DO SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLIC RELATIONS AGENCIES DELIVER EXCELLENT PR SERVICES? A QUANTITATIVE SURVEY

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to investigate South African agencies' ability to deliver excellent public relations services to clients, as it is maintained that excellence can only be achieved by following a symmetrical worldview of public relations (PR). A quantitative approach, utilising questionnaires, was followed. The findings indicate that most agencies practised a two-way symmetrical model within a symmetrical worldview. Some agencies still focus on obtaining publicity and providing information (one-way communication) as well as technical public relations, but generally the requirements for excellent communication in South African PR agencies are met. The majority of public relations practitioners (PRPs) are females and they are more inclined to use the two-way symmetrical model than their male counterparts. An important finding emanating from the research is that the level of education of the PRP impacts on the selection of the PR model applied. Consequently, further education of public relations practitioners is considered necessary to improve the level of service excellence offered by PR agencies in South African.

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INTRODUCTION

The practice of public relations has fundamental difficulties that are not being ameliorated by the tremendous growth of the profession and its extension into new areas because of growing internationalisation through globalisation (Kruckeberg 1998: 45). There are both obvious and underlying problems that characterise the study and practice of the field. Underlying problems include the lack of agreement on the fundamental purpose and scope of the function itself. Problems that are more obvious include its lack of scientific status and professionalism, as well as a lack of recognition within the industry. There seems to be a general agreement that PR should first achieve professional status before its social role will be broadly accepted as valuable to society and organisational clients would value the counsel of public relations professionals (Brody 1992: 350; Hogg & Doolan 1999: 580; Lages & Simkin 2003: 298; Toth, Serini, Wright & Emig 1998: 145).

Arguably the most valuable contribution PRP's can make to their clients' practice of PR is to influence their choice of PR models by selecting a model that underwrites the professional practice of PR. Grunig and White's (in Grunig 1992: 31) axiom that for PR to be excellent, PR must be viewed as symmetrical, idealistic, critical, and managerial, has been accepted worldwide by PR practitioners. These authors acknowledged that symmetry was an essentially normative theory of how PR should be practiced in order to make organisations more effective and maintained that this normative model describes the conditions under which PR is able to contribute most to the achievement of organisations' objectives and therefore how "excellent" PR programmes and departments should be managed.

The symmetrical worldview is compatible to negotiation, mutual adaptation and organisation-public relationships (Ledingham & Brunig 2000 in Bishop 2006: 216). The community-building and communitarian view of PR was explored by Pearson (in Bishop 2006: 216) who linked two-way symmetrical communication, organisational responsibility within the public sphere and ethics to PR. Bishop (2006: 216) concluded that organisations should behave as responsible members of the communities in which they operate and therefore operate interdependently with these communities.

The purpose of this article is to determine whether PR agencies in South Africa has a symmetrical or asymmetrical worldview (as presented by the four models of public relations), in order to determine whether excellent PR agency clients can indeed practice excellent PR. The four models of PR are the press agentry model, public information model, the two-way asymmetrical model and the two-way symmetrical model (Grunig & Hunt 1984). In contributing to the effectiveness of the organisation — and therefore the bottom-line — the preferred model of practicing PR and

communicating with publics is the two-way symmetrical model (Grunig & Grunig in Grunig 1992: 309)

South Africa offers a unique opportunity to study the research question at hand as well as whether PR models developed in the United States would be practised in a developed country such as South Africa (Holtzhausen & Petersen 2003: 307). These authors states that South Africa probably has been left out of consideration by those conducting international PR research because of its isolation under the apartheid regime. There is, according to Holtzhausen and Petersen (2003: 307), very little existing literature on PR practices in South Africa, even though this country is the leading economic power in sub-Saharan Africa.

Although the roles performed by PRPs are extensively researched in South Africa (Steyn 2001; Le Roux & Steyn 2006), limited research has been conducted on the four PR models, i.e. the practice of symmetrical or asymmetrical communication by PR agencies. Furthermore, academic literature on the four models of PR from a South African perspective is limited.

WORLDVIEWS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

The general theory of excellence in communication management and its contribution to organisational effectiveness begins at the level of worldview — the way that people and organisations think about and define public relations (Grunig & Grunig in Grunig 1992: 258). Kearney (in Grunig & White in Grunig 1992: 33) defines a worldview as "a set of images and assumptions about the world". Image in this regard can be analysed in two ways. Firstly, the literal sense of a visual representation in the mind, and secondly, organising principles that have variously been called schemata, plans, and structures. Verwey and Du Plooy-Cilliers (2003: 23) agree with this definition and further define a worldview as "the different ways in which people view themselves, the environment, time, space, truth, etc."

