

**CHAPTER 8**  
**CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND**  
**LIMITATIONS**

## **8.1 INTRODUCTION**

This study consists of 7 chapters, each focusing on a particular range of perspectives. These perspectives all contributed to addressing the aim of this study *describing the current practice of PR in Africa*. Literature on the models and roles of the practice of PR were used in an attempt to describe the current practice of PR in Africa. The underlying dimensions of the practice of PR in Africa were determined by conducting an exploratory factor analysis on both the models and the roles of the practice of PR. A three-factor solution emerged for the models and a two-factor solution emerged for the roles in the African context. This chapter summarises the main findings of Chapter 7, and conclusions are drawn on the current practice of PR in Africa. The implications of these findings are discussed and recommendations are made. Next, the limitations of this study are discussed, and then the recommendations for future research are highlighted.

## **8.2 CONCLUSIONS FROM A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE**

In an attempt to describe the practice of PR in Africa, it was necessary to theoretically describe the current practice of PR. In Chapter 3 the major concept, namely the practice of PR, was defined by two other concepts, namely the models and the roles of the practice of PR. Global literature, specifically that of North America, Europe and South Africa, was consulted to explore the development of the aforementioned concepts. The literature review revealed that the 4 models of the practice of PR as identified by Grunig & Hunt (1984) are still used for empirical studies. The literature review however revealed

another model. This model was referred to in this study as the fifth model, the reflective model. This model was conceptualised by Holmstrom, a European scholar. It was decided to operationalise this model and include it in this study, as this new perspective provided some guidance in research studies. Furthermore, many similarities were drawn between the reflective role of the PR practitioner and that of the role of the strategist. This adapted version of the strategist was therefore included in this study.

In Chapter 4 the macro-environment the impact on thereof on businesses was discussed. These macro environmental issues affect the long-term decisions and strategies of organisations. As PR was studied as a strategic function it was important to emphasis the impact of these issues on the field of PR. The importance of education was discussed as this influences the way in which PR is being practiced. This chapter also addressed the importance of a body of knowledge because it directs the education, future research and the development in PR as a profession.

Chapter 5 discussed the practice of PR in Africa. This chapter addressed the uniqueness of the African context. The literature on the practice of PR in Africa was explored and no empirical evidence was found. Most of the literature found was either from a South African perspective or obtained from African practitioners' conferences. The literature was therefore mostly based on PR practitioners' own experiences and case studies. Currently no body of knowledge on the practice of PR exists on the African continent. Although African PR associations and institutes play an important role in the African context and seem to be very influential, this is not effectively communicated through literature. Some of the African countries' PR associations and institutes have succeeded in lobbying for legislation on practising PR, stating that PR practitioners who are not members of a PR association or institute are not allowed to practise PR in that particular country. Furthermore, this implies that a PR practitioner needs to fulfil all the minimum requirements of that association. In most instances this implies that a certain level of educational level is necessary, which contributes to the professionalism of the field of PR.

In conclusion, the fact that no empirical evidence has been published on the practice of PR in Africa is not a sign that no activities are performed; in fact, the field of PR is very active. In order to better understand the business within the African context, it is necessary to refer to African culture. The cultural element of the African person is more verbal and less written; the implication being that very little has been documented about the practice of PR in Africa. The cultural element as well as the macro environmental issues impact on the way in which PR is practised in Africa. The fact that 60 to 70% of the population of African countries are situated in the rural areas contributes to the fact that businesses need to consider this situation within strategy formulation. The core of social responsibility is summarised in the African world-view and social structures. Africans have a sacred view of humans as social beings. Furthermore, because of poverty and deprivation, African communities have been forced to rely on brotherly groups in order to survive and not through individual self-reliance. The disadvantaged groups in the African communities survive through collective consciousness and collective unity that is the basis of Ubuntu. African governments have needed help from businesses for a long time as a result of the immense need within their countries and the limited resources of governments, and therefore social responsibility has long been part of the African context.

### **8.3 MAIN FINDINGS RELATING TO THE EMPIRICAL PHASE**

As was mentioned before, the practice of PR in this study was explained and empirically tested in terms of the models and roles of the practice of PR as discussed in Chapter 3. The discussion that follows will address both the models and roles separately.

