CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTORY PERSPECTIVES

> Aim of this chapter:
>
> *In this introductory chapter the subject of the study is demarcated, the purpose of the study is discussed and the research problem is stated. Theoretical background information on the problem is offered and the importance of the problem is discussed. Empirical background information is also offered and the problem researched is described by briefly discussing the methodological agenda for the study.*

1.1   INTRODUCTION

Human activity is always directed towards the achievement of objectives. The objective of a particular act may not be entirely clear at all times to all observers – or even to the actors – but according to Koehler, Anatol & Applebaum (1981:11), it is difficult to conceive of any conscious action that is not aimed at producing some change or achieving some objectives.

With the ascendance of non-physical forms of productive resources, today's economy requires new approaches to pursuing the objective of prosperity. However much that pursuit may be a national or international objective, depends mostly on how organisations define their goals, the strategies they adopt to pursue them, and the criteria guiding business decisions (Morgan, 1998:2).

Organisations exist because goals can be achieved only – or at least more efficiently – through the co-ordinated activity of individuals. Robbins & De Cenzo (1998:3) define an organisation as a structured system of relationships that co-ordinates the efforts of a group of people toward the achievement of specific objectives, or "to accomplish some specific purpose". An organisation's success depends largely on its ability to process information of appropriate richness to reduce uncertainty and clarify ambiguity that occurs in an environment of constant change (Spicer, in Ströh, 1998:39).

With the effective use of communication, the actions of individuals on whom the survival of the organisation depends can be co-ordinated to achieve the connectivity and alignment of relationships necessary in a global knowledge economy.

Organisations are in more or less continuous interaction with the society in which they exist. They interface with the external environment through an elaborate system of human and non-human intermediaries – products, documents, customers, vendors, directors, stockholders, representatives, competitors, the media, government agencies – which results in the exchange of information that enables the organisation and its environment to respond to one another (Koehler, Anatol & Applebaum, 1981:11). The flow of information, communication and the relationships facilitating it, become horizontal as well as vertical, both internally and between the enterprise and the outside world (Morgan, 1998:2).

In an age of chaos and change, the communication managers of organisations will become facilitators and networkers who will be the integrators and interpreters of such information and managers of such relationships – not only within organisations, but also with publics outside the organisation (Marlow & O'Connor Wilson, in Ströh, 1998:39). According to Grunig (1992:11), this managed interdependence between the organisation and its environment is the major characteristic of successful organisations.

Effective organisations are able to choose appropriate goals for their environmental and cultural context and then achieve those goals. However, strategic constituencies (i.e. stockholders, publics, etc.) within the internal and external environment can constrain the organisation to meet its goals and achieve its mission. Organisations strive for autonomy from these publics and try to mobilise publics that support their goals (Grunig, J, 1992:11). One of the departments most strategically placed in the organisation to support senior management in its endeavour to be successful in a competitive and continuously changing environment is the public relations or communication department.

Excellent communication departments contribute to decisions made by senior management by providing them with information about the environment of the organisation, about the organisation itself, and about the relationship between the organisation and its environment. Excellent departments engage in environmental scanning, have access to senior management, and present information at an appropriate level of abstraction for different levels of management (Grunig, J, 1992:12). Organisations will also be more likely to have excellent communication departments when they face a high level of environmental uncertainty.

The increasing need for business transformation in order to position organisations for the new economy represents a fundamental shift in the relationship of the corporation to individuals and to society as a whole. Gouillart & Kelly (in Verwey, 1998:4) argue that the Communication Revolution not only forms the basis of this new business model, which necessitates the ability to manage the flow of information, but is in actual fact the facilitator of a fundamental social and business influence; an unstoppable trend towards connectivity.

The theory that will be discussed next will serve as a critical guide to thought, research and conceptualisation. This set of interrelated propositions (or generalisations) and definitions serves to conceptually organise selected aspects of the world in a systematic way. In this study, theory, method (conceptualisation) and research activity are interwoven in a contextual and circular process so that theory guides research while research guides theory (Du Plooy, 1996:30). The way in which the research is linked to the theoretical problem for this study will now be discussed.

1.2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

This study was undertaken to add to the body of knowledge in the sphere of public relations and corporate communication management. The field of study of public relations and communication management can be distinguished from other fields such as general management, human resource management, marketing management and information management, as well as other communication fields of study such as

business communication, organisational communication and management communication.

According to Kroon (1996:4), general management as a business function differs from the other functions in the sense that it does not exist as an independent department in the business. General management refers to the task of leading, which is performed at all levels of management and which comprises the following:

- The four basic management functions – planning, organising, activating and controlling.
- The six additional management functions – decision making, communication, motivation, co-ordination, delegation and disciplining.

Smit & Cronje (1992: 6) state that management is a process or series of activities that gives the necessary direction to an enterprise's resources so that its objectives can be achieved as productively as possible in the environment in which it functions. Management is also a process of getting things done, effectively and efficiently, through and with other people (Robbins & De Cenzo, 1998:6; Mondy & Noe, 1981:4).

Human resource management or personnel management is concerned with supplying a service to the other functions by determining the manpower needs on the basis of the strategic plan and the recruitment, selection, placement and induction or orientation of employees. It includes the formulation of personnel policy as well as the training and development of existing personnel. Other tasks include the handling of remuneration, promotions, transfers, demotions, resignations and dismissal of employees (Kroon, 1996:5; Mondy & Noe, 1981:5-7; Cherrington, 1983:7-10).

According to Gerber, Nel & Van Dyk (1997:10), the British Institute for Personnel Management defines the concept *personnel management* as follows:
"Personnel management is that part of management concerned with people at work and with their relationships within an enterprise. Its aim is to bring together and develop into an effective organisation the men and women who make up an enterprise

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and, having regard for the well-being of the individual and of working groups, to enable them to make their best contribution to its success".

When compared to other academic business disciplines, the field of information systems (IS) is relatively new. The increasingly important role played by information systems in modern business organisations made the IS discipline itself a necessity. According to Stair (1996:5), we live in an information economy. Information itself has value, and commerce often involves the exchange of information, rather than tangible goods. In IS terms, **data** consists of raw facts, such as an employee's name and the number or hours worked in a week, inventory part numbers, or sales orders. **Information** is a collection of facts organised in such a way that they have additional value beyond the value of the facts themselves. **Knowledge** is the body of rules, guidelines, and procedures used to select, organise, and manipulate data to make it suitable for a specific task.

According to Van der Walt, Strydom, Marx & Jooste (1996:4), marketing, in its simplest form, is merely an exchange between two people. The activities of the marketing function are based on the transfer of ownership of the goods and services of the business to the consumer and, in so doing, earning an income. Kotler & Armstrong (1990:5) define marketing as the social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging products and value with others.

The marketing function determines the needs and preferences of the consumer and develops and supplies a suitable product or service to fulfil the identified needs. The marketing task is performed by deciding on a marketing strategy, which includes the choice of a target market and marketing mix or the so-called 4Ps.

By means of the marketing, mix the products or services of the business are presented to the target market in the best possible combination of product, price, distribution (place) and marketing communication (promotion). It is generally accepted that selling forms part of the marketing function (Churchill & Peter, 1995:7; Kroon, 1996:6).

According to Grunig (1992:357), public relations and marketing are both essential functions for a modern organisation. Marketing managers identify markets for the products and services of the organisation. Then they supervise marketing communication programmes to create and sustain demand for the products or services. Public relations managers, in contrast, supervise programmes for communication with publics – groups of people who organise themselves when an organisation affects them or they affect it. Markets are limited to the consumer segment of an organisation's environment. Publics can arise within many stakeholder categories – such as employees, communities, stockholders, governments, students, suppliers, and donors, as well as consumers.

Marketing and public relations serve different functions and public relations cannot be excellent of it is subjugated to the marketing function. When an organisation makes public relations a marketing function, practitioners are reduced to the technician role, and the organisation loses a valuable mechanism for managing its interdependence with its strategic publics (Grunig, 1992:357).

Apart from the distinction from other fields of study as mentioned above, public relations and communication management can also be distinguished from other fields of communication. Groenewald (1998:35), in developing a model for communication management training, distinguishes between four fields of study: business communication, organisational communication, management communication and corporate communication.

Groenewald (1998:35) suggests the following definition of Reinsch (1994) to describe the field of business communication:
"Business communication can be defined as the scholarly study of the use, adaption and creation of languages, symbols and signs to conduct activities that satisfy human needs and wants by providing goods and services for private profit."

Business communication has explicit ties to management schools, different from organisational communication and corporate communication, for example, that developed from speech communication and journalism respectively (Reinsch in

Groenewald, 1998:35). According to Smeltzer, Glab & Golan (1983:73), the traditional domain of business communication is the structural component of the correct writing style, business letters, competent use of words and formal reporting. It later expanded to include meetings, verbal presentations and interviewing (Krapels & Arnold, 1996:349). However, the focus is still written communication in business, with the emphasis on "the exchange of messages that support the goal of buying and selling goods and services".

The field of study of business speech, where researchers studied the persuading properties of verbal communication and research, and which was stimulated by the growth in advertising and marketing, led to the inception of organisational communication – a field of study that explained communication structures and systems in organisations (White-Mills & Rogers, 1996:353).

The theoretical foundation of organisational communication is grounded in both organisational and communication theories (Koehler & Taugher in Groenewald, 1998:2). Organisational communication is unique in the sense that it combines the study of organisational theory and behaviour with the study of communication theory in an attempt to understand the communication processes and behaviour in organisations (Redding; Steinberg in Groenewald, 1998:39). This field of study has its roots in management theory and organisational behaviour. The academic home of organisational communication is in speech or communication departments (Mumby & Stohl, 1996:55).

The fact that business, management and corporate communication are business specific, causes these fields of study to stand in a symbiotic relationship to the corporate world and more specifically to management. Research in these fields is therefore pragmatic and aims to deliver results to management. Organisational communication, on the other hand, has no corporate responsibility and represents stakeholders other than management (Mumby & Stohl, 1996:55).

Organisational communication is largely focused on the study of structures in the organisation and the way in which information flows through the different

organisational structures and networks. Typical subjects addressed in organisational communication are: horizontal and vertical communication; communication channels and communication media; network analysis; organisational culture; information processing; communication levels; and formal vs informal communication channels. Because of the emphasis on organisational structures and networks, the relationship aspects of communication in organisations are often disregarded. Sophisticated communication networks without people with the necessary communication skills cannot ensure an effective communication process for the organisation (Groenewald, 1998:43).

Management communication is the only field of study that integrates communication with management. This field of study consists of all forms of communication that enable the manager (and therefore every worker in the information community) to communicate more functionally. Management communication includes aspects of business communication, organisational communication and corporate communication. Although it is not considered a functional area in the business, its focus is to equip each manager as a functional communicator. It consists of the meaningful mixing of the communication skills a manager must have, as well as the knowledge necessary to develop a communication strategy (for the individual) (Feingold, 1987:123).

According to White-Mills & Rogers (1996:359) management communication as a field of study is developing away from communication in the direction of management. Management communication is based on the theoretical substructure of sister disciplines in the communication science, but the future development in the field of study is largely directed by the communication needs of managers in practice.

According to Groenewald (1998:49), many authors regard corporate communication as a field of study as a mature science. The domain of the field of study, according to Hazleton & Botan (1998:13) and Grunig & Hunt (1984:5), is the social sciences. Corporate communication is an applied social science based on communication. Since communication is a social science, corporate communication can be studied as an applied communication science (Holzhausen & Verwey, 1996:26). Grunig (1992)

describe corporate communication as a sub-domain of communication, with close ties to management and organisational theories.

Corporate communication developed from press agentry and publicity and various terms such as *public relations, public affairs, corporate communication* and *communication management* distinguish the development of the occupation. Corporate communication represents a functional management terrain in the business and can, therefore, be distinguished from other fields of communication (management communication, organisational communication and business communication).

Pragmatically defined corporate communication is:
- The communication on behalf of a business.
- As managed by people (or a person) in the functional terrain.
- Who has the responsibility for the communication of the business?

The current trend is to replace the term *public relations* with *corporate communication* (Budd, 1995:78). The field of study of corporate communication is known as public relations in academic literature.

The definition that made the biggest contribution to the formation of corporate communication, is the definition of Grunig & Hunt (1984:6), where corporate communication is described as "the management of communication between an organisation and its publics" (Holzhausen & Verwey, 1996:25). The other authoritative definition of Cutlip et al (1985:4) describes corporate communication as "the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the publics on whom its success or failure depends".

Corporate communication is, therefore, a management function, not a set of activities of individual behaviour manifested through communication, as in the case of management communication (Rubin, 1996:14). The only aim of corporate communication is to make the organisation more effective by creating and maintaining

mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and its strategic stakeholders – this coincides with the objective of business and management communication. According to Groenewald (1998:52), three key terms – *organisation, public* and *manage* – appear in almost all the definitions.

Different from business and management communication, the literature on corporate communication refers to an organisation rather than a business. Corporate communication is the communication on behalf of a government, a person, or a business (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

Grunig (1992:5) includes organisational communication in corporate communication as "communication managed by an organisation", especially as communication managed for the organisation by communication specialists. The difference between organisational communication and corporate communication is a difference between academic autonomy and a pragmatic orientation to the occupation.

A public is any group influenced by the organisation or that can influence the organisation (Newsom et al in Groenewald, 1998:52). It can include the stakeholders in the organisation (employees, unions, shareholders) or in the external environment (government, competitors, clients, activists) that facilitate the achievement of objectives of the business (Dozier et al, 1995:85). This creates further distinction between corporate communication and organisational communication as the latter focuses largely on interpersonal (dyadic) communication within the organisation (Grunig, 1992:5).

Where the media was initially the most important public for corporate communication, it focused on other external publics like consumers, shareholders and the general public in the 1980s – with the aim of managing a corporate image, and to increase sales. In the 1990s a shift took place to the employee as the most important public. It also stated that internal communication is not only the responsibility of the corporate communication function, but that every manager in the organisation has a responsibility

in this respect. Much emphasis was placed on the corporate communication manager as facilitator or consultant in an internal communication process where every manager's communication is critical (Groenewald, 1998:54).

Budd (1995:178) warns against the use of the word communication since the action/activity is only the last step in the management process of corporate communication – a process that starts with research, policy formation, decision making and objective setting. Not every decision made necessarily requires communication. Issues management and the gathering of strategic information (environmental scanning) – two of the most important functions of corporate communication – are not communication as such (Baskin & Aronoff; Sweep, Cameron & Lariscy in Groenewald, 1998:54). Arber (1986:4) states that "... public relations should be part and parcel of every business decision".

Preference should be given to the term *communication management* as academic field of study, to ensure that it is understood as a management function and not just as a set of techniques (promotion, publicity and industrial journalism). This focus in terminology is confirmed by the trend in modern literature to refer to *public relations and communication management* (Grunig, 1992; Dozier et al, 1995).

According to Grunig, this follows the Grunig & Hunt (1984) definition of public relations as "the management of communication between an organisation and its publics" in which *public relations* and *communication management* are equalised.

By using the terms *public relations and communication management*, academics ensure a clear, broader management approach to communication techniques and/or specialised corporate communication programmes like media relations and publicity (Grunig, 1992:6).

"Public relations and communication management describe the overall planning, execution and evaluation of an organisation's communication with both external and internal publics – groups that affect the ability of the organisation to meet its goals"

(Grunig, 1992:4).

A theoretical perspective on public relations, supplied by Grunig, J, will now be given.

1.2.1 Theory of public relations

Public relations and communication management is based on theories and models of which the following are examples:

1.2.1.1   The normative model for strategic communication management

The normative model, as spelled out by Grunig, J (1992:12), specifies that organisational communication should be practised strategically – a type of communication management that is necessary for public relations to make organisations more effective.   An organisation that practises public relations strategically develops programmes to identify and communicate with internal and external publics that provide the greatest threats and opportunities for the organisation and are, therefore, most likely to limit or enhance its autonomy.   These strategic publics fit into categories that theorists call stakeholders.

Organisations use strategic management to define and shape their missions. They do so through an iterative process of interacting with their environments. Most theories of strategic management do not suggest a formal mechanism in the organisation for interacting with the environment, nor do they acknowledge the presence of public relations. Excellent public relations departments, however, provide the obvious mechanism for organisations to interact with their environments (Grunig, J, 1992:12).

When public relations is part of the organisation's strategic planning function, it is also more likely to manage communication programmes strategically.   According to Grunig, J (1992:11), it provides the integrating link that connects the theory of excellence to the level of public relations programmes. Public relations managers help to identify the stakeholders of the organisation by participating in central strategic

management. They then develop programmes at the functional level of public relations to build long-term stable, open and trusting relationships with these strategic constituencies and to manage the organisation's interdependence with them.

The quality of these relationships is a key indicator of the long-term contribution that public relations makes to organisational effectiveness.

Strategic public relations, therefore, begins when communication practitioners identify potential problems in the relationship with the organisation's stakeholders and define the categories of stakeholders that are affected by the problem. They then segment the publics that respond differently to those problems – publics that arise within stakeholder categories (Grunig, J, 1992:13).

After identifying problems, publics and issues, strategic public relations identifies objectives for communication programmes, uses these objectives to plan communication programmes and evaluates the effects of those communication programmes – that is, whether they achieved the objectives set for them and as a result contributed to organisational effectiveness (Grunig, J, 1992:14).

1.2.1.2   A general theory for public relations

Grunig (1993b:164) states that public relations research has over the years progressed through three levels of problems. The macro (environmental) level refers to explanations of public relations behaviour and the relationship of public relations to organisational effectiveness. The meso (group) level refers to how public relations departments are organised and managed. The micro (individual) level refers to the planning and evaluation of individual public relations programmes.

i.   The macro level

At the macro level, researchers have looked at conditions in and around the organisation that explain why some organisations practise public relations in an

excellent way and others do not (Grunig, J, 1993b:167).An integrated theory explains the value of excellent public relations for an organisation. Achieving micro communication objectives helps organisations achieve their missions and goals at the macro level. The literature on organisational effectiveness shows that effective organisations choose appropriate goals and then achieve them. When public relations helps the organisation build relationships, it saves the organisation money by reducing the costs of litigation, regulation, legislation, pressure campaigns, boycotts, or lost revenue that result from bad relationships with publics – publics that often become activist groups. Good public relations also helps make money by cultivating relationships with donors, consumers, shareholders and legislators (Grunig, J, 1993b:170-171; Hunt, 1989:37-40).

ii.   The meso level

At the meso level conceptualising public relations as a management function allows scholars to link the micro-level theories of communication planning and evaluation to the meso level of an organisation – the level of a group or department. At this level, researchers have asked how the communication function must be managed in an organisation for public relations to be excellent – that is, to contribute to organisational effectiveness (Grunig, 1993:167).

iii.   The micro level

At the micro level individual public relations programmes are managed strategically. Organisations use strategic management to relate their missions to their environments. They plan public relations programmes strategically, therefore, they identify the publics that are most likely to limit or enhance their ability to pursue the mission of the organisation and design communication programmes that help the organisation manage its interdependence with these strategic publics. Grunig, J & Repper (1992) have developed a theory that links strategic management of the public relations function to issues management and to the overall strategic management of the organisation (Grunig, 1993:167; Hunt, 1989:40-42).

Research (for example, Grunig, J & Grunig, L, 1989) has identified four typical ways in which public relations is practised. These practices are depicted in four models which will be discussed next. According to Severin & Tankard (1979:29), a model is a theoretical and simplified representation of the real world. It is a structure of symbols, and operating rules that is supposed to match a set of relevant points in an existing structure or process.

1.2.1.3   Four models for practising public relations

The most common public relations model is the "press agentry" or "publicity" model. This is a one-way approach that relies primarily on getting favourable publicity in the mass media. Grunig & Hunt (1984:22-25) state that public relations serves a propaganda function in the press agentry/publicity model. Practitioners that follow this model concern themselves most with getting attention in the media for their organisation's clients.

The second one-way model, the "public information" model, values relatively objective information dissemination from the organisation to the so-called "general public" through the mass media and other controlled media such as newsletters, brochures and direct mail (Grunig, L, 1997:7). Grunig & Hunt (1984:22-25) state that the purpose of this model is the dissemination of information, not necessarily with a persuasive intent. The public relations practitioner using this model functions essentially as a journalist-in-residence, whose job it is to objectively report information about the organisation to the public. These organisations have an active press relations programme, offering news to the media about the organisation. They also produce much communication collateral – all designed to inform publics about the organisation. Like press agentry, this approach to public relations is not based on research or strategic planning. Both of these traditional one-way models characterise the average (or worse) departments the *Excellence* team studied (Grunig, L, 1997:7).

Two-way programmes may be asymmetrical, trying to convince publics to change, or symmetrical, assuming that both the organisation and its stakeholders may have to

compromise and collaborate with each other. Most forms of two-way communication involve specialised knowledge about formal and informal research. Two-way symmetrical and asymmetrical communication reflect two distinctly different assumptions, or worldviews, about the nature of relationships between organisations and publics (Dozier et al, 1995:12).

Asymmetrical public relations relies on research to develop the messages most likely to persuade publics, while symmetrical communication, the more effective approach, uses research to manage conflict, to negotiate with publics and to improve understanding all the way around (Grunig L, 1997:7). In the two-way symmetrical model, practitioners serve as mediators between organisations and their publics with the aim of creating mutual understanding.

However, in the work situation communicators alternately negotiate and persuade, depending on the situation. The excellent communicator advises senior management and knows how to use both the symmetrical and asymmetrical models of communication (Dozier et al, 1995:14).

With the general theory and the four models for public relations as background, the objectives of the *Excellence Study* will now be briefly discussed. A literature review that will sharpen our theoretical understanding of the topic and that will acquaint us with the problems, hypotheses and results obtained by previous research will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 2, 3 and 4. The aim of this literature review is therefore to place the current research project into a scientific perspective (Dane, 1990:62).

Information concerning communication theory, as well as research methods and data analysis, was gathered and will now be discussed.

1.2.2 The *Excellence Study*

The *Excellence Study*, the largest and most intensive investigation ever conducted of public relations and communication management, was used as a framework for this study. It measured, amongst others, the shared expectations (relationship) between the communication department (and the top communicator) and senior management (and the chief executive officer (CEO)).

As this study has as its main source the findings of the *Excellence Study*, a short history of the latter will suffice. Terms will be defined later in this chapter in much the same way as has been done in the *Excellence Study*.

The *Excellence Study* was conducted in celebration of the 10th anniversary of the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) Research Foundation in 1992. In 1985, the foundation committed itself to this project that has come to be called the *Excellence Project*. The *Excellence* team began its work with a thorough review of the literature in public relations and related disciplines relevant to the research questions:

- What are the characteristics of an excellent communication department?
- How does excellent public relations make an organisation more effective, and how much is that contribution worth economically (Grunig, 1992:xiii)?

The book *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management* (1992), edited by JE Grunig, is the product of this first stage of the research.

The team then developed a programme of survey and qualitative research to test the propositions derived from the literature review in order to build theory. What started as a literature review has ended in what Grunig, J (1992) believes is a general theory of public relations – a theory that integrates most of the wide range of ideas about and practices of communication management in organisations. The general theory integrates most of the available body of knowledge in public relations (Grunig J, 1992:xiii).

The book *Manager's Guide to Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management* by Dozier, Grunig, L and Grunig, J (1995), reports the findings of this $400 000, three-nation study of public relations and communication management. The *Excellence Study* included a survey of 321 organisations in Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States from 1990 to 1991 – the first phase (quantitative) of the research. It also included a second phase: follow-up case studies in 1994 of 24 organisations that participated in the original survey (Dozier, Grunig, L & Grunig, J, 1995:ix).

The *Excellence Study* has helped identify the following key elements of excellent communication:

1.   It can make an organisation more successful. To do this, it must be developed and managed strategically, and must support the strategic objectives of the organisation.

2.   It nurtures relationships with key internal and external publics and stakeholders who provide the greatest threats to and opportunities for the company.

3.   It makes a direct contribution to the bottom-line by preventing the costs of conflict with key publics in terms of strikes, litigation and boycotts.

4.   It can also help the company make money by enhancing relationships with customers, shareholders and regulators (White & Mazur, 1995:22).

The *Excellence Study* focused on three spheres of communication excellence, i.e. the "knowledge level of the practitioner", "the shared expectations between senior management and the top communicator" and the "culture of the organisation".

1.2.2.1   The three spheres of communication excellence

The model that will be used as a framework for this study is the one developed by Dozier et al (1992:10).

Figure 1.1 – The three spheres of communication excellence

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          Participative culture

        Shared expectations

           Knowledge
              core
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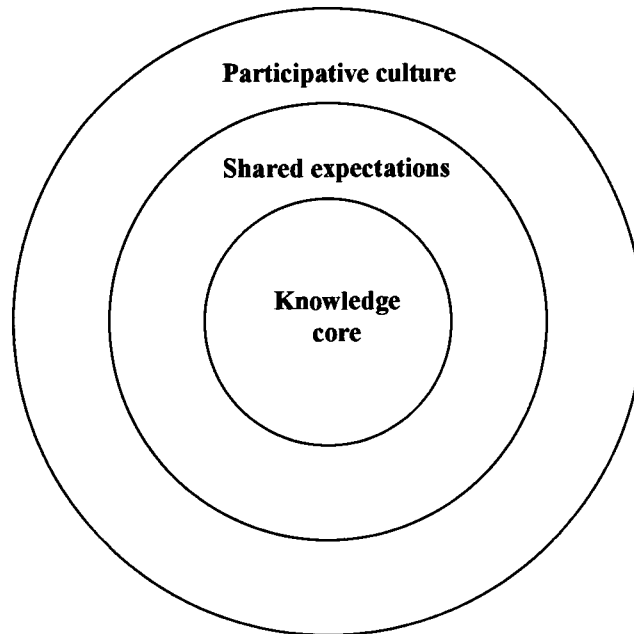
The above three spheres of communication excellence are discussed below.

i.   The knowledge base of the communication department

Most communication departments, excellent as well as less-than-excellent, have creative technicians who can write and edit, handle technical aspects of production, and know about photography and graphics. However, enhancing these technical skills in itself, does not lead to excellence (Dozier et al, 1995:11).

Smith (in Walmsley, 1998:12) believes that public relations practitioners need to be leaders in understanding and promoting more strategic and integrated communication. "More strategic in that they will help transform the profession from a series of tactics – writing news releases, preparing presentations, drafting speeches – toward a strategic programme that will address the fundamental mission of an organisation" (Walmsley, 1998:12; Potter, 1998:15).

Communicators need to become business managers who specialise in organisational

communication. Organisational leaders respect business managers, and view their experience as necessary and relevant. Potter (1998:15) states that communicators should first become business managers. They should then help other business managers to be more effective and successful with their communication experience.

Communicators need to have more business knowledge to be perceived as equals by the people from marketing, finance, accounting, legal, operations, etc. If they do not understand basic business concepts like ROE (Return on Equity) and brand management, for example, and can't speak "the language of business" properly, they won't be taken seriously.

The IABC's *Excellence Study* found that senior managers felt communicators' most valuable contribution to their organisations could be in identifying trends that might affect business and operations. However, most of those senior managers did not feel that communicators were particularly effective in determining and managing those trends. It is much easier – and safer – for communicators to produce "deliverables" in performing the communication job in the organisation. It is not easy to be knowledgeable and courageous enough to get out in front of strategic issues – even if that is what senior management wants and expects of the public relations practitioner (McGoon, 1998:19).

