

**STRATEGIC INTERNAL COMMUNICATION IN
INTERNATIONAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS**

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that the Master's script, which I hereby submit for the degree MPhil (Communication Management) at the University of Pretoria is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at another university.

Jessica Hume

April 2010



“As we journey along our strategic route we remain ever alert to the need to change our pace and our direction as new events and unexpected futures cause us to reconsider, re-evaluate and re-strategize our future destination and take a new route on our eternal journey.”

P. Franklin (1998)



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Abstract

The role and importance of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) has increased with globalisation and the growth of global institutions. Not only do INGOs play a major role in aid delivery in developing countries, they also serve as the voice of the people in the growing global governance system. Thus they have an increasing impact on the social and economic welfare of people around the world.

For this reason, the performance and management of INGOs is vital. However, research on their management is lacking. INGOs possess unique characteristics including complex environments, value-based missions and no financial bottom line. Therefore, management practices, like internal communication, that are generally developed for for-profit organisations need to be evaluated for suitability within the INGO context.

Strategic internal communication has been identified as driving organisational performance. Internal communication can be defined as strategic when its purpose is to align internal stakeholders with the organisation's strategic intent. By facilitating strategic alignment, internal communication can play a critical role in organisational performance.

Research on strategic internal communication is limited and virtually non-existent when considered within the INGO context. However, by considering communication management theory, strategic management theory and NGO management theory, it is possible to develop theoretical propositions on the strategic functioning of internal communication in INGOs. In particular, the theory suggests that a postmodern approach to strategic management and strategic internal communication can assist INGOs in addressing many of the challenges they face.

This study explores the strategic functioning of internal communication in INGOs through exploratory, qualitative case studies. The evidence shows that internal communication in INGOs does not generally function strategically. However, the function is recognised as having potential to improve the performance of these organisations. In particular, there is support for the suitability of a postmodern approach to strategic internal communication in INGOs.



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Chapter 1

Orientation and background

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have a growing impact on the social and economic welfare of people in modern society making their performance and management ever more important. Over the last two decades, NGOs have grown in number, size and power. Today NGOs are responsible for \$1.1 trillion in capital and 19 million employees (Zadek, 2003 quoted in Van Tulder & Van der Zwart, 2006:16). They account for an average of five percent of jobs worldwide and provide many services that government and corporations will not and/or can not (Ehlers & Lazenby, 2007:274).

In South Africa, the official government registry of non-profit organisations contains over 58,000 NGOs (Department of Social Development, 2008). Meanwhile, a 1998 survey indicated there were over 98,920 NGOs in the country, accounting for 8.7 percent of the formal non-agricultural workforce and 1.3 percent of the gross domestic product (Swilling, Russell, Sokolowski & Salamon, 2004:111). The result proves that this is a sector with a vital role in the functioning and overall health of society.

One unique type of NGO is the international NGO (INGO). Globalisation has led to the rise of INGOs over the last decade (Katsus, 2004:387-389). In 1981, there were 13,000 known INGOs worldwide. In 2001, this number had increased to over 47,000 and formal links between INGOs and international organisations, such as the United Nations (UN), the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the World Bank, had increased by 46 percent (Anheier, 2005:11). As such, the influence of INGOs is large and growing.

The critical and growing role played by NGOs and INGOs in society means that the performance of these organisations is vital. Academic research into the management of NGOs has increased over the last decade, but it has not kept pace with the growth of the sector (Anheier, 2005:12; Salamon, Sokolowski & List, 2004:4). Fundamentally, while a NGO does not make a profit, it does need to have a positive cash flow in order to complete its activities and provide its services (Ehlers & Lazenby, 2007:275). Therefore, NGOs must

adhere to effective management practices similar to all other forms of organisations (Chung & Lo, 2007:83). While this is the case, NGOs and INGOs possess unique characteristics that require management practices, generally developed for for-profit organisations, to be evaluated in their particular context. Internal communication is one domain in corporate management that needs to be evaluated within the NGO context.

Strategic internal communication has been called both the “promised land” (Oliver, 2000:179) and the “secret weapon” of successful organisations (Yates, 2006:71). It has been identified as a function that can have a major effect on an organisation’s performance. Yet, academic research on the process of internal communication in NGOs is not readily available.

Internal communication can be defined as strategic when this communication function is managed for the purpose of aligning internal stakeholders with the organisation’s strategic intent. Literature indicates that this type of internal communication improves an organisation’s chances of success and its bottom line (Robson & Tourish, 2005:213; Theaker, 2004:164; Yates, 2006:72). It does so by bringing the actions of an organisation’s employees in line with its mission and objectives (Dolphin, 2005:173; Verwey, 2003:3; Yates, 2006:74) through ongoing negotiations between an organisation and its employees to build healthy relationships (Ströh, 2007:216). Strategic internal communication must ensure that the organisation’s strategic intent is sufficiently known and understood for strategic alignment to occur (Puth, 2002:198). If it does, the result is improvement in organisational performance as identified through the following indicators: increased employee engagement, commitment to and enhancement of the corporate reputation and organisational prestige (Dolphin, 2005:171; Meyer & De Wet, 2007:19). As such, **strategic internal communication plays a critical role in the performance of an organisation.**

NGOs have several distinguishing characteristics that influence the application of strategic internal communication in this context. First, mission and values are central to NGOs because they guide decision making. Unlike profit-driven corporations there is no financial bottom-line to provide the basis for strategic decisions (Sawhill & Williamson quoted in Brown & Yoshioka, 2003:6) whether on its own or in combination with the mission statement. Instead, NGOs make decisions on the basis of their mission and in accordance

with their values in order to achieve their goals and maintain their legitimacy. Second, a NGO is dependent on funders for revenue while providing its services to a different client, unlike in a corporation where there is a direct exchange of funds and services/product between the client/customer and the organisation (Ehlers & Lazenby, 2007:278). Third, NGOs are limited by both the amount of funds available and by restrictions from donors on how they can use them. Finally, employees of NGOs are not necessarily motivated by financial reward but “by an intrinsic need for self worth” that is obtained by working towards a worthwhile mission (Maneerat, Hale & Singhal, 2005:189). These characteristics of NGOs do not excuse them from having sound and effective management practices. This however, means that **these practices need to be evaluated within the unique context of NGOs in order to optimise their impact on organisational performance.**

Strategic internal communication can have a major impact on the performance of NGOs and INGOs. With the growing role these organisations are playing in society, it is necessary to ensure management practices are effective in this unique context. This study takes a first step in this direction by considering the management of strategic internal communication in INGOs.

1.2 THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The above introduction identified a need to investigate and ensure that management practices are relevant and effective for INGOs. With the influential role played by INGOs in society, it is of ever greater importance for these organisations to follow effective management practices. Strategic internal communication has been identified as a critical management process that has an impact on organisational performance. However, academic literature on strategic internal communication generally, and within NGOs in particular, is lacking. In addition, no literature has been found that outlines the current state of internal communication in INGOs. As such, this study is centred on the following research question: “*Does internal communication in INGOs function strategically?*”

1.3 THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

The research question is best understood within a contextual framework. In particular, it is necessary to understand the context in which INGOs operate, the current perspectives on NGO management and the role of strategic internal communication in the performance of all organisations, including INGOs.

1.3.1 Placing INGOs in context

NGOs and INGOs are part of a broader component of society, generally referred to as civil society. Civil society is that part of society separate from the state and market and formed by people coming together in the pursuit of shared interests. As such, “civil society is created, changed, and maintained through various types of communication” (Botan & Taylor, 2005:685). It is considered one of three spheres of society, alongside the state and market. How these three spheres function and interact comprises the functioning of society as a whole and each sphere plays a key role (Van Tulder & Van der Zwart, 2006:8).