#### **8.3.1 Main findings relating to the models of the practice of PR in Africa**

A set of 25 questions was used to investigate the concept of the models (purpose) of the practice of PR. The underlying dimensions identified by the research related to the theory of the 5 models (purpose) of the practice of PR.

An adapted version of the 4 models developed by Grunig & Hunt (1984) was used, as well as the 5th model, the reflective model. This model was operationalised for the first time. The measuring instrument used proved to be a reliable and valid measuring instrument. Consequently, all 5 these models were included in the measuring instrument used in this study.

The results proved that in the African context, 3 models (purpose) of the practice of PR exist, namely the reflective/ two-way symmetrical, two-way asymmetrical/ symmetrical and the public information/ press agency model. These findings illustrated that the models as explained in global literature exists in Africa. The models, however, collapsed into 3 factors instead of the theoretical explanation of 5 models. This illustrates that in the African context PR practitioners view the purpose of PR from a different perspective, but the fact remains that these models are present in the African context. Furthermore, only sixteen of the original twenty-five questions remained as part of the purified measuring instrument. From the literature review, 8 variables were used to define the reflective model. In the scale purification it was found that 7 of the 8 variables remained as part of the measuring instrument, illustrating that the variables used to define and explain this model effectively tested this model. Most of the variables that were deleted in scale purification were variables explaining the two-way asymmetrical and press agency models.

The models of the practice of PR pertain to the purpose that PR fulfils within an organisation. The findings of this study proved that in the African context the main purpose of PR pertains to the importance of understanding society and the influence PR has with regard to top management's decisions regarding organisational behaviour and decisions in order to become a trustworthy corporate citizen, the importance of research and the sharing of information about the organisation. This proved that the reflective model, which is regarded as the most advanced level of practicing PR in this study, is found in Africa. When referring to the factor loadings identified in this study, it proves that this factor, the reflective/ two-way symmetrical is very strong in the African context.

### **8.3.2 Conclusions regarding the main findings relating to the models of the practice of PR in Africa**

The concepts and constructs defining the models of the practice of PR as discussed in global theory exist in the African context and can be used to determine the level of the practice of PR. The respondents, all PR practitioners, are therefore of the opinion that the main purpose of PR is currently focused on society and understanding society, as well as to influence the organisation to act in a socially responsible manner in terms of the organisation's behaviour and decision making. The findings therefore prove that African PR practitioners are clearly aware of the importance of society's power to influence the organisation's 'licence to operate'. Furthermore, the respondents are of the opinion that the PR department is currently essentially responsible to and for society by making the organisation and top management more aware of the importance of understanding and listening to society.

The other 2 models that were identified, namely the two-way asymmetrical/symmetrical and the public information/ press agency models, are also found in the African context. The purpose of the two-way asymmetrical/ symmetrical model, focused on research but predominantly, research regarding the PR programme. The purpose of the third model, the public information/ press agency model, is to provide information about the organisation. According to the literature discussion, these 2 models are regarded as models that are aimed at a more technical purpose. In the African context, these models are performed at implementation level, therefore focusing on the functional level of an organisation but with a very strong strategic focus. This conclusion was made based on the correlations that were drawn between the models and roles identified in this study. The findings proved that each of these models had a relationship with the role of the strategist. This illustrates that even if a PR practitioner functions at the level of the strategist and needs to provide information about the organisation, using the public information/ press agency model, it is clear that this information needs to be structured and communicated in a strategic manner. The same applies for conducting research about the PR

programmes, and in this case it is clear that a strong strategic focus is used. Therefore, although these models exist and form part of organisations in the African context the purpose it fulfils has a very strategic focus.

### **8.3.3 Implications of the main findings regarding the models of the practice of PR in Africa**

The research findings illustrated that the global literature is present in the African context and that Africa is in fact performing PR at the most advanced level of the practice of PR as explained in the literature, from a models perspective. The strong cultural influence of the African world-view, focusing on the importance of the human beings as well as the macro environmental issues in the African context, may all have an influence on the prominent societal purpose of PR. It is, however, clear that African PR practitioners are well educated and very influential within the organisation, which contributes to the fact that PR practitioners need to optimise this opportunity to educate and assist top management in understanding the essence of communication.

On a continental level, NEPAD offers many opportunities for African PR practitioners to unite with PR practitioners from other African countries and to build a network and knowledge base for PR in Africa. It is also essential that these African countries and the African PR society understand the importance of documenting empirical research. The lack of published literature and empirical work in the field of PR in Africa has created a perception that PR does not exist on the African continent and if it is present, it is practiced at the very lowest level of development according to global theory. However, this study has proved that perception wrong.