Practitioners should be able to develop a marketing plan, write a mission statement, run a focus group, perform a content analysis, design an intranet site, use experiential games for team building, create their own consulting company, write the president's speech for the annual shareholder's meeting, etc (Walmsley, 1998:12).

Dozier et al (1995:11) adds to this by stating that the core knowledge base that distinguishes excellent from less-than-excellent communication furthermore involves management role-playing, especially strategic management. The excellent communication department should have the expertise to contribute to strategic planning; have the knowledge base to make policy decisions; be held accountable for programme success and failure; outline communication programme alternatives; and

guide senior management through a logical problem-solving process. The top communicator should consider herself to be the organisation's communication expert, while other managers should also regard the top communicator as a communication expert. More important than anything else that contributes to communication excellence, the communication department's expertise to play the role of communication manager, is paramount (Dozier et al, 1995:11).

ii.   The shared expectations of the top communicator and senior management about the role and function of communication

Surrounding the core of the model (the knowledge base) is a larger sphere which represents a set of shared expectations about communication between top communicators and senior managers in organisations. These shared expectations create linkages between the communication department and senior management. One linkage is the demand for communication excellence from senior management. A second reciprocal link is the delivery of such excellence from the communication department (Dozier et al, 1995:10). This linkage is investigated in this study, as it is the necessary foundation for excellence.

The top communicator in any organisation today has certain expectations of senior management. To have excellent communication and public relations in an organisation, it is necessary for the top communicator and senior management to regularly consult each other and for the top communicator to have the freedom to make recommendations and to implement them (Dozier et al, 1995:15).

Potter (1998:15) states that public relations practitioners cannot make anyone – such as senior management – value them, if their values are different. Public relations practitioners must approach management on their own terms and must establish what management values, and what behaviours they must adopt to be valued. Senior leaders value and require results-oriented, strategic management from business managers. Communicators must, therefore, become business managers adept at strategic communication.

CEOs or organisations that have excellent communication programmes, tend to believe that communication should develop mutual understanding between the management of the organisation and the publics the organisation affects. They support communication and want communicators to research the external environment and tell them what key publics think about the organisation. They want two-way communication and win-win outcomes (Lindeborg, 1994:5).

In an organisation with an excellent communication programme, the top communicator, therefore, makes communication policy decisions (does not primarily function as a technician); participates actively in the organisation's strategic planning and decision-making; works closely with senior management to solve organisational problems that involve communication and relationships; facilitates two-way rather than one-way communication; and uses formal and informal research techniques to monitor trends and to gain understanding of the environment outside the organisation. The knowledge and behaviour of the top communicator is the single-most important factor in creating excellent communication (Lindeborg, 1994:5).
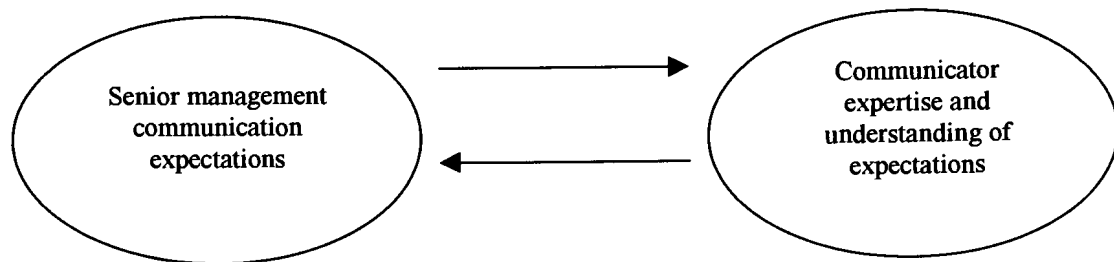
According to Dozier et al (1995:16), senior management sees communication essentially as one-way – from senior management to publics – in organisations with less than excellent communications programmes. Communicators in those organisations, hired largely for their technical expertise as writers, for example, are brought in after decisions are made. Their expertise is sought solely to help disseminate information in support of senior management objectives.

Dozier et al (1995:16) holds that senior management attaches no value in seating a technician at the decision-making table. They need strategic input with regard to the management of relationships between the organisation and its stakeholders.

If senior management understands the meaning of communication excellence and if communicators have the knowledge base to provide such excellence, then critical linkages evolve between the communication department and senior management. When senior management demands excellence from the organisation's communicators and

communicators understand that demand and are able to deliver, a demand-delivery linkage is established. This demand-delivery linkage, displayed below, describes an ongoing relationship between communicators and senior management (Dozier et al, 1995:16).

Figure 1.2 – The demand-delivery linkage for communication excellence

(Dozier et al, 1995:16)

Over time expectations and performance reinforce each other. The knowledge or expertise in the communication department to deliver communication excellence is reinforced when senior management expects communicators to think strategically to solve a problem or conflict with a key public. When communicators respond strategically to help solve a problem important to the senior management, that reinforces the strategic view of communication in the senior management. The senior management comes to value and support the communication department. Such political support from senior management is integral to the set of shared expectations that leads to communication excellence (Dozier et al, 1995:16-17).

iii.   The organisation's culture

Both the knowledge core and the sphere of shared expectations are embedded in a larger sphere of organisational culture. Two basic forms of organisational culture emerged from the analysis of the *Excellence Study*: participative and authoritarian. (Dozier et al, 1995:17).

A participative corporate culture fosters excellent communication. Such a culture is decentralised with shared power and decision-making. It values co-operation and equality, including opportunities for women. It welcomes innovation and ideas from the outside. Excellent communication can work in an authoritarian culture but is easier to achieve in a participative culture (Lindeborg, 1994:5).

1.2.2.2 The middle sphere of communication excellence

The middle sphere of communication excellence represents the shared expectations that communicators and senior managers hold about communication. According to Dozier et al (1995:73), communication departments may have the core knowledge to practise excellent communication, but senior management must also share a common understanding about the role and function of communication.

The middle sphere of shared expectations, as described in the *Excellence Study*, has three components for communication excellence which will be addressed in this study, namely departmental power; the demand-delivery loop: expectations of senior management of the communication department and its ability to deliver; and the role played by the top communicator in the organisation. This can be illustrated as follows:

Figure 1.3 – The middle sphere of shared expectations
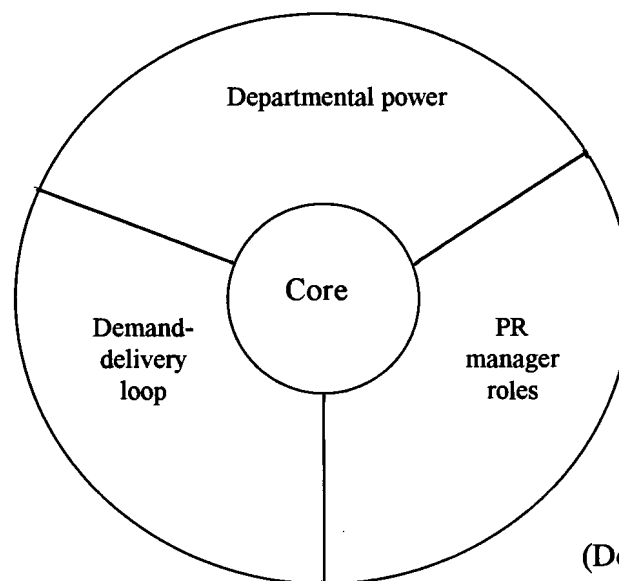
(Dozier et al, 1995:74)

(The above components will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 respectively. A brief description of each component in this chapter will suffice.)

The first component of excellence in the middle sphere is "departmental power", the ability to influence members of senior management. Sometimes top communicators are members of senior management, participating directly in strategic management and planning. However, top communicators can also exert informal influence as providers of information and as process facilitators to senior management (Dozier et al, 1995:73).

The second component of excellence in this sphere is the "demand-delivery loop". In excellent organisations senior managers demand two-way practices from their communicators to persuade and negotiate, and top communicators are aware of this. Excellent communication departments can also deliver on these expectations. This sets up a loop of repeated behaviour, with senior management demanding and communicators delivering excellent communication programmes (Dozier et al, 1995:73).

The third component of excellence in this sphere is the "organisational role played by the top communicator". In some organisations top communicators may have formal decision-making authority for communication policy; they may be responsible for programme success or failure and may, therefore, play the public relations manager role. On the other hand, the top communicator may play an informal role as senior advisor who outlines options and provide research information needed for decision-making by other senior managers. Both manager and senior advisor role-playing contribute to communication excellence (Dozier et al, 1995:74).

An understanding of the relationship (partnership) between the top communicator and senior management could lead to the top communicator (or communication department) getting involved in strategic decision-making which should lead to communication excellence.

As this middle sphere is embedded between the "knowledge base sphere" and the "culture sphere", these two spheres cannot be ignored completely and will be referred to throughout the study.

Various other articles on this and other studies were also consulted for this South African study.

The empirical context of this study will now be discussed. The domain phenomena and the aspects, characteristics and dimensions that were researched will be addressed (Mouton & Marais, 1989:37). By using a method of scientific research, a systematic, controlled, empirical and critical investigation of natural phenomena, guided by theory and hypotheses about the presumed relations among such phenomena, will be carried out (Du Plooy, 1996:30).

1.3   RESEARCH PROBLEM STATEMENT

In this quantitative descriptive research, which is also of a hypothesis-testing nature, an explicit problem statement and hypotheses will be stated first.

Stating the problem that will be dealt with in this study will include specifying the unit of analysis. This involves the clear specification of the kind of social "entity" to be studied, the variables that the researcher is interested in and the relationship between them. The research objective or purpose and research strategy will also be clarified (Mouton & Marais, 1989:38; Mouton, 1996:91).

The format of the research problem determines what would constitute appropriate evidence to address the problem (Mouton, 1996:81; Du Plooy, 1996:35; Leedy, 1993:60). This is a hypothesis-testing study in which three kinds of reasoning, namely deductive reasoning, inductive support, as well as inductive generalisation, will be used.

Research problem statement: There is a perception amongst public relations and communication professionals that the top communicator is often not at the table when strategic decisions are made. The top communicator is, therefore, not involved in strategic decision-making which could lead to communication excellence and could contribute to the bottom-line of the organisation in order to make the organisation more effective. To be able to contribute to the strategic decision-making process, top communicators need to understand the expectations of senior management with regard to the strategic contribution they can make in the organisation in order to practise excellent communication.

1.3.1 A South African perspective

According to Ferreira (1999:30), it is generally accepted in the available literature on public relations theory, that public relations is practised from different perspectives and definitions by different organisations and in different countries, depending on, among other things, the culture of the particular country and the evolutionary level that public relations has attained in that particular country.

If there is one feature that characterises South African society at present, it is that of social change. Therefore, the trends and directions of the change process must be taken into consideration when examining public relations in South Africa (Mersham, Rensburg & Skinner, 1995:7).

The reintroduction of South Africa into the South African market after its exclusion for a few decades, 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 programmes that

could face these challenges. As organisations increasingly began to realise the importance of the public relations function, more came to be expected of in-house departments, while those organisations without public relations departments employed consultancies to advise in this regard (Claassen & Verwey, 1997:45).

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 changing dramatically. 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 (Claassen & Verwey, 1997:49).

Because of these aspects, Mersham, Rensburg & Skinner (1995:15) state that public relations in South Africa may reasonably be described as being in a transitional phase. It tries to reconcile and situate its activities within the form of an ethical science. In doing so, it strives to adopt a broader, more humane social vision in which accountability to its stakeholders is given its full importance. It is suggested that in the South African context, rapid political and social change has led to more questioning and a closer review of the social purpose and social accountability dimensions of public relations. Public relations is a communication phenomenon that is rooted in the understanding of social issues, and emphasises the integral part it has to play in the constructive engagement of a post-apartheid South Africa.

There is one factor that underlies all social change – communication. Given the complexity of cultures and levels of development in South Africa, it also becomes evident that intercultural communication, an area with which the present generation of South African public relations practitioners is largely unfamiliar, will increasingly require more attention as we move into the post-apartheid era. One could argue that professionals should see themselves as channels of messages from a wide variety of

sources (Mersham et al, 1995:7).

Rhodes & Baker (in Lubbe & Puth, 1994:285), add to this by stating that the rate of social and political change in South Africa and in the region, is dramatically altering the scope of our industry, our marketplace, our competition and, consequently, the attitudes and skills that we bring to our individual jobs. With regard to the Southern Africa experience, the practice of public relations is relatively advanced, if not yet well understood in South Africa and Zimbabwe. In other Southern African countries, while public relations is growing in importance, it is served by very few practitioners. This seems to bear a direct relationship to the number and variety of media in a country, whether private or government controlled.

Many disciplines are moving into areas that were traditionally considered to be the field of the public relations practitioner. Management consultants perform communication audits, while advertising agencies handle annual reports, product brochures and social marketing campaigns. The strengths of public relations practitioners in South Africa are limited. They have developed in-depth skills in a few key areas in response to the need of the time, but there is plenty of scope to do more. They are in an industry of generalists turning their hands to almost anything – from writing copy for a radio advert to conducting a climate survey. Their skills have served them well up to now, but they will need to acquire and use other skills to take advantage of the new opportunities which emerge from the changing South African environment. They need additional doses of creativity and innovation as the old South Africa disappears and the new and challenging one emerges (Rhodes & Baker, 1994:287).

Opportunities and threats in this new environment include a proper understanding of the environment; the effects of political and social transition; understanding the levers of change; the need for economic recovery; poor concepts of customer service; threats to the natural environment; social marketing; issue management; cross-cultural communications; culture change management; and social responsibility communications.

The public relations industry can deal with these opportunities and threats by:

- Recruiting differently: Practitioners from other disciplines and diverse backgrounds should be recruited for this profession.

- Skills development: We have much to learn from competent industrial relations specialists – from the legal mind, those with holistic marketing skills, and human resource management. Within the public relations consulting industry, it is high time we learnt from our colleagues and competitors in advertising and management consulting.

- Project management: Project management combines the skills of planning, co-ordinating, directing and controlling as well as delivering on brief, on budget and on time. While the latter requirements are typical of most public relations programmes, the former skills are not conspicuous amongst the ranks of our industry. The public relations component of the marketing mix is often best able to drive the strategy for the programme – not least for the reason that only a fraction of the programme spend typically ends up in public relations, as opposed to advertising.

- Programme evaluation: One of the chief stumbling blocks to growth in our industry is management's unwillingness to take the public relations contribution sufficiently seriously. The counter-strategy is to prove value and the method is via research – whether formative, diagnostic, or evaluative – to get and keep programmes on track and finally to demonstrate results (Rhodes & Baker, 1994:289-296).

Public relations in South Africa also needs to be positioned as a management function. According to Claassen & Verwey (1998:76), communication management in the South African business environment to a great degree still suffers the consequences of traditional interpretations of the function, as that of mainly media liaison and event management. Organisations have not yet fully made the transition in their perception of the function from a basically technical function to a more strategic function. Therefore, communication management is not always acknowledged for the contribution it can make to the organisation's survival in a dynamic global environment.

It is against the above background that this study set out to investigate the perceptions of the top communicator in the South African organisation about senior management's expectations with regard to excellent communication.

1.3.2 Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis in this empirical study will be individuals and their orientation towards the subject (opinions, attitudes, values, preferences) as opposed to their conditions or actions (Mouton & Marais, 1989:40; Du Plooy, 1996:39).

The object of study (unit of analysis) is top communicators in South African organisations. More specifically, the cases were top communicators who are members of professional public relations and communication associations and communication managers of the Top 200 companies in South Africa, as ranked by the magazine *Finance Week*, in its *Top 200, 1999*.

Communication departments make significant contributions to strategic planning and management in their organisations when the communication department has communicators with the knowledge to play the manager role; who can contribute to strategic decision-making; and who can execute two-way communication programmes. However, to build excellent programmes, communicators must forge partnerships with the organisation's senior management. In this partnership, shared expectations about communication are developed between top communicators and senior managers in organisations, which culminates in a demand-delivery loop.

The constructs involved in these relationships are: The power of the communication department, which is constructed of the variables "value the senior management attaches to the communication function" and "the strategic contribution the top communicator makes to organisational decision-making"; the four models of public relations, namely the "press agentry model", the "public information model", the "two-way asymmetrical model" and the "two-way symmetrical model"; and the "public

relations manager" or "public relations technician" role the top communicator plays in the organisation.

1.3.3 The research question

In this study a survey was conducted to establish the top communicator in the South African organisation's perception of senior management's expectations with regard to the management of communication in the organisation. This pertains specifically to:

- the power of the communication department and the top communicator in the organisation which can be measured by establishing the value and support it receives from senior management, as well as the strategic contribution it makes because of the knowledge level of the top communicator and members of the communication department;

- senior management's expectations of the communication department on delivering two-way communication practices (two-way asymmetrical communication and two-way symmetrical communication) and the understanding and knowledge of the top communicator and communication department to deliver on those expectations; and

- the communication manager and/or communication technician role the top communicator plays in the organisation, and whether it gives the top communicator an opportunity to contribute to the strategic decision-making process.
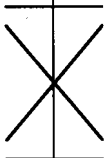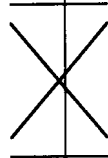
The relationships between the qualitative variables, the building blocks for the constructs, will be measured to come up with an explanation for the practice of communication in South African organisations.

Two or more variables are related, associated or linked to the extent that changes in the one variable are accompanied by systematic and sometimes predictable change in the other (Mouton, 1996:96; Du Plooy, 1996:37).

Although this is a basic or academic study, it also pertains to a typical problem in the social world, which indicates that it also has applied facets (Mouton, 1996:104). The phenomena will be investigated within the public relations and communication

management paradigm, as opposed to the technical public relations and communication paradigm. The relationship between the following variables will be studied (these relationships are depicted in more detail in Chapter 5):

Table 1.1 – Linkages between variables

Power	Public relations models	Role
Value / Strategic contribution	One-way models / Two-way models	Public relations manager / Public relations technician

The following research question was derived from the abovementioned constructs:

Primary research question:

What is the perception of top communicators in South African organisations of the expectations of senior management with regard to the management of communication, with specific reference to the power of the communication department, the one-way and two-way public relations models used in communication activities and decision-making in the organisation and the public relations manager and/or public relations technician role the top communicator plays in the organisation?

Secondary research questions:

1. What is the top communicator's perception of the expectations of senior management of herself and the communication department, with specific reference to the power of the top communicator and the communication department in the South African organisation? The following questions will be addressed:

    • Does senior management value and support the top communicator and the communication department in the South African organisation?

- Do the top communicator and the communication department make a strategic contribution to organisational decision-making in the South African organisation?

2. What is the top communicator's perception of the beliefs of senior management with regard to the preferred way of communication by means of the four public relations models, namely the press agentry model, the public information model, the two-way asymmetrical model and the two-way symmetrical model? The following questions will be addressed:
   - What is the top communicator's perception of senior management's demand for one-way public relations practices in the South African organisation?
   - What is the top communicator's perception of senior management's demand for two-way public relations practices in the South African organisation?

3. What is the top communicator's perception of senior management's expectations of herself with specific reference to the role she should play in the organisation. The following questions will be addressed:
   - Does senior management expect the top communicator to make a strategic contribution to organisational decision-making when she predominantly plays the public relations manager role?
   - Does senior management expect the top communicator to make a strategic contribution to organisational decision-making when she predominantly plays the public relations technician role?

1.3.4 The research objectives

The primary objective of this study was to determine the expectations of the senior management in the South African organisation of the top communicator and the communication department as perceived by top communicators. As mentioned above, the cases – the actual concrete instances of the unit of analysis – were top communicators in South African organisations.

In this case there is a tradition of research, specifically by Dozier et al (1995), in this academic sphere. This study, therefore, aims to test the existing theories and explanations and can be referred to as a validational or confirmatory study (Mouton, 1996:102).

An empirical study was done by conducting a descriptive study of a representative sample of respondents. This descriptive study attempts to describe phenomena in detail – it describes how things are and what happens, as opposed to explanatory studies, which generally attempt to explain a social phenomenon by specifying why or how it happened (Bailey, 1987:38; Mouton, 1996:102; Cooper & Schindler, 1998:141). This study, furthermore, attempts to describe the situation with regard to the set of shared expectations about communication between top communicators and senior managers in the South African organisation.

One of the objectives of this study was to develop a reliable measuring instrument. This instrument was sent to senior communication managers (top communicators) in South African organisations in order to gather data on the following research objectives:

1. To establish what the top communicator perceives to be the expectations of senior management with regard to the strategic contribution to organisational decision-making made by the top communicator predominantly playing the public relations manager role, and the strategic contribution to organisational decision-making made by the top communicator predominantly playing the public relations technician role.

2. To establish what the top communicator perceives to be the beliefs and expectations of senior management with regard to the strategic contribution to organisational decision-making made by the top communicator using one-way public relations models in communication activities, and the strategic contribution to organisational decision-making made by the top communicator using two-way public relations models in communication activities.

3. To establish what the top communicator perceives to be the beliefs and expectations of senior management with regard to the top communicator

predominantly playing the public relations manager role using one-way public relations models in communication activities and organisational decision-making, and the top communicator predominantly playing the public relations technician role using one-way public relations models in communication activities and organisational decision-making.

4. To establish what the top communicator perceives to be the beliefs and expectations of senior management with regard to the top communicator predominantly playing the public relations manager role using two-way public relations models in communication activities and organisational decision-making, and the top communicator predominantly playing the public relations technician role using two-way public relations models in communication activities and organisational decision-making.

5. To establish what the top communicator perceives to be the expectations of senior management with regard to the top communicator making a strategic contribution to organisational decision-making when reporting to the CEO and when reporting to any other manager.

6. To establish what the top communicator perceives to be the expectations of senior management with regard to the top communicator making a strategic contribution to organisational decision-making when reporting to senior management and the strategic contribution to organisational decision-making she makes when reporting to middle management.

7. To establish what the top communicator perceives to be the expectations of senior management with regard to the top communicator making a strategic contribution in a small organisation, and the expectations of senior management with regard to the top communicator making a strategic contribution in a large organisation.

8. To establish what the top communicator perceives to be the expectations of senior management with regard to the top communicator making a strategic contribution in a small public relations department, and the expectations of senior management with regard to the top communicator making a strategic contribution in a large public relations department.

9. To establish what the top communicator perceives to be the beliefs and

expectations of senior management with regard to the use of one-way public relations models for communication activities and organisational decision-making by the top communicator in a small public relations department, and the use of one-way public relations models for communication activities and organisational decision-making by the top communicator in a large public relations department.

10. To establish what the top communicator perceives to be the beliefs and expectations of senior management with regard to the use of two-way public relations models for communication activities and organisational decision-making by the top communicator in a small public relations department, and the use of two-way public relations models for communication activities and organisational decision-making by the top communicator in a large public relations department.

11. To establish what the top communicator perceives to be the expectations of senior management with regard to the strategic contribution made by top communicators with a graduate qualification and the strategic contribution made by top communicators with a postgraduate qualification.

12. To establish what the top communicator perceives to be the expectations of senior management with regard to the strategic contribution made by top communicators with a few years' experience in the communications field and the strategic contribution made by top communicators with many years experience in the communications field.

The research design follows logically from the research problem and will be discussed next.

1.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is defined as a set of guidelines and instructions to be followed in addressing the research problem. The degree of structure in this design is a direct function of the research goals stated above (Mouton, 1996:107-109). The planning

and structuring of this project contribute to the eventual validity of the research findings.

1.4.1 Conceptualisation

According to Mouton (1996:109), conceptualisation refers to both the clarification and the analysis (definition) of the key concepts in the problem statement. However, in this section not only concepts in the problem statement will be defined, but also certain concepts that will be referred to often in this study.

According to Mouton (1996:xi), conceptualisation also means 'integrating one's study into a larger conceptual framework' of theoretical and empirical knowledge. One way of doing this is to frame research hypotheses, either by deriving them deductively from well-established theories, or by basing them on observation of phenomena and events in everyday life.

Conceptualisation, through theoretical definition, is a process aimed at achieving internal theoretical or connotative validity in the study (Mouton & Marais, 1989:59).

The conceptual analysis that will be done next involves the clear and unambiguous definition of central concepts (Mouton, 1996:109). This can be considered the first step in the conceptualisation phase.

1.4.1.1   Defining key concepts

The fact that concepts acquire meaning, or even new meaning within a conceptual framework such as a theory, a model or a typology, has led philosophers of science to refer to such concepts as "theoretical concepts" or "constructs". The aim in empirical research is to operationalise such constructs meaningfully by rendering them either measurable or observable.

The following constructs that will regularly be used in this study are clarified with the

aim of being valid, exhaustive and mutually exclusive:

Top communicator: The most senior communicator in the organisation. He/she may be head of a department or may function alone as the most senior communicator in the organisation. These top communicators may carry an array of job titles: vice president, directors, managers and supervisors of communication, public relations, public affairs, corporate communications and so forth (Dozier et al, 1995:x).

Top communicators are key to communication excellence. Through them the expertise of the communications department is brought to bear on strategic issues facing the organisation. The demand of senior management for advanced two-way practices is communicated to the department through top communicators. Top communicators manage the demand and material resources of their departments to deliver excellence (Dozier et al, 1995:117-118).

Senior management: In the *Excellence Study,* Dozier et al (1995) studied the middle sphere of communication excellence: the shared expectations that communicators and senior managers hold about communication. According to Dozier et al (1995:73), communication departments may have the core knowledge to practise excellent communication, but senior management must also share a common understanding about the role and function.

For the purpose of this study the perception of the top communicator with regard to senior management's expectations of excellent communication in the organisation was measured. Senior management refers to senior managers in the organisation who have formal decision-making power and a position of authority in the hierarchy of the organisation.

Expectations: Communicators are linked to senior management in organisations with excellent programmes by a specific set of shared understandings or expectations about the following questions: What is communication management? What should communication do for this organisation? What role does communication play in the

overall management of this organisation? In what ways can communication benefit this organisation (Dozier et al, 1995:14)?

Communication excellence: This describes the ideal state in which knowledgeable communicators assist in the overall strategic management of organisations, seeking symmetrical relations through management of communication with key publics on whom organisational survival and growth depends (Dozier et al, 1995:x).

South African organisation: Any organisation within the borders of South Africa, including corporations, not-for-profit organisations, government agencies and professional-trade associations. According to Dozier et al (1995:vii), communication excellence is a powerful idea of sweeping scope that applies to all organisations, large and small, that need to communicate effectively with publics on whom the organisation's survival and growth depends. The essential elements of excellent communication are the same for corporations, not-for-profit organisations, government agencies and professional trade associations – they apply to organisations globally.

Communication manager: The communication manager role consists of the formal authority to manage the communication function and make communication policy decisions. Top communicators in this role hold themselves accountable for the success or failure of communication programmes, as do others in the organisation. Through their experience and training, top communicators in this role are organisational experts in solving communication and public relations problems (Dozier et al, 1995:107).

Public relations technician: In this study "technician" describes the predominant role of the individual communicator to provide communication products and services, usually at the direction of others. This role is not related to the decision-making processes involved in the selection of the goals and objectives served by those communication activities. For this reason, a technician can be alternately described as a tactition, in contrast with other communicators who play roles as strategists (Dozier et al, 1995:11).

Communication department: Any department that is responsible for public relations and communication management in the organisation, whether referred to as Public Affairs, Corporate Communication, Public Relations, etc.