The role of civil society can be seen as one of filling in the gaps, providing those products and services that the market and state either cannot or will not provide. As such, it includes many functions, such as delivering vital human services, empowering the disadvantaged, giving expression to artistic, religious and culture impulses, building communities and mobilizing individual efforts in the pursuit of a common good (Salamon *et al.*, 2004:3-4). Civil society organisations (CSOs) can range from small, informal clubs and social groups, to large social movements and international organisations, all of which are formed on the basis of shared values. The most important representatives of civil society are NGOs and they are primarily responsible for the growing influence of civil society on the local and international scene (Van Tulder & Van der Zwart, 2006:61).

The term NGO, while it could apply to almost all CSOs, is generally associated with development organisations (Salamon *et al.*, 2004:3-4). These organisations fulfil functions in developing countries ranging from service provision and empowering the poor to advocating individual and group rights. In developed countries, these organisations raise funds, raise awareness and advocate on development issues. As noted above, international NGOs (INGOs) have increased substantially worldwide over the last three

decades; however, the rate of expansion has been even greater in low and middle income countries, such as South Africa. It is within this context of a growing INGOs presence in South Africa and worldwide that this study is undertaken. The INGO context is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

1.3.2 INGO management

With the growth in the number and influence of INGOs, increasing attention has been paid to the accountability and legitimacy of these organisations. INGOs have multiple stakeholders to whom they are accountable, including members, donors and the publics they seek to assist (Ehlers & Lazenby, 2007:277). Meanwhile, their legitimacy is constantly called into question by the lack of representation of this last group in their decision-making bodies (Long, 2008:51). In this complex operating environment, NGOs require solid management practices to perform effectively.

Since the modern foundations for the study of CSOs and NGOs were laid only two decades ago, there has been huge growth in the field (Anheier, 2005:12). However, research into the management of CSOs generally (Anheier, 2005:115), and NGOs in particular (Lewis, 2007:9), has been lacking. Some authors have grouped the management of CSOs in with the management of public institutions (McNabb, 2002; Pynes, 2004; Steiss, 2003). Other authors, such as Rania (quoted in Katz, 2006:335), have argued that INGOs are being pressured by funders to adopt the management practices of trans-national corporations which do not necessarily apply because of their unique characteristics. Their critique of this pressure is supported by CSO and NGO management scholars, such as Anheier (2005) and Lewis (2007). These scholars argue that CSOs and NGOs are a distinct type of organisation with specific management needs.

The argument is not that management in CSOs should be approached in a less rigorous way than in corporations or the public sector. Indeed, as elucidated by Udoh James (quoted in Lewis, 2007:9), “management capacity is the lifeblood of all organizations, irrespective of whether they are private entities, public agencies, not-for-profit concerns or non-governmental varieties.” The argument is rather that CSOs have unique characteristics that require special consideration. One of the distinguishing characteristics

of CSOs is that they tend to be more complex than businesses of comparable size (Anheier, 2005:229). Known as the “law of nonprofit complexity,” this characteristic is a result of the multiple stakeholders, missing profit motive and prominence of value-based missions. As a result of this and other characteristics of CSOs, a unique field of CSO and NGO management is emerging (Lewis, 2007:9).

In order to illustrate this unique management field, Lewis (2007:219) developed a composite framework for NGO management. This framework argues that NGOs should draw upon a variety of management traditions – generic management, third-sector management, development management and public sector management – in order to develop unique management practices that fit their context and organisational characteristics. This study is conducted from the perspective of this composite framework and draws upon different fields of management study in order to understand how strategic internal communication should be managed in INGOs. This perspective is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

1.3.3 Strategic internal communication in INGOs

As noted in the introduction, internal communication has garnered considerable attention in the business world in recent years for its ability to improve organisational performance when implemented strategically. It does so through a specific function: aligning employees with the organisation’s strategic goals so that they are committed to those goals and actively engaged in achieving them (Dolphin 2005:173; Verwey, 2003:3; Yates, 2006:74).

Strategic internal communication facilitates the relationship between an organisation and its employees in order to align them towards achieving the same goals and objectives. Therefore, the relationship between an organisation’s management and its employees is at the centre of strategic internal communication (Kennan & Hazleton, 2006:311). As noted in the introduction, employees in NGOs are often motivated partly by a genuine desire and commitment to the organisation’s mission. However, as shown in a study by Brown & Yoshioka (2003:14), while a CSO’s mission does attract employees, it is not enough to maintain them, particularly in the face of unsatisfactory pay and perceived poor management. In this context, strategic internal communication has the potential to

increase motivation, improve management practices and generally maintain a positive relationship between management and employees.

Strategic internal communication has the potential to help INGOs handle an additional issue as well. INGOs generally have a staff drawn from a large number of countries (Anheier, 2005:349). The result is a highly diverse workforce with different cultures, languages and values. This is particularly the case in South Africa, where even the local population is incredibly diverse. In this context, strategic internal communication plays the role of facilitating negotiations between employees and the organisation to develop consensus on the key values and goals of the organisation and encourage diversity and creativity to keep the organisation both focused and adaptable in its dynamic environment.

It is in recognition of the potential of strategic internal communication to improve the performance of INGOs that this research question is posed. The concept of strategic internal communication is further explored in Chapters 4 and 5.

1.4 GENERAL AIM AND OBJECTIVES

1.4.1 General Aim

To explore the current state of strategic internal communication in INGOs.

1.4.2 Objectives

Objective 1

To identify key components of strategic internal communication in INGOs through a review and synthesis of relevant literature.

Objective 2

To identify the current strategic internal communication practices of INGOs empirically.

Objective 3

To compare the empirical findings about current strategic internal communication practices in INGOs with the synthesis from the relevant literature.

1.5 META-THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The meta-theoretical and conceptual framework for this study includes seven layers, moving from the abstract (meta-theoretical assumptions and worldview) to the specific (concepts and constructs) of this study. Table 1.1 outlines the complete framework.

Table 1.1: Meta-theoretical and conceptual framework

General Aim	To explore the current state of strategic internal communication in INGOs			
Meta-theoretical assumptions	Epistemological Ontological Axiological			
Worldview	Integration of postmodernism and social constructivism			
Paradigms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholder theory Three sector view of society Neo-institutional view of organisations 			
Grand Theory	Postmodern strategic management of communication			
Theoretical disciplines	Communication Management	Management Science		Human Resource Management
		<i>For-profit sector</i>	<i>Non-profit sector</i>	
Sub-fields within theoretical disciplines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate communication Organisational communication Internal communication Public relations Development communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic management Postmodern strategic management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-profit (CSO) management NGO management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employee communication Employee relations
Individual theories from specific theoretical disciplines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Interpretations of the excellence theory of public relations (PR) Symmetrical communication Theory of strategic communication Contingency theory Development communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enabling management Learning organisation Complexity theory Strategic thinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Civil society Law of Non-profit complexity Differences between CSOs and corporations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisational culture Organisational structure Theories of control
Individual models from specific theoretical disciplines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public-information, persuasion, asymmetrical and symmetrical models of PR 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Composite framework of NGO management Analytical-normative model of NPOs Three sector society model 	
Concepts	INGO, Strategic internal communication			
Constructs	Strategic intent Strategic position and role		Strategic alignment Strategic knowledge	

1.5.1 Meta-theoretical assumptions

Meta-theoretical assumptions are the most abstract component of the conceptual framework. In Greek, meta means “over” (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:20), therefore meta-theory can be understood to mean the theory of theory (Baldwin, 2004:23). As such, meta-theoretical assumptions guide and constrain the understanding of theory and research.