The subjectivity of the human mind plays an important role in how and what people think about PR — and in how it is studied and practiced. PR is also rooted in the culture of organisations, communities and societies and fundamental beliefs about the world are used for thinking and observing (Childers 1989: 86). Grunig (in Verwey & Du Plooy-Cilliers 2003: 23) postulated that most organisations are dominated by one either the asymmetrical or symmetrical worldview and that the role of communication within an organisation depends to a large extent on the worldview of the company. In short: in order to distinguish excellent from less excellent public relations, PR worldviews need to be compared and evaluated.

Kearney (Grunig & White in Grunig 1992: 33) argues that specific worldviews result in certain patterns of behaviour. However, it is also said that only the mind can free people of the bondage of their worldview. This implies that only by identifying them and by choosing to adopt one or to change to another, can worldviews be changed. Kearney propose that worldviews be evaluated based on internal and external criteria. From an internal perspective, worldviews are assumptions that are logically and structurally related to each other better than others are (Grunig & White in Grunig 1992: 37). Accordingly, Vroom (in Grunig & White in Grunig 1992: 37) lists similar internal criteria of worldviews, namely obviousness, coherence, freedom from contradiction, unity, and relevance. In terms of the external criteria for measuring PR worldviews, PR must be effective with problem solving of organisational and human problems and judged on a relative neutral and ethical research and history. Therefore, from an external perspective some worldviews allow people to relate better to their environments than others (Kearney in Grunig & White in Grunig 1992: 37).

It can be concluded that an excellent worldview for PR will be one that is logical, coherent, unified, and orderly (assuring the internal criteria). Furthermore, it should also be effective in solving organisational and human problems, as judged by relatively neutral research or by history (the external criterion). It should also be ethical in that it helps organisations build caring relationships with other individuals and groups they affect in a society or in the world (Grunig & White in Grunig 1992: 38).

Three worldviews have shaped excellence and the accompanying effectiveness of PR – the view that PR is asymmetrical, the view that PR has both a neutral or advocacy role in society, and the view that PR is a technical function (Grunig 1993). Importantly, in contrast to these worldviews, an excellent PR worldview is symmetrical, idealistic or critical and is management orientated (Grunig 1993).

Botan and Hazleton (1989) and Childers (1989: 89-91) discuss the following characteristics of the asymmetrical and symmetrical worldviews:

TABLE 1: ASYMMETRICAL VS. SYMMETRICAL WORLDVIEWS

In organisations with an asymmetrical worldview:	*In organisations with an symmetrical worldview:*
• *Internal* orientation*:* Members do not see the organisation as others do.	• *Interdependence:* Publics and other organizations are not kept out by

• *Efficiency:* Efficiency and control is valued more than innovation.	organisational boundaries.
• *Elitism:* Leaders know best; wisdom is not the product of a "free marketplace of ideas"	• *Open system:* Information flows freely between systems.
• *Conservatism:* Change is undesirable, change efforts subversive.	• *Moving equilibrium:* Systems seek a moving equilibrium with other systems through cooperation and mutual adjustment.
• *Tradition:* Tradition provides stability and maintains culture.	• *Decentralisation of management:* The input of all people is valued. There is a commitment to eliminate the adverse consequences of organisational actions.
• *Central authority:* Power is concentrated in the hands of the few, with employees having little autonomy.	• *Autonomy:* People are more innovative, constructive and self-fulfilled when they have the autonomy to influence their own behaviour, rather than having it controlled by others.
	• *Innovation*: New ideas and flexible thinking should be stressed rather than tradition and efficiency.

Grunig (1993) argues that an asymmetrical mind-set has dominated the practice of PR and public perceptions of public relations. Such a mind-set, "defines PR as the use of communication to manipulate publics for the benefit of the organisation". According to him, the asymmetrical worldview steers PR practitioners toward actions that are unethical, socially irresponsible and ineffective. Dilenschneider (1990: 8) sums this worldview up in stating: "If you are communicating effectively, you will get positive recognition from the audiences you are trying to influence, which means people will think what you are doing is right and that you are doing it in the right way. When you get positive recognition your influence grows. You are perceived as competent, effective, worthy of respect — powerful".

