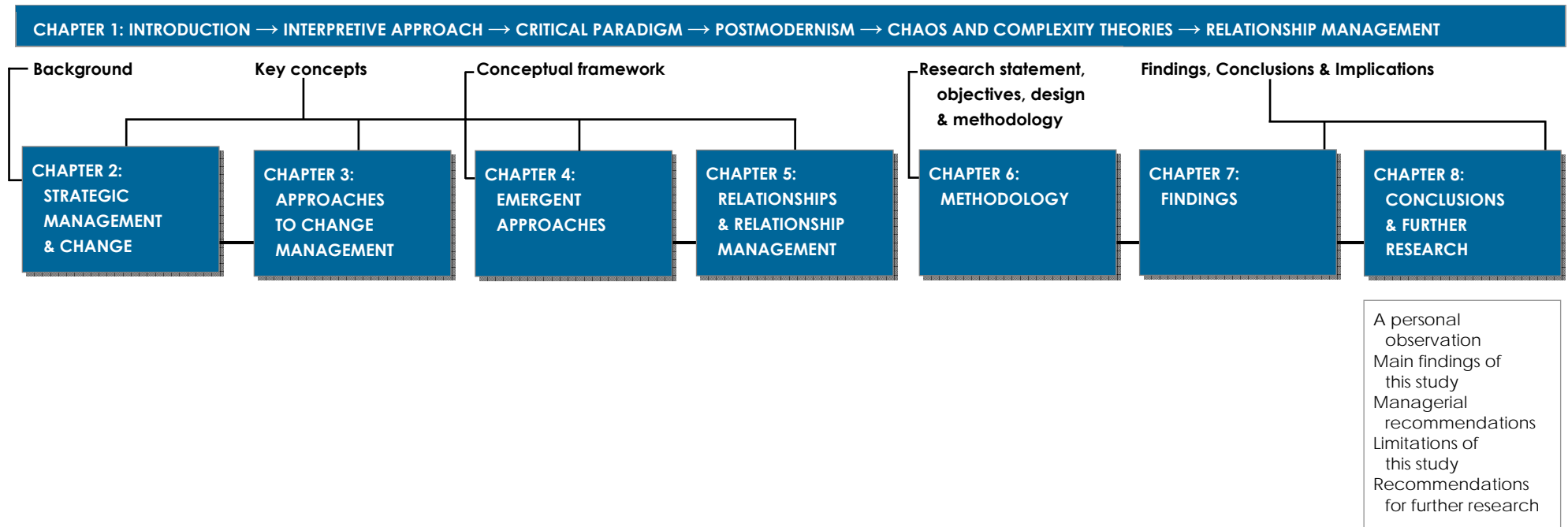


OVERVIEW OF CHAPTER 8: *Conclusions and Further Research*



CHAPTER 8:

Contributions, Limitations and Conclusions

In this final chapter, the findings of the research questions and hypotheses come full circle and they are brought into context. The conclusions focus on the unique contribution of the study to the field of public relations and relationship management. Limitations of this study necessarily lead to suggestions for further research.

8.1 Main findings and implications of this study

The experimental design showed high internal validity, and the experimental manipulation (the two different change management strategies) had a definite effect on the relationship that internal stakeholders would have with organisations. Two other variables showed some possible influence, namely, the type of organisation and the employee's educational level. No other variables tested had an influence.

It would seem that although employees show confidence in an organisation that follows a planned approach, they also feel that these organisations are neither caring nor considerate, therefore they are unwilling to commit to these organisations. Employees tend to evaluate an organisation that follows a participative change approach as slightly less reliable than an organisation that follows a planned approach. Nevertheless they also tend to feel more committed and more positive towards an organisation that follows a participative approach.

Further findings show that high participatory change strategy will lead to significantly more *trust*, *control mutuality*, *commitment*, and *satisfaction* with the *relationship* between an organisation and its employees than with a lower degree of participation and a planned approach. Despite this, high participatory change strategy will not necessarily make employees change their behaviour. A possible reason for this finding could be that a positive relationship does not imply behavioural change. It could also be that the items used in this study to determine

this dimension were not well-designed and did not actually measure what they set out to measure. These items were not part of the measuring instrument set up by the Institute of Public Relations (Hon & Grunig, 1999), which were used to measure other relationship dimensions.