Within the academic community, there has been considerable debate about meta-theory (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:20). The reason is partly because meta-theoretical assumptions are basic beliefs with no way to establish the truth (Guba & Lincoln, 1994:107). All researchers have meta-theoretical assumptions underlying their work, although many do not explicitly acknowledge these (Baldwin, 2004:23). The following discussion explicitly states those epistemological, ontological and axiological assumptions that form the meta-theoretical position adopted in this study.

1.5.1.1 Epistemological position

Epistemology is the study of knowledge: what is known, how it is known (Baldwin, 2004:23; Wood, 2004:56) and “who is the knower” (Anderson, 1996:49). One’s answers to these questions places them on a continuum that ranges from there being a single unchanging Truth, to a single truth with multiple interpretations, to multiple truths with multiple interpretations, to finally multiple truths that can only be partially interpreted (Anderson, 1996:49). The position a researcher takes can determine what she considers constitutes acceptable knowledge (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007:102). This study is positioned on the second rung of the continuum, recognising that there may be an absolute reality but that it is impossible to know because of the subjective role of human perception. Thus knowledge is considered to be constituted, not just by objective facts, but also by the subjective perceptions of people.

Similar to the positions regarding what knowledge is, there are various positions on how knowledge is obtained. A common question is whether an individual or society determines the truth (Baldwin, 2004:23). For example, rationalists believe that knowledge is the product of human reasoning to uncover the truth (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005:19). This study

takes the position that reality is socially constructed, that people create knowledge in order to function in the world with meaning negotiated as part of a larger group.

The epistemological position taken in this study underpins certain assumptions about the research phenomenon. It is thus assumed that a single reality within an organisation cannot be identified. Rather, members of the organisation create an understanding of the organisation in negotiation with each other, but each views the organisation from a subjective standpoint. Therefore, it is understood in this study that an objective view of an INGO is not possible and that in order to gain a comprehensive view of strategic internal communication, multiple sources of data are necessary.

1.5.1.2 Ontological position

Ontology is concerned with basic assumptions about human nature and reality (Baldwin, 2004:23; Saunders *et al.*, 2007:108). Determinists argue that humans are constrained by social, biological and environmental factors and are therefore reactive and passive in their behaviour. On the opposite side, pragmatists argue that people choose their behaviour in order to meet their needs, in other words, they exert free will (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005:20). This study occupies an ontological middle ground. It takes the position that humans make choices within the confines of social and cultural constraints.

Ontology is also concerned with the duality between objectivism and its view that social entities exist in an external reality versus subjectivism and its view that social phenomenon are created from the perceptions and consequent actions of social actors (Saunders *et al.*, 2007:108). This study adopts the subjectivist view that it is the perceptions and actions of social actors that create social phenomenon and that these are not independently part of an external reality.

This ontological position results in certain assumptions about the research question: does internal communication in INGOs function strategically. For example, it is assumed that decisions and actions taken by people within INGOs are guided both by personal goals and by social constraints. It is also assumed that internal communication as a phenomenon is firmly embedded within the social and cultural environment of the organisation. Finally, the position underpins the assumption that change is possible within

an organisation, although constrained by environmental factors. In terms of methodology, this position supports the need to consider the social and cultural context in which the research phenomenon occurs.

1.5.1.3 Axiological position

Axiology refers to the study of values. In particular, it is concerned with the question of whether theory and research can be separated from the values and interest of those creating or conducting it (Baldwin, 2004:24; Saunders *et al.*, 2007:110). In classical science it is fully separated from epistemology in that science was concerned with what is and not with what ought to be (Anderson, 1996:188). From this perspective, science took the view that theory and research can (or more recently, should aim to be) value free – that the role of the scholar is to produce knowledge and the use of that knowledge is not their concern (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005:20-21). This study, however, rejects this value-free position in favour of a value-conscious position. This position argues that value-free inquiry is not possible: the very choice of what to study is influenced by the values of the researcher (Baldwin, 2004:24). Similarly, the position acknowledges that the process of studying a phenomenon can change that phenomenon. Therefore, rather than aiming to be value-free, the value conscious position recognizes that knowledge is used by the powerful to dominate the weak and therefore researchers must take responsibility for the ways that their research will be used in society.

In addition to a recognition of the effects of the researcher's values on the study, this axiological position results in certain assumptions about the research phenomenon. Primarily, it necessitates an approach to strategic internal communication which does not view it as solely a tool to be used by management to manipulate and control its employees. Rather, strategic internal communication is assumed to be a tool to enhance the performance of an organisation, while also empowering the workforce. In terms of methodology, this position requires that the evidence be analysed from a critical perspective. It also guides the researcher in understanding the ethical implications of her work and the activities needed to address this.

1.5.2 Worldview

The second level of the conceptual framework is the worldview. A worldview is a way of seeing the world and understanding reality. As Risse (2007:126) describes it, it is a lens through which a researcher looks at the world and thus influences any interpretations made. The worldview adopted for this study rests firmly on the meta-theoretical assumptions outlined above and draws upon two inter-related philosophical traditions: postmodernism and social constructivism. As noted by Ströh (2007:204), “postmodernism underwrites a worldview that relies on constructivism.” Therefore, instead of resulting in two different lenses through which the study is undertaken, these two traditions combine in a complementary way to provide an integrated perspective on the research phenomenon.

Both postmodernism and social constructivism have multiple interpretations and definitions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994:109; Prawat, 1996:215; Risse, 2007:126; Ströh, 2007:204). Postmodernism can be seen as a general rejection of the main tenets of modernism (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:40; McKie & Munshi, 2007:77; Taylor & Trujillo, 2001:161). In particular, postmodernism rejects universality in favour of context-specific historically-situated narratives (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:45). Meanwhile, at its core, constructivism is the belief that reality is a relative concept and there are multiple constructions of ‘reality’ dependent on the individuals and groups that create them (Guba & Lincoln, 1994:111). As such, social constructivism is the view that social reality is constructed and reproduced through the daily actions of people (Berger & Luckmann, 2002; Risse, 2007:128). These two positions complement each other in unique ways, making them an appropriate worldview for this study.

As noted above, postmodernism rejects the idea of a universal explanation for a phenomenon and instead emphasises the importance of context. Social constructivism complements this position in that it is an ontological middle ground between individualism and structuralism. It views humans as inseparable from their social environment because it defines who they are, but, at the same time, believes humans create, reproduce and change culture through their actions (Risse, 2007:128). Gergen (1985:267) describes it as follows “the terms in which the world is understood are social artefacts, products of historically situated interchanges among people,” thus emphasising the importance of the historical context. As such, social constructivism also emphasises the role of context and

identifies how those contexts can be influenced and changed. For this study, this combined approach emphasises that strategic internal communication is deeply dependent on the context in which it is undertaken and that changes to this context occur via human interaction.

Since change occurs through human interaction, social constructivism emphasises communication and discourse practices because it is through these that people make sense of the world and give meaning to their activities (Risse, 2007:131). Even the basic language used maintains the social constructed reality (Berger & Luckmann, 2002:48). Therefore, communication is central to the construction of reality (Littlejohn in Ströh, 2007:204) and thus at the centre of any organisation. The postmodern approach also places discourse at the centre of an organisation with interaction and relationships as the means for organic organising (Ströh, 2007:205). In addition, postmodernism focuses on the fragmentation and differences between people (Blaney & Wolfe, 2004:269). Thus it recognises the complex relationships and diversity inherent in an organisation. Within the context of this study, these two perspectives combine in the recognition of the central role of communication in the negotiations of complex relationships between diverse players which in turn construct the reality within the organisation.