In contrast, the symmetrical worldview steers communication to be a two-way process (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig in Verwey & Du Plooy-Cilliers 2003: 23). In organisations with a symmetrical worldview communication plays a central role in the functioning of the company and communication managers try to establish mutual understanding between target publics and the dominant coalition through the effective use of two-way communication. These organisations are striving towards a win-win solution, also referred to by Susskind and Field (in Bishop 2006: 216) as the "mutual gains approach". Furthermore, organisations with a more symmetrical worldview have

a tendency to rely more on systems thinking. Grunig, Grunig and Ehling (1992) noted that symmetrical communication grows out of basic systems theory which addresses interdependence of organisation and their environments, which is the community-building construct of PR and the communitarian view of PR (Kruckeberg & Starck in Bishop 2006: 216). Furthermore, Pearson (in Bishop 2006: 216) explored the community-building and communitarian view of PR and linked two-way symmetrical communication, organisational responsibility within the public sphere and ethics to PR. Organisations operate interdependently with their communities and should therefore behave as responsible members of those communities (Bishop 2006: 216). Dialogic communication is necessary for corporations to operate in today's climate of active publics and demands for transparency (Bishop 2006: 217). Two-way symmetry, dialogue, and interdependence are all relevant to community, ethical communication and relationship building and considered underpinnings of authentic communication — authentic being genuine, real, reliable and trustworthy (*Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language* 1996 in Bishop 2006: 217). Furthermore, PRPs plays a social role as representatives of organisations acting in the public sphere (Bishop 2006: 217) and play a key role in adjusting or adapting behaviour of organisational dominant coalitions, bringing publics and dominant coalitions closer together (Grunig & Grunig 1996 in Rensburg & Cant 2003: 270). This win-win approach also provides an ethical basis for PR as it provides a coherent framework for socially responsible practices (Grunig & Grunig 1996 in Rensburg & Cant 2003: 270).

PR MODELS

According to Holtzhausen and Petersen (2003: 308), model building in public relations has been one of the most pervasive methods for comparing international public relations practices. They define model building as "a process that will reproduce the same pattern of empirical data that are found in specific concrete situations". In public relations, models simulate real-life public relations activities, which form a basis for direct comparisons of practitioner behaviour across cultures and national boundaries (Holtzhausen & Petersen 2003: 308).

Based on the initial classification of PR as either symmetrical or asymmetrical, Grunig and Hunt (in Moss, Warnaby & Thame 1996: 70) identified four models to explain the broad differences in the way in which PR has been practised since the mid-nineteenth century. Although these models were originally conceived as a means of explaining the evolutionary development of PR, Grunig and Hunt (1984) maintained that these models also provide a means of broadly describing and explaining the differences in the way in which PR is practised in organisations today. The authors acknowledged the limitations of the models as a means of capturing the wide variations in modern

PR practice and should therefore be treated as simplified representations of the spectrum of contemporary practice styles. Subsequent studies by PR researchers have found that the four models do provide a means of classifying the principal forms of PR practice, but their limitations have been exposed by a number of scholars.

Miller (in Moss, Warnaby & Thame 1996: 70) argued that persuasion is the natural way by which organisations seek to exert control over their environments as a criticism to Grunig and Hunt's (1984) and Grunig's (1993) arguments about the superiority of the two-way symmetrical model in particular. However, Grunig and Grunig (in Grunig 1992: 320) maintained through subsequent studies that they do represent a sound positive theory of PR as it is practised today. They further reasserted the belief that the two-way symmetrical model defines the most "excellent" way of practising PR, but acknowledged that organisations often fail to practise PR in this way.

The four historical models were tested in India, Greece and Taiwan and here two additional models were identified. The personal influence model was used when PRPs were expected to develop contacts with important people and the cultural interpreter model was used when practitioners had to interpret local cultural practices for multinational companies (Grunig, Grunig, Sriramesh, Huang & Lyra in Holtzhausen & Petersen 2003: 309). Similar studies conducted in India, South Korea and Japan found that the four historical models described only some of the PR practices and that the personal influence model was practised across all three cultures (Sriramesh, Kim & Takasaki in Holtzhausen & Petersen 2003: 309). In Nigeria, Canada and the United States, it was found that PRPs in developing countries were more likely to use the press agentry and public information models (Pratt & Ugboajah in Holtzhausen & Petersen 2003: 309). A previous empirical study of PRPs in the new South Africa found no evidence that respondents grouped PR practices according to principles of symmetry of asymmetry. Instead, South African PRPs developed their own culture-specific models of practice based on the economic, social and political realities of their country. These included the conflict based Western Dialogic model, the Activist model, the Ubuntu model and the Oral Communication model (Holtzhausen & Petersen 2003: 305).