Dominant coalition: Child (1971) argued that a group – called the dominant coalition – forms in an organisation with the power to make and enforce decisions about the direction of the organisation, its tasks, its objectives and functions. It has the power to set organisational structures and strategies over a sustained period of time. The dominant coalition's power becomes recognised as legitimate in time by those over whom such power is exercised (White & Dozier, in Grunig J, 1992:93). The term senior management is not strictly a synonym for dominant coalition.

Top levels of the dominant coalition typically identify some dominant coalition members, but dominant coalitions are often informal alliances. Such coalitions can include others who are low on the organisational chart or missing from it altogether. Individuals who control a scarce or valued resource can be included in dominant coalitions, as can those who are central to the network of decision makers in organisations (Dozier et al, 1995:15).

Value: Departmental value refers to the value that the top communicator thinks her public relations or communication department has in the organisation (Dozier et al, 1995:80).

Support: Support refers to the support for the function among dominant coalitions in the abstract – somewhat separate from actual performance of communicators in the organisation (Dozier et al, 1995:78).

Public relations, communication management, organisational communication:
In this study no distinction will be made between "public relations", "communication management" and "organisational communication". These terms encompass programmes traditionally and more narrowly defined as media relations, government relations or public affairs, employee communication, financial relations, product

publicity, community relations and so forth. The key element to the definition of public relations is the notion of managed communication. In this study then, all of these constructs refer to the management of communication between an organisation and its publics. The common focus of all definitions of public relations is communication and management. The terms "public relations" and "communication" are therefore used interchangeably (Grunig J, 1992:4).

Power of the communication department: Communication departments need power within senior management in order to make strategic contributions. These contributions, in turn, lead to greater power and influence in management decision-making. Power is the capacity to exert influence – a transaction in which one gets others to change their behaviour as one intended. Influence is therefore circular. Power is necessary to be given the opportunity to contribute, while strategic contributions increase the value and support that dominant coalitions give to communication departments (Dozier et al, 1995:88).

Strategy: Strategy in the original Greek refers to the world of military generals where, once the policy is agreed upon, one works out how to position oneself to achieve the political will, or purpose (policy), given the broad deployment of the scarce resources available (Garratt, 1996:44).

Furthermore, the terms "strategy" and "tactics" are often confused. Strategy involves the crucial decisions of a campaign. Tactics are mini-decisions made during the course of the battle and usually result from on-the-spot decisions. In the business arena, strategies have been defined as follows: "... the schemes whereby a firm's resources and advantages are managed or deployed in order to surprise and surpass competitors or to exploit opportunities." Tactics are used to implement strategy and do not figure heavily in the planning process. Adherence to this formal process will earn management commitment of resources; establish money and manpower priorities; keep the project on track; and permit mini-course corrections (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 1985:231).

Strategic contribution: Strategic contribution (management and planning) involves the exercising of organisational power at the highest level, because an organisation's mission and long-term goals are "on the table" when dominant coalitions plan strategy. The very purpose and direction of an organisation can be recast when top managers, and specifically the top communicator, plan strategically. If the top communicator proved her worth in strategic planning, her power will increase in time.

The four public relations models:

- Press agentry model: The purpose of communication is predominantly to get the organisation's name into the media and to prevent unfavourable publicity for the organisation.

- Public information model: The purpose of communication is predominantly to disseminate information.

- Two-way asymmetrical model: The purpose of communication is to persuade publics to behave as the organisation wants them to behave.

- Two-way symmetrical model: The purpose of communication is to change the attitudes of management as much as it is to change the attitudes of publics.

1.4.1.2   Formulation of research hypotheses

As the second step in the conceptualisation phase, this study was integrated into the underlying theoretical framework for the communication science by formulating research hypotheses.

Two important epistemic criteria, namely empirical (testability) and exploratory potential were taken into account when the research question or problem was more specifically formulated in the form of research hypotheses, as will be discussed next (Mouton, 1996:110; Bailey, 1987:41).

The research questions and the hypotheses for the study link directly to the research objectives mentioned above, but were formulated as tentative concrete and measurable assumptions as obtained from the literature study (Bailey, 1987:10; Du Plooy,

1996:36; Mouton 1996:110). Since the hypotheses were derived from an established theoretical framework that was successfully applied to explain similar phenomena in the past, they (potentially) strengthen the conclusions drawn from the research, and meet the criterion of "theoretical validity".

On the basis of the assumptions generated in Chapters 2, 3 and 4, the hypotheses were formulated and fully motivated in Chapter 5.

Through deductive reasoning, the general research hypotheses were derived from the theory. These relational hypotheses postulate that a certain kind of relationship exists between two or more variables. These are correlational (or descriptive) hypotheses as opposed to causal (or explanatory) hypotheses. The hypotheses also refer to a class of cases and can, therefore, be referred to as general hypotheses, as opposed to singular hypotheses which only apply to one case (Mouton, 1996:122; Du Plooy, 1996:36).

In Chapters 2, 3 and 4 of this study the stated hypotheses were embedded in the body of knowledge by stating assumptions about the literature in the text and linking it to the relevant hypotheses. Assumptions (and presuppositions) have the same epistemic status as hypotheses in that they are also "hypothetical" or "conjectural" statements (Mouton, 1996:123).

The above research problem and objectives, stated in the form of primary and secondary research questions, will now be stated in terms of hypotheses.

The research (alternative) hypotheses that were tested in this study are discussed. (Null hypotheses are stated in Chapter 5.) These hypotheses were formulated about the perceptions of top communicators in South African organisations on the expectations of senior management with regard to the strategic contribution to organisational decision-making made by the top communicator; the one-way and/or two-way public relations models used by top communicators and communication departments in communication activities and organisational decision-making; and the public relations manager or public relations technician role senior management expects the top

communicator to play. The formulation of the hypotheses was guided by the research objectives as stated above.

H1: There is a significant difference between the expectations of senior management with regard to the **strategic contribution** the top communicator predominantly playing the **public relations manager role**, makes to organisational decision-making, and the expectations of senior management with regard to the **strategic contribution** the top communicator predominantly playing the **public relations technician role**, makes to organisational decision-making.

H2: There is a significant difference between the beliefs and expectations of senior management with regard to the top communicator using the **one-way public relations models** to make a **strategic contribution** to organisational decision-making, and the beliefs and expectations of senior management with regard to the top communicator using the **two-way public relations models** to make a **strategic contribution** to organisational decision-making.

H3: There is a significant difference between senior management's beliefs and expectations of the top communicator predominantly playing the **public relations manager role** using the **one-way public relations models** in communication activities and organisational decision-making, and senior management's beliefs and expectations of the top communicator predominantly playing the **public relations technician role** using the **one-way public relations models** in communication activities and organisational decision-making.

H4: There is a significant difference between senior management's beliefs and expectations of the top communicator predominantly playing the **public relations manager role** using the **two-way public relations models** in communication activities and organisational decision-making, and senior management's beliefs and expectations of the top communicator predominantly playing the **public relations technician role** using the **two-way public**

relations models in communication activities and organisational decision-making.

H5: There is a significant difference between the **expectations** of senior management with regard to the top communicator's strategic **contribution to** organisational decision-making **when** reporting to the **CEO,** and the expectations of senior management with regard to the top communicator's **strategic contribution** to organisational decision-making when reporting to any **other senior manager.**

H6: There is a significant difference between the expectations of senior management with regard to the top communicator's **strategic contribution** to organisational decision-making when reporting to **senior management** in the organisation, and the expectations of senior management with regard to the top communicator's **strategic contribution** to organisational decision-making when reporting to **middle management** in the organisation.

H7: There is a significant difference between the expectations of senior management with regard to the **strategic contribution** made by the top communicator in a **small organisation,** and the expectations of senior management with regard to the **strategic contribution** made by the top communicator in a **large organisation.**

H8: There is a significant difference between the expectations of senior management with regard to the **strategic contribution** the top communicator in a **small public relations department** makes to organisational decision-making, and the expectations of senior management with regard to the **strategic contribution** the top communicator in a **large public relations department** makes to organisational decision-making.

H9: There is a significant difference between the beliefs and expectations of senior management with regard to the use of **one-way public relations models** for

communication activities and organisational decision-making by the top communicator in a **small public relations department**, and the beliefs and expectations of senior management with regard to the use of **one-way public relations models** for communication activities and organisational decision-making by the top communicator in a **large public relations department**.

H10: There is a significant difference between the beliefs and expectations of senior management with regard to the use of **two-way public relations models** for communication activities and organisational decision-making by the top communicator in a **small public relations department**, and the beliefs and expectations of senior management with regard to the use of **two-way public relations models** for communication activities and organisational decision-making by the top communicator in a **large public relations department**.

H11: There is a significant difference between the expectations of senior management with regard to the **strategic contribution** to organisational decision-making made by the top communicator with a **graduate qualification,** and the expectations of senior management with regard to the **strategic contribution** made to organisational decision-making by the top communicator with a **postgraduate qualification**.

H12: There is a significant difference between the expectations of senior management with regard to the **strategic contribution** the top communicator with a **few years'** experience in the communications field makes to organisational decision-making, and the expectations of senior management with regard to the **strategic contribution** the top communicator with **many years' experience** in the communications field makes to organisational decision-making.

1.5   OPERATIONALISATION

Operationalisation or operational definition refers to the development of a measuring instrument through which the specific domain phenomenon can be understood. It is a

process aimed at achieving denotative or measurement validity (Mouton & Marais, 1989:7). Operationalisation, therefore, consists of linking the key concepts in the problem statement to the actual phenomena to be studied by constructing a measuring instrument (Mouton, 1996:xi; Broom & Dozier, 1990:163).

1.5.1 The operationalisation of variables

Operational definitions – concrete representations of abstract theoretical concepts – have been created. According to Dane (1990:33) the operational definition of a concept represents the concept and is called a variable – a measurable entity that exhibits more than one level or value.

A variable is a characteristic or attribute of a person, place or object the researcher is studying. In this study the variables that will be operationalised will be qualitative (Mouton, 1996:95). As Wimmer & Dominick (in Du Plooy, 1996:39) and Broom & Dozier (1990:163) point out, variables are classified in terms of their relationship to one another (Du Plooy, 1996:39).

Once operationalised definitions for theoretical concepts have been stated, it is possible to form a hypothesis – a statement that describes a relationship between variables – to be tested in the research. Dane (1990:33) refers to a hypothesis as a concrete statement of an abstract relationship described in a theory.

Care has been taken to ensure validity of measures through criteria validity (and more specifically concurrent validity) and construct validity (Mouton & Marais, 1989:68). Five to six items were used for each variable in order to obtain a scale score. In this study construct validity has been measured by means of the statistical method of factor analysis.

Data or information on theoretical concepts or constructs is gathered through indirect measurement. Items or questions measure aspects of the phenomena "power", "shared expectations with regard to the use of the four public relations models" and the "role

the top communicator plays in the organisation". By asking questions on the aspects of the construct, a total image of a person's position with regard to the construct is measured. The process of operationalisation implies that a list of characteristics denoted by the concept, is compiled (for measurement). In constructing a measuring instrument (scale, questionnaire) the items/questions can be seen as indicators of this list of (denoted) characteristics (Mouton & Marais, 1989:65; Mouton, 1996:126).

The statistical techniques used for the testing of the reliability and validity of the measuring instrument were Cronbach's alpha and factor analysis and the technique used for hypothesis testing was analysis of variance (ANOVA). The operationalisation of the variables in hypothesis testing is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. However, the following table briefly operationalises the variables as taken up in the questionnaires:

Table 1.2 - Table of operationalised variables

Variable	Items in the questionnaire
Power: • Value (5 items) • Strategic contribution (5 items)	Division A Items 1 - 5 Items 6 - 10
Four public relations models: • Press agentry (3 items) • Public information (3 items) • Two-way asymmetric (3 items) • Two-way symmetric (3 items)	Division B Items 1 - 3 Items 4 - 6 Items 7 - 9 Items 10 - 12
Public relations roles: • Public relations manager (6 items) • Public relations technician (6 items)	Division C Items 1 - 6 Items 7 - 12
Demographic questions (6 items)	Division D, items 1 - 6

As mentioned above, the primary objective of this empirical study was to determine the nature of the expectations of senior management with regard to the strategic contribution the top communicator and communication department make to organisational decision-making. The investigation took the form of a mail survey through questionnaire research with posited hypotheses that were tested. Information was gathered through questionnaires received from 202 respondents.

1.5.2 Development of the measuring instrument

A measuring instrument consists of a set of measuring scales that organise and transform information into numerical data. Multiple measures of constructs were used to compile the measuring instrument for this study, which helps to capture more of what is meant by the construct (Broom & Dozier 1990:165).

An existing standard measuring instrument (as is usually used in communication research) like the Thurstone scale, the Guttman scale, Osgood's semantic differential scale and the Likert scale (Du Plooy 1996:77), was not used for this study. Instead, a measuring instrument with a 0 to 10 scale was developed. Reasons for this are documented fully in Chapter 5.

The process followed to construct the scale was:
- The constructs that had to be measured were established. The constructs that form the building blocks for shared expectations are "departmental power", "the use of the four public relations models", namely the press agentry model, the public information model, the two-way asymmetrical model and the two-way symmetrical model in communication activities and organisational decision-making and the top communicator playing the "public relations manager role and public relations technician role".
- A multi-item battery of the possible scales to measure each construct was compiled. Each of the constructs that was conceptually defined in Chapters 2, 3 and 4, was changed into measurable variables in Chapter 5.
- Through a process of pre-testing, as described in Chapter 5, the final set of scales was chosen.

The final compilation of the measuring instrument and considerations for the questionnaire will be discussed in Chapter 5.

1.5.3 Sample design

Sampling refers to the process of selecting participants for a research project (Dane, 1990:289). The population of top communicators in South African organisations was considered potential respondents in this study. The sample used for this study can therefore be referred to as a probability sample, since the probability of selecting any particular sampling element was known (Walton F, 1990:124; Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 1997:13). The sampling frame (concrete list of the elements in a population), as discussed in Chapter 5, was considered to be the population for the study and no sample was drawn from this frame.

The sampling unit (sample elements) in this study is the top communicator in the South African organisation who is a member of any of the professional public relations institutes in South Africa, namely PRISA, IABC, SAKOMM, Unitech, IMPRO and the Top 200 companies as identified by the magazine *Finance Week*, Top 200, 1999. These sampling units were included in a sampling frame (Bailey, 1987:81; Du Plooy, 1996:50; Dane, 1990:289; Mouton, 1996:135).

1.5.4 Data analysis and interpretation

The data for this study was analysed by identifying patterns and themes in the data and drawing certain conclusions from them. Appropriate statistical techniques were used for certain levels of measurement. Statistical techniques such as item-to-total correlation and Cronbach's alpha were used to do a reliability analysis of the measuring instrument. Factor analysis was used to measure the validity of the instrument and analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test hypotheses. In terms of computer software necessary for the statistical calculations, *Microsoft Excel* and *Statistica* were used.

Inferences were drawn according to the principles of statistical inference (the whole logic of hypothesis testing). The outcome of the analysis and interpretation are certain

conclusions which followed logically from the empirical evidence. The conclusions can therefore be regarded as valid results (epistemological criteria) (Mouton, 1996:111).

1.6   IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

Communication is fast becoming a strategic management function in the South African organisation. When communication programmes help manage relationships with key publics that affect the organisation's mission, goals and objectives, they add value to the positioning of the organisation and become a necessary component of strategic decision-making. Apart from the *Excellence Study* (Dozier et al, 1995), research on the contribution of the top communicator to strategic management in the organisation, is limited. There is a great need in the communications industry for the communications function to be recognised (especially by the CEO) as a management function. The *Excellence Study* showed that among most excellent organisations, both the CEO and top communicators reported that communication departments make highly "significant" contributions to strategic planning. It is, however, necessary to determine what exactly the nature of these "significant" contributions to strategic planning is.

This cross-sectional study will not only provide communication managers with information on how to become involved in strategic management in order to practice excellent communication, but can also be used by anyone wishing to contribute to excellence in the organisation through communication. By studying a cross-section of the population at a single point in time, this study will highlight the importance of the power that the top communicator and the communication department have, the expectations that senior management have of the top communicator and the communication department with regard to the use of one-way and two-way practices; and the role the top communicator should play in the organisation in order to contribute to communication excellence.

Those who will benefit are:

- public relations or communication managers who are uncertain about their role in strategic management in order to contribute to excellence in an organisation;
- general managers in South Africa who are uncertain about the role the public relations or communication manager in the organisation should play; and
- the organised public relations and communication profession.

1.7   DEMARCATION OF THE STUDY

The research project is divided into seven chapters. **Chapter 1** constitutes an introduction to the study. The theoretical background and context, research problem statement, objectives of the study, conceptualisation, an overview of the research methodology employed in the study and the delimitation of the study are presented.

Chapters 2, 3 and **4** present the theoretical base of the study. **Chapter 2** focuses on the power of the communication department.

Questions of why we need powerful communication departments, power and empowerment of communicators, top management support for communication, the relative value of the communication department, top communicators in top management and the contribution of communication to strategic planning are discussed.

Chapter 3 provides information on the shared expectations between the top communicator and the top management of the organisation. The demand-delivery loop, the knowledge of the communication department to deliver on the expectations of senior management with regard to the four models of communication, namely press agentry, public information, two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical are discussed.

Chapter 4 explains the role the top communicator should play in the organisation. The communication manager and senior advisor roles are discussed in detail, as

previous research has shown that top communicators must play these advanced organisational roles to achieve communication excellence. The public relations technician role is also referred to.

The research design is outlined in **Chapter 5**. Sampling design and data collection, the formulation of hypotheses and the statistical techniques used in this study are discussed in detail.

Chapter 6 analyses the results obtained from the reliability analysis (item-to-total correlation and Cronbach's alpha) and the validity analysis (factor analysis) of the measuring instrument, as well as hypothesis testing (ANOVA).

Chapter 7 draws inferences from the findings of the research project and concludes with recommendations and the acceptance of the objectives set for the study.

CHAPTER 2

THE POWER OF THE COMMUNICATION
DEPARTMENT

> Aim of this chapter:
>
> *In this chapter the power of the communication department in organisations, represented by the value and support top management attaches to it and the strategic contribution it makes to organisational decision-making, are considered.*

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Communication departments that prove their worth to senior management by their strategic contributions are valued and supported by top management. Communication departments need power within senior management in order to make strategic contributions. These contributions, in turn, lead to greater power and influence in management decision-making. Power is the capacity to exert influence: a transaction in which one gets others to change their behaviour as one intended (Dozier et al, 1995:75). Influence is therefore circular. Power is necessary to be given the opportunity to contribute, while strategic contributions increase the value and support top management gives to communication departments (Dozier et al, 1995:88). These constructs are the focus of this chapter.

According to White & Mazur (1995:22) the *Excellence Study* discovered that the top executive and top management understood the strategic role of communication, and wanted to involve the communication function in strategic decision-making for the organisation. However, it appears that the greatest barrier to making this happen is the knowledge level, or at least what senior management perceives to be the knowledge level of the top communicator. In this chapter communicator expertise, the necessary foundation for excellence, is therefore also considered.

At its core, the communication department must have communicators with the knowledge to contribute to strategic decision-making (Chapter 2), to execute two-way communication programmes (Chapter 3) and to play the public relations manager role (Chapter 4) for the organisation and its communication programmes to be excellent (Dozier et al, 1995:14).

However, communicator expertise cannot build excellence in isolation. To build excellent programmes, communicators must forge partnerships with top management (Dozier et al, 1995:14). The communication function in an organisation can be transformed to excellence by a demanding CEO, a powerful top communicator, and increasing expertise in the communication department to complement traditional one-way practices (Dozier et al, 1995:103).

Communicators are linked to senior management in organisations with excellent programmes by a specific set of shared expectations about communication management in the organisation: What role communication plays in the overall management of the organisation and the ways in which communication can benefit the organisation (Dozier et al, 1995:14). Both CEOs and top communicators must agree about the role communication should play in the organisation. Ambiguity and uncertainty about the value and support of communication diminishes the department's ability to contribute (Dozier et al, 1995:88).

The contribution that public relations can make to strategy development requires nurturing. This can happen in a number of ways:

1.   Management must recognise that public relations can make a contribution, by broadening its own conception of public relations beyond communication and representation (White & Mazur, 1995:26).

2.   It must accept that the contribution that public relations may make is an uncomfortable one which may threaten existing approaches, but produce constructive results (White & Mazur, 1995:26).

3.   Practical arrangements need to be made for public relations staff to play their part in strategy development. This means that reporting relationships must be

4.   in place for public relations to report findings from contacts.

It also means that public relations staff must be given a recognised status in the strategy development process (White & Mazur, 1995:26).

5.   According to Baird (in Lubbe & Puth, 1994:124), researching and planning for public relations problems or issues in the dynamic environment in which the organisation exists is not a task which can effectively be undertaken by one person or even one department within the organisation. He suggests an integrated approach to public relations planning which is necessary for the attainment of public relations goals that coincide with and support the organisation's goals. Integrated public relations planning can be described as a holistic, multi-disciplinary and multi-functional approach to planning.

Dozier et al (1995:14) state that the top management of organisations with excellent communication programmes, value communicators for their input before decisions are made. In this strategic role, the communicator acts as boundary spanner, environmental scanner, and an "early warning system". Such communicators tell top management what publics know, how they feel, and how they may behave to strategic decisions under consideration. In a sense, communicators act as advocates for publics, articulating those external points of view as they counsel top management. When decisions are made, excellent communicators design programmes and craft messages to effectively communicate in a fashion that achieves the top management's desired outcomes among target publics. To play this role as a two-way communicator, the top communicator sits at the decision-making table with other senior managers and contributes to strategic management and planning, either formally or informally. That is, the top communicator plays the manager role. Informed strategic decisions that affect relationships with key publics cannot be made if the organisation's expert on relations is not at the table.

Including a knowledgeable top communicator in the strategic planning circle can therefore contribute to communication excellence in organisations – an idea that will now be discussed further.

2.2   COMMUNICATION EXCELLENCE IN THE ORGANISATION

According to Broom and Dozier (1984) the inclusion of practitioners in the organisation's top management is "perhaps more important to the profession of public relations than any other measure of professional growth" (Grunig, L, in Grunig, J, 1992:484).

However, the *Excellence Study* found that top communicator membership of top management is an important characteristic, but not a mandatory requirement for excellence in communication. According to Grunig, L (1997:6), this finding is a fortunate one, since few organisations – excellent or average – include their top communicators in the power elite. And only slowly, over time, does even the most expert communicator become a true part of this influential group. Key determinants of gaining access to the group of players who make policy decisions hinges on several factors which include past successes in public relations (especially during crises), knowledge of the business or industry and respect on the part of top management (Grunig, L, 1997:6). These factors point to the professionalism of the top communicator.

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 the strategic level. This is attributed to the fact that organisational management still perceives public relations as a technological function, while its strategic role is viewed with scepticism (Grunig, L, in Grunig, J, 1992:484).

The communication department cannot be excellent when the CEO is not involved in the communication function. CEOs must be more than just supporters of the function. Top-echelon executives need to get directly and actively involved in shaping and managing the communication process. CEOs need to realise that they are also CCOs – chief communicating officers – as such, they are increasingly expected not only to understand communication's strategic role, but also to help translate strategy into reality (Pincus, 1994:28).

The CEO, because of her standing and unique organisational vantage point, is the key "enabling" communicator. The CEO, therefore, creates the appropriate context in an organisation so that the public relations department can effectively manage the communication systems. This enabling role appears to loosely parallel the environment-enhancing "manager" or "process facilitator" roles described in the public relations roles research (Pincus, Rayfield & Cozzens, 1991:5; White & Mazur, 1995:36).

The CEO's involvement leads to her buy-in and personal commitment, and ultimately to an embracing of the chief communication officer (CCO) role. Nobody in an organisation possesses the CEO's understanding of the company's direction, capabilities, and potential. That insight alone can make the difference between a fuzzy and sharply focused strategy. Pincus & De Bonis (1994:230) state that if others in an organisation, particularly lower-level managers, see the leader personally involved in a communication programme, they will automatically attach more credence to it and want to be part of it.

CEOs seem to be increasingly supportive of public relations and, at the same time, appear to recognise the power of their personal involvement in the communication process (Pincus, Rayfield & Cozzens, 1991:5).

CEO communication strategies should furthermore be tied more directly to organisational objectives so that CEOs can see the linkages between their communication activities and the attainment of organisational goals. There is also a need to develop distinct CEO communication strategies that are incorporated into the organisation's overall communication plan, not apart from it (Pincus, Rayfield & Cozzens, 1991:29).

As crucial as the CEO's role is to an organisation's communication management effort, it is only one of many roles that must be played effectively if the overall communication programme is to be successful. CEOs cannot do it alone. Managers at every level have built-in supporting and reinforcing roles to play. Without co-ordination between the CEO and all other managers, employees are likely to receive inconsistent and confusing

messages.

So essential are manager's augmenting roles that Pincus and De Bonis (1994:235) believe all managers should be held directly accountable for the quality of their communication with employees and those to whom they report.

2.3 POWER AND INFLUENCE OF THE TOP COMMUNICATOR AND COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT

Power comes to the public relations department from different sources. The value top management attaches to the public relations function is one key way, while the expertise of practitioners, leading to increased professionalism, is another way. White & Dozier (in Grunig, J, 1992:485) state that to increase their access to top management, public relations practitioners should increase their own expertise via education, experience and professionalism. But top management should also come to appreciate the potential of public relations.

The dominant role played by top communicators, either manager or technician, provides key indicators of the communication department's power. Serving in the manager role means that top communicators influence key strategic decisions of top management. Serving in the technician role means that top communicators implement, as service providers, decisions made by other senior managers (Dozier et al, 1995:76).

Top management comes to accept the top communicator when they see work coming out of the communication department that meets their strategic objectives (Dozier et al, 1995:75).

Too often, public relations practitioners (or any other boundary spanning personnel) lack the formal authority for action. As a result, they rely on subtle means of influence such as expertise and friendship. Scholars have rarely distinguished between power and influence.

One notable exception is the work of Katz and Kahn (1966), who said "... influence is a transaction in which one person (or group) acts in such a way as to change the behaviour of an individual (or group) in some intended fashion. Power is the capacity to exert influence. Power does not have to be enacted for it to exist, whereas influence does; it is the demonstrated power". Influence derives from the informal power of those whose personal attributes result in the ability to persuade others. However, like power, influence often derives as well from the control of resources others value (Grunig, L, in Grunig, J, 1992:486).

The power of communication departments is frequently informal. This means that excellent communication departments, usually through top communicators, influence the decision-making of top management without having any formal power or authority to do so. Some top managers have formal power explicitly spelled out in organisational charts – a capacity to influence others whether they choose to exercise such authority or not. Communicators, on the other hand, are influential only to the degree that they actually influence decisions of senior management. The power of communicators is therefore dynamic, found in the "doing" of senior management decision-making (Dozier et al, 1995:76).

According to Bryce (1991:33), formal channels in organisations should be used, but the top communicator should not rely on them entirely, as she will find that she then loses out to people who know how to use the informal network.

Power rarely lies with one person; there is usually a group, linked by common experience or values (Hunninger, 1997:27). The values held by these elites are likely to affect what happens at lower levels and, in particular, how participative structures operate (Heller & Wilpert, 1981:15). To get new ideas implemented, one needs to know who has influence and who has access to those with power. The CEO's secretary may have little power, but enormous influence. As well as knowing who makes the decisions, one needs to find out who influences decision-making (Hunninger, 1997:27).