The overall finding of this study is that a higher degree of participation during high change in organisations will lead to significantly **more positive overall relationships** between an organisation and its internal publics than with lower degrees of participation and a planned approach. In other words, there is a meaningful difference in terms of the relationships with internal stakeholders between a planned approach and a participatory approach to change.

Change efforts often fail for any (or all) of the following reasons: because the changes are not communicated well, or that organisations fail to align change efforts to the strategic goals of the organisation, and they do not facilitate learning or advanced training (Head, 1997, p. 4). Due to adverse contingent circumstances, change cannot be based on plans and projections, but rather on understanding the complexities of situations and weighing different options available (Burnes, 1996, p. 187). Quinn (1998) notes from the findings of a study of 9 organisations that change strategies were not initially included in the formal strategies of those organisations, but came about on an ad hoc and incremental fashion. This was happening for at least two reasons: (1) because of uncontrollable environmental changes and a large number of powerful opponents, a diversity of possible outcomes and viewpoints developed; and (2) results of these outcomes were impossible to predict, so any pre-planned strategies were useless unless they could be tested interactively. Thus Quinn proposes that organisations should always test relational strategies that concern stakeholders through environmental scanning. Furthermore, they should interact in a proactive way in order to test public opinions and the impact of political action.

The continued participation of different stakeholders of an organisation – including to what extent they will co-operate as the organisation changes – depends on how much they will benefit as a result. No business can expect to survive if it affects negatively on any significant group of people or interest. Stakeholders provide an organisation with a ‘license to operate’, and they only truly

benefit if the organisational goals are devoid of harm through pollution or unwelcome cultural influences, reduction of risk, or creation of offsetting benefits (Post et al., 2002). Although this seems obvious, most organisations still place a large emphasis on ensuring investor and share-owner gain and bottom-line results. However, as environments become more turbulent, it becomes increasingly difficult to plan for specific outcomes, as Sherman & Schultz (1998) observe,

Planning doesn't work well in relation to unanticipated behaviours because it is essentially linear (p. 22).

The new sciences emphasise limitless possibilities and the “process of everlasting becoming” (Sherman & Shultz, 1998, p. 23), thus encourages the practice of scenario planning and considering all possibilities for outcomes. Similarly, Costin (1998, p. xii) suggests that a differentiation of scenarios may be a solution to the debates about normative and descriptive approaches to strategy. In other words, whether a strategy should be analytical, structured, planned or rational, or whether it should be intuitive, unplanned, chaotic or flexible, ought to be determined by various factors appropriate to the change scenarios. Factors such as the number of actors involved, the information available, or the timing of decision-making, may all have various implications and effects. In order to consider all possibilities, it is necessary to have enough information from the environment. Scenario planning has become highly regarded in strategic management thinking because it provides solutions

far beyond the traditional financial and forecast-based planning approaches (Graetz et al., 2002).

As according to Graetz et al. (2002), scenario planning has become a communication tool for managers in aiding their decision-making during chaotic times of high uncertainty and complexity. It is thinking ‘outside the box’, challenging the status quo, and stimulating lateral thinking. Furthermore, scenario planning is about finding a balance between over-predicting the outcomes of change and falling over the edge of chaos into total disintegration.

Having stated the propositions regarding structure and change, Cohen (2000) concludes:

Where complex new behaviour is needed and there is high dependency on the goodwill of organisation members, change will require both structural and process interventions, each stimulating and supporting the other. Structural interventions are unlikely to be a viable starting point for change (p. 187).

In a similar line, Beer & Nohria (2000) take a postmodernist approach in their final conclusion about the tension between the planned approaches (Theory E) and the emergent approaches (Theory O) to change. They suggest that the arguments for both these approaches are equally persuasive, although they advocated in the simultaneous integration of the two, using the tension between them to the benefit of change. The paradoxes guiding these approaches can be used as a competitive advantage. Accordingly, the most successful approach is one that combines both Theories E and O.

In a stable environment where small localised changes are called for, the changes can be planned with a focus on technical and structural factors. Emergent approaches are apt in a turbulent environment where changes affect the whole organisation and the focus is on human resource and behaviour (Ströh & Jaatinen, 2001). The findings of this study indicate that organisations will have to increase their environmental scanning in order to identify issues and trends that might affect their decision-making (Burnes, 1996, p. 188). Management will also have to rethink and re-formulate what change is all about, not just change for the sake of change. They will have to move away from thinking in a linear and planned way, and allow for unanticipated behaviours and probabilities because postmodern environments are more complex and chaotic than ever before (Sherman & Schultz, 1998, p. 22).