Within social constructivism, the socially constructed world is generally seen by its' inhabitants as being an objective reality (Berger & Luckman, 2002:47). Thus humans are deeply embedded in and affected by their social environment and therefore are guided by a desire to do the right thing within their social context and not just to realise their own advantage. Postmodernism also emphasises the role of values. As Cilliers (quoted in Ströh 2007:207) notes, values are not just nice to have but necessary for the growth and survival of an organisation. Values allow for the decentralisation of control and the self-organisation of the organisation making it more flexible and adaptable in its environment (Ströh 2007:207). Alternatively, compromising those values can threaten the survival of the organisation when the environment (for example, the public) can turn on it. The combination of the social constructivist and postmodern approach to values is particularly apt when considering NGOs. Values generally play an important role in NGOs which are guided by the intentions (if not the reality) of doing good. The social constructivist perspective helps explain why this is the case while the postmodernist perspective

identifies the importance of these values to the organisation. Within this context, internal communication plays the role of building healthy relationships within the organisation based on its values (Ströh 2007:207).

Social constructivism is generally descriptive in its aim (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005:46), however it can also have a critical element (Grunig & White, 1992:53; Risse, 2007:128). This is because reality is not only constructed but can be deconstructed and reconstructed (Grunig & White, 1992:54). This is a key point for strategic internal communication because it underpins the idea that through communication, the organisation can be changed. Through its rejection of meta-narratives, postmodernism also adopts a critical perspective and argues that organisations need to challenge what they traditionally hold sacred, such as culture and strategic intent (Ströh 2007:207). In addition, it means that a researcher studying an organisation should similarly question traditionally held views of organising and organisations. By integrating the social constructivist position with the postmodern position, there is a view that strategic internal communication need not embody traditional forms of management, but can serve as a tool for challenging the old way of doing things. For the researcher, the perspective also indicates a need to look beyond the traditional linear process of management.

The integration of postmodernism and social constructivism provides a particular worldview for this study. It emphasises the role of context, communication, relationships and values within the organisation, all key components of strategic internal communication. In addition, it notes the need to consider the research question from a critical perspective. It is with these factors in mind that this study is undertaken.

1.5.3 Paradigms

Paradigms form the third level of the conceptual framework. Paradigms are a means of clustering theories together (Baldwin, 2004:25). They are more specific than a worldview in that a paradigm is generally applicable to a specific area of research. However, each paradigm can encompass multiple theories and grand theories.

Three paradigms outline the conceptual perspective taken to this study's research context. They are stakeholder theory, neo-institutionalist view of organisations and three-sector view of society. These are each discussed separately below.

1.5.3.1 Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory outlines a specific way of looking at an organisation. Its central concept, the stakeholder, is classically defined as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives" (Freeman, 1984 quoted in Friedman & Miles, 2006:1). In stakeholder theory, the organisation is no longer viewed as an isolated unit, guided and managed solely by its directors under the influence of its shareholders (Friedman & Miles, 2006:25). Instead, the organisation is seen as interdependent, with multiple stakeholder groups whom it both affects and is affected by. As a result, an organisation must become more responsive to its external environment and the changes within it in order to survive (Welch & Jackson, 2007:183).

This study's research question is considered through the paradigm of normative stakeholder theory. The normative perspectives require stakeholder relations to be based on morals and ethics and require broader consideration of all stakeholder interests with the aim of developing win-win situations (Deetz, 2003:608) and ultimately a more 'just' society. Deetz (2003) refers to this normative perspective as a 'reformed stakeholder' conception arguing that consideration of the values and interests of any one stakeholder over all the others is to privilege the one group, at the expense of the organisation as a whole (Deetz, 2000:273). This normative stakeholder perspective complements the neo-institutionalist view of organisations, adopted by this study and discussed in the following section. Under both these perspectives, an organisation, such as an INGO, cannot be simply guided by its own rational decision-making but must also adhere to social pressures, as pushed forth by its stakeholders, in order to maintain its legitimacy and thus its long-term survival.

Postmodernism has influenced certain conceptions of normative stakeholder theory. From a postmodern worldview, normative stakeholder theory calls for the recognition and consideration of interests and relationships that may not be part of traditional management practices (Friedman & Miles, 2006:68). It argues for the adoption of multiple stakeholder dialogue to replace traditional manager-centred forms of decision making (Friedman &

Miles, 2006:69). As such, normative stakeholder theory serves as a basis for postmodern strategic management that is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Stakeholder theory fundamentally validates the importance of strategic internal communication because it identifies the intrinsic value of all stakeholders, employees and other internal stakeholders included, not just as instruments to further the organisation's goals but as important groups who need to be considered in their own right (Friedman & Miles, 2006:29). In addition, Deetz (2003:609) notes the importance of communication practices to the 'reformed stakeholder' conception in order to ensure constructive dialogue without costing productivity. As such stakeholder theory both justifies internal communication as a necessary and beneficial management function and highlights the role of communication therein. It is thus a cornerstone of this study.

1.5.3.2 Neo-institutionalist view of organisations

This study adopts the neo-institutionalist view of organisations. From this perspective, organisational actions are not solely guided by rational decision-making, but also by institutions (Anheier, 2005:147). Institutions are understood to be norms, rules and values taken for granted in the social context (Risse, 2007:130) in which the organisation is located. Derived directly from the social constructivist worldview, the neo-institutionalist view of organisations strives to address the tension between rational decision-making and the complex social pressure on organisational decision-makers (Anheier, 2005:148). Institutions are viewed as placing constraints on the number and type of legitimate decisions available to an organisation. As such legitimacy (the conformance with institutional expectations) is "the central resource that organisations require for long-term survival" (Anheier, 2005:147). In other words, organisations must conform to the social expectations placed upon them in order to be successful over the long term. It is against the backdrop of this paradigm of organisations that this study addresses the question of strategic internal communication in INGOs.

1.5.3.3 Three sector view of society

Up until the 1980s, a two-sector view of society was dominant (Anheier, 2005:13). In this view, society was made up of the state sector and the market sector. However, with the decline of the welfare state, the end of the Cold War and all the changes these brought to

society, a new view emerged. In this view, society contains three mutually dependant and inter-related sectors: state, market and civil society. Civil society and its many components including CSOs are given equal weighting in terms of the importance of their role in society *vis-a-vis* the state and the market. It is within this paradigm that a majority of studies on CSOs, including this research study, occur. A more in-depth discussion of what this view of society means for the importance and characteristics of CSOs is provided in Chapter 2.

1.5.4 Grand Theory

Theory can be defined as “a description of concepts and specifications of the relationships between or among concepts” (Metts, 2004:9). Steyn (quoted in Steyn & Butschi 2003) describes a grand theory as a comprehensive theory that applies to an entire phenomenon. As such, grand theory forms the fourth level of the conceptual framework in that it incorporates the multiple concepts implicated in a phenomenon and their many relationships. There is no grand theory of internal communication specifically, however, there is a theory that can explain the role, purpose and process of communication in and by organisations: the strategic management of communication.