For the purposes on this study, the four traditional models developed by Grunig and Hunt were used. The first three models, press agentry, public information and asymmetrical two-way public relations, follows an asymmetrical worldview. The fourth model, symmetrical two-way PR applies a symmetrical worldview to public relations. These are discussed in greater detail in the following section.

Press agentry model (publicity model)

The press agentry model was relevant to the practise of PR in the period from 1850-1900. This era of the press agentry model was characterised by mottos like *"There is no such thing as bad publicity"* (P.T. Barnum); *"The public be fooled"* (E. Goldman); and *"The public be damned"* (William Vanderbilt) (Grunig & White in Grunig 1992: 287). The formal communication on behalf of the organisations, persons or businesses consisted of the search for free media exposure in any press which was freely available to the masses. Information on an organisation was often spread through incomplete, distorted, or half-true information. This was not necessarily the truth and was aimed at promoting the business. Press agents viewed communication as "telling not listening", but they did not give the complete true picture. This model involves only one-way communication dedicated to "help the organisation control the publics that affect it". This model describes propagandistic PR that seeks media attention in almost any way possible. The Excellence Study conducted by the IABC Research Foundation holds that press agentry is designed to produce favourable publicity, especially in the mass media.

Public information model

This model was formed in the era 1906-1923. This model characterises PR as practised by a "journalist-in-residence" that disseminates the information. The public information model favours truthful disclosure of information to the media, though damaging information may not be volunteered. Good media relations generate favourable publicity in the long run. The communicator is a "journalist" for organisations using the public information model. This is seen as the second stage of PR development. Primarily government agencies, nonprofit organisations and associations use it. The reaction of corporate communication toward this was to "Tell the truth" and "The public be informed" (Ivy Ledbetter Lee). Communication departments using this model communicate to their publics through pamphlets, media releases and other forms of mass communication. The purpose of the model was the dissemination of information, not necessarily with a persuasive intent. The people using this model did not use research, but followed a journalistic model of preparing informational material for largely unknown publics. In South Africa it is especially true for government departments and parastatals (Grunig & White in Grunig 1992: 288).

According to a survey of high-ranking communication administrators at a variety of U.S. academic institutions it was found that, when describing their jobs according to Grunig and Hunt (1984), four models of PR practice was found:

TABLE 2: JOB DESCRIPTION BASED ON GRUNIG AND HUNT MODELS

Job Description based on Grunig and Hunt models	
Public Information	*30.6%*
Press agent / Publicity	*25.6%*
Two-way asymmetric	*21.9%*
Two-way symmetric	*21.9%*

(Bobbitt 1996: 36)

It is clear that in the above study, the people see themselves as public informationalists.

Two-way asymmetrical model

Practitioners using the two-way asymmetrical PR model have a function more like that of the press agents, although their purpose can best be described as scientific persuasion. They use what is known from social science theory and research about attitude and behaviour to persuade publics to accept the organisation's point of view and to behave in a way that supports the organisation. With this model the organisation does not change as a result of public relations; it attempts to change public attitude and behavior. These practitioners carefully plan what they communicate to publics to achieve change in attitude and behavior. This model is tilted in favour of the organisation. Feedback is used for manipulative purposes, to establish what public attitudes are toward the organisation and how they might be changed (Grunig & White in Grunig 1992: 288).

According to the Excellence Study, the public information model disseminates relatively objective information through mass media and controlled media. It is also the model mostly used in a survey done in a variety of U. S. schools of high-ranking communication administrators (mentioned above). In the two-way asymmetrical model the communicator plays an important role in gathering information about publics for management decision-making. The information gathered about publics is not used to modify the goals, objectives, policies, procedure, or other forms of organisational behaviour — this model is therefore very manipulative (Grunig & White in Grunig 1992: 289).

Two-way symmetrical model

Organisations using this model use bargaining, negotiating, and strategies of conflict resolution to bring about symbiotic changes in the ideas, attitudes, and behaviors of both the organisation and its publics. With this model the organisation attempts to reach a "state-of-affairs" with its publics that

are acceptable to all. Instead of thinking of the organisation as the source of communication and the publics as the receiver, both are conceived as groups engaged in a transaction. The model consist more of a dialogue than a monologue and when persuasion occurs, the public should be just as likely to persuade the organisations management to change as the organisation is likely to change the public's attitude (Grunig & White in Grunig 1992: 289).