The effective manager is able to form political relationships with others. Few organisations are ruled by a single person, so power coalitions are necessary to implement decisions. Even fewer organisations are pure democracies in which majority rules. Most organisations require strong and skillful coalitions to bring about co-ordinated action. Without them, power is fractionalised and actions are divisive (Huse, 1982: 503).

Child (1971) argued that a group – called the dominant coalition – forms in an organisation with the power to make and enforce decisions about the direction of the organisation, its tasks, its objectives and functions. It has the power to set organisational structures and strategies over a sustained period of time. The dominant coalition's power becomes recognised as legitimate in time by those over whom such power is exercised (White & Dozier, in Grunig J, 1992:93).

Top levels of the dominant coalition typically identify some dominant coalition members, but dominant coalitions are often informal alliances. Such coalitions can include others who are low on the organisational chart or missing from it altogether. Individuals who control a scarce or valued resource can be included in dominant coalitions, as can those who are central to the network of decision makers in organisations (Dozier et al, 1995:15).

According to Kroon (1990:354), anyone in a business has power – regardless of the job. Smit & Cronje (1992:337) state that managers should therefore realise that subordinates also have power. An effective manager balances her own power with that of subordinates.

Dependency is also increased when the resource one controls is important and scarce. It has been found, for instance, that organisations seek to avoid uncertainty. We should, therefore, expect that those individuals or groups who can absorb an organisation's uncertainty would be understood to control an important resource. The ability to reduce uncertainty, therefore, increases a group's importance and, hence, its power, but what is important is that it is also situational.

Depending on the situation, certain groups in the organisation will have more power. It varies among organisations and undoubtedly also varies over time within any given organisation (Robbins, 1997:159).

The existence of structural and situational power depends not only on access to information, resources and decision-making, but also on the ability to get co-operation in carrying out tasks. Managers and departments that have connecting links with other individuals and departments in the organisation will be more powerful than those who do not (Hellriegel, Slocum & Woodman, 1998:279).

Scarcity, furthermore, explains how low-ranking members in an organisation who have important knowledge not available to high-ranking members, can gain power over the high-ranking members. The scarcity-dependency relationship can also be seen in the power of occupational categories. Individuals in occupations in which the supply of personnel is low relative to demand, can negotiate compensation and benefit packages far more attractive than can those in occupations where there is an abundance of candidates (Robbins, 1997:159).

The assumption can be made that:

- The dominant role played by top communicators, either manager or technician, provides key indicators of the communication department's power. Serving in the manager role means that top communicators influence key strategic decisions of senior management. Serving in the technician role means that top communicators implement, as service providers, decisions made by other senior managers. (Refer to H_1 (Hypothesis 1).)

2.3.1 Top communicators in senior management

According to Dozier et al (1995:83), communication departments are more likely to be excellent when top communicators are members of top management, although it is not a prerequisite for communication excellence.

Pollack (1986) discovered that when public relations practitioners are represented in top management, they are likely to practice two-way symmetrical communication. They also conduct more managerial and somewhat more liaison activities (Grunig, L, in Grunig, J, 1992:493).

In a programme of research that approaches a general systems theory of public relations, Grunig, J and Grunig, L (1989) found that, in general, managerial support for and understanding of public relations correlated with the most sophisticated, two-way models of public relations (both balanced and unbalanced). Based primarily on Pollack's study (1986), Grunig, J and Grunig, L posited two explanations for the inclusion of public relations practitioners in top management: Either public relations departments represented in the power elite are empowered to practice a two-way model of communication or only those practitioners with expertise to practice such a model would be included in that inner circle. Because of the significant correlations between inclusion in top management and both education and experience in public relations, they favoured the latter explanation (Grunig, L, in Grunig, J, 1992:493).

Professionals, furthermore, state that those who want to influence strategic decisions have more effect when they are part of a group than when they act as organisational entrepreneurs. Thus, the public relations practitioner with the potential to contribute to organisational goals would be more effective as a member of top management than as an independent actor in the organisational system (Grunig, L, in Grunig, J, 1992:491).

Characteristics of practitioners themselves are a significant factor in their exclusion from top management. Key variables include their lack of broad business expertise; their passivity; their naiveté about organisational politics; and their inadequate education, experience or organisational status. Other determinants of public relations' role in the organisation relative to power, include gender and longevity in the job (Grunig, L, in Grunig, J, 1992:489).

The assumptions can be made that:

- When public relations practitioners are represented in top management, they are likely to practice two-way symmetrical communication. (Refer to H4.)

- Only those practitioners with expertise to practice the two-way model of communication would be included in the power elite. There is a significant correlation between inclusion in top management and both education and experience in public relations. (Refer to H11, H12.)

2.3.2 Getting into the strategic planning circle

According to Kinkead & Winokur (1992:20), a professional public relations practitioner can break through organisational barriers to top management by having a good strategy and making it work.

2.3.2.1 Targeting the CEO and top management

The CEO, as well as members of top management should be targeted as top priority publics deserving of special attention and treatment by communication managers (Pincus, 1994:28). The secret of getting into top management and staying there is to treat top management as one would any audience. The top communicator should communicate to them with honesty, candour and timeliness and make emotional connections. Top management must be helped to understand the value and benefit of credibility and effective communication. They must understand the difference between communicating for the record and effective communication (Berzok, 1993:25).

That means developing separate CEO/top management communication strategies that are fused with the overall communication and business strategies. Many CEOs remain unenlightened and unconvinced; therefore they hold the communication function at arm's length. They tend not to understand communication's larger purpose and how the process, if executed effectively, can enrich an organisation. A key to sensitising CEOs to the complexities and potential of their transformed communication role is to change the way they think about communication (Pincus, 1994:28).

According to Pincus (1994:28), CEOs have to be prepared (1986) – that is, educated and trained – for this part of the job. If progress is to be made, then responsibility for preparing unprepared CEOs for their communication responsibilities is as much the top communicator's as anybody's.

2.3.2.2 Strategies for getting into the strategic planning circle

Following are strategies which can make the public relations practitioner part of the CEO's inner circle.

1. *Define the organisation's mission, vision and/or ethics.* If an organisation does not have a mission or vision statement or a statement of organisational values which is current and relevant, the public relations practitioner can create a powerful mission statement that uniquely describes the company – a statement that outlines the organisation's fundamental purpose (Kinkead & Winokur, 1992:20).

2. *Develop action plans.* Implement the mission, vision or values or ethics statement. Get top management to sign off on the implementation of specific strategies and develop tactics for communicating them throughout the organisation (Kinkead & Winokur, 1992:20).

3. *Practice what you preach.* Demonstrate an interest in, and a talent for, strategic planning. Compile a mission statement for the public relations department that parallels and supports the organisation's mission statement, as well as a vision statement outlining where public relations is going and a communications strategy document detailing how you intend to get there (Kinkead & Winokur, 1992:20).

4. *Encouraging debate is also important.* The public relations executive should help the CEO formulate his overall corporate vision by constantly raising the

issue, debating and discussing it. Then she has to help her communicate it (Foster, 1990:10; Winokur & Kinkead, 1993:22).

5. *Participants earn their places by individual performance and relationship to the general strategist* (Kinkead & Winokur, 1992:19).

6. *Contributions to risk management and marketing make powerful arguments for a public relations voice in strategy development.* Communicators should not neglect the bottom-line strategic potential of public relations. Marketing in most companies has already gained recognition for its strategic value. Therefore, many communicators agree that marketing can provide a level useful for practitioners wanting to pry their way into strategic planning sessions (Kinkead & Winokur, 1992:20). However, others counsel caution about "mixing" marketing and public relations.

7. *Some practitioners hold that asset protection is the strongest argument for being included in strategic planning.* They argue that the more valuable an asset is, the more strategically important it is. Those who manage valuable assets should help formulate the plans for optimising these assets. One such asset is the company's reputation. Buildings depreciate, patents expire, but, properly managed, a company's name and reputation grow in value every year. Reputation is, therefore, a company's most valuable asset and it must be managed strategically by the public relations practitioner charged with its care (Kinkead & Winokur, 1992:20; White & Mazur, 1995:37).

The communicators who aspire to win a place in the company's senior management council need not only master the craft, learn the company's business (and that of its industry), but ultimately they must also learn to "think like a chief executive and speak the language of management" (Arnold, 1988:12).

The corporate communicator can take the following seven steps to improve the CEO's appreciation of her capabilities and bring into sharper focus the role of communications as a corporate strategy:

1. ***Develop a strategic communications plan*** tied directly to corporate strategic goals and the business plan, both long range and short term.

2. ***Take a leadership role in developing a comprehensive communication strategy*** integrating all aspects of the corporate communications programme. Establish a rationale for this "seamless communications" plan that will win the support of the major communications players in the company regardless of whether they are positioned in the operating divisions or in other corporate units. Become "owner" of the communications strategy and philosophy for the company – that is, develop a communications strategy so effective that it becomes a corporate strategy, useful to establish and enhance reputation and differentiate the company in the marketplace of products and services, the arena of public policy debate, or the financial markets.

3. ***Learn to be a risk-taker,*** which ultimately means being accountable for accomplishing business goals.

4. ***Advocate measurement and evaluation of communication programmes.*** Develop a communication plan that establishes goals linked to the corporate business strategy and use communication tactics that can be quantified and evaluated in terms of business results.

5. ***Become an effective voice for change in the company.*** Make communication the essential, indispensable ingredient in the CEO's strategy to deal with the company's evolution.

6. ***Assume the leadership role in establishing the corporate crisis communications*** plan and make yourself an indispensable part of its execution.

7. *Speak the language of management.* Become comfortable with the CEO's vision, the pace of the company, its important milestones for the coming year, its long-range business goals, its short-term plan of action. Learn to translate communication programmes and tactics into terms important to a CEO: return on investment, measurable impact, specific action steps, business strategies and goals. Make communication integral to the corporate strategy, not irrelevant or incidental (Arnold, 1988:12).

2.3.3 Professionalism of the top communicator

The knowledge base of the communication department (and the top communicator) forms the inner core of communication excellence as described by Dozier et al (1995:2). There must be expertise in communication departments to play a senior-level strategic role in managing communication and public relations programmes, as well as contributing to the overall strategic management of the organisation. Dozier et al (1995:21) calls this knowledge, manager role expertise.

According to Berzok (1993:24), this profession includes people who are very experienced communicators, but many do not understand much about the dynamics of business. The top communicator must know the business and the business strategy. One has to know what is going on in the operations of the business: marketing, research and development, manufacturing and the like.

The *Excellence Study,* furthermore, showed that while most departments were capable of one-way communication, they had little experience in more sophisticated two-way models of communication which took into account the interests and views of all internal and external audiences; they tended to practice press agentry – the dissemination of favourable information about the organisation – because they mistakenly believed it was what CEOs want, and even more disturbingly, because it is what they know how to do (White & Mazur, 1995:23). Further, their one-way communicative efforts may be inadequate for coping with the turbulent environment. Relegation to a functionary role also inhibits the professional development of individual

practitioners and of the entire field of public relations (Grunig, L, in Grunig, J, 1992:483).

Howard, E (1995:14) says of communicators that it is up to them to educate themselves so they can effectively convey strategic information to internal and external audiences, because knowledge is power.

The public relations practitioner, in order to develop the perspective that will make her contribution valuable, must also be thoroughly informed about the organisation and outside views of it. This is a demanding requirement, one which requires skills in social analysis, as well as realistic knowledge of business operations. This perspective must develop – and be sustained – regardless of whether the practitioner is working internally, in-house, or as an outside consultant (White & Mazur, 1995:28).

Pollack (1986) found that practitioners included in the inner circle tend to have more training in public relations as opposed to just a few courses or seminars or no formal education in public relations. This finding is consistent with Lawler and Hage (1973), who, more than a decade earlier, established that professional training, along with professional activity, decreases at least felt powerlessness (White & Dozier, in Grunig, J, 1992:493).

The result of a lack of relevant knowledge is that organisations sometimes, unfortunately, look outside the ranks of their own communication and public relations technicians to find managers for this important function. Encroachment is the inevitable by-product of a calling that fails to rise above technique. The career failure of top practitioners to assume the management role within the organisation is also a failure to truly emerge as a profession from the communication skill cluster that operationally defines what practitioners do – and what the practice is (Dozier, in Grunig, J, 1992:352).

The assumptions can be made that:

- Public relations in less than excellent organisations tends to practice press agentry – the dissemination of favourable information about the organisation – because it mistakenly believes it is what top management wants and because it is what they know how to do. (Refer to H2.)

- Pollack (1986) found that practitioners included in the inner circle tend to have more training in public relations as opposed to just a few courses or seminars or no formal education in public relations. (Refer to H11.)

2.4 THE VALUE SENIOR MANAGEMENT ATTACHES TO THE COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT

Communication departments that prove their worth to senior management by their strategic contributions are valued and supported by this constituency. In order to make strategic contributions, communication departments need power within senior management. These contributions, in turn, lead to greater power and influence in management decision-making (Dozier et al, 1995:75).

The power-control perspective states that organisations do what they do because the people with the most power in the organisation – top management – decide to do it that way. Organisations practice public relations as they do, therefore, because the top management decides to do it that way (Grunig, L, in Grunig, J, 1992:483).

2.4.1 Support for the communication function as an indicator of the power of the communication department

Support refers to the support for the communication function in the abstract among top management. This is somewhat separate from actual performance of communicators in the organisation. This is the first among shared expectations or understandings between top communicators and CEOs that define communication excellence (Dozier et al, 1995:79; Malan & L'Estrange, 1973:70).

In the *Excellence Study*, CEOs and top communicators generally provided similar assessments of top management support for the communication function in their respective organisations. Communicators in organisations with excellent communication reported that the communication function has strong support from top management. CEOs in those same organisations recognise that same strong support for the communication function (Dozier et al, 1995:79-80).

2.4.2 Value attached to the communication department as an indicator of the power of this department

Allen (1979) believes that the top management dictates organisational action to a far greater degree than does the environment, a long-cherished predictor of organisational structure and decision-making. He furthermore contends that managers value the organisational roles that are part of their management teams. When public relations is excluded from the decision-making process as it tends to be in the typical traditional organisation, one would expect managers to devalue its role (Grunig, L, in Grunig, J, 1992:489).

Maples (1981) agreed. She found that managers value organisational roles that demand autonomous decision-making. Thus, the greater the autonomy, the greater the value that managers should hold for public relations practitioners (Grunig, L, in Grunig, J, 1992:489).

Departmental value refers to the value that the top communicator and the CEO thinks the public relations or communication department has in their particular organisation (Dozier et al, 1995:80). How much CEOs and top management value their communication departments, for example, affects the power of top communicators to retain or expand the departmental budget (Dozier et al, 1995:81).

Companies with a culture to recognise the importance of the so-called "soft side" of strategic development tend to include communicators on their strategic planning teams. The soft side of development tends to formalise such tasks as awareness building, the

creation of teams, free discussion of options, testing of ideas, consensus building, formation of coalitions and organisation politics. In contrast, the "hard side" includes elements such as quantitative risk analysis, hurdle rates, competitive performance and scenario planning (Kinkead & Winokur, 1992:19).

Excellent departments are valued by the top management, while mediocre departments are not. Members of the power elite are more likely to include the senior public relations person in organisations with excellent communication initiatives. The most effective programmes the *Excellence* team studied were characterised by a state of equilibrium between top management's expectations of public relations and the potential of that department. Further, if the head of public relations does not understand the demands or perceptions of top management, frustration and mis-communication are likely; excellent communication is unlikely (Grunig L, 1997:10).

In organisations with less-than-excellent communication programmes, top management sees communication essentially as one-way: from top management to publics. Communicators, hired largely for their technical expertise as writers, are brought in after decisions are made. Their expertise is sought solely to help disseminate information in support of top management objectives. However, top management sees no value in seating a technician or tactician in a support function like communications at the decision-making table, as they reason that they could not contribute to strategy formulation (Dozier et al, 1995:15-16).

Dozier et al (1995:103) asked what comes first – an enlightened top management demanding excellence, or a knowledgeable communication department delivering excellence? They concluded that expertise typically – but not always – comes first. Top management tends to value and support communicators who first demonstrate their worth. Public relations will be considered to be part of top management if it can prove that it can do the job.

Top management should also be convinced (influenced) to redefine its notion of communication from one of "information exchange" to one of "relationship-building"

– which is what many experts view as the gist of potent leadership (Pincus, 1994:29).
According to Campbell (1993:16), leadership is what makes the difference between
public relations with little impact and public relations that is effective.

Pincus (1994:29) states that the closer communication can be coupled with other
strategic business concepts such as leadership, the more apt top managers will be to
deem it a strategic force. The top communicator should view herself as a
businessperson with special expertise in communication, not only as a communicator
first and last.

The assumption can be made that:

- In organisations with less-than-excellent communication programmes, dominant
coalitions see communication essentially as one-way. Communicators, hired largely
for their technical expertise as writers, are brought in after decisions are made to
help disseminate information in support of top management objectives. The top
management sees no value in seating a technician or tactician in a support function
like communications at the decision-making table, as they reason that she could not
contribute to strategy formulation. (Refer to H_1, H_2, H_3, H_4.)

2.4.3 The value communication adds to the organisation

The real reason top communicators and their CEOs value public relations is because
they understand that communication works with other managerial functions to build
quality, long-term relationships with all strategic publics. To do so, public relations
professionals must go beyond their traditional communication role to function as
counsellors, negotiators and strategic planners. They must be involved in every
dimension of the organisation – and especially with top management. Thus the
Excellence team considered the "bottom-line" contributions of public relations to
combine conventional financial return and social responsibility (Grunig, L, 1997:13).

Grunig, L, Grunig, J and White (1992) found that public relations contributes to the
effectiveness of an organisation by helping the organisation to meet its goals, especially

by developing communication programmes that build quality relations with strategic publics. To do this, public relations must be part of the strategic management of the organisation and must manage its own programme in line with the principles of strategic management. If communication is managed strategically, it will prevent poor publicity, fines, private suits and penetration of the organisation by activist groups and government. This will provide the measure for determining the monetary value of public relations (Holzhausen & Verwey, 1996:34).

The researchers of the *Excellence Study* believed that the value of a communication programme should be demonstrated by determining its contribution to the effectiveness of an organisation, rather than by attempting to make an account of how efficient the communication programme is. They explored how useful several approaches to organisational effectiveness can be in explaining the economic contribution of communication to an organisation (Lindeborg, 1994:10).

If the effectiveness of communication programmes is to be measured in economic terms, public relations management must not be viewed as a technical task, but must be defined in terms of a mission that is socially defensible, organisationally relevant and quantifiable (Lindeborg, 1994:10).

However, public relations' contribution to the bottom-line is difficult to quantify. Many CEOs believe that, although public relations contributes to the bottom-line, its contribution is intangible and difficult to measure. Campbell (1993:17) states that "If you do figure out a way to measure public relations' return on investment (ROI), it should be measured on an ongoing basis by the same people who measure ROI for the rest of the company."

According to Grunig, L (1997:12) it was found in the *Excellence Study* that both CEOs and their heads of public relations are of the opinion that public relations tends to return more than it costs to implement – on average about 185 percent return on investment (ROI). For every dollar they spent they felt they received back almost two. CEOs and managers of public relations in these organisations tended to value public

relations more highly than "the typical department" in their organisation.

One way of overcoming the problem of determining the economic benefits of public relations to the company is through the process of "compensation variation". During its research, the team of *Excellence* researchers actually helped participants assign monetary values to communication benefits. The process begins by isolating communication as the primary cause or at least an important contributor to a beneficial outcome. Typical outcomes included rooting out waste in work through employee communication programmes, turning around declining stock prices through financial relations, raising the national ranking of the operation through media relations, unblocking overseas markets formerly frozen because of insensitive intercultural communication, averting lawsuits and restrictive legislation through relationships with activists and regulators, gaining acceptance for rate hikes through customer relations and simply surviving tough economic conditions that doomed competitors with less-effective communication programmes. The second step in compensating variation, is to assess the monetary value of such outcomes (Grunig, L, 1997:12).

Two aspects that further influence the value top management attaches to communication are the handling of a crisis and activism.

2.4.3.1   Handling a crisis

CEOs and communicators in the *Excellence Study* mentioned crises as catalysts for changes in management's view of communication. These events serve as wake-up calls to senior managers who previously placed little importance on public relations and communication management (Dozier et al, 1995:103). The occurrence of a crisis is an example of what Koehler, Anatol & Applebaum (1981:189) call a power vacuum.

According to them there are many power vacuums in organisations which individuals can fill, initiating decisions and actions that lead to more power and influence for them. Influence and power are derived largely from personal qualities and situational factors. Although formal authority and official power are needed to ratify and implement

decisions, the persons behind those decisions may have considerable influence and informal power even if they do not have any formal authority (Koehler, Anatol & Applebaum, 1981:189).

Kinkead & Winokur (1992:18) state that handling a crisis is a hallmark skill for seasoned practitioners and provides public relations with a crisis showcase. In this case, the most effective way to help management avoid the crisis in the first place is for the top communicator to gain a seat at strategic planning sessions. In this way upper-level management will in time grow comfortable with the public relations operations and gain confidence in the ability of public relations professionals to play an important role in the handling of issues such as a crisis, as well as strategic planning and implementation of that plan on behalf of the company. This will lead to more power and influence for the top communicator and the communication department (Kinkead & Winokur, 1992:22).

2.4.3.2   Activism

An act of activism can also be regarded as a crisis. Counter-intuitive as it may be, the *Excellence* team found that activism pushes organisations toward excellence. In fact, activism emerged as the second greatest determinant of the value top management holds for public relations (Grunig, L, 1997:9; Grunig, J, 1991:370).

Activist publics and turbulent conditions inside and outside organisations push organisations toward excellence. When organisations fail to communicate with active publics, members of those publics frequently join activist groups to pressure the organisation for change. Communicating openly with activists and demonstrating a willingness to change rather than simply trying to dominate them may result in an all-important credibility for the organisation. Thus, activist groups constitute the most important part of an organisation's environment and its most strategic publics (Grunig, L, 1997:9; Grunig, J, 1991:370).

2.5 COMMUNICATION AS A STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT FUNCTION

Strategic communication is a critical success factor in addressing the political, social and economic issues which business management is already addressing and will increasingly have to address in future. A management philosophy that excludes strategic communication is no longer appropriate for the present and likely future environment; and public relations will become a meaningless function unless it complements management strategically at the highest level. To be meaningful, public relations must therefore become a management function (De la Rey, 1994:17).

Strategic management and planning involve the exercise of organisational power at the highest level, because an organisation's mission and long-term goals are "on the table" when top management plans strategy. The very purpose and direction of an organisation can be recast when top managers plan strategically (Dozier et al 1995:84). If the top communicator proved her worth in strategic planning, her power will in time increase.

Beerel (1998:161) states that the strategic planning function is engaged in envisioning the future and co-creating a vision for the organisation that resonates with organisational stakeholders. As part of business leadership, the strategic planning function focuses on the organisation's ability to self-organise by helping it to reframe its assumptions and renegotiate its relationship links.

According to Cutlip, Center & Broom (1985:235), thinking in terms of strategy is at the heart of public relations planning. In a pure sense, a strategy is a plan to use selected means in predetermined ways to attain a desired result. Strategic thinking links the fact-finding phase to the planning and programming.

2.5.1 Characteristics of strategic communication management

According to Kinkead & Winokur (1992:23), the communication manager should work closely with the CEO and his key executives to help formulate policy, as opposed to merely planning the communications aspect of given events.

Strategic public relations and communication management differ from tactical or functionary communication. They involve top communicators in the highest management roles in an organisation, and help top management assess the external environment and respond appropriately to it (Dozier et al, 1995:85).

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 that the communication management function enjoys in the organisation has a significant influence on the extent to which it is allowed to consult directly with management and to initiate changes (Claassen & Verwey, 1997:49).

Communicators who practise excellent communication provide two-way channels of communication from top management to publics and back again. Such feedback loops are crucial to top management assessment of organisational environments and appropriate responses to them (Dozier et al, 1995:85).

Grunig & Grunig (1989) cite research by Cupp (1985), Nelson (1986) and Grunig (1986) which showed that organisations vary their approach to public relations as a function of the issues and publics involved. Even in a generally dynamic and hostile environment, the organisation may utilise two-way symmetrical communication with some groups and other forms of communication for other groups in much the same way that superiors vary their leadership across subordinates (Leichty & Springston, 1993:333).

The strategic communication department develops programmes to communicate with the publics that provide the greatest threats and opportunities to the organisation. Participation in strategic management also elevates public relations from its traditional reactive style of responding to communication crises to a proactive, responsive style of anticipating and then helping reduce emergent conflicts (Grunig L, 1997:5).

Tactical or functionary communication, on the other hand, involves non-strategic dissemination of messages from organisations to their (frequently poorly defined and/or understood) publics. Under such conditions, top communicators need not be managers. A supervising technician, with routine budgeting and personnel supervision skills, will suffice. At best, such one-way practices execute strategies chosen and planned by others in the organisation. At worst, one-way communication is simply functionary, the generation of messages as an end in themselves (Dozier et al, 1995:85).

Beerel (1998:25) distinguishes between adaptive and technical work. She states that in the adaptive age there will be a backlash against our dependence on technical fixes. Adaptive problems will be understood as interconnected and interdependent systemic problems that cannot be grasped or addressed in isolation.

Adaptive work is about understanding the ends to which we are called or driven and working on the value challenges that these might represent. Technical work is the procedural work that is carried out once the adaptive work has been done. Technical work is about means to ends and when it comes to means, we can usually readily make choices (Beerel, 1998:25).

The operation of average departments can be explained as more "historicist," or doing what they do because they have always done so. For example, the mediocre department may focus on employee relations because at some point in its history employees were the most strategic public. Managers of this kind of static programme fail to conduct the kind of research or engage in the environmental scanning necessary to identify emerging publics that may prove vital to the organisation's long-term

viability. They may manage their own programmes adequately.

However, they do not tie in their departmental objectives with the larger goals of the organisation. As a result, their contribution to overall organisational effectiveness is minimal (Grunig, L, 1997:5).

According to Beerel (1998:162), the new approach to strategic planning requires a new lens and a new focus in seeing and interpreting the world. In this paradigm, communication managers and planners need to adopt systems thinking and they need to distinguish between adaptive and technical work. They need to place their primary focus on adaptive work. The technical work should be left to the communication technicians in the communication department. Strategic planners should know when the technical work should begin and they should be in tune with the communication department's tendency to go into technical mode before the adaptive work has really been done.

Large-scale, complex organisations have a higher tendency to include public relations in the policy-making process. They usually operate in a highly competitive environment and are more sensitive to policy issues, public attitudes and establishing a solid corporate identity. Consequently there is more emphasis on press conferences, formal contact with the media, writing executive speeches, and counselling management (Wilcox, Ault & Agee, 1989:66).

In contrast, a small-scale organisation manufacturing a minor product feels few public pressures and little governmental regulatory interest. It has little public relations activity, and staff members are relegated to such technician roles as producing the company newsletter and issuing routine news releases. Public relations has little or no input into management decisions and policy formulation (Wilcox, Ault & Agee, 1989:67).

According to the *Excellence Study*, the key characteristics of excellence in public relations and communication management are:

1.   That these practices are strategic, not historical; excellent communication programmes are created for strategic purposes. They are not just an evolution of what has been done in the past, and they are aimed at groups that are important to the organisation in strategic terms.