Strategic management is a proactive, mission-driven form of management which includes a heightened awareness of the organisation’s external and internal environment (Ehlers & Lazenby, 2007:2). This means that the organisation proactively engages in strategic planning on an ongoing basis to align its actions and goals with its environment in order to improve the organisation’s performance. Within this framework, communication management serves the role of monitoring the organisation’s environment and ensuring that it is taken into consideration during the strategic planning process as well as managing the relationships between the organisation and its stakeholders (Steyn & Puth, 2000:452). Within this framework, strategic internal communication can be seen as the process of monitoring the internal environment, managing the relationship between the organisation and its employees and ensuring that the organisation’s strategy and employees are aligned.

Traditional strategic management of communication is a linear hierarchical process whereby top-management develops a strategy which is implemented by the organisation

to obtain pre-determined results. Postmodernism rejects the structure and linearity of this approach as impossible due to the unpredictability of the environment and calls for a more flexible and participative strategic management, where management is thought of more as facilitation than management (Ströh, 2007:205/215). Stacey (quoted in Ströh, 2007) defines postmodern strategic management as “the process of actively participating in the conversations around important emerging issues.” In taking this perspective, the role of communication management still remains focused on environmental scanning and relationship management, but rather than conforming to management principles, its role is to embrace diversity and creativity by ensuring constant negotiations with its many stakeholders in its ever-changing environment (Ströh, 2007:211). As such, the role of strategic internal communication centres on the negotiations and relationships between an organisation and its internal stakeholders, its employees.

Strategic management is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. Strategic communication and strategic internal communication are addressed in Chapter 4.

1.5.5 Disciplines

While there is debate as to whether internal communication is a human resources or a communication management phenomenon, this study firmly places it within the communication management discipline based on its strategic role as part of the communication management function as discussed in the previous section. That said, as was noted in section 1.3.2 and the discussion around the Lewis’ (2007) composite framework for NGO management, this study does draw upon several different theoretical disciplines to explain the phenomenon within the INGO context. These disciplines include communication management, management sciences for both the corporate and non-profit sector, and human resources management.

1.5.6 Theories

Theories form the fifth level of the framework. Theories generally deal with fewer concepts and relationships than grand theories because they look at more specific elements of the research phenomenon. Each of the disciplines drawn upon for this study provides specific theories that help to clarify the research question. For example, management science

provides a variety of theories that give insight into the broader functioning of management in organisations. From the corporate sector, theories such as the interactive management and the learning organisation provide an understanding of the role and process of management in INGOs. Following on this, complexity theory outlines the manner in which an INGO needs to balance the chaos and instability with order and stability in order to avoid stagnation and lack of progress in the modern world. In addition, the emerging subfield of non-profit and NGO management considers the unique management needs of NGOs. For example, its view on the differences between INGOs and corporations which culminates in the law of non-profit complexity helps explain how standard management theory and techniques can and cannot be directly applied to INGOs. Finally, human resources management, concerned with the management of employees, provides theories that help explain management of strategic internal communication.

However, as the home discipline for this study, communication management is home to many theories that help in understanding strategic internal communication. For example, the theory of strategic communication highlights the role, function and objectives of strategic internal communication while symmetrical communication theory highlights how it should be conducted. In particular, the Excellence Study of Public Relations developed many theories that directly relate to this study's research phenomenon. More specifically, new interpretations of the Excellence Study, influenced by postmodern thinking, are heavily drawn while exploring the theoretical process of strategic internal communication in INGOs. These theories are discussed next.

The excellence theory of PR was the result of the IABC Excellence Study conducted during the early 1990s. Public relations (PR) and communication management can be considered one and the same. For example, Grunig and Hunt (quoted in Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2006:35) define PR as "the management of communication between an organization and its publics." As such, the theories within the study, which started by looking at the value of public relations to organisations and society incorporates multiple other theories to explain how and why it achieves that value (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2006:35), is equally applicable to communication management as to public relations.

Critics of the theory (for examples, see McKie & Munshi, 2007:36) in its original expression (see Dozier, Grunig & Grunig, 1995; Grunig, 1992) argue that excellence theory is essentially a modernist theory. As such, several researchers have taken a postmodern worldview to further explore and expand this theory (for examples, see Toth, 2007). This study draws upon these new postmodern interpretations of the excellence theory of PR to identify those key components of this theory that form part of its conceptual background.

The excellence theory is based on the premise that the value of PR lies in how it helps reconcile and build the relationships between the organisation and its publics in the internal and external environment (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2006:35). It argues that the PR function, when operating 'excellently', helps to ensure that the organisation works in harmony with its publics, behaves in ways acceptable to these groups and thus avoids many of the negative consequences of not addressing the concerns of these publics. This component is in line with a postmodern perspective which emphasises the importance of interaction and relationships (Stroh, 2007:204). Within this framework, the value of strategic internal communication rests on how it maintains and develops the relationships between the organisation and its internal publics.

The excellence theory argues that these relationships need to be based on symmetrical communication. Symmetrical communication in PR occurs when the organisation engages in dialogue with its publics where it is not only trying to persuade those publics to the organisation's point of view but is also open to being persuaded as well (Grunig & White, 1992:39). Excellence theory posits that internal communication in particular should be symmetrical (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2006:35). The reason is because symmetrical internal communication helps build a participative organisational culture that increases employee satisfaction which, in turn, improves organisational performance.

The postmodern interpretation of the excellence theory accepts symmetrical PR as the normative ideal (McKie & Munshi, 2007:37). This approach argues that a focus on building democratic process and healthy two-way relationships will lead to the overall success of an organisation (Ströh, 2007:213). However, as critics note (McKie & Munshi, 2007:37), there are many practical issues in implementing symmetrical PR, including accusations that it is misleading in its promise of equality amid uneven power distribution. Therefore,

even in organisations claiming to practice symmetrical internal communication, there is still a need to be aware of and consider the real power dynamics of the organisation and not accept outward trappings of equal relationships as necessarily reflective of the inner reality. As such, this study is conducted from the viewpoint that symmetrical internal communication is the ideal but requires careful evaluation.

For communication management to function optimally and enhance organisational performance, the excellence theory states that all PR functions must be integrated within the organisation (Grunig & White, 1992:39). Excellence theory posits that internal communication in particular should be symmetrical (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2006:35). All programmes need to be aligned with the overall strategy of the organisation. Within a postmodern interpretation, the strategic concept adopts a more flexible, adaptive and participative connotation (Ströh, 2007:37). Postmodern strategic management and its relation to strategic internal communication is discussed further in Chapter 3 and 4.

Finally, the excellence theory of PR not only recognizes 'excellent' internal communication as a component of excellent PR, but also as a prerequisite (Grunig, 1992:532). As such, strategic internal communication is a central component of an organisation's overall communication function. Excellence theory and its conceptualisation of internal communication is discussed further in Chapter 4.

1.5.7 Models

In addition to theories, this study draws upon several models from the identified disciplines. For example, in communication management, the publicity, public information, asymmetrical and symmetrical models of public relations provide insight into the functional and normative processes of communication management. Meanwhile, several models from the non-profit sector of management sciences are useful in understanding how INGOs need to be managed. For example, its model of a three-sector society positions INGOs within broader society. In addition, its analytical-normative model of non-profit organisations (NPOs) helps characterise how these organisations need to be managed.

1.5.8 Concepts

The final two levels of the conceptual framework, concepts and constructs are very specific to the research phenomenon being studied. Concepts are objects or ideas that have something in common (Comadena, 2004:38). They are “not tangible objects but definitions that allow scholars to investigate a particular phenomenon” (Metts, 2004:10). As such, they refer to an abstract notion that has particular characteristics. This study focuses on two key concepts: INGOs and strategic internal communication. These terms are further explored in Chapters 2 and 4 respectively.