This study shows that variables such as size and type of organisation, as well as educational levels, would have to be taken into consideration when employing a change and communication strategy. Neither of the two main approaches can achieve all the management objectives normally set by most organisations and their employees. A paradoxical combined approach will require constant analysis of the environment, and all variables that could have an influence on the organisation. In the end, the chosen approach to facilitate the process of change effectively should not rely on which change management strategy is being followed; rather the

emphasis should be on building relationships with all relevant stakeholders. Strong relationships could guide the decision-making processes and provide democratic systems that nourish trust, openness and an ethical approach.

8.2 From communication manager to relationship manager

Emerging approaches to change, as discussed in Chapter 4, propose that change and, more specifically, transformation, should be viewed as a continuous process linked to the complexities of the changing market, changing nature of work environments, new management approaches, and redefined organisational boundaries and relationships. In order to survive and ensure growth and success, it is crucial for organisations to scan the environment for issues and trends while also involving all members of the organisation in this process. Since the responsibility for organisational change cannot be carried by just a few managers. It is precisely here that communication managers can take up a leadership role in the change process. Because of their boundary spanning function they can be research experts, especially with regard to environmental scanning, in identifying and providing information on emerging issues around which the organisation needs to adapt. More importantly still, they could facilitate participation through dialogue and provide networking structures.

Costin (1998, p. xiv) suggests that in situations where the information and time necessary for decision-making are widely available, and there are many stakeholders involved, a participative process would be appropriate. However, when there is a crisis and information is scarce and ambiguous, it would be more appropriate to centralise the decision-making. This is debatable, drawing from chaos and complexity theories, because during a crisis, bifurcation points occur where decision-making might have larger consequences than planned for many stakeholders. It is particularly during this time that managers and information holders must bear the responsibility of distributing information widely and transparently, so that all stakeholders involved may partake in bringing about change. At this point, knowledge may be created through dialogue, that is, despite limited and ambiguous information to start with, in order to aid the decision-making process. To centralise decision-making during times of rapid change and

instability may be putting too much pressure and responsibility on one single actor; while contributions from too many knowledge sources may overload or be overlooked, resulting in limited choices and outcomes. Costin (1998, p. xiv) observes that there is an inverse relationship between the availability of critical information and the use of what he calls 'fuzzy' skills, such as intuition. The question to be asked, however, is whether we could ever have or know the full extent of information available in this complex and ever changing world.

Traditional hierarchies and borders in organisations should therefore be challenged in existing paradigms of change and management. Kiel (cited in Evans, 1996) proposes that the participations of citizens and customers should be encouraged to increase participation, ownership, and service excellence. More strategic and advanced communication can improve these relationships with outside stakeholders and create arbitrary boundaries for the organisation (Sherman & Schultz, 1998). Boundaries within the organisation are also broken down and a more interdisciplinary approach is followed.

Building a culture of constant, flexible change within an organisation is a further responsibility of public relations managers, and within the postmodern paradigms, leadership should be concerned with guiding visions and values through constant communication in all directions (Wheatley, 1994). This implies allowing and even facilitating the questioning of management decisions, conflict, dialogue and debate. Participation of employees in the decision-making and change-driving processes can be facilitated by providing channels to transmit, analyse, and discuss change issues. The organisation should also facilitate interactions that respect people and build their confidence and trust (Burnes, 1996; Weick, 2000). This respectful discourse has an intrinsic power for change.

Dawson (cited in Burnes, 1996: 188) claims that change ought to be linked to changing markets realities, flexible boundaries and relationships with stakeholders, work ethic changes, and alterations in management controls. Short-term change strategies yield short-term results, but increase instability. The building of relationships provide organisations with a long-term strategy, which paradoxically provides stability within potentially chaotic and ever-changing environments.