2.   They are concerned with impact, not process, and aim to influence audience attitudes, opinions or behaviours rather than simply putting processes into motion such as news release production.

3.   Excellent public relations uses both formal and informal research to understand its audiences and monitor effectiveness (White & Mazur, 1995:23).

The assumptions can be made that:

- Tactical or functionary communication involves non-strategic dissemination of messages from organisations to frequently poorly defined and understood publics. Under such conditions, top communicators need not be managers. A supervising technician, with routine budgeting and personnel supervision skills, will suffice. Such one-way practices execute strategies chosen and planned by others in the organisation. It is simply functionary – the generation of messages as an end in itself. (Refer to H_1, H_2, H_3.)

- Large-scale, complex organisations have a higher tendency to include public relations in the policy-making process. A small-scale organisation has little public relations activity, and staff members are relegated to technician roles. Public relations has little or no input into management decisions and policy formulation. (Refer to H_7.)

2.5.2 The strategic contribution of the communication department to organisational decision-making

Communicators provide specialised expertise in helping senior management teams make better decisions. Communication excellence comes from the quality of strategic decisions made by senior management that anticipate the impact of decisions on relationships, modifying those decisions appropriately to build or maintain long-term, mutually beneficial relationships (Dozier et al, 1995:129). This is an important aspect

of the strategic contribution that the communication department can make to the organisation.

Decisions in organisations are not based on logic alone: they are also determined by power and influence. A top communicator may be absolutely right in his/her proposals, but can still not contribute to decision-making on senior management level because he/she is not powerful and influential enough in the organisation. Knowledge of the communication management function will give communicators the necessary power to operate on a strategic management level (Dozier et al, 1995:76). Winokur & Kinkead (1993:16) state that public relations professionals, like the proverbial shoemaker's children going barefoot, often ignore the persuasive power of academic research to make a case for including public relations in the decision-making process at the top.

Power is important to implement excellent communication programmes. Lacking the ability to influence the strategic decision-making of top management, communication departments must execute less-than-excellent communication programmes. Such less-than-excellent, one-way communication programmes seek to influence publics on issues important to top management, but cannot exert a reciprocal influence on top management on behalf of publics (Dozier et al, 1995:76).

A powerful communication department can play an important role in mutual adjustments of top management and publics.

Symmetrical practices among communicators require that the communicators act as advocates of their organisation's viewpoint when communicating with publics, and as advocates of public interests when communicating with top management. Communicators help organisations and publics negotiate mutually acceptable resolutions to disputes and building long-term relationships.

The specialist in communication is often called upon to guide and counsel management in determining its objectives and responsibilities and the path it should take in designing its policies and procedures affecting the public interest (Skinner & Von Essen, 1982:7).

The impact of a management decision and the way it is communicated are very closely tied together. Good management decisions are made with a detailed knowledge of the attitudes and probable reactions of the persons affected by the decision; the communication manager should be able to convey information about these persons as the decision is being formulated (Farace, Monge & Russell, 1977:253).

It is, therefore, nearly impossible to separate public relations policy from overall corporate strategy. The bigger the decision, the larger the company, and the greater the number of people that are affected, the more significant the public relations component becomes. More often than not, however, the chief executive officer would not consult with public relations about major policy matters. And yet major public relations problems continually arise from policy decisions in which public relations has had no part. The public relations director may not be sitting at the conference table, but the "publics" are (Mason, 1974:121).

2.5.2.1   Information as basis for decision-making

Top management needs information to help it make decisions. It constructs environments from a subset of the information that flows into the organisation. Ignoring seemingly irrelevant information from the environment can have disastrous consequences for organisations (White & Dozier, in Grunig J, 1992:93).

According to Bartha (1994:138), business firms do not usually lack information about the external environment. The underlying reason for inadequate awareness and understanding is that managers, for the most part, do not know what to do with all the incoming signals. Missing is some kind of an analytical framework to help make the environmental information relevant for business decision-making.

Where environments generate a variety of problems or uncertainties, boundary-spanning staff who are able to interpret and make sense of the surroundings, become influential in decision-making. Some management writers, in fact, maintain that control in organisations has passed to those interpreters who often come from staff as

opposed to line groups (White & Mazur, 1995:27; White & Dozier, in Grunig, J, 1992:103).

Boundary spanners are individuals within the organisation who frequently interact with the organisation's environment and who gather, select, and relay information from the environment to decision-makers in top management. Communication managers and public relations practitioners are among an organisation's designated boundary spanners (White & Dozier, in Grunig J, 1992:93; De la Rey, 1994:21).

Environmental turbulence and uncertainty create opportunities for practitioners to participate in strategic decision-making. Lack of information, ambiguity in information, or uncertainty regarding the likelihood of outcomes in given situations make decision makers uncertain. Top management pays greater attention to information from boundary spanners such as communication managers under conditions of environmental turbulence because decision makers are less certain as to which information to attend to and which information to ignore as they manage the organisation's response to rapid environmental change (White & Dozier, in Grunig, J, 1992:93).

Regarding high-level, strategic decisions, boundary-spanning practitioners perhaps play their most important role when they serve as consultants who advise on methods of problem representation.

As environmental scanners, practitioners make important decisions when they decide to present some information (but not other information) to the decision-making session. Other decision makers will tend towards constructing partial representations of the organisational environment, giving importance to only that information that affects their area of specialisation. As generalists, communication practitioners must strive to provide fuller representations of the environment to decision makers (White & Dozier, in Grunig, J, 1992:105). In order to do this, Farace, Monge & Russell (1977:252) suggest that the communication manager should be located at the centre of message flow in the organisation.

Public relations can also serve as a sounding board for the rest of the organisation. In a decentralised organisational structure, public relations executives provide a unique framework through which the CEO can listen to the organisation outside of normal reporting channels. This role for public relations is widely known and respected throughout the senior management ranks, because it helps make executive management more responsive to the rapidly-changing climate in which businesses operate. The CEO can also rely on them for honest and candid feedback on any and all issues that affect his ability to successfully lead the organisation (Foster, 1990:9).

Studies of the way in which so-called 'boundary-spanning' individuals decide on what they should attend to in the organisation's environment have found that they do so on the basis of:

- instructions given to them;
- their own skills;
- contacts; and
- their personalities and personal strategy (White & Mazur, 1995:26).

But if the public relations practitioner is not involved, she will have to take the initiative with suggestions and ideas. The CEO must be shown that the public relations practitioner can play a vital role in this ongoing process of decision-making (Kinkead & Winokur, 1992:19).

2.5.2.2   Levels of organisational decision-making

Some decisions made by public relations practitioners are relatively low level, involving concrete operational decisions related to technical tasks concretely and physically at hand. Examples include decisions about the cover of the staff magazine, handling technical aspects of producing public relations materials and editing the writing of others in the organisation for grammar and spelling. Such technical decisions are made in relatively short order; frequently involve a single decision maker; and are made within a highly structured "goal-closed small world" (White & Dozier, in Grunig, J, 1992:95).

As one moves from the lower level concrete organisational decisions to higher levels, decisions become more social and more abstract (more removed from concrete specifics). Relevant information needed to make higher-level decisions becomes more ambiguous; decision support systems frequently do not exist at higher levels of decision-making. Higher-level decisions are more open from a systems perspective. At the same time, such decisions are frequently more important (White & Dozier, in Grunig, J, 1992:95).

Strategic decisions are those that profoundly affect the future success and destiny of the organisation. Mintzberg et al (1976) specified strategic decisions as important ones, in terms of actions to be taken, resources to be committed, and consequences for the organisation and those who make decisions. Keller (1983) suggested that strategic decisions are those that contribute to effective use of organisational resources to deal with environmental competition. Strategic decisions affect the survival and growth of organisations. Such representations become more ambiguous and difficult to construct as decision levels increase (White & Dozier, in Grunig, J, 1992:98).

High-level strategic decision problems require abstract thinking and, because they are strategic, such decision problems are dealt with by those high in the organisational structure.

The challenge for communicators and public relations practitioners is to understand and respect the qualitative differences between concrete operational decisions that they routinely make as technicians and abstract strategic decisions they must make as managers (White & Dozier, in Grunig, J, 1992:98).

2.5.3 The strategic management of the communication function

The strategic management of the communication function takes place on three levels: the macro, meso and micro level. The management of communication on these levels will be discussed next.

2.5.3.1 The macro level

Grunig (1990) suggests that characteristics of public relations at macro level pertain to issues of organisational structure, organisational culture and some environmental influences. A theoretical and literature overview by Holzhausen & Verwey (1996:39), however, suggests a slightly different and extended interpretation of the macro level concept.

In an application of the systems theory, Long and Hazelton (1987) suggest that public relations uses input from environmental supersystems; transforms the input through the public relations decision process; and supplies output through the communication process with target audiences. In this sense then, macro will, according to Holzhausen & Verwey (1996:39), mean environment or environmental supersystems. Pearce and Robinson described the environment in terms of economic conditions, social change, political priorities and technological developments, thereby adding the concept of society to environmental supersystems. This also coincides with the interpretation of one of the three levels of strategic management, namely the corporate or organisational level where the interests of stockholders and society are reflected.

Another supersystem influences public relations practice, namely societal culture, especially as proposed by Sriramesh and White (1992). According to Holzhausen and Verwey (1996:39), culture could, however, be interpreted as part of the social supersystem, and it can therefore be referred to as the socio-cultural supersystem.

These interpretations suggest an umbrella or macro environment consisting of a number of supersystems which influence the organisation. It is in this context that the term macro level will be used, and the following supersystems will apply at this level: legal/political, economic, competitive, socio-cultural and technological (Holzhausen & Verwey, 1996:41).

Holzhausen's theoretical overview suggests a deeper structure of the public relations function, which is replicated at each of the macro, meso and micro levels. This deeper

structure is constituted by three functional levels of public relations practice, namely a metatheoretical level, an organisational level and a communication level (Holzhausen & Verwey, 1996:42).

At the macro level, the *functional level of metatheory* pertains to the worldviews and presuppositions of the external environment and those dominant in the organisation, especially as influenced by socio-cultural patterns. It also refers to a number of systems approaches between the organisation and the environment. The metatheoretical level can also be described as the philosophical level. However, at the *macro level,* a *functional level of organisation* can also be identified. This relates to how the external environment impacts on the organisation and what the organisation's stance towards the external environment is. It also explains whether the external environment threatens the autonomy of the organisation or not. The third *functional level* at macro level is that of *communication*. This describes the communication philosophy between the organisation and its environment, and will, for example, stress power relations in the discourse process between the organisation and its environment, such as proposed by Gandy, Rakow, Salmon and an analysis of post-modern theory (Holzhausen & Verwey, 1996:42).

Two levels that make up the macro level will now be discussed in more detail, namely the corporate level, which includes aspects such as strategic corporate management and strategic plans as communication vehicles; and the communication level which includes aspects such as communication strategies as part of corporate strategy and strategic communication management (issues management, setting of strategic goals and objectives, boundary-spanning, environmental scanning and alignment).

i.   The corporate level

To be strategic, public relations must align with the corporate vision and mission – the company's reason for being – and must substantially contribute to achieving the organisation's objectives. Webster (1990:18) states that public relations should ideally be part of the team helping to create the corporate mission and set the objectives.

a.   Strategic corporate management

Strategic management is a process that enables any organisation – company, association, non-profit or government agency – to identify its long-term opportunities and threats, mobilise its assets to address them and carry out a successful implementation strategy. According to Forbes (1992:32), it is the flip side of the reactive, short-term thinking that has pervaded so many companies and constrained their ability to compete internationally.

Top management engages in strategic planning when it makes strategic decisions in a proactive manner. Steps in strategic planning include determining the organisation's mission, developing an organisational profile, assessing the external environment, matching the organisational profile with environmental opportunities, identifying best options consistent with the mission, choosing long-term goals, developing short-term objectives, implementing programmes, and evaluating success or failure (Dozier et al, 1995:85). The strategic plan gives direction – it provides the strategy, goals and business policy of the organisation (Kroon, 1996:80).

According to Beerel (1998:162), the strategic planning function within the living organisational network is the key node that drives all organisational self-organisation. As such, the strategic planning process is the organisation's claim not only to what it is, but what it would like to become.

Beerel (1998:162) furthermore states that strategic planning is a formal process designed to interpret the organisation's environment for the purpose of identifying its adaptive challenges and guiding its responses so as to optimise longer-term competitive advantage.

Although planning undoubtedly produces a series of integrated decisions, this serves a secondary purpose. The very process of monitoring and evaluating the environment is the sharp end of the strategic planning process. It is the critical link between the organisation as a living network and the infinite number of networks that defines its environment (Beerel, 1998:162).

Strategic management and planning are high-level organisational functions tightly linked to excellence in public relations and communication management. Higgins (1979) defined strategic management as the "process of managing the pursuit of the accomplishment of organisational mission coincident with managing the relationship of the organisation to its environment". That is, the purpose and direction of an organisation (its mission) is affected by relationships with key constituents (publics) in the organisation's environment. These relationships affect an organisation's autonomy to pursue its mission and accomplish its goals (Dozier et al, 1995:85).

Strategy is, therefore, essentially concerned with the long-term direction and scope of an organisation. It is arrived at through a process of analysis and decision-making, to which many in the organisation will and should contribute. Once developed, it will need to be communicated so that it can be implemented (White & Mazur, 1995:25).

The participation of each member of staff in the implementation of the chosen plan is necessary. To make this possible, each subordinate, in conjunction with her manager, must determine what she must achieve within the overall plan.
This is done by allowing the worker to decide on an end result to be achieved. She must then continually monitor her progress towards attaining the objectives and make adjustments where necessary. Thus, each worker's performance can be determined effectively and remunerated accordingly (Kroon, 1996:159).

Writers on strategy stress the importance of communication in transmitting and sharing information about key business values and directions. They are, however, much less explicit about how communication is to be made to happen. The question here is one of responsibility for communication, and public relations staff provide one possible source of expertise in communication which can be used for internal as well as external purposes (White & Mazur, 1995:27).

b.   Strategic plans as communication vehicles

Plans, as they emerge from strategic programming as programmes, schedules, budgets,

and so on, can be prime media to communicate not just strategic intentions, but also what each individual in the organisation must do to realise them. Formal planning activities are fulfilling certain vital functions in co-ordinating strategies, including awareness building, consensus generating and commitment-affirming. Planning forces managers to communicate systematically about strategic issues (Mintzberg, 1994:352; Middleton & Wedemeyer, 1985:163).

Improvement in communication and co-ordination are not just functional side effects of planning, but the essential reasons to engage in it. According to Mintzberg (1994:352), communication is one of the most important, if not the most important role of strategic planning. Communication through planning provides a means whereby management as a whole, on a regular basis, (can) talk about strategy. It is planning's conceptual tidiness that may provide a better vocabulary for communication within organisations. More specifically, management can convey its intentions, ensure coherence across activities and rationalise the allocation of resources through the strategic plan (Mintzberg, 1994:352).

The strategic plan is a tool of internal and external communication. It can be introduced to employees through mass meetings, the house magazine and the distribution of a shortened version of the plan itself. Often the president of the company is less concerned with what plan the process generates (what are the strategic decisions to make) and more with how committed the key employees are to the implementation of whatever strategic decisions are made. The plan of the firm presents itself ... as a favoured means of communication, providing the personnel with a statement of the organisation's situation, an analysis of the ends and general objectives, and the expression of a clear policy, unblocking the way to concrete actions (Mintzberg, 1994:353).

Mintzberg (1994:354) is not referring to planning as – what he calls – a "public relations exercise" ("planning for show") because it looks good rather than it is good. Instead, he means informing stakeholders about the substance of the plans so that they can help the organisation realise them.

## ii.	The communication level

On the communication level, the communication strategy as part of the corporate strategy will be addressed, as well as the strategic management of the communication function.

### a.	The communication strategy as part of the corporate strategy

The concepts of strategic communication planning and design go beyond isolated, anecdotal message production and consumption activities. Strategic communication planning implies an *a priori*, long-range co-ordination of purposes for organisational communication activities. Analysis of strategic communication planning begins with an understanding of communication management philosophy. Management philosophy influences design selections; design selections influence communication content, division of communication labour, and communication flow (Cummings, Long & Lewis, 1987:89).

Public relations performance should harmonise with business strategy. The public relations executive has the responsibility to implement the corporate communication strategy in harmony with the company's business plan. The communication plan should integrate the employee communications with the messages to all constituencies and the general public. Because these groups interact with and influence each other, it is vital to have consistent, candid messages tailored to the specific audiences with the overall goal of contributing to the success of the business (Foster, 1990:9-12; White & Mazur, 1995:27; Winokur & Kinkead, 1993:18). Public relations practitioners are increasingly called on not only to ensure consistency of voice, but also to have a hand in defining just what the message is.

An important tenet of present-day strategising is that those who do not have 'ownership' of the plan, are least likely to implement the plan effectively. Since modern business plans go well beyond financial forecasts, incorporating strategies that deal with the way in which an organisation ought to interact with its stakeholders, public

relations must inevitably be part of the strategising process. Public relations must help to define the target audiences to be reached by the organisation and to devise and implement the communication plans to reach those audiences (De la Rey, 1994:23). The strategic plan should, therefore, feature a public relations section designed by public relations professionals (Kinkead & Winokur, 1992:21).

Communication strategies, as is the case with all other strategies, must be coupled with objectives and the results must be measurable. Management commitment to communication is a prerequisite for the success of any such strategy. If management displays a negative attitude towards company strategies, objectives, goals and decisions, those reporting to it will probably feel the same. Management cannot expect to obtain credibility and acceptance for a communication strategy if it pays lip service to the idea of communication. These decisions will therefore be taken within the parameters of the constraints placed on effective communication (Oberholster, 1993:25).

Organisational and public relations goals are reciprocally related. Public relations goals are the consequence of organisational goals, not the reverse. As such, public relations programmes focus upon complementing organisational productivity, efficiency, member and client satisfaction, adaptation, development and survival through communication management activities (Long & Hazelton, 1987:8).

Even in the absence of a master plan for public relations, a company can emerge with an effective, well co-ordinated programme because of its results-oriented approach. From the beginning, once a public relations initiative is taken in a particular area, it should be strategically supported by research, planning and involvement by many players within the company who would be critical to the programme's success. Public relations should also be managed by objective, and the function should be held accountable for measurable and meaningful results (Webster, 1990:19).

The following are key to putting public relations on a strategic basis:

- The communication strategy/programme must be planned to achieve specific rather than "ad hoc" goals.

- The communication strategy/programme must be aligned with overall corporate goals such as helping to create shareholder value, improve sales and profits, build market share, enhance the company's reputation, improve productivity and build employee alignment.

- Whenever possible, the strategy/programme should be proactive.

- Results should be quantifiable. It will often exceed the resources being invested in the public relations strategy/programme.

- Many people outside of public relations should contribute to the strategy/programme's success.

- The public relations activity must have the CEO's support and that of senior management. Without that, one is almost guaranteed to fail (Webster, 1990:20).

According to Worcester (1987:78), it is important for the corporate communications programme to have the support of senior management; to be communicated to the workforce, so that it can put its muscle behind it; to ensure that shareholders' goodwill can be tapped and that the other publics of importance can see a co-ordinated effort.

b.   Strategic communication management

In the *Excellence Study*, two items measured expertise to play the manager role and involved knowing how to manage communication strategically. These items measured knowledge or ability to:

- manage the organisation's response to issues; and

- develop goals and objectives for the communication department.

Both items involve the strategic management of relationships with publics. By strategic management, Dozier et al (1995:27-28) mean the balancing of internal processes of organisations with external factors. The strategic management of organisations is inseparable from strategic management of relationships, traditionally the responsibility of the public relations or communication department (Dozier et al, 1995:27-28).

The most strategic functions of the top communicator, therefore, include issues management of which boundary spanning activities and environmental scanning are part. By creating alignment within the organisation, internal and external relationships are reoriented in an effort to influence the organisation's response to internal and external forces.

The focus of strategic symmetrical communication programmes is on relationships – a coming together of the top management and members of strategic publics around issues of mutual interest. Evaluating relationships requires sophisticated expertise in research methods (Dozier et al, 1995:33).

The strategic communication functions, as mentioned above, will now be discussed.

➤ **Managing the organisation's response to issues**

To play a senior role, communicators must know how to manage the organisation's response to issues and must have the knowledge to set goals and objectives. Often desired relationships are affected by the organisation's response to issues important to key publics. By managing responses to key issues strategically, desired relationships can be built or maintained with key stakeholders (Dozier et al, 1995:28).

Issues management is the process that allows organisations to know, understand and more effectively interact with their environments. Lauzen and Dozier (1994) posited and found that issues management is a process linking public relations practices to organisational environments. Public relations practitioners contribute to issues management through boundary-spanning activities (Lauzen, 1995:188).

According to Sadie (in Lubbe & Puth, 1994:254), an issues management strategy involves the creation of a programme that includes the following steps: examining all possible issues or trends that could affect the company, identifying specific issues to be considered, in other words prioritising issues, evaluating their potential impact on the company's survival and profitability, defining the corporate position on each,

determining the course of action to be taken, implementing the action plan and monitoring the results so as to modify the programme as required. The evaluation of results is particularly important as findings may contribute to more effective management of issues in the future.

The public relations division can also lead an issues management group that functions as an early warning sentinel for the corporation. The group identifies critical issues and, with the help of company subject matter experts, analyses their impact upon the company, its employees and critical stakeholder groups. In this way public relations can gain company-wide acceptance because "the communications programme that results from the up-front counselling benefit from the environmental scanning the public relations practitioner brings to the executive suite" (Kinkead & Winokur, 1992:23).

Lauzen (1995:188) found that public relations managers are more likely than technicians to be responsible for each step in the issues management process. Public relations managers contribute to environmental scanning (including both issues identification and monitoring) through formal and informal scanning activities. Formal activities include media content analysis, surveys of publics, and focus group studies of key stakeholders. Managers also use informal scanning activities such as media contacts and monitoring written and phone complaints.

➢ **Setting strategic goals and objectives for the communication department**

The communication department sets goals and objectives as a clear bottom-line measure of communication performance for an organisation. This strategic knowledge can be contrasted with tactical knowledge in communication. Traditional expertise in communication involves tactical knowledge which involves the expertise to target messages to publics through appropriate media. Such tactical decisions are important, but in the final analysis, excellence of communication programmes must be judged by the relationships it established or maintained, not by the quality of communication products as an end in themselves (Dozier et al, 1995:29).

Tactical knowledge comes to the fore after strategic knowledge has been employed to make decisions about the relationships desired with key publics. All too often communicators write tactical goals and objectives: the number of issues of the employee publication to be produced next quarter, or the number of news releases to be placed during the next budget cycle. Called process measures, such goals and objectives confuse means and ends. Strategically speaking, communication products are not an end in themselves – they are tools used in the pursuit of desired relationships with key publics. Tactical decisions about messages and media remain important, but are clearly subordinate to the consequence of strategic decisions reflected in the goals and objectives for communication programmes (Dozier et al, 1995:29).

➢ Boundary-spanning

What business needs the most for its decisions – especially its strategic ones – is data about what goes on outside of it. It is only outside the business where there are opportunities and threats. And it is here where the communicator as boundary spanner can play a role in strategic communication management (Howard, E, 1995:15).

Public relations scholars and practitioners alike have argued for breaking down the organisation-environment boundary. Krippendorf and Eleey (1986), for example, seem to use the term environment loosely when they argue the need for organisations to "monitor their symbolic environment" using a variety of strategies that analyse, manifest and project their specific interests. Furthermore, Grunig, J (1984) found that many public relations specialists are beginning to appreciate the creative potential of their activities – for crossing and even redefining organisational boundaries (Cheney & Dionisopoulos, in Botan & Hazleton, 1989:146).

Public relations practitioners (and all other corporate communication specialists) are necessary contributors to the "interface" between organisation and environment. "Boundary spanners" whose job is defined as communication, are continually involved in making symbolic connections between the organisation and the environment, gathering information that can be used for decision-making (Cheney & Dionisopoulos, in Botan & Hazleton, 1989:146).

Boundary-spanning activities can be formalised through management information systems. Such systems provide decision makers with information needed to make decisions. It must organise information in suitable forms at appropriate points and levels in the decision-making process. To be useful to decision making, information gathered by boundary-spanning practitioners must be organised in a manner that fits the decision-making structure and process (White & Dozier, in Grunig J, 1992:93).

> **Environmental scanning**

Strategic, value-added public relations starts with highly qualified input to the most senior decision-making levels and a receptive environment at those levels. Without the public relations input of information about trends and developments in the environment, no meaningful strategies can be constructed (De la Rey, 1994:23; White & Mazur, 1995:25).

Environmental scanning is the study and interpretation of the political, economic, social and technological events and trends which influence a business, an industry or even an entire market. According to Kroon (1996:73), issues in society are often forerunners of trend breaks, but must not be confused with trends. Issues can be very limited in scope and can be a temporary, short-lived reaction to a social phenomenon. An issue usually has a self-rectifying character, but when it keeps recurring, it can become a trend.

Scanning is also the communication activity through which organisations learn about trends and events in their environment. Organisations with formal environmental scanning systems tend to monitor a larger number of issues in their environments for shorter periods of time, when compared to organisations with informal environmental scanning systems (Lauzen, 1995:187).

Environmental scanning has always been recognised as an integral part of any business's successful continued existence. In systems where uncertainty has become one of the primary characteristic scenario's, environmental scanning is the mechanism

that links facts and perceptions, thereby allowing changes in the management environment to be more readily anticipated and understood (Kroon, 1996:73).

According to White & Dozier (in Grunig, J, 1992:103), the role of information gatherer and processor is key to the communication manager's participation in management decision-making. The primary responsibility of the public relations counsellor is to provide a thorough grasp of public sentiment.

The counsellor must gather systematic intelligence, process it against a company's business imperatives and produce strategically focused recommendations for action. She must bring top management to an understanding of broader issues which can affect a company's image and reputation (Osborne, 1994:64). According to Forbes (1992:32), the CEO is looking for public relations professionals for strategic counsel, not for in-house journalism.

> **Alignment**

Environmental scanning allows firms to focus on external forces that significantly influence internal relationships. According to King & Cushman (1994:18) the value chain theory allows us the opportunity to reorient an organisation's internal relationships in an effort to influence that organisation's response to external forces.

Competitive advantage in a rapidly changing economic environment will depend upon a corporation's capacity to accurately monitor changes in external economic forces and then to rapidly reorder a firm's internal resources to effectively respond to these external economic forces. King & Cushman (1994:15) state that in order to accurately monitor changes in the external economic forces, an organisation must have a world-class information and communication capability. A high-speed management system is required to successfully employ such an environmental scanning and value chain alignment capability. This must allow an organisation to track and respond in real-time to international changes in the cost of capital, labour and raw materials as well as changes in consumer tastes and competitor response.

Alignment must also manifest in internal and external corporate public messages. A lost sense of place puts all the more emphasis on the intertextual relations among corporate public messages, as the line separating internal and external communications becomes more blurred and corporate messages become more interrelated. Many internal and external messages flow together, in that, for example, employees who receive internal messages also go home to watch corporate messages to the external public on television.

According to Cheney & Dionisopoulos (in Botan & Hazleton, 1989:145), the traditional distinction between corporate communication inside the organisation and public relations outside the organisation, therefore, makes little sense.

Webster (1990:18) and Osborne (1994:64) state furthermore that strategic public relations programming is based on a senior management conviction – articulated in different ways by different managements – that no corporation can hope to succeed and prosper over the long term in a hostile climate, or without the assistance and alignment of those individuals and constituencies who are interrelated and on whom it relies for support.