According to the Excellence Study the two-way symmetrical model is based on research and uses communication to manage conflict and improve understanding with strategic publics. Organisations do indeed want PR people to work in their interest. They do not want to give in to all outside demands on the organisation when they believe the organisation's position is right. It is here where PR practitioners and experts identified the mixed model. In short it can be referred to as a combination of the four different models, depending on the situation the organisations finds it and what they decide to do (Grunig & White in Grunig 1992: 310).

Previously, Grunig and Grunig (1986) (as quoted in Childers 1989: 88) argued that two of the models are asymmetrical in purpose — press agentry and two-way asymmetrical — and that two are symmetrical — public information and two-way symmetrical. In retrospect, only the two-way symmetrical model is truly symmetrical. The reason for this is that for communication to be excellent and for an organisation to be truly in touch with its environment, communication flow from and to the organisation should be in balance. To achieve this, the two-way symmetrical model should be practised. This is the model most likely to make an organisation effective (Grunig & Grunig 1992; Murphy 1991). Lindeborg (1994) succinctly states: "Excellent communication is communication that is managed strategically, meets its objectives, and balances the needs of the organisation and the needs of key publics with two-way symmetrical communication".

The two-way symmetrical model has been the subject of criticism over the years (Bishop 2006: 216). One criticism stated that this model was more a guideline for how PR ought to be practised than how it actually was practised by professionals in their everyday careers and that symmetry was only applicable or appropriate in certain circumstances (Cancel, Cameron, Sallot & Mitrook in Bishop 2006: 216).

Grunig (1993) notes: "few organisations practise the two-way symmetrical model because their worldview of PR does not include that model and they seldom have PR personnel with the expertise to practice it". Bernays (1998) supports Grunig in contending that PR should last as long as democracy — as long as people are in power and there is open competition in the market place for

goods, services and ideas. In our society, freedom of expression and freedom of choice rule. Competition makes organisations dependent on the people's will. Consent of the public is essential to the life of an organisation or idea. All of this supports a symmetrical worldview. In effect, PR will last as long as it is practised symmetrically.

Leichty and Springston as well as Van der Meiden (in O'Dwyer 2005: 812) pointed out that most organisations practise a combination of the four models rather than practising one individual model exclusively. According to Grunig and White (in Grunig 1992: 310) PR practitioners and experts identified the mixed model being referred to as a combination of the four above-mentioned models being practised depending on the situation the organisation finds itself in and what they decide to do. Grunig (1993) acknowledge that in order for PR to be considered a management function, either one or both of the two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical models must dominate.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

It is clear that two dominant worldviews have shaped excellence and the accompanying effectiveness of PR — an asymmetrical and a symmetrical worldview to public relations. These worldviews determine to a large extent the model that organisations follow in implementing and practicing PR in the organisational context. In an asymmetrical worldview, organisations follow a combination or one of the models of press agentry model, public information model or asymmetrical two-way model to public relations. Organisations following a symmetrical worldview apply the two-way symmetrical model to public relations.

The question at hand is whether South African PR agencies are practising excellent public relations by assisting their clients in selecting the best PR model.

RESEARCH AIM

The aim of this study is therefore to determine the worldviews of PR agencies in South Africa based on the PR models they advise their clients to follow. The following research questions guide the research: Is the worldview of the PR agencies in South Africa asymmetrical or symmetrical in nature?; Which PR model does PR agencies in South Africa apply?; and Are the requirements for excellent communication present in PR agencies in South Africa?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A quantitative methodological orientation, within a positivist paradigm (Allan & Skinner 1991: 16), was adopted. The variables under investigation were measured with the purpose of predicting

behaviour (Mouton & Marais 1985: 157). Huysamen (1993: 3) states that the quantitative research approach confines the terms "science" and "knowledge" to the results of those observations that are observable.

As little research on this topic in the South African context is available, an exploratory research design was elected to provide a basic familiarity with the topic (Babbie & Mouton 2001: 79). A purposive sampling technique was used to draw a sample from the population, which consists of all PR agencies in South Africa, by using the judgement of an expert in selecting cases with a specific purpose in mind (Neuman 2000: 198). All PR agencies in Johannesburg listed on the "bizcommunity" website were selected. Bizcommunity is regarded as South Africa's leading daily advertising, marketing and media news resource for the industry. Only agencies that described themselves as "PR agencies" were considered in the sample.