The most important implication for communication management is the obligation to build relationships while working towards achieving an organisation's strategic objectives (Grunig, 1992, p. 11). To use communication strategically is to build trust, commitment, mutual satisfaction and mutual control of relationships with all important stakeholders (Flower, 1993, p. 50). The quality of relationships can be increased by facilitating participation and communication in all directions, and subsequently, overcoming barriers to knowledge-sharing and strategic information (Marlow & O'Connor Wilson, 1997, p. 68). Building relationships is providing a strong foundation from which to manage any crisis, thus easing the change management process such that the organisation is geared for any possible change scenario. This also leads to high morale and a positive climate or culture which, in turn, leads to improved customer service and a constructive contribution to the strategic goals of the organisation.

Relationship building should be a necessary process in any strategic or change management strategy. The strategy, in terms of what steps to follow or what plan to use, is ultimately irrelevant if relationships are solidly built. The change process will follow as it should, and goals will be reached.

In the postmodern era, true long-term value for an organisation is in focussing on the process of relationship building rather than on the outcomes of those relationships (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995). As is revealed in relationship marketing, the shift in focus, that is, from outcomes of an exchange (transaction) to process of relationship engagement and enhancement, means that boundaries in organisations are broken down and the roles of the marketing actors are enmeshed and blurred. These co-operative relationships eventually have little to do with the exchange of products, services, or even values, but become

*a process of value creation through co-operative and collaborative effort
(Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995, p. 414.)*

As Sheth & Parvatiyar (1995) note, this is clearly an example of an evolution towards a postmodern approach. It would therefore be to the benefit of the field of public relations to shift the focus from measuring outputs (or even behavioural outcomes) to the relationship processes, that is, of engagement and enrichment through constant dialogue, debate and discourse. This is the making of true values,

not only for the organisation, but also its environment and, ultimately, society as a whole. The well-known business philosopher Charles Handy (2002) believes that running an organisation should be a moral issue. Many organisations have lost the trust of their stakeholders because their stakeholders suspect that corporations are immoral in that they have no purpose other than themselves. Organisations will have healthy relationships by being good citizens and by leading in areas such as environmental and social sustainability. In this sense, an organisation should be good by doing good (Ledingham, 2003).

A further contribution of emergent change management to relationship building is the importance of participation. Bennis (2000, p. 114) argues that a top-down change leadership is a myth, because adaptive problems in complex environments require alliances and involvement of all affected by the changes. This further promotes participation because participation encourages a more ethical, energetic and empowering process (Dunphy, 2000).

In the stakeholder participation approach, the role of the relationship manager is the co-ordination of conflicting interests between diverse stakeholder groups, rather than containment of stakeholder interests (Deetz, 1995). As according to Deetz (1995),

In a strong representation model, management would be hired by all stakeholders and work to coordinate optimally the meeting of all interests as if they were interests of the corporation, thus seeking the most creative codetermination for the benefit of all stakeholders (p. 49).

The relationship manager needs to determine which stakeholder group has the more legitimate interests, and what those interests are, in order to provide communication platforms for dialogic communication and negotiation.

8.3 Unique contributions of this study

The application of postmodern approaches such as chaos and complexity theories to relationship management within public relations have only been done by a small number of theorists (Murphy, 2000; Aula, 1999; Holtzhausen, 2001). The relevance of relationships, connectivity, self-organisation, and participation in

change management, from the field of public relations has not been studied before. This study contributes by emphasising relationship management for effective change management. It does not merely apply analogies to human action but provides strong metaphors from chaos and complexity theories for theorising human interaction and relationships.

Emerging approaches such as postmodernism, contingency, chaos and complexity theories all stress the importance of interconnectivity between subsystems of societies and organisations, as well as the role of relationships in creating energy in the form of information and dialogue which amount to more than the individual parts of any system. The complex and dynamic nature of the environment, structural alteration, and the subsequent need for employee flexibility are recognised. A further contribution of this study to change management is the view that organisations should create visions and perform strategic planning around scenarios to guide actions. It is also crucial to adapt to change by influencing back on change, and lead change through building relationships, managing conflict, and participation in decision-making.