Such stakeholder and environmental alignment results from research, strategic planning, and the implementation of carefully developed strategic communications and advocacy programmes, designed to achieve a desired result and to create specific perceptions, actions or reaction from each public with whom the company relates (Webster, 1990:18).

According to Labovitz & Rosansky (1997:9), alignment is a response to the new business reality where customer requirements are in flux, competitive forces are turbulent, and the bond of loyalty between an organisation and its people has been weakened. Aligned organisations capture the best of specialisation but are able to respond quickly to change. People in aligned organisations have the capacity to sense change as it happens and the ability to realign themselves rapidly with a minimum of top-down direction. The old linear approach has given way to one of simultaneity – to alignment.

Alignment provides a way of capturing the best of total quality management (TQM) and re-engineering by linking strategy and people and integrating them with customers and process improvement. Leadership and culture become the key drivers that enable an organisation to adjust rapidly to its environment (Labovitz & Rosansky, 1997:13).

2.5.3.2   The meso level

Grunig, J (1990) describes the meso level of public relations as the managerial level. Although the theoretical overview of Holzhausen & Verwey (1996:41) supports Grunig, J's general theory at meso level, it also suggests an expansion of this general theory to an inclusion of functional levels of metatheory, organisation and communication at meso level. The overview also yields support for the existence of a persuasion model and a mixed model at this level. Where the functional levels at macro level are directed at the interface between the organisation and its macro environment, as described above, the functional levels at the meso level are directed at the organisation of the public relations function. It will, therefore, describe how the public relations function is influenced at each of the functional levels (Holzhausen & Verwey, 1996:41).

At meso level the *functional levels of metatheory* again stress worldviews and presuppositions, but at this level only those of the management of the organisation. It also addresses the value systems of management, the impact of culture on the practice of public relations, the approach to problem-solving and the attitude towards women practitioners. The *functional level of organisation* will determine whether the public relations function is independent or whether it is controlled by another department, and whether it is regarded as a bridging function between the organisation and its environment. It will also determine whether it is part of top management, whether public relations is regarded as a technical or management function and what the status of women practitioners is. At the organisational level, the structure of the organisation, i.e. hierarchical or decentralised, will also have an influence on the public relations function (Holzhausen & Verwey, 1996:43).

Although the *functional level of communication* did not receive as much theoretical attention as the other functional levels at meso level, this might be attributed to a lack of awareness of this functional level.

This pertained to whether management regarded communication as symmetrical or asymmetrical and specifically addressed the communication relationship between the organisation and the public relations agency or the public relations department (Holzhausen & Verwey, 1996:43).

Aspects of the meso level that will now be discussed in more detail include reporting relationships, the importance of a single integrated communication department, placement of the department in the hierarchy and authoritative and participative cultures in the organisation.

i.   Reporting relationships

Dozier et al (1995:83), Seitel (1989:45) and White & Mazur (1995:36) state that reporting relationships provide a way to measure the power and influence of the communication or public relations department in the organisation.

However, when Dozier et al (1995:84) compared reporting relationships to overall excellence scores in the *Excellence Study*, they were surprised by the weak relationships they found. Top communicators who report directly to CEOs have slightly higher overall excellence scores for their organisations than do top communicators who report to CEOs through a longer chain of command.

Direct communicator-CEO reporting relationships are therefore necessary, but hardly sufficient for communication excellence. Reporting relationships alone tell us little about the influence of individuals on top management decision-making. The critical factor is not whom one reports to, but rather whether one has access. As a communicator, one should have access to any of the [corporate] officers at will (Dozier et al, 1995:84).

The assumptions can be made that:

- Reporting relationships provide a way to measure the power and influence of the communication or public relations department in the organisation. (Refer to H5, H6.)

- Top communicators who report directly to CEOs have slightly higher overall excellence scores for their organisations than do top communicators who report to CEOs through a longer chain of command. (Refer to H5, H6.)

ii. A single, integrated communication department

Public relations in the less-than-excellent organisation is often splintered into discrete functions that support other departments (primarily marketing, finance or personnel) or respond to different publics. These departments typically develop from a historicist – rather than strategic – direction. As a result of their fragmented structure, they cannot respond and change as the strategic nature of their publics fluctuates (Grunig, L, 1997:6).

The excellent department is an integrated one. It encompasses all communication functions and thus has the flexibility to shift its resources to respond to the inherent dynamism of today's environment (Grunig, L, 1997:6).

If public relations is to be the interpreter of management, then it must know what management is thinking at any moment on virtually every public issue. If public relations is made subordinate to any other discipline – marketing, advertising, legal, administration, whatever – then its independence, credibility and ultimately, value as an objective management counsellor, will be sacrificed (Seitel, 1989:47).

iii. Placement in the hierarchy

The relationship between placement of the communication department in the hierarchy and the organisation's degree of centralisation is also important according to Grunig, J (1976). He reasoned that public relations departments in centralised structures would

lack power unless they were located at the top of the hierarchy because rigid structures preclude decision-making power at lower levels. In decentralised organisations, the unit's power would be determined less by its location in the hierarchy because discretionary power is distributed throughout the organisation (Grunig, L, in Grunig, J, 1992:485).

According to the strategic contingency theory (Hickson, Hinnings, Lee, Schneck & Pennings, 1971), participation in decision-making increases departmental centrality in organisations, one of the factors used to explain intra-organisational power. Centrality is the degree to which a department's activities are linked to the larger organisation.

According to Lubbe (1994b) (in Lubbe & Puth, 1994:27), the more responsive the public relations department is to the overall strategy and structural arrangements, the broader its scope of operations and impact will be. Conversely, the weaker the fit between the public relations unit and the organisational structure and strategy, the more limited the scope of public relations.

Broom & Dozier (1986) suggested that when public relations practitioners are isolated from decision making, public relations becomes a low-level support function. However, when public relations is involved in decision making, "information about relations with priority publics gets factored into organisational decisions, policies and actions, making public relations more central to the organisation" (Lauzen & Dozier, 1992:210).

The research reviewed in the *Excellence Study* indicates the following ways in which the communication function should be structured to be most effective:

1. Position the communication function in the organisation to give it ready access to the managerial subsystem.
2. Integrate all public relations functions into a single department to facilitate strategic management.
3. Develop a dynamic horizontal structure within the department to give it flexibility on new strategic objectives (Lindeborg, 1994:5).

With regard to the point above, the *Excellence* team was impressed with a structure that seems to lead to the most open communication of all – the matrix structure. Levels do exist within the matrix, but they are less hierarchical than most organisational configurations (Grunig, L, 1997:10). This contributes greatly to the integration of the public relations function, as individuals can "go over" into a co-worker's work territory and *vice versa*, which leads to the sharing of problems and conclusions.

iv.   Authoritative and participative cultures

Organisations exhibit characteristics of two basic forms of culture: authoritarian and participative. A participative culture, as opposed to an authoritarian corporate culture, fosters excellent communication.

Authoritarian cultures emphasise centralised control and decision-making by a few powerful managers. Participative cultures, on the other hand, emphasise teamwork, with wide participation in decision-making (Dozier et al, 1995:77).

According to Senge (1990:181), in the traditional authoritarian organisation, the dogma was managing, organising and controlling. In the learning organisation the new "dogma" will be vision, values and mental models. The healthy organisations will be ones that can systematise ways to bring people together to develop the best possible mental models for facing any situation at hand.

Every organisation exhibits characteristics of both authoritarian and participative cultures. The authoritarian side emphasises power rooted in formal authority. The participative side emphasises influence – the informal power to persuade others involved in decision-making (Dozier et al, 1995:77).

Centralised control and decision making often leave many employees powerless. Employees may be accountable or responsible for performing some task or achieving some outcome, but they lack sufficient authority over resources to get the job done.

This leads to job dissatisfaction. Communicators are especially subject to such dissatisfaction from powerlessness. They are responsible for organisational relationships with publics, but cannot influence the decisions of top management that shape those relationships (Dozier et al, 1995:77).

The solution is to empower employees, giving them sufficient control over needed resources to complete the job. The empowerment value runs deep in participative culture. The total quality management (TQM) philosophy, for example, seeks to empower employees, decentralising some aspects of decision-making (Dozier et al, 1995:78).

A participative culture provides a nurturing soil in which communication excellence can grow. The top communicator is more likely to be excluded when a few top managers make centralised decisions by virtue of formal authority. As decision-making expands to include other contributors without formal authority, top communicators are more likely to be influential. Top communicators need such informal power – a form of empowerment for communication departments – for communication excellence (Dozier et al, 1995:78).

On the micro level, which will be examined next, the strategic communication plan and support for the communication strategy will be discussed.

2.5.3.3   The micro level

As Grunig, J points out, public relations at the micro level is the area which traditionally receives the most attention from public relations practitioners. The micro level is the level where the actual communication process between the organisation and its publics is implemented. A contributing factor to this is most probably the fact that this is historically the area where the public relations activity started. Among some practitioners, this still seems to be the only area of concern to public relations, as the many courses that offer technical training to practitioners prove. Although this approach might not be the correct one, the fact remains that communication or

communication management remains a very important function of the public relations discipline and is most often the level where management tests public relations effectiveness (Holzhausen & Verwey, 1996:42).

The functional levels also emerged at the micro level. As was the case with the other three levels, at the *functional level of metatheory*, worldviews and presuppositions play an important role in determining the public relations process between the organisation and its publics. At micro level it is the worldviews and presuppositions of the practitioners who plan campaigns and execute the public relations function, which are the determining factors in the communication process. At this level too, the systems approach plays a role because the communication process would be different for an open or closed system. This would also determine whether public relations is regarded as functionary or functional and whether an emphasis is placed on conflict resolution or symbolic control over the environment. At the *functional level of organisation*, the model of communication, i.e. press agentry/publicity, public information, two-way asymmetric or two-way symmetric, would be decided on, as would be the approach to internal communication. The *functional level of communication* will determine which communication theories are applied and which segmentation and evaluation techniques are used (Holzhausen & Verwey, 1996:43).

i.   The strategic communication plan

Before compiling an effective strategic public relations programme, the company needs to have a clear view of where it is going and what it wants to be. It also has to have established the specific objectives it must achieve to get there. Without corporate direction, the public relations professional is severely handicapped.

The next step is for public relations to develop its own strategic plan for the entire function and ideally, for each sub-function. That plan should include a description of public relations as it is presently constituted at the company; a view of the end state that public relations needs to achieve to advance the company's objectives; and a description of the voids that exist between the department's current status and the

desired goals. The plan should address the strategies and tactics that have to be put in place to reach the firm's overall objectives. Sections of the constituencies the company is trying to influence, and the primary messages it needs to articulate, are often part of the strategic plan. A key section of any strategic public relations plan is what Webster (1990:19) calls a "blueprint for action".

Baird (in Lubbe & Puth, 1994:124) suggests a holistic approach to public relations planning, which is an effort to plan in such a way that the sum of the parts makes more than the whole by ordered grouping. According to Baird (1994) integrated planning is a multi-disciplinary approach. Public relations planners not only involve different disciplines in the planning team, but also ensure that they are from different levels in the organisation.

Joint implementation of a public relations plan also demands an integrated approach. Public relations practitioners very often have to rely on their colleagues in the organisation to assist in implementing public relations activities. This is more likely to be accepted with enthusiasm if an integrated approach to planning is followed (Baird, in Lubbe & Puth, 1994:124).

Ferrari & Lauer (2000:19) refer to this integrated approach as participatory strategic planning. The latter implies identifying all an institution's internal and external market segments and engaging stakeholders and opinion leaders from each segment in meaningful conversations about the institution's future.

ii.   Getting broad-based support for the communication strategy

It's virtually impossible to develop an effective public relations plan in isolation. If possible, the CEO and other senior managers should be partners in creating the plan. Colleagues in the public relations team should also help develop the plan, particularly if they are going to be asked to help implement it (Webster, 1990:19).

It is precisely this sort of participatory planning process that can ensure that the plan will reflect and support the organisation's goals. Before the plan itself is implemented, a draft ought to be shared with those managers who will be most involved in and responsible for its execution. Since they hold a personal stake in the outcome, their feedback may be the best guarantee that all parties' interests, most notably the CEOs, will be incorporated into the overall plan (Pincus & De Bonis, 1994:232).

The support of the organisation at large is critical. The agreement and willing assistance of a broad-based "team" composed of people within and outside the public relations staff is necessary, if meaningful results are to be achieved. The company must also give the top communication practitioner the resources to execute the programme. Management commitment, no matter how firm, must be matched with adequate human resources (either staff or consultants), an adequate budget and, most important, enough time to succeed (Webster, 1990:19).

The top communicator must also have the discipline to follow the strategic plan, the flexibility to amend it as circumstances warrant, and the determination to stick to the blueprint. The blueprint becomes a contract with the employer, and the top communicator will be expected to deliver the results – on time and on budget (Webster, 1990:19).

Kinkead & Winokur (1992:21) describe strategic planning in public relations terms as follows: "The successful implementation of any strategic plan relies on three very important considerations: communication, communication and communication." The CEO must seize upon every opportunity to reaffirm the strategic direction of the business and articulate where the business is going and the role of each unit in carrying out specific activities related to the achievement of the overall plan. We should keep two thoughts in mind as we think about this communication process: Never lose sight of the fact that the longer-term vision of the business may be very clear to top management but for most of the organisation the focus is on much shorter time frames, usually the 12 month operating plan. In any communication one wants to give the long-term perspective, but also concentrate on the linkage between the currently operating plan or specific projects and the longer-term plan.

2.6   THE EXPLANATION OF VARIABLES

In this section the conversion of the constructs into measurable variables is described. These constructs are the "value that senior management attaches to the communication function" and the "strategic contribution the communication manager makes to organisational decision-making".

Table 2.1 - Variables that describe the construct "value"

1. Senior management supports the communication function in your organisation.
2. Senior management recognises that communication can make a strategic contribution.
3. You readily have access to senior management.
4. Senior management values your input before it makes decisions.
5. Senior management expects you to make communication decisions fairly autonomously.

Table 2.2 - Variables that describe the construct "strategic contribution"

6. Senior management expects you to contribute towards effectiveness by helping the organisation to meet its goals.
7. Senior management expects the communications department to manage its own programme in line with the principles of strategic management.
8. Senior management expects you to work closely with it to solve organisational problems that involve relationships with target audiences.
9. Senior management expects you to use (formal and informal) research techniques to monitor trends in the organisation's environment for use in business decision making.
10. You are in a position to influence key strategic decisions of senior management.

2.7   SUMMARY

Communication departments that prove their worth to senior management by their strategic contribution to organisational decision-making, are valued and supported by top management. These contributions lead to power and influence in management decision making. However, in order to be able to make a strategic contribution, the top communicator and members of the communication department must have the necessary managerial and technical communication knowledge and expertise.

Top communicators are key to communication excellence. Through them, the expertise of the communication department is brought to bear on strategic issues facing organisations. The demand of top management for advanced two-way practices is

communicated to the department through top communicators, and they manage the demand and material resources of their departments on a macro, meso and micro level to deliver excellence. Top management comes to accept the top communicator and communication department when it sees work coming out of the communication department that meets its strategic objectives.

Communicators can also build excellence by becoming more expert in the emerging, more sophisticated aspects of communication practices. Using the two-way models, research and sound budgeting practices empower communicators by placing the most central aspects of excellence directly under their control.

But communicator expertise alone is not enough. Dominant coalitions need to understand excellence in order to enter into a set of shared expectations with the top communicator. Such dominant coalition support must be based on shared expectations regarding public relations manager role-playing and two-way communication practices, both symmetrical and asymmetrical. Such shared expectations presuppose new communicator expertise in strategic knowledge and research knowledge.

Management must recognise that public relations can make a contribution, by broadening their own conception of public relations beyond communication and representation. A management philosophy that excludes strategic communication is no longer appropriate for the present and likely future environment; and public relations will become a meaningless function unless it complements management strategically at the highest level. To be meaningful, public relations must become a management function.

CHAPTER 3

SHARED EXPECTATIONS WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO ONE-WAY AND TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION PRACTICES

Aim of this chapter:

This chapter examines the demand-delivery loop of shared expectations between the top communicator and top management with regard to the practising of one-way and two-way communication. If top management understands the meaning of excellence, and if the top communicator has the knowledge base to provide such excellence, then critical linkages evolve between the communication department and top management. This leads to communication excellence in the organisation.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Organisations that achieve excellence, have communication departments with the expertise for both traditional one-way practices and advanced two-way communication to negotiate and persuade both senior management and publics toward mutually beneficial relationships. However, communication departments need a CEO and a top management that understand such practices and expect them from their communication departments (Dozier et al, 1995:89).

Top management needs to understand excellence in order to enter into a set of shared expectations with the top communicator. Organisations achieve excellence only when top management values and supports its communication department. Top management support must be based on shared expectations regarding two-way communication practices, both symmetrical and asymmetrical, and manager role-playing. Such shared expectations presuppose new communication expertise (Dozier et al, 1995:27).

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Pincus (1994:27) referred specifically to the CEO when he said that "communication needs the CEO, and the CEO needs communication". Without the CEO's genuine backing, public relations has little or no chance to be more than a publicity operation.

According to Pincus, Rayfield & Cozzens (1991:5), the CEO's support of and participation in public relations programmes, both internally and externally, are vital. As a management function, public relations is an extension of the CEO, the top communicator of the organisation. Obviously, if the CEO doubts the value of public relations, the function will receive little funding or support from top management – and efforts are likely to be ineffective.

McElreath & Blamphin (1994:78) state that members of senior management often have higher expectations of the function than practitioners, and are often disappointed in the qualifications and performance of their public relations managers.

One of the basic tenets of professional public relations is that it must be an integral part of management to succeed. What seems to be missing from this basic 'Public Relations Law' is the requirement for management to be an integral part of public relations. If public relations makes a bottom-line contribution, then it is imperative that the CEO be involved in the major decisions of the public relations department (Foster, 1990:7-12).

According to McElreath & Blamphin (1994:78), one of the strongest factors affecting the role and function of public relations within an organisation is the worldview of senior management. CEOs who most value public relations, spend more time in external communication themselves than do CEOs who value it less. Their worldview for excellent public relations is two-way and symmetrical. They are determined that the senior person in public relations should be a strategic manager (Grunig, L, 1997:9).

Management today is insisting that public relations be run as a management process. Like other management processes, professional public relations work emanates from clear strategies and bottom-line objectives, which flow into specific tactics, each with its own discrete budget, timetable, and allocation of resources (Seitel, 1989:45).

The *Excellence Study* provided information on what CEOs and top communicators said their dominant coalitions expect regarding communication and public relations practices. Organisations with high overall *Excellence* scores have CEOs who reported a strong preference for two-way symmetrical and two-way asymmetrical practices. This is the demand for advanced, two-way practices. Top communicators in these same excellent organisations also reported high top management demand for two-way symmetrical and two-way asymmetrical practices. Further, communication departments in excellent organisations know how to deliver both two-way symmetrical and two-way asymmetrical practices (Dozier et al, 1995:102).

If top management understands the meaning of communication excellence, and if the communicators have the knowledge base to provide such excellence, then critical linkages evolve between the communication department and top management. Top management therefore demands excellence from the organisation's communicators. This demand-delivery linkage describes an ongoing relationship between communicators and top management.

Over time, expectations and performance reinforce each other:

- When top management expects communicators to think strategically to solve a problem or conflict with a key public, that reinforces the knowledge or expertise in the communication department to deliver communication excellence.

- When communicators respond strategically to help solve a problem important to top management, that reinforces the strategic view of communication in top management. Top management comes to value and support the communication department. Such political support from top management is integral to the set of shared expectations that lead to communication excellence (Dozier et al, 1995:16).

The communication department must have power and influence within top management to help organisations practice the two-way symmetrical model. Excellent communication programmes incorporate the communicator's ability to influence decisions about an organisation's goods and services, its policies and its behaviour (Dozier et al, 1995:75).

The assumptions can be made that:

- Members of senior management often have higher expectations of the public relations function than practitioners and are often disappointed with the qualifications and performance of their public relations managers. (Refer to H_{11}, H_{12}.)

- Organisations achieve excellence only when top management values and supports communication departments. This support must be based on shared expectations regarding two-way communication practices, both symmetrical and asymmetrical, and strategic manager role-playing. (Refer to H_1, H_2, H_3, H_4.)

The CEO's and top management's demand for communication excellence will now be discussed in more detail.

3.2 THE CEO's AND SENIOR MANAGEMENT'S DEMAND FOR COMMUNICATION EXCELLENCE

Pincus & De Bonis (in Winokur & Kinkead, 1993:22) report widespread agreement among CEOs that communication is a vital and growing part of their responsibilities. The top executive in the future will, more than anything else, be expected to be able to gain the trust of and construct coalitions with people of different cultures and values. Essential to this process of "team-building" is the CEO's ability to use communication strategies and tactics to find the elusive compromise positions that so often separate management from employees and other stakeholder groups.

Excellent company CEOs want communication that is strategically based on research and that involves two-way communication with key publics. Other CEOs talk about the value of long-term relationships between the organisations they run and key constituencies or publics. These relationships are worth everything to organisations, especially in times of crisis (Dozier et al, 1995:122).

> The assumption can be made that:
>
> - Top management wants communication that is strategically based on research and that involves two-way communication with key publics. (Refer to H2, H4.)

3.2.1 The CEO's and senior management's understanding of communication excellence

Excellent communication programmes occur in organisations in which senior managements understand communication excellence. Senior management teams demand excellence, then provide the necessary support to communication to make excellence happen. In many organisations with the potential for communication excellence, senior managers need to rethink public relations and communication management (Dozier et al, 1995:128).

Every senior manager cannot be an expert on the knowledge, opinions and behavioural predispositions of all the publics affected by an organisation. In excellent organisations, top communicators and their staff provide such expertise. Senior managers in excellent organisations value this expertise and call on it frequently when strategic decisions are made. They value and support communication precisely because communicators help other managers make better decisions. This, in turn, makes organisations more effective (Dozier et al, 1995:129; Pincus & De Bonis, 1994:226).

Top managers appear to be increasingly cognisant of the importance of effective communication in meeting their own objectives. The communication process has become recognised by CEOs as absolutely critical to the accomplishment of their missions. More specifically, Pincus and Rayfield (1985) have argued that the top manager's key responsibilities as chief communicator include (a) serving as "the catalyst" in forming an organisation's communication philosophy; (b) establishing management's credibility with employees; (c) creating forms of two-way communication that foster trust; and (d) selecting the "right" communication medium for each situation (Pincus, Rayfield & Cozzens, 1991:5).

According to Rogers & Agarwala-Rogers (1976:7) communication is the lifeblood of an organisation; if we could somehow remove communication flows from an organisation, we would not have an organisation. Communication pervades all activities in an organisation, represents an important work tool through which individuals understand their organisational role, and integrates organisational subunits.

From an open system perspective, an organisation is an elaborate set of interconnected communication channels designed to import, sort, and analyse information from the environment and export processed messages back to the environment. Communication provides a means for making and executing decisions, obtaining feedback, and correcting organisational objectives and procedures as the situation demands (Rogers & Agarwala-Rogers, 1976:7).

Not only is communication an essential ingredient in the internal functioning of an organisation, but it is also vital in the organisation's information exchanges with its environment. The communication system serves as the vehicle by which organisations are embedded in their environments (Rogers & Agarwala-Rogers, 1976:7).

Potentially, key relationships are affected by every strategic decision made in the organisation. Every senior manager can play a role in establishing mutually beneficial relationships with key constituents in the internal and external environment and practising proactive public relations and communication management. However, every senior manager can also do great damage to those same relationships by making decisions in ignorance, without considering how a decision affects the organisation's various strategic relationships. This leads to reactive public relations (Dozier et al, 1995:128; White & Mazur, 1995:37; Foster, 1990:7).

Companies expect their communication practitioners to have initiative. They expect the communication function to take a proactive role in identifying how communication can help them meet the challenges and enable them to recognise and maximise opportunities while avoiding pitfalls (Grates, 1993:20).

All CEOs want a public relations executive who is interested in the business, enthusiastic about the company's prospects, and anxious to work and help achieve success for the company (Woodrum, 1995:10).

Important to the CEO is an understanding of corporate goals, the business plan, the competitive environment, and the ability to produce results. As CEOs seek to solve communications problems and gain a communication advantage, they will turn increasingly to corporate managers who are best able to produce a high return on investment, especially in this period of increasing downsizing, restructuring, refocusing, global markets, international competition and "lean and mean" corporate staffs (Arnold, 1988:12; Howard CM, 1995:6; Osborne, 1994:64).

Just as a company develops a financial plan, a growth strategy, a marketing plan, a distribution plan or a human resources plan, CEOs should expect a co-ordinated, comprehensive communication programme to orchestrate all corporate communication activities: corporate advertising, product and service advertising, public affairs, marketing communications, investor relations, employee communications, lobbying, media relations, customer relations, issues management, corporate identity, publications, trade advertising, community relations, corporate philanthropy, and so on through all the conceivable ways a company might communicate and relate to internal and external audiences (Arnold, 1988:9).

According to Arnold (1988:9), the chief executive wants communications designed for impact and resulting in action. He stated that the CEO is more interested in a "seamless communications strategy" – that is, a co-ordinated communication plan actively using all the appropriate communication channels and tactics such as advertising, public relations, public affairs, marketing communications, etc. in such a way that it gives the company a singular communication advantage over its competitors in the marketplace for goods and services, in public policy debate, and in the financial markets as well.

The CEO's role in corporate communications grows ever larger as communication develops into an important new strategy for business.

The chief executive wants competitive business thinking from good managers who are skilled communication strategists, not good communicators who have to be managed. She wants results for the corporate resources applied to communications – sufficient research and measurement to indicate return on investment (Arnold, 1988:10).

To illustrate the importance of this role, Winokur & Kinkead (1993:23) wrote that Hicks Waldron, CEO of Avon from 1984 to 1989, brought to the company an open communication philosophy that marked his stewardship. "I've come to realise that the business of communicating is not just communicating about business," he said. "It's communicating to improve business. And a substantial part of that job belongs to top management."

Arnold (1988:11) states that communications may have become too important to be left (only) to the communicators, just as war is too important to be left (only) to the generals.

The CEO and the public relations practitioner must also strive to "speak the same language". In a survey Esler (1996:10) did, it was realised that CEOs and communication executives were speaking different languages about communication. When the communication vice-president talked about communication, she generally meant the internal media – the products, programmes and activities she and the communication team have created.

When the CEO reflected on communication, she meant something different. CEOs described communication in terms of results; of solutions to critical problems:
- a shared vision (or the lack of it);
- departments creating co-operation and sharing information (or not);
- an empowered, committed, self-starting workforce; and
- satisfied, if not delighted customers (Esler, 1996:9).

Foster (1990:12) stated the following about top management's expectations:

- Good CEOs have moved into the centre of their corporation's communications decision-making, and they carefully monitor the results.
- They expect their senior managers to have a sensitivity to the public relations aspects of important business decisions.
- Public relations professionals, corporate or agency, who are not fully attuned to the new level of expertise being demanded of them will experience frustrations. These expectations are tied to an intimate knowledge and understanding of the business plan, the ability to work closely with other corporate disciplines, and awareness of the dynamics of global business, and keeping pace with technology.
- The expectations for those holding top positions are higher and more diverse than ever.