### **8.3.4 Recommendations regarding the models of the practice of PR in Africa**

Although it is clear that the African PR society is very active and this study proved that PR is functioning at a strategic level, it is essential to communicate

the African PR developments to the global PR society. The Western world does not understand the African continent and has a largely uninformed idea of Africa and its activities. This may be due to many reasons, and one important contributing factor is the fact that African people are more verbal, which means that they prefer to share thoughts verbally rather than documenting them. This is a strong weakness for researchers, since there is very little published literature to base research on. Consequently, it is critical for PR practitioners and scholars to publish empirical findings.

The findings of this study further proved that PR practitioners are well educated and well trained in the field of PR. It is essential to determine what paradigm is taught at the formal and informal institutions of training. This is essential in order to determine what world-view is influencing the PR practitioners on the African continent. Furthermore, it is essential to determine if an African world-view is addressed in the educational material. The impact of macro environmental issues on the practice of PR was illustrated in this study. It is therefore essential to address these issues and the importance thereof in the African context, and they should therefore be addressed and included in the educational material of PR practitioners.

Furthermore, it is necessary to take note that in this research study the PR practitioners were the unit of analysis, implying that the research was focused only on the practitioners and their opinions. The results might be different when top management becomes the unit of analysis, investigating their opinions of the current purpose that PR is fulfilling in the organisation.

### **8.3.5 Main findings relating to the roles of the practice of PR in Africa**

A set of 21 questions was used to investigate the concept of the roles (activities) of the practice of PR. On the basis of global literature, 3 underlying dimensions were identified, relating to the 3 roles (activities) of the practice of PR. The reflective role, conceptualised by Holmstrohm, was included in an adapted version of Steyn's roles (1999). This role was operationalised and the

measuring instrument proved to be reliable and valid. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, all 3 the roles were included in the measuring instrument.

The research results proved that in the African context, 2 roles (activities) of the practice of PR exist, namely the strategist and the technician / manager. This proved that the roles explained in literature exist in the African context. It is important to note though that of the 21 variables used in this section of the questionnaire, 18 remained as part of the purified measuring instrument. Furthermore, the variables used for the role of the strategist were based on a previous measuring instrument but were adapted as mentioned before. It was found that not one of these variables had been deleted in the scale purification phase, illustrating that these variables defined and explained the role of the strategist very effectively.

The roles of the practice of PR pertain to the activities that PR practitioners fulfil. The findings of this study proved that the current activities of a PR practitioner show a high concern for societal issues, which motivates a continuous dialogue between the organisation and society. This illustrates that the PR practitioners have a responsibility towards the organisation as well as society, because the success of an organisation depends on the social responsibility within the societies in which organisations operate, which creates public trust. This proved that the role of the strategist, which is regarded as the most advanced level of practicing PR, is found in Africa. When referring to the factor loadings identified in this study, it proves that this factor is very strong in the African context.

### **8.3.6 Conclusions regarding the main findings relating to the roles of the practice of PR in Africa**

The research proved that the concepts discussed in global theory for the practice of PR exist in the African context and can be used to determine the level of the practice of PR. According to the respondents, African PR



practitioners' current activities mainly focus on the activities of the strategist. These activities are focused on societal issues and act as an 'early warning system' to top management. These individuals are also responsible for a continuous dialogue between the organisation and society. This illustrates that currently these practitioners fulfil a very high-profile function and are very influential in the organisation. The research findings further prove that African PR practitioners currently play an essential role in focusing the organisation's attention on the importance of social responsibility, which is essential to gain public trust. The focus of this role is on a strategic level, that of decision making, giving direction, educating top management on the possible outcomes and feeding strategic information into the decision-making circle.

The second role that was identified in the African context was the technician/manager. According to theory, two separate roles are identified, but the African PR practitioners are of the opinion that these roles are performed as one, and therefore in this study they were collapsed into one role. These research findings further illustrated that in the African context, differences are found between the role of the strategist and that of the technician but no clear difference exists between the roles of the manager and the technician. In fact, it seems as though the role of the manager as conceptualised in theory does not exist in the African context.