Relationships have previously been studied from the systems theory perspective (Broom et al., 2000; Angelopulo, 1994; Grunig et al., 2002; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Steyn & Puth, 2000) where mutually influential interactions exist between an organisation and other systems in the environment because of the interdependence of subsystems. This is a clear indication of the modernist perspectives to many of the current theories and approaches to strategic communication management and public relations. Spicer (1997) is one of many theorists who have criticised the systems approach, particularly in terms of the lack of recognition of the power differences between subsystems. Furthermore, the systems theory has an inherent bias towards management, and that asymmetry seeks consensus, custom and conformity to culture. In this respect, Spicer (1997) predicts that, as the field of public relations matures, emphasis will shift beyond the organisational and managerial bias towards the societal role and a broader interconnectedness with the environment. This thesis has been an attempt to contribute to the approach of public relations on a broader sphere from a *process* perspective. The conceptual framework of this study is based on the principles of complex responsive processes of participation, continuous interaction and meaning

making. Within this paradigm, practitioners do not set out strategies and agendas beforehand, but they become participants in self-organised processes. They do not play the role of facilitators who take notes, summarise, structure, or call for feedback, but instead listen, guide articulation, link themes, reflect and thus become part of the ‘narrative’ and ‘conversation’ of the organisation. As Stacey (2003) envisions,

It is these shifts in communicative patterning that constitute organisational change. This means that unlike the systems practitioner, the practitioner from a complex responsive processes perspective is not concerned with any whole or system at all but with the detail of the local interactions between people in the living present (2003, p.403).

A further shift of emphasis suggested in this thesis is the move away from communication management to behaviour management; that is, where the decision-making processes of an organisation have a direct impact on relationships between the organisation and its stakeholders. As suggested by Steyn & Puth (2000), if organisations are to fulfil true relationship management, the emphasis ought not to be on what is communicated but to whom. More importantly, it is ethical behaviours that build trust and, essentially, a healthy reputation. The emphasis is thus much less on communication management, and much more on relationships and behaviour management.

This thesis further questions whether relationships can be managed by formulating corporate communication strategies. One of the problems with this approach is that the emphasis is on the communication manager becoming part of the top management function in order to have decision-making and influencing powers in strategy (Steyn & Puth, 2000). The assumption that strategic thinking lies with the upper levels of organisations is persistently questioned in this study. Essentially, if communication managers are part of the decision-making process then they become part of the problem, and strategic decision-making becomes a top-down approach.

Another problem with the formulation of corporate communication strategies is the question of whether relationships can be managed this way. Postmodern theorists and corporate communication managers are starting to move away from

models of strategic planning, objective setting and positivistic measurement. New approaches support environmental scanning as an important starting point to identifying stakeholders who might be affected by organisational actions. They then suggest the building of relationships with these stakeholders through the decision-making processes, thereby sustaining the goal achievement and reputation of the organisation (Grunig et al., 2002; Holtzhausen, 2001). Conflict management, discourse and participation are therefore emphasised. Where an organisation's success within the modernist paradigm depends on its ability to process information of appropriate richness, and to reduce uncertainty and clarify ambiguity (Spicer, 1997, p. 241), emergent approaches focus attention on anxiety, diversity, conflict, unpredictability and paradox (Stacey, 2003). In highly complex environments and processes with emergent long-term outcomes, the control and linearity associated with strategic management as suggested by theorists such as Steyn & Puth (2000), Harrison (2003), Smith (2002), and Ferguson (1999), are impossible. Postmodern approaches support paradoxes, ambiguity and uncertainty (Stacey, 2003). For example, managers should learn how to take action while experiencing the anxiety of unpredictability, and use the anxiety as energy for creativity. They are also encouraged to use the constraints associated with relationships as a form of self-organising control.

Stacey (2003) further suggests that complex interaction between people and groups make it impossible for change processes to be governed by top management through planned change processes. Interestingly, Stacey also makes it clear that it is not that management cannot, or should not, make decisions or choices, but rather that strategy should be an emerging process of relationship building. That is,

Strategic management is the process of actively participating in the conversations around important emerging issues. Strategic direction is not set in advance but understood in hindsight as it is emerging or after it has emerged (Stacey, 2003, p.423).

Measurement, from the emergent perspective in this thesis, is focused on qualitative methodologies, participative action research and ethnographic research. Organisations can maintain strong relationships with stakeholders who will commit over the long term by conducting action research with full participation of all involved, constantly sharing open and honest information, and getting involved

in discussions and discourse regarding shared interests. The answer is not to be fixated on measurement, but to be more flexible in the acceptance of less positivistic approaches and to use participative research to achieve a deeper understanding of contexts and behaviour.

This study incorporates various fields: contributions towards the understanding of change is made from the perspectives of strategic management and public relations. Support towards the development of the study of relationships come from the fields of marketing, interpersonal relationships and public relations theory. A postmodernist interdisciplinary approach is called for where all fields of study are applied in understanding phenomena and there are no borders to prevent so called 'encroachment'.