A self-administered, structured questionnaire, adapted from the Excellence Study, was used as a measuring instrument and e-mailed to the 81 PR agencies in Gauteng. Each model, namely, the press agentry, the public information, the two-way asymmetrical and the two-way symmetrical model were tested with four items each. Table 3 outlines which items represented the different models.

TABLE 3: MODEL REPRESENTATION ACCORDING TO ITEMS

	Press Agentry	Public Information	Two-way Asymmetrical	Two-way Symmetrical
Items	1	3	2	5
	9	7	4	8
	11	14	6	10
	12	16	13	15

A total of 26 usable responses were received. Agencies were categorised based on their function and size as indicated on the "bizcommunity" website. The categories were labelled technical, strategic and a combination between technical and strategic. The sized varied between 1-10, 11-20 and 21 or more employees.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

Demographic analysis

Table 4 provides a breakdown of the demographics of the respondents.

TABLE 4: DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF RESPONDENTS

Gender		Age		Qualification	
Male	27%	**20-29**	26%	**Grade 12**	7%
Female	70%	**30-39**	59%	**2/3 year diploma/ degree**	59%
		40-49	15%	**3/4 year degree/ honours degree/Postgraduate diploma**	33%
		50 and up	0%	**Masters and higher**	0%

Descriptive statistics

Models applied by PR agencies in South Africa

Table 5, 6, and 7 represent the models practised by the PR agencies in the survey:

TABLE 5: PRESS AGENCY MODEL

	Item	Strongly disagree or disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly agree or agree
Q1	The purpose of PR is, quite simply to get publicity for our clients.	52%	22%	26%
Q9	In public relations, one mostly attempts to get favorable publicity and not unfavorable publicity.	0%	4%	96
Q11	The success of communication can be determined from the number of people who respond to it.	48%	22%	30%
Q12	In your view, does PR and publicity mean essentially the same thing?	85%	11%	4%

Respondents generally disagreed (51.8%) that PR is simply to get publicity for clients. Most of the respondents (96.3%) agreed that in public relations, one mostly attempts to get favourable publicity and not unfavourable publicity and 48.1% of the respondents disagree that the success of communication can be determined from the number of people who respond to the communication.

Most of the respondents (84.6%) said that PR and publicity does not essentially mean the same thing.

TABLE 6: PUBLIC INFORMATION MODEL

	Item	Strongly disagree or disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly agree or agree
Q3	Communicators are normally so busy writing stories or producing publications that there is no time to do research.	42%%	16%	42%
Q7	When communicating it is important that, accurate information should be disseminated, but unfavourable information should not be volunteered.	44%	15%	41%
Q14	Keeping a clipping file of media articles is about the only way to determine the success of public relations.	70%	22%	8%
Q16	Communication is more a neutral disseminator of information than a mediator between management and employees of a client organizational.	41%	33%	26%

Some of the respondents (42.3%) disagreed that communicators are normally so busy writing stories or producing publications that there is not time to do research, whilst some (42.3%) agreed with this. The majority of the respondents disagreed that when you are communicating, it is important that accurate information should be disseminated, but unfavourable information should not be volunteered. Of the respondents 70.3% disagreed that keeping a clipping file of media articles is about the only way to determine the success of PR and most of the respondents (40.7%) disagreed that communication is more a neutral disseminator of information than a mediator between management and employees of a client organisation.

TABLE 7: TWO-WAY ASYMMETRICAL MODEL

	Item	Strongly disagree or disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly agree or agree
Q2	After completing a communication campaign, research should be done to determine how effective the campaign has been in changing peoples` attitudes.	0%	15%	85%
Q4	The broader goal of communication is to persuade publics to behave as the client organizational wants them to behave.	41%	26%	33%
Q6	Before starting a communication program, one should consider attitude surveys to ensure that the client organisation and its policies are described in ways its publics would most likely accept it.	7%	19%	74%
Q13	The purpose of communicating is to change the attitudes and behaviour of management of a client organisation as much as it is to change the attitudes and behaviour of publics.	7%	30%	63%

The majority of respondents (85.2%) agreed that after completing a communication campaign, research should be done to determine how effective the campaign has been in changing people's attitudes. However, only 33.3% agreed that the broader goal of communication is to persuade publics to behave as the client organisation wants them to behave, while 40.7% disagreed with this. The majority of the respondents (74%) agree that before starting a communication programme, one should consider attitude surveys to ensure that the client organisation and its policies are described in ways its publics would most likely accept it. The majority of the respondents (62.9%) also agreed that the purpose of communicating is to change the attitudes and behaviour of management of a client organisation as much as it is to change the attitudes and behaviour of publics.