Perhaps more than any other relationship among senior executives in a company, the chemistry that exists between the CEO and the senior public relations executive is most critical. If things are working as they should, the public relations person is given the unique opportunity to become the CEO's "loyal opposition," the one who can say, "If you do this you are making a huge mistake" (Foster, 1990:8).

The CEO who worked with a skilled public relations executive, one endowed with good judgement and confident enough to be the "loyal sceptic", is the CEO most likely to make enlightened decisions that are in the public interest (Foster, 1990:12).

The assumptions can be made that:

- Top communicators and their staff provide expertise on the knowledge, opinions and behavioural predispositions of all publics affected by an organisation in excellent organisations. Senior managers in excellent organisations value this expertise and call on it frequently when strategic decisions are made. They value and support communication precisely because communicators help managers make better decisions. (Refer to H_1, H_4.)
- The two-way symmetrical model can be argued to be the technique of choice for the top management of the future. (Refer to H_2.)

3.2.2 Determining the role of public relations

It is important that, in working with public relations managers, senior managers are clear about the contribution they expect these managers to make. If they, for example, expect a comprehensive analysis of the external environment from the practitioner's perspective, then this needs to be made explicit. Experienced practitioners will earn their credibility by providing this kind of analysis, whether asked for it or not, but it is more likely to be used and to be effective, if it has been asked for by senior management (White & Mazur, 1995:26).

In today's environment, every organisation must be cognisant of many factors that can affect its success. Modern management recognises that public relations is a tool for problem-solving as well as attention-getting and expects information analysis, issues management, education and training of management regarding public relations and management expertise. Public relations personnel – at least those who aspire to policy-making positions in an organisation – must master the techniques of management. They must understand such concepts as management by objectives (MBO), allocation of resources, supervision of personnel, and the use of cost-effective communication tools. All public relations strategies and programmes must relate directly to the organisation's overall objectives (Wilcox, Ault & Agee, 1989:67-68).

Public relations should be managed as an activity that is an adjunct to strategy; in a basic form, it can be controlled and is effective. If management makes too much of it, public relations can get out of control, and begin to dominate the company's activities. If centralised within one department in the company, public relations will be kept independent and critical. That centralisation, and close proximity to top management, should also make the function more controllable, and easily accessible. Managers should understand what they want the public relations function to do – providing clear, but not too strict, boundaries and limits – before they will be able to manage it successfully. Given guidelines, the public relations department can be creative up to a point. Otherwise it will tend to "play it safe" (Dickson, 1984:217).

Most companies today need a top communicator who has the experience to take part in policy making, since most business decisions have some public impact. The public relations director must have corporate stature, however, to make her opinions count. Otherwise other executives will not heed her warnings (Dickson, 1984:218).

According to Dickson (1984:220), the failure of public relations (where it occurs) is a simple failure of management to manage it. All too often, a company buys public relations, without knowing what to do with it, where to put it, or what to put into it. Any corporate function needs clearly defined responsibilities and authority, a visible location in the organisation, and clear-cut channels to other functions. No department head can define the role of her department without guidance – and if she tries to, as many public relations directors are forced to do, then this is a diversion from doing the very job she is trying to define.

Mason (1974:120) adds to this by stating that defining the relationship of the communication manager to the rest of the members of the management team is as important to successful public relations staffing as determining the range of her responsibilities. A company should not hire a new public relations director until they have determined what they have for her to do, how she will work with other top executives, what their public relations goals are, and what public relations can add to their organisation. Such research will show whether they need (or want) someone who can take part in policy making, or simply a public relations technician. The former is more likely to be the case Mason (1974:120) suggests, since nearly every major policy decision has its public relations implications.

3.3 SENIOR MANAGEMENT'S DEMAND FOR ADVANCED PRACTICES

Excellent communication relies on two-way dialogue between the organisation and its publics. It is no longer enough for companies to use one-way communication to inform or try to persuade people to believe what it wants them to believe. Key publics must be able to communicate with the organisation and be heard. Excellent communication,

therefore, requires research to take into account the interests and views of all internal and external audiences, and seek to create understanding and dialogue (White & Mazur, 1995:22).

Excellent communication programmes stress two-way interaction – advanced practices – with strategic publics. Communicators practising these models serve as the eyes and ears of the organisation. They use research and dialogue with stakeholders to "find out what's going on out there." As a result, they serve as a kind of early warning system, able to alert the organisation to potential conflicts with strategic publics. (And in the process, to establish a base for themselves in strategic planning and management decision-making.) (Grunig L, 1997:7). The dominant coalition must also demand these practices for communication programmes to be excellent.

3.3.1 One-way practices

The most common public relations model is "press agentry" or "publicity." This is a one-way approach that relies primarily on getting favourable publicity in the mass media. Grunig & Hunt (1984:22-25) state that public relations serves a propaganda function in the press agentry/publicity model. Practitioners that follow this model concern themselves most with getting attention in the media for their organisation's clients.

The "public information" model values relatively objective information dissemination from the organisation to the so-called "general public" through the mass media and other controlled media such as newsletters, brochures and direct mail (Grunig, L, 1997:7). Grunig & Hunt (1984:22-25) state that the purpose of this model is the dissemination of information, not necessarily with a persuasive intent. The public relations practitioner functions essentially as a journalist in residence, whose job it is to report objectively information about her organisation to the public. These organisations carry an active press relations programme, offering news to the media about their organisation. They also produce much communication collateral – all designed to inform publics about the organisations.

Like press agentry, the above approach to public relations is not based on research or strategic planning. Both of these traditional one-way models characterise the average (or worse) departments the *Excellence* team studied (Grunig, L, 1997:7).

3.3.2 Two-way practices: Symmetry and asymmetry in organisations

Public relations practitioners and their top management both think of or have a scheme for one model of public relations. Those with an asymmetrical worldview use knowledge about stakeholders to try to gain their compliance, manipulating and dominating both internal and external publics to further the goals of top management. Those with a symmetrical worldview exchange information with stakeholders in an effort to devise win-win solutions to their common problems or issues (Grunig, L, 1997:8).

Asymmetrical worldviews limit the effectiveness of public relations. If, on the other hand, senior managers value symmetrical communication, the department is more likely to be excellent. Similarly, if the worldview for public relations is as a technical function, then it is unlikely to be headed by a strategic manager (Grunig, L, 1997:8).

According to Lindeborg (1994:5) symmetrical public relations is also more ethical and socially responsible than asymmetrical public relations because it manages conflict rather than wages war.

In organisations with excellent communication programmes, the use of symmetrical and asymmetrical practices seems paradoxical. Two-way symmetrical practices provide an ethical basis for public relations and communication management. Purely asymmetrical practices, on the other hand, simply provide more sophisticated tools for manipulating publics. The solution to this seeming paradox is achieved by subordinating asymmetrical and symmetrical practices (Dozier et al, 1995:96).

The two-way models are concerned with scanning the organisation's environment and evaluating the implementation and impact of communication programmes. The two

models differ in goals. The asymmetric model organisations seek environmental domination whereas the symmetric model organisations seek co-operation. These models require practitioners to make communication policy decisions and account for programme success or failure. They help management solve public relations problems and facilitate communication between management and publics. The two-way models require practitioners skilled in expert prescription, problem-solving process facilitation and communication facilitation. Conceptually, the role (manager) and the functions (two-way asymmetric and symmetric models) go hand in hand (Lindeborg, 1994:9).

Grunig (in Lindeborg, 1994:9) lists the following characteristics of organisations that hold asymmetrical and symmetrical worldviews:

In organisations with an asymmetrical worldview (persuasion):

- Members do not see the organisation as others see it.
- Efficiency is valued more than innovation.
- The leaders know best; wisdom is not the product of a "free marketplace of ideas".
- Change is undesirable.
- Tradition provides stability and maintains culture.
- Power is concentrated in the hands of the few, with employees having little autonomy.

In organisations with a symmetrical worldview (excellence):

- Publics and other organisations are not kept out by organisational boundaries.
- Information flows freely between systems.
- Systems seek a moving equilibrium with other systems through co-operation and mutual adjustment.
- The input of all people is valued.
- Employees have great autonomy.
- Innovation is valued over tradition.
- There is a commitment to eliminate the adverse consequences of organisational actions. Conflict is resolved through negotiation and communication.

- The political system is viewed as a mechanism for opening negotiation among interest or issue groups (Lindeborg, 1994:9).

Holzhausen & Verwey (1996:43) furthermore describe which factors determine which public relations model, within the general theory of public relations, as applied in an organisation. These factors are summarised here and have been translated into a step process.

Characteristics of a persuasion model of public relations:

1.   Macro level

- Strategic environmental management with the emphasis on control of the environment.
- Top management with asymmetric, masculine worldviews.
- Conservative, autocratic and undemocratic external environment.
- Single, dominant cultural and gender perspective.
- Closed system, or open system aimed at environmental control.
- Environmental autonomy, with few legal/political and competitive constraints.
- Public relations used to change behaviour of environment by imposing own value systems.
- Autocratic, non-participative organisational culture.

2.   Meso level

- Asymmetric worldview and management style.
- Internal orientation.
- Fatalistic or problem-solving organisation.
- Technical public relations staff.
- Information used to manipulate and persuade.
- Autocratic and traditional values.
- Power centrally situated.
- Public relations not a boundary-spanning function but a technical function.
- Closed top management.
- Public relations not part of top management.

- Women in technician roles, not part of top management.
- Hierarchical organisational structure.
- Public relations falls under marketing function.

3. Micro level
- Public relations practitioners hold asymmetrical worldviews.
- Information from environment used to control and manipulate.
- Exerts symbolic control over environment through a functionary, synchronic approach.
- Use of press agentry/publicity and two-way asymmetric models.
- Psychological paradigm for internal publics, stressing the individual rather than the group.
- Communication with employees emphasises media content.
- Consistent positive portrayal of the organisation, with an emphasis on the use of mass media.
- Public relations function supports the marketing function.
- Use of marketing segmentation techniques.

4. Effects of the persuasion model
- High levels of individualism among employees.
- High levels of conflict with publics.
- High media profile.
- High cost of communication, both in terms of litigation and through the use of marketing techniques.

Characteristics of an excellence model of public relations:
1. Macro level
- Strategic environmental management.
- Democratic external environment.
- Tolerant socio-cultural environment respecting cultural and gender differences and regarding all people as equal (state of dissymmetry).
- Top management with symmetric worldviews.

- Participative organisational culture.
- Turbulent, complex environment.
- Open system, prepared to change.
- Responsible, value-driven public relations function.

2. Meso level

- Symmetric worldview and management style.
- People-oriented and innovative approach to problem solving.
- Public relations is a boundary-spanning function, operating as a single integrated public relations function.
- Support for dissymmetric approach to employees.
- Group goal oriented.
- Public relations manager a member of top management.
- Organic organisation.
- Strategic organisational management of the public relations function by educated and appropriately trained practitioners.
- Equal opportunity for men and women in public relations.
- Responsible symbolic behaviour of practitioners.

3. Micro level

- Strategic communication management.
- Symmetric worldviews of practitioners.
- Communication leads to understanding and conflict resolution through a system of mutual persuasion.
- Microsegmentation of publics through the use of the situational theory.
- Feedback from publics used to adapt to environment.
- Two-way symmetric model applied to both internal and external publics.
- Sociological paradigm applied to internal publics, acknowledging social, cultural, gender and historical perspectives of employees.

4. Effects of the excellence model:

- Contribution of public relations to organisational effectiveness.

- High job satisfaction among employees.
- Low levels of conflict with publics.
- Contribution to organisational survival through management of the change process.

Characteristics of the mixed model of public relations:

1. Macro level
    - Symmetrical and asymmetrical worldviews.
    - Public relations as both persuasion and dialogue.
    - Organisation is an open system.
    - Mixed stance to activist groups.
    - Strategic environmental management.
    - Theories of societal culture.

2. Meso level
    - Symmetric and asymmetric worldviews.
    - Mixed mechanistic/organic organisations and problem-solving organisations.
    - Dual approach to symbolic management of the environment.
    - Open system, using symmetric and asymmetric communication.
    - Mixed marketing/public relations function.
    - Application of social scientific and societal cultural theories.

3. Micro level
    - Use of both excellence and persuasion models, depending on environmental circumstances.
    - Use of public information model and combination of asymmetric and symmetric models of communication.
    - Use of situational theory and VALS segmentation techniques.

4. Effects of the mixed model
    - Public relations' contribution to organisational effectiveness cannot be determined.

- Lack of clear public relations strategy.

- Unsure attitude towards activist publics.

(Holzhausen & Verwey, 1996:43-46)

3.3.2.1   Ethical imperatives versus pragmatic consequences

Selection of symmetrical or asymmetrical practices is based on an ethical commitment by professional communicators to place greater emphasis on mutually beneficial, long-term relationships than other parties might (for example, leadership of activist publics or top management). In game theory terms, the communicator is a co-operative antagonist that seeks to preserve the integrity of the game, often at the expense of a short-term advantage (Dozier et al, 1995:50).

In the interest of building long-term relationships with key publics, communicators may choose to forego asymmetrical practices as an investment in future returns in the form of more symmetrical behaviour from the publics involved. In this way, professional communicators can view short-term asymmetrical practices as necessary tactics for pursuing organisational self-interest in a mixed-motive game. Professional communicators must subordinate such practices, as well as the asymmetrical worldview they support, to a broader, symmetrical worldview. That larger symmetrical worldview is implicit in communicator Arthur W Page's declaration that "All business in a democratic country begins with public permission and exists by public approval" (Dozier et al, 1995:50).

3.3.3 Expectations regarding two-way asymmetrical practices

According to Dozier et al (1995:95) ignorance probably causes the expectation gap between CEOs and top communicators in least-excellent organisations with regard to two-way asymmetrical practices. Top communicators in these least-excellent organisations are isolated from senior management decision-making. Further, communication departments in these least-excellent organisations do not have the expertise to deliver two-way asymmetrical practices.

Asymmetrical public relations relies on research to develop the messages most likely to persuade publics (Grunig, L, 1997:7). Practitioners of two-way asymmetric public relations have a function more like that of the press agent/publicist, although their purpose can best be described as scientific persuasion. They use what is known from social science theory and research about attitudes and behaviour to persuade publics to accept the organisation's point of view and to behave in a way that supports the organisation. The press agent/publicist's attempts at persuasion, in contrast, are more intuitive than scientific.

The two-way asymmetric model finds most of its adherents in business firms, especially those that face considerable competition. A majority of these firms sell consumer products. The majority of public relations consulting firms also provide two-way asymmetric services to their clients more often than services patterned after the other three models (Grunig & Hunt, 1984:22-26).

Within the range of possible, mutually beneficial relationships, both organisations and publics seek positions of relative advantage. That is, organisations and publics use asymmetrical tactics to better their respective positions, so long as those tactics do not violate the basic integrity of long-term relationships (Dozier et al, 1995:99). In terms of the game theory, organisations play asymmetrical communication as a "zero-sum" game: Your organisation "wins" only if the public or publics "lose" (Dozier et al, 1995:12).

Communicators must protect the integrity of long-term relationships with key publics against inappropriate asymmetrical practices.

3.3.4 Expectations regarding two-way symmetrical practices

Two-way symmetrical public relations is communications (based on research and dialogue) intended to manage conflict, improve understanding and build relationships. With the two-way symmetric model, both the organisation and publics can be persuaded: both may also change their behaviour. This model embraces the notion that

the communicator, using well-documented research, has the option to help the organisation modify its strategy to accommodate public needs and expectations (Winokur & Kinkead, 1993:16; Dozier et al, 1995:92).

To illustrate the role that shared expectations play in excellence, organisations with high overall *Excellence* scores were compared with organisations with low overall *Excellence* scores in the *Excellence Study*. CEOs and top communicators in the most-excellent organisations said their top management had high expectations for two-way symmetrical practices (Dozier et al, 1995:92).

Poor understanding of top management expectations in the least-excellent organisations may have resulted, in part, from the isolation of top communicators from strategic planning and decision-making. In the least-excellent organisations, top communicators reported little expertise to practice the two-way symmetrical model. These communication departments lack the knowledge necessary to provide the advanced practices that their top management expects to a moderate degree (Dozier et al, 1995:94).

(The assumption is that CEOs, as members of top management in their organisations, have a better understanding of these expectations than do top communicators, who are typically not members of top management in these least-excellent organisations (Dozier et al, 1995:94).

The symmetrical practices model addresses the purposes of public relations and communication management: to mediate, to change management as well as publics, and to develop mutual understanding. The actual research techniques used to accomplish these purposes are seen by top communicators as separate from the symmetrical purposes of public relations and communication management (Dozier et al, 1995:100).

Symmetrical communication uses research to manage conflict, to negotiate with publics and to improve understanding all the way around. One immediate pay-off for

balanced, interactive internal communication, for example, is increased job satisfaction among employees (Grunig, L, 1997:7). In the two-way symmetric model, practitioners serve as mediators between organisations and their publics. Their goal is mutual understanding between organisations and their publics. These practitioners, too, may use social science theory and methods, but they usually use theories of communication rather than theories of persuasion for the planning and evaluation of public relations.

The two-way symmetric model is most often practised in large firms that are regulated by government agencies – firms that must provide evidence of socially responsible behaviour to their government regulators.

For example, in press relations, many organisations have replaced the press release with invitations to reporters to come in and develop their own story about the organisation. Others invite reporters to dialogue sessions with organisational officials (Grunig & Hunt, 1984:22).

Two-way symmetrical communication serves as a tool for negotiation and compromise, a way to develop "win-win" solutions for conflicts between organisations and publics. Specifically senior management may change what it knows, how it feels, and the way the organisation behaves as a result of symmetrical communication. In game theory, organisations play symmetrical communication as a positive sum game. Both the organisation and the publics involved can win as a result of negotiation and compromise (Dozier et al, 1995:12).

Symmetrical communication provides one foundation for ethical practices, because communicators play an active role as advocates of the public's interests in strategic decision making. When symmetrical communication practices prevail, communication and public relations make valuable contributions to society as a whole (Dozier et al, 1995:13).

However, in the work situation, communicators alternately negotiate and persuade, depending on the situation. The excellent communicator advises senior management

and knows how to use both the symmetrical and asymmetrical models of communication.

The assumption can be made that:

- Senior management has high expectations for two-way symmetrical practices. (Refer to H2, H4.)

The two-way mixed motive game, which allows for the use of both asymmetrical and symmetrical practices, will now be discussed.

3.3.5 The two-way mixed motive model

The research of Grunig, J and Grunig, L shows that organisations ranked at or near the top of the *Excellence* scale typically combine elements of the two-way asymmetrical and symmetrical models. These professionals in public relations operate from what game theorists call "mixed motives" or the assumption that they are advocates both for the organisation that employs them and for the publics it affects. However, they tend to emphasise the more balanced, symmetrical model over the asymmetrical advocacy. CEOs participating in the *Excellence Study* rated the two non-excellent, one-way models of public relations low and the two excellent, two-way models high. They responded most affirmatively to the statement that "the purpose of public relations is to develop mutual understanding between the management of the organisation and publics the organisation affects." They told the *Excellence* team that they believe research should be an integral part of the communication process. Heads of public relations tended to underestimate the extent to which their CEOs or the dominant coalition value this kind of excellence (Grunig L, 1997:7).

Advanced practices combine two-way communication with negotiation and persuasion. Short-term asymmetrical tactics can be used to stake out more advantageous positions within the larger context of mutually beneficial relationships. Ethical communicators always subordinate asymmetrical methods to broad principles of symmetrical purpose.

In doing so, communicators use both formal and informal research methods (Dozier et al, 1995:104).

The two-way mixed motive model of practices emphasises research before and after execution of public relations and communication programmes. To practice two-way communication, communicators need a body of knowledge about research methods and interpretation derived from the social sciences. Research (the other half of two-way communication) can serve both symmetrical and asymmetrical outcomes. Deciding when to persuade publics and when to negotiate and compromise with publics is more art than science (Dozier et al, 1995:14).

The assumption can be made that:

- Senior management rates the two non-excellent, one-way models of public relations low and the two excellent, two-way models high. (Refer to H2.)

3.4 KNOWLEDGE IN THE COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT TO DELIVER ON EXPECTATIONS

It seems that communication managers are not always equipped to deliver the outputs required by top management. This can be the result of a lack of understanding of the full implications of the changes taking place in the business environment, which 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 (Claassen, 1997:60).

An excellent communication department does its best work when it helps senior management understand organisational constituents. Persuasion cuts two ways. Savvy CEOs let excellent communicators persuade their senior managers as well as constituents. CEOs include excellent communicators in all strategic decisions, because nobody else knows better how those decisions will affect key constituents. On that basis, senior managers come to value the communication department in a new way,

and support the communication function as an important component of organisational effectiveness (Dozier et al, 1995:124).

3.4.1 The communication department's understanding of the expectations of the CEO and senior management

For public relations to be valued by the organisation it serves, practitioners must be able to understand what is expected of them. They must also be able to demonstrate that their efforts contribute to the goals of the organisation by building long-term behavioural relationships with strategic publics – those that affect the ability of the organisation to accomplish its mission.

To do so, public relations practitioners must demonstrate effectiveness at two levels – the micro level of individual programmes to communicate with different publics, and the macro level of overall organisational effectiveness (Grunig J, 1993a:136).

Public relations practitioners often do not have the training to be communication managers, but rather to be communication technicians. Thus, top executives frequently do not delegate autonomy to the public relations department (Grunig & Hunt, 1984:101).

As a result, many public relations departments are forced to provide press agentry or public-information functions, even though the organisation would benefit most from one of the two-way models of public relations. The public relations department, therefore, continues to function with a structured hierarchy, under which managers merely oversee the work of communication technicians low in professionalism (Grunig & Hunt, 1984:101).

The public relations department, as a result, suffers in prestige and power in the organisation. And, because the public relations functions provided are not the most appropriate for the organisation's environment, the public relations department suffers budget and personnel cuts when funds are scarce (Grunig & Hunt, 1984:101).

The top communicator is the main link between the top management and the communication department. She must be able to translate the expectations of the top management to the communication department and must help them understand those expectations and deliver on them.

3.4.2 The communication department's expertise to deliver on the expectations of senior management

Public relations practitioners are at present insufficiently prepared for business and management careers, and compared to the other senior managers competing for board or senior management group positions, seem to lack qualifications and stature (White & Mazur, 1995:32).

3.4.2.1 Expertise in the communication department

Three points about communicator expertise should be kept in mind. Firstly, the knowledge base is primary, providing the necessary foundation for all other aspects of communication excellence.

Secondly, knowledge or expertise is a characteristic of the department, not necessarily of a single individual. One-person communication departments require much from a single communication professional. Hiring outside consultants to provide needed expertise to the communication department on an as-needed basis may be one way to expand departmental expertise (Dozier et al, 1995:25).

Thirdly, knowledge alone cannot establish excellent communication programmes. Although knowledge to play the manager role is an essential and necessary requirement for communication excellence, manager role knowledge by itself does not lead to excellent communication programmes. The senior management's understanding of the communication function is also important and participative organisational cultures enhance the opportunities for excellent communication programmes to flourish (Dozier et al, 1995:25).

In some organisations excellence evolves over time, with incremental increases in departmental expertise as communication personnel change. Excellence involves the collective knowledge of the communication department.

Not all managerial knowledge in the department needs to belong to a single "renaissance" communicator who is expert in all aspects of traditional and emerging communication sophistication. As the knowledge base of the profession grows, excellent departments will likely consist of complementary communicators who hold different forms of expertise that work well together (Dozier et al, 1995:26).

According to White (2000:85), innovation in public relations depends, in part, on practitioners claiming a role for themselves which is larger than the role many accept at present – the communication specialist role. This broader role means that public relations consultants will become, in effect, management consultants. Arguably, public relations should be recognised as part of the overall management function, examining and helping to manage important relationships, seeking to influence the development of those relationships and perceptions and behaviour associated with them.

It makes use of managed communication (which is "real", two-way communication) and, as an anticipatory practice, analyses and addresses the future of the relationships of concern to the organisation (White, 2000:85).

Emerging communicator expertise in strategic planning and research does not replace or diminish the importance of traditional communicator skills in writing, editing, graphics, media relations, and so forth. Rather, the new expertise is added to the traditional communicator's set of skills to build a well-rounded, excellent communication department (Dozier et al, 1995:27).

This empowers communicators by placing the most central aspects of excellence directly under their control. Communicators can, therefore, build excellence by becoming more expert in the emerging, more sophisticated aspects of communication practices (Dozier et al, 1995:25). Knowledge of research and budgeting forms part of these practices.

Excellent departments and communicators can contribute in the following way to the success of the organisation:

- Excellent departments practice traditional crafts of a communication department better than most.
- Excellent communication departments know how to communicate in two directions, using cutting-edge expertise in public relations research.
- Excellent communicators know how to design appropriate messages and select appropriate media to communicate the organisation's message outward to those groups that affect the organisation's survival and growth.
- Excellent communicators help the CEO anticipate the reactions of publics before they happen, permitting her to act strategically rather than reactively.
- Excellent communicators know how to gather information from constituents through focus groups, surveys of publics, and systematic analysis of what the media says about the organisation and issues important to the CEO. They study opinion polls and media coverage to identify emerging issues and help manage issues already on the organisation's agenda. In other words, excellent communicators help the CEO with strategic planning and decision-making. They are part of the senior management team.
- Generally, however, excellent communicators do their best work when they persuade the CEO to change.
- Top communicators, with the support of the expertise in their departments, make substantial contributions to strategic planning and decision-making. Using formal and informal research techniques, they help with diagnosis and problem solving, then execute effective communication programmes to build lasting, long-term relationships with key constituents (Dozier et al, 1995:128; White & Mazur, 1995:32).

The major issues confronting public relations practitioners today are the need to:

- gain commitment for communication from top management;
- clarify their tasks in organisations that are devolving responsibilities and fragmenting; and
- find ways to measure their effectiveness (White & Mazur, 1995:45).

3.4.2.2 Knowledge about models of public relations practices

Just as roles describe patterns in the activities of individual communicators, models describe the values and a pattern of behaviour (practices) that communication departments use to deal with publics. The press agentry/publicity and the public information models involve the generation of messages about organisations that are distributed to audiences or publics. These unsophisticated one-way models date to the turn of the 20th century. The sophisticated, two-way models are evolving with the communication profession itself (Dozier et al, 1995:40).

The two-way models are professional because they are based on a body of knowledge and a set of techniques used for strategic purposes: to manage conflicts and build relationships with publics. The one-way models are "craft", meaning that communication techniques are used to generate messages as if messages were ends in themselves (Sriramesh, 1999:227-230; Dozier et al, 1995:42).

3.4.2.3 Knowing two-way communication practices

To play the manager role, communicators must know advanced practices that rightfully treat communication as a two-way process. Seitel (1989:167) states that the SMR (sender-message-receiver) approach is therefore fundamental. This model suggests that the communication process begins with the source, who issues a message to a receiver, who then decides what action to take, if any, relative to communication. This element of receiver action, or feedback, underscores that good communication always, involves dialogue between two or more parties.

Communication is, therefore, dynamic, proactive, interactive and contextual (Rasberry & Lemoine, 1985:25). According to Cutlip, Center & Broom (1985:260-261), by communication we mean the interpretation, transmission and receiving of ideas or information – a transaction. To communicate effectively, the sender's words and symbols must mean the same thing to the receiver than they do to the sender.