The use of experimental randomised block design involving mixed factors with repeated measures is not a common research design in public relations research. This design was used because the research questions required the manipulation of independent variables (change strategies followed) in order to measure the influence thereof on the dependent variables (trust, control mutuality, commitment, and satisfaction). This provided a solid foundation from which to base future action research activities. There were however various limitations to the use of experimental design and these will be discussed as follows.

8.4 Limitations of this study

Although the findings of this study indicate strongly that the participation of employees will lead to more positive relationships with organisations, and thus to a higher willingness to change, it would be even more significant if these findings could be generalised to other stakeholders such as clients, communities, suppliers, government, the media, and financial stakeholders. While the initial intention was to include these stakeholders in the study, but time limit and funding did not allow this. Another hindrance was that too few responses were received from these parties to do any useful analysis on the data.

Another limitation, where change management is concerned, is that experimental cross-sectional research cannot provide the same depth of

information as qualitative longitudinal research. Within the traditional systems, theories formative causality applies; however, in heterogeneous complex adaptive systems, where environments and agents are changing all the time, causality is more transformative (Stacey, 2003). A system takes on a life of its own and ‘wholeness’ is never really fully achievable; ‘wholes’ are forever changing and evolving, and are never complete.

Furthermore, as this study approaches relationships as processes and not as states that can be measured at distinct points, longitudinal studies or, more specifically, action research would be better suited with the metatheoretical approach of emergent, interpretive, and critical theories. Participatory action research methodologies will be much better suited to further research on change management within complex environments. Participatory action research (PAR) involve the participants to the extent that these participants help to set the research agenda, participate in data gathering and processing, and share in decisions about the use of outcomes (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Participants share ownership of the total research process. PAR furthermore has a strong emphasis on power sharing between the researcher and the researched. Action research is also a valuable tool in creating change while studying it. As Babbie & Mouton (Babbie & Mouton, 2001) point out, “PAR aims towards social change or transformation” (Babbie & Mouton, 2001, p.64), that is, where actions towards the upliftment and empowerment of people are the outcomes.

Further research should be conducted on behavioural effects by a more effective measuring instrument in order to ascertain a stronger relationship between change strategy, relationship outcomes and change behaviour.

Factors such as structure and type of organisation, as well as size of the organisation, should be further investigated. The educational level of the employees participating in the change management process should also be considered, and the precise influence of this variable needs further investigation

8.5 Recommendations for further research

Descriptive models of relationship management (Broom et al., 2000; Grunig & Huang, 2000) are becoming well established within public relations. Interpersonal theories have been well incorporated into relationship building and decline (Bruning & Ledingham, 2000; Ledingham & Bruning, 2000a; Toth, 2000). Grunig & Huang (2000) have presented a model for relationships, and Hon & Grunig (1999) have put together a measuring instrument to measure relationship outcomes. Three types of relationships, namely, community, professional and personal relationships, have been identified and tested by Bruning & Ledingham (2000). Ledingham has furthermore put together an explicated theory of relationships as a general theory of public relations (2003), thereby solidly establishing relationships as the appropriate domain of public relations. This study contributed by linking change and communication strategies to relationship outcomes, and applied the emergent approaches of chaos and complexity theories to relationships.

The next step would be to link change strategy and communication approach to relationship outcomes and, ultimately, to behavioural outcomes. Further research should be conducted on behavioural effects by using a more effective measuring instrument than was used in this study, in order to ascertain a stronger relationship between change strategy, relationship outcomes and change behaviour. Different strategies should be tested within different types and sizes of organisations using longitudinal action research. The education levels of participants should also be questioned and researched. This will provide practitioners with guidelines and frameworks within which they can build healthier relationships and facilitate change processes.

8.6 Summary and Conclusions

Pagels, a physicist, is

convinced that the nations and people who master the new sciences of complexity will become the economic, cultural, and political superpowers of the next century (cited in Youngblood, 1997, p. 33).