The role of the technician/ manager explains the importance of communicating on behalf of the organisation by implementing plans and strategies as well as writing and editing material. The focus of this role is therefore on taking action and performing activities. This role can be positioned at the functional level where activities need to be performed. In positioning this role at a functional level does not necessarily mean that the individual or the PR practitioner performing this role is exclusively performed at this level. This merely states that the type of activity performed by the PR practitioner is at an implementational and functional level.

According to the literature discussion, the 3 roles are very different in the type of activities performed. In this study it illustrated that in the African context the activities performed by African PR practitioners can be viewed mainly from two perspectives: firstly, activities relating to the role of a strategist, these activities are very influential and affect top management and participate in the decision making, and secondly, activities pertaining to the role of the technician/manager, focusing on the implementation of plans and strategies as well as writing and editing material.

### **8.3.7 Implications of the main findings of the roles of the practice of PR in Africa**

The research findings illustrate that currently the most advanced level of the practice of PR from a roles perspective the strategist is found in the African context. These findings further illustrate that the global literature is present in the African context. Furthermore it was proved that PR practitioners fulfil very influential and critical roles within organisations. The importance of feeding strategic information into the organisation is essentially part of the role of the African PR practitioner but it is clear that these practitioners are also responsible for communicating on behalf of the organisation.

The demographic information shows that African PR practitioners are well educated and trained in the field of PR. The implication is that these individuals are regarded as influential individuals, fulfilling very strategic and essential activities within the organisations. It is essential for the global PR society to take note of this situation, and furthermore it is essential for African PR practitioners to explain this role and the reasons contributing to it. Furthermore, African PR practitioners need to optimise this role by explaining the importance of managing communication strategically within the organisation.

The African PR associations are very active on the African continent and contribute much to the development of the PR profession. Their efforts have been very successful in a few African countries, where PR practitioners are not

allowed to practice PR unless these individuals are registered as members of the national PR association or institute. The implication is that the standards and codes of ethics of these associations need to be revised and adapted continuously in order to look after the well-being of the practitioners but also of the field as a whole.

### **8.3.8 Recommendations regarding the roles of the practice of PR in Africa**

The research findings have illustrated that the African PR practitioners are very influential. However, the positions of these practitioners within the organisation have not been tested and empirically verified. This would provide a clear indication of where PR is positioned within the organisation and what role it fulfils.

Furthermore, although the African PR associations play a vital role in the African context, this study did not investigate what is needed for PR practitioners to become members of the national PR associations or institutes. It would be interesting to determine what is needed for PR practitioners to become a member. Furthermore, investigating the codes of conduct and minimum requirements would be essential for determining the value of the role of these associations.

The PR practitioners were the units of analysis. The focus of this study was to determine their opinion of the current role that they are fulfilling in the organisation. These results might be different when top management becomes the unit of analysis, focusing the attention on their opinions of the current role that the PR practitioners are fulfilling. It would be interesting to see if there is a difference between the current role the PR practitioners are of the opinion that they fulfil and the role they fulfil in the opinion of top management.

## **8.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The delimitations of this study were briefly discussed and summarised in Chapter 1. This was necessary since a single study cannot and should not attempt to address all aspects of a particular field of enquiry. Specific limitations identified in this study in the literature as well as the empirical phase of the study will be discussed.

### **8.4.1 Limitations from a theoretical perspective**

This study focused on the practice of PR and was defined by referring to the models and the roles of the practice of PR. It is, however, possible that literature on mass communication could have provided more insight into the African situation as most of the courses in Africa are offered from this perspective. However, this discipline was not considered in this study and therefore such literature was not consulted. Anthropology may also have provided valuable input in understanding the African context a little better owing to the critical influence of culture on the social interaction within Africa. This discipline was, however, not included and consequently the literature was not consulted. Furthermore, the importance of the uniqueness of the macro environmental issues on the African context could have justified the inclusion of the political and economic literature, which might have contributed to a better understanding of the African context. These disciplines were not included and therefore the literature was not consulted.

### **8.4.2 Limitations from an empirical perspective**

Survey research was conducted in an attempt to describe the practice of PR in Africa, as described by global literature. Chapter 6 explained the research methodology that was followed. The research design and the choice of research methods and techniques were guided by the fact that the research was quantitative and descriptive in nature. This chapter provided a step-by-step approach that was followed in the attempt to get enough respondents.