1.5.8.1 INGOs

INGOs are a specific type of NGO which in turn is a specific type of CSO. Therefore, to define INGO, it is necessary to first define CSO and NGO. CSOs form the organisational infrastructure of civil society. Salamon *et al.* (2004:10) identified five characteristics required of an organisation for it to be considered a CSO. It must be organized, private, not profit-distributing, self-governing and voluntary. The United Nation’s *Handbook on Nonprofit Institutions* (quoted in Anheier, 2005:54) provides a similar but modified list arguing that CSOs must be: self-governing, not-for-profit and non-profit-distributing, institutionally separate from government and non-compulsory. As clarification, it should be noted that in both these lists, the terms voluntary and non-compulsory refer to the requirement to participate or contribute to the organisation as opposed to any reference to a complete or partially voluntary workforce. What these two lists make clear is that CSOs are private self-governing organisations who invest any resources they make back into the organisation and with whom people choose to participate voluntarily.

As noted previously, the term NGO is generally applied to a specific type of CSO that is involved in some way in development work. Development is understood to be improving the social, cultural and/or economic well-being of society. Thus NGOs encompass a wide range of organisations engaged in a multitude of activities. Considered From various perspectives they are considered to be more efficient, more flexible, more innovative, more democratic, more equal and more capable of promoting social change than government and international development agencies, NGOs have grown into powerful players in the development field (Anheier, 2005:340).

INGOs are at their most basic simply NGOs operating in two or more countries. They too fulfil the characteristics of CSOs, but with the added component of being engaged in some manner in development. This engagement can range from very political advocacy work, to entirely operational service provision (Van Tulder & van der Zwart, 2006:66). While the term INGOs often conjures up visions of huge multinational organisations such as Amnesty International and Oxfam, INGOs exist in multiple organisational forms. These range from large centralised organisations to small decentralised organisations. The only common characteristics that can be used to define this group is that they are all CSOs engaged in development and operating in two or more countries. For further discussion of CSOs, NGOs and INGOs see Chapter 2.

1.5.8.2 Strategic internal communication

Strategic internal communication forms the central concept of this study. Although there is a growing body of knowledge on internal communication, there is no general agreement in the literature as to its definition. One common definition is that provided by Frank and Bothwell (quoted in Dolphin, 2005:172; Welch & Jackson, 2007:179) which sees internal communication as “the communication transactions between individuals and/or groups at various levels and in different areas of specialisation that are intended to design and redesign organisations, to implement designs, and to co-ordinate day-to-day activities.” Yet, Welch and Jackson (2007:179) note that their definition, in fact, refers to organisational communication as a field of study and practice and not to internal communication as a component of communication management.

This critique hints at a common difference between definitions of internal communication: whether it includes managed and unmanaged communication or just managed communication. Many authors (for examples see Scholes, 1997:xviii; Stauss & Hoffmann in Yeomans, 2006; Welch & Jackson, 2007:184; and Chen, 2008:167) include only managed communication, while others (for example see Kalla, 2005:304 and Maubane, 2006:11) include both. In this study, the term strategic internal communication will refer to only the managed use of communication in the organisation.

A second area of divergence among definitions of internal communication is its goals. For example, in their definition of internal communication Stauss and Hoffman (quoted in

Yeomans, 2006) declare this management function to have the aim of “systematically influenc[ing] the knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of current employees.” Meanwhile, in his definition, Chen (2008:167) describes the purpose of internal communication as helping to “identify, establish, and maintain relationships between an organisation’s management and its employees.” These examples reflect only some of the diversity among definitions. This study, however, views the purpose of managed internal communication through the framework of its role in the strategic management of the organisation.

A strategy is “an effort or deliberate action that an organisation implements to out-perform its rivals” (Ehlers & Lazenby, 2007:2). It can refer to the “logic behind the actions” and the organisation’s “pro-active response to an ever-changing environment” (Steyn & Puth, 2000:29). The essence of an organisation’s strategy is exhibited in its strategic intent. Strategic intent refers to the vision and direction the strategy provides and the new areas the organisation is set to explore, as well as to the goal and purpose this exploration is designed to achieve (Puth 2002:188). This latter is encapsulated in the organisation’s mission. A strategy’s purpose is to provide direction to an organisation’s activities by focusing them on its strategic goals and mission while ensuring that the methods used are in line with the environment and context in which the organisation operates (Steyn & Puth, 2000:29). Following on this, Hallahan, Holtzhausen, van Ruler, Vercic and Sriramesh (2007:20) define strategic communication as “the purposeful use of communication by an organisation to fulfil its mission.” Steyn and Puth (2000:452) state that the key role of strategic communication is to scan the organisation’s internal and external environment and manage the relationships between the organisation and its stakeholders bringing all in line to improve organisational performance and achieve the organisation’s mission.

As noted in section 1.5.4, from a postmodern perspective this purpose remains the same, but focuses on maintaining ongoing negotiations between the organisation and its stakeholders through which the organisational strategy emerges rather than being completely predetermined. Based on this understanding of ‘strategic’, this study views strategic internal communication as aligning an organisation with its internal environment and stakeholders through ongoing dialogue around its strategic intent. Therefore strategic internal communication is defined as:

“The strategic management of communication to align the organisation’s internal stakeholders with its strategic intent”.

1.5.9 Constructs

Constructs, the final and most specific level of the framework, are the elements that make up concepts. As such, they are easier to measure within a research study. Four constructs have been identified as composing strategic internal communication and will be measured as part of the empirical phase of this study.

Strategic internal communication’s first construct is its purpose: strategic alignment. As defined above, strategic alignment refers to bringing all elements within an organisation in line with its strategic intent so that they act together towards the same goals.

The second construct of strategic internal communication is its position and role: part of strategic management. In order to achieve strategic alignment, internal communication function must play a role in both strategy development and strategy implementation. In order to do so effectively, internal communication must be represented at the senior management level, either in its own right or as part of the remit of the most senior communicator.

The third construct is the knowledge of the senior communicator. The senior communicator requires the knowledge and experience to implement communication and internal communication strategically.

The final construct of strategic internal communication is its content focus: strategic intent. As noted above, the organisation’s strategic intent is the essence of an organisation’s strategy and as such is the central content focus of strategic internal communication. In other words, it can be considered ‘the message’ of strategic internal communication.

The strategic purpose, position, knowledge and content are the constructs of strategic internal communication and will be measured in this study. In addition, the process of

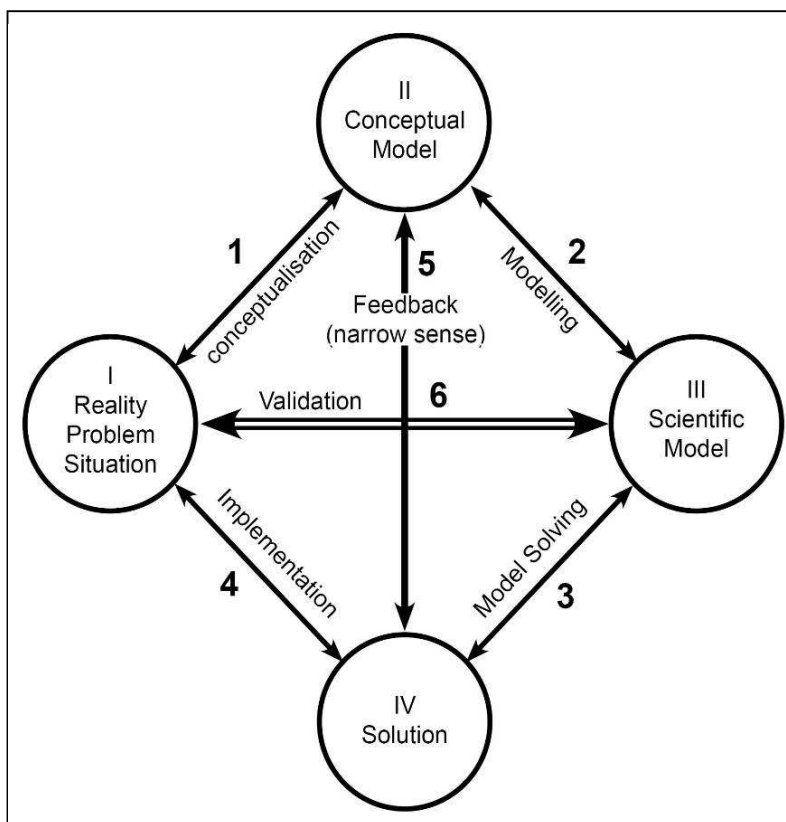
internal communication will also be considered. The INGO, the second concept discussed in the previous section, forms the context in which this measurement will occur and thus its construct will not be measured specifically.