TABLE 8: TWO-WAY SYMMETRICAL MODEL

	Item	Strongly disagree or disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly agree or agree
Q5	The purpose of communication is to develop mutual understanding between the management of a client organisation and the publics it affects.	0%	0%	100%
Q8	Before starting a communication program, research should be done to determine the mutual understanding between management of the client organisation and the external and internal publics.	4%	11%	85%
Q10	Before starting communicating, one should do research to determine public attitude towards the client organizational.	0%	15%	85%
Q15	Communication should provide mediation means for the client organisation – to assist management and publics to manage conflict.	4%	26%	70%

All respondents agreed that the purpose of communication is to develop mutual understanding between the management of a client organisation and the publics it affects. The majority of the respondents (85.2%) agreed that before starting a communication programme, research should be done to determine the mutual understanding between management of the client organisation and the external and internal publics. 85.2% of the respondents also agreed that before starting communicating, one should do research to determine public attitude towards the client organisation and 70.4% agreed that communication should provide mediation means for the client organisation — to assist management and publics to manage conflict.

TABLE 9: MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION OF THE FOUR PR MODELS

Model	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Press agentry	27	1.75	4.33	2.9383	0.68078
Public information	27	1.75	4	2.7407	0.64852
Two-way asymmetrical	27	2.75	5	3.7963	0.58027
Two-way symmetrical	27	3	5	4.0556	0.44035

PR agencies' function and size analysis

TABLE 10: PR AGENCY ANALYSIS ACCORDING TO SIZE AND FUNCTION

Agency size		Agency category	
1 to 10	63%	**Technical**	52%
11 to 20	13%	**Strategic**	8%
21 or more	24%	**Combination**	40%

From Table 10 it can be concluded that the PR agencies in South Africa in the Johannesburg region are very small, between one to 10 members of staff. Most of these PR agencies also perform more technical functions than strategic functions or perform a combination of technical and strategic functions.

Cross-tabulation of the PR agency function and most dominant model

Table 11 describes which model is the most dominant model applied by the PR agencies according to the function of the PR agency. Due to the nature of the data, a fifth model was added as some PR agencies indicated that more than one model are being applied at a time.

TABLE 11: PR AGENCY FUNCTION AND MOST DOMINANT MODEL

Function category	Model				
	Press agentry	**Public information**	**Two-way asymmetrical**	**Two-way symmetrical**	**Mixed model**
Technical	7%	0%	0%	71%	22%
Strategic	0%	0%	50%	50%	0%
Combination	0%	0%	33%	44%	23%

Agencies that were categorised as performing technical functions mostly practise the two-way symmetrical model and then the mixed model. The PR agencies categorised as performing strategic functions, practise either the two-way asymmetrical or the two-way symmetrical model and the PR agencies categorised as performing a combination of functions mostly practise the two-way symmetrical model.

PR agency size and most dominant model

TABLE 12: PR AGENCY SIZE AND MOST DOMINANT MODEL

Size	Model				
	Press agentry	**Public information**	**Two-way asymmetrical**	**Two-way symmetrical**	**Mixed model**
1 to 10	12%	0%	6%	59%	23%
11 to 20	0%	0%	33%	67%	0%
21 and more	0%	0%	33%	50%	17%

Irrespective of the size of the company, the majority of respondents practise the two-way symmetrical model.

Practitioners' gender and most dominant model

TABLE 13: PRACTITIONERS' GENDER AND MOST DOMINANT MODEL

Gender	Model				
	Press agentry	Public information	Two-way asymmetrical	Two-way symmetrical	Mixed model
Male	12.5%	0%	37.5%	37.5%	12.5%
Female	5%	0%	5%	68%	22%

It was found that 37.5% of male respondents practise the two-way asymmetrical model and another 37.5% practise the two-way symmetrical model. In contrast to this, 68.4% (the majority) of females practise the two-way symmetrical model.

Practitioners' age and most dominant model

TABLE 14: PRACTITIONERS' AGE AND MOST DOMINANT MODEL

Age	Model				
	Press agentry	Public information	Two-way asymmetrical	Two-way symmetrical	Mixed model
20 – 29	14%	0%	0%	72	14%
30 – 39	6%	0%	19%	50%	25%
40 and up	0%	0%	25%	75%	0%

Respondents between the ages of 20 – 29, as well as 40 and older have a strong inclination toward the two-way symmetrical model with 71.4% and 75% respectively.