This was one of the major issues in this study, as there was no knowledge of the African PR practitioners. Data was collected through the medium of e-mail, which proved to be not the most effective medium in the African context. Face-to-face data collection proved to be much more effective, illustrating the importance of interpersonal relationships in the African context. This was proven by the impact of, firstly, meeting some African PR practitioners face-to-face and, secondly, the referrals that followed. The e-mail as medium also proved that the technological infrastructure is still not as stable in some of the countries as was expected.

The questionnaire did not cater for consultants to provide a proper reflection of what PR's current purpose and activities entail, since the questionnaire was based on that of an existing one, which focused on PR as part of an organisation. Although the questionnaire was designed to address this particular study and its objectives, a few more questions were included in order for the researcher to get a better understanding of the nature of PR in Africa. This, however, made the questionnaire a little long and could have also contributed to the low response rate.

The sample method used in this study, namely snowball sampling, was very time consuming and the researcher did not have much control over the type of respondents who participated. It would have also been more effective if PR practitioners from the various sectors of society could have been included in this study in order to see if there are any differences in the practice of PR.

The sample was not big enough to compare different countries with one another or to do a confirmatory factor analysis in order to assess if the measuring instrument can in fact be used in this context.

Although this study was of a descriptive nature and a quantitative approach was used it was found that more in-depth information is necessary in order to explain certain aspects more effectively.

## **8.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The former section 8.4 addressed the limitations of this particular study and therefore certain recommendations will be made in the following

### **8.5.1 Continuation of the present study**

This study merely focused on the practice of PR and did not refer extensively to the educational and research aspect of the African body of knowledge. In the attempt to investigate a body of knowledge research on all 3 these aspects should be included.

### **8.5.2 Important research topics**

There are numerous opportunities for future studies in the practice of PR in Africa. Based on the limitations of this study a few recommendations can be made for future research:

- A comparison between different countries in terms of the practice of PR could be interesting;
- Inclusion of more African countries especially those countries with active PR associations and institutions;
- Explore which tertiary institutions offer PR training;
- Explore the perspective from which this PR training takes place;
- This study found that African countries offer courses in PR, it would be interesting to assess from which scientific perspective this training takes place;
- Determining the PR curriculum that is taught at the formal and informal institutions in Africa;
- The importance of culture in the practice of PR; Anthropology and sociology will contribute to a better understanding of the African context.

## 8.6 CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to describe the practice of PR in Africa. Very little information was available about the practice of PR in Africa and therefore it was essential to develop a benchmark that could be used to describe the African situation. This was done in this study through a theoretical discussion, in the attempt to explore the current level of development for the practice of PR. This theoretical discussion guided the empirical phase where the various concepts and constructs were tested.

The empirical phase of this study proved that 3 models and 2 roles exist in the African context. The findings further empirically verified that the reflective model and the adapted role of the strategist are present in the African context. Relationships between the models and roles in the African context were found, which illustrated that the practice of PR predominantly takes place on a very high and influential level. This could be due to the high educational level that was found amongst PR practitioners but there could also be various other factors contributing to this.

This study proved that very little is known about the practice of PR in Africa due to various reasons but an important issue is that of a lack of documented literature on the practice of PR in Africa. The limited information has created perceptions that there is not happening in the field of PR in Africa or if there is then it takes place at a very low technical level. This study proved that those perceptions are incorrect. Africa is currently according to the opinions of the PR practitioner functioning at a very strategic level where the purpose of PR is focused on understanding society and the way in which it influences businesses.

Africa can and should continue with the continental discussions on the practice of PR. The continent should however eagerly seek to participate in the global discussions providing a better understanding about the practice of PR in Africa. The Western world does not understand the complex and dynamic environment

of the African continent and these issues impact life in general on the continent. Furthermore, the authenticity of the African culture has a major impact on the way in which PR is practiced. It is therefore essential for African PR practitioners to explain this worldview to the global society, as this influence social interaction and therefore the practice of PR. When referring back to Biko's words that was stated in the beginning of this study:

*"We believe that in the long run the special contribution to the world by Africa will be in this field of human relationships. The great powers of the world may have done wonders in giving the world an industrial and military look, but the great gift still has to come from Africa – giving the world a more human face"* (Biko in Coetzee & Roux, 1998:30)

it is clear that Africa can provide a very unique contribution to the understanding of PR in the African context.