A sender can encode a message and a receiver can decode it only in terms of his/her own experience and knowledge. When there has been no communication experience, then communication becomes virtually impossible. Commonness in communication is therefore essential to link people and purpose together in any co-operative system.

Eisenberg & Goodall (1993:22) identify four major definitions of communication that are applicable to organisations: (1) communication as information transfer; (2) communication as a transactional process; (3) communication as strategic control; and (4) communication as balancing creativity and constraint.

Newcomb's symmetry model can also be used to explain two-way communication practices. His approach (1953) to communication is that of a social psychologist concerned with interaction between human beings. His model implies that any given system may be characterised by a balance of forces and that any change in any part of the system will lead to strain toward balance or symmetry, because imbalance or lack of symmetry is psychologically uncomfortable and generates internal pressure to restore balance. Symmetry has the advantage of a person (A) being able to readily calculate another person (B)'s behaviour. Asymmetry is also indicated in Newcomb's model when people "agree to disagree" (Severin & Tankard, 1979:36; McQuail & Windahl, 1981:21).

Measures of expertise in two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical practices complete the knowledge sphere, the core sphere of communication excellence. Knowing how to practise communication using both models makes an important contribution to overall communication excellence (Dozier et al, 1995:39).

Knowledge of two-way symmetrical communication practices includes the following aspects:
- Negotiate with an activist public.
- Use theories of conflict resolution in dealing with publics.
- Help management to understand the opinion of particular publics.
- Determine how publics react to the organisation (Dozier et al, 1995:45).

Knowledge to perform these tasks is deeply rooted in research. The task of helping management understand publics assumes that communicators have such understanding to share. According to Hunt (1989:28), communication involves one person trying to create meaning in another. In order to create understanding, communication must therefore take place to create meaning in the listener and to transfer information (Hunt, 1989:28: Koehler, Anatol & Applebaum 1981:408; Rogers & Agarwala-Rogers, 1976:10-14; Farace, Monge & Russel, 1977:43). This comes from strategic research.

Measuring public reactions to the actions of organisations is another source of communicator expertise. Negotiation with activist publics and the use of conflict resolution involve a detailed understanding of publics involved, obtained through strategic research (Dozier et al, 1995:45).

Knowledge of two-way asymmetrical communication practices includes the following:
- Persuade a public that your organisation is right on an issue.
- Get publics to behave as the organisation wants.
- Manipulate publics scientifically.
- Use attitude theory in a campaign (Dozier et al, 1995:46).

These items emphasise persuasion – getting publics to do what management wants them to do. By persuading publics to the organisation's position on issues, getting them to behave as management wishes, and manipulating publics scientifically, communicators practice a sophisticated form of public relations and communication management (Dozier et al, 1995:46; Sriramesh, 1999:227-230).

Symmetrical and asymmetrical communication use different processes to achieve different kinds of outcomes. In symmetrical practices, communicators use theories and techniques of conflict resolution and negotiation to increase top management understanding of publics. In asymmetrical practices, communicators use attitude theory, persuasion and manipulation to shape public attitudes and behaviours.

Although both models involve two-way communication, two distinctly different worldviews are incorporated in each (Dozier et al, 1995:46; Sriramesh, 1999:227-230).

3.4.2.4   Knowledge of research

Science attempts to provide more reliable answers than those provided by other generally used ways of knowing. To the extent that one can use the scientific method of decision-making in public relations management, one elevates the function from the intuitive enterprise of the artist and makes it part of an organisation's management system. In this approach, research is at the core of how the function is managed (Broom & Dozier, 1990:18).

The knowledge to use research is critical to communication excellence. Specifically when playing the manager role, communication departments need the research expertise, among other things, to segment publics and evaluate programmes (Dozier et al, 1995:30-31).

Seitel (1989:135) states that research is the systematic collection and interpretation of information to increase understanding. He furthermore states that most research in public relations is either theoretical or applied. Applied research solves practical problems; theoretical research aids understanding of a public relations process.

According to Puth (1994b:110-111), research is becoming an increasingly important part of any public relations programme. Research must not only be accepted, but in actual fact practised, as a vitally important function in the public relations process. It provides the initial information necessary for the planning and execution of the public relations campaign, as well as the means and guidelines for the later evaluation of the programme.

Public relations practitioners, like their colleagues in any other area of management, need to measure and justify their contributions to organisational goals and objectives

on the basis of verified information. However, public relations research must become more sophisticated and practitioners better educated in research techniques before they will turn to it more often (Puth 1994:110-111).

Traditionally, communication management research was associated with the evaluation of communication intervention effects and the analysis of publicity. While many practitioners were only equipped to conduct publicity and effects research, the potential of the communication management department to make contributions to the strategic management process, through strategic research, had been ignored or misunderstood by many technician practitioners, communication managers and top managers alike (Ströh & Leonard, 1999:2).

Communication management research had also been criticised for the inferior quality thereof and the limited number of techniques that were used in the process. Practitioners' poor understanding of the importance of this element in the communication management process, as well as their inferior level of research expertise often contributed to the poor credibility of the communication management department in many organisations (Ströh & Leonard, 1999:2).

Communication research takes on many forms. Some organisations use formal and informal techniques to identify emerging issues that may affect their organisations, tracking public opinion regarding those issues, while others seek to define publics based on how they are affected by the organisation and how they may behave toward the organisation. Some organisations hold communication programmes accountable by asking communicators to evaluate the impact of programmes on the awareness, knowledge, opinions and behaviours of publics. Research also plays an important role in two-way practices, both symmetrical and asymmetrical (Dozier et al, 1995:30; Ströh & Leonard, 1999:145).

Three primary forms of public relations research are methods, mostly indirect, of observing human behaviour:

- Surveys are designed to reveal attitudes and opinions – what people think about certain subjects.

- Communication audits are often designed to reveal disparities between real and perceived communication between management and target audiences. Management may make certain assumptions about its methods, media, materials and messages, whereas its targets may confirm or refute those assumptions.

- Unobtrusive measures – such as fact finding, content analysis, and readability studies – enable the study of a subject or object without knowing the researcher or the research as an intruder (Seitel, 1989:137).

According to Cutlip, Center & Broom (1985:202), a research orientation is necessary for those practising public relations in the Information Age. The research attitude calls for fact-finding, listening and systematic problem definition to help bridge gaps between organisations and their publics (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 1985:202; Puth in Lubbe & Puth, 1994:111).

Puchan, Pieczka & L'Etang (1999:168) state that the use of research is linked both to degrees of professionalism and to the potential status of the individual practitioner in the organisation. It is suggested that those capable of providing management with soundly researched evaluation of activities linked to overall communication objectives as well as specific programme objectives, are more likely to gain the ear of top management.

3.4.2.5 Sophistication means strategic research

The more sophisticated professional models require a form of expertise that the less sophisticated craft models do not. To practise either two-way model, the communication department needs expertise regarding strategic research – the ability to systematically collect reliable information about large and small publics that affect the organisation, organise that information into a manageable form, and share that information with senior management to improve strategic decisions (Dozier et al, 1995:42).

According to Gill & Johnson (in Ströh & Leonard, 1999:3) management research is concerned with the process of finding out how to approach a task to be accomplished. They contend that all management research approaches have a problem-solving nature and serve as a systematic check when undertaking research. Cooper & Schindler (in Ströh & Leonard, 1998:14) describe the application of this process in business as follows: "Research is a systematic inquiry aimed at providing information to solve managerial problems ... a systematic inquiry that provides information for management decision-making".

Seitel (1989:35) states that an organisation must acquire enough accurate, relevant data about its publics, products and programmes to answer the following kinds of questions:

- How can we identify and define our constituent groups?
- How does this knowledge relate to the design of our messages?
- How does this relate to the design of our programmes?
- How does it relate to the media we use to convey our messages?
- How does it relate to the schedule we adopt in using our media?
- How does it relate to the ultimate implementation tactics of our programme?

The research process provides managers with a systematic and disciplined way of solving managerial problems. Not only does research advance knowledge but it contributes to the manager's self-development as a manager and problem-solver (Ströh & Leonard, 1999:3).

According to Bergen (2000:323), strategic public relations programmes have driven the development of a wide variety of research and measurement capabilities. Public affairs has adopted many of the techniques of market research to identify various audiences and to track the effectiveness of messages designed for those audiences.

Strategic research differs from tactical research – the ability to gather information in order to generate or distribute messages. Checking facts for a news release or gathering library information to help write the annual report are forms of tactical

research. Tactical research even includes doing a scientific survey to generate news releases and media coverage (Dozier et al, 1995:42).

According to Grunig & Hunt (1984:24), the press agent/publicist seldom uses research, unless it is informal observation of whether their publicity materials have been used in the media. At times they may also count the number of people that attend an event they have promoted or the number of people who make use of their products or services.

The traditional public-information specialists also do little research. They follow a journalistic model of preparing informational materials for largely unknown publics. At times, they may do readability tests to see if the information is at the appropriate level of difficulty for their intended audience, and they may also do readership studies, to see if the audience actually uses the information. But, for the most part, public-information specialists have little idea of what happens to the materials they prepare (Grunig & Hunt, 1984:24).

In contrast, research plays an important role in both two-way models – in fact, research is the very reason they are called two-way models. The research is quite different, however. There are two major types of research: formative and evaluative. Formative research helps to plan an activity and to choose objectives. Evaluative research finds out whether the objectives have been met (Grunig & Hunt, 1984:24; Seitel, 1989:133).

In the asymmetric model, the public relations practitioner uses formative research to find out what the public will accept and tolerate. The practitioner identifies the policies and procedures of an individual or organisation with the public interest in mind. When two-way asymmetric practitioners do evaluative research, they measure attitudes and behaviour before and after the public relations effort to see what effect the campaign has had (Grunig & Hunt, 1984:25).

In the two-way symmetric model, practitioners use formative research to learn how the public perceives the organisation and to determine what consequences the organisation

has for the public. This research can then be used to counsel management on public reaction to policies and on how those policies could be changed to better serve the public interest. Formative research can also be used to learn how well publics understand management and how well management understands its publics – information that helps a great deal in choosing specific communication objectives. Evaluative research in the symmetric model measures whether a public relations effort has actually improved the understanding publics have of the organisation and management has of its publics (Grunig & Hunt, 1984:25).

i.   Types of strategic research

Academics have been urging practitioners to use more research at both strategic and planning levels and to get to grips with evaluation because of the identified value of research to the development of public relations and potential influence at boardroom level (Puchan et al, 1999:169).

Strategic research gathers information about publics to improve strategic decision-making. Such research consists of both formal (scientific) and informal methods or techniques. In reviewing a number of communicator surveys and studies, Dozier et al (1995:43) found that scientific research correlated with the two-way asymmetrical model and to a lesser degree with the two-way symmetrical model. Scientific research involves both scientific scanning (research to detect environmental turbulence – for example, new competition, strikes boycotts, and regulations) and scientific evaluation (research to see if strategic communication programmes worked).

Techniques of scientific research include surveys to track issues, the use of public opinion research agencies and monitoring other research in the public domain. Mixed research consists of both scientific techniques (i.e. formal analysis of media content and complaints by phone or letter) and informal techniques (i.e. media contacts).

Informal research involves keeping in touch with members of publics, calling back people attending an organisation's presentation and checking with field personnel (Dozier et al, 1995:44).

Communicators use informal research most frequently, followed by mixed research. Communicators use scientific research least often. Measures of usage probably reflect the greater cost and time it takes to do more rigorous forms of research. Dozier et al (1995:44) think of the three types of research – scientific, mixed and informal – as a cluster of techniques from which communicators can choose selectively, depending on the circumstances (Dozier et al, 1995:44).

ii.   Scanning and evaluation research

There is an increasing recognition in the communication world that, to be taken seriously, there has to be evidence of the contribution made. There is growing evidence that organisations and clients require public relations and the communication function to demonstrate their effectiveness, and that showing a file of press clippings is not enough. The question comes back: "So what? What difference does that make to the organisation?" (Gregory, 1999:6).

Communicators use research to "scan" the organisation's environment, helping to sensitise senior management to changes and potential threats to relationships with key publics. Environmental scanning is a part of the larger management function of strategic planning. An organisation's environment is made up of many groups of people and organisations that affect an organisation's autonomy. Government regulations can sharply curtail corporations' ability to make profits for stockholders. A company can, for example, carefully monitor pending legislation both at the national level and in the state where corporate headquarters are located. Events and issues can affect members of non-profit organisations and their relationship to the organisation. Environmental scanning can be done in these organisations by listening to people in the field (Dozier et al, 1995:43).

Communicators also use research to measure the impact of communication programmes on relationships with key publics, which can be done by means of a questionnaire. The essence of communication evaluation is: Did we accomplish what we planned to accomplish with this programme? To contribute strategically, communication evaluation must focus on measures of outcomes. Evaluations do not measure anything of inherent value to organisations when they focus on such communication process measures as the number of news releases written and/or published (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 1985:291; Dozier et al, 1995:43).

Evaluation starts at the beginning of a programme, not at the end. Setting a benchmark means that there is a clear and demonstrable baseline. Next comes the setting of objectives. These objectives need to contribute towards achieving the organisation's overall goals; for tactical campaigns these can be quite simple. The final stage is an assessment of whether or not the objectives were met: that is, summative evaluation (Gregory, 1999:6).

These process or implementation measures become meaningful to senior management when they are coupled with outcome measures – awareness, knowledge, opinions, and behaviours of publics that affect the organisation (Dozier et al, 1995:43). Lindenmann (1998:67) furthermore states that, to carry out effective public relations measurement and evaluation, what are really needed are mechanisms for measuring awareness and comprehension, recall and retention, opinion and attitude change, and behavioural patterns.

iii.   Research to segment publics

Researching the problem situation includes the discovery or confirmation of who is involved and who is affected in the context of their relationship with the organisation. From those identified as somehow contributing to or touched by the problem, one selects and assigns priorities to the target publics of the programme. This is as much part of strategic decision making as any other step.

Too often, however, publics are selected from static "laundry lists" without taking into account the specific problem situation. As seductive as these lists may be – because they reduce the need for research and decision-making – such cross-situational typologies may or may not apply in a particular problem situation (Broom & Dozier, 1990:32).

Publics then, are defined on the basis of their connection to theory in a particular situation. Whereas this linkage is useful for conceptually defining publics, it does not provide the observable attributes needed to identify publics. For that purpose, we need operational measures to help us determine who is "in" and who is "out" of a particular public. The following approaches provide useful referents: geographics, demographics, psychographics, covert power, reputation, membership, role in the decision-making process and communication behaviour (Broom & Dozier, 1990:32).

Several ways have been identified to segment publics. Some strategies, such as identifying publics by organisational membership, geographic area, or demographic characteristics (age, gender, income, education and so forth) require minimal research. Other strategies, such as segmentation by psychographics, covert power, and role in the relevant decision-making processes, require detailed research before segmentation can occur (Dozier et al, 1995:31; Vorster in Lubbe & Puth, 1994:79-81).

To segment publics according to Grunig, J's situational theory, communicators must conduct research on individuals and organisations to determine if they are affected in any way by organisational behaviour, to learn if those affected are aware of this impact of organisational behaviour, and to learn if those affected are communicating with each other and organising to do something about it. Research is needed on those affected to segment them as latent, aware or active publics. Because active publics are the only ones that generate consequences for organisations, communicators might be tempted to ignore latent and aware publics. However, proactive communicators seek to communicate with latent and aware publics while there is still room for negotiation.

When organisations or groups of individuals in the environment are not affected in any way by an organisation's behaviour, they are a non-public (Dozier et al, 1995:31; Van Heerden in Lubbe & Puth, 1994:94-100).

Research provides one way for senior management to become attuned to strategic publics. It is essential for two-way communication, both symmetrical and asymmetrical. Focus groups and surveys are as much channels of communication as are news releases, press conferences and internal publications. The frugal communicator can use the same focus groups and surveys of publics to set an evaluation benchmark, while educating the senior management in the process. The focus of strategic symmetrical communication programmes is on relationships, a coming together of the senior management and members of strategic publics around issues of mutual interest. Evaluating relationships requires sophisticated expertise in research methods (Dozier et al, 1995:33).

The relationship between an organisation and one of its publics results in part from what the individuals in that public know about the organisation and related issues. Similarly, organisational intelligence about the public and related issues affects the public-organisational relationship. Likewise, how people in the public and organisation feel about each other and issues in common, has impact on the public-organisational relationship. And finally, what people in the public and organisation do to each other and things in common, determines the nature of their relationship. Public reactions to the organisation and organisational reactions to the public result from their respective knowledge, predispositions, and behaviours regarding each other and issues in common (Broom & Dozier, 1990:32).

iv.   Research to evaluate communication programmes

One characteristic of the communication manager role is that managers take responsibility for the success or failure of their organisation's communication programmes. Others in the organisation likewise hold communication managers accountable for success or failure of their programmes.

Robinson (1969) viewed the demand for research as coming from outside public relations, from managers schooled in the management-by-objectives philosophy, seeking accountability from communications, public relations, and other staff functions (Dozier, in Grunig J, 1992:336).

Mathews (2000:12) states that the only way to know if one's programme increased awareness, is to have a benchmark of the level of awareness by the targeted audience before one's campaign and to survey after the campaign to see if the level increased. Companies cannot afford the luxury of paying for processes and programmes that are not connected with bottom-line successful results. Counting clips measures one's activity, one's output. They have no correlation to the changed or desired behaviour of the audiences one intends to reach.

According to Berzok (1993:25), credibility is gauged by the final element of the communication process: measurement of the effectiveness of communication. Apart from looking at how measurement is related to the bottom-line, one should also ask how much an audience would be willing to pay for the communication product and service that the communication department provides.

There is much hand wringing over the inability to provide management with measurable results in public relations programming (Forbes, 1992:31). Increasingly public relations practitioners believe that public relations can be measured; that the function should be held accountable for results; and that it can provide value to the corporation far in excess of the resources invested in it. Indeed, the return on investment in public relations programming can be among the highest in the corporation (Webster, 1990:18). According the Puchan et al (1999:165), evaluation provides its user with two major advantages: feedback and the documentation of effectiveness.

The more specific the goal, the easier it is to establish a cost/benefit relationship. Therefore, the more specific management is in its expectations of public relations, the easier it will be to evaluate its performance (Mason, 1974:126).

If strategic management is employed, however, one is driven inexorably toward accountability. That is because the entire process is goal-driven. Strategic management of public relations works best when the organisation is driven by the strategic process. If the CEO and the board know where they want to go and how to get there, the role of public relations will be clearly defined. A public relations strategy can then be based on the corporate plan (Forbes, 1992:31).

An "alignment" check can also be made to ensure that communication products serve common strategic goals. Questions such as whether message points are consistent; whether the audience is adequately identified; whether the desired behaviour is defined; and what the benefits are, must be answered. This procedure discourages generating messages for the sake of generating messages. Rather, messages must attempt to do something (Dozier et al, 1995:34; Grunig & Hunt, 1984:183).

The above contrasts the strategic contribution of communication programmes with tactical programme evaluation. Communicators too often set programme goals that are actually tactical objectives to produce and distribute communication products. These "process" goals and objectives are attractive, because producing communication products is largely under the control of communicators. Evaluating such tactical goals and objectives is also attractive, because evaluation may simply mean counting communication products such as news releases and internal publications and comparing the totals to those originally projected. Questions about programme impact on problems, opportunities and issues, remain unanswered (Dozier et al, 1995:34; Broom & Dozier, 1990:23).

The problem with tactical communication alone is that senior management will not settle for processes that do not affect the bottom-line (Dozier et al, 1995:34). If public relations professionals are to survive in an era of mergers, corporate staff downsizing and increasing demand for greater productivity, they must demonstrate their value to the corporation and communicate it to top management in terms they understand and can relate to.

That means measurable benefits such as enhanced cash flow, improved share price and shareholder value, greater productivity, more sales, bigger market share, less employee turnover and higher earnings per share. And that requires thinking and acting strategically in the public relations arena (Webster, 1990:18).

The senior management could well ask what communication actions are worth to the organisation. The answer, in part, is that communication processes can help organisations build strategic relationships with key publics. These relationships, in turn, are crucial to the effectiveness of organisations and, in many instances, have measurable monetary impact. The first step in linking communication to the bottom-line, is planning programmes that focus on outcomes (relationships) and then evaluating them by measuring the maintenance or change in relationships (Dozier et al, 1995:34; Broom & Dozier, 1990:24-32).

It must be established whether members of a key public are knowledgeable or even aware of the organisation's position on an issue of mutual concern; whether members of that public agree or disagree with the organisation's position or behaviour; how members of that public behave towards the issue or the organisation; whether lawsuits have increased or decreased; and whether employee turnover is increasing or decreasing compared to the benchmark. To answer these questions, the communication manager must be a sophisticated practitioner – or at least a sophisticated consumer – of evaluation research (Dozier et al, 1995:32; Broom & Dozier, 1990:32, 36-37).

Although no single design fits all evaluation settings, a minimal design for evaluation research, measures the awareness, knowledge, opinions and behaviours of members of a target public both before the communication programme is executed and after execution. An initial survey of the target public provides a benchmark of awareness, knowledge, opinions and behaviour against which subsequent studies can be compared (Dozier et al, 1995:32; Broom & Dozier, 1990:72-88).

Various research methods (techniques of gathering data) can be used to administer measures of public relations objectives to members of the public or organisational subsystems that one intends to affect. A choice can be made between qualitative and quantitative observations (Grunig & Hunt, 1984:184).

Conducting research to appraise the organisation of early warning signs that indicate the need to shift their strategic direction, and developing the organisation's business policy is part of the public relations manager's work today. There is a shift away from a tactical positioning (media relations) toward a strategic one (industry consulting based on behavioural science) (Carrington, 1992:46).

The corporate communications executive who understands how a CEO thinks about communications, will understand the necessity of using research to guide and underpin the entire communications programme (Arnold, 1988:11).

3.4.2.6   Knowledge of two-way models and research usage

In the *Excellence Study*, the researchers tested to see if knowledge of the two-way models affected research usage. Indeed, communication departments with the expertise to practice the two-way models used research much more extensively than did departments with little knowledge of two-way practices. Significantly, departments with the knowledge to practice the two-way models used both formal and informal research much more frequently than did departments without two-way expertise (Dozier et al, 1995:44).

Formal research gathering included:
- Regularly conducted and routine research activities.
- Specific research conducted to answer specific questions.
- Formal approaches to gather information for use in decision-making other than research (Dozier et al, 1995:44).

Informal information gathering included:

- Informal approaches to gathering information.
- Contacts with knowledgeable people outside the organisation.
- Judgement based on experience.

3.4.2.7   Knowledge of budgeting

Knowledge of budgeting techniques is also essential. The more strategic the communication department is, the more sophisticated budgeting issues become. That is because excellent communication departments constantly adjust and restructure programmes to respond dynamically to changing relations with strategic publics. Contemporary trends of downsizing and outsourcing in corporations and other organisations add additional wrinkles of complexity to budgeting in communication departments and for programmes (Dozier et al, 1995:35).

Like any other business activity, public relations programmes must be bolstered with sound budgets and principles of cost control. After identifying objectives and strategies, the public relations practitioner must detail the particular tactics that will help deliver those objectives.

The key to budgeting may lie in performing these two steps:

- Estimating the extent of the resources – both manpower and purchases – needed to accomplish each activity.
- Estimating the cost and availability of those resources (Seitel, 1989:57).

Contrast this strategic notion of structure and budgeting with "historicist" structure and budgeting. Some organisations depend heavily on "what we did last year" to make plans for next year. Such routine favours departmental budgets built around costs of specific communication products and services: the annual report, the employee and stockholder magazines, the media relations staff and so forth. Organisations like historicist routine, because such routine decisions require less effort, and less emphasis is put on justifying the communication department's existence.

The process of communicating becomes an end in itself; the budgeting is justified by promising to do as much communicating next year as this year (Dozier et al, 1995:35; Grunig & Hunt, 1984:163-165).

Programmes produced through historicist budgeting routines typically cannot satisfy senior management demanding strategic relevance from communication. The communication manager therefore needs to know how to budget strategically. Programme planning starts with identifying the most strategic publics and the kinds of relationships that senior management wants to establish and maintain with those publics. Managers build programme goals and objectives around the desired relationships sought. Budgets are zero-based, designed to implement the most efficient programmes for the most strategic publics (Dozier et al, 1995:36; Grunig & Hunt, 1984:164-165).

The assumptions can be made that:

- The knowledge base is primary for communicator expertise.
- Knowledge or expertise is a characteristic of the communication department and not necessarily of a single individual.
- Emerging communicator expertise in strategic planning and research does not replace or diminish the importance of traditional communicator skills in writing, editing, graphics, media relations, and so forth. Rather, the new expertise is added to the traditional communicator's set of skills to build a well-rounded, excellent communication department. (Refer to H11, H12.)

3.5 THE EXPLANATION OF VARIABLES

In this section, the conversion of the constructs of the four public relations models, the press-agentry model, the public information model, the two-way asymmetric model and the two-way symmetric model (as described above) into measurable variables, is described. These variables were used as items in Section B of the measuring instrument.

One-way models

Table 3.1 - Variables that describe the construct "press agentry model"

1. Senior management believes that the purpose of communication is predominantly to get your organisation's name into the media.
2. Senior management believes that the success of communication is measured by the number of people who use your products or services.
3. Senior management believes that the purpose of communication is to prevent unfavourable publicity for your organisation in the media.

Table 3.2 - Variables that describe the construct "public information model"

4. Senior management believes that it is your task to prepare news stories that reporters will use.
5. Senior management believes that it is only necessary to keep a clipping file to determine the success of public relations.
6. Senior management believes that the top communicator is a neutral disseminator of information.

Two-way models

Table 3.3 - Variables that describe the construct "two-way asymmetric model"

7. Senior management believes that in communication, the broad goal is to persuade publics to behave as the organisation wants them to behave.
8. Senior management believes that after completing a communication programme, research should be done to determine how effective this programme has been in changing people's attitudes.
9. Senior management believes you should make sure that the organisation's policies are described in ways its publics would be most likely to accept.

Table 3.4 - Variables that describe the construct "two-way symmetric model"

10. Senior management believes that the purpose of communication is to change the attitudes of management as much as it is to change the attitudes of publics.
11. Senior management believes it is the role of communication to facilitate mutual understanding between the management of the organisation and the publics the organisation affects.
12. Senior management believes communication should provide mediation opportunities to help management and publics negotiate conflict.

3.6   SUMMARY

The public opinion factor has risen to new levels of importance in corporate decision-making. More than ever before, CEOs expect their senior management people to specifically deal with the public relations ramifications of their decisions so that potential problems are not allowed to escalate into major issues. Anticipating issues important to an organisation and setting up communication that prevents crises and

fosters good relations with many different publics are key strategies for successful CEOs.

CEOs often make difficult decisions which are more closely linked to human factors than ever before. The needs and desires of corporate "publics" – with the customer in the forefront – will increasingly influence corporate direction. Present CEOs must be more sensitive, responsive and communication-competent than prior generations. Altered expectations by employees, stockholders, customers and media make that fact unavoidable.

Organisations that achieve excellence have communication departments with the expertise for both traditional one-way practices and advanced two-way communication to negotiate and persuade both senior management and publics toward mutually beneficial relationships.

If indeed, CEOs must be more "communication competent" in the future, they will expect the next generation of public relations executives to supply them with the background and know-how required. The two-way symmetrical model can be argued to be the technique of choice for the CEO and the top management of the future.