Practitioners' level of qualification and most dominant model

TABLE 15: PRACTITIONERS' LEVEL OF QUALIFICATION AND MOST DOMINANT MODEL

Qualification	Model				
	Press agentry	Public information	Two-way asymmetrical	Two-way symmetrical	Mixed model

Grade 12	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
2-3 year diploma / degree	12.5%	0%	12.5%	69%	6%
3-4 year degree/honours/postgrad diploma	0%	0%	22.2%	55.6%	22.2%

All respondents with a Grade 12 (matriculation) qualification practise the mixed model. On the other hand, respondents with a 2/3 year diploma/degree mostly practise the two-way symmetrical model (68.8%). 12.5% practise the press agentry model, another 12.5% practise the two-way asymmetrical model and the last 6.3% practise the mixed model.

Most of the respondents with a 3/4 year degree/honours/postgraduate diploma practise the two-way symmetrical model (55.6%). 22.2% practise the two-way asymmetrical model and the rest (22.2%) practise the mixed model.

Reliability

TABLE 16: CRONBACH'S ALPHA

Model	Reliability statistics
Press Agentry	0.639
Public Information	0.451
Two-way asymmetrical	0.521
Two-way symmetrical	0.553

From Table 16 it is clear that the Cronbach's Alpha for the four models is similar to the Cronbach's Alpha averages in the seven studies conducted by Grunig and Grunig (in Grunig 1992: 294). The public information index was also lower, which is again consistent with what Grunig and Grunig (in Grunig 1992: 294) found.

CONCLUSION

Firstly, in contradiction to the Holtzhausen and Petersen (2003: 305) study who found that South African PRPs did not group PR practices according to principles of symmetry or asymmetry, this study found that PR agencies in South Africa apply the two-way symmetrical model and as a result it can be deduced that they have a symmetrical worldview. This in turn implies PR agencies in

South Africa support the community-building and communitarian view of PR as Pearson (in Bishop 2006: 216) linked two-way symmetrical communication, organisational responsibility within the public sphere and ethics to PR. Therefore, PR Agencies behave as responsible members of the communities in which they operate and therefore operate interdependently with these communities (Bishop 2006: 216), and advise their client to this effect. According to Grunig, Grunig and Ehling (1992), the symmetrical worldview have a tendency to rely more on systems thinking and noted that symmetrical communication grows out of basic systems theory which addresses interdependence of organisation and their environments. These are the community-building construct and the communitarian view of PR (Kruckeberg & Starck in Bishop 2006: 216).

Secondly, it can be argued then that the requirements for excellent communication are present in PR agencies in South Africa, based on the finding that PR agencies in South Africa apply two-way symmetrical communication. However, a strong trace of the application of the two-way asymmetrical model was also found.

Thirdly, in support of the Holtzhausen and Petersen (2003: 305) study that found that PR practitioners' demographic characteristics did not influence their use of PR model, this study concludes that PR agencies in South Africa mostly consist of females between the ages of 30 and 39 and that neither the gender or the age of the respondents influence their choice of PR model.

Furthermore, it was found that the majority of PR agencies in South Africa are small agencies (between 1 and 10 members of staff) who tend to practise public relations on a technical level. The size of the PR agency also did not influence the choice of PR model.

Most importantly, it was found that the level of education of the practitioner at a PR agency has an impact on which model is applied. Respondents with a Grade 12 qualification apply a mixed model, while respondents with higher qualifications are mostly inclined to apply the two-way symmetrical model.

Lastly, females were more inclined to applying the symmetrical model than males.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The educational level of PRPs at agencies seems to be problematic as those practitioners with a lower level of education tend to adapt to asymmetrical communication as opposed to their colleagues with a higher level of education. It can be argued that this responsibility lies not only

upon the individual practitioners, but also on agencies, clients exerting pressure, universities and colleges as well a governing bodies of the field of PR.

LIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY

As this was an exploratory study, it was limited to providing the current status quo in the South African PR consultancy industry. However, it does not explain how the agencies accomplish two-way symmetrical communication, nor is it representative of the whole PR industry in South Africa, as organisational PR was excluded from the study.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Further research is necessary to explore how PR agencies in South African accomplish two-way symmetrical communication and the dynamics between agencies and clients in deciding on which model to adapt to. Furthermore, this research needs to be extended to the organisational context of PR in South Africa and emerging models identified by various authors need to explored further.

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