In the new millennium of change and chaos, communication management can contribute greatly to organisations in achieving this. Communication managers will become relationship managers, facilitators, networkers, integrators and interpreters of information, not only within the organisation but also with publics outside the organisation (Marlow & O'Connor Wilson, 1997, p. 68). Communication managers should constantly strive towards creating media and channels to assist participation; furthermore, they should facilitate a two-way communication process in order to provide a climate that would benefit change initiatives. Employees, in particular, ought to be considered the most important of these stakeholders. Consider, for instance, how employees are directly influenced by their participation in the communication process, and how their attitudes and loyalty subsequently influence the way they treat customers and clients, which essentially affects the growth of the bottom line.

New responsibilities of communicating for the new millennium include: bridging differences, learning and understanding new ways of thinking, communicating within diversity, managing conflict (or sometimes even creating it), and functioning between different disciplines (Marlow & Wilson, 1997, p. 77). If relationships can be the strange attractor, or if constant change can be communicated as a strange attractor, it may become a core value. In other words, the culture does not have to be changed because transformation can occur without concentrating on cultural change.

Traditional and conventional strategic management approaches are linear in methodology, but the unpredictability of the business environment is so acute that managers are unable to control all the implementation of strategies and strategic plans. Long-term planning, therefore, becomes impractical and impossible (Singh & Singh, 2002, p. 29). As the chaos and complexity approaches demonstrate,

strategic management should be more about facilitation than management, which means that corporate communication managers should be more concerned with the building of relationships with stakeholders through the facilitation of participation than with 'strategic planning' and 'strategic management'. The role of the communication manager should, therefore, not be one of facilitator between management and stakeholders, or internal problem-solver, but one of organisational activist (Holtzhausen, 2000) – a fourth role to be added to the strategist, manager or technician roles identified by Steyn (2003). Furthermore, they should be involved with the facilitation of conflicts rather than the resolution of conflicts, thereby instigating dynamic instability. Communication managers should create and maintain channels for discourse by opening all information systems to allow self-regulation of communication. They should not seek unanimous control and equality, but should work towards allowing for diversity and different voices in order to keep the system creative and on the edge of chaos. Rather than measuring, they should try to understand the complexity of the environment and the interaction of all the different components of the organisation.

Again, the role of the communication manager is one of facilitator, but not as part of top management; that is, not to be perceived as a mouthpiece for management. The facilitator role should be one of negotiation between conflicting parties, as well as of conflict creator through the provision of channels and forums for discourse. The role should be strategic, but not as part of the management team, rather as one of outsider/agent and organisational critic (Holtzhausen, 2001). The communication manager should facilitate a climate of constant change, conflict and diversity, where the relationships management function becomes the 'strange attractor', keeping the organisation from entropy and instilling a culture of 'positive chaos' (Ströh, 1998).

If we think about the concept of 'relationship', and return to some of the basic relational theories, we will find some alternatives to linear strategic management processes. People are in relationships because they have a need to share and create something better for themselves than when they are alone. Handy (2002) refers to the reason for the existence of an organisation as not being simply for profit.

Similarly, Dave Packard (cited in Handy, 2002) believes that an organisation is a group of people who get together

to accomplish something collectively that they could not accomplish separately—they make a contribution to society, a phrase which sounds trite but is fundamental (cited in Handy, 2002, p. 36).

More important still is that people get into relationships without planned strategies of how they are going to achieve success in those relationships. Relationships tend to be self-organising. Healthy relationships exist when a new entity is formed out of the togetherness of individuals, and the relationship becomes more important than these individual units. As High Prather puts it (cited in Adler & Towne, 2003):

For communication to have meaning it must have a life. It must transcend “you” and “me” and become “us”.... In a small way we then grow out of our own selves and become something new (p. 314).

Grunig & Huang (2000) refer to Ferguson’s focus on the relationships in public relations, and emphasise that the focus should not be on the organisation nor the public, but on the relationship between them, which amounts to a kind of third party or entity in the relationship that takes a higher priority than the two individual parties. If an organisation can put the relationships with stakeholders first and not focus on its own bottom line, the relationship will give back a lot more, and the bottom line will look after itself. In essence, respect for the environment and for the stakeholders create exponential returns.

Another element of good interpersonal relationships that organisations can learn from is the principle of trust, which develops out of moral and ethical behaviour towards each other. In this sense, running an organisation is a moral issue (Handy, 2002). Organisations can have healthy relationships by being good citizens and by leading in areas such as “environmental and social sustainability” (Handy, 2002, p. 53). We do not constantly measure or plan our personal relationships, yet they happen and go well if we are good partners in those relationships. If we are ethical and moral, and if we share the same visions and values, we become part of growing, loving and trusting relationships. However, Handy (2002) also consoles that if we apply this to organisations, “doing good does not necessarily rule out making a reasonable profit” (p. 55).

