

**STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT ROLES OF THE
CORPORATE COMMUNICATION FUNCTION**

by

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SINOPSIS

Hoof uitvoerende beamptes en ander senior bestuurders skyn ontevrede te wees met die prestasie van hul korporatiewe kommunikasiebestuurders/praktisyns. Hul persepsies is dat praktisyns faal om breë besluitnemingsrolle in organisasies te vertolk. Dit kom voor asof hulle nie in staat is om die groter geheel of belangrike vraagstukke in hul industrie te verstaan nie -- hul denkwysie is takties, eerder as strategies. Praktisyns is gefokus op hulle eie aktiwiteite en media, op die bereiking van kommunikasie doelstellings en doelwitte—sonder om dit noodwendig aan besigheidsdoelstellings te verbind. Daar is klaarblyklik 'n gebrek aan begrip tussen topbestuur en die korporatiewe kommunikasiefunksie oor laasgenoemde se rol in die strategiese bestuursproses.

Hierdie situasie is moontlik die gevolg van 'n gebrek aan strategiese bestuurs- en strategiese kommunikasiekennis en -vaardighede by korporatiewe kommunikasiebestuurders, veroorsaak deur onvoldoende opleiding in hierdie velde (Groenewald 1998a).

Hierdie studie spreek die volgende navorsingsdoelwitte aan: **Eerstens**, om 'n strategiese rol vir die korporatiewe kommunikasiepraktisyn op die topbestuursvlak van die organisasie te konseptualiseer (die rol van *die 'korporatiewe kommunikasie strategies'*.) Dit vind plaas deur middel van 'n ondersoek van die strategiese bestuursliteratuur om vas te stel of daar 'n behoefte op topbestuursvlak vir so 'n strategiese rol bestaan. Die gedragsaktiwiteite van so 'n rol word geïdentifiseer uit beide die korporatiewe kommunikasie- sowel as die strategiese bestuursliteratuur.

Tweedens, om *korporatiewe kommunikasiestrategie* te konseptualiseer as 'n aktiwiteit van die kommunikasiepraktisyn in die rol van die *'korporatiewe kommunikasiebestuurder'*, 'n strategiese rol op die funksionele of meso vlak van die onderneming. Verder, om korporatiewe kommunikasiestrategie te differensieer van 'n kommunikasieplan.

Derdens, om 'n hipotetiese model vir die ontwikkeling van korporatiewe kommunikasiestrategie daar te stel. Vervolgens, om die model te implementeer, te evalueer en te verbeter deur die assessering en vergelyking van die korporatiewe kommunikasiestrategie projekte van derdejaar korporatiewe kommunikasiebestuurstudente aan die Universiteit van Pretoria, as vennote in die aksienavorsingsproses.

Die geselekteerde navorsingsbenadering is *kwalitatiewe* navorsing—'n *verkennde* ontwerp word gebruik in die bereiking van die eerste drie doelwitte (deur middel van 'n literatuurondersoek). 'n *Bevestigende* ontwerp word aangewend vir die implementering, evaluering en verbetering van die model (deur middel van aksienavorsing metodologie).

In die implementering, evaluering en verbetering van die hipotetiese model beweeg hierdie studie weg van die tradisionele dosent-gesentreerde benadering in die klaskamer na 'n situasie waar studente betrokke gemaak word in 'n navorsingsondersoek wat ten doel het om teorie te bou. Terselfdertyd word die deelnemende gemeenskap (in hierdie geval, nie-winsgeoriënteerde organisasies) blootgestel aan strategiese kommunikasiekennis. Hulle word betrokke gemaak by 'n proses waardeur hulle aktiewe deelnemers word (in samewerking met die studente en die navorser/dosent) in die ontwikkeling van korporatiewe kommunikasiestrategie vir hul organisasies. Die gevolge hiervan is tweeledig: eerstens verkry die personeel van die nie-winsgeoriënteerde organisasie sowel as die studente strategiese kommunikasievaardighede; tweedens verken die navorser 'n nuwe belangstellingsarea, bou teorie en bewerkstellig 'n leerproses vir studente om ervaring en kennis op te doen wat toepaslik is vir die praktyk.

In die konseptualisering van 'n nuwe rol vir die korporatiewe *kommunikasiepraktisyn op topbestuursvlak* (die rol van die korporatiewe kommunikasie 'strategis'), sowel as in die voorstel van korporatiewe kommunikasie strategie as skakel tussen die kommunikasieplan en die korporatiewe strategie, word daar gepoog om moontlike oplossings vir belangrike kwessies in die praktyk aan die hand te doen.

ABSTRACT

Chief executives (CEOs) and other senior managers do not seem to be satisfied with the performance of their corporate communication managers/practitioners. Perceptions are that practitioners fail to assume broad decision making roles in organisations. They seem to be unable to see the big picture or understand the key issues in their industry—their thinking is tactical, rather than strategic. Practitioners are focused on their own activities and media, on the achievement of *communication* goals and objectives—without necessarily linking them to *business* goals. There appears to be a lack of understanding between top management and the corporate communication function on the latter's role in the strategic management process.

This situation might be the result of a lack of strategic management and strategic communication knowledge and skills amongst corporate communication managers, possibly caused by insufficient training in these areas (Groenewald 1998a).

The research objectives addressed by this study are the following: **Firstly**, to conceptualise a strategic role for the corporate communication practitioner at the top management level of the organisation (the role of the *PR strategist*). This is done by investigating the strategic management literature to determine whether a need exists at the top management level to play a strategic role. The behavioural activities of such a role were identified both from the public relations and the strategic management literature.

Secondly, to conceptualise *corporate communication strategy* as an activity of a corporate communication practitioner in the role of the *PR manager*, a strategic role at the functional or meso level of the organisation. Furthermore, to differentiate a corporate communication strategy from a communication plan.

Thirdly, to hypothesise a model for developing corporate communication strategy — and thereafter to implement, evaluate and improve the model by assessing and comparing the corporate communication strategy projects of third year corporate

communication students at the University of Pretoria, as partners in the action research process.

The research approach selected is *qualitative* research—an *exploratory* design is employed in achieving the first three objectives by means of a literature investigation. A *confirmatory* design is used for the implementation, evaluation and improvement of the model through the methodology of action research.

In implementing, evaluating and revising the hypothesised model, this study moves away from the traditional teacher-centred approach in the classroom to a situation where students are involved in a research inquiry to build theory. At the same time, the participant community (non-profit organisations in this case) is exposed to strategic communication knowledge. They are involved in a process whereby they become active participants (together with the students and the lecturer/researcher) in developing corporate communication strategy for their organisations. The results are twofold: firstly, staff members of the non-profit organisation (as well as the students) acquire strategic communication skills; and secondly, the researcher investigates a new area of interest, builds theory, and facilitates a learning process for students whereby they obtain experience and knowledge that is applicable to practice.

In conceptualising both a new role for the corporate communication practitioner at the top management level (the role of the *PR strategist*), and proposing corporate communication strategy as the link between the communication plan and the corporate strategy, an attempt is made to provide possible solutions to important problems in practice.

FIGURE 1.1: OUTLINE OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