The above discussion lays out the meta-theoretical and conceptual framework that guides this study. Its various components are discussed further in Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5.

1.6 APPROACH TO SCIENTIFIC PROBLEM SOLVING

This study approaches scientific problem solving using the model developed by Mitroff, Betz, Pondy and Sagasti (1974). This model is illustrated in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1: A systems view of problem-solving



Source: Mitroff *et al.* (1974:48)

Mitroff *et al.* (1974:46) developed their model based on the principle that a holistic view of a phenomenon is necessary in order to understand all its essential characteristics. As

such, their model takes a systems' view of problem-solving, examining the process as a whole and the many interactions between the different elements. In its simplest form, their model of problem-solving contains four key circles – the problem, the conceptual model, the scientific model and the solution – and four key processes – conceptualisation, modelling, model solving and implementation. However, Mitroff *et al.* (1974) emphasise that each of these components and processes are dependent on and influence each other. As well, the overall problem-solving process can start and finish at any place in the model using almost any combination of circles and processes, each with particular consequences for the study being undertaken.

This study is located between Circle I, the problem, and Circle II, the conceptual model, and is primarily engaged in the first process: conceptualisation. The process of conceptualisation is concerned with defining the research problem and determining the nature and number of variables that will need to be considered in finding a solution (Mitroff *et al.*, 1974:47). This study engages in conceptualisation to define the current process of and problems with managing strategic internal communication in INGOs and identify what variables and factors must be considered in finding a solution to this problem.

The study does not present these variables in a conceptual model, Circle II. Rather, this study is an exploratory first step to lay the foundation for future research to develop a conceptual model and move into the later stages of Mitroff *et al.*'s problem-solving model. As is discussed in Chapter 5, there is a wide variety of models and frameworks related to internal communication already in the literature, but there is very little relationship between them. Therefore this first step is necessary in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

1.7 IMPORTANCE AND BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

To date there has been relatively little academic interest in the management of internal communication (Asif & Sargeant, 2000:300; Kennan & Hazleton, 2006:312; Welch & Jackson, 2007:178; Yeomans, 2006:237). The primary focus of the academic literature has been the benefits of effective internal communication, particularly when it is strategic. Several positive indicators of corporate performance have been linked to strategic internal

communication including increased employee engagement and commitment, enhancement to the corporate reputation and organisational prestige (Dolphin, 2005:171; Meyer & De Wet, 2007:19), increased employee satisfaction and decreased resistance to change (Asif & Sargeant, 2000:299). Studies have also linked other indicators with more direct correlations to costs and effective strategic internal communication, including decreased employee turnover and reduced absenteeism (Yates, 2006:71), improved productivity, higher quality of services and products and increased levels of innovation (Clampitt & Downs in Tourish & Hargie, 2004:2). Overall, strategic internal communication has come to be seen as a means of improving a company's financial performance (Asif & Sargeant, 2000:299) and developing a sustainable competitive advantage (Yates, 2006:72).

Various studies have also been conducted to try to define and characterise internal communication (Dolphin, 2005; Welch & Jackson, 2007), yet there is little consensus on the definition or process of internal communication or what is needed for it to make a strategic contribution to the organisation. In Chapter 5, nine models, frameworks and theories related to strategic internal communication are introduced, such as Asif and Sargeant's (2000) model of internal communication in the financial service sector and Welch and Jackson's (2007) redefinition of the field from the stakeholder's perspective, but the majority of the models and frameworks are considered only within a specific sector and none have been found to have been studied by any academics other than their authors. , There is little agreement on a definition or model of strategic internal communication, leaving a gap in the academic literature.

The literature on NGO management is in a similar state. Despite the role played by NGOs in society, it is only in the last two decades that NGO management has been seen as distinct from the management of businesses and government and it still receives comparatively minor attention (Lewis, 2007:9). In addition, studies on NGO management have tended to focus on the work that NGOs do and not on what goes on inside the organisation - its internal management (Lewis, 2007:111-112). In terms of communication management, the growing civil society sector, of which INGOs are a part, has complex and even unique communication dynamics but very few studies consider these unique dynamics in terms of strategic communication (Lewis, 2005:239) or strategic internal

communication. Thus there is a gap in the NGO management literature around internal management broadly and strategic internal communication in particular.

This study aims to contribute to academic knowledge by starting to fill both those gaps. The conclusions of this research, derived from both the theoretical and empirical portions of this study, help to both synthesise the current literature on strategic internal communication and consider its application in a previously unconsidered setting, the INGO. Since this study is exploratory in nature, its main contribution is as a basis for further study into this area of management and the context of an INGO. In addition, it can provide insight for INGOs and similar organisations as they attempt to implement strategic internal communication in their own organisations. Additional suggestions for further research based on this study are included in Chapter 8.

1.8 SYNOPSIS OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In order to develop an understanding of the research problem as highlighted in Circle I of the Mitroff *et al.* model (Figure 1.1), this study is undertaken in two phases. Phase one is a literature review to develop a theoretical understanding of strategic internal communication in the INGO context. Phase two is an empirical study to establish current practices of internal communication in the INGO context and its strategic contribution. The results from the first phase are used to further understand and characterise the evidence from the second phase, and together the two phases identify the overall answer to this study's research question. The following outline provides a brief overview of the empirical research design of this study.

This study adopts a qualitative, exploratory, multiple case study research design. Each of the elements of this design is selected based on its fit with the research question and objectives and the conceptual framework adopted for this study (see Table 1.1). For a more detailed discussion of the research design and methodology see Chapter 5.

As noted in section 1.6, this study is exploratory because of the limited research available on strategic internal communication. Exploratory studies are often qualitative (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:94-95) as is the case with this study. Qualitative research generally seeks to

understand the complex nature of phenomena (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:94-95) such as strategic internal communication. In addition, it is usually flexible and adaptable as the research project progresses, seeking the viewpoints of research participants, and is undertaken in the natural setting of the research phenomenon. It is cognisant of the researcher's role in research (Daymon & Holloway, 2002:5-6). For these reasons, interpretive, critical and postmodern scholars often embrace qualitative research (Taylor & Trujillo, 2001:163) and therefore it was selected as the appropriate approach to this study.

According to Yin (2003:13), a case study is "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident". The research phenomenon is a contemporary event where it is difficult to separate the phenomenon, internal communication management, from the broader context of the INGO. As will be further discussed in Chapter 3 and 4, a management function such as strategic internal communication is influenced by the organisation's form, structure and culture. A case study is a suitable research design to investigate the research question while taking into consideration these contextual elements. It is also appropriate given the postmodern and social constructivist worldview of this study.