Other interpersonal theories, such as the social penetration theory of Altman & Taylor, teach honest self-disclosure (cited in Griffin, 2003; Stafford & Canary, 1991), where companies learn by being totally transparent regarding financial statements and accountability. Relational dialectics (Adler & Towne, 2003) teach that relationships are full of paradoxes, and that there is a constant struggle between connectedness and individual separateness. While relationships are always in flux and full of complex contradictions, there is also growth and enjoyment, which is much in line with what the chaos approach teaches about organisational relationships (Wheatley, 1994; Stacey, 2003). In healthy interpersonal relationships, we listen to our partners, care about their problems, and try to reduce uncertainty (Littlejohn, 1992). The five dimensions of relationships developed by Stafford & Canary (1991): *positivity* (enjoyment and mutual satisfaction), *openness* (disclosure), *assurances* (commitment and assurances of legitimacy), *networking* (inter-connectedness), *shared meaning* and *responsibility*, compare very well with the requirements of a two-way symmetrical approach to public relations (Grunig & Huang, 2000).

In the same line, Toth (2000) calls for a return to a focus on the communication process rather than on the management process. Specifically, she argues that there has been a focus on management of relationships using communication, but not on the communication process at the centre of the public relations. Relationships management should happen on an interpersonal level with recognition of the importance of the strategic management of relationships between organisations and their publics.

A major paradigm shift needs to take place in terms of organisation and public opening up to views and inputs from each other. Ongoing research needs to consider the inputs from various disciplines and domains because new findings may impact on current views of relationships. Studies, such as that of Hibbard et al. (2001) from the field of relationships marketing, have warned that positive effects of relationships diminish over the long term, which raises serious concerns because this is a field whose central focus is on relationship building. Knowledge development needs to be shared between all disciplines that are concerned with the theories and practice of relationships. That is the only way that the field of

relationship management can grow and contribute fully to strategic management of organisations.

The postmodern ontology proposed in this thesis recognises that an organisation is not a unit of analysis, physical object or resource, but consists of complex relationships between the entities that make up the organisation. Postmodern communication management therefore ought to play an important role in empowering marginalised groups through participation. Furthermore, it ought to create dialogue and recognise differences and dissension between the organisation and its publics. This thesis therefore argues for a more participative approach with high ethical and moral meaning creation through action science and research, rather than structured approaches practised by current corporate communication theorists. This approach will ensure a positive reputation for the organisation through socially responsible strategy-making, which will have relational influences upon the larger societal community structure.

It needs reiterating that employees are the most important stakeholders to consider because they are the most precious assets of any organisation. The attitudes and loyalty of employees are directly influenced by their participation in communication efforts, and this has a direct influence on how they treat customers and clients, which in turn leads to growth of the bottom line. At the same time, it is important for managers to investigate the paradoxes of different kinds of approaches and the merits of all. If managers could muster the strength to face the complex inconsistencies and impossibilities of making use of change management approaches that ensure economic growth, while at the same time build organisational capability, they will be successful in gaining competitive advantage. These emergent types of change management processes will contribute to caring organisations, which could bring about a cumulative effect of global proportion. Managers should provide the channels and facilitate dialogue and discourse emanating from these paradoxes. Providing forums for discussions will create knowledge-sharing cultures, and allowing experimentation through scenario planning could also establish living laboratories in organisations. Participatory structures would bring science into practice and close the gap between researchers and practitioners. This is the only way we can share knowledge to make us truly conscious of the reality of our organisations and our society. Organisations can

provide us with platforms for true democracy such that they are not merely corporations which exist to make money, but rather to contribute to a humane and ethical civilization. As Saul (1997) has put quite eloquently,

The virtue of uncertainty is not a comfortable idea, but then a citizen-based democracy is built upon participation, which is the very expression of permanent discomfort. The corporatist system depends upon the citizen's desire for inner comfort. Equilibrium is dependent upon our recognition of reality, which is the acceptance of permanent psychic discomfort. And the acceptance of psychic discomfort is the acceptance of consciousness (1997, p. 195).