By adopting a multiple case study design, this study is able to provide a more compelling answer to the research question. Multiple case studies both produce a greater volume of evidence and allows for the use of replication logic to increase support for the study's conclusions (Yin, 2003:47). In addition, a multiple case study design helps to research to distinguish between contextually dependent elements and elements that impact INGOs more generally.

Evidence was collected for this study from two sources: the most senior local communicators in INGOs using semi-structured interviews and organisational documents. The analysis of the evidence occurred through four cognitive phases as identified by Morse and Field (1995:103): comprehending, synthesizing, theorizing and recontextualising. Through the process of thematic analysis and coding, the evidence from the empirical portion of the study was analysed both as single cases and cross-case. The results of this are presenting in Chapter 7. The results of Phase 2 of the study, the

empirical portion, were compared to the results from Phase 1, the literature review, in order to develop a thorough understanding of the research problem and the variables involved. This process and its results are presented in Chapter 7. For more details on the research design and methodology see Chapter 6.

1.9 DELIMITATIONS

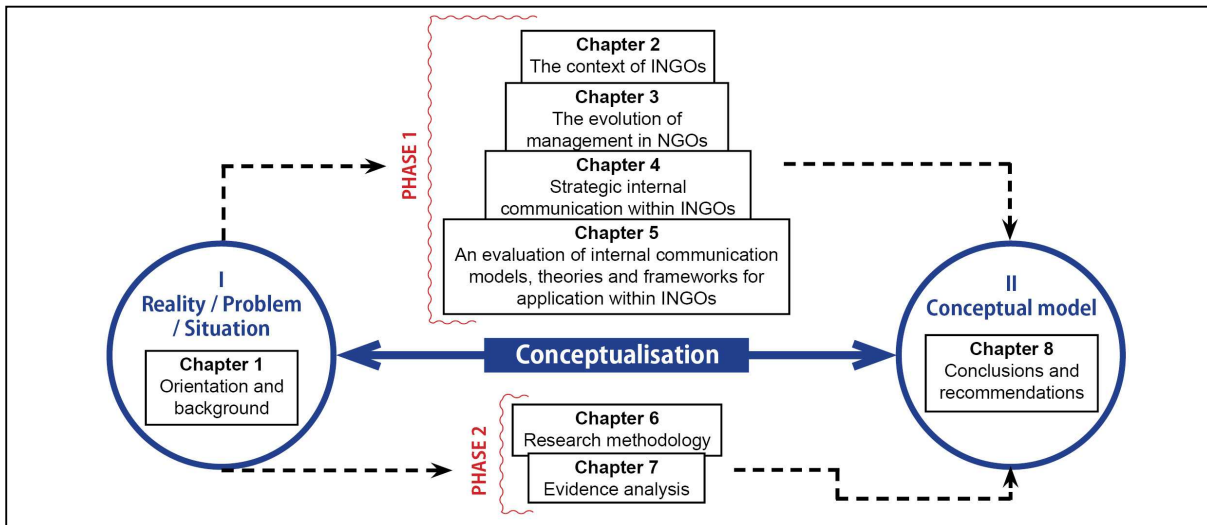
The study has several delimitations related to the context, constructs and domain of the study. Firstly, it is limited to the context of INGOs operating in South Africa. As such, the study results may not be generalised to other types of CSOs or those operating in other countries and regions. Secondly, the study is focused on strategic internal communication which limits it to internal communication that is managed with the goal of fulfilling the organisation's mission. Therefore, interpersonal communication or superior-subordinate communication are not examined in detail.

Finally, due to the exploratory nature of the study and the limits on the researcher's resources, this study only considers the management perspective on strategic internal communication. The focus of the study centres on the management of strategic internal communication and the decisions and actions of management in implementing this concept. Therefore, while it is recognised that the perspective of employees is an important component for understanding the impact, goals and issues of internal communication in an organisation, obtaining this perspective is outside the purview of this study. Validating the conclusions of this study from the employee perspective would form part of the modelling process in Mitroff *et al.*'s (1974) model of problem solving.

1.10 DEMARCATION OF CHAPTERS

Mitroff *et al.*'s (1974) model of problem solving (Figure 1.1) not only provides an understanding of the activities of this study, but also provides a means of demarcating the chapters of this dissertation. Figure 1.2 illustrates how the chapters fit within the problem solving model between the research problem (Circle I in the Mitroff *et al.* model), the process of conceptualisation and the conceptual model (Circle II).

Figure 1.2: Demarcation of chapters



Adapted from: Mitroff *et al.* (1974:48)

Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 make up Phase one of this study and provide a theoretical understanding of the research problem. Chapter 7, on the basis of the research method described in Chapter 6, makes up Phase two of this study and provides an empirical understanding of the research problem and compares it to the theoretical understanding. Finally, Chapter 8 provides the final conclusions and recommendations of this study. The following provides a more detailed demarcation of these chapters.

Chapter 2: The context of international non-governmental organisations

This chapter is the first chapter of the theoretical phase of this study and focuses on the context of the study, the INGO. First, it situates civil society within broader society and notes how it is distinguished from both government and the market sectors. The different types and characteristics of CSOs are highlighted and differentiated from government agencies and corporations. Particular attention is paid to the internal aspects of CSOs and their workforce. The chapter then provides an in-depth discussion of INGOs, their unique characteristics and their situation in South Africa. It concludes with a discussion of the challenges INGOs face which effect their management.

Chapter 3: The evolution of management in non-governmental organisations

Since this study is focused on applying a management practice developed for corporations in the context of an INGO, this chapter considers the role of management in CSOs and INGOs more generally. It starts with an overview of the debate around the management of CSOs. Following this is an in-depth discussion of the evolution of strategic management and its application to INGOs. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of internal management and its key elements in INGOs.

Chapter 4: Strategic internal communication in international non-governmental organisations

This chapter discusses the central concept of this study – strategic internal communication – and its place in INGOs. It lays the foundation by considering the different perspectives on internal communication in the literature. It then focuses on the concept of strategic communication and defines strategic internal communication within this framework. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the application of strategic internal communication in INGOs and the challenges and opportunities it provides.

Chapter 5: An evaluation of internal communication models, theories and frameworks for application within international non-government organisations

This chapter reviews and critiques of frameworks, theories and models for internal communication in the literature. It considers each model individually, highlighting both the contributions of the framework and elements that appear to be overlooked. The chapter concludes with remarks on the overall body of models, theories and frameworks identified.

Chapter 6: Research methodology

This chapter outlines the process for Phase two of this study and the reasoning behind adopting an exploratory, qualitative, multiple case-study design for investigating the research question. The evidence collection process and tools are also presented in this chapter, as well as the method of evidence analysis. Finally, criteria for evaluating the quality and rigour of the study are presented.

Chapter 7: Evidence analysis

This chapter presents the evidence collected for each case within its own unique context, focusing on the constructs of internal communication within each case and the barriers and challenges it faces in implementing effective strategic internal communication. The cases are then compared to identify commonalities and differences along various contextual elements and in relation to the theory developed in Chapters 2 to 5.

Chapter 8: Conclusions and Recommendations

This final chapter starts by describing the conclusions to each of the three objectives of this study. The results of the case studies illustrate that internal communication does not function strategically in INGOs. INGOs face a variety of challenges that may explain this, including limited resources, poor strategic intents and cultures prioritising action over reflection. However, the theory and evidence support the potential of strategic internal communication to impact positively on the organisational performance of INGOs. This chapter concludes with several recommendations for further study in this area.